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Research article

The Permeability of Social Boundaries for Russians in the Post-Soviet Space: The Role of Social Identities and Perceived Security

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Abstract. Russians are one of the largest ethnocultural minorities in the post-Soviet and the issue of their inclusion in the societies of host countries remains relevant. Therefore, this study was focused on the relationship between perceived security and social identities (civic, ethnic or European) and the perceived permeability of social boundaries for Russians in Armenia, Kazakhstan, Estonia, and Kyrgyzstan. The study had a cross-sectional design. The data were collected online in 2020–2022, from samples of Russian minorities in these countries (total $N = 765$, including: 145 Russians in Armenia, 133 Russians in Kazakhstan, 186 Russians in Estonia, and 300 Russians in Kyrgyzstan) using the scales of ethnic identity, civic identity and perceived security from the questionnaire of the international MIRIPS project, the scale of European identity developed by K. Velkova, and the scale of permeability of social boundaries by M. Ramos et al. Path models were built to test the hypothesis and find an answer to the research question. The analysis of regression coefficients, as well as direct and indirect effects in the path models, demonstrated a universal positive relationship between perceived security and the perceived permeability of social boundaries for the Russians. The inclusiveness or exclusiveness of a particular identity was found to be culture-specific. Civic identity contributes to the perceived permeability of social boundaries in Armenia, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. European identity impedes perceived it in Kazakhstan. Ethnic identity promotes it in Kazakhstan but hinders it in Estonia (at tendency level). In a number of countries, significant mediation effects of ethnic (Estonia), civic (Kazakhstan and Armenia), and European (Kazakhstan) identities were found. The results were discussed in relation to the structural characteristics of the socio-cultural contexts of the studied countries. It was concluded that perceived security would affect the inclusiveness of the context in combination with social identities, depending on the characteristics of the sociocultural context.

Keywords: permeability of social boundaries, ethnic identity, civic identity, European identity, perceived security, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Estonia, Armenia, Russians, post-Soviet space

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Introduction

Cultural diversity in a society raises the issue of its inclusiveness for migrants and ethnic minorities. This is related not only to issues of social cohesion and the favorability of intercultural relations, but also to whether cultural differences will be perceived as a benefit and resource, or will serve as a source of discord and polarization in society. The positive aspects of cultural diversity are most realized in inclusive societies, while its threats are most realized in exclusionary societies (MM, 2019).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the newly independent republics actively formed their own social policies, which make it possible to classify this region primarily as a “nationalizing state”. It is believed that in societies of this type, the regulation of intercultural relations is based on the principles of assimilation, which means the rejection of minorities from their cultural traditions in favor of the culture of the majority (Letnyakov, 2019).

The issue of inclusiveness of society in the post-Soviet countries is of particular relevance for the Russian ethnic minority, as it is one of the most represented in the region. The problem of this study is the insufficient number of research of socio-psychological factors that promote or hinder inclusiveness of Russians in the post-Soviet space. To fill this gap in scientific knowledge, we consider the inclusiveness of society through the perceived permeability of social boundaries for Russians in four post-Soviet countries (Armenia, Kazakhstan, Estonia and Kyrgyzstan). We suppose that the perceived security, that may affect social identities, determine this permeability. Therefore, the goal of the study is to identify the role of social identities in the relationship between the perceived security and perceived permeability of social boundaries in various socio-cultural contexts.

Perceived permeability of social boundaries as an indicator of the inclusiveness of society

The permeability of social boundaries in psychology usually means the fundamental ability of people or groups to overcome, soften, or eliminate boundaries between social groups (Tajfel, Turner, 2004), including ethnocultural ones. From the perspective of the host society, the permeability of social boundaries describes the desirability of inclusion of members of another group, whereas from the perspective of a minority, it describes the fundamental (perceived) possibility of inclusion in society (Johnson et al., 2005; Verkuyten & Reijerse, 2008).

In general, when social boundaries are perceived as permeable, group members interact more actively (Piontkowski et al., 2000), which leads to improved intergroup relations (Loh et al., 2010), reducing perceived discrimination and increasing psychological well-being (Bourguignon et al., 2015). In contrast, impermeable social boundaries reflect the exclusionary orientation of the sociocultural context and are associated with a negative image of members of the external group (Echabe & Castro, 1996), i.e., ethnocultural minorities.

The perceived permeability of social boundaries as an indicator of social inclusiveness is based on the idea of the consequences of social categorization. The process of social categorization, i.e., assigning oneself and other people to certain categories, is inevitable. However, by making certain categories more inclusive, it

is possible to redefine perceived group boundaries (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005). This raises the issue of the relationship between social identities and the permeability of social boundaries.

