Simultaneous and widespread: Colombia's fertility transition

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Colombia experienced one of the fastest declines in fertility in the world: children per woman fell from 7 in 1960 to 3 in 1985. Despite the stark inequalities of the country, the regional character of the decline has been neglected in previous research. This study examines the rapid decline in fertility rates in the country, focusing on regional patterns. Using complete census registers from 1973 to 1993, it provides a detailed empirical perspective on the fertility transition. By analysing spatial patterns with Local Indicators of Spatial Association (LISA), the study identifies geographical clusters and explores the association between geography and fertility before and during the fertility transition. Additionally, new estimations of fertility rates from 1958 to 1990 are presented at the subnational level. The findings indicate that before the fertility transition, fertility patterns were influenced by historical legacies and geographical endowments. However, after 1964, fertility began to decline simultaneously across all regions, regardless of their historical fertility levels. While regional convergence in fertility rates was not achieved by 1983, the total fertility rate halved in most regions within just 25 years. Despite regional disparities, the fertility decline in the country was not only fast but also widespread. This simultaneous decline suggests that socioeconomic improvements alone do not always explain demographic processes.