Ethnicity, Religion and Demographic Change in Russia: Russians, Tatars and Jews[*]

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1. Introduction

The Russian Federation is a multiethnic country. However, during many years Russia proper was only part of an even more variegated state — first the Tsarist Empire, and then the Soviet Union, which was dissolved in 1991. Therefore demographic transition was in the past studied mostly in the framework of the USSR and ethnic factors were discussed for this larger unit as a whole. This article is the first to compare ethnicity, religion and demographic change among Russians, Tatars and Jews in Russia alone. These three groups were chosen specifically because they represent distinctive religions, as well as greatly differing ethnic backgrounds and cultures.

The Russians are a Slavic people whose traditional religion is Russian Orthodox Christianity. They were for many years the dominant ethnic group of the Tsarist Empire and the Soviet Union, and now form

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the majority (81.5%) of the Russian Federation. The Tatars of Russia are a Turkic people, the overwhelming majority of whom are traditionally Sunni Muslims, accounting for about half of the entire Muslim-origin population in the Russian Federation. Less than 5% of the Tatars make up a baptized subgroup, the *Kreshchenye*. Since the time of Ivan the Terrible (16th century) the Tatars' territory was part of the Russian State. Most of the Jews of today's Russian Federation originate from the former Tsarist Pale of Settlement (Belorussia, Ukraine) and either they themselves or their immediate forebears migrated to Russia proper during World War I, in the 1920s and early 1930s, or as recently as World War II and after; they are mostly Ashkenazic Jews whose traditional language was Yiddish. The demographic transition of these three very different ethnic groups of the Russian Federation is a rewarding field for comparative study. Ample Russian demographic statistics by ethnic group provide a good basis for such analysis.

2. The Demographic Transition

At the end of the 19th century in European Russia, both fertility and mortality were relatively high; the crude birth rate (CBR) has been estimated for 1896–97 as 53.1 per 1,000 Orthodox Christian population, 48.3 for the Muslim population and 35.9 for the Jews (Binshtok and Novosel'skii, 1915, p. XXV). There are no detailed vital statistics by ethnic group for this period. However according to indirect estimates, the total fertility rate (TFR) was about 7 for Russians (Andreev and Darsky, 1992, p. 4) and 6 for Jews (Bloch, 1980, p. 80; we note that B. Bloch adjusted the 1896 –97 figures for underreporting of Jewish CBR which he estimated to be as high as about 40 per 1,000). On the basis of these indicators we may assume that Tatar TFR was similar to that of the Russians.

At the same time, life expectancy at birth was lowest among the Russians: 27.5 for men and 29.8 for women; for Tatars this indicator was higher: 34.6 for men and 35.1 for women (Ptukha, 1960, p. 261). This discrepancy between the two ethnic groups was mainly due to different levels of the infant mortality rate (IMR): 331 and 243 per 1,000 newborns, respectively (estimated from ibid., pp. 246, 252). Life expectancy of the Jews in European Russia at the end of the 19th century was the highest among the three ethnic groups: it has been

estimated at about 45 for men and 46 for women, with an IMR of approximately 145 per 1,000 (Bloch, 1980, pp. 78, 80; for alternative estimates see: Andreev et al., 1992, p. 45). These more favorable longevity indicators for Jews are the result of the earlier sizable reduction of mortality over the three decades following 1867–68, during which the unadjusted Jewish crude death rate (CDR) fell by 42%. Still, in 1867–68, the CDR for Jews was 27.4 per 1,000, that is, about the same as that recorded for Muslims in 1896–97 (27.7), both these figures being lower than that of the Orthodox Christian population (34.8 per 1000) (Binshtok and Novosel'skii, 1915, pp. XXXII–XXXIII).