Social identities and the permeability of social boundaries

Social identities, reflecting the fact of perceived membership in a social group, as well as its emotional and value assessment (Tajfel, Turner, 2004), can play an inclusionary or exclusionary role in a certain context (Lepshokova, Leb-edeveva, 2022). Indeed, homogeneity and similarity between groups, allowing them to be considered within the same or similar categories, contribute to the permeability of social boundaries and the reduction of prejudice (Zhang, 2014).

It has been found that salient ethnic identity can act as a divisive factor and lead to exclusionary attitudes towards migrants (Morrison et al., 2010). Civic identity promotes trust in the host society in all aspects and, thus, cohesion and inclusiveness (Breibahl, Gustavsson, 2022). And supra-ethnic/supranational identification with Europe is positively related to more inclusionary attitudes towards migrants (Curtis, 2014) and negatively related to prejudice (Stone, Crisp, 2007).

Therefore, for ethnic minorities, the permeability of social boundaries in a society may depend on how open and inclusive the society's approach to different forms of identity is. Increasing the permeability can occur through respect for ethnic differences, strengthening civic and supranational identities, as well as creating conditions for interaction and integration of different groups in society. Moreover, according to integral threat theory, people are willing to accept others when they have a basic sense of security in intergroup relations. Conversely, feeling oneself threatened will lead to prejudice and discrimination (Stephan et al., 2005).

*Perceived security and the permeability of social boundaries:
The role of social identities*

In the context of intercultural relations hypotheses, perceived security and its antipode, perceived threat, refer to the feeling of individuals or groups of their own safe space in interactions with members of other cultures or ethnic groups. Perceived threat comes in several forms and is reflected in fears associated with the loss of cultural heritage, worsening economic conditions, and a reduced sense of physical security (personal security). According to the multiculturalism hypothesis, perceived security is associated with more positive intercultural relationships (Berry, 2013); in particular, it leads to tolerance and support for multicultural ideology and an orientation towards the integration of ethnocultural minorities. Many studies have empirically confirmed this hypothesis in samples of ethnocultural minorities and the majority (Kodja et al., 2019; Kruusvall et al., 2009; Leb-edeveva et al., 2016).

A number of studies have examined the relationship between perceived security and social identities. However, the results are heterogeneous. In some studies, perceived security promotes a pronounced ethnic identity (Zinchenko et al., 2019); while in others, perceived threat promotes civic identity and European identity (Baydhowi et al., 2023; Matonyte, Morkevičius, 2013). Thus, both the

feeling of security and the feeling of threat can stimulate social identities. However, since there is a critical lack of research on this issue, it is impossible to extrapolate these findings to ethnic minorities and different sociocultural contexts.

Post-Soviet space: sociocultural context of the countries studied

Armenia is practically a mono-ethnic state, with ethnocultural minorities accounting for less than two percent of the population, and Russians being the second largest ethnocultural minority (less than 1%). Despite such a small representation of Russians, interethnic relations in the country remain positive (Kurkchian, Herzig, 2004). This can be partially explained by the common Soviet past, which had a positive impact on the development of Armenian identity and the desire to preserve and pass on to descendants the collective memory of Armenian culture, so that “Soviet” and “Armenian” were often inseparable from each other in the past (Bayadyan, 2007). At the same time, the favorable position of Soviet-Slavic ethnocultural minorities, and in particular Russians, reflects their status as the “successors” of the Soviet Union (Schulze, 2017). The Russian language has a special status and performs a cultural-civilizational function and the function of intercultural communication, since more than half of the country’s population speaks Russian.

The Russians in **Kazakhstan** represent the largest ethnocultural minority making up about 15% of the total population. As in the other countries in the post-Soviet space, their number in the republic decreased significantly after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Karabec, Kotenko, 2015). At the same time, researchers note that for the Russians in Kazakhstan it is also very important to “remain Russian” and “live Russian culture”; in particular to profess Orthodoxy and speak Russian (Svinchukova, 2012). The majority of the country’s population speaks Russian, and even a number of government organizations actively use the Russian language (Melich, Adibayeva, 2013). Thus, the issue of language does not become a divisive factor. And, although Russians themselves rate the favorability of interethnic relations in the country lower than Kazakhs, and in general Russians are rather excluded from the political life of the country (Peyrouse, 2007), government policy is principally aimed at interethnic harmony and integration (Mukhitdenova, Akbolat, 2015).

The post-Soviet period in **Estonia** has been characterized by a growing rift between Estonian society and Russian-speaking groups. The Russians constitute about a quarter of the population and are the most represented ethnic minority in Estonia. Due to the fact that the Russians face problems related to the status of the Russian language and discrimination (Włodarska-Frykowska, 2016), interethnic relations in the country remain complicated. There is a strong assimilation pressure, which also affects Russians’ sense of belonging to Estonia (Vetik, Helemäe, 2011). In Estonia, the ethnic Russians transitioned from political power and economic advantage to a relatively deprived minority. Moreover, Estonian “integration” policy was limited to the minorities’ linguistic, political and socioeconomic participation; however, the problem of cultural preservation has not been resolved.

