

JUNE 2018

# Religion and Violence in Russia

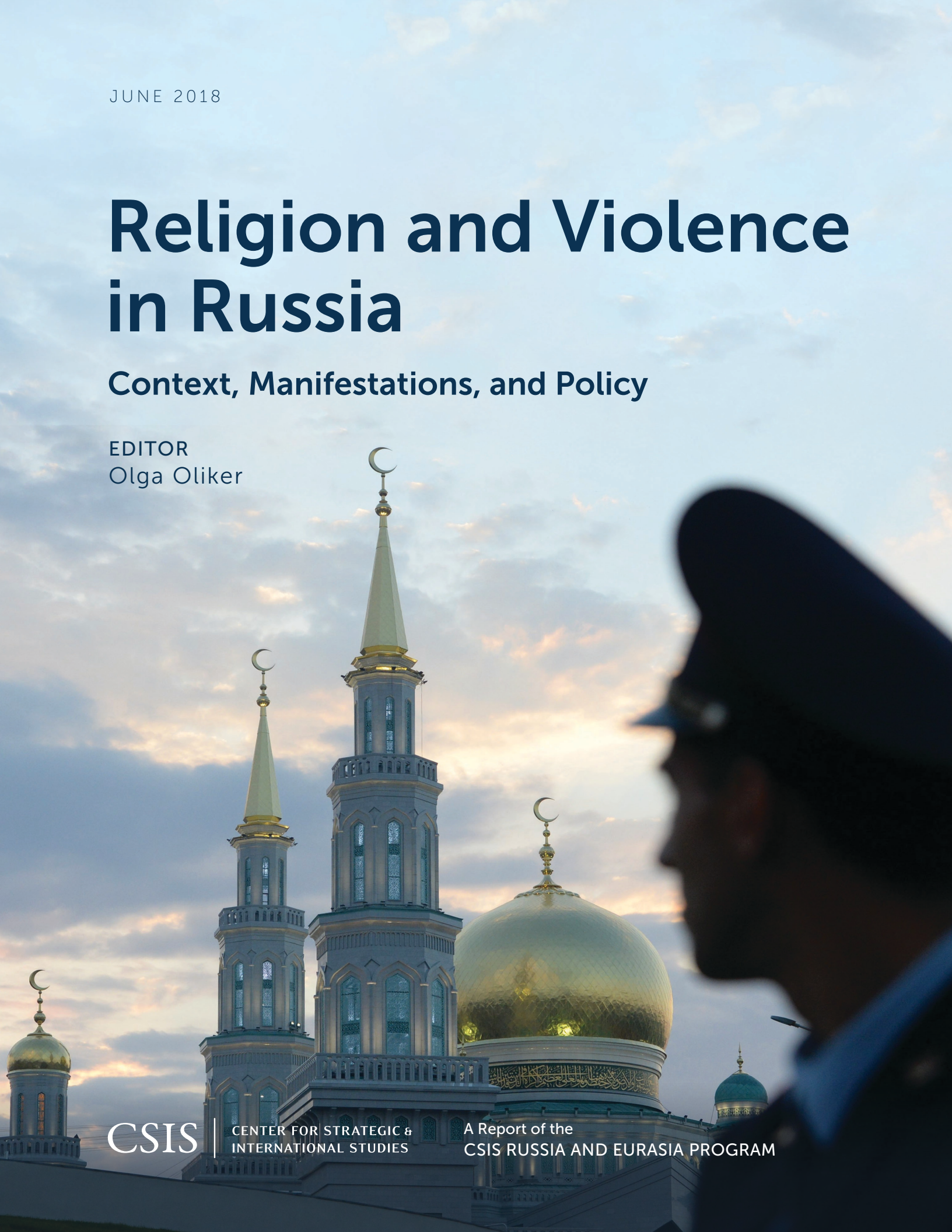
Context, Manifestations, and Policy

EDITOR  
Olga Oliker

CSIS

CENTER FOR STRATEGIC &  
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

A Report of the  
CSIS RUSSIA AND EURASIA PROGRAM





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# Introduction

**Olga Oliker**

Violence and conflict between, by, and against religious groups are surely as old as both faith and fighting themselves. In the Russian Federation, as elsewhere in the world, religious teachings and philosophies are used to both justify and combat violence, whether that violence is political, criminal, and/or domestic. Both the state and its opponents use violence in efforts to prevent violence, sometimes engendering more. Groups and individuals justify violent action on the basis of their religious beliefs or those of their victims. And while many, including Russian authorities, increasingly view religious conflict in that country through the prism of violent radical Islamic jihadism, the full picture is much more multifaceted. It includes religious propaganda employed by violent ultra-right-wing groups, continuing violent repression of religious communities and organizations by local and federal authorities, and conflict within confessions. Moreover, violent action may be couched in the language of self-defense as modernity clashes with a multitude of perceived and real traditions. A better understanding of the dynamics at the heart of religious violence in Russia, in its many manifestations, is critical to the country's future development and its security.

We conceived and began this project, with the generous support of the Henry Luce Foundation, because we wanted to contribute to that better understanding. The complicated nature of the problem creates, in our view, an imperative to develop stronger analyses and deeper insights into the causes and effects of the various sorts of conflict in evidence. Such analyses and insights can inform policy solutions that do a better job of making Russia and Russians of all religions (and no religion) safer and more secure.

Some argue that it is impossible to separate violence rooted in religion from a variety of other types of violence. Indeed, in Russia's diverse, multiethnic and multireligious society, religious violence is far from unitary. Identities historically linked to ethnicity and culture can be difficult to parse from those tied to religious belief. These overlaps between religion, ethnicity, and culture in Russian public and social perceptions make religious violence and ethnic/xenophobic violence overlapping phenomena. Yet, it is also clear that religion does play its own role: for one thing, it is cited as a factor by those who justify and perpetrate intolerance and violence. Indeed, even a brief reading of typical xenophobic writings in Russia reveals a religious component, albeit one tied closely to culture and ethnicity.

We do not pretend to cover all of the different ways in which religion and violence overlap in the Russian Federation. We seek instead to fill a few gaps in the literature, and on that basis identify other areas for research and analysis. When we began this project, we were struck by a relative absence of cross-confessional comparisons; the lack of study on the impact of state policy on religious violence; and incomplete understandings of the links between violent religious groups in Russia and those in other parts of the world. We also wanted to improve our understanding of the implications of social media and other new technology for religious conflict and to ask how lessons from global experience may be applied to Russia. We found a paucity of efforts to parse the role of religion in the context of other sorts of xenophobic violence in Russia and very little on the evolving situation in Russia's Volga region. We noted that the question of effective policy solutions, whether for Russia's national and local governments, other states, or nonstate actors, remained vastly underexplored.

We believe that this resulting volume usefully elucidates some of the critical building blocks of these dynamics, even as it identifies further areas in need of research and analysis. Alexander Verkhovsky provides a detailed discussion of how Russian legislation concerning religion and extremism may affect religious violence. Marlene Laruelle and Natalia Yudina ask whether Islamophobia is on the rise. Geraldine Fagan and Olga Sibireva describe the rise in violence toward groups deemed "nontraditional" or "sects." Two papers consider propaganda of various sorts. Jean-François Ratelle and Ekaterina Sokirianskaia describe how violent Islamists seek to recruit Russian Muslims, particularly through the Internet. Irina du Quenoy and Dmitry Dubrovskiy assess whether and how the rhetoric of Orthodox "traditional" values is used to justify certain types of violence. Bringing in an international dimension, Jeffrey Mankoff and Alexei Miller consider the role of the Russian Orthodox Church, as well as other religious institutions, in the war in Ukraine. Finally, we ask how these factors play out in some specific parts of Russia. Sufian Zhemukhov, Sergey Markedonov, and Akhmet Yarlykapov provide an overview of the situation in and near the North Caucasus, while Denis Sokolov and I present the complicated dynamics in play in the multi-ethnic regions of Tatarstan, Tyumen, and Astrakhan.

As our work took shape, we noticed a common thread running through almost every context examined. Narratives of "traditionalism" are at the center of religious debates in Russia, and have a tremendous impact on how violence and conflict do and do not manifest. Religious and secular officials, social groups, and others discussing religion in Russia present certain behaviors and beliefs as "traditional" to the Russian Federation and therefore positive and in line with Russian values. That which is not "traditional" is foreign, undesirable, and often "extremist"—often with attendant legal repercussions. Thus, the language of "tradition," including as used by the state, is instrumentalized to delegitimize and justify violence against the "nontraditional," and is difficult to counter, particularly when it is picked up by multiple voices and in the media. This factor creates particular challenges for improving public policy to prevent and mitigate the dangers of religious violence, as it justifies as acceptable attacks—including, in some cases, violent attacks—against the "nontraditional," whether those attacks emanate from the state or from nonstate actors.

## APPROACH

Russia's pre-Soviet history, like that of Europe as a whole, is fraught with brutality against religious minorities. During the seven decades of communism, and especially in the 1920s and 1930s, religious institutions and believers were subjected to often violent repression by the state, which pushed much religion and religious practice underground. This history of religious and anti-religious violence in Russia is comparatively well documented. The situation today is not as well understood, however, even as violence in the name of religion and violence against religious groups continue to shape Russian society and its politics.

In light of these circumstances, we did not take a historical approach, but focused on documenting the situation as it stands today. Wanting to ensure that we were interdisciplinary and inclusive of both Western and Russian experience, we first convened a steering group of experts, comprising Marlene Laruelle, Jeffrey Mankoff, Sergey Markedonov, Denis Sokolov, Alexander Verkhovsky, and myself. The steering group refined the list of topics and identified possible participants. We then selected research teams, including steering group members, to investigate the eight topics selected and produce papers. Each paper is a result of collaboration between at least one Russia-based scholar and a scholar based in North America or Western Europe. The coauthor teams were designed to help incorporate both Western and Russian perspectives and to bring a broader base of international experience to the discussion. We are also very pleased to report that the papers collected here reflect original analysis, in many cases drawing on new and extensive fieldwork. This means that this volume is able to genuinely shine light where there was previously darkness, and raise questions and start conversations that have not previously gotten the attention they are owed.

As our work developed, we gathered to discuss our methodologies and findings, both in closed workshops and in a public conference. Consequently, the papers presented in this compendium are also the result of collaboration within the entire set of authors. Chapter contributors provided multiple drafts to the group and received comments from other participants through an open, iterative, and collaborative peer review process. This approach improved all of our work and leveraged the wide-ranging expertise we had assembled. It also enabled all participants to more usefully question the assumptions each of us brought to discussions of religion and violence in Russia.

One of our primary challenges was rooted in language. As already discussed, the importance of narratives surrounding what is, and is not, "traditional" is central to many of our papers, and runs through this book as a whole. We thus had to grapple with how we ourselves would use this word and others that pose similar challenges. Aside from "traditional," we found that terms such as "radical" and "extremist"—to say nothing of "violence" and "religion"—carry different weights and different meanings with different audiences, despite their widespread use. This situation is not unique to Russia, but in the Russian Federation, as elsewhere, its repercussions range from the social to the juridical: the same legal language means different things to different people. Indeed, the ways such words are used in both Russian legal documents and in rhetoric, government and otherwise, are a critical component of how religious conflict is exacerbated in Russia.

In response, we first sought to collaboratively reach agreed-upon definitions to some of the most contested terms. However, two factors made that impossible to do in a comprehensive way. First was the reality of the aforementioned diverse governmental definitions, which we had to acknowledge, even if we did not agree with them. Second was the challenge of words that are not, and perhaps cannot be, objectively defined to our satisfaction. Extremism and radicalism, for example, are relative descriptors—one is extreme or radical compared to something else, even though the words themselves are often used without clear references. After much discussion, we decided that what was most important was not necessarily using identical definitions, but making sure to be precise and concrete in our language to the best of our abilities. All participants agreed to be clear when using the definitions of others, for instance by putting the relevant word in quotation marks, and to explain the ways in which each set of authors defines the terminology they use. Several authors chose to avoid their own use of words such as “traditional” and “extremist,” including the terminology only in reference to others’ use of it.

This agreement did not address two words that did require common definitions: religion and violence. When it came to religion, we agreed that as long as those involved referenced religion, it could be included in our research. For violence, we started from the definition in the Oxford Dictionary, but adapted it to include not just acts, but also threats, as follows: behavior involving physical force intended to hurt, damage, or kill someone or something, or the threat (explicit or implicit, including the perceived threat) of such behavior. We felt it was important to include implicit and perceived threats of violence in our definition, as well as public incitement to violence, so that we were not limited to physically destructive acts that had already occurred.

## FINDINGS

Despite the centrality of the “traditionalism” narrative to many of our findings, its formulation is comparatively new. Du Quenoy and Dubrovskiy date the incorporation of this language into Russian government rhetoric to 2012. Then and since, official statements and documents have sought to portray Moscow as the defender of that which is “traditional” against enemies foreign and domestic. The language of “traditionalism” is closely linked to the discourse regarding “radicalism” or “extremism,” which are typically portrayed as the antithesis of “traditional” approaches to religion. Although, as already discussed, these are relative concepts, they are generally presented as recognizable and concrete evils and threats to Russia, whether they have violent components or not. Often but not always linked to religion, they are presented as threatening either because they are described as inherently violent (most often in regard to Islam) or because they seek to change Russia’s moral character (e.g., through conversion to other, foreign, faiths).

The identification of “radicalism” and “extremism” with opposition to “tradition” has significant implications, because it effectively equates nonviolent challenges to a vaguely defined concept of “traditionalism” with violent attacks on civilians and the state, treating them as equivalent crimes. Verkhovsky traces the implications through Russian legislation. He finds that Russian lawmakers’ efforts to write laws that support “tradition” and place limits on “radicalism” and “extremism” have created a legal framework that allows prosecution for activities that pose no discernable threat to

individuals, state, or society. Broad legislative definitions of “extremism” can easily include simple professions of faith, and have been interpreted to include the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ ban on blood transfusions and now, Jehovah’s Witnesses as a religion. And while earlier enforcement of laws against “extremism” successfully limited the activities of some violent neo-Nazi groups, Verkhovsky demonstrates that today these laws are consistently used to target Muslim and non-Orthodox Christian communities. Moreover, it is notable that while violent Islamist groups are consistently also prosecuted under these statutes, groups that use Orthodox imagery and concepts, even when they do so explicitly with the aim of inciting violence, are often left alone.

Du Quenoy and Dubrovskiy argue that this situation has emerged in part because the language of “traditionalism” has fostered an atmosphere that justifies violence in its defense. One manifestation is the blind eye authorities often turn to violent activists who describe themselves as defending traditional values. This toleration of violence is particularly common, they argue, when it comes to violence ostensibly in support of Russian Orthodoxy and the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Du Quenoy and Dubrovskiy’s assertion that this sort of selective prosecution normalizes certain kinds of violence holds up to the evidence presented in other chapters. Indeed, it appears that government inaction can be as influential as government action when it comes to perpetuating violence. The lack of any state sanction against groups that use Orthodox religious imagery and symbolism to promote violence or attack Protestants or Muslims as “nontraditional,” while non-violent Muslims are arrested and Jehovah’s Witnesses banned as “extremist,” suggests that it is the latter that is viewed as criminal, and the former all but sanctioned by the state.

Indeed, both du Quenoy and Dubrovskiy and Sokolov and I note cases in which victims of attacks faced trouble with authorities while perpetrators went free. In some cases, this situation stems from preexisting relationships between authorities and religious leaders, something Sokolov and I also report. As du Quenoy and Dubrovskiy, and to a lesser extent Sokolov and I, note, the media also plays a role, by echoing dominant narratives and further normalizing them.

But if these “traditional values” narratives are often linked to Orthodoxy, the state-sanctioned leaders of other religions, including Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism, also use this language to promote their own approaches and silence others, du Quenoy and Dubrovskiy point out. Their argument is further supported by evidence presented in the discussion of Tatarstan, Tyumen, and Astrakhan by Sokolov and me, and aspects of the same phenomenon are also evident, if not explicitly discussed, in Chapter 8 on the North Caucasus by Zhemukhov with Markedonov and Yarlykapov. In many parts of Russia, Muslim religious leaders define themselves and their approaches as “traditional” while more fundamentalist, and younger, preachers are delegitimized (and, indeed, accused) as foreign-influenced, “radical” and “extremist” “Salafis.” Indeed, in almost all cases of denunciation of other religious approaches and beliefs, the accusation of “foreign” roots plays an important role, something noted also by Verkhovsky, Laruelle and Yudina, Fagan and Sibireva, and du Quenoy and Dubrovskiy. Importantly, these narratives resonate in media, including social media, with substantial effects.

The same phenomena are further illustrated by Fagan and Sibireva’s reporting on a congruence of government restrictions on, Orthodox church denunciation of, and violent action against groups

termed “sects.” The most notable group thus targeted is Russia’s Jehovah’s Witnesses, whose religion is now banned as an “extremist” organization. Other faiths, including Roman Catholics and Pentecostals, have also faced similar pressure. Perpetrators of violence against these groups, which is well documented throughout Russia (although underreporting is likely), rarely face legal sanction. Fagan and Sibireva note the parallels between “anti-sect” campaigns today and the state-sanctioned ones of the Soviet period.

Islamophobia in Russia follows some similar patterns. Laruelle and Yudina find that while anti-Muslim sentiment generally remains at lower levels in Russia than in much of the rest of Europe, it also appears to be increasing. Despite the challenges of differentiating prejudice based on ethnicity from religious prejudice against Muslims, the authors find ample evidence that religion is a factor. They also note the rise in the securitization of Islam by the Russian government, including a disproportionate focus on Islamic groups, Muslim individuals, and Islamic religious texts in arrests, prosecutions, and bans on grounds of extremism, something Verkhovsky also identifies. Laruelle and Yudina see examples of Islamophobia in Russian mass media and social media. Opinion polls also support their conjecture that anti-Muslim feeling is on the rise. It is notable that manifestations of Islamophobia in Russia (as elsewhere) are in some ways gendered, for instance in disproportionate attention to policing women’s dress and behavior. More evidence of similar phenomena is presented in Chapter 7 by Sokolov and me and also referenced by Zhemukhov with Markedonov and Yarlykapov.

The violent jihadism that is dangerously conflated with other sorts of religious activity by Muslims also, of course, presents a very real threat itself. Ratelle and Sokirianskaia describe the evolution of violent jihadist recruiting among Russia’s Muslims, including the rise of social media as a recruiting tool. The latter has coincided with the growth of ISIS in Russia and the participation of Russians and other post-Soviet citizens in the Syrian conflict. Through these connections, ISIS has become particularly adept at targeted approaches that focus on specific demographics within Russia. In the meantime, Russian authorities have sought to deploy a range of tools to counter this messaging and its effectiveness. However, their broad definitions of extremism and failure to differentiate between the violent and the fundamentalist (documented in other chapters) indicate that some of these policies may prove counterproductive.

The Orthodox Church and the question of what is traditional present an entirely different picture when it comes to the conflict in Ukraine, the subject of Chapter 9 by Mankoff and Miller, and the only chapter of this volume whose focus lies outside of Russia. We included the war in Ukraine because religion, and indeed, the Moscow Patriarchate, continues to play a role there, suggesting a potential for the Russian Orthodox Church to serve as a mechanism to either exacerbate or tame fighting beyond Russia’s borders. Moscow has pegged this conflict as at least partly a defense of “Russianness” against foreign interference, in line with the broader “traditionalism” narrative. Indeed, some have tried to capitalize on Orthodox unity to the benefit of the separatist fighters the Kremlin has backed in Ukraine’s east. However, in the face of a counternarrative that it is Russian culture, language, and religion that are foreign to Ukrainian “tradition,” this approach has largely backfired. Instead, individual churches and religious leaders affiliated with the Moscow Patriarchate have increasingly sought to distance themselves from the separatists, their cause, and Moscow’s

rhetoric even as their ties to Moscow have cost them followers. Churches without a Russian affiliation have, for their part, benefited, being able to stake the claim of being untainted by Russia and truly in line with Ukrainian “tradition.”

In summary, the chapters presented here provide both overviews and deeper assessments of some of the key topics and themes relevant to understanding religious conflict, broadly defined, in Russia today. We conclude by drawing from all eight papers developed for this project the key recommendations that participants derived from their research, and the areas for further analysis that they identified. We are very pleased with what we have accomplished, which provides, in our view, fresh, interdisciplinary, research-based, and methodologically sound looks at a series of topics too often discussed in a framework of hyperbole and in the absence of reliable data. We therefore hope that our work as presented in this volume elucidates the situation as it stands and helps define the way forward for further research and analysis in this field. We are also very hopeful that this volume can contribute to efforts by policymakers, advocates, and people of faith to reduce the threat of violence linked to religion.





Part I

# Religion, "Extremism," and Violence: The Context



# The State Against Violence in Spheres Related to Religion

Alexander Verkhovsky

## INTRODUCTION

Religion and violence can meet in many possible ways in modern society. We can point out at least three parameters that describe the intersection of religion and violence, and all three can take different values. In this context, we focus only on violence in its literal sense (physical attacks against people or property) or on public calls for this kind of violence.

First, the religious aspect of violence, like any motive for an action, always pertains to an offender. However, this parameter is two-pronged: in the first case, we focus on a violent perpetrator's self-identification in religious terms; in the second case, on the way an offender identifies the target of their attack in these terms. Of course, both these versions may be present simultaneously, as in the classic case of followers of one faith being attacked in the name of another. Perpetrators can also attack nonreligious objects in the name of their faith—the examples include attacks against the editorial office of *Charlie Hebdo* or against the Sakharov Museum exhibitions (occasionally, but not necessarily, attackers define their self-avowedly secular opponents in religious terms, for example as Satanists). However, in the fairly secular Russian society, attacks by nonbelievers against representatives of a certain religion they regard as a dangerous ideology are also quite frequent (this is true for many attacks on Muslim or Orthodox sites).

Second, if violence takes place on behalf of a certain religious community (whether real or imagined), it can be directed outward, usually against the alleged opponents of the community, or inward, against other members of the same community. The latter case can develop according to one of the two scenarios: the split of a community into the “right” and the “wrong” parts (the practice of *takfir* in Islam), with violence directed against the latter; or when violence for disciplinary or spiritual purpose (as the group understands it) is inflicted on “righteous” adepts.

The third factor, important for government policy development, pertains to the target against whom the violence is directed, whether it is the society as a whole, a specific segment of the

society, or the state. Once again, we don't imply a clean split into these groups, but the authorities, at least in Russia, pay great attention to the emphasis of any particular violent practice—whether the act was intended to confront the authorities or to confront another part of society.

In principle, the state should take all the above-listed parameters into account when formulating its policy in this area, but it does not necessarily need to have a policy formulated specifically on the issue of “religion and violence.” This issue can be addressed in another developed policy protocol, or in several at once. This is exactly the case in modern Russia. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to identify these policies and present an analysis of their origins, the place (and specific aspects) of the issue of religion and violence within each policy, and the actual law enforcement practice. Accordingly, we shall review the legislation being used and its associated conceptual apparatus, as well as key trends in law enforcement in relation to radicalization of Islam, ultra-right ideologies, and several other challenges.

In the first approximation, it is obvious that the state, as represented by its legislators and political leaders, identifies two key threats to public and state security. The first is subversive political activity that uses religious slogans, for which a template and examples are found in religiously motivated terrorism in the style of the Caucasus Emirate (*Imarat Kavkaz*) or ISIS. The other perceived threat comes from nonpolitical illegal activities of religious associations and is illustrated by various stories about groups that practice violence against their members, extort their money, and so on. However, conceptualizing these two threats, whether in combination or separately, proved not to be a simple task.

Looking at the first post-Soviet years, we can recall that the very need to formulate a policy for some kind of selective suppression of a generally legitimate activity related to religion was a challenge for all branches of post-Soviet government in the first years of its existence. The total Soviet bans had just been repealed, and introducing new ones seemed a very controversial undertaking.

In the mid-1990s, when the post-Soviet conceptual system in the sphere of state and public security was already beginning to form, the threat of religiously motivated terrorism was practically ignored. Religious political radicals were few and far between; nationalism was considered the main threat to security, be it militant (primarily Chechen) separatism or the movement of radical Russian nationalists. The latter were represented at that time primarily by the Russian National Unity (*Russkoe Natsional'noe Edinstvo*, RNE), which, of course, had its own religious views, and rather exotic ones at that, but for the RNE the religious aspect was secondary; more religious nationalist groups were marginal.

Meanwhile, the second threat, denoted then and now by the term “totalitarian sects,” prompted one repressive bill after another, beginning as early as 1993. It is important to note that the issues related to actual threats to citizens, be it violence, robbery or sexual exploitation, blended with the perceived threat to the moral foundations of citizens and the country as a whole. These threats were primarily understood not as features of religious life, perhaps temporary and related to the great changes in the wider society, but as a result of purposeful outside influence. In its most coarse version, this theory views real or alleged illegal practices of “totalitarian sects,” including violence, as part of the West's general policy of corrupting Russian citizens for the purpose of their further enslavement. The same ideas, only in milder and more scholarly form, were also expressed

by representatives of official academic science.<sup>1</sup> Thus, a typical moral panic about “totalitarian sects” was politicized and took the usual anti-Western direction for the antiliberal part of Russian society, implying the need for specifically political measures.

However, it took a long time to create legislation targeting the perceived threat. In the new Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations, adopted in 1997, the list of grounds for liquidation of an organization in Article 14 contained a random mix of reasons pertaining to the threats of the first and second type: creating armed units, destroying families, using violence or hypnosis, committing depraved acts, engaging in war propaganda, and so on. The list looked quite eclectic.

Adopting a more conceptual norm, or at least a declarative document, proved problematic in many respects due to the political standoff between the president and the parliament, which continued for most of the 1990s. Anything perceived as politically significant by one side immediately aroused suspicion in the other. At the turn of the century, several attempts were made to somehow bring together the two security threats related to religion by using the notion of “religious extremism,” but these attempts failed for purely political reasons.<sup>2</sup> When the current Law on Combating Extremist Activity was finally adopted in 2002, it included nothing on specifically “religious extremism.” Meanwhile, the “political” items were removed from the abovementioned Article 14 of the Law on Freedom of Conscience and replaced by a reference to the anti-extremist law. Two types of threats were separated in the legislation that regulated religious activity, but this separation never took place in the public consciousness or in the minds of legal experts, who exerted the greatest influence on the policies of law enforcement agencies. For example, the term “religious extremism” was used directly in the title of the doctoral dissertation by Viktoriya Burkovskaya, a long-term employee of the Academy of the General Prosecutor’s Office and a professor at Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO); she currently heads the Expert Council under the Ministry of Justice. Accordingly, two types of “religious extremism” continue to coexist at the law enforcement level, as demonstrated by some examples of bans against religious organizations, provided below.

The current interpretation of “religious threats” as an attack against “traditionality” also took shape in the early 2000s. The very notion of “traditional religions,” as entitled to state protection and preference, was formed at that time by public figures associated with the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and proved unprecedentedly successful in influencing the official discourse. The term “traditional religions” was already used by the top state officials in 2002, and even President Putin, along with the majority of citizens, erroneously believed that this term was present in the 1997 Law on Freedom of Conscience.<sup>3</sup> Several active attempts to adopt a special law on privileges

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1. Nikolai Trofimchuk, Mikhail Svishchev, *Ekspansiya* (Moscow: Department of Religious Studies, Russian Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Russian Federation, 2000).

