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**FEATURES OF IDENTITY FORMATION IN THE  
MULTINATIONAL URAL-VOLGA REGION**

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***Abstract***

In the present article, we made an attempt to reveal the main trends in the formation and development of ethnic regional and national identity based on data from several large-scale ethnosociological studies conducted from 1993 to 2017 in several republics of the Ural-Volga region. The ethnic structure of population of Bashkortostan is represented by the three largest ethnic groups - Russians (36.0%), Bashkirs (28.4%), Tatars (24.9%). Survey data shows that the formation of different levels of identities is influenced by the ongoing social and ethnocultural policies, aimed to form the awareness within the population of their connection with the territory they live in, or with the country, with its nationwide idea of a single “Russian identity”. At the same time, depending on the regions, for a significant part of the inhabitants priority identity is ethnicity. First of all, this refers to the republics of the North Caucasus. In the course of ethnosociological research, one tendency was revealed, the essence of which is that respondents who speak Russian in everyday life consider themselves more Russians than representatives of their region, and those who use the national language are more inclined to choose regional identity. It is noted that over the past few less than 30 years, despite the revival of ethnicity and regional identity, the national identity has also been formed in the national republics. Residents of the republics have become more associated not only with their ethnicity, but also feel their belonging to a great country - Russia.

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**Keywords:** Ethnicity, identity, multi-ethnic region, all-Russian nation, regionalism.



## 1. Introduction

The problem of the formation and development of the all-Russian civil identity in the country has acquired not only scientific and theoretical, but practical significance. An all-Russian unified idea, which in past existed as “Soviet people”, was absent for many years a huge effect on the consolidation of Russian society is observed nowadays. In the Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation “On the federal target program“ Strengthening the unity of the Russian nation and the ethnic and cultural development of the peoples of Russia (2014–2020) ”, adopted on 20th of August , 2013, No. 718 (amended on 25th of August, 2015), a weak all-Russian civil identity with an increasing importance of ethnic and religious identity was noted as the key problem in the state of interethnic relations in in modern Russia.

**Table 01.** What is the Motherland for you?\*( in %)

	Russians		Bashkirs		Tatars		Others	
	1995	2014	1995	2014	1995	2014	1995	2014
My Motherland is the former USSR	29.2	21.7	16.7	16.8	38.8	20.7	56.6	23.8
My Motherland is Russia	38.6	55.0	5.1	41.3	21.5	41.0	25.2	33.3
My Motherland is Bashkortostan	28.2	21.3	76.3	40.0	34.7	34.3	12.8	34.9
Not sure	4.0	2.0	1.9	1.9	5.0	4.0	5.5	8.0

**Table 02.** With whom do you share a sense of community the most? \*( in %)

	Russians	Bashkirs	Tatars	Others
With the civilians of the former USSR	16.7	14.8	14.5	25.4
With citizens of Russia	48.1	39.4	38.8	34.9
With the residents of Bashkortostan	17.8	31.0	28.6	25.4
With the residents of Tatarstan	0.8	1.3	2.2	0.0
With ones who share our political opinion	5.4	1.9	2.6	0.0
Not sure	11.2	11.6	13.3	14.3

**Table 03.** What is the Motherland for you?\*( in %)

	My Motherland is the former USSR	My Motherland is Russia	My Motherland is Bashkortostan	Not sure
Russians	4.1	65.6	17.4	12.8
Bashkirs	3.8	30.6	60.5	5.1
Tatars	3.1	52.8	35.8	8.3
Others	11.9	47.6	21.4	19.0