All these factors lead the Russian minority to fear group-based injustices and the devaluation of their identity (Kus, Liu & Ward, 2013; Ward, 2024). Nevertheless, according to researchers, in recent decades (before the start of the special military operation), there has been some progress in intercultural relations (Shlapentokh, 2018).

Finally, in *Kyrgyzstan*, the Russians make up 5% of the country's population, although they are the third largest ethnic group. At the same time, intercultural relations in the country are rather ambiguous. On the one hand, the Russian language retains the status of the state language, and almost a third of the population uses it as the language of communication (Galyapina, 2021; Khairutdinova *et al.*, 2023). On the other hand, more than half of the Russians report high inter-ethnic tension (Chotayeva Ch., 2013). The negative background of intercultural relations and the separation of ethnic majorities and minorities is associated, among other things, with emphasizing the differences between ethnic groups and measures to strengthen the ethnic identity of the Kyrgyz majority (Agadjanian, 2020).

It can be concluded that the sociocultural contexts of the countries under consideration differ in a number of ways. Firstly, this is the representation of the Russians, which is low in Kyrgyzstan and Armenia but quite high in Estonia and Kazakhstan. Secondly, this is the favorability of state policy in relation to the Russian ethnocultural minority, the Russian language and culture, as well as the degree of tension in intercultural relations in the country. Thus, Estonia and Kyrgyzstan are more likely to be characterized by tense intercultural relations with the Russians and more assimilationist policies, while Armenia and Kazakhstan are more likely to gravitate towards more positive relations with the Russians and a desire for integration. In addition, of course, the cultural distance and general "similarity" between the groups are important. For example, in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, where the civilizational identity is Turkic, the supranational European identity of the Russians is more likely to increase cultural distance and differences between the groups. Because of these differences, various social identities may play an inclusionary or exclusionary role for the Russians in these countries.

Thus, based on the given theoretical framework and consideration of the sociocultural context, the following hypothesis and research questions can be put forward.

Hypothesis: Perceived security is positively related to the permeability of social boundaries for the Russians in Estonia, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia and Kazakhstan.

Research question 1: Which social identities (ethnic, civic, European) are inclusionary, and which are exclusionary for the Russians in Estonia, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia and Kazakhstan?

Research question 2: What is the role of social identities in the relationship between the perceived security and perceived permeability of social boundaries for Russians in in Estonia, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia and Kazakhstan?

Methods

The sample for this study consisted of 765 respondents, representatives of the Russian ethnic minority in Armenia (145 respondents, including 85 women; mean age = 37.91, standard deviation = 13.98), in Kazakhstan (133 respondents,

including 90 women; mean age = 36.45, standard deviation 13.92), in Estonia (186 respondents, including 131 women; mean age 32.37, standard deviation = 15.95), and in Kyrgyzstan (300 respondents, including 196 women; mean age = 35.56, standard deviation = 17.4). Thus, the sample was predominantly composed of women, with over 70% of the respondents being employed in each country and over 50% adhering to the Russian Orthodox faith.

The study was conducted using a *cross-sectional, non-experimental design*. The sample was formed using a method of non-probability sampling of consenting individuals. The data were collected through an online survey, conducted on the Ika platform, in the format of a socio-psychological study. The potential participants were invited to fill out the questionnaire through personal invitations via email; significant support in distributing invitations was provided by foreign partner universities. Each participant was required to read and sign the informed consent form before starting the questionnaire.

The research instrument included five scales (based on the Likert scale) as well as several questions about the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. Information on the reliability of the instrument is provided in Table.

The level of perceived security among the Russian ethnic minority was assessed using the relevant scale from the questionnaire of the international MIRIPS project “Mutual Intercultural Relations in Multicultural Societies” (MIRIPS questionnaire), adapted for use in Russian and shortened as part of the work on a scientific project “Empirical Verification of the Applicability of Multiculturalism Policy in Russia in the Context of World Experience”. Here is an example statement from this scale: “There is room for a variety of languages and cultures in [country]”, with response options ranging from 1 (Totally Disagree) to 5 (Totally Agree). The original scale in Russian contained 6 statements (three positive and three negative ones) regarding security or the presence of threats, including physical, economic, and cultural aspects. In this study, three positive and one negative statement (items 1, 4, 5, and 6 of the scale) were used, as this combination yielded the highest reliability of the instrument across all countries. Due to the small number of items in the version of the scale used, the indicator was calculated for the entire scale (as the arithmetic mean of the respondent’s answers) without identifying the subscales.