2. Alexander Verkhovsky, *The Policy of the State in Relation to Radical Nationalist Associations 1991–2002* (Moscow: SOVA Center, 2013), 121–151.

3. Verbatim: “I do not remember the exact title of the law, but it speaks of four basic religions: Christian Russian Orthodoxy, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism,” press conference, as published in the *Washington Post*, on September 29, 2003, is cited from the Russian translation on the Inopressa website, <http://web.archive.org/web/20031009101146/http://www.inopressa.ru/details.html?id=14823>.

for “traditional religions” were made in 2002, but they failed. At the same time, the official group “on countering manifestations of religious extremism” under the Presidential Administration, formally headed by Akhmat Kadyrov,<sup>4</sup> attempted to create a special concept to counter “religious extremism,”<sup>5</sup> but was dissolved. In its softer form, the idea of favoring “traditionality” via measures of state support and control (for the purpose of countering “religious extremism,” among other reasons) was promoted by official religious scholars who proposed a draft concept of the state religious policy<sup>6</sup> in 2002–2003. The concept was rejected, but apparently has been influencing state policy ever since. As early as 2004, one of the project’s authors, Aleksandr Zhuravsky, was put in charge of overseeing the Ministry of Regional Development’s religious policy, and then oversaw the ministry’s entire ethnic policy (which includes religious policy) until 2015. Olga Vasilieva, who headed the Department of Religious Studies of the Russian Academy of Public Administration in 2000s, became Minister of Education in August 2016.

All these undertakings established, in one form or another, that there were forms of religiosity traditional for Russia (be it prevalent Orthodoxy or relatively small Lutheranism), and they, with a few minor exceptions, posed no threat to public security and deserved some extent of state support, or at least protection. On the contrary, religions that were newly introduced in Russia or new movements within existing religions (religious innovations) were fraught with threats, including even violence, and subject to restrictions, if not prohibition. This logical construction has obviously emerged under the influence of the relations between the official Islamic leadership formed in the Soviet era and new, oppositional, and often (but not always) truly radical Muslim groups, whose most extreme segment had already been involved in terrorist activities and was, by that time, the leading force of the Chechen armed separatism. The same model was then extended to the entire religious spectrum (from the Pentecostals, who have been quite numerous in Russia for a long time, to new religious movements that just came into existence in the 1990s), and, therefore, the abovementioned texts described religious innovations as a threat to various aspects of stability. Here, the threat of terror and the threat to “moral health” or “spiritual security” were mentioned in the same breath.<sup>7</sup>

The fact that the political leadership did not endow such concepts with official authority speaks well of the leaders, but no alternative understanding of religious policy was formulated either, and therefore the concepts that were never adopted still became the ones used in practice.

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4. At that time the head of the Chechen leadership loyal to the Russian authorities, before that the mufti of Chechnya, including under the separatist regime.

5. “Draft Report of the Working Group of the Presidium of the State Council of the Russian Federation on Countering the Expression of Religious Extremism in the Russian Federation,” Portal Credo, December 18, 2002, <https://www.portal-credo.ru/site/?act=news&id=5776>.

6. “A new concept of relations between religion and the state will appear in Russia, according to the head of the Department of Religious Studies of the Russian Academy of Public Administration,” *Russkaya Liniya*, December 20, 2002, [http://web.archive.org/web/20030216143511/http://www.rusk.ru/News/02/12/new20\\_12r.htm](http://web.archive.org/web/20030216143511/http://www.rusk.ru/News/02/12/new20_12r.htm); “The Concept of the State Religious Policy of the Russian Federation,” *Religion and [the] Mass Media*. February 5, 2004, [http://www.religare.ru/2\\_8227.html](http://www.religare.ru/2_8227.html).

7. In this article, we only consider expert opinions dominating in official milieu, rather than the more radical views present in more conservative and less official strata.

The only element of the “traditionality” theories included in the official language prior to 2012 was the view of foreign influence as harmful or at least dangerous, as reflected in the National Security Strategy adopted in 2009.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, the current version of the Strategy adopted in 2015,<sup>9</sup> that is, in the midst of the confrontation with the West, uses the expression “traditional Russian spiritual and moral values” nine times, but still avoids the marginal “spiritual security” rhetoric. It speaks of “respect for the confessional traditions,” and of the threat of “activities . . . of groups using . . . religious extremist ideology . . . aimed at . . . destruction of traditional Russian spiritual and moral values.” The terms “religious extremism,” “religious radicalism” and so on are used without apparent semantic differentiation.

The expansive and rather nebulous understanding of security leaves its imprint on legislation and, even more so, on its enforcement. The case in point here is the anti-extremist legislation that has become the principal tool used by the state in cases pertaining to religion and violence—namely, the Law on Combating Extremist Activity and related criminal and other norms. As will be demonstrated below, the antiterrorist legislation and other laws play only a secondary role.

## LEGAL AND CONCEPTUAL BASIS FOR COMBATING VIOLENCE RELATED TO RELIGION

### The Law on Combating Extremist Activity

The purpose of this article is not to analyze the evolution of the anti-extremist legislation, although numerous amendments were issued and have significantly changed the shape of this legislation since the adoption of the framework Law on Combating Extremist Activity and the first relevant amendments to the Criminal Code and other laws in the summer of 2002 (at the time of writing, the latest amendments were adopted in the summer of 2016). We will proceed from the legal norms and other official documents in force as of early 2017.

Anti-extremist legal mechanisms are multifaceted; they include a whole set of the Criminal Code articles, several articles in the Code on Administrative Offenses, a number of ways to influence the media and different types of organizations (including religious ones) prescribed in the relevant laws, the mechanism for prohibiting books and other materials as extremist, and various mechanisms for blocking access to “dangerous” online materials. All these mechanisms are based on the framework law and its definitions.

The Law on Combating Extremist Activity defines extremism via a long list of different types of extremist activity, ranging from rebellion and commission of terrorist acts to public display of

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8. “Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of May 12, 2009, No. 537, ‘On the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2020,’” *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, May 19, 2009, <https://rg.ru/2009/05/19/strategia-dok.html>.

9. “Decree No. 683 of the President of the Russian Federation of December 31, 2015, ‘On the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation,’” *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, December 31, 2015, <https://rg.ru/2015/12/31/nac-bezopasnost-site-dok.html>.

prohibited symbols (such as the swastika),<sup>10</sup> so the definition does not specifically focus on violent actions or actions related to violence or incitement to it, in contrast to the much clearer definition of terrorism in the Law on Combating Terrorism.<sup>11</sup>

Terrorism is defined as any activity related to violence (including calls for such) undertaken for the purpose of influencing state authorities. Accordingly, religion is not mentioned in this law; it is treated like any other ideological motivation of terrorism, while the target of terrorism is the secular state.

Meanwhile, the definition of extremism does include the concept of religion, albeit enumeratively along with others. The key elements of the definition of extremism applicable to religion are: incitement to hatred, hate crimes, discrimination, participation in organizations banned for extremism or terrorism, and, finally, public incitement to any of the above, from discrimination to terrorism. The connection to religion can also be established through the perpetrator—that is, via their religious or antireligious motivation—or through the target of action—that is, through defining a person, a group of people, or an object in religious terms or in connection to religion.

In reality, we have encountered practically no cases of religious discrimination. The cases of religious hate crimes—that is, violence (including damage to property, which the Russian law calls “vandalism”) inflicted with religious (or antireligious) motives—cause no fundamental law enforcement problems (see below on the practice of such enforcement). Conversely, the cases related in one way or another with evaluating public statements, especially those relating to religion, tend to cause considerable problems.

The formulas in the definition of extremism that pertain to incitement to hatred deserve strong criticism. For example, the phrase “*propaganda of the exclusivity, superiority or inferiority of a person on the basis of their religious affiliation or attitude to religion*” can be understood in such a way as to criminalize a simple assertion of the superiority of the followers of one’s religion over other people in a religious sense (for example, in the afterlife) or any other spirited religious dispute. As we are about to see below, this is exactly what happens. In and of themselves, formulas similar to the one quoted above can be found in other national legislations related to incitement to hatred, especially given the existence in many countries of the norms relating to “defamation of religion” and so on.<sup>12</sup> Intelligible authoritative comments and references to decisions of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) can compensate for a certain vagueness of the law. In fact, the Supreme Court of Russia adopted the Resolution, which, inter alia, explained that only truly dangerous appeals should be interpreted as incitement to hatred under the criminal law, while “*criticism of political organizations, ideological and religious associations, political,*

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10. See the definition in Article 1 of the law: [http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons\\_doc\\_LAW\\_37867/2daf50f586c69eac11512c1faa4309699b52ec9b/](http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_37867/2daf50f586c69eac11512c1faa4309699b52ec9b/).

11. See the definition in Article 3 of the law: [http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons\\_doc\\_LAW\\_58840/4fdc493704d123d418c32ed33872ca5b3fb16936/](http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_58840/4fdc493704d123d418c32ed33872ca5b3fb16936/).

12. Alexander Verkhovsky, *Criminal Law on Hate Crime, Incitement to Hatred and Hate Speech in OSCE Participating States* (The Hague: SOVA Center, 2016), 40–43, 56–61.



*ideological or religious beliefs, national or religious customs in and of itself should not be regarded as an act aimed at inciting hatred or enmity.*<sup>13</sup> Alas, neither these clarifications nor the extensive ECtHR practice in cases of incitement to hatred<sup>14</sup> had much effect on law enforcement practice (see below).

The civil law practice of banning books, video clips, and other materials was affected even less. The Law on Combating Extremist Activity has created a mechanism, unique in Europe and the post-Soviet space at that time, to prohibit books and other materials (leaflets, videos, pictures, songs, etc.) with subsequent punishment for their distribution, albeit not criminal but administrative. Later, this mechanism was borrowed by several post-Soviet countries. It is based on the notion that books and other such materials play a fundamental role in the functioning of dangerous movements, and therefore the removal of these works from public circulation is important in and of itself. This argument in favor of the bans was put forward, for example, by Roman Silantsev, one of the key experts on “religious extremism” and a steadfast ideologist in favor of suppressing various religious minorities. He considers bans against the books by L. Ron Hubbard, Said Nursi, or al-Wahhab an effective way to weaken the corresponding religious movements.<sup>15</sup>

There is every reason to doubt the effectiveness of this method. Every new edition of a prohibited work, even with the most minor changes, requires a new trial, so any interested group of activists can easily generate so many versions that courts will not be able to keep up, especially when materials are published online. Indeed, we have yet to see any cases of the mechanism for banning materials actually being able to stop the spread of any kind of propaganda. However, the failures only push prosecutors to continue with large-scale bans; the list of banned materials exceeded 4,150 entries in the summer of 2017. The scope of the prohibitions makes it impossible not only to comply with them (nobody can remember such a list), but also to conduct qualitative analysis of the works being banned, especially if dealing with hard-to-understand religious texts. Not surprisingly, the set of forbidden works came to include the collections of hadiths, medieval Sufi treatises, and many similar works. In all these cases, the prosecutors, as well as the academic experts engaged by them, intended to find “signs of extremism,” and successfully found them; the case was often considered in the absence of any respondent.<sup>16</sup> This practice, much larger in scope and more chaotic than the enforcement of the criminal law, has completely eroded any understanding of the applicability boundaries for the term “extremist,” especially with regard to religious statements.

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13. “Resolution No. 11 of the Plenary Meeting of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, ‘Concerning Judicial Practice in Criminal Cases Regarding Crimes of Extremism,’ of June 28, 2011,” The Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, June 29, 2011, [http://www.supcourt.ru/Show\\_pdf.php?id=7315](http://www.supcourt.ru/Show_pdf.php?id=7315).

14. Tarlach McGonagle, “A Survey and Critical Analysis of Council of Europe Strategies for Countering ‘Hate Speech,’” in *The Content and Context of Hate Speech* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 456–498.

15. “The Civic Chamber hearings: ‘Application and possibility of improving legislation on extremism in relation to religious and social processes. Responsibility for desecration of objects revered by believers,’” SOVA Center, April 26, 2012, <http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/discussions/law/2012/04/d24294/>.

16. For details on the peculiarities of this practice, see: Alexander Verkhovskiy, Margarita Ledovskikh, Aidar Sultanov, *Watch Out for Extremism!* (Voronezh: OOO Elist, 2013), 10–12, 59–61, 67–84.

Attempts to challenge the legal basis of this vicious practice have failed. The Constitutional Court ruled that the definition of extremist activity was sufficiently clear, and could be used as a basis for prohibiting books and other works. The Constitutional Court cited numerous norms of Russian and international law guaranteeing freedom of speech and freedom of conscience, but simply ignored the fact that these freedoms were being systematically violated on the basis of all these norms and the Law on Combating Extremist Activity.<sup>17</sup>

It must be noted that the Constitutional Court is prepared to uphold the current legislation, even in the most egregious cases. In 2015, it considered an appeal of a Falun Gong follower, whose charges included the use of the swastika—a traditional Eastern symbol, clearly not connected to Nazism in this case. Nevertheless, the court confirmed that any public use of the swastika was illegal, regardless of the context, resorting to rather exotic arguments: first, that the ideology of Nazism is banned in Russia (although Russian law provides no possibility of banning any ideology whatsoever), and next, that the use of the swastika “regardless of its genesis” insults the feelings of the relatives of those killed in World War II (fortunately, nobody has thought to apply the same consideration to World War II movies).<sup>18</sup>

In 2015, after a ban against yet another collection of commentaries to the Koran verses and the ensuing controversy involving Ramzan Kadyrov,<sup>19</sup> President Putin made his single and extremely clumsy attempt to correct the current practice. He introduced the following short amendment to the law: “The Bible, the Koran, the Tanakh, and the Kangyur, their contents or quotations from them cannot be recognized as extremist materials.” Interestingly, prior to this amendment, nobody had ever tried to prohibit these books in their entirety or quotes from them as such (only in the context of comments recognized as extremist), but there had been a failed attempt to ban a certain Russian translation of the Koran. However, even after the adoption of the amendment, in August 2017, the Bible in the Jehovah’s Witnesses translation was banned as extremist in Vyborg. Indeed, the presidential amendment never clarified which translations of the sacred texts were now protected.

Criminalization of participation in entities banned for extremism or terrorism is no less problematic. Such prohibitions are possible per se, but, due to vagueness of the definition of extremism and extremely poor quality of the procedures, the bans against a number of organizations should be considered, at the very least, controversial (see examples below). The sanctions for trying to continue the activities of a banned organization are very serious, especially if the organization has been banned as terrorist (since the summer of 2016, the punishment for this offense ranges from 10 to 20 years of imprisonment).

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17. This was clearly articulated in a decision regarding the claim filed by a Scientologist, who tried to challenge the prohibition of books by L. Ron Hubbard as extremist. See: Case No. 1053-O, “On refusal to accept for consideration the complaint of citizen Kochamarov, Vladislav Sergeevich, on violation of his constitutional rights by the provisions of Paragraphs 1 and 3 Article 1 and Paragraph 3 Article 13 of the Federal Law on Combating Extremist Activity,” The Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation, July 2, 2013, <https://www.lawmix.ru/prof/96548>.

18. “Determination of the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation on refusing to accept for consideration the complaint of citizen Alekhin, Sergey Nikolayevich, on violation of his constitutional rights by the provisions of Paragraph 1 Article 1 of the Federal Law on Combating Extremist Activity,” The Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation, March 3, 2015, <http://doc.ksrf.ru/decision/KSRFDecision188813.pdf>.

19. See Chapter 3 by Laruelle and Yudina.

Here, an important and not yet clarified legal collision arises—what exactly should be considered “continuing the activity” of a specific organization? In fact, we are talking about any attempt to continue organized activities of the same groups of people with approximately the same goals. It is difficult to understand what exactly should be recognized as the “continuation of the activity,” as opposed to a new activity, organized by former members of the banned organization and their fellow travelers. The law enforcement practice does not provide the answer, and the Supreme Court, which has already issued two explanations on the relevant articles of the Criminal Code,<sup>20</sup> nevertheless failed to clarify this particular point. For example, the activists of the National Bolshevik Party (NBP), banned in the mid-2000s, later created a new organization called the Other Russia (*Drugaya Rossiya*), and faced responsibility for continuing the activities of the NBP, since the courts believed, quite reasonably, that the new organization was just the same old one under a different name. The Supreme Court Resolution of 2016 uses the formula “continuation or restoration of the activity of a given organization,” and the word “given” could be interpreted to say that it is not criminal for former activists of a banned organization to create a new, somewhat different organization. It is hard to predict whether law enforcement will interpret this resolution in the above manner.

As mentioned previously, the anti-extremist legislation as such did not identify “religious extremism” as a specific threat, but the situation began to change once the political regime first encountered mass political opposition. Beginning in 2012, the concept of “traditional values” became widespread in the official rhetoric (although, of course, it had been introduced much earlier).<sup>21</sup> Undoubtedly, this metamorphosis of the official discourse reflected the need to rhetorically resist the protest movement, but, specifically, it happened in relation to the notorious Pussy Riot case. The obvious impasse, in which the Russian judicial system found itself attempting to “find a criminal article” fitting this crime,<sup>22</sup> gave rise to the Criminal Code amendment, obviously designed for the Pussy Riot case in hindsight; it criminalized actions that were rowdy in form (hooliganism) and also intended to insult religious feelings. After an unusually long debate, the law was signed on June 30, 2013. The addition of the new norm to the state’s arsenal in its fight against “religious extremism” (or “antireligious” in this case) is not the only important issue here.

Two popular arguments in favor of this new norm are also of paramount importance. The first one contends that “antireligious hooliganism” in the spirit of Pussy Riot encroaches on the very foundations of Russian statehood, which are connected to the “traditional religions”; this opinion was

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20. The abovementioned Resolution of 2011 was supplemented on November 3, 2016, by the Plenary Meeting of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation Resolution No. 41, “On Amending the decisions of Resolution No. 1 of the plenary meeting of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation ‘On Certain Issues of Judicial Practice in Criminal Cases Regarding Crimes of Terror of February 9, 2012,’” and Resolution No. 11 “Concerning Judicial Practice in Criminal Cases Regarding Crimes of Extremism,” of June 28, 2011, The Supreme Court, [http://www.vsr.ru/Show\\_pdf.php?id=11086](http://www.vsr.ru/Show_pdf.php?id=11086).

21. Tatiana Stanovaya, “Chem Ugrozhayet Putinu Novaya Rossiyskaya Ideologiya?” [Why Is the New Russian Ideology a Threat to Putin?], Carnegie Center, April 7, 2015, <http://carnegie.ru/commentary/?fa=59679>.

22. Mikhail Dmitriev, “Pussy Riot: Analysis of the Composition of the Crime,” *Zakon*, August 28, 2012, [https://zakon.ru/blog/2012/8/28/pussy\\_riot\\_analiz\\_sostava\\_prestupleniya](https://zakon.ru/blog/2012/8/28/pussy_riot_analiz_sostava_prestupleniya).

expressed directly by the Russian parliament on September 25, 2012.<sup>23</sup> The second argument asserts that, by adopting the new legislation, the state prevents violence that could potentially be provoked by the actions of “insulters of feelings.” This theory was also discussed in the State Duma, with references to the unrest in the Arab countries after the emergence of the *Innocence of Muslims* video.<sup>24</sup> The limited law enforcement experience with the new content of the Criminal Code shows that it is being applied to hooliganism or controversial public gestures, as well as to innocent statements. In any case, as of the spring of 2017, we can definitely state that this direction of criminal law enforcement has no relation to counteracting violence or calls for violence.<sup>25</sup>

The most striking legislative addition was introduced in the summer of 2016 within the repressive “antiterrorist package” of amendments to various laws, which came to be known as the “Yarovaya Package.”<sup>26</sup> Restriction against preaching doctrines that promote violence (at least, in the authorities’ opinion) is considered one of the most important directions in counteracting religiously motivated terrorism; thus, it was decided to restrict missionary work not related to officially registered (that is, to some extent, controlled) religious organizations. In the context of “terrorism prevention” the new legislation evidently targets the Salafis,<sup>27</sup> Hizb ut-Tahrir, and similar organizations. The so-called antimissionary amendments, included in the Yarovaya Package, mean, in essence, that only the clergy belonging to registered associations and believers carrying a missionary’s certificate from such associations have a right to publicly recruit people into their religious associations. Violation of this restriction entails relatively large fines, but the law does not explain whether all conversations regarding religion should be interpreted as “recruitment” into a religious association. Strictly speaking, for example, an Orthodox believer should be fined under the current law for inviting a passerby into a church for a feast. The vague wording, combined with the widespread “anti-cult” prejudices, produced an unsurprising result; when the amendments went into effect on July 20, 2016, the Protestant preachers and, to some extent, the Hare Krishna movement became their first targets.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, we see that the “antimissionary amendments” perfectly translate both key fears mentioned above—of religiously motivated political radicalism and of the unusual (for the majority) religious

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23. “Statement No. 40 Article 5409 of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation ‘On Protection of Religious Feelings of Citizens of the Russian Federation,’” Collection of Legislation of the Russian Federation, October 1, 2012, <http://www.szrf.ru/doc.phtml?nb=edition00&issid=2012040000&docid=69>.

24. “All factions of the Duma are ready to support the draft law on the protection of the feelings of believers,” RIA Novosti, September 26, 2012, <https://ria.ru/politics/20120926/759777904.html>.

25. Maria Kravchenko, “Inappropriate Enforcement of Anti-Extremist Legislation in Russia in 2016,” SOVA Center, April 21, 2017, <http://www.sova-center.ru/en/misuse/reports-analyses/2017/04/d36857/>.

26. “New Amendments to the Ozerov and Yarovaya Package,” SOVA Center, June 21, 2016, <http://www.sova-center.ru/misuse/news/lawmaking/2016/06/d34835/>.

27. We are referring here to an entire cluster of groups advocating for a return to “pure” Islam of its first century and, accordingly, in opposition to “official Islam.” The word “Salafi” is rarely used in official rhetoric. The preferred word is “Wahhabi,” and, when used, it presupposes not only religious dissidence of the indicated kind, but also support for the armed Islamist underground.

28. Olga Sibireva, “Freedom of Conscience in Russia: Restrictions and Challenges in 2016,” SOVA Center, May 10, 2017, <http://www.sova-center.ru/en/religion/publications/2017/05/d36996/>.

trends or simply unusual forms of religiosity—into the law enforcement reality. It is worth noting that these amendments were included in the bill after it had passed the first reading. In fact, the amendments to restrict missionary activities had been discussed repeatedly for almost two decades, unable to progress toward real acceptance due to their clearly anticonstitutional nature. Cleverly including antimissionary legal norms in the antiterrorist package, destined for passing, brought a long-awaited success to the “anti-cult” lobby.

## The Strategy for Combating Extremism

An official attempt to formalize the terminology within the field of countering extremism in general, including extremism related to religion, was made in 2014. It was reflected in the Strategy for Countering Extremism in the Russian Federation Through 2025,<sup>29</sup> signed by President Putin late in the year. It should be noted that the public discussion of the Strategy began in the late spring of 2014, that is, after the annexation of Crimea and against the backdrop of the intensifying war in Donbas, but its draft had been prepared earlier, since all such projects are subject to long interagency coordination procedures. Thus, we can’t definitely say that the draft Strategy was introduced as a result of the radical change in the political course that took place in February–March 2014, but there is no doubt that this change influenced the content of the Strategy.

Of course, the Strategy was based on previously established approaches in this area, and the long-term evolution of these approaches also deserves analysis, but in this work, we shall limit ourselves to the analysis of the form they have taken in the new “post-Crimea” political reality.

It should also be mentioned that the initial draft of the Strategy, submitted by the Ministry of Internal Affairs to the Human Rights Council under the President in late May 2014, was subsequently substantially refined, in particular following the discussion in the Council. As a result, some incongruities and overly repressive propositions, present after the preliminary agreement between the security agencies, disappeared from the project. Nevertheless, the final document, signed by Putin, retained its distinctly repressive character and its (in many ways inadequate) notions regarding religious and other similar environments, typical for the agencies in charge of implementing anti-extremist policies. These features are what makes the text of the Strategy interesting—it is not very important as an actual practical instruction, but as a locus of the official approaches.

The strategy is not designed to interpret laws or change them in any way—it takes them as a given. The purpose of the Strategy is primarily to create a basis for the policies of all state and public actors outside of the field of law enforcement per se, whom the authors see as participants in the fight against extremism (i.e., policies aimed at prevention). The term “prevention” is very important, because it reflects understanding of the fact that having only the criminal policy is insufficient, and a more comprehensive approach is required.

However, one should take into account the fundamental features of Russian law enforcement: the state wins almost any court case against a private actor; acquittals in criminal cases consistently comprise less than one percent, and the percentage of acquittals in relation to “extremist crimes”

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29. “The Strategy for Countering Extremism in the Russian Federation through 2025,” National Security Council website, 2014, <http://www.scrf.gov.ru/security/State/document130/>.

in recent years has been close to zero. If a Russian court sentences a defendant, charged with anything but the most insignificant crimes, to something other than real loss of liberty or to a prison term equal (or approximately equal) to the time already spent in pretrial detention, such a verdict is perceived by the participants of the process as almost an acquittal or as a form of warning, that is, a preventive measure.<sup>30</sup> This is especially true with regard to penalties for administrative offenses. Bans against literature, as discussed above, are also understood not as a punishment, but as a form of preventive restriction of a potentially dangerous activity. Searches conducted in the residences of witnesses in a case also serve not only as the means of obtaining evidence, but as a form of preventive work with the witnesses (leaving an impression that some long cases, which never ended in a sentence, were conducted primarily for the sake of such prevention). Thus, the de facto range of preventive activities is very broad, ranging from disciplinary conversations in a police office to not-too-severe criminal sentences. De jure, of course, only actions not associated with criminal or administrative sanctions can be considered prevention. This ambiguity should be borne in mind when speaking about the anti-extremist policy.

However, some measures, officially categorized as preventive, are de facto repressive. The most obvious example is the system of preventive registration. Registration of suspicious citizens is common in principle, but registrants in Russia could be subject to numerous unlawful restrictions, and, in Dagestan, this system has become a real scourge of society.<sup>31</sup> A register, created to track people involved in extremist and terrorist activities, including suspects in such cases or those who had long served their sentences, constitutes another important example. The fully legitimate purpose of the register was to control financial operations of these people. However, in 2013, extremely tight restrictions were imposed on individuals on the register with regard to their use of their own money, turning this measure into an extrajudicial punishment.<sup>32</sup>

Returning to the Strategy, it admittedly introduced into the official discourse a number of new concepts built on the basis of the definition of extremist activity provided in the law. These concepts were created in order to on the one hand somehow align this definition with the use of the word “extremism” in political language, and, on the other hand, to designate the sphere of prevention around the sphere of law enforcement outlined by the definition of extremist activity.

An “extremist ideology” was defined as “a system of views and ideas that represent violent and other unlawful acts as the principal means of resolving . . . conflicts.” In other words, the views in question

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30. The mechanism for making such decisions was described in: Ella Paneyakh, “The Practical Logic of Judicial Decision Making,” *Russian Politics & Law* 54, no. 2–3 (September 2016): 138–163.

