

THE COLLECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS AND BEHAVIOUR OF THE MACROREGION'S POPULATION

The Image of Russia in Contemporary Representations by the Population of the Border Regions

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Abstract. This article analyses some of the components of the image of Russia in eight border regions of the Urals, Siberia and the Far East. The study reveals that most of the inhabitants of the border regions associate Russia with a controversial image. The image's positive features are related to the international prestige of Russia, its historic achievements and cultural heritage. The negative ones are determined by low standard of living, social inequality and the imperfection of the economic system. A considerable part of the research focuses on the emotional elements of the image of Russia. The research shows that the parameters of identification of border region citizens with the Russian community vary considerably depending on a number of factors. The most important factors include such sociodemographic characteristics as age, gender, level of material well-being and region of residence. The Jewish Autonomous Region has the highest level of identity with the Russian community in almost all the parameters. The Zabaykalsky Krai shows the highest level of emotional identity in comparison to the other regions. The citizens of the Omsk Region, the Orenburg Region and the Republic of Altai have a much lower level of identification with the Russian community. On the basis of the results obtained, we make conclusions about the influence of the sociocultural specificity of the border regions on their citizens' image of Russia.

Keywords: Image of Russia, the emotional component of the image of Russian, civic identity, national unity, border regions of Russia.

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INTRODUCTION

The image of the state is an important resource for both foreign and domestic policy, the most important means of protecting its national interests [12]. Developing a favourable image of a country is vital not only for political but also for economic objectives, as it helps to attract tourists and to

increase investments and export [1]. The image of a country in the minds of its citizens can have an impact on its legal culture, the degree of civic participation, levels of social tension and protest activity, and institutional and interpersonal trust. Indirectly, the image of a country can impact citizens' propensity to emigrate, which is regarded as

a serious problem in the current demographic situation [10].

At present, due to recent social, economic and political changes and unstable values among Russian people, the image of Russia cannot be considered unambiguous and well-established. Researchers note a discrepancy between the social expectations of Russians at the end of the 20th/the beginning of the 21st century and their opinion about the real situation in the country, which has a negative impact on its image [5].

In modern society, the development of the image of the state is profoundly affected by the influence of mass media and, consequently, may be subject to manipulation [3; 9]. Factors that may have an impact on the image of the country include cinema [2], literature [8] and mass media [4]. Moreover, recently Western media have created a negative image of Russia [7]. In these conditions, it is particularly important to track the dynamics of the perception of the image of Russia and to develop effective tools for its improvement.

RESULTS

To analyse the image of Russia in the mind of its population, we carried out a survey *Civic and ethnic identity of the residents of the border regions* (the sample comprised 3,600 respondents 15–75 y/o). We performed this survey in eight border regions of Russia: the Altai Krai, the Amur Region, the Jewish Autonomous Region, the Zabaykalsky Krai, the Kemerovo Region, the Omsk Region, the Orenburg Region and the Republic of Altai.

One of the factors affecting the development of the image of the country is the self-awareness of its ethnic communities and the degree of identification with the Russian community. Evaluation of civic

identity was based on three parameters: identification with the Russian community, identification with Russian culture, and the emotional perception of these facts. The results of the survey carried out among Russian citizens show that 93.2% of the respondents consider themselves Russians (the sum total of the respondents who answered “partially agree” and “strongly agree”). 88.0% of the respondents consider themselves part of the Russian culture. 85.9% of the respondents feel proud to be Russian, 73.4% of the respondents feel happy to be Russian. Symbols of the state are also important for Russians: most of the respondents feel a sense of pride when they hear the national anthem or see the Russian flag being raised (Table 1).

