

## CONFESSIONAL GROUPS IN THE REPUBLIC OF TATARSTAN: IDENTITY AND FEATURES OF ITS DESIGN

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**Abstract:** *The relevance of the problem is determined by the need for a comprehensive study of interfaith group viewpoints in multi-ethnic and multi-confessional regions of the Russian Federation. The purpose of this article is to analyze the strategies of designing the identity in the environment of religious groups in the Republic of Tatarstan in 2017 - 2018. The leading approach to the study of this problem is based on the multi-paradigmatic methodology. The article gives a comparative description of ideological attitudes of the three groups studied - Muslims, Orthodox Christians, and atheists. Special attention is paid to the analysis of mechanisms of religious socialization and transmission of religious values. It is concluded that Muslims attach greater importance to the performance of religious rites and practices; they consider a family as the main agent of religious socialization and support the opinion that "people do not choose their religion".*

**Keywords:** *Confessionality, Tatarstan, identity, religious socialization, rites and rituals, ethnicity.*

**Rezumat:** *Gupuri confesionale din Republica Tatarstan: identitate și caracteristici ale proiecției salei. Relevanța problemei este determinată de necesitatea unui studiu cuprinzător referitor la punctele de vedere interconfesionale de grup în regiunile multietnice și multi-confesionale din Federația Rusă. Scopul acestui articol este acela de a analiza strategiile de proiectare a identității în mediul grupurilor religioase din Republica Tatarstan în perioada 2017 - 2018. Abordarea principală a studierii acestei probleme are la bază metodologia multiparadigmatică. Articolul oferă o descriere comparativă a atitudinilor ideologice ale celor trei grupuri studiate - musulmani, creștini ortodocși și ateii. O atenție deosebită este acordată analizei mecanismelor de socializare religioasă și transiterii valorilor religioase. Se concluzionează că musulmanii acordă o importanță mai mare desfășurării ritualurilor și practicilor religioase; ei consideră familia drept agent principal al socializării religioase și susțin opinia potrivit căreia „oamenii nu își aleg religia”.*

**Résumé: Groupes confessionnels de la république Tatarstan: identité et caractéristiques de son projection.** La relevance du problème est déterminée par la nécessité d'une étude complète concernant les points de vue interconfessionnels de groupe dans les régions multiethniques et multiconfessionnels de la Fédération Russe. Le but de l'article ci-joint est d'analyser les stratégies de projection de l'identité dans le milieu des groupes religieux de la République Tatarstan dans la période 2017-2018. L'abord principal de l'étude de cette question est fondé sur la méthodologie multi paradigmatique. L'article offre une description comparative des attitudes idéologiques des trois groupes étudiés – musulmans, chrétiens orthodoxes et athées. On y accorda une attention tout à fait particulière à l'analyse des mécanismes de socialisation religieuse et à la transmission des valeurs religieuses. On tira la conclusion que les musulmans accordent plus d'importance à la performance des rituels et des pratiques religieuses; ils considèrent la famille comme l'agent principal de la socialisation religieuse et soutiennent l'opinion conformément à laquelle „les gens ne choisissent pas leur religion”.

## INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Tatarstan is historically one of the multinational and multi-religious regions of the Russian Federation. At present, the confessional landscape of the Republic is mainly determined by the interaction of such religious movements as Islam and Orthodoxy. It should also take into account the significant influence of groups that identify themselves as „non-believers”, that is, atheists. The tendency towards the growth of religious self-consciousness has an impact on all spheres of society. In this regard, the relevance of studying strategies for designing a confessional identity is determined by the needs of the multinational and multi-confessional society of the Republic of Tatarstan. Strategies for designing identity and religious practices of the population of the Republic influence intergroup interactions in industrial, cultural, recreational spheres, the nature of interpersonal communication, as well as the general state of interethnic and interfaith relations in the Republic.

Interfaith relations in society are realized at two levels: institutional and intergroup. The first is studied mainly by ethnopolitologists<sup>1</sup>, the second by ethnosociologists<sup>2</sup>. In ethnosociology, interfaith interaction is studied through the

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<sup>1</sup> В. А. Тишков, Ю. П. Шабаев, *Этнополитология: Политические функции этничности. Учебник для вузов* [Ethnopolitology: Political Functions of Ethnicity. University textbook], Москва, Издательство Московского университета, 2011, 376 с.