31. Tanya Lokshina, “Invisible War. Russia’s Abusive Response to the Dagestan Insurgency,” Human Rights Watch, June 2015, [https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report\\_pdf/russia0615\\_forupload.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/russia0615_forupload.pdf); Summary of the practice of appealing legal violations in preventive registration in the Republic of Dagestan in 2016–early 2017. This report of the Memorial Human Rights Center is available on its website: “Dagestan: Fact Sheet of the Memorial Human Rights Center on the practice of being taken off the preventive registration,” Memorial Human Rights Center, April 3, 2017, <http://memohrc.org/news/dagestan-spravka-pravozashchitnogo-centra-memorial-o-praktike-snyatiya-s-profucheta>. In the spring and summer of 2017, there were reports giving reasons to hope that this registration system would cease to exist, but there is no certainty on this so far.

32. Maria Kravchenko, “Inappropriate Enforcement of Anti-Extremist Legislation,” in *Russia in 2013: Xenophobia, Freedom of Conscience and Anti-Extremism in Russia in 2013* (Moscow: SOVA Center, 2014), 89–90.

could belong to any version of political, religious, or other world outlook that suggests “unlawful” means of resolving conflicts existing in the society. It is important to understand that unlawful actions in this context denote not just “ordinary” crimes or ideologically motivated calls for violence, but also actions that were made illegal by the anti-extremist legislation, including “asserting religious superiority,” “insulting the religious feelings,” and so forth. Thus, any system of views based on religion or on its rejection becomes an “extremist ideology,” or, more precisely, might become one, because even the Criminal Code does not presume consistent application in this sphere, let alone the Strategy.

The Strategy defined “radicalism” as an extreme degree of adherence to an “extremist ideology,” fraught with “*actions aimed at violent change of the foundations of the constitutional system and violation of the integrity of the Russian Federation*”; such actions were thus ascribed a higher level of public danger than murders motivated by hatred or even than terrorism. This tells us something about the real priorities of the state policy for combating religious or any other kind of “extremism,” rather than those declared in the same Strategy. It should be noted, however, that such an understanding of the word “radicalism” has not yet taken hold (as mentioned before, the National Security Strategy adopted in 2015 uses the terms “extremism” and “radicalism” more or less synonymously).

The Strategy also introduced the notion of “manifestations of extremism,” which included not only illegal actions, but also “*acts that contribute to the emergence or aggravation of interethnic, interconfessional and regional conflicts*.” Such a definition covers the acts aimed at deliberately provoking conflicts (such as interfaith conflicts), but it could also be interpreted to include obviously innocent acts that, in principle, could potentially provoke such a conflict—for example, any religious polemics. Even public actions held without the permission of local authorities are classified as “manifestations of extremism.” Apparently, “manifestations” should be understood as actions pertaining to the “ideology of extremism,” not necessarily “radical.”

Such broad notions were introduced not in order to expand the already very wide scope of the anti-extremist law enforcement, but to denote the widest possible scope of the anti-extremist “preventive work” of various authorities.

The Strategy specifically mentioned such factors as “radical Islamic movements” imported to Russia and other foreign religious associations, as well as migration that violated “*the established . . . ethno-confessional balance of the population*” in some localities (this “balance” as subject to state protection has been wandering from one document to another for a long time). These arguments continue the long-standing tradition of understanding threats to stability and traditionality as external rather than generated internally by the evolution of Russian society.

The emphasis on traditionality in the Strategy is particularly evident with regard to Islam—this is not surprising, since the whole logic of combating “religious extremism” has been largely built on its example. On the one hand, the Strategy asserted that “*radical Islamic movements promoting their own exclusivity and violent methods of dissemination*” did come from abroad; on the other hand, it emphasized that the followers of such movements, who didn’t descend from “*people traditionally professing Islam*” (implying, primarily, Russian converts) could be particularly dangerous.

Traditionality enjoys even wider protection: the realization of freedom of conscience is limited not only in the usual way (prohibition against calls for violence or incitement to hatred), but also by

protecting “the religious feelings of believers and the national identity of Russian citizens.” As we know from the law enforcement practice, the first element in this formula means the de facto suppression of any assaults on the traditional religious representations and symbols for each of the “major” religions. The second element is more complex, given the ambiguity of the term “national” in Russian. If we take it to denote the “civic nation,” then the formula appears to say that freedom of conscience should not result in forfeiting one’s loyalty to the political nation—a possible hint at Jehovah’s Witnesses, Salafis, or other groups that attach little importance to this type of loyalty. If we understand “national” as “ethnic,” then the statement is directed against “proselytism” among ethnic groups that historically “belong” to another religion; this idea forms an important basis for the consensus of large organizations representing the four Russian “traditional religions.”<sup>33</sup>

Remarkably, very few of the many preventive measures proposed in the Strategy target the religious sphere directly. In fact, there are only two of them: control over (but not a ban on) Russian citizens who leave the country to receive religious education abroad, and support of religious organizations willing to counter the “manifestations of extremism.” It seems that the authors of the Strategy either had no other clear proposals in this area, or did not see the need to include them in the official document.

## RADICALIZATION IN RUSSIAN ISLAM

In terms of violence at the intersection of religion and politics, the set of groups and trends usually denoted by the term “radical Islam” constitute the crucial and most dangerous phenomenon. This statement seemingly needs no further proof, but definitely needs clarification, because both key parameters—attitude toward violence and the radical nature of the interpretations of Islam—don’t just assume binary values (“yes” or “no”) but vary rather capriciously. This presents a problem both for understanding this phenomenon and for developing counteraction policies. Jumping ahead, we can say that the Russian state, so far, has not been successful in resolving this problem either in terms of understanding or in terms of counteraction.

In this article we are not trying to analyze the effectiveness of combat operations against armed groups or individual militants. In any case, it is clear that such operations are necessary, and disputes can only relate to their effectiveness or proportionality in the use of force.<sup>34</sup> We are more interested in state actions aimed at preventing a militant underground movement from being formed. In principle, these actions include preventing the dissemination of ideas of violent struggle or ideas that inflame such a struggle, and preventing people, who already sympathize with such ideas, from moving on to real violence. In combination, this is what we call counteraction to the

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33. This principle of religious and ethnic structuring of the population of Russia was appropriately labeled “hegemonic ecumenism”: James Warhola, “Religiosity, Politics and Formation of Civil Society in Multinational Russia,” in *Burden or Blessing? Russian Orthodoxy and the Construction of Civil Society and Democracy*, ed. Christopher Marsh (Boston: Boston University Press, 2004), 91–98.

34. “The Challenges of Integration (II), Islam, the Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency,” International Crisis Group, October 19, 2012, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/caucasus/russianorth-caucasus/north-caucasus-challenges-integration-ii-islam-insurgency-and-counter-insurgency>.



radicalization of Muslims. Therefore, it is important to explain, at least briefly, how and by whom the term “radical” is interpreted in relation to Islam.

The Muslim community of Russia is very diverse. There are significant regional differences, caused by a huge influx of migrants, primarily from Central Asia, and the mass internal migration of Muslims primarily from the North Caucasus. Most importantly, there has been a proliferation of numerous Islamic concepts and entire movements that were little known in the Soviet era but which have gained quite a bit of popularity over the past 30 years. Official muftiates with their alliances and conflicts are seen on the surface, but this surface doesn’t reveal much about the religious life and religion-related political views of Russian Muslims.

The sociology of public polls in Russia is not sufficiently accurate to reveal the religious differences amongst Muslims, and qualitative studies allow us to study only certain elements of the multifaceted reality. Unfortunately, the efforts of bona fide religious scholars are clearly insufficient to provide society with an adequate picture of the activity of Muslim organizations and groups or to answer the question on the ways to identify the danger of a violent assault against constitutional principles or the public.

Not only the common prejudices proliferate in this situation, but also various explicitly biased conceptual approaches characterized by radical reductionism. The aforementioned Roman Silant’ev, who has already published several books on Islam in Russia, is the most successful representative of such reductionist Islamic studies. He openly claims that all the “unconventional” (or simply personally unappealing to him) Islamic movements in Russia should be combined under the umbrella term “Wahhabism,” understood by both him and the newspapers specifically as an ideology of Islamist terrorism. In other words, Silant’ev basically refuses to distinguish even between those who approve of violence and those who fully recognize Russian laws and act legitimately. The fact that the movements, allegedly united under this term, are in conflict with one another—the Salafis, the Said Nursi followers, Hizb ut-Tahrir party, and so forth—also does not stop Silant’ev. He insists not only on the legislative prohibition of “Wahhabism,”<sup>35</sup> but also on banning the Council of Muftis of Russia (*Sovet Muftiev Rossii*, SMR),<sup>36</sup> the most visible official association of Russian Muslims outside the North Caucasus, for demonstrating its noticeable tolerance toward various “unconventional” movements. Meanwhile, Silant’ev is regularly invited to serve as an expert by the state, primarily by law enforcement agencies (in addition, he is also affiliated with the leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church).<sup>37</sup> Experts such as Silant’ev need to be discussed in such detail because their reductionist and repressive approaches have a significant impact on public policy.

The state, as represented by its political leadership and the leaders of law enforcement agencies, is mostly satisfied with such ideas, not making any real attempts to understand the essence or dynamics of various trends in Russian Islam, but simply dividing it into “traditional” and “radical.”

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35. Dagestan even passed the relevant law in 1999. Gradually this law has been forgotten as completely inapplicable.

36. Roman Silant’ev, “It’s time to raise the issue of a complete ban against Wahhabism in Russia,” EADaily, January 29, 2016, <https://eadaily.com/ru/news/2016/01/29/roman-silantev-pora-stavit-vopros-o-polnom-zaprete-vahhabizma-i-deyatelnosti-soveta-muftiev-rossii>.

37. He heads the Human Rights Center of the World Russian People’s Assembly, an organization that acts as a “secular mouthpiece” of the ROC. See the center’s website at <http://pravovrns.ru/>.

“Radicalism” in the sense of following certain doctrines is seen as clearly linked to political radicalism (attitude toward the constitutional order and to the existing authorities) and furthermore, linked to readiness for radical (that is, violent) actions against the authorities and other opponents. Undoubtedly, there are some real, albeit not so trivial, links between these different forms of “radicalism.” Very significant differences between these forms are just as indisputable, and quite obvious to any competent observer. For example, in places such as Dagestan, where Salafism is not exotic, it is obvious to the authorities that Salafis can be completely apolitical or very politically active, peaceful or militant, and with many intermediate gradations. This empirical understanding, unfortunately, does not sufficiently influence the general state policy, perhaps because the latter is created from the top down, while empirical understanding has problems traveling up from the bottom.

The primitive scheme more or less directly equating “nontraditional” Islam with violent methods appeared soon after the Law on Combating Extremist Activity, once the authorities showed their interest in discussing “religious extremism.” On February 14, 2003, the Supreme Court recognized 15 Muslim organizations, starting with al Qaeda, as terrorist. The list included the Islamist party Hizb ut-Tahrir, and this particular decision should be recognized as simply wrong. Hizb ut-Tahrir advocates a totalitarian ideology and plans a worldwide military jihad as soon as the legitimate (in their opinion) Caliphate becomes possible to proclaim. These views allow us to consider the party’s goals contradictory to the Russian Constitution and fundamental human rights. However, it is also true that the party is not actually involved in any militancy; it does not even call for violent actions (although a few isolated cases have been recorded), delegating to others this “practical” part of the struggle for the Caliphate, and leaving the role of propagandists for themselves.<sup>38</sup> Based on these considerations, we believe that the activities of this party are not protected either by the Constitution of Russia or the European Convention on Human Rights, and the state has the right to ban it; on the other hand, Hizb ut-Tahrir should not be considered a terrorist organization. This is the position of the European Court of Human Rights, including in relation to Russia.<sup>39</sup>

Hizb ut-Tahrir is relatively widespread in Russia and attracts serious concern from the authorities,<sup>40</sup> so the number of convictions for participating in it (dozens of people every year) far exceeds the corresponding number for all the other banned organizations combined (although the exact number of convicted offenders is unknown); this does not include the severity of the punishments. The fact that Hizb ut-Tahrir has been banned specifically as a terrorist organization leads to charges under antiterrorist articles of the Criminal Code on purely formal grounds. Television and

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38. Alexander Verkhovsky, “Is Hizb ut-Tahrir an Extremist Organization?,” SOVA Center, February 2, 2006, <http://www.sova-center.ru/en/xenophobia/reports-analyses/2006/02/d7187/>.

39. “The Case of Kasymakhunov and Saybatalov vs. Russia,” European Court of Human Rights, March 14, 2013, [http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-117127#\(itemid%22:%22001-117127%22\)}](http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-117127#(itemid%22:%22001-117127%22)).

40. It is difficult to assess the actual growth, but it definitely takes place, as can be seen, for example, in this expert review of official data: “The Rise of Nontraditional Islam in the Urals,” Carnegie Moscow Center, September 30, 2015, <http://carnegie.ru/2015/09/30/rise-of-nontraditional-islam-in-urals-pub-61461>.

other news outlets often portray actions against Hizb ut-Tahrir as antiterrorist operations.<sup>41</sup> The believers are even sentenced under the charges of planning to overthrow the Russian government, which are, of course, completely unfounded.<sup>42</sup>

The most important feature of the abovementioned Supreme Court decision of 2003 was its almost complete lack of reasoning,<sup>43</sup> which left the impression that the country's highest court had simply taken on faith the words of the FSB (and, of course, we do not know how the FSB came to such conclusions). This quality of the decision should have become the basis for its revision in and of itself, but the revision was, of course, impossible both politically and legally. However, from that point on, judicial bans against literature and organizations have included detailed reasoning of the court, allowing us to see at least the legal facade, if not the actual "back room," of decision-making.

Counteracting real terrorist organizations—that is, those associated with Imarat Kavkaz and other armed underground groups (and in recent years with sending people to the Middle East to participate in the war on the side of ISIS or other groups)—does not require much effort other than actual operational work. If a participant in such an organization or group happens to be arrested rather than killed under various circumstances, there is no need to seek evidence related to his views.

Proving the cases of incitement to armed jihad or glorification of its modern heroes also presents no significant problems (the number of such cases increases every year, especially in connection with propaganda in support of ISIS). However, the cases related to public statements that can be regarded as Islamist propaganda are much more numerous than the cases related to direct calls for violence. This is true both for the criminal cases and for the prosecutorial claims seeking to ban books, videos, and other materials. Chapter 3 (Laruelle and Yudina) in this volume examines the quantitative data on this practice. It is also worth noting that among those who were not merely found guilty, but really deprived of liberty only for their public statements, military jihad apologists are only half as numerous as those from the ultra-right.<sup>44</sup>

In this chapter, it is more important to pay attention to legal argumentation. The analysis of judicial decisions (not including the very fact of their large number and, for the most part, inaccessibility) is problematic for two reasons.

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41. A good example: REN-TV filmed and showed the storming of labor migrant residences. They found 200 Hizb ut-Tahrir brochures, although the news report was styled as the capture of a "gang" of ISIS supporters. As a result, 20 out of 97 migrants taken to the police office were arrested and accused specifically of participating in Hizb-ut-Tahrir. Their verdicts started to arrive in September 2016. "Storming the Terrorists Involved in Building ISIS in Russia Was Recorded on Video," REN-TV, 20 October 2015, <http://ren.tv/novosti/2015-10-20/shturm-terroristov-stroivshih-igil-v-rossii-zasnyali-na-video>; "A Resident of Tajikistan Sentenced in the Hizb ut-Tahrir Case in Moscow," SOVA Center, September 28, 2016, <http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/extremism/counter-extremism/2016/09/d35497/>.

42. Maria Kravchenko, "Inappropriate Enforcement of Anti-Extremist Legislation in Russia in 2016," SOVA Center, April 21, 2017, <http://www.sova-center.ru/en/misuse/reports-analyses/2017/04/d36857/>.

43. It became evident only when the decision was finally published after a delay of several years. It can be accessed on the Memorial's website: <http://old.memo.ru/hr/jbl/doc/2.htm>.

44. "Who is Deprived of Liberty for 'Extremist Crimes' Not of Generally Criminal Character," SOVA Center, February 20, 2017, <http://www.sova-center.ru/misuse/publications/2017/02/d36413/>.

The first reason is related to the content of the charges. Some form of criminalizing public calls for violence or other forms of incitement to hatred is generally accepted both in Europe and in the post-Soviet countries.<sup>45</sup> However, the broad interpretation of “extremism,” discussed above, on the one hand, allows the prosecution to file charges for almost any religiously motivated statement made in a somewhat dramatic form, and, on the other hand, does not allow us to determine whether these charges are appropriate in each particular case. The lack of clear demarcation between legitimate and forbidden actions leads to confusion in legal argumentation, and in many cases verdicts fail to provide any information on the content of the incriminating statements.

The second problem is of the procedural nature, but it significantly affects the content and interpretation of judicial decisions. The Russian judicial system has developed the practice of obligatory involvement of academic experts in all cases related to anti-extremist legislation, and, in cases of public statements, expert opinions constitute the primary or even the only real evidence.<sup>46</sup> However, prosecutors (and then courts) can use expert opinions and arguments selectively without having to justify them. As a result, neither an indictment, nor an expert opinion on which it is based, can be viewed as a necessary and sufficient set of arguments, and the verdict itself, which cites the materials of the case only partially and often randomly, looks insufficiently substantiated in almost all the cases.

Notably, the use of expert knowledge in most cases does not imply any involvement of religious scholars (prosecutors most frequently engage linguists, less frequently psychologists or social psychologists), but involving religious scholars still fails to prevent embarrassing mistakes. For example, the Supreme Court of Tatarstan once approved a lower court decision in which a citizen was, in fact, accused of preaching Wahhabism, but the lower court insisted that he had been creating a cell of “adherents of the radical Islamic movement Ahl al-Sunnah (Followers of the Sunnah)” —that is, adherents of Sunni Islam. In other words, the experts and the court simply repeated the defendant’s self-identification.<sup>47</sup> Such mistakes are numerous, and, looking at the resonance on social networks, leave active Muslims with the impression that the authorities either conduct an anti-Islamic policy or are simply not competent enough to manage their Muslim citizens, or both. Thus, the preventive tasks of anti-extremist law enforcement are clearly not being fulfilled; on the contrary, such enforcement can potentially provoke hostility toward the authorities and sympathy for the radicals. These considerations are simply more evident with respect to Muslims, but apply to some extent to the entire anti-extremist policy.

To any relatively informed observer, the law enforcement practice appears arbitrary in general. It is not easy to convincingly demonstrate any prevailing trends in it. Therefore, we must limit ourselves here only to the trends and supporting examples that appear most widespread according to the available data.

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45. Alexander Verkhovsky, *Criminal Law on Hate Crime, Incitement to Hatred and Hate Speech in OSCE Participating States* (The Hague: SOVA Center, 2016), 36–51.

46. Regarding this practice: Aidar Sultanov, *Protection of Freedom of Conscience, the dissemination of beliefs through the prism of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights* (Moscow: Statut Publishing House, 2013), 195–221.

47. The court decisions are available from the authors. See: “Tatarstan issued a warning for Sunni Islam ‘as a radical movement,’” SOVA Center, December 1, 2009, <http://www.sova-center.ru/misuse/news/persecution/2009/12/d17440/>.

Based on the law enforcement practice, it is possible to identify the main triggers that draw law enforcement's attention toward particular active Muslims. These triggers, rather than clauses of the definition, shape the approaches to countering extremism.

The first trigger is a positive attitude toward actual terrorist activity, whether in Syria, the North Caucasus, or elsewhere. Therefore, for example, songs of the Chechen bard Timur Mutsurayev, which are very popular in Muslim circles far beyond the Caucasus, have been banned as extremist again and again.<sup>48</sup>

Involvement in Hizb ut-Tahrir—the most extensive Islamist organization in Russia outside the Caucasus, as discussed above—constitutes the second trigger, giving rise to a somewhat peculiar law enforcement aberration. Since Hizb ut-Tahrir texts pay much attention to the future revival of the Caliphate, any positive mention of the Caliphate, even without any connection with this party, is, in and of itself, perceived as the intention to overthrow the constitutional order.<sup>49</sup>

Because the ideological bases of actual terrorist activity are associated with Salafism, any views (even not Salafi per se) that focus on the “purity of Islam,” “returning to the times of the Prophet,” and so forth have become the third important trigger. They cause strong and, of course, not unfounded suspicions,<sup>50</sup> but, in each particular case, nobody is usually ready to seriously evaluate the extent of the connection between the Salafi (or somewhat similar) ideas and propensity toward violence. Suspicions often lead to absurd judicial injunctions of any literature actually or allegedly associated with Wahhabism (the eighteenth-century treatise of al-Wahhab became the first book to be banned in 2004) and to equally absurd criminal sentences, some examples of which are provided in Chapter 3 (Laruelle and Yudina).

The most far-reaching result of such suspicions was the Supreme Court ban of the Tablighi Jamaat movement on May 7, 2009, which deserves a separate discussion. The arguments found in Russia in favor of the social danger presented by Tablighi Jamaat can all be traced back to an article by a U.S. expert published in Russian back in the early 2000s.<sup>51</sup> The author, Alex Aleksiev, never claimed that Tablighi Jamaat was engaged in a violent struggle, but believed that the movement was very dangerous due to its fundamentalist interpretation of Islam (the Deobandi school, which the author interpreted as close to the Wahhabi school), and due to the fact that many followers of the movement participated in real terrorist activities later or even at the same time. Alex Aleksiev's former employer, the Center for Security Policy (CSP), continues to endorse this

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48. It is worth noting that Mutsurayev has had no connection to the underground for a long time and lives peacefully in Chechnya under Ramzan Kadyrov's patronage.

49. For example, Bagir Kazikhanov was sent to prison for 3.5 years in 2015 for participating in the inappropriately banned Nurcular organization (for more on it, see below) and for “under the guise of Islam study groups, holding clandestine meetings, during which he called for actions aimed at creating a global Islamic state (caliphate).” See: “Three residents of Ulyanovsk were convicted for studying books by Nursi; one received a real term,” SOVA Center, February 26, 2015, <http://www.sova-center.ru/misuse/news/persecution/2015/02/d31365/>.

50. In addition to anti-extremist measures, other methods of prevention are used here. Sporadically emerging local bans against wearing hijabs certainly belong to this category.

51. A special issue of the *Otechestvennyye Zapiski* almanac, entirely devoted to Islam, represents a variety of points of view. See Alex Aleksiev, “Tablighi Jamaat: The Invisible Legion of Jihad,” *Otechestvennyye Zapiski*, no. 5 (2003).

point of view even after his departure,<sup>52</sup> but CSP is generally known for its emphasis on the purported threat of the Sharia law taking over the United States. The Southern Poverty Law Center, a well-known advocacy group, directly calls the CSP anti-Islamic.<sup>53</sup>

In any case, Aleksiev's ideas could have become the subject of a substantive discussion in Russia, but unfortunately they never did. Even if we accept all the assumptions and contradictory information in his work as true, Aleksiev argued not that Tablighi Jamaat intended to overthrow the constitutional order in a particular country (the article never mentioned Russia at all), but that such an environment naturally produced or temporarily attracted radical young people, who then proceeded to carry out militant actions, and therefore this environment could be more tolerant toward militants. It would have been natural to conclude from such an assertion that Tablighi Jamaat should be the object of close attention of the intelligence services, as well as a target (and, preferably, also a participant) of various preventive programs, aimed at countering the believers' transition to violence based on Islamist ideas. Instead, it was decided to simply ban Tablighi Jamaat, and so it was done.

Judging from the text of the Supreme Court's decision, which (as always in such cases) sided with the prosecution, the General Prosecutor's Office demonstrated a rather vague acquaintance with the subject. Here is a characteristic quote: *"The supporters of Tablighi Jamaat preach a version of Islam that is almost indistinguishable from the ideology of jihadists of the Wahhabi or Salafi persuasion, practiced by all terrorists."*<sup>54</sup> Contrary to the well-known facts about Tablighi Jamaat (even in Aleksiev's interpretation), the Supreme Court insisted that representatives of the movement *"made calls for the forcible seizure of power."* However, the key charges were different—*"the spread of forms of Islam not traditional for Russia," "statements insulting the top leadership of the Russian Federation," "propaganda of exclusivity or superiority of citizens on the basis of their attitude toward religion"*—that is, ordinary preaching and criticism of opponents. Actually, this is the standard set of charges in the overwhelming majority of cases concerning "religious extremism": nontraditionalism in terms of doctrine and/or practice, political disloyalty, and the active affirmation of the verity of one's own beliefs and the falsity of others.

Finally, the fourth popular trigger is being associated with Pan-Turkism. Pan-Turkism as a threat to the sovereignty and integrity of Russia was repeatedly and seriously discussed in the 1990s. It was assumed that Turkey, relying on its long-standing ethnic kinship with Russian Tatars, its historical links with Circassians, and other factors, was not only going to interfere in Russia's affairs, but also, in the long term, might be looking to tear some territories away from Russia. As the confidence in the stability of the political regime returned in the 2000s, these fears were voiced much less frequently. Nevertheless, there was something that remained: the idea of the global conspiracy by Fethullah Gülen and, accordingly, the threat arising from his real or presumed supporters inside

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52. Ilana Freedman, *Gateway to Jihad: Tablighi Jama'at 2* (Washington DC: The Center for Security Policy, 2016).

53. "A Journalist's Manual: Field Guide to Anti-Muslim Extremists," Southern Poverty Law Center, October 25, 2016, <https://www.splcenter.org/20161025/journalists-manual-field-guide-anti-muslim-extremists>.

54. The decision of the Supreme Court is available on the website of the late human rights defender Rustem Valiullin: <http://lawfulstate.ru/index.php/zashitapprav/2010-03-28-13-27-47/q-q/the-decision-on-an-interdiction-of-tabligi-dzhamaat.html>.

Russia. This idea resulted in a fairly well-organized campaign against the Gülen followers, launched in 1999. In its first years, the campaign was primarily limited to mass closing of the so-called Turkish lyceums, actually related to Gülen, but the subsequent part was directed against other followers of the Turkish Islamic teacher Said Nursi, even though the materials obtained during the searches showed that they almost never were Gülen followers (Gülen is the leader of only one group among the followers of Nursi, albeit the most famous one).<sup>55</sup>

The campaign against the followers of Nursi began somewhat chaotically, but then arrived at a clear scheme—the prohibition of the founding texts (books by Said Nursi, Fethullah Gülen, and a few others), followed by the prohibition of the movement as extremist, and then selective prosecution of activists for continuation of the banned activities. The same scheme was used repeatedly, with some variations, but the example of the Nursi followers is perhaps the easiest to follow, and thus worthy of more detailed analysis.

In 2001–2006, several criminal cases, primarily in Tatarstan, requested numerous expert examinations of the Said Nursi books that comprise his *Risale-i Nur* collection of religious texts. The majority of experts found the books to contain either justification of violent methods or negative statements about the nonbelievers, the Jews, and some other groups, or something along the lines of “zombification,” creation of a “death cult,” and so on. Only a small number of experts believed that Nursi’s books contained no substantial incendiary elements other than the usual religious polemics against secularists or adepts of other religions. As a rule, the expert opinions went far beyond their professional competence. This is quite typical for extremism-related cases, as the professional qualifications of an expert don’t usually correspond to the specific characteristics of the case, and an expert is called upon to answer a wide range of questions, including even questions of a legal nature. This practice directly contradicts the law but has been quite common since at least the mid-2000s. Still, at that time, all attempts to formulate and bring to court charges against Nursi followers for inciting religious hatred were unsuccessful.