To assess the extent of *civic and ethnic identity*, the scales from the MIRIPS questionnaire, translated and adapted for use in Russian, were also applied (Lebedeva, Tatarko, 2009). The extent of *European identity* was evaluated using a supra-ethnic identity scale, developed based on the scales from the MIRIPS questionnaire (Velkova, 2020). Each scale contained four statement-items assessing cognitive and affective aspects of self-identification with a particular group. Examples of questions included as follows “I think of myself as [group]” and “I feel that I am part of [group] culture”; instead of gaps, the Russian group was indicated (for ethnic identity), the majority group in a specific country (for civic identity), the supra-ethnic group (European for European identity). The response options ranged from 1 (Totally disagree) to 5 (Absolutely agree). The indicator for each

scale was calculated as the arithmetic mean of the respondent's answers without distinguishing the subscales.

The perceived permeability of social boundaries in society for the Russians was assessed using the social boundary permeability scale (Ramos et al., 2016). The scale was adapted for use in the study of intercultural relationship in previous studies (Bultseva et al., 2021). The respondents were asked to rate how difficult it would be for a Russian person to integrate into the society of a particular host country using a scale ranging from 1 (Very Difficult) to 5 (Very Easy). Here is an example statement: "To become a full-fledged member of various... groups (friendly, professional, etc.) for a Russian person in...". Instead of a gap, the majority groups and the name of the country were indicated. The scale indicator was calculated as the arithmetic mean of the respondent's answers.

The mathematical and statistical **data processing** was performed using the SPSS software and its extension, AMOS (version 22). Preliminary data filtering was conducted to remove incorrectly completed questionnaires. The consistency of the scales was established (according to the Cronbach's alpha criterion). Then descriptive statistics, including comparisons of means were calculated: ANOVA and Tukey's *post-hoc* tests for cross-cultural comparisons; Student's *T*-test for related samples, and pairwise comparisons for intra-county comparisons. To test the hypothesis and find answers to the research questions, a regression analysis was conducted using SPSS, and structural equations were built using bootstrap procedures and evaluation of mediation effects in AMOS.

Results

Analysis of the level of the phenomena studied

Table presents descriptive statistics from a cross-cultural perspective. Cross-cultural comparisons (ANOVA, Tukey's *post hoc* tests) show that there are significant differences between the countries. First, the level of permeability of perceived social boundaries of the host society for the Russians differs significantly ($F = 15.72, p < 0.01$). In particular, in Kyrgyzstan and Estonia, the permeability of social boundaries is approximately the same, but significantly lower than in all the other countries under consideration. Second, differences are also found in the levels of perceived security ($F = 36.79, p < 0.01$): in Kyrgyzstan it is significantly lower than in the other countries. Third, social identities are pronounced to a different degree, specifically: civic identity ($F = 51.95, p < 0.01$) and European identity ($F = 54.46, p < 0.01$). The Russians in Armenia have the lowest level of civic identity, while it is significantly higher among the Russians in Kyrgyzstan and even higher among the Russians in the other countries. At the same time, the Russians in Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan have approximately the same level of European identity, which is significantly lower than that of the Russians in Estonia. Thus, the peculiarities of the countries really affect the self-identification of the Russians living there and their perception of the sociocultural context.

Next, intra-country comparisons of social identities (Student’s *T*-test for related samples, pairwise comparisons) show that in those countries where there are few Russians, ethnic identity is more pronounced than civic identity; e.g., in Armenia ($T = 9.96, p < 0.01$), in Kyrgyzstan ($T = 12.09, p < 0.01$). In all the countries under consideration, ethnic identity is more pronounced than European identity: in Armenia ($T = 13.06, p < 0.01$), in Kazakhstan ($T = 13.13, p < 0.01$), in Estonia ($T = 2.52, p < 0.05$), in Moldova ($T = 4.11, p < 0.01$), and in Kyrgyzstan ($T = 19.26, p < 0.01$). At the same time, in some countries, civic identity is also more pronounced than European identity: in Kazakhstan ($T = 11.18, p < 0.01$) and in Kyrgyzstan ($T = 7.98, p < 0.01$). Thus, in general, European identity is less pronounced than the other two, and the significance of ethnic and civic identities depends on the context of a particular country

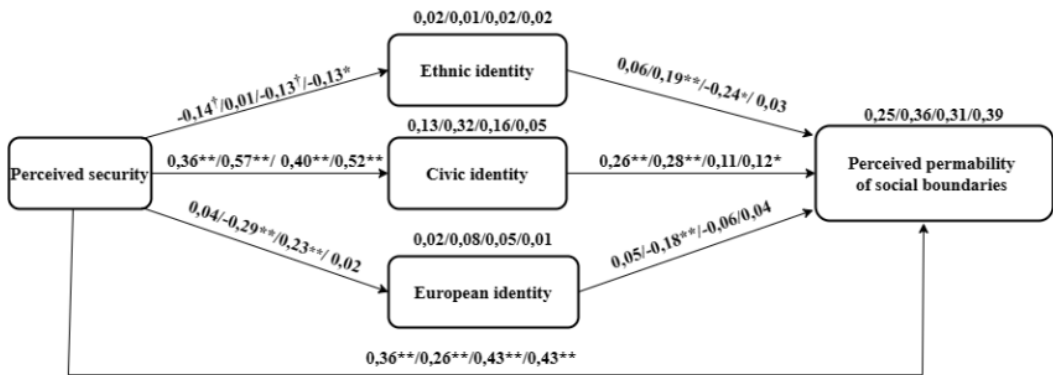
Descriptive Statistics and Reliability of Instruments Used in the Studied Countries