<sup>2</sup> Л. М. Дробижева, С. В. Рыжова (ред.), *Позитивные межнациональные отношения и*

opinions, attitudes, orientations, values of people in different spheres of life - business, production, leisure, and family. The purpose of this research is to analyze the strategies for constructing identity among confessional groups in the Republic of Tatarstan in 2017–2018. The strategies for designing confessional identity form a wide range of problems, the study, and solution of which seems promising and relevant.

### METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH METHODS

The article is based on quantitative and qualitative research methods (survey, in-depth interview, focus groups), following the methodological principles of the multi-paradigmatic approach. In the context of our study, two provisions of F. Barth's theory are fundamental: firstly, the conclusion that the determinants of membership in the group are socially-defined factors, which are founded on the phenomenon of categorical attribution, and not on „objectively” existing cultural differences. Secondly, the ethnic categories, both in the identification itself and in the process of assigning others to certain ethnic groups, take into account not just the sum of objective differences, but only those that are perceived significant by individuals themselves<sup>3</sup>.

### CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESEARCH OBJECT

The study, conducted in 2018, was attended by 2.100 respondents, 700 of whom identified themselves as Muslims, 700 as Orthodox, and 700 as non-believers (atheists). The study covered the following cities and towns of the Republic of Tatarstan: Kazan, Naberezhnye Chelny, Nizhnekamsk and Nizhnekamsk district, Zelenodolsk and Zelenodolsk district, Mamadysh and Mamadysh district, Leninogorsk and Leninogorsk district, Almetyevsk and Almetyevsk district, Chistopol and Chistopol district, Laishevo and Laishevsky district, Aktanyshsky district, Vysokogorsky district. Of the total respondents, 51.1% are natives of the area, 28.3% moved more than 10 years ago, every tenth respondent moved 5 to 10 years ago, 7.7% - from 1 to 5 years ago, 3.7% - less than 1 year ago. In addition, 40.2% of respondents consider themselves Tatars, 47.1%

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*предупреждение нетерпимости: опыт Татарстана в общероссийском контексте* [Positive ethnic relations and the prevention of intolerance: the experience of Tatarstan in an all-Russian context], Санкт-Петербург: Нестор-История, 2016. 152 с.

<sup>3</sup> Fredrik Barth, *Analysis of Culture in Complex Societies*, "Ethnos. Journal of Anthropology", Vol. 54, 1989., No. 3-4, p. 120-142.

- Russians, and 12.7% are representatives of other ethnic groups.

Socio-demographic characteristics of the object of study: 50.2% of the respondents are men and 49.8% are women. Distribution by age groups: 18-24 years old - 14.7%; 25-30 years old - 15.3%; 31-50 years old - 39.7%; over 51 years old - 30.3%. 1.5% of respondents have primary education; 20.1% have secondary education; 47.7% - secondary specialized education; 30% - higher, incomplete higher; 0.8% of the respondents have an academic degree. Almost a quarter of respondents are employed in the service sector; one in five respondents work in the industry, construction, transport sector; 13.6% - in education, science, culture; 11% are pensioners, and 9.4% are students.

Among the respondents who identify themselves as Muslims, 90.4% are Tatars, 1.1% - Russians, 4% - Bashkirs, and 4.5% representatives of other ethnic groups. Of those who declared themselves Orthodox, 82.1% are Russians, 2.9% - Kryashens; 2% - Tatars, 2.7% - Chuvashes, 2.3% - Ukrainians, 2.1% - Maris, 1.9% - Udmurts; 1.7% - Mordovians, 2.3% - the representatives of other ethnic groups. The group of Muslims is mostly mono-ethnic in composition; more than 90% of this group are Tatars. Thus, there is a connection between ethnic and religious self-identification of the respondents. By identifying themselves as a particular denomination, respondents express their ethnic identity. Russians dominate among the atheist respondents - 58.1%; 28.3% are Tatars, 2.4% - Bashkirs, 2% - Chuvashes, 2.4% - Maris, 6.8% - representatives of other ethnic groups.

