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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our data suggest that as of 1997 the Russian Orthodox Church can claim only a minimal influence on the religious and ethical values and behavior of young Russian believers. The unavailability of religious education and religious/social activities prevents the Church from holding onto those young people who are initially interested in the Church. To the extent that the Russian Orthodox Church leadership chooses to invest its limited resources in stellar monuments of religious architecture and the persecution of its religious competition instead of the development of religious education and social activities, we should expect the religious revival among the Russian Orthodox to be slow indeed.

On the eve of the passage of unconstitutional legislation which would once again restrict religious freedom in Russia, our 1997 survey data of 1,000 Russian seventeen year olds, 1,700 twenty five year olds, and 1,700 thirty two year olds show that approximately 50% of ethnic Russians classify themselves as either actively (believing and practicing) or passively (believing) religious. The overwhelming majority of ethnic Russians claim Russian Orthodoxy as their faith with interest in other religions declining with age.

Religiosity is higher among women than men, and among those with young children. Both of these patterns mirror other Christian societies including the United States and Europe. Unlike other Christian societies, however, religious affiliation drops off rapidly after children are born, suggesting both a superficial attachment to the church and the absence of reinforcing mechanisms such as Sunday school and church sponsored social activities. Church attendance is minimal among believers, being primarily restricted to family celebrations and religious holidays. Reported rates of prayer are substantially lower among Russian believers than those reported in the United States. Only half of the young Russians who classified themselves as believers reported that their religious beliefs were either "very significant" or "significant" to them.

No substantial differences between believers and non-believers with respect to self-reported ethical attitudes was found. Only two-thirds of young Russian believers reported that they believed in God's judgment or punishment for sins. Only 28% of believers could say that they did not believe in witchcraft and magic. Only 40% of believers could say that they did not believe in astrology and horoscopes.
RELIGION AND CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN YOUTH

Susan Goodrich Lehmann

Introduction

Dr. Andrew Greeley, a professor of sociology at the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, has said that:

Russia is the most interesting test case of all in which to examine the issue of whether a long period of enforced secularization will either destroy religion or leave it so enfeebled that it has little resiliency once the weight of oppression is lifted (1994: 254).

This report focuses on ethnic Russian youth and the revival of Russian Orthodoxy. Three age groups are compared - 17 year old high school students, 24 and 25 year olds, and 31 and 32 year olds - to see to what extent claims can be made for a significant revival of interest in Russian Orthodoxy in the post-Soviet era.

In previous work I have argued that the strength of Islam in Russia, both as a religious and social institution, varies regionally despite the shared experience of Soviet anti-religious policies. Our 1993 data showed that Muslims in Chechnya and Dagestan were much more likely to report that they actively practiced Islam than Muslims living in Kabardino-Balkharia, Tatarstan, and Bashkortostan.1

Most importantly religious practice in Russia in 1993 was high among non-traditional groups of Chechens and Avars: the young, the urban migrants, the highly educated, and men reported high levels of active worship.2 In Bashkortostan, Tatarstan, and Kabardino-Balkharia in contrast, active religiosity was primarily confined to old rural women with low levels of education. These differences, it was argued, are linked to the Sufi Islam tradition present in Chechnya and Dagestan but absent in the other Muslim Autonomous Republics (Lehmann, 1997).

The Survey Data

The data which form the basis of this report come from two of our surveys - the June 1996 Pre-election Survey3 and the spring 1997 survey of Youth in the Russian oblasts.4

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1These data were collected with support from National Science Foundation (SBR-94-12051 and SBR-94-02548), the MacArthur Foundation, and the Carnegie Foundation.

2The 1993 data set and codebook will be placed on my Web site at Columbia University by early Spring 1998. This will enable interested parties to download the data and conduct their own analyses. Support for this endeavor comes from National Science Foundation Grant SBR-97-11674 “Putting Sociological Studies of the Former Soviet Union Online.”

3Support for the 1996 election surveys came from the MacArthur Foundation, National Science Foundation Grant SBR-96-01315, and the United States Information Agency.