Constructs	Country								
	Kazakhstan		Estonia		Armenia		Kyrgyzstan		ANOVA
	M (σ)	α	M (σ)	α	M (σ)	α	M (σ)	α	
Boundaries permeability	3.33 (0.78)	0.89	2.85 (0.79)	0.86	3.22 (0.95)	0.90	2.84 (0.84)	0.86	15.72 ($p < 0.01$)
Perceived security*	3.54 (0.76)	0.67	3.55 (0.73)	0.64	3.44 (0.77)	0.52	2.93 (0.78)	0.54	36.79 ($p < 0.01$)
Ethnic identity	4.07 (0.81)	0.84	4.02 (0.95)	0.89	4.19 (1.01)	0.88	4.30 (0.78)	0.86	2.58 ($p > 0.05$)
Civic identity	4.04 (0.81)	0.85	3.78 (0.93)	0.85	2.67 (1.23)	0.92	3.48 (0.93)	0.85	51.95 ($p < 0.01$)
European Identity	2.61 (1.06)	0.96	3.89 (0.91)	0.89	3.22 (0.95)	0.96	2.82 (1.26)	0.95	54.46 ($p < 0.01$)

Note. * – Since the scale of perceived security has low consistency indicators according to the Cronbach’s Alpha criterion (due to the small number of items in the questionnaire), then according to the recommendations (Pallant, 2020) the correlation coefficients between the items of the scale were calculated (in Estonia: from 0.23 to 0.44; in Kazakhstan: from 0.19 to 0.57; in Armenia: from 0.17 to 0.31; in Kyrgyzstan: 0.16 to 0.39; all the correlations are significant)

The results of regression and path analysis

The results of the path analysis are presented in summary form in Figure.



Model of the relationship between perceived security, social identities and perceived permeability of social boundaries for Russians in Armenia / Kazakhstan / Estonia / Kyrgyzstan

Note: † $p < 0,1$; * $p < 0,05$; ** $p < 0,01$.

Armenia. The results of the regression analysis demonstrate that perceived security contributes to the perception of social boundaries of Armenian society as more permeable ($F = 34.33$, $R^2 = 0.19$, $\beta = 0.44$, $p < 0.01$). This confirms the first hypothesis for the Russians in Armenia. According to the results of the analysis of the constructed path model ($CMIN/df = 0.49$, $CFI = 0.99$, $RMSEA = 0.01$, $PClose = 0.73$; $^\dagger p < 0.1$; $*p < 0.05$; $**p < 0.01$), perceived security contributes to a higher perceived permeability of social boundaries of Armenian society for the Russians, a more pronounced civic identity, but also hinders (at the tendency level) the ethnic identity of the Russians (Figure). At the same time, the civic identity contributes to the perception of social boundaries of Armenian society as more permeable. A significant indirect mediation effect of perceived security through the civic identity was also found ($\beta = 0.09$, $p = 0.02$). Thus, it is the civic identity of the Russians in Armenia that plays an inclusionary role.

Kazakhstan. The results of regression analysis demonstrate that perceived security contributes to the perception of social boundaries of Kazakh society as more permeable ($F = 36.91$, $R^2 = 0.22$, $\beta = 0.47$, $p < 0.01$). This confirms the first hypothesis for the Russians in Kazakhstan. According to the results of the analysis of the constructed path model ($CMIN/df = 0.72$, $CFI = 0.99$, $RMSEA = 0.01$, $PClose = 0.59$; $*p < 0.05$; $**p < 0.01$), perceived security contributes to a higher perceived permeability of social boundaries of Kazakh society for the Russians, a more pronounced civic identity, but also impedes the European identity of Russians (Figure). At the same time, the ethnic and civic identities contribute to, while the European identity prevents the perception of social boundaries of Kazakh society as more permeable. Significant indirect mediation effects of perceived security through the civic identity ($\beta = 0.16$, $p = 0.01$) and European identity ($\beta = 0.59$, $p = 0.04$) were also found. Thus, the civic identity of the Russians in Kazakhstan plays an inclusionary role, while the European identity separates them from the host society. Interestingly, the ethnic identity, although independent of perceived security, also has a positive effect on the perception of social boundaries as more permeable.