The lag in demographic transition during the early decades of the 20th century persisted. Only in 1926–27 did the Russians reach the level of life expectancy at birth (42.2 for men and 47.9 for women; see Andreev et al., 1992, p. 46) which the Jews had already attained three decades earlier. By 1926 the CDR for Jews in the Russian Federation had fallen to 10.2 per 1,000 compared with 17.1 and 21.5 for Tatars and Russians respectively in that year, and the CBR was 27.6 per 1,000 Jews, but 42.0 and 44.4 per 1,000 for Tatars and Russians, respectively (TsSU RSFSR, 1928, p. XL). By 1936, according to partial data, the CBR and CDR were as low as 15.8 and 8.7 per 1,000 Jews respectively (Kupovetsky, 1994, p. 31). That is, the Jewish population of the Russian Federation had, before World War II, reached an advanced stage of demographic modernization.

By 1959, when post-war demographic processes approached normalization among the three ethnic groups, each was at a very different stage of demographic development. The Jews were the first to reach a negative balance of births and deaths. At the same time the CBR of Tatars was 34.2 per 1,000, one and a half times more than for Russians, but the balance of births and deaths for both these ethnic groups was undoubtedly positive: 25.9 and 14.5 per 1,000 Tatars and Russians, respectively (tab. 1). By 1979 the CBR for Russians and Tatars had become very similar. Over these two decades this indicator for the Tatars was dramatically halved. Another turning point came in 1991 when, for the first time, the Russians reached a negative balance of births and deaths, 32 years after the Jews. Only 2 years later, in 1993, the Tatars also arrived at a negative balance of births and deaths demonstrating a convergence of demographic processes.

Tab. 1 - Balance of crude birth and death rates for Russians, Tatars and Jews in the Russian Federation, per 1000, 1959-1993

	Russians	Tatars	Jews
Birth Rate*			
1959	22.2	34.2	10.1
1979	15.0	17.6	7.2
1989	13.4	19.3	6.3**
1991	11	15	4
1993	8	11.5	3
Death Rate			
1959	7.7	8.3	10.3
1979	10.9	8.8	20.1
1989	10.9	9.0	24.4**
1991	12	10	28
1993	14	12	30
Balance			
1959	14.5	25.9	-0.2
1979	4.1	8.8	-12.9
1989	2.5	10.3	-18.1**
1991	-1	5	-24
1993	-6	-0.5	-27

* Births to mothers of given nationality.
** 1988-89.
Sources: Goskomstat RSFSR, 1990b, p. 110; Goskomstat SSSR, 1990, p. 184; Tolts, 1993, p. 107; and author's estimates on the basis of Statkomitet SNG, 1993b, p. 38; Goskomstat Rossii, 1995, p. 50; vital statistics data.

Basic mortality indicators confirm our previous conclusions made on the basis of crude rates. During the two decades between 1959 and 1979 the Tatar IMR fell by as much as 2.7 times and reached 19.4. In 1959 the Tatar IMR was almost one third higher than that of the Russians, but by 1979 it was below the Russian rate (19.4 and 22.5); it was also lower than the 1959 IMR of the Jews (tab. 2). In both 1978–79 and 1988–89 the level of life expectancy at birth for both men and women was again higher among Tatars than among Russians. That is, the ranking of the ethnic groups which existed at the end of the 19th century was restored. Jewish men have the highest life expectancy at birth, but this indicator for Jewish women is lower than for the women in the other two groups. This is true despite the low IMR among Jews

Tab. 2 - Basic mortality indicators for Russians, Tatars and Jews in the Russian Federation, 1959-1989

	Russians	Tatars	Jews
Infant mortality rate			
1959	39.8*	52.4*	19.6**
1979	22.5*	19.4*	15.0**
1988-89***	17.7	17.3*	11.7**
Probability of dying before age 60 for men at age 15, per 1000			
1978-79	350	...	180****
1988-89	300	276	169
Probability of dying before age 60 for women at age 15, per 1000			
1978-79	129	...	127****
1988-89	111	107	113
Life expectancy at birth, 1978-79			
men	61.6	62.5	67.6****
women	73.0	73.4	72.1****
Life expectancy at different ages for men, 1988-89			
0	64.5	65.5	69.7
15	51.4	52.7	56.7
45	25.2	26.7	28.6
65	12.0	13.0	13.1
Life expectancy at different ages for women, 1988-89			
0	74.6	75.9	73.5
15	61.1	62.7	60.2
45	32.5	34.2	31.5
65	15.8	17.3	14.8