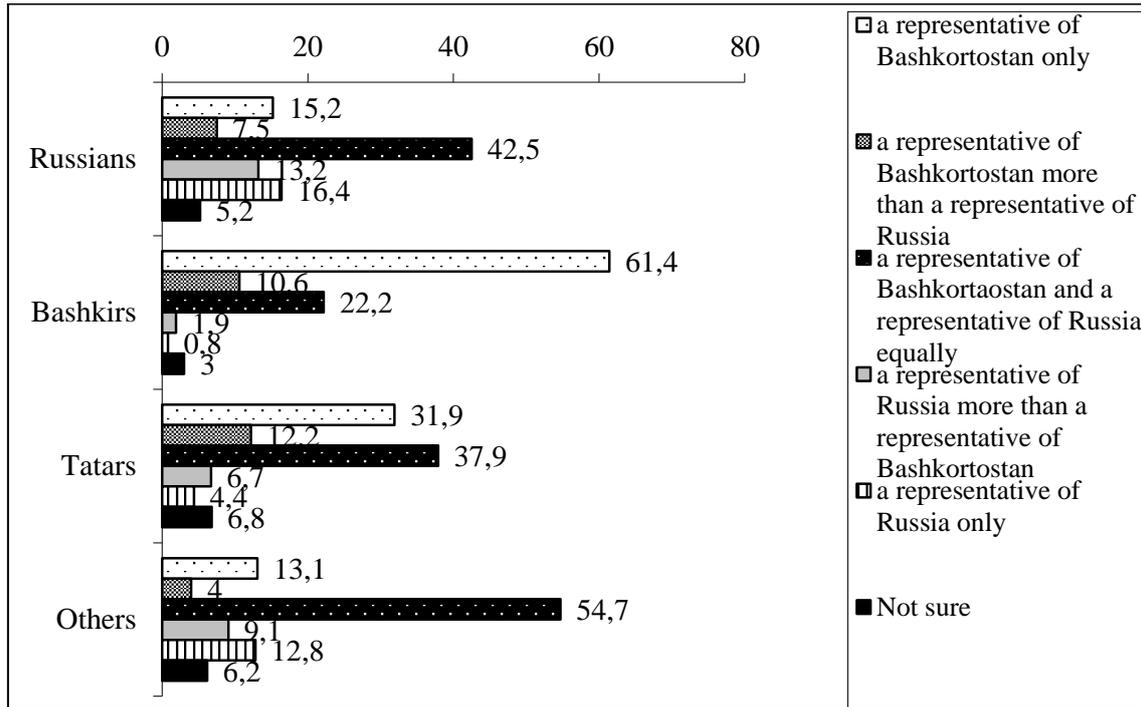


Figure 01. Which statehood representative do you consider yourself? (in %)