For each of these characteristics, we found significant differences depending on such sociodemographic factors as age, gender, and financial position. Most often, those who associate themselves with Russians and Russian culture and experience positive emotions associated with being Russian are older people (50–75 y/o). People 30–49 y/o feel less positive about their national identity, and younger people 15–29 y/o feel least positive about being Russian and show the lowest tendency to identify themselves with Russia and its culture. Civic identity is more prevalent among women than men. The level of wealth also affects these characteristics: the wealthier the respondents, the more likely they are to agree with the given statements. However, the results of the survey did not reveal the same interconnection between the patriotic feelings of the respondents and their educational level, professional category, the size of the settlements in which they live, and their ethnicity and religion.

Moreover, national identity indicators vary significantly depending on the region. The highest

Table 1. The degree of the respondents' agreement with the characteristics of civic identity (%)

	Strongly disagree	Partially disagree	Not sure	Partially agree	Strongly agree
I consider myself a citizen of Russia	2.1	1.1	3.5	21.5	71.7
I feel that I am part of Russian culture	2.3	1.7	8.1	31.2	56.8
I am proud to be Russian	2.5	1.5	10.2	26.9	59.0
I am happy to be Russian	2.6	2.1	13.7	27.5	45.9
I feel a sense of pride when I hear the Russian anthem	2.5	2.0	9.8	28.4	57.4
I feel a sense of pride when I see the Russian flag being raised	2.6	1.8	10.3	28.0	57.3

values of each of the indicators were recorded in the Jewish Autonomous Region. In the Zabaykalsky Krai we can observe higher values of parameters associated with the emotional component of identity than in the total sample (these parameters include pride and happiness experienced by the respondents in connection with their national identity). The lowest values for the emotional component associated with national identity were recorded in the Kemerovo region. At the same time, the percentage of Kemerovo region citizens who consider themselves Russians is above the average data for all the regions combined. The citizens of the Omsk Region, the Orenburg Region and the Republic of Altai tend to associate themselves with Russian culture less than people in other regions.

We performed a regression analysis where the dependent variable was the average value of indicators of civic identity, and the independent variables (predictors) included gender, age, material wealth, and the region of residence of the respondents (Table 2). The analysis revealed that according to this model, the greatest factors influencing the level of civic identity were the region of residence ($\beta=0.123$, $p<0.01$) and the age of the respondents ($\beta=0.103$, $p<0.01$).

The concept of the “citizen of the state” includes multiple meanings. They are associated with formal attributes of citizenship, a set of declared rights and obligations, with love for one’s country and a sense of civic duty. The most important factors that shape civic identity, in the respondents’ opinion, were the following: “To be a patriot, to love Russia”, “To abide by the law, to respect the Constitution”, “To be able to enjoy all the rights provided by the laws of this country”, “To realise one’s civic duty, to have a sense

Table 2. Regression models of prediction of identification with the Russian community

Predictors	Standardised coefficients (β) of the final model
Gender	0.068*
Age	0.103*
Level of material well-being	-0.020
Region	0.123*
Final R ² (%)	31.0

Note: * $p < 0.01$

of civic responsibility and civic conscience” (Table 3). Answers related to love for the country and civic duties were slightly more common than those associated with the benefit received from the state.

A significant characteristic of the country’s image is its emotional colouring. According to the survey results, 89.5% of Russians take pride in their country. The most popular reasons for the respondents’ national pride are the following: the victory in the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945), Russia’s prestige in the world, the Russian President Vladimir Putin, Russia’s great writers and composers (Table 4).

However, a significant proportion of the respondents (57.0%) feel a sense of shame for their country. According to their answers, this feeling is caused by a low standard of living, low wages, unemployment; corruption, bureaucracy; the decline of industry, agriculture, and the economy in general; alcoholism, drug addiction (Table 5). As one can see, the population of the border regions of Russia link their sense of shame primarily with socioeconomic, moral and legal shortcomings.

These categories reflect the main components of the image of Russia distinguished by contemporary researchers. These components include politics, economy, resources, society and culture [11]. Thus, the positive aspects of the image of Russia in its citizens’ eyes are related to foreign policy and cultural heritage, the negative ones are connected with the quality of life of the population, the inef-

Table 3. Distribution of answers to the question “What does it mean for you to be a citizen of Russia?”