* Rough estimate based on the number of births and deaths for given year.
** Author's estimate.
*** 1988 for Tatars and 1989 for Jews.
**** Urban population.
Sources: Andreev, 1992, pp. 7–8; Goskomstat RSFSR, 1990b, p. 110; Statkomitet SNG, 1995, p. 257; Tolts, 1993, p. 102; and data kindly given to the author by Evgeny Andreev.

and about the same probability of dying before 60 for Jewish women at age 15 compared with others. The reason for this apparent

inconsistency is problematic. However, there is a substantial difference in the family status/history of Jewish and other women, and the role of family/marital status is definitely related to mortality rates; and therefore its effects in the higher age brackets should be examined.

Of the three groups under consideration, Jewish women have the highest level of infertility. According to the 1979 census, among the women of the oldest cohorts (aged 70 and above), 19.0% of Jewish women, but only 6.0ý% of Tatar women and 10.9% of Russian women, had had no births. In the 1989 census this discrepancy was still apparent: e.g., the percentage of childless women at ages 50–54 after the fertile ages was 15.1% for Jews, 8.5% for Russians and 8.1% for Tatars (tab. 3). At the same time, according to the 1979 and 1989 census data, the average number of children ever born fell dramatically among Russian and Tatar women born in the 20th century. For Tatar women this indicator decreased from about 5 children per woman born before 1909 (i.e., for women aged 70 and over in the 1979 census) to 2.42 for those born in 1939–43. The 1914–1918 cohort of Russian women had already reached a level of 2.49 children ever born. In other words, there was a time lag of about 25 years between Tatars and Russians. Russian women born in 1939–43 had 1.82 births compared with 3.59 for women born before 1909. However, starting from 1919, the birth cohorts of Jewish women had a very stable and low level of fertility — about 1.4 or less.

Fertility transition in Russia generally starts in the urban population and Jews have always been in the vanguard. This latter fact coincides with findings for Jews throughout the world (see DellaPergola, 1989). By 1959 the CBR for urban Russians was 20.3 per 1,000, while for rural Russians it was 24.3 per 1,000. In this year the CBR for urban Tatars was higher — 29.9 per 1,000, but for rural Tatars it was even greater — 37.4 per 1,000 (TsSU RSFSR, 1960, pp. 224–225). By the end of the Soviet era in 1988–89 the TFR for the total Russian population (1.955) was below replacement level, and this indicator for the total Tatar population (2.330) was not much higher. However, the TFR for the Jewish population (1.492) was far lower than replacement level (Statkomitet SNG, 1995, p. 245). By 1988–89 the TFR for urban Tatars (2.145) had just about reached replacement level.

Another interesting finding is that age-specific birth rates for Jewish women at ages 25 –39 were very similar or even higher than those of urban Russian women. This can be explained only by the different marriage patterns of these two ethnic groups. Indeed, in 1989 singulate

Tab. 3 - Fertility indicators for birth cohorts of Russian, Tatar and Jewish women in the Russian Federation, according to the data of the 1979 and 1989 censuses*

Birth years of women	Age at census date	Average number of children ever born			Percentage of childless women**		
		Russians	Tatars	Jews	Russians	Tatars	Jews
1979 census of the population							
before 1909	70+	3.59	4.95	1.59	10.9	6.0	19.0
1909-13	65-69	2.87.	3.99	1.59	11.5	8.3	17.5
1914-18	60-64	2.49	3.55	1.56	12.7	10.5	17.4
1919-23	55-59	2.16	3.19	1.43	14.3	13.6	17.7
1924-28	50-54	2.10	3.09	1.41	11.9	11.8	17.3
1929-33	45-49	2.01	2.85	1.34	9.5	9.8	17.2
1989 census of the population							
1934-38	50-54	1.88	2.65	1.34	8.5	8.1	15.1
1939-43	45-49	1.82	2.42	1.33	8.0	7.6	14.7
1944-48	40-44	1.73	2.09	1.33	8.2	8.2	14.2

* All marital statuses.