Estonia. The results of the regression analysis demonstrate that perceived security contributes to the perception of social boundaries of Estonian society as more permeable ($F = 59.31$, $R^2 = 0.24$, $\beta = 0.49$, $p < 0.01$). This confirms the first hypothesis for the Russians in Estonia. According to the results of the analysis of the constructed path model ($CMIN/df = 1.62$, $CFI = 0.99$, $RMSEA = 0.06$, $PClose = 0.34$; $^\dagger p < 0.1$; $*p < 0.05$; $**p < 0.01$), perceived security contributes to higher perceived permeability of social boundaries of Estonian society for the Russians, more pronounced civic identity, and European identity, and also hinders the ethnic identity of Russians (at the tendency level) (Figure). At the same time, it is the ethnic identity that prevents the perception of social boundaries of Estonian society as more permeable. A significant indirect mediation effect of perceived security through the ethnic identity was also found ($\beta = 0.05$, $p = 0.04$). Thus,

the social identities in Estonia do not play an inclusionary role, and the ethnic identity separates Russians from the host society.

Kyrgyzstan. The results of the regression analysis demonstrate that perceived security contributes to the perception of social boundaries of Kyrgyz society as more permeable ($F = 78.12$, $R^2 = 0.21$, $\beta = 0.46$, $p < 0.01$). This confirms the first hypothesis for the Russians in Kyrgyzstan. According to the results of the analysis of the constructed path model ($CMIN/df = 2.74$, $CFI = 0.98$, $RMSEA = 0.07$, $PClose = 0.22$; $*p < 0.05$; $**p < 0.01$), perceived security contributes to a higher perceived permeability of social boundaries of Kyrgyz society for the Russians, a more pronounced civic identity, but also hinders the ethnic identity of the Russians (Figure). At the same time, the civic identity contributes to the perception of social boundaries of Kyrgyz society as more permeable. A significant indirect mediation effect of perceived security through the civic identity was also found ($\beta = 0.03$, $p = 0.03$). Thus, it is the civic identity of the Russians in Kyrgyzstan that plays an inclusionary role.

Discussion

This study aimed to determine the relationships between perceived security, social identities, and perceived permeability of social boundaries for the Russians in four post-Soviet countries. By analyzing the results of previous studies and the characteristics of sociocultural contexts, a hypothesis and two research questions were formulated. The hypothesis that perceived security contributes to the perceived permeability of social boundaries for the Russians was confirmed in each of the countries considered: Armenia, Kazakhstan, Estonia, and Kyrgyzstan. The research questions posed in this study concerned the inclusiveness or exclusiveness of social identities and their role in the relationship between perceived security and the permeability of social boundaries for the Russians. Let us now review the results obtained.

When members of the Russian ethnic minority in these countries feel that they are in a safe and supportive environment, they may be more willing to interact with members of the majority and overcome the boundaries between them. This result echoes the fact that perceived security contributed to the preference for the integration strategy among the Russian ethnocultural minorities in Dagestan, Georgia, and Tajikistan (Berry et al., 2019; Galyapina et al., 2021). In fact, countries with more multicultural policies and with greater levels of immigrant acceptance have better sociocultural integration rates (Ward, 2024). It is interesting to note that, for example, in a study of the Russian ethnic minority in Latvia, perceived security is negatively associated with the intensity of contacts with members of the ethnic majority (Lebedeva, Tatarko, Berry, 2016). This indicates the need for further research on the permeability of social boundaries and its associated variables in each specific sociocultural context. In addition, it is important to consider that intercultural relations are a dynamic process, and not only can perceived security affect the permeability of social boundaries, but also, conversely,

the permeability of social boundaries can contribute to the formation of more tolerant and safe social structures. When the boundaries between groups become more permeable, this can create opportunities for interaction, understanding, and cooperation between different social groups, which can ultimately contribute to a stronger overall sense of security and belonging.

The results of the study provided an answer to the research question of which social identities (ethnic, civic, European) are inclusionary and which are exclusionary for the Russians in the countries under consideration. Thus, it turns out that civic identity plays an inclusionary role in three of the four countries examined (with the exception of Estonia). European identity contributes to the permeability of social boundaries in Armenia but hinders it in Kazakhstan. Ethnic identity has a consolidating significance in Kazakhstan but hinders the permeability of social boundaries in Estonia. Thus, the inclusionary role of civic identity was found in most contexts, while the role of ethnic and European identity depends on the favorableness of intercultural relations in the country and the cultural proximity between the Russians, titular nations, and Europeans. It is of interest to note that in the theory of social identity (Tajfel, Turner, 2004), the opposite direction of the relationship between the constructs under consideration is assumed. The degree of permeability of social boundaries affects the formation of social identities and related behaviors: individual mobility (attempts to gain membership in a new group), social competition (attempts to protect the interests of one's own group), social creativity (recategorization, decategorization, revision of attitudes, *etc.*). In future studies, it would be interesting to look specifically at identities in dynamics and at Russians' strategies for responding to the permeability of social boundaries for them.