### **RELIGIOUS IDENTITY AND ITS DESIGN**

In explaining the reasons for the revival of interest in religion, the respondents' positions were distributed as follows: 27.1% of the respondents believe that interest in religion was caused by the plight of ordinary people in the 1990s; 20.7% of the respondents noted the position that „the society, having lost the ideals of communism, began to find the meaning in the religious values”, 18% are of the opinion that the process of national revival sparked interest in religion. The position „this cannot be explained by anything other than God's Providence” found the most supporters among Muslims (13.4% of Muslim respondents, 4% of Orthodox, and 0.4% of atheists). The explanation of interest in religion in the general decline of education is typical primarily for non-religious respondents (20.9% atheists, 6% Muslims and 7.1% Orthodox).

When analyzing the design of respondents' confessional identity, the following features were identified. For Muslim and Orthodox respondents, the following ideological attitude prevails: “To do good deeds, to help those in need,

not expecting gratitude in response". Yet, the ritual component of religiosity is more important for Muslim respondents. Atheists are more inclined to adhere to the statement: „To believe or not to believe is a personal matter of each person". The missionary approach "to carry the light of truth and faith to other people" is shared by 11.6% of Orthodox and 13.9% of Muslims.

**Table no. 1, What do you think it means to be a believer? (%)**

	Muslims	Orthodox	Atheists
Strive to comply with all the rites, rituals and regulations	31.7	23.7	19.7
To bring the light of truth and faith to other people.	12.9	11.6	3.1
Do good deeds, help those in need, not expecting gratitude in return	32.7	39.4	17.4
To believe or not to believe is a personal matter of each person.	16.1	19.4	46.9
Something else	1.3	1.1	1.7
Difficult to answer	5.3	4.7	11.1

Thus, religiosity is not clearly dogmatic. For most believers, religiosity is not limited to performing rites and rituals but involves certain social practices ("do good deeds", "bring the light of truth"). However, Muslim respondents attach greater importance to the dogmatic side of religion than Orthodox respondents do. This is manifested in the declared desire to perform religious rites and regulations:

*- "Enlightenment, education, explaining, not in a distorted way, the concepts of Islam to people. It is very important to bring Islam to people in the original sense. It can be interpreted in different ways, so it is important to convey to people the correct assessment of Islam, namely the image of Islam in modern times, which can be muffled especially in connection with current events" (focus group, ethnic Muslims, Kazan).*

*- "Yes, the most important thing is to bring the original version of the Prophet, from whom all this came. Islam is the youngest religion and the cleanest" (focus group, ethnic Muslims, Kazan).*

- *"I think we need religion in order to define the power of the human soul, which is in "the cosmos" so that it will bring the right fruits. Therefore, religion is needed. However, to argue what is correct... Here we are believers, Orthodox, and that is it that the Lord ... I just would not like to divine, but I believe that Orthodoxy is the true religion. One can feel in every way, for example, through Protestantism - a person felt with his heart where the spirit is, where the truth is" (focus group, Orthodox practitioners, Kazan).*

- *"I was the same, I was in Islam, and I had had faith since childhood. When I went to the first grade, the head teacher came in and said: "There is no God, children," and everything inside me broke off, I had believed for 7 years, but she came and told me that there was no God. And internal protest mounted in me. Therefore, faith was originally, although I was a Muslim. All this was higher than me" (focus group, practicing Orthodox, Kazan).*

### **RELIGIOSITY AS A TOOL OF SOCIALISATION**

A correlation with the confessional affiliation of respondents was revealed when analyzing religious socialization and transmission of religious values. Muslims give the family, as an agent of religious socialization, greater importance than the Orthodox and atheists, believing that "the father and mother (family) lead the person to the path of communion to the faith, because people do not choose their religion" (44.4% of Muslims, 34.1% Orthodox and 9.3% atheists).

Orthodox and atheists more often than Muslims choose the position "the person himself, fully consciously, approaches the issues of faith, the choice of religion" (42.7% of Muslims, 52.1% of Orthodox, 49.7% of atheists). Atheists are characterized by the statement that if their educational and cultural level is raised, a person no longer needs the authority of religion (32.4% of atheists, 2.6% of Muslims and 2.9% of Orthodox).