** Among women for whom the number of children ever-born is known.

Sources: Goskomstat SSSR, 1989, vol. 6, part 3, pp. 118, 128, 132; Statkomitet SNG, 1993a, vol. 4 , pp. 164-167, 174-175.

mean age at marriage (SMAM) was higher for Jewish women (22.7) than Russian (21.7). In the same year SMAM for Tatar women was 22.5. In 1959 the percentage currently married among young Tatar women at ages 16–19 was 8.0%, and in 1989 it was 9.6% with the percentage ever-married in this age group 10.4%. According to the 1989 census final celibacy among Russian and Tatar women was at the same low level: only 3.6% had never married. Thus, the role of marriage dynamics in post-war fertility transition of Russian and Tatar populations was marginal.

3. Social Modernization, Secularization and Ethnic Assimilation

Demographic change among the three ethnic groups was dependent on rapid social modernization, and urbanization has been central to this process. By 1959, the Jews had an extremely high level of urbanization (94.8%) and their fertility transition had also already reached a very advanced stage. Urbanization increased among the two other groups from 1959 to 1989. The percentage of urban dwellers rose considerably from 54.9% to 76.7% for Russians and from 42.1% to 65.8% for Tatars (tab. 4). By 1989 among the large indigenous ethnic groups, the Tatars in the Russian Federation had the highest level of urbanization (cf. Saks, 1995, p. 6).

Another important aspect of social modernization is a rising educational level. In 1959 more than half of the employed Russians and Tatars had received less than 7 years of education. Three decades later, in 1989, 73.9% of employed Russians and 71.9% of employed Tatars had at least a general secondary education; in 1970, this educational level for employed Russians was 1.4 times higher than that of the Tatars. By 1989, the gap had vanished. On the other hand there was no dramatic change in the already high educational level of the Jews. In 1970, the majority of employed (82.1%) Jews had a general secondary education or more. However, by 1989 more than half of the Jews aged 20 and over had attained higher education (that is, the Russian equivalent of Western college and graduate degrees as a whole). This indicator for Russians and Tatars was much lower: 12.6% and 8.5%.

Educational data show a high level of women's emancipation, meaning the abandonment of traditional sex roles among Tatars.

Tab. 4 - Some indicators of social modernization among Russians, Tatars and Jews in the Russian Federation, 1959-1989

	Russians	Tatars	Jews
Percentage urban dwellers			
1959	54.9	42.1	94.8
1970	65.8	49.7	97.4
1979	72.5	58.3	98.1
1989	76.7	65.8	98.3
Percentage with incomplete secondary education* or more among employed persons			
1959	44.5	41.8	87.2
1970	66.3	62.8	93.4
1979	81.0	78.3	96.4
1989	91.7	90.9	98.3
Percentage with general sec ondary education** or more among employed persons			
1970	33.5	24.1	82.1
1979	52.7	46.5	88.7
1989	73.9	71.9	93.5
Percentage with higher education among those age 20 and over			
1959	3.1***	1.3	29.9
1979	8.7	5.5	46.8
1989	12.6	8.5	53.9

* Received 7 years of education before 1962, or 8 years thereafter.
** Received 10 or 11 years of education depending on period.
*** In the entire USSR.
Sources: 1959, 1970, 1979 and 1989 censuses.

