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RUSSIAN HISTORY 46 (2019) 84-101

RUSSIAN HISTORY

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The Policy of Russifying in Late Imperial Russia and its Failure

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Abstract

After the Great Reforms of the 1860s – 1870s the Russian government embarked on the construction of a modern nation-state and was faced with the need to unify all parts of the empire administratively, culturally, legally, and socially. The new ethno-confessional policy in Russian historiography is often called Russification because the order established after the Great Reforms in the Great Russian provinces served as a model for the transformation of all parts of the empire. The Russification policy included many aspects, including Russifying [*obrusenie*] - the introduction of the Russian language as obligatory in the record keeping of public institutions, in court and administration, in education and everyday life. While the policy of Russifying has found ample reflection in the historiography, its results have been insufficiently studied. The purpose of this article is to fill this gap and to try to assess the process of Russifying ethnic minorities at the imperial level, drawing upon the first general census of the Russian Empire in 1897. The analysis has led to the conclusion that the policy of Russifying did not provide the expected results.

Keywords

Late Imperial Russia – Russification – Russifying – pseudo-Russifying – the First General Census

Supplementary Material

TABLE 1 *Change in the percentage of "Russians" among the population of the Russian Empire in 1857–1897 (%)**

Age	Year of Birth	European Russia	Vistula Provinces	Caucasus	Siberia	Central Asia
1–	1897	82.3	4.8	47.2	86.2	28.0
1–9	1887–1896	80.3	4.5	31.7	82.2	9.0
10–19	1877–1886	79.6	4.6	34.9	82.1	8.8
20–29	1867–1876	79.4	16.3	34.5	79.4	9.6
30–39	1857–1866	80.1	5.3	33.5	79.5	8.0
40–49	1847–1856	80.4	4.9	35.6	79.6	7.9
50–59	1837–1846	80.1	4.7	35.3	79.7	7.8
60+	1827–1836	80.1	4.3	30.8	79.8	7.9
Change in the percentage of "Russians" from 1827–1836 to 1887–1896		0.2	0.2	0.9	2.4	1.1
Increase in the percentage of "Russians" among infants up to one year of age		2.0	0.3	15.5	4.0	19.0
Percentage of "Russians" in 1897		80.0	6.7	34.0	80.9	8.9

Source: Calculated from *Obshchii svod po imperii rezul'tatov razrabotki dannykh pervoi vseobshchei perepisi naseleniia, proizvedennoi 28 ianvaria 1897 goda*: in 2 vols. (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia N. L. Nyrkina, 1905), 2:134–75.

* Among those who indicated a native language.

TABLE 2 *Change in the percentage of "Russians" among the rural (R) and urban (U) populations of the Russian Empire in 1857-1897 (%)**

Age	Year of Birth	European Russia		Vistula Provinces		Caucasus		Siberia		Central Asia	
		R	U	R	U	R	U	R	U	R	U
1-	1897	83.2	74.4	5.1	3.5	46.5	51.8	85.9	90.2	23.9	47.4
1-9	1887-1896	81.4	70.2	4.8	3.4	30.4	43.2	81.8	89.6	7.2	24.3
10-19	1877-1886	80.5	72.6	4.9	3.3	33.9	41.3	81.6	88.3	6.9	25.1
20-29	1867-1876	80.3	74.9	10.9	28.3	32.2	45.6	79.0	82.9	5.7	33.0
30-39	1857-1866	80.9	76.0	5.5	4.7	32.0	43.2	79.4	80.7	6.0	22.8
40-49	1847-1856	81.3	75.3	5.2	4.1	34.2	44.4	79.3	83.1	6.0	21.2
50-59	1837-1846	81.0	73.4	5.1	3.2	34.1	43.4	79.2	85.2	6.0	20.2
60+	1827-1836	81.0	73.5	4.7	2.6	29.5	40.9	79.2	87.5	6.3	20.4
Change in the percentage of "Russians" from 1827-1836 to 1887-1896		0.4	-3.3	0.1	0.8	0.9	2.3	2.6	2.1	0.9	3.9
Increase in the percentage of "Russians" among infants up to one year of age		1.8	4.2	0.3	0.1	16.1	8.6	4.1	0.6	16.7	23.1
Percentage of "Russians" in 1897		81.0	73.6	5.9	9.4	32.5	43.6	80.5	85.3	6.6	25.7

Source: Calculated from *Obshchii svod po imperii rezul'tatov razrabotki dannykh pervoi vseobshchei perepisi naseleniia, proizvedennoi 28 ianvaria 1897 goda*: in 2 vols. (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia N. L. Nyrkina, 1905), 2:134-75.

*Among those who indicated a native language.