Applying path modelling, we found an answer to the research question about the role of social identities in the relationship between perceived safety and the perceived permeability of social boundaries for the Russians in the countries under consideration was found. The discussion of these results should be considered in two directions: firstly, to emphasize the connection between perceived security and identities, and secondly, to pay attention to the identified mediational (indirect) effects.

In contrast to previous studies that did not consider ethnocultural minorities (Baydhowi et al., 2023; Matonyte, Morkevičius, 2013), perceived security was found to contribute to civic identity in all the countries, and European identity in Estonia, where it may be the basis for recategorization. Some authors even note that a new hybrid model of integration is being formed in Estonia, consisting in the fact that the Russians are included in Estonian society, and Estonian society is gradually integrated into the European community (Laitin, 2003). The relationship between perceived security and ethnic identity turned out to be negative in the countries with tense intercultural relations (Kyrgyzstan, Estonia) and in Armenia, where a few Russians reside. This may indicate that ethnic identity is not so much a response to the possibility of preserving one's culture, but rather a way of cop-

ing with assimilationist pressure and preserving oneself in the absence of inclusion in the Russian community in the country due to its lack of representation. The negative relationship between perceived security and ethnic identity of the Russians living in Estonia, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan can also be explained by the way the Russians and attitudes towards them are represented in media and public discourse; especially in the broader context of international relations. Previous studies have noted that in Estonia, contemporary Russia is perceived to still be associated with the memories of the Soviet Union, resulting in a negative perception of Russian identity among the host population and consequently affecting the Russian population within the country (Kus, Liu & Ward, 2013). This logic can conditionally be extended to the other two countries as well, although their histories of relations with Russia are somewhat different. Overall, this is consistent with the researchers' finding that the identity salience, as a function of perceived security, can increase or decrease depending on the context and personality characteristics (Albert, Schneeweis, Knobbe, 2005).

In terms of the mediation effects identified, perceived security was found to contribute to the perception of social boundaries as more permeable, in part because it was associated with greater salience of inclusive identities (civic in Armenia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, European in Armenia) and less salience of exclusive identities (ethnic in Estonia and European in Kazakhstan). Thus, perceptions of contextual safety, self-identity processes, and appraisals of the permeability of social boundaries interact to shape a social environment that may be more conducive to the development of positive intergroup relations and an enhanced overall sense of safety and belonging.

The practical significance of our findings can be seen in three broad directions. First, our findings point to the need to promote civic identity among Russian minorities to enhance their social integration. This could include civic education programs, encouraging Russians to participate in national holidays dedicated to their shared history. Such programs that encourage Russian minorities to participate in national events may contribute to a stronger sense of belonging, improving perceived social integration. For example, a study conducted in Denmark found that participation in public events, including national holidays, influenced social trust and a sense of civic identity among ethnic minorities (Dinesen & Sonderskov, 2015).

Second, our findings show the importance of tailoring ethnic and civic identity initiatives to national contexts. We found that ethnic identity has opposite effects across countries, i.e., promoting border permeability in Kazakhstan and hindering it in Estonia. This suggests that policies promoting ethnic identity should be carefully tailored to the specific context. In Estonia, it would be more useful to emphasize a common civic identity rather than ethnic identity to promote social integration. In contrast, in Kazakhstan, initiatives that respect and emphasize ethnic identity may contribute to better integration of the Russian minorities.

Third, the findings can be used to justify the need to strengthen social security and develop policies aimed at reducing barriers between ethnic groups. This can be done through educational campaigns or public forums that emphasize measures to ensure security of all citizens, including minorities, as well as by combating discrimination and ensuring fair treatment. Such measures to improve the perception of security among Russian-speaking minorities can lead to a decrease in social isolation and a stronger connection with the majority population, increasing overall societal cohesion.

The limitations of the study are related to the cross-sectional, non-experimental design and unbalanced sample, as well as the period of the study. In addition, the instrument used to assess perceived security showed insufficiently high indicators of internal consistency, which may be due to a small number of items in the scale. In further work, it would be useful to apply not a shortened, but a full version of the scale of perceived security, as well as consider security and insecurity issues in the context of the presence of different types of threats with their differentiation according to the subscales of the instrument. In the current circumstances associated with a special military operation, the influx of Russian migrants into the countries of the post-Soviet space, and the ambiguity of reactions from the new republics, it is important to track the dynamics of the permeability of social boundaries for Russians, the degree of inclusiveness of the context for Russian ethnocultural minorities and new Russian migrants, as well as factors contributing to the sociocultural and psychological adaptation of Russians in modern conditions. Further study is needed to consider gender and generational differences, as they lacked a thorough analysis. A separate interesting area of research is the impact of state policies and support from Russia on the situation of Russians in the post-Soviet countries. Understanding the political and social conditions in the host country is crucial for integration among minorities and immigrants (Ward, 2024). Thus, using the example of Estonia, studies show that Russian state policy aimed at developing and maintaining the “Russian world” abroad contributes to some strengthening of the ethnic identity of the Russians and demonstrates consolidation around the Russian language and the historical and cultural heritage of Russia (Kallas, 2016). It seems promising to study the understanding of the concept and consequences of the “Russian World” in other countries in this region.