4Support for the 1997 youth surveys came from National Council Grant 812-26 and the MacArthur Foundation.
The 1996 Pre-election Survey was a national random sample of approximately 3,800 respondents, stratified by region. The respondents were interviewed by local social scientists in their homes. The data were weighted by age group, educational level, gender, and urban/rural locale to correct for slight differences between the sample demographics and 1994 Russian census data.

The 1997 survey of youth was a national random sample of 1,000 high school students, 1,700 people aged 24 and 25, and 1,700 people aged 31 and 32. The sample was stratified by region to account for natural variation in population concentration. The high school students completed a questionnaire in school. The older respondents were interviewed by local social scientists in their homes. A weighting variable for the data on 25 and 32 year olds was constructed on the same principle as the one used with the 1996 survey.

In addition to our data, this report will periodically refer to results from University of Chicago sociologist Andrew Greeley's analysis of a 1991 attitude survey conducted by VTsIOM under the direction of Dr. E. Petrenko and the International Social Survey Program. That national sample of almost 3,000 Russians aged 16 years and older was a self-completed questionnaire which contained several questions about religion and religious beliefs. According to Dr. Greeley, the VTsIOM study was the first national study of religion conducted in post-socialist Russia (Greeley 1994).

The comparative figures on religion in America are taken from the World Values Survey of almost 3,000 Americans conducted in 1983 by social scientist Ronald Inglehart and his colleagues. Those data were analyzed and the results presented in an article by Campbell and Curtis (1994).

**Religious Legislation**

To briefly review the post-Soviet legislation on religion, in May 1990 a new law on religious organizations was passed. It granted religious organizations full legal status, permitted religious education in public schools after regular school hours, allowed religious organizations to own their places of worship and other property, allowed them to import literature from abroad and to engage in charitable activity, and equalized the tax structure for clergy who had been taxed at a higher rate. This new law guaranteed freedom of worship, forbid government interference in religious activities, and prohibited the government from financing either atheist work or religious activities. Religious organizations could publish their own materials including periodicals. These freedoms are incorporated into Article 14 of the 1993 Russian Constitution (RFE/RL July 10, 1997).

On June 23 1997, under increasing pressure from the Russian Orthodox Church hierarchy, the Duma voted 300-8 to support a bill which would ban religions not legally recognized in 1982 (RFE/RL June 24, 1997). This legislation was then approved by a vote of 112 to 4 by the Federation Council on July 4 (RFE/RL July 7, 1997).

The law would give full rights to religions that have existed for at least 50 years in more than half of Russia's oblasts. This would include all the major religions of Russia: Russian Orthodoxy,
Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism. The Roman Catholic Church and some Baptist organizations are in the second category of religious groups, those registered in 1982. Second category groups would not be able to practice charity, own property, publish literature, or organize worship in public places. These restrictions are expected to severely limit the ability of the Catholic Church, Baptists, and other second category groups to function normally.

This legislation would restrict missionary activity in Russia to those who have been invited by registered religious organizations. The restriction on missionary activity would have the greatest impact on Evangelical Christian groups which are currently among the most visible religious organizations and those which require the most active level of participation from their members. Many of these groups, including the branches of the Russian Orthodox and Baptist Churches which refused to work with the Council on Religious Affairs during the Soviet era as well as Adventists, Evangelical Christian groups, the Mormons, and cults like Aum Shinri Kyo, would be illegal.

Religiosity in General

The controversial legislation which would restrict religious freedom in Russia was drafted by the Duma with the advice of Orthodox priest Vyacheslav Polosin and is "strongly backed" by the Russian Orthodox Church (RFE/RL June 24 and 30, 1997). Though the law is being touted as a solution to the proliferation of "pseudo-religious cults", deliberately raising the universally unpopular specter of Aum Shinri Kyo, the real reason for the strong Orthodox Church support is less exotic and more fundamental.