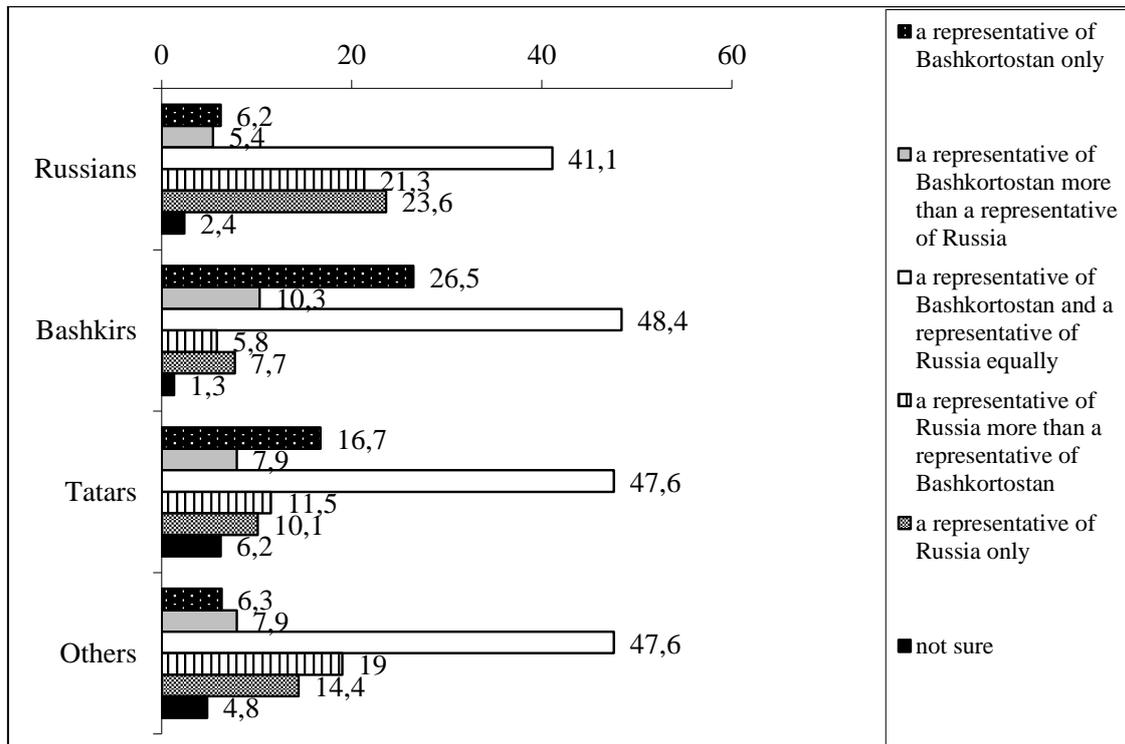


Figure 02. Which statehood representative do you consider yourself? (in %)

## 2. Problem Statement

In the new Strategy of the state national policy of the Russian Federation for the period until 2025 (in the editorship of the Presidential Decree dated 06.12.2018 No. 703) one of the key and priority tasks was to strengthen the all-Russian civil identity and the unity of the multiethnic people of the Russian

Federation (Russian nation). This, above all, applies to regions with a multi-ethnic composition of the population.

The problem of forming an all-Russian identity was widely discussed in scientific and journalistic literature even before the appearance of these documents. However, the idea of formation of such a community as the “Russian nation,” like the “Soviet people,” was perceived ambiguously in the multinational country.

### **3. Research Questions**

Ethnic mobilizers in the republics saw in this concept the attempt to quietly assimilate their ethnic groups and note that their own nations is enough for them (Valeev, 1998). According to other researchers, civilian identity in the political consciousness of residents of the North Caucasian republics is more amorphous and much less structured than ethnic, regional, confessional and local identities. Such a feature of alternative identities is, first of all, due to the fact that the crisis of national-state identity in modern Russia has not been fully overcome (Usmanova, 2013).

During the post-Soviet period, the national policies were aimed at forming a unified regional civic community at the republican level. For example, the following concepts were promoted: the “Tatarstan nation” (KHakimov, 1993), or the concept of “ethnic sovereignty” as part of “Bashkortostan citizenship”, in which representatives of the title ethnos will be given a special priority status (Valeev, 1998).

A number of authors, studying the dynamics of self-identification the North Caucasus republics residents, came to the conclusion that it is characterized by processes of gradual reduction of the role of civic identity, as well as further mass distribution and growth of the political significance of the model of ethnic identity (Kukva, 2005; Zhade, Kukva, Liausheva, & SHadzhe, 2010). Others also confirm the idea that the North Caucasus has still not truly integrated into the all-Russian sociocultural space, since there traditionalistic trends dominate over modernizing ones in the collective consciousness (Avksentyev & Aksiumov, 2010).

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to uncover factors and trends affecting the formation of ethnic, regional, all-Russian identities in the Ural-Volga region. The policy of the regional (republican) authorities has a significant impact on these processes. For example, during the years of establishing the sovereignty in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, the main argument of regional authorities in sticking to the sovereign course was the revival and identification of ethnicity.

### **5. Research Methods**

In this article, on the basis of the sociological method, in the context of comparative discourse, taking into account the peculiarities of the ethnic structure and the development of the ethno-political situation, we attempted to reveal the evolution of ethnic, regional and all-Russian identities in a number of national republics of the Ural-Volga region. For example, in Tatarstan, according to a survey conducted in 1994, two-fifths of Tatars (41.2%) in cities indicated ethnicity as their priority identity, while among respondents

of Russian nationality only a quarter (24.6%) noted this category (Makarova, 2010). At the same time, civic identity among the residents of Tatarstan appeared to be very modest in comparison with ethnic identity. Moreover, respondents of Tatar nationality preferred “Tatarstan” identity more than “all-Russian”. Among Russians, “all-Russian” identity prevailed over “Tatarstan” identity (Makarova, 2010).

## 6. Findings

The results of the ethnosociological study conducted in 2010 showed that the emphasis on ethnicity has noticeably decreased over the years, while a number of ethnocultural problems have been resolved and have become less relevant as they were during the sovereignization period. Other socio-economic and socio-cultural problems and identities associated with them came to the fore. As the basic categories, the ethnicity marker among Tatars decreased 4 times, and almost 9 times among Russians. At the same time, the all-Russian identity was significantly actualized, with a noticeable reduction in the share of self-determined as “representatives of Tatarstan” among the Tatars by 3 times, and twice among Russians (Makarova, 2010).