However, these and similar expert opinions formed the basis for the decision of a district court in Moscow to ban 14 books by Said Nursi (their Russian translations, to be precise) as extremist. The court refused to request even a single opinion from a religious studies expert. This decision was issued on May 21, 2007, approved by the Moscow City Court on September 18, and then came into force; previously stalled criminal cases against the groups of Nursi followers were immediately resumed in different regions of the country. Early in the following year, the Prosecutor General filed a claim in the Supreme Court seeking to ban the Islamic organization Nurcular, despite the fact that even the existence of this organization (as opposed to just an amorphous network of groups of Nursi followers) was, and still remains, unproven.

The Supreme Court banned the nonexistent Nurcular on April 10, 2008. The purely legal argument for the ban consisted of the reference to the court decision to prohibit Said Nursi’s books for presumably “*containing information aimed at inciting religious hatred (between believers and*

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55. The origins and the course of the campaign are described in: Vitaly Ponomarev, *FSB protiv «Risale-i Nur»: presledovaniya posledovateley Saida Nursi v Rossii* [FSB v. *Risale-i Nur*: persecution of followers of Said Nursi in Russia.] (Moscow: The Memorial Human Rights Center, 2012).

*non-believers*).<sup>56</sup> From that moment on, it became possible to prosecute people for participation in the Nursi groups under Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code. Such cases were promptly initiated. We know of 27 sentences issued for participation in Nurcular in 2009–2016 (six of them involve real prison terms). None of these cases involved any additional, more serious charges.<sup>57</sup> In the meantime, several other books by Nursi have been banned.

It is worth noting that, at the same time, no bans were imposed on books authored by Fethullah Gülen. In 2010, Nauchnaya Kniga Publishing House was planning new editions for eight of Gülen's books; fearing problems, it requested the opinion of the Council for the Study of Informational Materials of Religious Content under the Ministry of Justice, headed by well-known expert in Asian and Islamic studies Vitaly Naumkin, regarding any signs of extremism present in these works. (This council was formed in 2009, with Naumkin at the helm, specifically to learn how to separate "acceptable" Islamic literature from "unacceptable," but practically has not functioned since its inception.) The Council came to the conclusion that Gülen's writings contained no signs of extremism, and actually recommended them for publication (although several members of the Council wrote a dissenting opinion).<sup>58</sup> However, in 2012, a single court decision in Orenburg banned 68 books at once—among them 6 books by Gülen. Fifty books from this infamous "Orenburg List" were later exonerated, including, for some reason, only half of Gülen's books.<sup>59</sup> Evidently, this ban was accidental and not the start of persecution directed specifically against the Gülenists. Here the law enforcement practice broke away from its initial political motivation (regardless of whether this motivation was based on conspiracy theories or on reality).

Summarizing the data on anti-extremist policy in the area of countering the radicalization of Muslims, it is difficult to determine whether, and to what extent, it is effective. We are unable to say whether a number of Muslims choosing the path of violence would have been greater or smaller if this policy had never existed at all. Undoubtedly, some people were successfully prevented from taking this path. However, it is also true that the obvious excessiveness of punishments, frequent evident injustices in policy implementation, and the flagrant official incompetence in Islamic affairs, which exasperates active Muslims, have contributed to many instances of radicalization.

## RELIGION AND ULTRA-RIGHT IDEOLOGIES

In addition to "radical Islam," radical political groups and trends based to some degree on other religious traditions (most often Russian or Slavic neo-paganism and, less frequently, Orthodoxy) are also present in Russia.

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56. The decision of the Supreme Court is reproduced in Ponomarev's book on pp. 243–246.

57. The data are given according to the reports of SOVA Center on misuse of anti-extremist legislation. All of them are available on the center's website: <http://www.sova-center.ru/en/misuse/>.

58. The opinion of the Council and the Special Opinion are available in the author's archive.

59. "Enough Joking: The Ban Was Overturned for 50 out of 68 Religious Materials Recognized as Extremist in Orenburg," SOVA Center, February 27, 2015, <http://www.sova-center.ru/misuse/news/persecution/2015/02/d31375/>.



Groups of neo-Nazi or other ultra-right “pagans” (their self-identification is very diverse) are the most militant and the most numerous in this category.<sup>60</sup> In their case, religion is most often secondary to political ideology, but the opposite might also be true. This urge to reconstruct neo-paganism stems from two main sources of inspiration. The first one comes from the experience of German Nazism and, in part, of modern neo-Nazi groups, which many members of the Russian ultra-right, especially the young, continue to see as their models. The second source is the reconstruction of the “primordial Russian faith” unspoiled by “Jewish Christianity.” Of course, in practice, these two trends can mix, but it is important for us to draw a distinction since they correspond to two streams of literature and two series of organizations that can also mix but still remain quite distinguishable. In recent years, it can be said that, in terms of organized activity, the latter trend, less politicized and less radical on average, has clearly prevailed over the former.

The state, legitimately concerned about ultra-right violence, sees its task in both suppressing specific hate crimes and in countering the corresponding ideological trends.

Hate crimes motivated by religion and committed against a person or a material object (meaning that the choice of an object is determined by religious considerations) are committed primarily by representatives of the ultra-right, including neo-pagans, or by their sympathizers (this includes attacks on Muslim and Jewish objects), although there are also types of attacks that can’t be attributed to a particular ideological trend (such as attacks against Orthodox sites, which come from various movements; or attacks against Jehovah’s Witnesses or, occasionally, Protestants, due to widespread intolerance toward these religious minorities). However, all these attacks combined are miniscule in number when compared to the number of hate crimes that are ethnically or racially motivated.<sup>61</sup>

Unsurprisingly, counteraction manifests itself in criminal sentences. Yevgeniya Zhikhareva’s group was a colorful example of a militant neo-Nazi and neo-pagan group in 2000s; the key members of the group were convicted in 2010 for several murders and bombing attacks, and were also implicated in an attempt to set fire to an Orthodox Church.<sup>62</sup> It must be noted, however, that a number of ultra-right neo-pagans undertook arson attempts against churches on their own.<sup>63</sup>

The practice of violence is connected to propaganda of such violence or propaganda of the ideas closely related to violence. The state counteracts such propaganda primarily by criminal

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60. Victor Shnirelman, *Russkoe rodnoverie. Neoyazychestvo i natsionalizm v sovremennoy Rossii* [*Russian Native Faith: Neo-Paganism and Nationalism in Modern Russia*], (Moscow: Publishing House BBI, 2012).

61. This data is analyzed in detail in SOVA Center annual reports. See: <http://www.sova-center.ru/en/xenophobia/>. Examples of hate crimes against Muslims, Protestants, or new religious movements can be found in Chapter 3 by Laruelle and Yudina, and in Chapter 4 by Fagan with Sibireva.

62. See more details about this group and its surroundings in: “The Case of neo-Nazi Bombers Was Sent to Court,” SOVA Center, June 7, 2010, <http://www.sova-center.ru/racism-xenophobia/news/counteraction/2010/06/d18948/>); “The Biryulyovo Front is suspected of organizing pogroms,” SOVA Center, October 21, 2013 (<http://www.sova-center.ru/racism-xenophobia/news/counteraction/2013/10/d28212/>).

63. “A resident of Chelyabinsk Was Convicted for Setting Fire to a Temple,” SOVA Center, December 21, 2016, <http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/extremism/counter-extremism/2016/12/d36053/>.

prosecution, and the scale of this prosecution increases year after year.<sup>64</sup> Some of these verdicts pertain to the statements that were in some way related to religion, including anti-Muslim, jihadist, anti-Semitic, anti-Orthodox, “anti-cult” and other similar statements. The problem is that criminal law enforcement in the field of hate speech is not even expected to specifically target incitement to violence—it is not stated in the relevant articles of the Criminal Code. In many of these criminal cases violence was clearly not intended, and occasionally, the charges were simply not appropriate. Finally, in most cases, we have no information on the content of the incriminating statements. However, reviewing the sentences that we know to have been issued for incitement to violence or for justification of terrorism, we can offer two observations. First, they are relatively few in number—less than a dozen per year in 2011–2015. Next, most of them are connected with calls for Islamist terrorism or justification of such terrorism; in 2014–2016, in contrast to the preceding years, no sentences were issued in any other category. In other words, law enforcement agencies have clearly turned away from the prosecution of incitement to any other forms of violence associated with religion.

Counteracting propaganda, including that of the ultra-right, in practice also means that some organizations, either purely religious or both religious and political, are recognized as extremist and that the literature, music, and other materials advocating the corresponding views are prohibited. As in the case of counteracting radical Islam, the bans do not always directly relate to counteracting violence, and could also be simply inappropriate.

For example, the bans against the groups of so-called Old Believers-Ingliings had no direct relationship to countering violence; one was a group under the leadership of Aleksandr Khinevich in Omsk,<sup>65</sup> and the other one was a Krasnodar organization with a typically (for Ingliings) long name, known as the VEK RA (although, in all fairness, the latter was found to stockpile firearms).<sup>66</sup>

The organization Spiritual and Tribal Sovereign Rus (*Dukhovno-rodovaya derzhava Rus*) was somewhat more aggressive in its activity. More than a decade ago, there were cases of its activists committing violent racist crimes. Some of its groups engaged in combat training. Nevertheless, the worth of their training, and, indeed, of the entire activity of the organization, has remained questionable. It suffices to say that the organization made decisions regarding the need to eliminate “criminal” political leaders, officials, and judges, and then sent these decisions on a swastika-decorated letterhead directly to law enforcement agencies, urging the latter to come over to their side. As of late 2016, it seems that all major groups of the Spiritual and Tribal Sovereign Rus have been destroyed (two organizations were also banned as extremist in 2006 and 2011). Some of its materials were also banned; the key activists have been convicted, sent for mandatory treatment, or are awaiting trial.<sup>67</sup>

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64. This data is analyzed in detail in the SOVA Center annual report; see: <http://www.sova-center.ru/en/xenophobia/>.

65. Viktor Shnirel'man, *Russkoe rodnoverie. Neoyazychestvo i natsionalizm v sovremennoy Rossii* [*Russian Native Faith: Neo-Paganism and Nationalism in Modern Russia*], (Moscow: Publishing House BBI, 2012), 200–203.

66. “Pagans Vedagor and Globa Were Detained in Moscow,” SOVA Center, February 19, 2013, <http://www.sova-center.ru/racism-xenophobia/news/counteraction/2013/02/d26488/>; “Decision of the Krasnodar Regional Court on the Prohibition of the Neo-Pagan Group,” SOVA Center, March 7, 2007, <http://www.sova-center.ru/racism-xenophobia/docs/2007/03/d10327/>.

67. News on bans and verdicts is available on the SOVA Center website. See, for example: “Right-wing Radicals Issued the Death Sentence to Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Zhukov,” SOVA Center, April 5, 2005, <http://www.sova-center.ru/racism-xenophobia/news/racism-nationalism/2005/04/d6960/>; “The Prosecutor’s Office Suspended the Activity of

The Federal List of Extremist Materials includes a considerable neo-pagan (or presumably related to neo-paganism) segment. Calculating its relative share is problematic—the list includes some purely religious neo-pagan texts as well as some purely political or militant ultra-right texts (ultra-right materials predominate on the list in general), but there are also many texts (books, songs, or other materials) that combine these two features. Moreover, with regard to many entries in this segment of the list, the material is impossible to identify. The entries related to neo-paganism range from doctrinal and ideological books (for example, numerous brochures of Aleksei Dobrovolsky [Dobroslav the Sorcerer]) or the repeatedly banned book *Udar Russkikh Bogov* (The Strike of Russian Gods) to juvenile images mocking Christianity or containing Nazi or similar symbols. The list includes texts, videos, or other materials that approve of violence (often, but not necessarily, the Holocaust) or call for it, but relation to violence is not a necessary condition.

Demonstration of banned symbols, most often of Nazi or a similar character, often leads to administrative responsibility in the form of small fines. According to Supreme Court data, a total of 1,796 people were punished for this offense in 2016.<sup>68</sup> In some cases, fascination with the swastika pattern, although associated with ultra-right ideas, is of a rather commercial nature and does not aim to incite violence, since the neo-pagan subcultures have long lived a largely hermetic life.

A special place close to neo-pagans is occupied by the groups that position themselves as radical political ideologies while they are in fact based on a bizarre mixture of terms allegedly borrowed from natural or political sciences—a version of parascience with a parareligious bent.<sup>69</sup> The case in point here is the movement alternately known as the Internal Predictor (*Vnutrenniy prediktor*), the Public Security Concept (*Kontseptsiya obshchestvennoy bezopasnosti*, KOB), Dead Water (*Mertvaya voda*), Toward God's Kingdom (*K Bogoderzhaviyu*), and the "Unity" Conceptual Party (*Kontseptual'naya partiya "Edinenie,"* KPE). In this movement, far-right ideas, including anti-Semitic ones, are weaved into an ostensibly innovative technocratic ideology, which appeals to the less educated fans of technocratic authoritarianism,<sup>70</sup> and especially to the former and current employees of the power structures and the military-industrial complex (the background of the movement's leaders). The KOB never resorted to violence but became a relatively popular teaching, pulling hundreds or even thousands of people into its orbit. It created a political party that ran for the Duma in 2003; authorities had reason to worry due to the kind of followers attracted by Dead Water, which made them potentially dangerous. This official concern resulted in a ban against one of the Toward God's Kingdom branches along with a number of their materials; the KPE was denied registration, and several criminal cases were opened.

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the Spiritual and Tribal Sovereign Rus'," SOVA Center, July 12, 2010, <http://www.sova-center.ru/racism-xenophobia/news/counteraction/2010/07/d19278/>; "The Verdict to the Leader of the Spiritual and Tribal Sovereign Rus' Has Entered into Force," SOVA Center, December 18, 2013, <http://www.sova-center.ru/racism-xenophobia/news/counteraction/2013/12/d28657/>.

68. Statistics of the Judicial Department of the Supreme Court for 2016: <http://www.cdep.ru/index.php?id=79&item=3834>.

69. Anastasia Mitrofanova, "Nationalism and Parascience," in *Russian Nationalism. Social and Cultural Context*, (Moscow: NLO, 2008), 87–103.

70. Yevgeniy Moroz, *The Story of the Dead Water—From a Scary Bedtime Story to Big Politics: Political Neo-Paganism in Post-Soviet Russia* (Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2006).

The Northern Brotherhood (*Severnoe bratstvo*), a splinter group of the ultra-right Movement Against Illegal Immigration (*Dvizhenie protiv nelegalnoi immigratsii*, DPNI) was a much more dangerous organization, known, among other things, for incitement to political attacks. The Northern Brotherhood was fond of the same type of parareligious teaching as the KOB—Pyotr Khomyakov's *Tekhnotronnaia Avesta* (Technothronic Avesta). The Northern Brotherhood was banned in 2012; Khomyakov died in a penal colony, and the leaders of the Brotherhood are still in prison.<sup>71</sup>

Of course, Orthodox Christianity is at least as popular among the ultra-right as neo-paganism or various fringe religious or parareligious ideas (there are also cases of ultra-right activists converting to Islam, viewed by the converts as a more promising antiliberal religion).<sup>72</sup> However, they don't usually go beyond understanding Orthodoxy as an element of ethnic Russian identity. Nationalist organizations that put their religious Orthodox self-identification first, or at least allow it to share the first place with the ethnic one, were not observed to actively engage in racist street violence (except, perhaps, the attacks against LGBT activists). In the 2010s, this group has included the People's Assembly (*Narodny sobor*), the Russian Imperial Movement (*Russkoe imperskoe dvizhenie*, RID), the Russian All-People's Union (*Rossiyskiy obshchenarodnyy soyuz*, ROS), and other smaller groups. Their militant potential became evident only in the course of the Donbas war,<sup>73</sup> but the religious motivation for violence was clearly secondary in this case.

A new approach to the use of violence from the Orthodox Christian position has been demonstrated by the groups attacking art exhibitions as "blasphemous" since 2003. The nationalist motivation could also be present but in a secondary role. On the one hand, their violence was almost never directed at people; on the other hand, they faced practically no punishment for these attacks (more detail is provided in Chapter 5 by du Quenoy and Dubrovskiy; here we shall mention only two significant examples). Such a lack of counteraction has fit and still fits two overarching trends at once. Firstly, the attacks carried out by supporters of the political regime remain unpunished, unless they are overly brutal or affect well-known persons. Secondly, violent vigilantism is generally tolerated, given that the violence does not cross certain boundaries.<sup>74</sup>

Orthodox violence with purely religious motivation has been demonstrated since 2013 by the God's Will (*Bozhya Volya*) group headed by Dmitry "Enteo" Tsorionov. Two points are worth noting. First, this group came together in the parish of Father Daniil Sysoyev, famous for his denial of nationalism and active proselytism among the Muslims (he was killed in a church by an Islamic

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71. More on the Northern Brotherhood in: *Radikal'ny russkiy natsionalizm: struktury, idei, litsa* [Radical Russian Nationalism: Structures, Ideas, Persons]. (Moscow: SOVA Center, 2009), 231–240.

72. The following is an example of a transformation of a militant neo-Nazi into an ISIS recruiter: "A Former Member of NS/WP Nevograd Was Convicted for Recruiting for ISIS," SOVA Center, December 23, 2016, <http://www.sova-center.ru/racism-xenophobia/news/counteraction/2016/12/d36079/>.

73. Alexander Verkhovsky, "Radical Nationalists from the Start of Medvedev's Presidency to the War in Donbas: True Till Death?," in *The New Russian Nationalism: Imperialism, Ethnicity and Authoritarianism, 2000–15*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 75–103.

74. This topic is being explored now as part of the project launched by the Public Verdict Foundation. The results will be available soon on the project website, <http://www.vigilanty.org/>.

radical). Next, the Enteo group also never engaged in excessively brutal violence and never faced any punishment. However, when they damaged engravings at an exhibition in a state museum, a criminal case was opened, and the radical actions ceased immediately.<sup>75</sup>

The increased confrontation between the ROC leadership and a significant part of the secularly minded public in 2012 actualized the perceived need to protect the Church from secularists. In particular, the Sorok Sorokov organization (not without its nationalistic ties, but these are secondary) has been active in this field in Moscow since 2013, constantly coming into physical confrontation with groups of citizens protesting the construction of churches in places formerly occupied by public parks.<sup>76</sup> The Sorok Sorokov activists, often professional athletes or soccer fans, also accurately measure their violence and have no problems with the police.

## HATE CRIMES RELATED TO RELIGION AND VIOLENCE WITHIN RELIGIOUS GROUPS

The investigation of religiously motivated hate crimes should not create significant problems, since these are just ordinary crimes. With regard to hate crimes, proving the motive of the criminal is always far more likely to be problematic. In practice, however, the process doesn't work as expected.

The number of victims of religiously motivated attacks known to the SOVA Center varies from 12 to 31 throughout 2010–2016. There were almost no murders in this category, except for the two victims of a man who broke into an Orthodox church in Sakhalin and not only defiled the icons but also opened fire. It must be noted that this murder was successfully investigated, but the vast majority of other religiously motivated attacks are investigated unsuccessfully or not at all. There are many reasons to believe that the fact of a victim belonging to an unpopular minority, such as Jehovah's Witnesses, has a negative effect on the investigation.

Religiously motivated vandalism is noticeably more common. The number of attacks has declined fairly steadily, including the number of the most dangerous acts, such as bombing, shooting, and so forth.<sup>77</sup> However, this trend did not result from successful investigations of the previous attacks. As far as we know, these were usually not investigated, at least not to the extent of taking ideological motivation into account in the verdict (in the Russian Criminal Code it can be done in a number of ways). Such verdicts are few and far between. Based on our data for 2011–2017, they were issued primarily for attacks against Orthodox (two in 2011 and 2017, five in 2013, and one in 2014–2016) and Muslim (two in 2012, four in 2013, one each in 2011, 2014, 2016, and 2017) sites. At the same time, we only know of one 2011 verdict for an attack against a Jehovah's Witnesses site, and

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75. There is no available research on the activities of the God's Will. A brief history is available on the Wikireality website: [http://www.wikireality.ru/wiki/Дмитрий\\_Энтео](http://www.wikireality.ru/wiki/Дмитрий_Энтео).

76. Grigoriy Tumanov, "Coming Down from the Stands: Football Fans Return to the Streets in a New Capacity," *Kommersant-Vlast*. July 27, 2015.

77. Statistics of the SOVA Center on such attacks are available on the Center's website, <http://www.sova-center.ru/en/database/vandalism/?tip1=304&xfield=phenotype&yfield=y&victims=Min&show=1>. For examples, please see Chapter 3 by Laruelle and Yudina, Chapter 4 by Fagan with Sibireva, and Chapter 5 by du Quenoy and Dubrovskiy.

one 2012 verdict for an attack against a Jewish site.<sup>78</sup> Comparing these numbers with the data on the number of attacks, one can easily see a quantitative and qualitative discrepancy. In particular, it is no coincidence that the number of attacks against Jehovah's Witnesses sites failed to demonstrate the same downward dynamics as the total number of attacks.

The incitement to religious hatred is a comparatively rare charge but not exceptional in the criminal cases related to hate speech. The complete data is not available—the Supreme Court summary data does not allow grouping by the type of hatred, while the SOVA Center data is incomplete. Thus the target of hostility often remains unknown. Based only on the sentences, for which the SOVA Center at least approximately knows the content of the incriminating statements, we can put together a preliminary picture. Of course, the verdicts for inciting enmity toward non-Muslims or the “wrong kind” of Muslims dominate by a large margin, and these charges are almost always associated with charges of incitement to military jihad. Such cases, strictly speaking, do not fully belong in the hate speech category, which implies a declaration of intolerance rather than “militant propaganda”—the genre ascribed by adherents of the military jihad to their statements.

This category is followed by three other top targets of enmity. The first one is Muslims (although separating religious enmity from ethnic is occasionally problematic), which accounts for 11 sentences in 2011–2016. The next group is Christians, particularly Orthodox Christians (these two categories are often conflated in Russia), comprising 14 sentences (including a number of clearly inappropriate ones). The third target is Jews (it is also difficult to distinguish between religious and ethnic hatred in this case), with seven verdicts. There were also two verdicts for expressing hatred toward Buddhists and three for hatred toward religious believers in general.

Apparently, incitement to violence took place primarily in relation to Muslims, less often to Jews and Christians—often against both these categories at once when the defendant was a neo-pagan. More frequently, people were sentenced for their insulting and degrading statements. It is doubtful that sentences of this type have somehow contributed to counteracting real violence. However, the same is true for some of the verdicts issued for actual incitement to violence—these calls were often emotional outbursts rather than part of systematic propaganda, and many offenders had only a miniscule audience.

The above-described practice of banning various “informational materials” is also viewed as an important part of activity aimed at preventing real crimes. The analysis of all banned materials that to any extent pertain to religion shows a clear preponderance of Muslim material and material in some way related to ultra-right neo-paganism. Both categories, as well as all the other ones, don't necessarily contain calls for violence in any form (as demonstrated by the example of Muslim material in Chapter 3 by Laruelle and Yudina).

The quantitative analysis of the Federal List of Extremist Materials is extremely challenging. First, it is very often unclear or not entirely clear what exactly has been banned. Second, one entry can include several materials, while the same material can be found in several entries. Third, we are unable to identify Russian (Slavic) neo-pagan materials, since they are often hard to tell apart from

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78. There was one sentence for pogroms in Armenian and Yazidi cemeteries, but the motive for the attack could be ethnic rather than religious.

other racist and ultra-right materials. Nevertheless, it is possible to make some preliminary observations.

Among 3,263 entries added to the list in 2011–2016, militant Muslim materials account for 514 entries (with a clear peak in 2013) and other Muslim materials account for an additional 298 entries (peak in 2012, with very low numbers in both 2014 and 2016). On the other hand, we see only three entries with anti-Islamic materials (two of them for the famous *Innocence of Muslims* video). Thirty entries on the list represent Jehovah’s Witnesses materials, which contain no calls for violence; another 26 deal with materials by various Orthodox fundamentalists, also, for the most part, containing no incitement to violence. Twenty-two remaining entries include materials by Scientists and other new religious movements. In other words, calls for violence are present in significantly more than half of the banned materials related to religion, but the materials outside of this category are still far too numerous. Most importantly, the practical benefits of the bans are unclear. For example, the undeniably incendiary video sermons of Said Buryatsky were repeatedly prohibited, but are still widely distributed and actively used.

As already mentioned, various forms of violence and abuse, which can be practiced within religious communities, are a topic that worries a significant part of society as well as the state. In principle, extortion, sexual harassment, violence, and even using hypnosis on members of a religious community can be seen as violations, which entail not only bringing offenders to responsibility, but also disbanding an entire community. Such violations, more or less serious, can happen in various religious communities and, as a rule, are unrelated to politics or public security. Apparently, however, the expansion of anti-extremist law enforcement, including with respect to religious groups, gradually gave law enforcement officers (and not only them) the idea that any forms of religious behavior not accepted by the society can be interpreted as extremism.

Since the beginning of the mass campaign against Jehovah’s Witnesses in 2009, which included banning their local organizations as extremist, their assertion of religious superiority and their criticism of other religions and movements were used as practically the only “proof” of extremism of this pacifist religious movement. On the basis of these claims, Jehovah’s Witnesses texts were banned, believers were punished for the distribution of these texts, and their organizations were closed down.<sup>79</sup> Finally, the Supreme Court banned all Jehovah’s Witnesses organizations as extremist on April 20, 2017.

In private and even public conversations, officials repeatedly stated that the Jehovah’s Witnesses ban on blood transfusion for anyone, including children, was also extremism, despite the fact that it didn’t contradict the existing Russian legislation.<sup>80</sup> The court decisions combined the charges of extremism and the charges of denial of medical care with some rather outlandish claims—for

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79. More details on this campaign can be found in: Maria Kravchenko, “Inventing Extremists. The Impact of Russian Anti-Extremism Policies on Freedom of Religion and Belief,” United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, February 12, 2018, <http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/Inventing%20Extremists.pdf>.

80. This point was repeatedly voiced by Russian government officials attending seminars on religious extremism in Russia organized by SOVA Center. See also: “Ministry of Justice: Forbidding Blood Transfusions, ‘Jehovah’s Witnesses’ Violate the Law on Combating Extremist Activity,” *Vesti.ru*, April 6, 2017, <https://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=2874746>.

example, that believers prefer part-time work.<sup>81</sup> Taken together, these official actions created an image of a “dangerous sect.”

All of the above applies to an even greater degree to less well-respected communities that could use violence against their followers and arouse suspicion with their “nontraditional” behavior.

Two examples of religious organizations and groups banned as extremist clearly demonstrate the manner in which the charges of extremism arise from the combination of the charges of violence, of using “nontraditional” religious ideas, and the charge, used against all new religious movements, of the alleged involuntary “change of consciousness.”