For one thing, the Russian Orthodox Church has become increasingly concerned about competition from heavily financed, frequently American-backed, Evangelical Christian missionary organizations. This legislation would outlaw many of these organizations. The provision stipulating that missionary groups could enter Russia only by invitation from a registered religious organization would give the Church a virtual monopoly on missionary access to Russia.

Secondly, this legislation could be interpreted to mean that any future sects which break away from established churches would not be granted rights as religious organizations. Future sects would neither meet the provision which stipulates that they have been in existence for 50 years in more than half of Russian’s oblasts nor the one which says that were registered in 1982. It is well known that there are tensions within the Orthodox Church hierarchy - between the monastic and parish clergy, and between those who chose to go along with the Soviet authorities during the years of religious repression and those within the Church who did not. Defrocked Orthodox priest Gleb Yakunin characterizes the new law as "blatantly discriminatory" and "oriented toward reinstating Soviet religious policy" (RFE/RL June 24, 1997). Clearly enactment of this law would mean that those elements within the Russian Orthodox Church who support a reformation within the Church would be forced to work within the Church’s existing hierarchy in order to maintain their right to exist.
Since one might expect a state church which has the historical loyalty of the Russian people to be so secure that it could afford to be magnanimous about a little religious competition, the Church’s position in favor of restricting the religious freedom of its competitors leads one to ask, seven years after the passage of the law on religious organizations, how much progress has the Orthodox Church made in attracting Russia’s younger generation?

Our 1996 national survey found the following attitude toward religion among ethnic Russians of all ages: 13% reported that they both believe in and actively observe religious rituals, and another 37% reported that they believe in religion, but do not take part in religious rituals. These two groups combined give us the size of the community of believers in Russia - 50% of the Russian population.

Not surprisingly, the majority of Russians who believe in religion claim Russian Orthodoxy as their faith. Interest in religions other than Orthodoxy is stronger among the younger respondents and declines with age. Among our 17 year olds: 72% of Russian believers claim Russian Orthodoxy as their faith, 14% claim simple Christianity, 8% claim to believe in a god of an unspecified faith, and 4% in their own god. Among our 32 year old Russian believers: 81% follow Orthodoxy, 15% follow simple Christianity, and a negligible amount follow other religions.

Age versus Life Stage

Most Christian societies show higher levels of belief among the older cohorts and Russia has the same pattern. According to our 1996 survey data, more than 70% of those aged 70 and over report being believers [veriushchii]. Approximately 40% of Russians in their forties report being believers. (Please see Figure 1, page 11). It shows that there is a great difference between men and women in the proportion of believers at all ages over 20.

Women are more likely to report that they are believers, with a total rate of believers twice that of men. Women are almost 4 times more likely to report that they are active believers (that is they are both believers [veriushchii] and observe religious rituals [sobliodaete religiozniie obriadii]). These results for Russia fit the international pattern for Christian societies (Lenski 1953; de Vaus and McAllister 1987).

As many American sociologists of religion have noted, in America religious belief is positively correlated with both age and life stage. Religious belief is low in the teenage years until the middle forties, and then rises (Greeley 1994: 256; See also Nash and Berger, 1962).

Most Christian groups in America provide religious education for their young people. Jews also have special educational training for young children. In many American communities there is strong social pressure placed on parents to provide religious education for their children. In addition, religious activities often have the secular benefit of providing adults with important social and professional contacts within the community.
In studies of American Christians, sociologists Dennison Nash and Peter Berger, among others, have found that there is a partial correlation of .78 between church membership and the number of families with children under 18 (Nash and Berger 1962). Looking at American church membership data from 1950 to 1966 they find that during that period of American religious revival, church affiliation [rose and fell] in association with the number of American families with children... . Nash and Berger found that church commitment by parents in their sample was almost entirely for the sake of their children who were going to Sunday School (Nash 1968, p. 240).