Conclusion

The conducted research allowed us to make a number of conclusions regarding the determinants of the permeability of social borders for Russians in the post-Soviet space. It turned out that the perceived security of the sociocultural context contributes to the permeability of social boundaries for the Russians in all the studied countries.

However, there is some cultural specificity in how this connection is realized through the formation of certain social identities. This connection is mainly realized through the formation of inclusionary identity, which underlines a com-

monality between the Russians and the ethnic majority in a particular country, or a decrease in exclusionary identity. In the countries with positive intercultural relations, such inclusionary identity is civic identity, as demonstrated in the examples of Kazakhstan and Armenia. On the contrary, in the countries that are culturally distant and have a different civilizational identity, European identity can separate the Russians from the host society and impede the permeability of social boundaries, as, for example, in Kazakhstan.

Of particular interest are the results on the role of ethnic identity. It was found that the feeling of insecurity stimulates ethnic identity in the countries where there are few Russians (Armenia, Kyrgyzstan) or where intercultural relations remain rather tense (Kyrgyzstan, Estonia). At the same time, in Kazakhstan, where the Russian population is larger and intercultural relations are more positive, ethnic identity contributes to the permeability of social boundaries for the Russians, whereas in Estonia, where the Russian population is larger as well but intercultural relations are tenser, it hinders it.

These findings may prove useful in assessing the overall inclusiveness of the sociocultural context of the countries examined and in developing government policies that help Russians integrate into host societies. The focus should be on creating conditions that generate a sense of security and form a common unifying identity with representatives of the host society. In this case, it is important to take into account the characteristics of a particular country, since the effects of social identities have their own specifics in each of them.

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Исследовательская статья

Проницаемость социальных границ для русских на постсоветском пространстве: роль социальных идентичностей и воспринимаемой безопасности

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Аннотация. Русские являются одним из самых многочисленных этнокультурных меньшинств на постсоветском пространстве, вопрос их инклюзии в общество принимающих стран не теряет свой актуальности. Поэтому в фокусе данного исследования находится взаимосвязь воспринимаемой безопасности и социальных идентичностей (гражданской, этнической и европейской) с воспринимаемой проницаемостью социальных границ для русских в Армении, Казахстане, Эстонии и Кыргызстане. Исследование имеет кросс-секционный дизайн. Сбор данных был проведен онлайн на выборках русских данных стран (общее количество $N = 765$: 145 русских в Армении, 133 русских в Казахстане, 186 русских в Эстонии, 300 русских в Кыргызстане) при помощи шкал этнической идентичности, гражданской идентичности и воспринимаемой безопасности из опросника международного проекта MIRIPS, шкалы европейской идентичности, разработанной К. Велковой, и шкалы проницаемости социальных границ М. Рамоса и соавторов. Чтобы проверить гипотезу и найти ответ на исследовательский вопрос были построены путевые модели. Анализ регрессионных коэффициентов, а также прямых и непрямых эффектов в путевых моделях продемонстрировал универсальную позитивную взаимосвязь между воспринимаемой безопасностью и воспринимаемой проницаемостью социальных границ для русских. Инклюзивность или эксклюзивность конкретной идентичности является культурно-специфической. Гражданская идентичность способ-

ствуется воспринимаемой проницаемостью границ в Армении, Казахстане и Кыргызстане. Европейская идентичность препятствует воспринимаемой проницаемости границ в Казахстане. Этническая идентичность способствует воспринимаемой проницаемости границ в Казахстане и препятствует в Эстонии (на уровне тенденции). В ряде стран были обнаружены значимые медиационные эффекты этнической (Эстония), гражданской (Казахстан и Армения) и европейской (Казахстан) идентичностей. Результаты обсуждаются в связи со структурными характеристиками социокультурных контекстов изучаемых стран. Делается вывод о том, что воспринимаемая безопасность сказывается на инклюзивности контекста в комплексе с социальными идентичностями, в зависимости от особенностей социокультурного контекста.

Ключевые слова: проницаемость социальных границ, этническая идентичность, гражданская идентичность, европейская идентичность, воспринимаемая безопасность, Кыргызстан, Казахстан, Эстония, Армения, русские, постсоветское пространство

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