The Horde (*Orda*) religious association, also known as the Way of the Ancestors (*Put' Predkov*), had exactly these three defects, according to a district court in the Chelyabinsk Region that banned it in 2012. The Way of the Ancestors is an offshoot of the new religious movement of the same name (*Ata Zholy*), banned in Kazakhstan in 2009. It was accused of using violence under the guise of “healing,” although the court described the violence only as “tapping the body with a whip.” Finally, the court decided that the healing methods practiced by the Horde were, in fact, “special methods of psychological influence, aimed at artificial changing of consciousness,” and caused “harm in the form of increased suggestibility, formation of an addictive personality, and affective involvement in a pseudo-religious teaching.”<sup>82</sup>

The ban imposed by the Supreme Court of the Republic of Mordovia on the Noble Order of the Devil (*Blagorodny Orden Dyavola*) in 2010 looks even more bizarre. The Order was, in fact, just a group of teenagers who were keen on Satanism and expressed it in the suitable rites, drunkenness, and sex; fistfights between these “Satanists” were also documented. Various charges against their leader, Alexander Kazakov, fell apart during the investigation; as a result, he was convicted only for the creation of the Order and for depraved actions against a teenage girl. Nevertheless, the Supreme Court of the Republic banned the group, which by that time had already ceased to exist, as extremist, although the materials of the case had no connection to the problem of extremism.<sup>83</sup>

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

When summarizing the analysis of the legal and conceptual basis and the practice of counteracting violence related to religion, it is difficult to evaluate its effectiveness with any degree of certainty. The dynamics of violence also depends on variables other than the official countermeasures; moreover, as shown above, these countermeasures do not maintain a clear focus specifically on the problem of violence.

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81. See, for example, the decision in one of the key cases in the campaign against Jehovah’s Witnesses: a verdict in the case of members of a previously banned local organization in Taganrog, issued November 30, 2015. The text of the verdict is available on the website of the Slavic Law Center: [http://www.sclj.ru/bitrix/templates/uno/img/Prigovor\\_legov\\_Taganrog.pdf](http://www.sclj.ru/bitrix/templates/uno/img/Prigovor_legov_Taganrog.pdf).

82. Case No. 2-430 / 2012, Kizilsky District Court of the Chelyabinsk Region (December 21, 2012).

83. Maria Rozalskaya, “Inappropriate Enforcement of Anti-Extremist Legislation in Russia in 2010,” in *Xenophobia, Freedom of Conscience and Anti-Extremism in Russia in 2010* (Moscow: SOVA Center, 2011), 74.



We have seen some successes, such as liquidation of the neo-Nazi groups (mainly pagan in terms of religious beliefs), and some obvious failures, such as the attempts to stop the spread of Salafism. It is important to further investigate the association between the level of law enforcement effectiveness and various factors related to laws, structural features of the law enforcement system, its human capital, domestic and foreign policy conditions, and so forth. At the same time, multiple and sometimes even mass human rights violations (a campaign against Jehovah's Witnesses being an extreme case) occur in the course of solving these problems.

But, in addition to these immediate results, we also see that the political goal-setting in this sphere is problematic. Formally, it reflects concern for the state and public security, but in reality it translates the political and ideological fears, widespread among the political leadership and a sufficiently visible (if not numerically prevalent) part of society, into legislation and law enforcement practice. These fears and their practical implications are tied to various prejudices and are not always rational, but nevertheless end up forming a fairly coherent, albeit not very consistent, system of legal norms and enforcement practices. This system is aimed at suppressing a very wide range of phenomena, from very dangerous to quite harmless, lumped together on the basis of being perceived as "not traditional." Unfortunately, due to inaccessibility of the sources, an aspect of this repressive approach related to personal sentiments, beliefs, or habits of law enforcement officers on different levels has not been sufficiently studied. It would also be important to understand the correlation between excessive repressions and the mass attitude toward the challenges of countering extremism.

In any case, the currently existing anti-extremist policy excessively expands the sphere of illegal acts and, at the same time, provides no clarity on what exactly is prohibited. On the law enforcement stage, this general approach is exacerbated by arbitrariness at all levels, from police units to the highest courts, discrediting the regulatory role of the state. As a result, state regulations, and legal regulations in particular, no longer work effectively, especially for the most dynamic groups.

Accordingly, it can be assumed that some relaxing of control and decrease in the severity of regulatory measures can have a somewhat beneficial effect. Of course, this is not a panacea, and there is no doubt that any weakening of control brings the risk of intensified activity of certain radical groups; but, overall, reducing the repressive measures leaves more room for other, more effective forms of counteracting radicalization.

The key issue here is the very definition of "extremism." The law must finally narrow it down, limiting its scope to actions that somehow relate to violence, including public calls for violence and financing of such activities. This change would bring the definition in line with the understanding of extremism reflected in the documents of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization—the only international agreements ratified by Russia that include the notion of "extremism."

The change will affect law enforcement in the most significant way.

In particular, the previously adopted decisions on banning organizations as extremist or terrorist could be reconsidered in order to eliminate the previously made mistakes.

We would like to add a few more recommendations.

### For legislators:

- Abandon the requirement for informal communities of believers to present information about themselves to government bodies, if they do not wish to obtain official status;
- Rescind the “antimissionary” amendments to legislation that increase risk for anyone practicing religious activity outside buildings owned by religious organizations;
- Stop the practice of court bans on books and other materials for “extremist content” and dispense with the ineffective Federal List of Extremist Materials;
- Accept that religious tolerance should be protected by the same mechanisms as for other forms of tolerance, and refrain from creating special rules that restrict freedoms specifically in relation to religious tolerance.

### For law enforcement:

- In line with Supreme Court recommendations, stop interpreting religious polemics as inciting religious hatred and prevent criminalizing religious debate;
- Cease blocking of bank accounts of those included in the list of individuals involved in or suspected of involvement in extremist or terrorist activity (which doesn’t preclude the use of the list for the purposes of monitoring).

# Islamophobia in Russia: Trends and Societal Context

Marlene Laruelle and Natalia Yudina

Like the rest of Europe, the share of Muslims in Russia's population is growing. Of the country's over 146 million inhabitants (including two million in annexed Crimea), there are about 15 million people who are nominally Muslims,<sup>1</sup> in the sense that they belong to an ethnic group whose cultural background mostly refers to Islam. Of these 15 million, not all are believers and even fewer practice Islam. Some self-identify through their ethnicity (*natsional'nost* in Russian), without placing any significance on religion; others combine both identities; and a minority considers their religious belonging as the main criterion of their identity. To these 15 million nominally Muslim citizens should be added about 5 million labor migrants who come from the formerly Soviet and culturally Muslim countries (Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Azerbaijan); they work in Russia and stay there for varying periods of time, but some of them plan to integrate into Russian society.<sup>2</sup> Islam is therefore a growing identity marker for many Russian citizens—and, like every evolution in the fabric of a society, this growth in Islam as an identity marker has produced an anti-Muslim reaction.

Historically, Islamophobia has been absent from Russia: in the eighteenth century, Catherine the Great pushed Siberian people practicing shamanism or Buddhism to convert to Islam. Today, as this chapter will explore, several indicators confirm the rise of Islamophobia in contemporary Russia. Yet, for several reasons, identifying Islamophobia remains a challenging task for scholars.

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1. This number is based on the 2010 census data (and its updates) and includes all populations culturally Muslim. The number is confirmed by Pew Research Center's survey of 2017, in which 10 percent of the Russian population (about 14.5 million of 145 million) presents itself as Muslim, <http://www.pewforum.org/2017/05/10/religious-belief-and-national-belonging-in-central-and-eastern-europe/>.

2. In 2014, the Russian migration services registered 3.4 million labor migrants, a number that does not include all those working undocumented in the country. On the debate over data, see Mikhail Denisenko, "Migration to Russia and the Current Economic Crisis," in *Migration and the Ukraine Crisis: A Two-Country Perspective*, eds. Agnieszka Pikulicka-Wilczewska and Great Uehling (Bristol, UK: E-International Relations, 2017), <http://www.e-ir.info/2017/05/05/migration-to-russia-and-the-current-economic-crisis/>.

First, it is difficult to dissociate what is ethnic from what is religious. For centuries, the Russian empire structured divisions between population groups by making religion a key marker: one was above all Orthodox, a nonorthodox Christian, a Muslim, a Jew, or a “Shamanist.” During the Soviet period, the criterion became ethnic, and one’s nationality, as defined in one’s passport, decided individual and collective destiny: people could be deported in the name of their ethnicity (punished peoples of the Caucasus and Volga Germans); could be banned from occupying certain professional domains (Jews); or could be promoted in the administration or in the Communist Party due to their status as part of the titular nationality (indigenization of the republics’ elites). In the 1990s, the Russian identity debate remained deeply marked by the criterion of ethnicity, whereby minorities would demand their right to political, cultural, and economic sovereignty. Since the 2000s, however, identity evolutions seem to have given a new preeminence to religion, and religious identities are being reasserted as part of one’s own identity. Not only do almost 80 percent of Russian citizens claim to be Orthodox (in the sense of asserting an identity affiliation, not practicing it), but Islam is also increasingly brandished as a major criterion of identification for North Caucasians, peoples of the Volga-Urals, and labor migrants.<sup>3</sup>

Second, unlike many European countries, where Islamophobia is widely analyzed, it remains an understudied topic for Russia. A brief review of the literature available in Russian shows that, with some minor exceptions, the term *Islamophobia* is mostly used to describe the situation in Western countries.<sup>4</sup> There is therefore almost no literature on which to build. Moreover, the term is not so widely used as it is in Western countries. It remains little applied in the Russian academic vocabulary; when searched on Yandex or Google, it appears mostly on Muslim websites denouncing what they see as current Islamophobia, but it does not seem widespread outside these Muslim circles.

Third—and this is the main methodological challenge—Islamophobia describes a range of complex perceptions and attitudes, with violent behavior at one extreme. In theory, violence against Muslims can be statistically documented, even if, as we will see below, information remains fragmented. Measuring attitudes is more challenging: it requires sociological surveys or anthropological fieldwork to comprehend if and when people, for instance, refuse to speak to, work closely with, or trade with a Muslim. Studying Islamophobia also opens the floor to wider societal debates about secular and religious norms in the public space, the expression of individual and collective identity, and the securitization mechanisms that have developed around the notion of Islam/Islamism.

In this paper, we have divided the study of Islamophobia around four main axes, going by concentric circles from what can be indisputably identified as Islamophobia (violence in the name of religious belonging) to more symbolic and therefore debatable battlegrounds: (1) violence against Muslims and Muslim symbols, (2) state securitization of Islam, (3) public perception and media frames that discriminate against Muslims, and (4) societal issues such as female dress code and mosque construction.

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3. See, for instance, Sophie Roche’s current research, “The Moscow Cathedral Mosque in the Life of Migrants from Central Asia.” (Presentation at the Central Asia Program, The George Washington University, February 21, 2017.)

4. For instance, Alexander Verkhovsky, “Islamofobiya posle 11 sentyabrya,” in *Rossiia Putina: pristrastnyy vzglyad* (Moscow: Panorama, 2003), 135–145.

## VIOLENCE AGAINST MUSLIMS AND MUSLIM SYMBOLS

The most obvious and indisputable component of Islamophobia is that of violence committed against Muslims and Muslim symbols. Hate crimes that can clearly be linked to the victim's Muslim identity remain rare in Russia, especially compared to violence linked to victims' ethnicity. To be sure, it appears challenging to dissociate xenophobia of an ethnic nature from xenophobia with religious motives, as attacked individuals mostly come from nominally Muslim populations: North Caucasians and Central Asians. Yet, some North Caucasian populations are not nominally Muslim (Ossetians, for instance), and Georgians and Armenians, both Christian, can be attacked for being "persons of Caucasian origin" (*litsa kavkazkoy natsional'nosti*). Similarly, individuals of East Asian heritage may be targeted for their "Asiatic appearance" (*aziatskaya vneshnost*).

Although data on anti-Muslim violence is by definition blurry, statistics show without any doubt that ethnic violence against people with Muslim backgrounds accounts for a considerable portion of all ethnic violence data: depending on the methods to calculate it, it ranges from 30 to 60 percent of all ethnic violence.

However, the percentage of avowedly *religious* violence—that is, when Islamophobic comments made by the attackers have been reported—is small. Indeed, few cases of explicit violence against people of Muslim background—or those considered as such by the attackers—have been documented, almost all in Moscow. Between 2013 and 2016, SOVA reported, for instance, five explicitly anti-Muslim attacks, four in Moscow and one in the Khanty-Mansi autonomous okrug. In three of these cases, the victims were Muslim women wearing traditional Islamic clothes; in one case they were attacked by radical soccer fans,<sup>5</sup> in another by an ordinary man in the Moscow metro.<sup>6</sup> In one case, a man leaving one of the Moscow mosques was attacked by another one yelling, "You, Muslim, I would behead you all."<sup>7</sup>

This data is not only partial—many cases probably remain unreported by victims, especially where the violence was committed by law enforcement agencies—but it also comes with sometimes unprecise motivations. With few exceptions, one cannot be sure of the anti-Muslim nature of the violence. In some cases, there can be settling of scores between criminal groups, or conflicts between different Muslim communities. Famous Islamic leaders, especially imams, have been victims of aggression. Between 2010 and 2016, 12 have been beaten, 5 wounded, and one threatened with death. The most famous case is probably the assassination of Valiylylly Yakupov, deputy mufti of Tatarstan, in 2012—a crime the perpetrators of which remain unknown to this day, even though the Russian security services actively hunted alternate Muslim groups after Yakupov's murder.<sup>8</sup> (This case is also discussed in Chapter 7 by Sokolov and Olikier.)

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5. A 24-year-old man who was passing by stood up for the woman. After that, the fans attacked and tried to stab him, but he managed to lean back and was not seriously injured.

6. "Moskva: napadenie na zhenshchinu v traditsionnoy musul'manskoy odezhde," SOVA Center, November 24, 2016, <http://www.sova-center.ru/racism-xenophobia/news/racism-nationalism/2014/11/d30712/>.

7. "Antimusul'manskiy intsident v Chelyabinske," SOVA Center, December 17, 2008, <http://www.sova-center.ru/racism-xenophobia/news/racism-nationalism/2008/12/d14861/>.

8. The document states that about 400 to 600 people were arrested for criminal convictions; the homes of 200 of them were searched, often at night. See more: "V Kazani proshel piket protiv massovykh zaderzhaniy podozrevaemykh v

**Table 1. Violence against nominal Muslims as a percentage of ethnic violence**

2010	33–57%
2011	31–42%
2012	31–38%
2013	46–62%
2014	35–42%
2015	21–33%
2016	57–67%

Source: SOVA Center<sup>9</sup>

Physical or verbal violence committed by law enforcement agencies is probably the least reported. Only a few cases are known. In 2010 in Tambov and Voronezh, police asked Islamic religious organizations to give them information on their members and how many converted from Christianity, despite being legally prohibited from doing so. In 2013, policemen checking documents of people in a halal café asked them to cut their beards.<sup>10</sup> That same year, other policemen attacked a group of 30 men of different nationalities sitting in a halal café, and insulted them as “Muslim pigs” (*musul'manskie svini*).<sup>11</sup>

Another category of data we have at our disposal is acts of vandalism committed against Muslim symbols, mostly cemeteries or prayer rooms, but also the burning of the Koran. In such cases, the antireligious motive is easier to identify. Between 2010 and 2016, SOVA listed 59 such acts of violence. Only in 2011 did desecration of Islamic symbols top SOVA's list, ahead of attacks on Christian or Jewish symbols.<sup>12</sup> This kind of violence has been perpetrated most in the Nizhnyi

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prichastnosti k pokusheniyu na muftiya i ubiystvu ego zamestitelya,” SOVA Center, July 30, 2012, <http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/community-media/right-protection/2012/07/d24983/>.

9. More specific data on attacks committed by radical nationalists in recent years is available in the annual reports of the SOVA Center, <http://www.sova-center.ru/racism-xenophobia/publications/>; the latest publication is Vera Alperovich and Natalia Yudina, “Dvizhenie ul'trapravyyh v situatsii davleniya. Ksenofobiya i radikal'nyy natsionalizm i protivodeystvie im v 2015 godu v Rossii,” SOVA Center, February 20, 2016, <http://www.sova-center.ru/racism-xenophobia/publications/2016/02/d33886/>.

10. For more details, refer to “V Moskve politseyskie v maskakh napali na musul'man—posetiteley khalyal'nogo kafe,” SOVA Center, March 28, 2012, <http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/harassment/intervention/2013/03/d26760/>.

11. According to eyewitnesses, masked men broke into the cafe, forced visitors to lie on the floor, beat them, including with rifle butts, and stepped on their hands and insulted them (in particular, calling them “Muslim pigs”). Eleven people were handed over to the police station “Zamoskvorech'e,” where they were fingerprinted and beaten.

12. “Baza Dannykh: Akty Vandalizma,” <http://www.sova-center.ru/database/vandalism/?tip1=304&xfield=phenotype&yfield=y&victims=Min&show=1>.

Novgorod region—where in 2011 a series of attacks against Muslims cemeteries was carried out—followed by Orenburg and Moscow. Russian nationalist groups are often responsible for desecrating Islamic symbols; they paint Nazi swastikas or Orthodox crosses, or put pig heads on Muslim graves.<sup>13</sup>

## THE SECURITIZATION OF ISLAM: THE RUSSIAN STATE AGAINST “ISLAMIC EXTREMISM”

A growing trend, noticeable in Europe, the United States, and Russia, is that of the securitization of Islam. By *securitization* we mean a process in which an actor, here the Russian state, transforms an issue into a threat to everyday security.<sup>14</sup> This is the case with the notion of “Islamic extremism,” a wide and blurry term that includes terrorist actions, jihadism, and calls for violence in the name of Islam, as well as calls for the establishment of a Caliphate, even without any violence. In the United States and Europe, the conflation between “Islamism” and “extremism” is widespread, while in Russia both state organs and mainstream media tend to be more careful in their association.<sup>15</sup> They use the term “extremism” widely without associating it specifically with Islam, and include other forms of “extremism,” such as those of the far right or far left; increasingly, they also include all those “offending” religious feeling or challenging state legitimacy. Cross-nation analyses by the Pew Research Center show that Russian public opinion is less concerned with “extremism” than European audiences.<sup>16</sup> However, this can be partly explained by the fact that the main terrorist acts conducted in Russia in the 1990s and 2000s were linked to the Chechen issue, and therefore attributed by public opinion to “Chechen separatism” and not to “extremism” more broadly. This is confirmed by Levada-Center surveys from 2008 to 2012, in which “Islamists” rank lower than Chechen insurgents, the United States, and NATO on lists of enemies of Russia.<sup>17</sup>

One may obviously discuss if legislation that forbids calls for violence in the name of Islam can be considered “Islamophobic” or is genuinely justified to protect citizens. Officially, forbidden groups and their supporters are not sued for their religious opinions per se—as the Russian state guarantees freedom of religion—but for religiously motivated violence, intolerance toward other groups, and threat to state security. However, we include this debate on the legislation in this chapter for two reasons: first, in several cases the SOVA Center finds the Russian judicial system’s

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13. Ibid.

14. Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998).

15. See Sergei A. Samoilenko et al., “Portraying Muslims and Terrorist Acts: A Comparative Russian-American Study of Character Attacks.” (Presentation given at the International Conference “The Image of Islam in Russia,” Uppsala Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Uppsala, Sweden, October 6–8, 2016.)

16. Jacob Poushter, “Extremism Concerns Growing in West and Predominantly Muslim Countries,” Pew Research Center, July 16, 2015, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2015/07/16/extremism-concerns-growing-in-west-and-predominantly-muslim-countries/>.

17. *Obshchestvennoe mnenie 2012* (Moscow: Levada Center, 2012), 198.

accusation of “extremism” unjustified; and second, Muslim communities denounce it as open discrimination against them.

This securitization of Islam is expressed mostly in the judicial realm, targeting organizations, individuals who belong (or are alleged to belong) to these organizations, and publications and the spread of them.<sup>18</sup> Russian anti-extremist legislation has progressively refined its legal tools, as discussed in Chapter 2 (Verkhovsky) in this volume. In wider Europe, Russia leads (with France) in terms of the number of legal state actions brought against religious groups, with more than 200 cases in 2014 and 2015. In France, these are mostly cases of individuals being punished for violating the ban on face coverings in public spaces and government buildings, while in Russia they are predominantly cases of people being prosecuted for being members of forbidden groups.<sup>19</sup>

Of the 27 organizations included on the first Russian list of groups forbidden for terrorism, published by the FSB in 2006, 23 were Islamic movements. Among them were international organizations, such as Al-Qaida, and Hizb ut-Tahrir, the specific case of the Caucasus Emirate, as well as some small groups that existed only at the local level in some Russian regions. If the typology of “terrorist” is obvious for some organizations, such as Al-Qaida or now the Islamic State, it is less clear for some others, such as Hizb ut-Tahrir. The group never committed violence or called for it;<sup>20</sup> however, the European Court of Human Rights, called by two members of the group who were hoping to see the Russian verdict contested, determined that, as the movement calls to overthrow current political systems and establish a dictatorial regime without any democratic rights, the Russian authorities are justified to forbid it.<sup>21</sup>

The Ministry of Justice also publishes its own list of extremist organizations, which includes 54 names; eight of these are Islamic groups, among them the Tablighi Jamaat, the foremost Islamic proselytizing movement, but a pietist one that does not call for any violence.<sup>22</sup> According to the SOVA Center, for at least four of these eight groups there is no real legal basis to justify the accusation of “extremism.” The Ministry of Justice also prosecutes individuals for belonging to these forbidden organizations, mostly those participating—or allegedly participating—in Hizb ut-Tahrir and Tablighi Jamaat, or those linked to the Nurcu network (disciples of Said Nursi and Fethullah Gülen). Members of Hizb ut-Tahrir have been the most targeted, especially in the Volga region and in some other Russian provinces, with 11 condemned in 2011, 10 in 2012, 16 in 2013, 20 in 2014,

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18. See more in annual reports written by Maria Kravchenko at SOVA Center, <http://www.sova-center.ru/en/misuse/reports-analyses/>; and Maria Kravchenko and Alexander Verkhovsky, “Inappropriate Enforcement of Anti-Extremist Legislation in Russia in 2015,” SOVA Center, June 3, 2016, <http://www.sova-center.ru/en/misuse/reports-analyses/2016/06/d34694/>.

19. “Global Restrictions on Religion Rise Modestly in 2015, Reversing Downward Trend,” Pew Research Center, April 11, 2017, <http://www.pewforum.org/2017/04/11/global-restrictions-on-religion-rise-modestly-in-2015-reversing-downward-trend/>.

20. Alexander Verkhovsky, “Yavlyatsya li Hizb ut-Tahrir ekstremistskoy organizatsiey?,” SOVA Center, February 6, 2006, <http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/publications/2005/10/d6036/>.

21. This resulted, most notably, in the banning of Hizb ut-Tahrir in Germany in 2003.

22. According to data as of January 17, 2017.



25 in 2015, and 20 in 2016.<sup>23</sup> They are usually pursued based on Article 282.2 on extremism and, since 2013, Article 205.5 on terrorist activities, which allows for longer sentences.<sup>24</sup> A smaller number of people belonging to Tablighi have been targeted, especially labor migrants; for instance, about 10 Uzbek citizens were deported from Russia for belonging to the movement.<sup>25</sup> Nursi's disciples have also been arrested. The most famous case was the trial in 2013 of two imams from Novosibirsk, Ilkhom Merazhov and Kamil Odilov, whose only link with the Nurcu movement was that they studied Nursi's works.<sup>26</sup>

Incitement to hatred—calling either for interethnic violence or for terrorism—is also prosecuted under several articles of the Penal Code. Between 2011 and 2016, 47 people were sentenced, mostly for making calls to jihadism, with a rise in number in 2015 and 2016, in relation to the war in Syria. SOVA considered some of these cases unjustified, including that of Elvira Sultanakhmetova, tried in 2015 for having said online that, according to the Koran, a Muslim cannot celebrate New Year's because it is a Pagan holiday.<sup>27</sup> That same year, the Procuracy recognized its own mistake in one case, that of the imam of the Cathedral Mosque of Rostov, Nail Bikmaev, who was found innocent on the charge of incitement to hatred.<sup>28</sup>

Russian justice not only follows organizations and individuals, but also monitors materials such as books and booklets, online articles, songs and videos that it considers extremist. There are more than 4,000 items on the federal list of extremist materials. SOVA elaborated a typology of the Islamic part of this material (see Table 2).

This list shows that in 2012, the Russian justice organs classified as extremist many items that did not belong to the jihadist sphere, classifications that could therefore be denounced as wrong; that number declined in the following year. Many of these bans have raised protests from Muslim communities. That was the case in 2013 when the Novorossiisk Court decided to ban a translation of the Koran in Russian by the Azerbaijani religious philosopher Elmir Kuliev, terming it extremist.<sup>29</sup> Kuliev has seen several of his previous books banned, but this translation of the Koran did not

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23. All the charges contained accusations of terroristic activity; 18 people were sentenced to prison terms ranging from 4 to 17 years.

24. The investigative bodies did not even try to present evidence in court that the alleged offenders had been trained to perpetrate terroristic attacks; it was enough to state that the offenders were involved in party activities, whether spreading (or simply studying) literature on Hizb ut-Tahrir, or meeting like-minded people. The courts (typically military courts, because these charges are usually related to counterterrorism activities) are willing to satisfy the demands of the prosecutor's office for a conviction, despite the poor quality of the investigation.

25. Maria Kravchenko, "Inappropriate enforcement of anti-extremist legislation in Russia in 2013," SOVA Center, June 6, 2014, <http://www.sova-center.ru/en/misuse/reports-analyses/2014/06/d29660>.

26. Ibid.

27. "Obyazate'nye raboty za prizyv ne prazdnovat" Novyy god," SOVA Center, May 18, 2015, <http://www.sova-center.ru/misuse/news/persecution/2015/05/d31997/>.

28. "V Rostovskoy oblasti prekrashcheno presledovanie imama Nailya Bikmaeva—prokuratura prinesla izvineniya," SOVA Center, November 6, 2015, <http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/harassment/harassment-protection/2015/11/d33200/>.

29. "Zapreshchen populyarnyy perevod Korana," SOVA Center, September 18, 2013, <http://www.sova-center.ru/misuse/news/persecution/2013/09/d27944/>.

**Table 2. Typology of Islamic materials in the list of forbidden “extremist” materials, 2010–2016**

Year	Forbidden items	Items from Islamic fighters	Other Islamic items	Wrongly—according to SOVA—forbidden materials
2010	281	29	21	-
2011	318	63	57	-
2012	522	57	108	80
2013	590	136	42	26
2014	381	93	20	8
2015	677	96	53	38

Source: SOVA Center.

contain any specific element that might have justified the court’s decision.<sup>30</sup> The court reversed its decision a few months later. In 2015, another scandal emerged, with the banning, by the South-Sakhalin Court, of a bilingual book, in Russian and Arabic, that explained the main Islamic practices. Among the protesters were the Moscow-based Council of Muftis, one of the two main institutions representing Russian Islam, as well as the leader of the Chechen Republic, Ramzan Kadyrov.<sup>31</sup> Here, too, as Verkhovsky discusses in Chapter 2, the court changed its mind and canceled the ban a few months later, and this case resulted in a new law declaring that the holy texts of world religions cannot be declared extremist.<sup>32</sup> As these examples show, in the majority of cases, the practice is to forbid texts based on their author or the organization that publishes them, without really studying their contents, implying that any text published by an organization or an individual already considered extremist should likewise be classified as extremist.<sup>33</sup>

The law also prosecutes individuals who spread materials considered extremist. SOVA counted 445 cases between 2011 and 2016, with an abrupt increase in 2013 and then again in 2015 (120

30. The decision of the Oktyabr’ksiy District Court of Novorossiysk no. 2-3649/2013, Oktyabr’skiy rayonnyy sud g. Novorossiyska, [https://novorossisk-oktybrsky—krd.sudrf.ru/modules.php?name=sud\\_delo&srv\\_num=1&name\\_op=doc&number=319985&delo\\_id=1540005&text\\_number=1](https://novorossisk-oktybrsky—krd.sudrf.ru/modules.php?name=sud_delo&srv_num=1&name_op=doc&number=319985&delo_id=1540005&text_number=1).