According to the 1989 census, the percentage with higher education among all employed Tatar women was higher than the percentage of men with higher education among all employed Tatar men (Goskomstat Rossii, 1992, vol. 2, p. 100). One should note that as early as 1959, the Tatar level of emancipation, as measured by education data, was very similar to the Russian level; it was far higher than the level of other ethnic groups of Muslim origin in the former USSR, as well as of neighboring traditional Christian groups of the Russian Federation (Chuvash, Udmurts, Mari) (cf. Jones and Grupp, 1987, p. 351). According to the occupational data on employed population in 1989,

Tatar patterns more closely resembled Russian patterns than those of other large indigenous ethnic groups of the Russian Federation (see Saks, 1995, pp. 7–9).Thus, it is not surprising that by 1989 the Tatars had reached the lowest fertility level (average number of children ever born to women by age according to the census data) among indigenous minority ethnic groups in Russia, other than the Karelians and Ossetians, despite the fact that many of these other groups had Christian backgrounds (cf. Harris, 1993, p. 563).

In many respects, rapid demographic change was a product of secularization. For many years the population of the USSR was subject to an intensive campaign against religion. The first to fall was Judaism. According to the data of the 1937 Soviet census only a minority of Jews identified themselves as religious, but most of the Christians and an even higher percentage of Muslims in the USSR did so (see Altshuler, 1991, p. 25). In the post-war period the religious situation continued to change. By the end of the Soviet era a great majority of Russians were secular (Levada, 1993, pp. 230–231). Of the Tatar urban intelligentsia, as well as among blue-collar urban workers, many were totally secularized and had abandoned all religious practice (Ro'i, 1995, p. 19).

Traditional Judaism totally forbids mixed marriage and Islam forbids it for women. Thus, the spread of mixed marriage is a good indicator of secularization for Jews and Tatars. According to the 1988 –89 data, the percentage of mixed marriages among all marriages involving Tatars was 39.0% for Tatar men and even higher — 39.9ý% for Tatar women; in urban areas such marriages for Tatar women reached 50.5%. It has been estimated that in the mid- 1980s 25.2% Tatars were currently married to Russians (Barkalov and Darsky, 1994, p. 9). Intermarriage has been predominant among Jews. In 1988–89 among all Jews who married, 73.1% men and 62.7% women entered into mixed marriage.

In the post-war period rising intermarriage was accompanied by a great increase in the proportion of children born to mixed couples. In 1959, out of all children born to Tatar women, the percentage of children born to mixed couples (we have no data on the number of such marriages) was as low as 8.6%. Twenty years later, in 1979, it was 31.0%, or 3.6 times more. Among the urban Tatar population in 1989 this percentage reached 40.2%. At the same time, in 1989, the percentage of children born to mixed couples among all children born to a Jewish mother reached 59.2%, or 2.2 times more than in 1959. Data on the offspring of mixed Russian-Tatar and Russian-Jewish

couples show a clear preference for Russian ethnic affiliation of children. Even according to the 1994 microcensus, this was the preference on average for 81% of the children of Russian-Tatar couples, and 89% for those children born to Russian-Jewish couples.

The incidence of mixed marriages among Tatars and among Jews reflects their high level of cultural and social assimilation in Russian society. Most Russian Jews had abandoned the Yiddish language for Russian, even before World War II. According to the last Soviet census of 1989, 90.5% Ashkenazic Jews identified Russian as their native tongue. At the same time, according to this census, only 14.2% Tatars did so, but an additional 72.7% noted that they spoke Russian fluently. In other words, Russian speakers made up 86.9% of the Tatars.

The three groups are, of course, very dissimilar in terms of population size. According to the 1989 census, 120 million Russians, 5.5 million Tatars and 551,047 Jews were living in the Russian Federation. These data cover 'core' Tatar and Jewish populations. By definition the 'core' population includes those people of a given ethnic group who identify themselves as such, e.g. in censuses. The 'enlarged' population is the total aggregate of the given ethnic group, including their non-group family members (see DellaPergola, 1993, p. 93). Estimated figures show that the 'enlarged' population can be much greater than the 'core' population of a given ethnic group: according to a medium estimate, as much as 1.35 times for urban Tatars outside the Tatar and Bashkir republics (Tatarstan and Bashkortostan), and 1.42 times for Jews (tab. 5; for the method of estimation see: Tolts, 1993, pp. 108-109).