This finding that having children is an event which brings people into the church has been observed in many Western European societies in addition to the United States (Greeley 1994). Once American parents start attending church for the sake of their children, the adults tend to continue. Overall, a 1983 World Values Survey revealed that 43% of American believers reported attending church weekly, 59% attended at least every month. 85% of American believers reported praying regularly (Inglehart et al. 1990 as reported in Campbell and Curtis 1994: 221).

The Russian pattern which our data show is very different from the American pattern. Russians in their late teens report being more religious than Russians in their 20s, 30s, and 40s. (Note the bold, dark line in Figure 1). Greeley also found this U-shaped pattern in his 1991 data for Russia and notes that this U-curve appears in very few of the dozen or so countries that the International Social Survey Program has investigated. The Russian pattern does, however, appear in East Germany. For this and other reasons, Greeley concludes that the Russian pattern is evidence of social change and religious revival among the young (Greeley 1994).

Though Greeley notes that the numbers of actively religious are small among those under retirement age, he views the greater self-reported religiosity of the 18 and 19 year olds as a sign of the rebirth of the Orthodox Church. Our data set is larger than Greeley’s and the next section examines the possibility that despite the fact that the Russian pattern of religiosity looks different from the American and European, it may still be a reflection of the important role which childbearing plays in bringing people into the church.

If we take a closer look at Figure 1, we see that the U-shaped curve for Russia hides large gender differences, particularly among the respondents aged 20–40. Women (the dotted line) show a sharp increase in the numbers of believers in their twenties, followed by a decline in their thirties which is almost its mirror image. This suggests that Russian women in their twenties are attracted to the church at precisely the time at which they are marrying and having children.¹

To examine the effect of childbearing on religiosity, I divided our 1997 data for the 25 year old and the 32 year old Russians into groups according to respondent’s stage of life. We only have

¹Russian childbearing occurs much earlier than it does in America with the typical woman having her first child in her early twenties (Lehmann 1992).
data on the age of the oldest child, so this part of the analysis only included people with no children or 1 child. I could not accurately analyze people with more than one child since I could not determine if those people had second or third children who were still babies.

I created six groups according to the stage of social development. These groups are seen along the X axis of Figure 2 (page 12). From left to right the groups are: 1) Those who have never been married and have 0 children, 2) Those who are married and have 0 children, 3) Those who are married and have 1 child younger than 3 years old, 4) Those who are married and have 1 child aged 3-6 years, 5) Those who are married and have 1 child aged 7-9 years, and 6) Those who are married and have 1 child aged 10-12 years.

I then computed the percentage who said that they were believers for each group. I have graphed the results in Figure 2. It shows that for both of our samples the highest percentage of religious believers is found among those who are both married and have a child under 3 years of age. That life stage is clearly distinct for the purposes of religious belief.

In part, Greeley’s optimism about religious revival in Russia was based on his finding that:

More than eight out of ten of the young Russian New Believers [said] that they intend[ed] to raise their children in religion, a sign that they consider religion to be part of their lives for the long run (1994: 261).

Our data however show a sharp drop in the percentage of believers among those in the 32 year old cohort with older children. This suggests that though childbearing may bring Russian couples to the church, without the widespread availability of religious instruction for children or other social benefits from church involvement which we typically find in America, the parents’ interest in the church is not sustained beyond a child’s first years.

What Does it Mean to Be a Russian Believer?

The above finding corresponds to results from several of our surveys which consistently show that few Russian believers attend church on a regular basis. Among our 25 and 32 year old believers, 26% report never attending church. An additional 54% report only attending for family celebrations or religious holidays. Since christening is one of the main religious family celebrations, it is natural that very new parents are more attracted to religion than parents of older children.

There are additional reasons to be cautious about predicting Orthodox religious revival in Russia. In our 1997 study only half of the young Russians who called themselves believers reported that their religious beliefs (prinadleznost’) was either “very significant” (ochen’ znachima) or "significant" (znachima) to them.

When 17 year olds were asked if they wanted their wedding to be conducted according to religious traditions, only 66% of believers said "yes". (28% of non-believers said "yes" as well.)
When asked to report how often they prayed, 36% of 17 year old believers said "never" and another 16% couldn't say or refused to answer the question.