31. See the Instagram post by Ramzan Kadyrov, September 9, 2015, [https://www.instagram.com/p/7aEvErCRgG\\_efWuB6UOyGjwgjxtzG2euO\\_HYQ0/](https://www.instagram.com/p/7aEvErCRgG_efWuB6UOyGjwgjxtzG2euO_HYQ0/).

32. See Chapter 2 (Verkhovsky) in this volume.

33. The most flagrant example here is the prohibition of 68 books during a 20-minute court hearing. See “Sud v Orenburge priznal ekstremistskimi 68 musul’manskih izdaniy,” SOVA Center, June 18, 2016, <http://www.sova-center.ru/misuse/news/persecution/2012/06/d24671/>.

cases in 2015 and 187 in 2016), but it is impossible to dissociate Islamic contents from non-Islamic. According to SOVA, around one-third of cases relate to Islamic publications. In 2012, Gabdunnur Kamaluddin, mufti of the Kirov region, was almost prosecuted for having distributed a book that would only later be added to the extremist literature list. In 2014, the annexation of Crimea put Crimean Tatars in a difficult situation, as they were given three months to get rid of the literature included on Russia's extremist list, and several of them were fined for possessing forbidden literature.<sup>34</sup>

Last but not least, since 2012, the Federal Service for Supervision in the Sphere of Telecom, Information Technologies and Mass Communications, Roskomnadzor, has launched a mechanism of Internet filtration based on the register of forbidden websites, mainly those spreading banned literature.<sup>35</sup> In 2016, there were about 283 blocked websites, a marked increase from only 139 in 2014.<sup>36</sup> According to the SOVA Center, in 2015, about 70 cases were unjustified; half of these were Islamic websites, often with references to or quotations from Hizb ut-Tahrir. Some websites are blocked not following any court trial but simply by the decision of the General Prosecutor, which can order Roskomnadzor to preemptively block any website deemed extremist.<sup>37</sup> These Islamic websites are listed in a second register that included 252 items in 2016;<sup>38</sup> among them, about one-third were Islamic websites, again mostly those with Hizb ut-Tahrir references.

## PUBLIC OPINION AND MEDIA FRAMES

The study of Islamophobia as a public opinion issue is even more complex. We lack in-depth sociological surveys and rely mostly on studies of media framing, which highlight only some aspects of the question.

Very few sociological surveys done in Russia inquire about perceptions of Muslims. Conventionally, surveys tend to ask about perceptions of other ethnic groups and of migrants, but do not formulate the question under a religious label. Traditionally, the term "Muslim" is associated with North Caucasians, who embody ethnic Otherness for Russians<sup>39</sup>—so here, too, it is difficult to dissociate

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34. See, for example, "V Evpatorii sud oshtrafoval imama za khranenie zapreshchennoy literatury," SOVA Center, November 28, 2016, <http://www.sova-center.ru/misuse/news/persecution/2016/11/d35902/>; "Rukovoditel' dzhankoytskogo medrese oshtrafovan za khranenie literatury," SOVA Center, August 26, 2014, <http://www.sova-center.ru/misuse/news/persecution/2014/08/d30117/>.

35. Federal Law of Russian Federation no. 139-FZ, "On amendments to the Federal Law 'On Protection of Children from Information Harmful to Their Health and Development' and to certain legislative acts of the Russian Federation," Kremlin, July 30, 2012, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/18423>.

36. See the updated list of the "Ekstremistskie resursy" in the Unified Register of Prohibited Websites, SOVA Center, <http://www.sova-center.ru/racism-xenophobia/docs/2014/08/d30056/>.

37. "Putin podpisal ukaz o dosudebnoy informatsii v seti," SOVA Center, December 30, 2013, <http://www.sova-center.ru/misuse/news/lawmaking/2013/12/d28742/>.

38. For more information, see Mariya Kravchenko, "Nepravomernoie primeneniie antiiekstremistskogo zakonodatel'stva v Rossii v 2014 godu," SOVA Center, March 30, 2015, <http://www.sova-center.ru/misuse/publications/2015/03/d31610/>.

39. Yoshiko M. Herrera, Nicole M. Butkovich Kraus, "Pride Versus Prejudice: Ethnicity, National Identity, and Xenophobia in Russia," *Comparative Politics* 48, no. 3 (April 2016): 293–315.

the religious from the ethnic. The Pew Research Center has been trying to investigate trends in the perception of Islam. At the beginning of the 2000s, around one-third of the Russian population harbored some negative feelings toward Muslims.<sup>40</sup> In 2012, a survey by FOM showed that Islam was the top religion named “foreign” to Russia, at 15 percent (before Protestantism at only 7 percent), and 23 percent of respondents had a personal negative relation to it. However, more than half the population (53 percent) considered itself “neutral” toward it. Answers to the question on the role of Islam in Russian history and world history were quite polarized, with about one-quarter seeing it as positive and one-third viewing it as negative for Russian history, and 20 percent positive and 40 percent negative for world history. In 2015, a Levada Center survey gathered more negative perceptions: the share of respondents who felt positive about Islam collapsed from 14 percent in 2008 to 8 percent, and negative responses jumped from 29 percent to 50 percent.<sup>41</sup>

The Russian political establishment tends to reproduce the official narrative, which can be defined as dual. First, it upholds the discourse—inherited from the Soviet regime—of “friendship between peoples”: Russia is a multinational and multireligious country in which all the historical traditional religions are recognized as equal, and Islam is a constructive and positive element of Russian statehood and culture. Second, it has crafted a narrative on radical Islam in which all nonconformist versions of Islam are subsumed under the label “Wahhabism”; political figures support the authorities in their fight against anything that looks like political Islam or violence made in the name of Islam.<sup>42</sup> Some exceptions to this mainstream position can be found among nationalist leaders and Orthodox figures. Unsurprisingly, famous politician Vladimir Zhirinovskiy has expressed his vision of a “Muslim danger” (*musul'manskaya opasnost'*) and the idea that Islam fosters religious wars several times.<sup>43</sup> Some Orthodox leaders, such as archpriest Dmitrii Smirnov, the head of the commission for family, defense of motherhood and childhood at the Moscow Patriarchate, have also publicly denounced what they see as a “Muslim threat” (*musul'manskaya ugroza*); Smirnov has stated that Europe risks becoming predominantly Muslim in a few decades.<sup>44</sup>

Media coverage plays a critical role in shaping public opinion. The media was known to be the key driver of antimigrant sentiment in Russia in the 2000s. This phenomenon has been well studied over the past decade and we will not cover it in this paper.<sup>45</sup> Media coverage of Islam is more ambivalent: mainstream media have to take their Muslim readership into consideration, and do not want to be prosecuted for transgressing the “offense to the religious feeling” law. Nonetheless,

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40. Alexander Verkhovskiy, “Muslims, Society and Authorities in Contemporary Russia,” in *Will Russia Become a Muslim Society?*, eds. Hans-Georg Heinrich, Ludmilla Lobova, and Alexey Malashenko (Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Bern, Brussels, New York, Oxford and Vienna: Peter Lang, 2011), 121–149.

41. “Terakt v Parizhe: karikatury, islam, zaprety,” Levada Center, January 29, 2015, <http://www.levada.ru/2015/01/29/terakt-v-parizhe-karikatury-islam-zaprety/>.

42. Marlene Laruelle, “How Islam will change Russia,” Jamestown Foundation Paper, September 2016.

43. Vladimir Zhirinovskii, *Posledniy brosok na Yug* (Moscow: Izdanie Liberal'no-demokraticheskoy partii Rossii, 1993), 74–75.

44. “V RPTs predrekli konets khristianskoy tsivilizatsii cherez 30 let: Evropa stanet musul'manskoy, a khristiane budut zhit” v polupodpol'e,” NEWSru, May 5, 2017, [http://txt.newsru.com/religy/05may2017/eu\\_islam.html](http://txt.newsru.com/religy/05may2017/eu_islam.html).

45. Galina Vitkovskaya, and Alexey Malashenko, *Neterpimost v Rossii. Starye i novye fobii* (Moscow: Carnegie Tsentr, 1999); Lev D. Gudkov, ed., *Obraz vraga* (Moscow: OGI, 2005); Alexander Verkhovskiy, ed., *Yazyk vrazhdy protiv obshchestva* (Moscow: SOVA, 2007).

some Islamophobic narratives can be identified. For instance, in 2014, the main television channel, Rossiya-1, screened two documentary films, *Aggressive Islam: Stavropol Divided between Us and Them* and *Normal House, Dormitory or Sect?*, both of which describe Muslims as extremists. These two films raised concerns among the Muslim viewership, and Chechnya ombudsman Nurdi Nukhazhiev complained that the first film contained open incitement to hatred.<sup>46</sup>

Echoes of European discussions around the caricatures of Islam and of the Prophet in Danish and then French press reached Russia, too. Several Islamic voices complained about *Charlie Hebdo's* caricatures,<sup>47</sup> and Chechen and Ingush authorities organized state-sponsored protests against them.<sup>48</sup> However, in that case, Russia positioned itself closer to the Anglo-Saxon perception than to the French and Danish ones: the need to avoid offending religious feelings made Russian authorities relatively sensitive to the Islamic associations' perspective. Roskomnadzor requested, for instance, that Russian media avoid republishing the caricatures and anything coming from *Charlie Hebdo*.<sup>49</sup> The authorities' aim was not to side with "Islam" per se but to avoid any risk of public riots. The Moscow municipality refused, for instance, to allow Muslim associations to demonstrate in the streets against the French satirical journal in order to avoid "provocations."<sup>50</sup> If the Russian law recognizes the notion of "offending religious feelings," this argument is sometimes used in an excessive way. For instance, the Islamic website Islam.ru and the Council of Muftis accused the publisher Kniga of having insulted Islam by publishing in *Moidodyr*, Korney Chukovsky's famous fairy tale/poem, a drawing of a crocodile with a page that seems to be writing in Arabic in its mouth. The publishing house decided to withdraw that drawing from the next printing of the book.<sup>51</sup>

While official media, widely controlled by the state, are respectful of the political norms in place, Islamophobia can develop freely on social media. Not only does the latter offer a space for free and (relatively) anonymous expression, but nationalist groups of all ideological persuasions are also heavily involved in it, therefore encouraging some topics more than others. Russian nationalist groups often display anti-Muslim narratives, even if this does not appear as their main driving ideological argument. VKontakte hosts, for instance, a far-right group called "The infidel elite against Islam" (*elita nevernykh protiv islama*), created in 2015 and with about 3,000 followers,

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46. "Prokuratura proveryaet syuzhet telekanala Rossiya o musul'manakh na nalichie priznakov vzbuzhdeniya vrazhdy," SOVA Center, March 3, 2013, <http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/community-media/media-conflicts/2013/06/d27233/>.

47. "Miting v Groznom: za 'lyubimogo proroka' i protiv Zapada," BBC, January 19, 2015, [http://www.bbc.com/russian/russia/2015/01/150119\\_grozny\\_rally\\_cartoons\\_muslims](http://www.bbc.com/russian/russia/2015/01/150119_grozny_rally_cartoons_muslims).

48. "V Chechne i Ingushetii sostoyalis" mitingi protiv karikatur na proroka," YouTube, January 19, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aapCHMt4GyU>.

49. Maria Kravchenko and Alexander Verkhovsky, "Inappropriate Enforcement of Anti-Extremist Legislation in Russia in 2015," SOVA Center, June 3, 2016, <http://www.sova-center.ru/en/misuse/reports-analyses/2016/06/d34694/>.

50. "Islamskiy mir vse zhestche vystupaet protiv karikatur Charlie Hebdo," Mneniya, January 18, 2015, [http://mnenia.zahav.ru/Articles/5480/islamsky\\_mir\\_protiv\\_karikatur#ixzz4Uv96yYwl](http://mnenia.zahav.ru/Articles/5480/islamsky_mir_protiv_karikatur#ixzz4Uv96yYwl).

51. "Chuvstva musul'man byli oskorbleny krokodilom iz skazki 'Moydodyr,'" NEWSru, May 25, 2013, <http://www.newsru.com/religy/24may2013/crocodilkoran.html>.

which specializes in anti-Muslim topics and sees Islam as a weapon to destroy the West.<sup>52</sup> During the main Islamic holidays, especially Eid al-Fitr, Russian nationalists linked to the National Democratic Party (NDP), the Russian National Liberation Movement (RONA), or the Russia's National Union increase their anti-Muslim rhetoric on social media, denouncing Russia as being "invaded" by Muslims (they used the terms *Moskvabad* and *Rusostan* to express the feeling of being dominated).<sup>53</sup> They criticize the Russian authorities, including the Moscow Patriarchate, for allowing the country to be dominated by Muslims, and reproduce the usual clichés about Muslim men being sexually dangerous to Russian women.<sup>54</sup> They also express fear that Russian Muslims will commit terrorist acts to denounce Moscow's involvement in Syria, and in November 2015 the nationalist group "For Honor and Freedom" (*Za chest' i svobodu*) organized a small march against the Islamic State during which anti-Muslim slogans such as "No Islam on our land!" (*Net islamu na nashey zemle!*) were chanted.

Specific news stories may inspire Islamophobic reactions. One of the most insightful examples occurred in March 2016 when an Uzbek nanny, Gulchekhira Bobokulova—who was subsequently acknowledged to be psychologically unbalanced—decapitated the baby she was minding and exhibited it in the streets, screaming "I am a terrorist. I want your death. I am a *shahid* (martyr). Allahu akbar."<sup>55</sup> On the day of the murder, the main state television channels did not report the incident at all, remaining conspicuously silent. Only REN-TV reported it, and even then only briefly. This led to speculation in Russian newspapers that the Kremlin had imposed a media blackout for fear of an antimigrant backlash, although the federal authorities denied imposing such censorship. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov told journalists that while the government supported broadcasters' decision not to report the murder, it did not intervene in their decision.<sup>56</sup> According to news.ru, immediately following the murder, the Moscow police stepped up measures to prevent a possible surge of xenophobia among nationalist groups.<sup>57</sup> RBK noted that police had held preventative talks with members of right-wing movements.<sup>58</sup> Members of the Communist Party organized an anti-Muslim campaign based on Bobokulova's theme, with a drawing of a woman in a black hijab with a cut head in her hands—the drawing circulated widely on Internet, but the party rapidly withdrew it from its official website.<sup>59</sup>

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52. See posts by "ELITA NEVERNYKH: PROTIV ISLAMA," V Kontakte, <https://vk.com/eliteincorrect>.

53. See the post by "Svobodnaya Rossiya," V Kontakte, September 12, 2016, [https://vk.com/russia\\_svoboda?w=wall-114086374\\_261](https://vk.com/russia_svoboda?w=wall-114086374_261).

54. "Putin v ocherednoy raz podtverdil, chto yavliaetsya vragom vsekh russkikh lyudey," *Russkaya sluzhba novostey*, December 7, 2016, [https://vk.com/rsnsn?w=wall-67405271\\_96829](https://vk.com/rsnsn?w=wall-67405271_96829).

55. See, for instance, "Zachem uzbekskaya mraz' ubila rebenka," *Sputniki Pogrom*, March 1, 2016, <http://sputnikipogrom.com/Russia/51483/a-good-uzbek-fellow/>.

56. "Peskov ob'yasn timer otstutvie siuzhetov na TV ob ubitoy nyaney devochke," *Interfaks*, March 1, 2016, <http://www.interfax.ru/russia/496800>.

57. "Delo ob ubiystve rebenka nyaney peredali v stolichnyy glavk SKR na fone soobshcheniy o profilaktike ksenofobii v Moskve," *NEWSru*, March 1, 2016, <http://www.newsru.com/russia/01mar2016/xeno.html>.

58. "Politsiya podgotovilas' k vsplesku ksenofobii posle ubiystva nyaney rebenka," *RBK*, March 1, 2016, <http://www.rbc.ru/politics/01/03/2016/56d57e6b9a7947ca702ba165>.

59. "Navedem poryadok v Rossii!!" *KPRF*, <http://stopmigration.kprf.ru/>.

Print media and online news portals covered the murder in depth. Different themes were touched upon—migration, ethnicity and Islam—and different theories offered as to the motive behind the attack: drug influence, schizophrenia, infidelity, and Islamic radicalization. Internet portals in particular witnessed a frenzy of activity. Mainstream media outlets, on the contrary, seemed to err on the side of caution, perhaps also anxious to avoid igniting nationalist sentiments, or simply attempting to toe the Kremlin line. Print publications mostly avoided generating a surge in xenophobia, often silencing references to Bobokulova’s nationality or religion, at least in their headlines.

However, there was some variation in the treatment of the question of Bobokulova’s background. *Moskovskiy Komsomolets* asked: “Who would prefer a ‘dark’ (*temnuyu*) nanny from Uzbekistan or a registered taxpayer with a specialist education and available medical records?”<sup>60</sup> A few days later the newspaper published an interview with a recruitment agency discussing the question of ethnicity in hiring nannies coming from Central Asia.<sup>61</sup> *Versiya* went further, publishing an article with the headline “Illegal migrants from Central Asia have become a national security problem,” in which it called for a visa regime for migrants from Central Asia and peddled the theme of ethnicity, drawing attention to the Tajik citizenship of Bobokulova’s former husband.<sup>62</sup> *Russkaya Planeta* made the same call.<sup>63</sup> On the day of the murder, *Argumenty i fakty* published an article entitled “Horror in a hijab. A Moscow nanny has been detained after decapitating the child she was looking after.”<sup>64</sup> In the days that followed, RIA Novosti published a couple of articles emphasizing Bobokulova’s Tajik connections based on sources it had spoken to.<sup>65</sup>

The most radical opinions were voiced not in mainstream publications or on major news channels, but on social media networks, mainly on the websites of right-wing groups. RONA, for instance, denounced the case as evidence of widespread “Muslim fanaticism.”<sup>66</sup> Radio Svoboda published a selection of comments from prominent Russian bloggers, ranging from those who saw no link between the crime and ethnicity or Islam to those who thought that Russia should implement a visa regime with Central Asia to those who saw in the incident religious extremism and terrorism.<sup>67</sup> One nationalist blogger, [komandorva.livejournal.com](http://komandorva.livejournal.com), published a piece titled

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60. “Zachem vzjali takuyu nyanyu: ubiystvo rebenka pytayutsya spisat’ na roditeley,” *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, March 1, 2016, <http://www.mk.ru/incident/2016/02/29/zachem-vzjali-takuyu-nyanyu-ubiystvo-rebenka-pytayutsya-spisat-na-roditeley.html>.

61. “Bol’shinstvo kadrovyykh agentstv zakryvayut glaza na proiskhozhdenie i kvalifikatsiyu nyan,” *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, March 1, 2016, <http://www.mk.ru/incident/2016/02/29/bolshinstvo-kadrovyykh-agentstv-zakryvayut-glaza-na-proiskhozhdenie-i-kvalifikatsiyu-nyan.html>.

62. “Nelegal’nye migranty iz tsentral’noy azii prevratilis’v problemu natsional’noy bezopasnosti,” *Versiya*, March 2, 2016, <https://versia.ru/nelegalnye-migranty-iz-centralnoj-azii-prevratilis-v-problemu-natsionalnoj-bezopasnosti>.

63. “Vyezd ne dlya vsekh,” *Russkaya Planeta*, March 3, 2016, <http://rusplt.ru/society/vyezd-ne-dlya-vseh-21919.html>.

64. “Uzhas v khidzhabe. V Moskve zaderzhali nyanyu, otrezavshuyu golovu vospitannitse,” *Argumenty i fakty*, March 1, 2016, [http://www.aif.ru/incidents/uzhas\\_v\\_hidzhabe\\_v\\_moskve\\_zaderzhali\\_nyanyu\\_otrezavshuyu\\_golovu\\_vospitannice](http://www.aif.ru/incidents/uzhas_v_hidzhabe_v_moskve_zaderzhali_nyanyu_otrezavshuyu_golovu_vospitannice).

65. “Podruga obvinyaemoy v ubiystve rebenka rasskazala o ee agressivnosti,” RIA Novosti, March 4, 2016, <https://ria.ru/incidents/20160302/1383155557.html>.

66. “Zayavlenie partii RONA,” VKontakte, February 29, 2016, [https://vk.com/ronainform?w=wall-45384782\\_21291](https://vk.com/ronainform?w=wall-45384782_21291).

67. “Zayavlenie TSK NDP,” NDP, <https://rigort.livejournal.com/1520526.html> (broken link).

"The nanny, the hijab and the Tajik link," outlining the themes of the post. Sputnik i Pogrom, News Front and news2.ru published aggressive articles in which ethnicity, Islam, and migrants were the subjects of vitriolic attacks. Meanwhile, videos by Russian nationalist channels, including Russian Cross, appeared on YouTube, entitled "Muslim nanny kills child" and "Uzbek nanny with child's severed head in her hands shouts Allahu akbar in Moscow," calling to "hang" and "cut in pieces" all those who follow Islam.

On the other side of the spectrum, *Spektr* interviewed Svetlana Gannushkina, chairwoman of the Civic Assistance Committee, and Ali Charinskiy, director of the association "For Muslims' Rights," who expressed their concern that Muslims may incur collective responsibility for the attack.<sup>68</sup> Nation-news.ru called on readers not to associate the murder with questions of ethnicity or religious beliefs, stating that this made no sense because the perpetrator was clearly mentally unstable.<sup>69</sup> *Izvestiya* published an opinion piece that harshly berated those who linked the murder to the perpetrator's ethnicity or to Islamic State.<sup>70</sup> *Vesti*, meanwhile, advanced the Kremlin's line, publishing a piece by Dmitry Kiselev urging Russians not to speculate as to the killer's motives or use the story to advance their own agendas.<sup>71</sup> RT, on the other hand, preferred to draw its readers' attention to what it alleged were unethical attempts by Western media outlets to boost their ratings by publishing unnecessary speculation as to the motives behind the murder, presented as the West's revenge for Russia's actions in Syria.<sup>72</sup>

## SOCIETAL ISSUES: ISLAMIC DRESS CODE AND MOSQUE CONSTRUCTION

More broadly, Russian public opinion is divided on societal issues about the place of Islam in the public space, and, as in Europe, focuses mostly on the question of Islamic dress code and mosque construction as two elements where "Islam" erupts in the urban landscape and social norms of behavior.

### The Issue of Islamic Dress Code in Public Space

The securitization of Islam contributes to discrimination against Muslims in public spaces such as transportation, as well as at work and, more importantly, in the school and higher education system. As in Europe, the main crystallizing element is external appearance, especially wearing clothes that are considered explicitly Islamic, in particular *hijab*, the scarf covering head and neck.

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68. "Isterika i konspirologiya: nyanya postavila musul'man v tyazheloe polozhenie," *Spektr* press, March 2, 2016, <http://spektr.press/isterika-i-konspirologiya-nyanya-postavila-musulman-v-tyazheloe-polozhenie/>.

69. "Parad gluposti: kto delaet politiku na obezglavlivanii rebenka v Moskve," Nation News, March 2, 2016, <http://nation-news.ru/183030-parad-gluposti-kto-delaet-politiku-na-obezglavlivanii-rebenka-v-moskve>.

70. "Bezumstvo vmenyaemykh," *Izvestiya*, March 2, 2016, <http://izvestia.ru/news/605408>.

71. "Kisilev prizval ne 'na istorii s nyaney, otrezavshey devochke golovu," *Vesti*, March 2, 2016, <http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=2728265>.

72. "Ekspert: vyvody zapadnykh SMI o motivakh nyani, ubivshey rebenka, prosto neetichny," RT, March 3, 2016, <https://russian.rt.com/article/151852>.



A 2015 survey by the Levada-Center shows that about three-quarters (74 percent) of respondents have a negative attitude toward hijab (36 percent very much against and 38 percent mildly against), with the highest proportion of negative reactions in Moscow (91 percent against).<sup>73</sup> There have been several cases of discrimination against people identified as Muslim by their mode of dress in Russia's hospitals and workplaces. More than ten cases of women sacked from their workplace for their Islamic dress have been reported in Kazan.<sup>74</sup> In 2014, a woman was refused the right to sit in a public bus in Kaliningrad because of her attire, but after complaining to the bus company, she received financial compensation.<sup>75</sup> In 2013, a doctor in Petrozavodsk was sanctioned for refusing to treat patients wearing Islamic dress.<sup>76</sup>

However, the main contentious issue in regard to Islamic dress code is related to educational institutions, both schools and higher education institutions. As in the rest of Europe, the issue of young girls wearing a scarf at school has become a symbolic battleground between secular and religious norms in the public space. One may legitimately discuss whether refusing to see school-age girls in Islamic clothes should be considered Islamophobia or a justified defense of the secular order.

In Russia, no federal law forbids wearing a scarf in educational institutions. The decision is therefore often left to regional or local authorities, and sometimes to school directors themselves. In traditionally Muslim regions everyday tolerance for wearing a veil has always been higher. However, in many of the country's regions, girls with scarfs are refused entry into the classroom. This has become a regular issue in several regions that are not historically Muslim but that today host relatively important Muslim communities, such as Stavropol, Astrakhan, Volgograd, and Ulyanovsk, as well as in Tatarstan, where the population is almost equally divided between ethnic Russians and Tatars. In 2013, the head of the Astrakhan region administration, Aleksandr Zhilkin, declared that, "Beginning on September 1 we will not allow any nonstandard clothes (*nestandartnye odezhdy*) in schools and educational institutions. (. . .) We shouldn't forget that we are a secular state and will continue to be. On a national, as well as on a religious basis."<sup>77</sup> In his *Direct Line* of April 2013, President Putin answered the question of the right to wear a scarf by explaining that "there were never such traditions in our country and in the Muslim regions."<sup>78</sup> Indeed, one aspect of the debate that we will not develop here is how to know whether Islamic clothes—and which

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73. "Rossiyane ne podderzhali noshenie khidzhabov v uchebnykh zavedeniyakh," Levada Center, June 30, 2015, <http://www.levada.ru/2015/06/30/rossiyane-ne-podderzhali-noshenie-hidzhabov-v-uchebnykh-zavedeniyah/>.

74. "Direktsiya avtosalona v Kazani grozit uvol'neniem sotrudnitse, vyshedshey na rabotu v khidzhabe," Portal Credo, July 19, 2010, <http://www.portal-credo.ru/site/?act=news&id=78896>.

75. "Sud Kaliningrada zashchitil musul'manku, vyzahennuyu iz avtobusa za khidzhab," Islamnews, November 7, 2014, <http://www.islamnews.ru/news-439945.html>.

76. "K vrachu-evreike musul'manka ne khodi?," *Minbar*, July 13, 2013, <http://minbar.kz/article/show/id/3739.html>.