Only about 1.8 million Tatars (32%) lived in Tatarstan and 1.1 million (20%) in Bashkortostan, where they outnumbered Muslim Bashkirs. The rest of the Tatars lived mostly in other parts of the Volga and Ural regions. There were regional variations in the urban percentage among the Tatars in 1989: 63.4% in Tatarstan, 57.8% in Bashkortostan and as high as 70.8% in the rest of the Russian Federation. In 1959 the urban percentage in Tatarstan had been only 29.4%. Jews in Russia, even more than Tatars, exemplify a dispersed settlement. However, in 1989 half of the Jews lived in Moscow and St. Petersburg. The dynamics and level of fertility among the Jews were very similar to the situation in the general population of the two biggest Russian cities (see ibid., 1993, p. 103).

In 1989 the proportion of urban Tatars living in ethnically heterogeneous households, as a percentage of all Tatars living in family

Tab. 5 - 'Enlarged' Tatar (urban) and Jewish (total) population in Russia, by structure, 1989

	Tatars (urban)	Of these in:			Jews (total)
		Tatar Republic	Bashkir Republic	The rest of Russia***	
People of given ethnic group living:					
outside family households	435,958	119,711	73,831	242,416	65,905
in uninational family households*	2,201,276	854,403	376,861	970,012	249,590
in multinational family households	995,750	144,678	196,951	654,121	235,552
'Core' population of given ethnic group*	3,632,984	1,118,792	647,643	1,866,549	551,047
Non-group members of multinational family households with group presence:**					
medium estimate	995,750	144,678	196,951	654,121	235,552
maximum estimate	2,190,600	332,800	453,000	1,404,800	424,000
'Enlarged' population of given group:					
medium estimate	4,628,734	1,263,470	844,594	2,520,670	786,599
maximum estimate	5,823,584	1,451,592	1,100,643	3,271,349	975,047

* Census figure.

** Tatar or Jewish ethnic group; we have not included households which contain no 'core' Tatars/Jews. Medium estimate based on assumption that, of each multinational (Tatar/Jewish) family household, half consisted of non-Tatars or non-Jews. Maximum estimate based on assumption that there was only one Tatar/Jew in each Tatar/Jewish multinational family household.

*** Estimated residually.

Sources: Goskomstat RSFSR, 1990a, pp. 11, 123, 133; Statkomitet SNG, 1993a, vol. 3, pp. 216-217, 222-223, 246-247; Tolts, 1993, p. 109.

households, varied considerably: 31% in the Russian Federation as a whole, only 14% in Tatarstan, 34% in Bashkortostan, and 40% in the rest of Russia (tab. 5).

Between 1979 and 1989, this same proportion for Jews rose from 39% to 49%. That is, the time lag of the indicators between Jews and urban Tatars living outside of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan is only about a decade. However, we should not overestimate the role of dispersed settlement itself in Tatar demographic change. According to my estimate, in 1991, by the end of the Soviet era, the CBR in Tatarstan was about 16 per 1,000 Tatars, compared with 15 per 1,000 Tatars in the Russian Federation as a whole.

4. Concluding Remarks

Empirical analysis of demographic change among Russians, Tatars, and Jews in Russia over a century demonstrates the transition to low fertility among groups of very different ethnic and religious origins. The Tatar example is especially important because it shows how a large group of Muslim origin reached a very advanced stage of demographic modernization (cf. indicators for other ex-Soviet Muslims: Tolts, 1995). Such development has been part of general modernization and interdependent with other aspects of these processes. Modernization in Russia under the Soviet regime was linked with a break in ethnic and religious tradition for all groups, including Russians. The remaining evidence of demographic differentiation would appear to be more a product of social and structural peculiarities than a manifestation of these populations' original history and culture. The recent data show that the vital dynamics of the three ethnic groups are very similar: since 1993, Tatars, like Jews and Russians, have had a negative balance of births and deaths. Thus, we can see continuation of long-term converging tendencies in the post-Soviet era.

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