Only 2/3rds of young Russian believers reported that they believed in God's judgment or punishment for sins. (Among Americans believers, in contrast, 96% believe in God and 88% believe in punishment for sins (Inglehart et al. 1990 in Campbell and Curtis 1994: 225)).

When asked about beliefs which clearly run counter to Russian Orthodox teachings, only 28% of young Russian believers said that they did not believe in witchcraft and magic. Approximately 40% of Russian believers did not believe in astrology and horoscopes. These findings suggest that even among self-reported believers, religion exists in puzzling co-existence with pagan beliefs.

When it came to willingness to engage in improper and illegal behavior, there were few differences of note between 17 year old Russian believers and non-believers. See Table 1 (page 8).

Lastly, when asked to report what they would first do with "extra" money they unexpectedly acquired, only 3% of 17 year old believers and non-believers alike said that they would spend it on charitable goals. This lack of difference between 17 year old believers and non-believers indicates that in Russia one cannot assume that claiming to be a religious believer has any social or ethical implications.

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*The differences were even smaller for 25 and 32 year olds.*
Table 1: Attitude Toward Dubious or Illegal Activities
17 year old Russians, 1997

% Considering it Unworthy under Any Circumstances
(or possible only in extreme circumstances)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Believers</th>
<th>Non-Believers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Using connections to obtain work</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking public transport w/out a ticket</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting money by trickery</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marrying for money</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding paying taxes</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent use of alcohol</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using uncensored expressions</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking bribes</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking money that is lying around</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleeping with someone for pay</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking money by force</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using of toxic substances or narcotics</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data from the 1997 Hough/Lehmann survey of Russian youth 17 years old.
Conclusion

The correlation between life stage and believer status leads to the preliminary conclusion that the pattern of religious adherence which we see from our data is better explained by the Russian pattern of early childbearing than by a religious revival. As in America, Russian young people are drawn to the church for weddings and christenings and so it is natural that they show a greater interest in religious issues at those times in their lives. The increase in the attraction to religion thus happens earlier in Russia, where people have children at a younger age than in America, but both Russians and Americans are attracted to religion for the same reason - the religious obligations of parenthood.

The difference in the two patterns comes later, after the child is no longer an infant. Once Americans join the church with young children, they are more likely to continue to be involved with religion. Russians, in contrast do not have access to regular religious instruction for their children and regular church attendance has long since ceased to be a social custom. Russians also do not expect the church to be a significant nucleus for their social and business lives. So despite the initial attraction which new Russian parents may feel for religion, there is currently no mechanism to reinforce the connection between the individual and the church.

In many ways the Russian Orthodox pattern of religious belief and practice mirrors that found in other countries with state religions. In the 1970s, sociologist Christel Lane remarked about religion in Russia, that:

If we compare Orthodox religiosity to the religiosity of members of other national or established churches, we find a striking similarity in general patterns and trends. Relatively low scores along most indices of religiosity, except participation in rites of passage, is not only typical of members of the Orthodox Church but of members of national churches in general (1978: 74-75).

Lane argued that this Soviet Russian pattern came about through a combination of the militantly atheistic stance of the Soviet government and the inflexibility to modernization characteristic of national churches.

Now that the state is not an obstacle to Russian Orthodox religious revival, we must wait and observe whether the leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church can successfully reclaim the influential role over everyday life which characterized the pre-Revolutionary church. Our data suggest that in the realms of religious and ethical values and behavior, so far this has not yet occurred. To the extent that the Russian Orthodox Church leadership chooses to invest its limited resources in stellar monuments of religious architecture and the persecution of the religious competition instead of the development of religious education and social activities, we should expect the religious revival among the Russian Orthodox to be slow indeed.
Bibliography


Figure 1. % Believers by Age
Russians Only
(1996 Russian Pre-election Study)
Figure 2  % Believers by Life Stage and Age Group, Russia 1997
(Only Russians with 0 or 1 Child)