77. "Na yuge Rossii zapreshchayut nosit' khidzhaby v shkolakh i vuzakh," *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, Portal Credo, June 27, 2013, <http://www.stav.kp.ru/daily/26099.4/2996635/>.

78. "Pryamaya liniya s Vladimirom Putinyem," The Official Site of the President of the Russian Federation, April 25, 2013, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/17976>.

ones—can be considered as ethnic, and in that case should be accepted as a “national tradition,” or whether they are an imported tradition coming from the Islamic world abroad.<sup>79</sup>

Here, too, as in Europe, the Russian debate about the female Islamic dress code is rooted in the principle of the state as secular, but also intrinsically, and increasingly, seems to conflate religious observance with the threat of terrorism, as the comments that follow illustrate. In 2012, the vice rector of the State Oil University in Tyumen, Dmitriy Novitskiy, declared that wearing hijab is a “factor of concern (*faktor trevozhnosti*) that breaks the school discipline and may offend the religious feelings of the others.”<sup>80</sup> In 2013, a representative of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Astrakhan region stated more explicitly that, “One can transform a normal modern girl into a *shahid* (a suicide terrorist) in six months . . . an intelligent girl, good at school, one day suddenly came to school in hijab.”<sup>81</sup> The security aspect of the debate was particularly vivid in the autonomous republic of Mordovia, where a series of densely populated Tatar villages are known for having almost all their girls covered. According to the Russian security services, five young people left one of these villages, Belozerye, for Pakistan and joined a jihadist insurgency.<sup>82</sup> Since 2014, as a “preemptive” measure, wearing a scarf or any other religious symbol has been forbidden in some local schools. Several families then decided to home-school their children, and sent a petition to President Putin, but the High Court of Russia upheld the decision.<sup>83</sup> In Belozerye, a compromise (recognizing the scarf as part of the national costume) for children was found with the help of local religious leaders, but in December 2016, local teachers began to be fined for wearing a scarf.<sup>84</sup>

A similar issue emerged in higher education institutions, where tolerance toward external appearance has been higher, given that pupils have legally attained their majority. But arguments against Islamic dress follow the same logic. For instance, Astrakhan University announced a ban on hijab, supported by many faculty and staff, such as professor Andrei Syzranov, who stated, “I support the law because the threat of radical Islam has been growing. These young ladies with scarves can potentially be spouses, girlfriends or fiancées of supporters of Wahhabism.”<sup>85</sup> At the Pyatigorsk Language Institute, the provost decided that all signs of religion were forbidden, but after protests from students he retracted that decision and

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79. Kaarina Aitamurto, “Protected and Controlled: Islam and ‘Desecularisation from Above’ in Russia,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 68, no. 1 (2016): 182–202.

80. “Schitat” nepriemlyemym provedenie religioznykh obryadov na territorii i v zdaniyakh Gosudarstvennykh obrazovatel’nykh uchrezhdeniy,” Portal Credo, May 4, 2012, <http://www.portal-credo.ru/site/?act=news&id=91992>.

81. “Iz obychnoy sovremennoy devchonki shakhidku mozjno sdelat’ za polgoda,” *Iskra Yuga*, October 27, 2013, <http://www.amic.ru/news/239871/>.

82. “V Saranske zaочно arestovali storonnika Islamskogo gosudarstva,” *Vechernii Saransk*, March 27, 2016, [http://www.vsar.ru/11433\\_V\\_Saranske\\_zaochno\\_arestovali\\_storonnika\\_Islamskogo\\_gosudarstva](http://www.vsar.ru/11433_V_Saranske_zaochno_arestovali_storonnika_Islamskogo_gosudarstva).

83. For details on this and other cases, see Olga Sibireva, “Problemy realizatsii svobody sovesti v Rossii v 2014 godu,” SOVA Center, April 1, 2015, <http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/publications/2015/04/d31644/>.

84. See the message posted on Facebook by the attorney Marat Ashimov, Facebook, December 30, 2016, [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=1818032525145499&id=100008163070114](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1818032525145499&id=100008163070114).

85. Ekaterina Malinina, “V shkolakh i vuzakh Astrahani zapretili nosit’ khidzhab,” *Komsomol’skaya Pravda*, June 25, 2013, <http://www.kp.ru/daily/26097/2995601/>.

declared it was only a recommendation, not a mandatory requirement.<sup>86</sup> Some students who felt they had been discriminated against brought their case to the courts: a young woman from Dagestan won a case against one of the Krasnoyarsk higher education institutions, which had expelled her for wearing a scarf.<sup>87</sup>

## Construction of New Mosques

As in Europe, another sensitive issue related to Islamophobia is that of the construction of new mosques or prayer houses. Information remains incomplete, but the SOVA Center listed several cases a year: 8 in 2010, 6 in 2011, 14 in 2013, 13 in 2013, 8 in 2015, and 7 in 2016.<sup>88</sup> Muslims are not the only group to face difficulties in getting authorization for new religious places: some Protestant movements, and new religious movements such as Hare Krishna, are also targeted. However, since 2013, the trend of tensions around Islamic prayer rooms is noticeable.<sup>89</sup> In 2015, the Levada Center organized a survey on perceptions of new religious places that demonstrated the gap between Orthodox and Islamic places of worship: 60 percent of respondents said they would welcome, very much or pretty much, the building of a new church, while only 29 percent replied the same for a mosque.<sup>90</sup>

The building of new mosques raises two kinds of issues: legal problems with the local administration, and protests from some segments of the population.<sup>91</sup> The most striking example is probably Moscow itself, where the number of Muslims—local residents and migrants—is estimated at about two million, but there are only five functional mosques. The celebration of Eid al-Fitr, the main Islamic holiday, has been a point of contention between “Muslims” and “Muscovites” for several years. Indeed, each year tens of thousands of people meet for Eid al-Fitr and, until the new Cathedral Mosque opened in 2015, they could not enter the old one and therefore were praying in the streets, impeding transportation in the whole Prospekt Mira neighborhood. The issue for this particular neighborhood has been solved with the opening of the new, larger building, but the Russian capital remains globally underprovided with Islamic establishments. Yet it seems the municipality has no plans to build any new mosques. On several occasions, Moscow mayor Sergey Sobyenin has stated that the city has enough Islamic prayer places because the majority of Muslims are migrants, in other words not destined to stay in Moscow.<sup>92</sup> As a way to “outsource” the

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86. Olga Sibireva, “Freedom of conscience in Russia in 2010,” SOVA Center, April 21, 2011, <http://www.sova-center.ru/en/religion/publications/2011/04/d21460/>.

87. “Otchislennaya za khidzhab studentka v Krasnoyarske poluchila kompensatsiyu,” Interfax, October 14, 2013, <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=52980>.

88. According to the data as of the end of November 2016.

89. See more in annual reports by Olga Sibireva at SOVA Center, <http://www.sova-center.ru/en/religion/publications/olga-sibireva-eng/>.

90. “Terakt v Parizhe: karikatury, islam, zaprety,” Levada Center, January 23, 2016, <http://www.levada.ru/2015/01/29/terakt-v-parizhe-karikatury-islam-zaprety/>.

91. For details, refer to the annual reports of SOVA Center; see also Olga Sibireva, “Problemy realizatsii svobody sovesti v Rossii v iyule—sentyabre 2016 goda,” SOVA Center, November 23, 2016, <http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/publications/2016/11/d35767/>.

92. “Sobyenin: Mechetey v Moskve dostatochno,” Rosbalt, October 13, 2016, <http://www.rosbalt.ru/moscow/2015/10/13/1450406.html>.

issue, Sobyenin has proposed to build new mosques and prayer rooms not in Moscow itself but in the Moscow region (which counts now 19 of them). Yet the Council of Muftis acknowledged that the situation was similarly tense in localities where mosques were planned and very few new projects were able to be formalized.<sup>93</sup>

In other regions of Russia, erecting new mosques has prompted similar reactions from the local authorities. In 2011, the Council of Muftis listed the regions in which discussions with administrative bodies were considered the most challenging: Moscow and St Petersburg, because of the disproportionately large number of migrants who would like to attend religious services; the Komi Republic and Perm; and cities from the Southern Federal district (Sochi, Krasnodar, and Rostov-on-Don<sup>94</sup>), whose proximity to the North Caucasus has always made them very sensitive to the issue of Islam.<sup>95</sup> Yet the problem extends across the country. In many cities, local Islamic communities complain about the difficulties of becoming authorized to buy or rent a piece of land in order to build a prayer room, as reported, for instance, in Tyumen<sup>96</sup> and Khabarovsk.<sup>97</sup> In Murmansk, the Islamic community was denied a piece of land downtown that was considered too central—and therefore too visible—and was authorized only for a prayer room in the suburbs.<sup>98</sup> In two cases, the authorities destroyed mosques they considered illegally built (Novyy Urengoy in 2015 and Pyatigorsk in 2014).<sup>99</sup>

Opposition to erecting Islamic religious places does not necessarily come from the local authorities. Sometimes the local population is the engine of a negative reaction and then lobbies the municipal powers to stop construction. In 2004–2005, Kaliningrad was shaken by debates over the construction of a mosque. Municipal authorities were ready to give a plot to the Muslim community but popular protests stopped it, backed by the Movement against Illegal Immigration (DPNI) and the Russian Orthodox Church, which argued that the Muslim building would be too close to an Orthodox monastery.<sup>100</sup> This was also the case in Moscow in 2010 in the *mikrorayon* Tekstilshchiki regarding a proposed mosque on Volzhskiy Boulevard: several protests occurred,

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93. "Musul'mane prosyat u glavy Podmoskov'ya mesto pod mecheti," *Rakhman*, February 7, 2013, <http://mro-rahman.ru/novosti-obshchiny/336-musulmane-prosyat-u-glavy-podmoskovya-mesto-pod-vosem-mechetej>.

94. In Sochi, the authorities have not allocated a plot of land for mosque construction since 2003.

95. "Zaprety na stroitel'stvo mechetey v Rossii," YouTube, February 20, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oUJDTmLh4Zw>.

96. For example, in Tyumen, the issue of overcrowded city mosques was discussed at the meeting of former President Dmitry Medvedev with Russian Muftis. After that, the city administration offered the Spiritual Council of the Muslims a plot of land for mosque construction. But in September 2010, the city government withdrew its decision and explained the refusal by saying that this plot of land was not in compliance with the city's general plan.

97. The authorities promised to provide a plot of land for mosque construction in 2013, but then they withdrew this decision. According to Sarverdin Tuktarov, a representative of the Tatar ethnic-cultural autonomy, "Khabar," the lack of mosques forces believers to pray outside, even in foul weather.

98. Marlene Laruelle (ongoing research on Islam in Russia's Arctic cities, fieldwork in Murmansk, July 2015 and July 2016).

99. Later on, the correct permit for building construction was obtained, but now the construction of the mosque is once again facing bureaucratic issues.

100. Anna Karpenko, "Building a Mosque in Kaliningrad," in *Crisis Management Challenges*, eds. Eugene Krasnov, Anna Karpenko, and Greg Simons (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2014), 131–154.

activated by Russian nationalist groups forcing the municipality to cancel the project.<sup>101</sup> A similar scenario played out in the Mitino neighborhood, where inhabitants pressured the local authorities to cancel the construction permit. In Ufa in 2016, local populations and Orthodox activists blocked the construction of a new Muslim center close to the historic Al-Rahim mosque.

Justifications for refusing the construction of a mosque are diverse. Some avoid the issue of Islam per se and insist on logistical questions: a new mosque will create traffic jams in the neighborhood (such arguments were used in Surgut; in the small city of Naro-Fominsk, near Moscow; and in Kostomuksha in Karelia<sup>102</sup>), or it will take over one of the last green places or parks available in the city (an argument used in Novosibirsk and Kazan), and so on. Security issues and the need for law enforcement agencies to be around the mosque in case of terrorist actions constitute a second line of reasoning, mentioned in petitions against new mosques in 2016 in the Volgograd region.<sup>103</sup>

Yet, in some cases the religious motivation is made explicit: in 2013, inhabitants protested against a new mosque in the small village of Berezovo in the Khanty-Mansi district by calling Muslims to convert to Christianity and go to church.<sup>104</sup> Very often, references are made to the “criminal activities of migrants” as a point against the construction of a mosque, as, for instance, in 2015 in Yaroslavl. There, a resentful population sent a petition to the region’s governor, arguing that, “we, the indigenous inhabitants (*korennyye zhiteli*) of Yaroslavl, do not need one additional point of concentration for *gastarbeiters* . . . The local conditions deteriorate because of the huge quantity of newcomers, the multiplication of sexual harassment cases against women and children, the traffic of drugs, arms and adulterated alcohol, the development of gambling places, and *raiding* actions against local kiosks.”<sup>105</sup>

Local protests may sometimes be spontaneous, yet it should be noted that Russian nationalist activists often take the lead in organizing them. In the Southern Federal District, Cossacks, who have been acting as vigilante patrols since the 1990s, have become one of these drivers. In 2013 in Rostov-on-Don, they lobbied to cancel a children’s Islamic fashion show, arguing that this show should be done in Grozny, not in Rostov, and complaining about the fact that some young female models wearing Islamic clothes were non-Muslims.<sup>106</sup> In several cities where protests against

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101. Olga Sibireva and Alexander Verkhovsky, “Restrictions and Challenges in 2010 on Freedom of Conscience in Russia,” SOVA Center, April 21, 2011, <http://www.sova-center.ru/en/religion/publications/2011/04/d21460/>.

102. Permission was obtained back in 2008.

103. “Petition ‘Ne dopustite stroitel’stva mecheti v gorode Volzhskom Volgogradskoy oblasti,” Change.org, 2016, <https://www.change.org/p/президент-россии-путин-владимир-владимирович-не-допустите-строительства-мечети-в-городе-волжском-волгоградской-области>.

104. Olga Sibireva, “Restrictions and Challenges in 2013 on Freedom of Conscience in Russia,” SOVA Center, June 3, 2014, <http://www.sova-center.ru/en/religion/publications/2014/06/d31861/>.

105. “Petition ‘Zapretit’ stroitel’stvo mecheti v Dzerzhinskom rayone goroda Yaroslavya,” Change.org, 2015, <https://www.change.org/p/губернатору-ярославской-области-мэру-города-ярославля-запретить-строительство-мечети-в-дзержинском-районе-города-ярославля>.

106. Anna Shevchenko, “Pokaz detskikh khidzhabov v Rostove otmenili iz-za bditel’nosti kazakov,” *161*, November 12, 2013, <http://161.ru/text/newsline/723590.html>.

erecting a new mosque occurred, local patriotic clubs took the lead in them, for instance in Novokuznetsk in 2011 and 2012. In some cases, Russian nationalist activists are members of far-right groups with wider visibility, such as Rubezh Severa, Slavyanskiy Soyuz and the Movement against Illegal Immigration (DNPI); they capitalize on the popular worries about mosques to advance their political agenda. In 2009 in Syktyvkar (Komi Republic), DNPI gathered more than 3,000 signatures against the new mosque.<sup>107</sup> In several cases, street protests against new mosques were followed by calls to deport “all Muslims.”

## CONCLUDING REMARKS AND NEW AGENDA FOR RESEARCH

While Islamophobia exists in Russia, it remains low compared with the majority of European societies, where violence against Muslims, negative public opinion, and behaviors are more widespread—with important variations by country, of course. Russian society overall remains fairly non-Islamophobic: cultural tensions continue to center on interethnic distinctions rather than on religious motives. Yet in the decades to come, it is probable that the terms of the debate will alter and a dividing line will be drawn between ethnic Russians—culturally Orthodox, long-assimilated Siberian minorities on one hand, and a broader category of “Muslims” on the other hand, encompassing North Caucasians, some Volga-Urals populations, and labor migrants settled in Russia. This dividing line will not necessarily bring any kind of violence, but will reflect current global trends that affect all European societies and the Muslim communities living in them.

The topic of Islamophobia in Russia is in need of further research in several directions: the importance of the gender issue in the rise of Islamophobia (veiled women seem to be targeted more often than men and the debate tends to crystallize around women’s symbolic status); the dissociation between historically Muslim regions and regions whose Muslim communities are new, with the hypothesis—still to be tested—that the former are less Islamophobic than the latter; and the contentious point of conversion to Islam by ethnic Russians. More globally, a critical element to be studied in depth remains the debates internal to Russian Muslims about what they consider the norm of “being Muslim” in terms of individual religious practices; their relationship to secular public spaces; the visibility of the Orthodox Church compared to other religions; the place of religion in collective identity; and the danger coming from “nonconformist,” “foreign,” or “dangerous” conceptions of Islam.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- If the term “extremism” is to remain in use in Russian law, Russian legislators need to establish a clear and accurate definition that takes into account scholarly research on the different meanings of the term. An appropriate definition might limit the term to acts that relate to violence, including public calls for violence and financing of related activities. This change

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107. Olga Sibireva and Alexander Verkhovsky, “Restrictions and Challenges in 2009 on Freedom of Conscience in Russia,” SOVA Center, March 18, 2010, <http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/publications/2010/03/d18233/>.

would bring the definition in line with the understanding of extremism reflected in the documents of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization—the only international agreements ratified by Russia that include the notion of “extremism.”

- A legal definition, validated at the federal level, of which kind of “hijab” is allowed and which is forbidden would avoid ad hoc decisions taken by local authorities or individuals.
- The Civic Chamber could launch a commission studying the issues of Islamic dress code and mosque construction, and develop lines of communication on these questions with the Spiritual Boards.
- The Spiritual Boards should better coordinate with local Islamic associations in their role as intermediary between Muslim communities, local institutions, and the population.





Part II

# Recruitment and Motivation



# Violence Toward “Nontraditional” Faiths in Russia

Geraldine Fagan with Olga Sibireva

Scant attention has been paid to violence and threats of violence toward minority faiths in post-Soviet Russia outside the contexts of anti-Semitism and Islamism. Independently of one another, the present authors have reported on incidents of this nature for more than a decade, while monitoring freedom of religion or belief.<sup>1</sup> Our coverage of this phenomenon has been piecemeal, however, and we are not aware of any previous attempt to present an overview.

In what we therefore believe is a first, we have identified 265 incidents from 2000 through 2016 of actual or threatened violence toward followers of minority faiths other than Islam and Judaism. Of these, 96 percent (254 incidents) concern Jehovah’s Witnesses and various Protestants. The other faiths affected are Orthodox Christian jurisdictions separate from the Moscow Patriarchate, Roman Catholicism, and the Society for Krishna Consciousness (Hare Krishnas).<sup>2</sup> Due to limitations of space, we have restricted our selection of faith groups to those known to have experienced at least one physical attack directed against a person.

We examine violent acts against people and property, as well as verbal threats to carry out such violence. We do not claim to have assembled an exhaustive inventory of violent incidents, as not all are reported. Yet the fact that victims bother to report a significant number of minor attacks on property suggests that the most egregious incidents—involving physical injury or death—are usually made public. The fact that escalations in serious attacks during the 2000s were reported as unprecedented further suggests they were less common during the 1990s.

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1. See, for example, Geraldine Fagan, “RUSSIA: Violence, arson and religious believers,” Forum 18 News Service, July 27, 2005, [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=617](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=617); Alexander Verkhovsky and Olga Sibireva, “Problemy realizatsii svobody sovesti v Rossii v 2007 godu,” SOVA Center, February 20, 2008, <http://religion.sova-center.ru/publications/AA3B942/AA3BAD2>.

2. Concerning acts of violence targeting Orthodox Christians under the Moscow Patriarchate, see Chapter 5 by du Quenoy and Dubrovskiy in this volume.

Conversely, it is not possible to suggest any definitive trend for less-serious attacks—involving minor damage to property and/or unfulfilled threats of violence—as these are more likely to go unreported. Minor acts of vandalism may also be the result of petty hooliganism, unrelated to the religious identity of victims.

The diligence with which different faith groups report attacks is another key variable. A low public profile (and the desire to keep it that way) may explain the few incidents reported by Roman Catholics, for example. The proliferation of attacks on Jehovah’s Witnesses, by contrast, is at least partially attributable to their largely systematic monitoring of such incidents and extensive public outreach. Indeed, such attacks typically occur when Jehovah’s Witnesses are performing their religious obligation to preach, either door-to-door or manning a literature stall. A further key factor is that most attacks on Jehovah’s Witnesses have followed the Russian state’s formal moves to criminalize them as “extremist” (see Chapter 2 by Verkhovsky), not an issue for the other faiths considered here.

In sum, we believe our study sketches general trends in violence and threats of violence toward “nontraditional” religious believers in post-Soviet Russia, outside the contexts of anti-Semitism and Islamism. It should not be treated as comprehensive, however, as no exhaustive data set of incidents exists.

## JEHOVAH’S WITNESSES

The most striking features of our data are the overwhelming number of attacks on Jehovah’s Witnesses—75 percent of the total—and their occurrence after 2005. By contrast, the majority of incidents affecting the other faiths considered here—40 of 66—occurred prior to 2005. This discrepancy is particularly pronounced when considering attacks from 2010 through 2016. During that period, we identified 185 incidents of violence or threats of violence against Jehovah’s Witnesses, while the other faiths considered here reported a combined total of just 13.

We therefore introduce the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ experience separately from the other faith groups. Our research identifies a total of 199 incidents of violence or threats of violence toward them since the beginning of 2005.<sup>3</sup> This is a minimum figure: the Russian Jehovah’s Witness organization has claimed 118 assaults and 92 acts of vandalism between September 2009 and August 2012 alone.<sup>4</sup> Here, however, we consider only those incidents whose key details have been made public.

Prior to September 2009, we are aware of 14 incidents of violence or threatened violence toward Jehovah’s Witnesses. State and public animosity toward the Jehovah’s Witnesses was well established by this period, and attacks could be serious. In 2007, for example, two female door-to-door

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3. Unless otherwise stated using footnotes, the sources of information on Jehovah’s Witness attacks are emailed press releases from the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ Russian headquarters in St. Petersburg.

4. “Contribution to the Report of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights,” European Association of Jehovah’s Christian Witnesses, October 8, 2012, [http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session16/RU/EAJCW\\_UPR\\_RUS\\_S16\\_2013\\_EuropeanAssociationofJehovahChristian\\_E.pdf](http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session16/RU/EAJCW_UPR_RUS_S16_2013_EuropeanAssociationofJehovahChristian_E.pdf).

preachers were beaten unconscious in the city of Moscow. Yet such violent incidents were still unusual.

A sea change in the Jehovah's Witnesses' situation occurred in the spring of 2009. More than 500 state checkups of their communities across Russia in a single month prompted them to claim "a new harassment campaign."<sup>5</sup> Notably for our research, these state inspections almost never involved violence or threats of violence. In one shocking exception from April 2009, police in Voronezh region reportedly tortured a Jehovah's Witness with beatings, suffocation, and electric shocks. Yet this appeared to be with the aim of forcing a confession to a recent theft in the local area, rather than faith-related.

The wave of state inspections led to court proceedings in Rostov-on-Don region, which resulted in the dissolution of a local Jehovah's Witness organization and ban on distributing 34 items of Jehovah's Witness literature under Russia's 2002 Law On Combating Extremist Activity. The verdict cited overtly flimsy examples of extremism, such as "demonstrating a negative attitude to true Christianity." It even ruled extremist citation of Leo Tolstoy's criticism of the Orthodox Church, and commentary on "popular disillusionment in religion in the context of processes taking place within the Anglican Church." Russia's Supreme Court upheld this ruling in December 2009.<sup>6</sup>

On September 16, 2009—the day after the Rostov-on-Don verdict was announced on national state television—a man beat up a female Jehovah's Witness preaching door-to-door in distant Leningrad region. The attacker claimed the Jehovah's Witness organization was now banned, and warned, "the Cossacks will come from Rostov-on-Don and kill you all!"<sup>7</sup> While this was the last—and only fourth—violent incident against Jehovah's Witnesses reported in 2009, its clear link with the Rostov-on-Don extremism case allows us to trace from it the subsequent escalation of violent attacks against Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia.

In 2010, there were 21 reported incidents of violence or threats of violence against Jehovah's Witnesses. Since then, the average annual total has been 26, with a peak of 58 incidents in 2015. In 2016, the number of reported incidents fell to 18, but the Jehovah's Witnesses have stated that they did not have the technical capacity to monitor the situation as closely as in previous years.

We find it highly surprising that no Jehovah's Witness has yet been killed. Of the 199 incidents against them, 104 (52 percent) involved a weapon and/or resulted in physical injury. Weaponry has included guns (18 incidents), knives (3 incidents), and axes (2 incidents). In a single incident in Mari El republic in 2014, an attacker wielded an ax at two female Jehovah's Witnesses before attempting to run them over in his car. The following examples of the most serious physical attacks give a sense of their potentially fatal outcome:

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5. Geraldine Fagan, "RUSSIA: Nationwide Strike at Jehovah's Witnesses," Forum 18 News Service, March 13, 2009, [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1267](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1267).

6. Rostov-on-Don Regional Court ruling no. 3-1/09, September 11, 2009, 19–20, 24, 29–30; Geraldine Fagan and Felix Corley, "RUSSIA: 34 Jehovah's Witness publications and one congregation banned," Forum 18 News Service, December 8, 2009, [http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article\\_id=1385](http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1385).

7. "V Leningradskoy oblasti izbita zhenshchina—svidetel' legovy," SOVA Center, October 5, 2009, <http://religion.sova-center.ru/events/13B74CE/146F060/DB1AD7B>.

- In 2012 in Kemerovo region, a man pushed two female Jehovah’s Witnesses down a set of stairs. He also beat up one of the women, aged 70.
- In 2013 in Moscow region, an apparently drunk man pushed to the ground and beat up a female Jehovah’s Witness, causing multiple injuries and bruises, and pushed a second, aged 73, breaking her left arm.
- In 2013 in Omsk region, a man ripped up literature offered by two female Jehovah’s Witnesses aged 76 and 81 before punching and kicking them. The 81-year-old was hospitalized with a broken rib and damaged right lung.
- In 2013 in the city of Moscow, a man held a gun against the head of a female Jehovah’s Witness. He later fired at her and a fellow preacher as they made their escape downstairs.
- In 2015 in Primorye region, a man pushed an 82-year-old female Jehovah’s Witness in such a way that she hit her head against the corner of an elevator shaft and lost consciousness.
- In 2016 in Transbaikal region, a man beat up a 76-year-old female Jehovah’s Witness, fracturing her hip.

Strikingly, of the 104 physical attacks on Jehovah’s Witnesses we have identified, 61 (59 percent) were directed by men against women, often of pensioner age. Several other cases involve the young. In 2014, for example, a teenage male Jehovah’s Witness preaching door-to-door in Vologda region was beaten up, threatened with rape, and forced to drink vodka. In two incidents in 2010 and 2012, schoolchildren in Kurgan region and Krasnodar region beat up Jehovah’s Witness classmates.

In a small but significant number of the physical attacks on Jehovah’s Witnesses—11 of 104 (10 percent)—the main perpetrators were state representatives rather than members of the public. A particularly shocking example occurred in Irkutsk region in 2011, when a village administration chief twice disrupted house meetings of Jehovah’s Witnesses while drunk, firing a gun at the ceiling before holding it against the heads of the homeowners. In Chelyabinsk region in 2012, a male Jehovah’s Witness was repeatedly struck on the head and neck during a police interrogation. Another was punched on the ear during a police interrogation in Orenburg region in 2013.