TABLE 3 *Change in the percentage of "Russians" among the male and female rural population of the Russian Empire in 1827-1897 (%)**

Age	Year of Birth	European Russia		Vistula Provinces		Caucasus		Siberia		Central Asia	
		M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W
1-	1897	82.2	82.5	4.7	4.9	45.9	48.6	86.1	86.3	27.9	28.2
1-9	1887-1896	80.2	80.5	4.5	4.5	30.9	32.5	82.2	82.3	9.0	9.0
10-19	1877-1886	79.5	79.6	4.6	4.5	33.1	36.8	81.6	82.6	8.4	9.3
20-29	1867-1876	79.0	79.7	26.2	5.0	34.6	34.4	77.5	81.5	10.7	8.4
30-39	1857-1866	79.9	80.4	5.8	4.8	33.1	34.0	77.4	81.9	7.7	8.4
40-49	1847-1856	80.0	80.9	5.3	4.6	35.3	35.9	77.9	81.5	7.5	8.4
50-59	1837-1846	79.4	80.7	5.0	4.4	34.4	36.4	78.3	81.2	6.9	8.9
60+	1827-1836	79.4	80.8	4.7	3.8	31.7	29.8	79.5	80.1	7.0	9.2
Change in the percentage of "Russians" from 1827-1836 to 1887-1896		0.8	-0.3	-0.2	0.7	-0.8	2.7	2.7	2.2	2.0	-0.2
Increase in the percentage of "Russians" among infants up to one year of age		2.0	2.0	0.2	0.4	15.0	16.1	3.9	4.0	18.9	19.2
Percentage of "Russians" in 1897		79.8	80.3	8.8	4.6	33.3	34.7	79.9	82.0	8.8	9.1

Source: Calculated from *Obshchii svod po imperii rezul'tatov razrabotki dannyykh pervoi vseobshchei perepisi naseleniia, proizvedennoi 28 ianvaria 1897 goda*: in 2 vols. (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia N. L. Nyrkina, 1905), 2:134-75.

*Among those who indicated a native language.

TABLE 4 *Change in the percentage of Russians, Ukrainians, and Belorussians among the population of the Russian Empire in 1827–1897 (%)**

Age	Year of Birth	Millions	Percentage					
			Population of the Empire			Russians	Ukrainians	Belorussians
1–9	1887–1896	30.0	12.5	5.9	1.5	42	20	5
10–19	1877–1886	26.5	11.5	4.9	1.3	43	18	5
20–29	1867–1876	20.4	9.1	3.4	0.9	45	17	4
30–39	1857–1866	15.8	7	2.7	0.7	44	17	4
40–49	1847–1856	11.7	5.5	2	0.5	47	17	4
50–59	1837–1846	8.3	3.8	1.4	0.3	46	17	4
60+	1827–1836	8.6	4.1	1.3	0.4	48	15	5

Sources: Calculated from *Pervaia vseobshchaia perepis' naseleniia*: in 89 vols. St. Petersburg, 1899–1905), vol. 1–89, table XV.

*Among those who indicated a native language.

TABLE 5 *Literacy rate in Russian and in the native language among the various peoples of the empire in 1897 (%)*

Peoples	Literacy Rate, %	
	Russian	Native Language
Latvians	36.6	47.8
Germans	31.8	40.4
Jews	31.1	17.8
Estonians	29.9	63.6
Bulgarians	28.3	0.2
Russians	27.0	0.0
Greeks	23.7	11.0
Northern Finns	20.9	11.9
Ukrainians	18.5	0.1
Belorussians	17.9	1.9
Poles	17.5	21.5
Others	11.9	9.7
Volga Peoples	9.7	0.1
Lithuanians	8.4	39.7
Moldovans	8.1	0.3

Peoples	Literacy Rate, %	
	Russian	Native Language
Armenians	7.9	8.2
Georgians	5.5	12.5
Tatars	2.9	13.4
Small Siberian Nations	2.4	2.6
Kalmyks	1.8	2.3
Caucasus Mountain Peoples	1.4	5.6
Uralic Peoples	1.4	24.8
Central Asians	0.4	3.0

Source: Obshchii svod po imperii rezul'tatov razrabotki dannykh pervoi vseobshchei perepisi naseleniia, proizvedennoi 28 ianvaria 1897 goda: in 2 vols. (St. Petersburg: Tipografia N. L. Nyrkina, 1905), 2:139.

TABLE 6 *Enrollment of school-aged children in primary schools in 1903, %*

Educational District	Number of Residents per Single Ministry of Public Education School	Enrollment of Children, %	
		%	Number of Times Greater than in Turkestan, Turkestan = 1
Riga	936	100	17
St. Petersburg	2,284	58	10
Moscow	2,445	54	9
Warsaw	2,549	52	9
Odessa	2,704	49	8
Kazan'	3,112	42	7
Khar'kov	3,398	39	7
Eastern Siberia	3,458	38	6
Orenburg	3,838	34	6
Caucasus	4,805	27	5
Kiev	5,315	25	4
Vilna	5,481	24	4
Western Siberia	11,833	11	2
Turkestan	21,750	6	1
The Empire	3,371	39	7

Source: Calculated from *Vsepoddanneishii otchet Ministra narodnogo prosvechshenia za 1903 god* (St. Petersburg: Senatskaia tipografia, 1905), 502–6.