At the same time, some researchers advise not to establish a hierarchy in the distribution of identities (Mihajlov & Mihajlov, 2009; Bojko & Kharitonova, 2013). The ratio of ethnic, regional and national identities can be situational. Depending on the circumstances, the individual or the ethnic group may place national, regional or ethnic identity first. In general, for some people, territorial identity (i.e. the region where they were born and grew up) may be the primary identity along with the ethnic one, and only after them comes the nationwide identity. But when people are abroad, far away from their Motherland, their main identity is associated with the national one. It seems to us that all these identities are not of primary or secondary importance. They complement each other and do not act as a replacement of one identity with another, while at the same time none of these identities is infringed upon. National identity is not aimed at erosion of ethnic, especially regional one.

An ethnosociological survey conducted in Chuvashia in 2011 showed that more than half of Russian respondents (53%) and a little more than one-third (36%) of Chuvash respondents marked an all-Russian identity, while every tenth Russian (11%) and one third of the Chuvash respondents (32%) marked the regional identity.

Thus, as shown by survey data in the multinational Republic of Chuvashia, there is also a multidimensional variation in the manifestation of identities, which, in turn, does not diminish any identity.

Almost the same situation, but with its own characteristics, is observed in the Republic of Bashkortostan. There, unlike the republics discussed above, the ethnic structure is represented by the three largest ethnic groups - Russians (36.0%), Bashkirs (28.4%) and Tatars (24.9%). For the respondents of Bashkir nationality, along with parents, language, and national identity, the place of residence - territory is one of the important indicators in determining their nationality, as is shown by research data. Taking the fourth place in the marker of the definition of ethnicity, the regional factor was chosen by one fifth (20.1%) of the Bashkirs surveyed, while among the respondents of the Russian (1.1%) and Tatar (5.4%) nationalities this factor played almost no role.

The results of a large-scale survey in Bashkortostan showed that more than 61% of Bashkirs associated themselves only with Bashkortostan identity, whereas among the Tatars this value was less than

one third, and among Russians it did not exceed 15%. And the Russian identity, even among Russians, was not so high, only 16.4%. And among the Bashkirs it was less than one percent, among the Tatars - 7.7%. The predominant identity in the mid-1990s, among the representatives of all ethnic groups, with the exception of the Bashkirs, had a dual identity. As it turned out during the survey, 43.5% of Russians, 37.9% of Tatars and 54.7% of respondents of other nationalities felt that they were equally representatives of Bashkortostan and Russians.

If in 1995 only 22.2% of Bashkirs considered themselves to be equally representative of Bashkortostan and Russian, in a survey conducted on in January 2014, the share of such people increased more than twice, reaching 48.4%. During this period from 1995 to 2014, the share of those who associated themselves more with the Russians than the representative of Bashkortostan also increased. This indicator tended to increase almost twice for all the nationalities without exception, and among Bashkirs - 3.1 times. The share of those who consider themselves as Russian only has also increased. Especially among the respondents of Bashkir and Tatar nationality, this indicator increased 1.6 and 2.3 times respectively (Figures 01 and 02).

After a little more than 10 years, the dynamics of views on this issue among all nationalities has significantly changed in the direction of recognizing the all-Russian identity. This is noticeable in the views of the respondents of the titular nation. In 1995, 15.2% of respondents among Russians identified themselves as representatives of Bashkortostan only, whereas in 2014 - 6.2%. Among the Bashkirs, this indicator, i.e. only regional (Bashkortostan) identity decreased from 61.4% by more than 2.4 times and amounted to 26.5%. A similar decrease was also observed among the Tatars (from 31.9% to 16.7%) and among the representatives of other nationalities (from 13.1% to 6.3%). In addition, among the Tatars and Russian respondents, the share of those who consider themselves to be more representative of Bashkortostan than the Russian has tended to decline.