- *"Faith initially appeared when people could not find an explanation: the crops had been washed away by the rain, which meant that the gods wanted it to be so. To make gods more favourable, people needed to pray to them" (focus group, atheists, Kazan).*

- *„To fill the void by faith is silly. Because of faith, there have been many wars; faith brings disappointment, more precisely, religion; then faith and religion separated. These two concepts are similar in meaning, but faith*

*is the faith in something abstract, and religion is the faith in God himself, in his existence. Because of religion, there was a lot of death. The scientific process, due to the fact that people believed, was hindered to a certain point. Human development could go a faster way, if not for religion. Maybe we would have already flown”(focus group, atheists, Kazan).*

### STUDYING CONFESSIONAL PROCESSES IN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

The studies of confessional processes in the Russian Federation are relevant for representatives of various scientific fields. While sociologists analyse the ethno-social and ethno-confessional aspects of migration in modern society<sup>4</sup>, political scientists are interested in the problems of the influence of the state of interethnic and interfaith relations on state policy and social processes in society<sup>5</sup>. A special place is occupied by the study of the psychological aspects of interethnic and interfaith interaction<sup>6</sup>. Researchers investigate the size of the intergroup distance between the host population and foreign cultural groups of migrants, the level of xenophobia, features of social contacts between representatives of different denominations and nationalities. Studies of everyday practices of interethnic and interfaith interactions are of interest to anthropologists and ethnologists. The analysis focuses, in particular, on the study of social intergroup distance and religious practices in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society<sup>7</sup>. At

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<sup>4</sup> Л. М. Дробижева (ред.), *Российская идентичность в Москве и регионах* [Russian identity in Moscow and the regions], Москва, Институт социологии РАН; МАКС Пресс, 2009, 268 с.; В. А. Тишков, *Реквием по этносу: исследования по социально-культурной антропологии* [Requiem for ethnos: research on socio-cultural anthropology] Москва, Наука, 2003, 544 с.

<sup>5</sup> Р. Г. Абдулатипов, *Этнополитология. Учебное пособие* [Ethnopolitology. Study guide], Санкт-Петербург: Питер, 2004, 313 с.

<sup>6</sup> Т. Г. Стефаненко, *Этнопсихология* [Ethnopsychology], Москва: Аспект-Пресс, 2003, 365 с.

<sup>7</sup> A. N. Sabirova, T. A. Titova, E. V. Frolova, *Collective social and cultural distance in the sphere of interethnic relations in the Republic of Tatarstan*, “The Turkish Online Journal of Design, Art and Communication”, Vol. 6, 2016, November Special Edition, [http://www.tojdac.org/tojdac/VOLUME6-NOVSPCL\\_files/tojdac\\_v060NVSE188.pdf](http://www.tojdac.org/tojdac/VOLUME6-NOVSPCL_files/tojdac_v060NVSE188.pdf);  
T. Titova, *Ethnic Cultural and Religious Practices of Migrant Women in the Republic of Tatarstan*, “Journal of Sustainable Development”, Vol. 8, 2015, No. 4, p. 177-186;  
T. Titova, *Ethnic identity and ethno-cultural needs of the modern Russian rural population of Tatarstan (based on ethno-sociological research)*, “Man in India”, Vol. 97, 2016, Issue 9, p. 1-7; T. Titova, *The host population and the migrants in modern*

the same time, the evaluation of the features of intergroup viewpoints in the multi-confessional regions of the Russian Federation requires more in-depth research.

The strategies for designing identity among confessional groups in the Republic of Tatarstan show that the confessional identity profile in the studied categories has the following features:

- Muslims attach greater importance to the performance of religious rites and practices; they consider the family as the main agent of religious socialization; they are mostly characterized by the position that „people do not choose their religion”;
- Orthodox pay less attention to the dogmatic side of religion, believing that faith is, first of all, social practices, “good deeds”;
- atheists tend to have a critical attitude towards religion; they consider the religiosity of society to be the result of a decline in education.

### CONCLUSION

The materials presented in the paper may have scientific-humanitarian and practical significance. The results achieved in the article can be useful for specialists in the field of social sciences: ethnologists, social and cultural anthropologists, political scientists, as well as representatives of bodies and structures responsible for issues of interethnic and interfaith interaction.