Answers	%
To be a patriot, to love Russia	54.0
To abide by the laws, to respect the Constitution	41.4
To have and exercise all the rights provided by the country’s laws	32.6
To realise one’s civic duty, civic responsibility and civic conscience	30.4
To feel protected, to have a sense of stability and confidence in the economy of the country	29.2
To live permanently on the territory of the country	25.3
To have no desire to emigrate	24.3
To be able to fulfill one’s potential	14.2
To feel part of state affairs	11.9
To respect people in authority	11.6

iciency of local authorities and the state of the economy. The success of Russian athletes, which is highly valued by the state, does not have any noticeable influence on the sense of pride in the country or shame for it.

One of the important conditions of good governance and functioning of the institutions of civil society is the achievement of national unity [6]. This task is often mentioned in modern political rhetoric, which provides a basis for the development of patriotism and peaceful interethnic relations [13]. Among the residents of the border regions, 55.8% believe that national unity in Russia exists, 31.8% think that it probably does not, and 12.3% cannot give a definite answer.

It is remarkable that the vast majority of the respondents do not consider the multinational character of the RF a factor affecting the disunity of people in modern Russian society. The most important reasons for disunity, in their opinion, are rooted in poverty, social inequality, and moral and psychological tensions.

CONCLUSION

The results of the research show that the population of the border regions of Russia view their country in positive terms. Generally, the image of Russia, Russian citizenship, and people's awareness of their civic identity evoke positive emotions.

Table 4. Distribution of answers to the question “Which of the following makes you feel proud of your country?”

Answers	%
The victory in the Great Patriotic War 1941-1945	67.4
The position of Russia in the world	37.8
President Vladimir Putin	30.6
Great Russian poets, writers, composers	30.5
Yuri Gagarin's space flight in 1961	21.0
The historic past of Russia	20.2
Russian natural resources	19.0
Russian achievements in science and technology	18.9
Russian athletes' achievements	16.4
The accession of Crimea to the Russian Federation	13.0
The Russian Army	11.8
Russian victories at international competitions, music and cinema festivals	6.2

Predominantly, the positive features of the image of Russia are associated with the position of Russia in the world, its historic achievements and cultural heritage. These categories in most cases are used in propaganda aimed at boosting patriotism. Apart from that, the perception of Russia is associated with a number of negative characteristics connected with a low standard of living, social inequality, corruption and bureaucracy. These components of the image date back to the 1990s [5]. The mitigation of their severity is impossible without positive changes in the actual state of the economy and without the provision of reliable social security to the population. It should be noted that the opinion of the population of the border regions may be markedly different from that of the inhabitants of the more inland republics, territories and regions of Russia. Undoubtedly, the sociocultural and historical characteristics of the respondents' places of residence affect their views on the image of Russia. Accordingly, the image of the inhabitants of the border regions can vary significantly depending on which country adjoins their particular region. To verify this hypothesis, it is

Table 5. Distribution of answers to the question “Which of the following makes you feel a sense of shame for your country?”

Answers	%
Low standard of living, low wage rate, unemployment, poverty	73.0
Corruption, bureaucracy	47.0
Declining industry, agriculture, and economy in general	30.9
Alcoholism, drug addiction	28.4
Inaction, poor work by the authorities; politicians' unworthy behaviour	21.0
Bad situation in education and welfare	17.4
Low level of culture, decadence among young people	15.9
Despoliation of national treasures and state property	15.6
High crime rate, larceny	9.8
Violation of human rights	6.9
Russian domestic policy	6.1
The position of Russia in the world, the attitude towards it in the world	3.9
Situation in the army, harassment of subordinates in the army	3.5
Failures in sports competitions	3.2
Russian foreign policy	3.0
Relations with the former Soviet republics	1.7

necessary to perform a representative study using a similar methodology.

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