## **7. Conclusion**

Thus, as shown by the data of ethnosociological studies, the ratio of regional and civil identities has undergone a certain evolution over the past 20 years. Regional identity has become significantly inferior, and the all-Russian identity has started to increase. Such a vector of change can be explained, first of all, by the fact that in the early 1990s, in connection with the policy of obtaining sovereignty of national republics, the theses on the advantages of declared sovereignty were widely publicized in the media (Khaliulina, Safin, & Alekseenko, 2015). This was particularly vividly manifested in the national Bashkir-language media. Thanks to the strengthening of Russian statehood, the alignment of the basic laws and legislative acts of the republics in accordance with Russian federal laws, as well as the change in the tone of the mass media in favor of the federal authorities, the of scales gradually began to tip in favor of an all-Russian identity.

In the course of ethnosociological research, one tendency was revealed, which is that respondents who speak Russian in everyday life consider themselves more Russians than representatives of their region, and those who use the national language are more inclined to choose regional identity (Safin & Khaliulina, 2015; Ikilikian, 2017; Borisova & Shadrina, 2012).

The proportion of Bashkir respondents who speak Russian and consider themselves as representatives of Bashkortostan and Russians equally amounted to more than half of the respondents (52.9%), while the proportion of Bashkirs who prefer using their native language in everyday communication with close friends reaches only 45.9%. Among the Russian-speaking Tatars and Bashkirs, the share of respondents marking only the regional Bashkortostan identity, is very modest, 6.9% and 8.0% respectively. Two-thirds of the Russian-speaking Tatars, as it turned out during the survey, marked equally both regional and national identity.

In this sense, the period of transformation of Russian society left a definite imprint on the formation of these indicators. As it turned out during the ethnosociological survey, the most popular option, when respondents are most of all united by a sense of community, is “with citizens of Russia” (Table 01).

The majority of Russians, both in 1995 (38.6%) and in 2014 (55.0%), admitted that they consider only Russia as their Motherland. At the same time, in 1995, slightly less than one-third of Russians, two out of five Tatars, and more than half of respondents of other nationalities considered the former Soviet Union as their Motherland. In 2014, more than half of the Russian respondents, two out of five Bashkirs and Tatars surveyed, as well as a third of representatives of other nationalities, recognized Russia as their only homeland. At the same time, among the Bashkirs, this indicator had the highest rate of growth, from 5.1% to 41.0%.

Thus, studies conducted in the regions of the Russian Federation confirm the consolidation orientation towards the search for a unifying idea on the formation of a common civil Russian identity (Arutiunian, 2009; Drobizheva, 2013; Tishkov, 2013).

Conclusion. The results of ethnosociological research among the youth of the republic also showed that in the first place among all respondents, regardless of ethnicity, was the sense of community with “citizens of Russia”. This form of identity was stated by 48.1% of Russians, 39.4% of Bashkirs, 38.8% of Tatars and 34.9% of respondents of other nationalities. At the same time, less than one third of the Bashkirs (31%), even fewer Tatars (28.6%), a quarter of respondents of other nationalities (25.4%) and only 17.8% of Russians felt their community with the inhabitants of the republic.

At the same time, at the beginning of 2014, a significant proportion of young people, regardless of ethnicity, still considered the former Soviet Union as their Motherland (Table 02). At the end of 2017, this share decreased significantly (Table 03). According to the youth survey data, for the majority of the titular nation (60.5%) the Motherland is Bashkortostan, while only one third of respondents associated the Motherland with Russia (30.6%).

According to two thirds of Russian (65.6%), more than half of Tatars (52.8%), less than half of respondents of other nationalities, and about one third of Bashkir youth, their Motherland is modern Russia. At the same time, every fifth respondent of other nationalities, almost the same proportion of Russians, more than one-third of the Tatars, and almost two-thirds of the Bashkir youth noted that Bashkortostan was the Motherland to them. For the Tatar part of the youth, along with the all-Russian, regional identity also plays a prominent role (35.8%) (Table 03).

Thus, over the past few less than 30 years, despite the revival of ethnicity and regional identity in the national republics, an all-Russian identity has been formed. Residents of the republics have started to associate themselves not only with their ethnicity, but also with a great country - Russia. If ethnicity in the

republics had a social status at a certain time, over time these priorities have been gradually losing their meaning in favour of the all-Russian identity. In this sense, these indicators are inherent for young people who were born and raised in the conditions of the strengthening of Russian statehood and increasing its international prestige. It seems that the processes of strengthening and spreading of the all-Russian identity will only intensify in the future.

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