The 35 police raids reported on Jehovah’s Witness worship premises from January 2013 through October 21, 2016, typically involved the disproportionate use of force. In September 2016, for example, around a dozen masked law enforcement agents carrying assault weapons gained entry to a Jehovah’s Witness kingdom hall in Stavropol region by scaling a perimeter fence and forcing their way inside using metal-cutting tools.<sup>8</sup>

The state’s treatment of Jehovah’s Witnesses appears particularly harsh in the North Caucasus, where law enforcement agents’ brutal handling of Islamists similarly branded as extremists is commonplace. In 2015, for example, counter-extremism police in Karachay-Cherkessia republic beat up a Jehovah’s Witness. The same year, police in Dagestan republic detained local Jehovah’s Witness

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8. Victoria Arnold, “RUSSIA: Many meetings raided and evidence planted,” Forum 18 News Service, October 24, 2016, [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2228](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2228). For video footage of the Stavropol region incident, see: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/16093008-46.html>.

representative Arsen Abdullayev for six hours, during which period he was handcuffed, beaten up, and had a polyethylene bag taped over his head. Such incidents appear rare, however. In 2010, Abdullayev told Fagan in Makhachkala that his community had never experienced particular problems in Dagestan, in his view due to the law enforcement agencies' preoccupation with local Islamists.<sup>9</sup>

The distinction between state and public among perpetrators may be blurred, however, as in Chelyabinsk region in 2010, when an ex-police officer tried to suffocate a female Jehovah's Witness with her scarf. Perpetrators may also be unofficial law enforcement or other authority figures. In three incidents in Voronezh and Krasnodar regions during 2014–2015, for instance, Cossacks whipped or threatened to whip Jehovah's Witnesses and/or threw rocks at Jehovah's Witnesses and/or their property. In 2012, an Orthodox priest in Arkhangelsk region beat two female Jehovah's Witnesses with a branch and threatened to drown them if they continued preaching. Orthodox clerics initiated similar incidents in Nizhny Novgorod and Tver regions in 2015.

Property was the principal target in 31 percent of all incidents against Jehovah's Witnesses (62 of 199). Eleven of these attacks on property (18 percent) involved arson.

There appears to be no major geographic concentration of violence against Jehovah's Witnesses, with attacks reported in 55 of the 83 constituent regions of Russia that are internationally recognized. While the city of Moscow and Moscow region report a combined total of 39 attacks (20 percent), this is broadly in line with their greater population.

Other regions also report a higher-than-average rate of incidents, including several where local courts have successfully banned Jehovah's Witness organizations and/or literature as extremist. They are: Rostov-on-Don region (12 incidents), Belgorod region (eight), Krasnodar region (seven), Sverdlovsk region (six), and Kemerovo region (five). There does not appear to be a precise correlation between prosecutions and attacks, however, as other regions where Jehovah's Witness organizations and/or literature are banned have reported fewer than average or no violent incidents. These are: Oryol region (two), Altai and Samara regions (one each), Altai and Kalmykia republics, Jewish Autonomous region, and Krasnoyarsk region (all zero).

By the end of March 2017, attempts to ban local Jehovah's Witness organizations as extremist had succeeded in eight regions: Rostov-on-Don, Samara, Belgorod (two organizations), Krasnodar, Oryol, Kalmykia republic, Jewish Autonomous region, and Karachay-Cherkessia republic. They had failed in Altai republic and Arkhangelsk and Tyumen regions.<sup>10</sup> A 2004 ban on the Jehovah's Witness organization in the city of Moscow—successfully appealed at the European Court of Human Rights in 2010 and followed by the restoration of the organization's legal status in 2015—did not rely upon allegations of extremism.<sup>11</sup>

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9. Jehovah's Witness representative Arsen Abdullayev, interview with Geraldine Fagan, Makhachkala, April 21, 2010.

10. "Verkhovnyy sud RF podtverdil likvidatsiyu organizatsii Svideteley legovy v Orle," SOVA Center, October 18, 2016, <http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/harassment/refusal/2016/10/d35631/>; "Likvidirovana obshchina Svideteley legovy v Cherkesske," SOVA Center, February 13, 2017, <https://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/extremism/counter-extremism/2017/02/d36379/>.

11. Geraldine Fagan, "RUSSIA: Full Moscow court decision slams JW's," Forum 18 News Service, May 25, 2004, [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=327](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=327).

Also by the end of March 2017, there were 88 Jehovah's Witness titles on Russia's Federal List of Extremist Materials. Chronologically, these items were banned in Rostov-on-Don region, Altai republic, and the regions of Kemerovo, Krasnodar, Krasnoyarsk, Kurgan, Altai, and Sverdlovsk. Several titles initially banned in Kemerovo and Kursk regions have been removed from the Federal List.<sup>12</sup> Once a title is added to the Federal List, it is banned from distribution throughout Russia.

Violence and/or threats of violence may therefore occur even in the absence of state opposition toward Jehovah's Witnesses in a particular region, while state opposition toward Jehovah's Witnesses may appear even if the situation in a region is otherwise calm. In 2013 Jehovah's Witnesses in Krasnoyarsk region told Fagan in the wake of a local ban on two items of their literature that the situation was otherwise "more or less civilized," including no confrontation with local Orthodox and a generally "reasonable" attitude from law enforcement.<sup>13</sup>

The response of law enforcement agencies to attacks also varies markedly but is reported in too few cases to determine any clear trend. In a handful of cases involving serious violence, it is known that the perpetrators were punished. In Chuvashia republic, for example, two attackers were given prison terms of six and four-and-a-half years, respectively, for severely beating a disabled Jehovah's Witness in 2011. In a further trio of cases in 2013, police arrested attackers who seriously injured Jehovah's Witnesses in Omsk region, Moscow region, and the city of Moscow. In Tver region in 2015, an Orthodox priest and parishioners threatened to pour boiling water over and set dogs upon Jehovah's Witnesses before summoning the police, apparently believing they would take further action. However, the responding police officer protected the Jehovah's Witnesses, and reminded all present that the right to share religious convictions is enshrined in the Russian Constitution.

Yet for the most part, violent incidents appear to be unopposed or even encouraged by the state. Responding to a 2011 public complaint about Jehovah's Witness preaching, police in Belgorod region sided with the complainants, detaining the Witnesses and threatening, "if it were 1937, we would shoot you behind that fence!" In 2015, police in Krasnodar region reportedly did not intervene when a group of Cossacks hurled stones and bottles at premises where a Jehovah's Witness service was taking place. Most notably, investigators in Irkutsk region refused to open a criminal case against the village administration chief who twice threatened Jehovah's Witnesses at gunpoint. While an official investigation was ultimately closed on the grounds of the official's allegedly poor health, he since appears to have been promoted to lead a larger administrative territory in Irkutsk region.<sup>14</sup>

Previously piecemeal restrictions moved toward a blanket ban in March 2017, when all Jehovah's Witness activity in Russia was halted in connection with a Supreme Court indictment seeking to

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12. Jehovah's Witness items on the *Federal List of Extremist Materials* are nos. 510–43, 556–73, 752–57, 975–8, 1042–5, 2034, 2170, 2454, 2455 [multiple items], 2493 [multiple items], 2823 [multiple items], 3563, 3565, 3600. Titles removed were nos. 914–5, 2444; <http://minjust.ru/ru/extremist-materials>.

13. Jehovah's Witness representatives Sergei Tolstonozhenko and Sergei Zapletin, interview with Geraldine Fagan, Krasnoyarsk, September 19, 2013.

14. Irkutskoe Rayonnoe Munitsipal'noe Obrazovanie, <http://www.irkraion.ru/airmo/mer-raiona>.



ban the organization at the federal level.<sup>15</sup> A nationwide ban followed on April 20, rendering all Jehovah's Witness activity illegal.<sup>16</sup>

Yaroslav Sivulsky of the Jehovah's Witnesses has confirmed to Sibireva that there were almost no incidents of violence in the 1990s, and that his organization only began to document attacks after the trial of its Moscow community commenced in 1998. Like our findings, however, he also noted that such incidents remained rare until prosecutions for extremism began in 2009, after which the number of attacks had only increased. Sivulsky believes this is closely linked to media coverage of extremism court cases: "The majority of them are presented negatively, Jehovah's Witnesses are portrayed in a negative light, and our sometimes-unbalanced citizens react accordingly."

Sivulsky also stated that victims of attacks generally do not report them to police if there is no serious physical injury. Even then, he knows of many cases in which "the response is always very weak or missing altogether, so the whole point of reporting them is lost. You lose even more time, nerves, energy." Speaking in May 2017, shortly after the Jehovah's Witnesses submitted an appeal against the previous month's nationwide ban on their organization, he estimated attacks had reached a peak. Yet, "if we lose the appeal and this label [extremists] sticks," predicts Sivulsky, "we can only expect an increase—and not just from citizens, the police too will be violent toward people."<sup>17</sup>

Outside the scope of this study, initial reports after the federal ban did enter full force on July 17, 2017, indicate a sharp rise in violent attacks on Jehovah's Witnesses.<sup>18</sup>

## OTHER FAITHS

We now turn to incidents involving faiths other than Jehovah's Witnesses. Here, we have identified a total of 66 cases of violence or threatened violence: 55 against various Protestant denominations, five against Hare Krishnas, four against Orthodox Christians distinct from the Moscow Patriarchate, and two against Roman Catholics. We are aware of several incidents before 2000, such as the murder of two Korean-U.S. Baptist missionaries in Khabarovsk region in 1995, and the whipping of Seventh-Day Adventists by Cossacks in Krasnodar region in 1998.<sup>19</sup> However, 2000 appears to be the first year in which anything resembling systematic reporting of attacks begins.

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15. "Pristanavlivaetsya deyatel'nost' mestnykh religioznykh organizatsiy Svideteley legovy," SOVA Center, March 17, 2017, <http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/extremism/counter-extremism/2017/03/d36612/>.

16. "Verkhovnyy sud prinyal reshenie o likvidatsii Upravlencheskogo tsentra Svideteley legovy v Rossii," SOVA Center, April 20, 2017, <http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/extremism/counter-extremism/2017/04/d36871/>.

17. Yaroslav Sivulsky, member of the presiding committee of the Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia, telephone interview with Olga Sibireva, May 21, 2017.

18. Victoria Arnold, "RUSSIA: Jehovah's Witnesses now banned," Forum 18 News Service, July 18, 2017, [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2297](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2297).

19. "Two Missionaries Murdered in Russia," *East-West Church & Ministry Report* 3, no. 2 (Spring 1995), <http://www.eastwestreport.org/articles/ew03203.htm>; Roman Lunkin, "Cossacks Use Whips Against Protestants," Keston News Service, September 15, 1998, <http://www.keston.org.uk/kns/misc2/5-8.html>.

The majority of incidents took place prior to 2005, the year when the Jehovah's Witnesses first began to report similar incidents. The years 2001 through 2004, as well as 2010, are the only ones with a higher-than-average number of attacks. Our sources of information on these incidents include a wide variety of media reports in addition to members of the faith communities concerned.<sup>20</sup> We do not believe that these faith communities have monitored violent incidents against their members quite as systematically as the Jehovah's Witnesses. However, it again appears that particularly egregious attacks—those involving physical injury or death—are typically made public. Here, the most serious attacks have resulted in death. Four people have been killed in three incidents:

- In 2000 in Astrakhan region, a Catholic priest was poisoned.<sup>21</sup>
- In 2008 in the city of Moscow, two Catholic priests were beaten to death in their apartment.<sup>22</sup>
- In 2010 in Dagestan republic, a Pentecostal pastor was shot dead outside his church.<sup>23</sup>

These cases share some characteristics: those killed were religious leaders, and there appears to be a personalized aspect not generally apparent in attacks against Jehovah's Witnesses. In both the Catholic murders, the victims appear to have been personally acquainted with the attackers.<sup>24</sup> Pastor Artur Suleimanov was well known locally for his missionary work among ethnicities historically regarded as Muslim. Several months before his murder, he told Fagan in Dagestan that he had regularly received death threats.<sup>25</sup>

We have identified a further 14 seriously violent incidents in which people were beaten up, struck with a weapon, or otherwise injured to the point of requiring medical assistance. Together with the killings, they account for 26 percent of the total number of incidents—around half the rate of serious physical violence reported by the Jehovah's Witnesses. Six of the 14 attacks involved the use of weaponry, including guns (two incidents) and metal bars (three). All but one of the 14 incidents not resulting in death were attacks on Protestant Christians, the exception being against a Krishna devotee.

Examples illustrate the nature of these attacks. After receiving anonymous threats to stop preaching in 2001, a Pentecostal pastor in Moscow region was severely beaten with a metal bar by several men, resulting in his hospitalization for 10 days. In 2006, a large group of drunken youths

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20. Media reports are cited as sources in the footnotes.

21. Vlad Kondrat'ev, "Smertel'no opasnyy tselibat," *NG-Religii*, December 17, 2011, [http://www.ng.ru/ng\\_religii/2011-12-07/8\\_celibat.html](http://www.ng.ru/ng_religii/2011-12-07/8_celibat.html).

22. "V Moskve ubity dvoe katolicheskikh monakhov," SOVA Center, October 29, 2008, <http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/extremism/murders-violence/2008/10/d14498/>.

23. "V Dagestane ubit episkop Severno-Kavkazkogo regiona ROSKhVE—Suleymanov Artur (video)," ProChurch.info, July 15, 2010, <http://prochurch.info/index.php/news/more/16986>.

24. Anastasiya Berseneva, "On priznalsya, chto ubil . . .," *Gazeta*, November 6, 2008, <https://www.gazeta.ru/social/2008/11/06/2874830.shtml>.

25. Pastor Artur Suleymanov of Hosanna Pentecostal Church, interview with Geraldine Fagan, Makhachkala, April 16, 2010.

disrupted a Pentecostal Easter concert in Kemerovo region, beating up the adults present and hospitalizing three with injuries that included a broken rib, damaged spine, and ripped ear.<sup>26</sup> In 2008 in Penza region, a gang threatened a Pentecostal congregation with a gun, beat up its pastor, and threatened to burn down the church.<sup>27</sup>

Many incidents closely resemble those reported by the Jehovah's Witnesses. In 2006, for example, Baptists manning a literature stall in Sakha republic were beaten and had the stall and their car smashed by a local police officer and his brother, a security guard.<sup>28</sup> Unlike the Jehovah's Witnesses, however, the victims of such attacks are almost always men. The few notable exceptions include the near death of a Pentecostal pastor's mother in an arson attack in Moscow region in 2001, and the inclusion of a pastor's wife among those beaten by police at a Pentecostal missionary event in Voronezh region in 2003.<sup>29</sup> The latter incident indicates that, as with the Jehovah's Witnesses, state representatives may also be those meting out violence. State representatives may also act to prevent violence, however, as by arriving swiftly when a local businessman threatened to shoot a Pentecostal bishop in Khanty-Mansiisk autonomous district in 2005.<sup>30</sup> Similar to the Jehovah's Witnesses' experience, there was no indication that state representatives were involved in violence in 85 percent of incidents.

Property was the principal target in 37 of the 66 incidents (57 percent). Of these, 27 attacks (73 percent) involved arson. This is nearly double the rate of property attacks experienced by the Jehovah's Witnesses, and four times the rate of arson attacks. The true figure may be even higher, judging by the nonchalance with which we have heard victims refer to vandalism on houses of worship—even arson—in disparate parts of Russia.

There again appears to be no major geographic concentration of violence, as incidents were reported in 29 of Russia's 83 internationally recognized constituent units. As with the Jehovah's Witnesses, the rate in the city of Moscow and Moscow region is higher, apparently due to greater population, with a combined total of 13 incidents. A higher-than-average number of incidents was also reported in Novgorod region (nine incidents), Voronezh region (four), and Krasnodar, Vladimir, and Yaroslavl regions (three each).

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26. "Na Paskhu v Kemerovskoy oblasti byli izbity pyatidesyatniki," SOVA Center, April 26, 2006, <http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/extremism/murders-violence/2006/04/d8020/>; "Troє veruyushchikh, serezno postradavshikh vo vremya izbieniya na Paskhu v Kemerovskoy oblasti, byli dostavleny v bol'nitsu," Portal Credo, April 28, 2006, <http://portal-credo.ru/site/?act=news&id=42639&topic=108>.

27. "Dokument. Obrashchenie svyashchennosluzhiteley Penzenskoy oblasti k oblastnoy administratsii v svyazi s proyavleniyami ekstremizma v otnoshenii protestantskikh tserkvey regiona," Slavic Centre for Law and Justice, May 20, 2008, [http://www.sclj.ru/news/detail.php?SECTION\\_ID=217&ELEMENT\\_ID=1887](http://www.sclj.ru/news/detail.php?SECTION_ID=217&ELEMENT_ID=1887).

28. "Otdel zastupnichestva MSTs EKHB Soobshchenie No.10," International Council of Churches of Evangelical Christian-Baptists, April 1, 2006, <http://iucecb.com/news/20060401>.

29. Petr Barankevich, "Vystuplenie k sborniku Svoboda veroispovedaniya, gosudarstvenno-konfessional'nye otnosheniya i protestantizm v Rossii," *Nauchnyy Ateizm*, August 17, 2002, <http://www.atheism.ru/lci/analys/?id=27>; "Aktsiya chlenov Ob'edinennoy tserkvi khristian very evangel'skoy razognana militsiy v Voronezhskoy oblasti," SOVA Center, August 29, 2003, <http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/harassment/intervention/2003/08/d888/>.

30. "V Nizhnevartovske militsiya podderzhivaet bortsu s nepravoslavnymi?" SOVA Center, December 19, 2005, <http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/harassment/intervention/2005/12/d6775/>.

Three constituent units of Russia report a higher-than-average rate of violence toward both the Jehovah's Witnesses and the other faiths considered here: the city of Moscow, Moscow region, and Krasnodar region. Six republics and regions report no violent incidents despite being adjacent to constituent units with an above-average rate of violence. These are: Kalmykia republic, Lipetsk region, Perm region, Pskov region, Ryazan region, and Smolensk region.<sup>31</sup>

Protestant and Hare Krishna representatives confirmed to Sibireva that there have been practically no acts of violence or threatened violence against them in recent years. Similar to our findings that such incidents mostly pertain to the years 2001–2004 and 2010, senior Baptist representative Sergei Belov suggested that there had been a spike in vandalism in 2005–2007, but that it was now “episodic.”<sup>32</sup> Senior Pentecostal representative Konstantin Bendas could recall “some cases 8 to 10 years ago,” but none from 2016–2017. He also stated that his Pentecostal union had monitored the situation from 2003 to 2013, that its affiliate pastors always reported attacks, and that the union’s legal department dealt with them thoroughly, including in partnership with the Moscow-based Slavic Center for Law and Justice. “We are aware of everything taking place on Russian territory,” he assured Sibireva. “I would know if there were [more] cases.”<sup>33</sup>

Krishna devotee and representing lawyer Mikhail Frolov similarly suggested that the situation for his faith had improved in Russia during the 2000s: “The more people see us, the more understandable we become to them (. . .) People see that we have lived here for so long, haven’t done anything bad, and are completely peaceful guys.”<sup>34</sup> Belov, Bendas, and Frolov all stressed that the law enforcement agencies now deal promptly and efficiently with complaints of threats to their communities.

While he likewise could not recall any recent violent attacks on Protestants, Vladimir Ryakhovsky of the Slavic Center for Law and Justice pointed to increased efforts to stoke religious intolerance, including in the media.<sup>35</sup> In Chelyabinsk, Pastor Aleksandr Filippov told Sibireva that his evangelical Cornerstone Church had experienced no acts of violence or threats of violence. However, he also pointed to “occasional flare-ups” in media hostility toward evangelicals; currently, he thought, due to their involvement in the recent political changes in Ukraine.<sup>36</sup> Frolov similarly noted that there were “constant sharply critical publications,” if not actual violence, directed against Hare Krishnas.

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31. The constituent units with higher rates of reported violence are: Belgorod region, Kemerovo region, Krasnodar region, Moscow city, Moscow region, Novgorod region, Rostov-on-Don region, Sverdlovsk region, Vladimir region, Voronezh region, and Yaroslavl region. For regions where violent incidents or threats of violence have been reported, the average rate differs for Jehovah’s Witnesses and the other faith groups considered here.

32. Sergei Belov, aide to the chair for external relations of the Union of Evangelical Christian-Baptists of Russia, telephone interview with Olga Sibireva, April 21, 2017.

33. Konstantin Bendas, assistant to the leading bishop of the Russian Union of Christians of the Evangelical-Pentecostal Faith, telephone interview with Olga Sibireva, May 2, 2017.

34. Mikhail Frolov, representing lawyer and member of the Society for Krishna Consciousness, telephone interview with Olga Sibireva, April 21, 2017.

35. Vladimir Ryakhovsky, lawyer at the Slavic Center for Law and Justice, telephone interview with Olga Sibireva, December 29, 2016.

36. Aleksandr Filippov, pastor of Cornerstone Church, interview with Olga Sibireva, Chelyabinsk, November 28, 2016.

Bendas suggested the number of anti-Protestant publications had fallen significantly in recent years, perhaps due to the 2013 law outlawing “offence to religious feelings”: “The public reaction to that law was mixed, but it does contain protective measures.”

## MOTIVATIONS FOR VIOLENCE: JEHOVAH’S WITNESSES

Of the 199 attacks against Jehovah’s Witnesses, the victims’ faith was discernibly the motivation in 74 incidents. In 38 cases, it was apparent only from the circumstances of the attack, as when Jehovah’s Witnesses manned a literature stall, when they introduced themselves as Jehovah’s Witnesses while preaching door-to-door, or in arson against identifiable Jehovah’s Witness worship premises. However, a few incidents suggest that attacks may sometimes be due to confusion or ignorance regarding the victims’ identity. In 2010, for instance, it was unclear whether a swastika daubed on Jehovah’s Witness premises in Rostov-on-Don region was connected with the Nazis’ ill-treatment of Jehovah’s Witnesses, which is not well known in Russia. In 2015, a man who kicked and pushed a female Jehovah’s Witness in Karelia republic mistakenly claimed she was a Scientologist.

In four cases, attackers criticized the victims’ faith, but it was unclear whether the Jehovah’s Witness faith specifically was meant. In the 2014 incident in Vologda region in which a teenage Jehovah’s Witness was threatened with rape and forced to drink vodka, for example, the attackers’ demand was that he “recant his faith.” In three cases, attackers stated that their hostility was toward Jehovah’s Witnesses specifically; in one example, a Cossack who threw a brick at a Jehovah’s Witness in Krasnodar region in 2014 demanded that “all Jehovahists must be destroyed,” using a Soviet-era term for Jehovah’s Witnesses. In a further three cases, attackers’ actions were directed against non-Orthodox, but it was unclear whether they knew their victims were Jehovah’s Witnesses. In 2013, for example, graffiti on premises used by Jehovah’s Witnesses in Tula region merely exclaimed, “Orthodoxy or death!,” itself a slogan banned as extremist in Russia.<sup>37</sup>

Yet most striking of all was that attackers in 15 cases explicitly motivated their actions as against a “sect” or “sectarians.” The following are examples from recent years:

- In 2010 in Volgograd region, a government official insisted to Jehovah’s Witnesses that the River Don area had always been Orthodox, and “we do not wish to put up with any sects.”
- In 2011 in Oryol region, an attacker who pointed a gun at the heads of Jehovah’s Witnesses shouted, “Get out, sectarians!”
- In 2012 in Tambov region, relatives of a woman who had become interested in the Jehovah’s Witnesses accused them of “zombifying” her and called them “sectarians” and “witches.” Police officers summoned to the altercation also referred to the Jehovah’s Witnesses as a “sect.”
- In 2013 in Moscow region, members of a group who punched and kicked a young Jehovah’s Witness until he lost consciousness shouted, “Look what must be done with sectarians!”

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37. “Federal List of Extremist Materials no. 865,” Ministry of Justice of Russia, <http://minjust.ru/ru/extremist-materials>.

- In 2015 in Tver region, an Orthodox youth group seizing religious literature from local Jehovah's Witnesses called them a "totalitarian sect."

## MOTIVATIONS FOR VIOLENCE: OTHER FAITHS

Of the 66 attacks identified against the other faiths considered here, the victims' faith was discernibly the motivation in 38 incidents.

There was some variation for the different faith groups. In two of the four incidents reported against alternative Orthodox jurisdictions, the motivation was clearly nonmembership of the Moscow Patriarchate. In 2004, a group threatening to destroy the church of one such community in Stavropol region insisted it should be subordinate to the local Moscow Patriarchate bishop.<sup>38</sup> In 2006, a group threatening to kill members of a similar community in Krasnodar region if they did not stop collecting donations at a local market called them "accursed schismatics."

In two of the five attacks reported against Hare Krishnas—both perpetrated by Cossacks in Krasnodar region in 2010—non-Orthodox identity was clearly the motivation. In the first, a Krishna devotee was told he was a "traitor to the native faith" and should be killed. In the second, another devotee was dragged to a nearby Moscow Patriarchate church and told he did not belong on "Orthodox soil."

Of the 55 attacks reported against Protestants, the victims' faith was discernibly the motivation in 34 incidents. As with the Jehovah's Witnesses, this was sometimes apparent only from the circumstances of the attack, as when Protestants were preaching in public, manning literature stalls, or when police raids targeted their worship services. In a few cases, attacks occurred before or after large-scale religious events. In 2004, for example, an explosion ripped through a Baptist church in Tula on the eve of a major religious conference, hospitalizing two with serious burns. Police claimed a gas leak was responsible, yet no gas was detected, and the church's gas equipment survived the blast intact.<sup>39</sup> Also in 2004, arson destroyed a house church in Moscow region used by the same Baptist organization. This occurred a few weeks after riot police broke up a large worship event hosted by the Baptists on nearby private land, insisting, "You will not pray to God here!"<sup>40</sup>

In some cases, incidents of violence or threatened violence against Protestants were clearly stated as being due to victims' specific beliefs. In 2004, for example, an anonymous leaflet circulating in Kursk region urged residents to

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38. "Dokument: Otkrytoe pis'mo Prikhodskogo soveta khrama Rozhdestva Ioanna Predtechi v s. Yutsa Stravropol'skogo kraya (IPTs(R)) o razgrome khrama," Portal Credo, December 22, 2004, <http://www.portal-credo.ru/site/print.php?act=news&id=29480>.

39. "Vzorvan Dom molitvy Tul'skoi tserkvi MSTs EkHB," International Council of Churches of Evangelical Christian-Baptists, January 14, 2004, <http://iucecb.com/news/20040114-0903>; January 30, 2004, <http://www.iucecb.com/news/20040130-0327>.

40. Ibid.; "Antikonstitutsionnaya aktsiya vlastey protiv MSTs EkHB," International Council of Churches of Evangelical Christian-Baptists, August 27, 2004, <http://iucecb.com/news/20040829-2220>; "Sozhzhen molitvennyy dom MSTs EkHB," International Council of Churches of Evangelical Christian-Baptists, September 14, 2004, <http://iucecb.com/news/20040915-0507>.

Hit the Baptists!!! Who are they? Traitors to the Orthodox faith. Rogues knocking youth off the true path. Agents of the U.S. secret services in Russia, accomplices of terrorists who shoot at our children! A Russian cannot be a Baptist! Due to the connivance of the authorities, members of a worldwide Baptist organization have a secure network of agents in our country. This is a disgrace and danger to Russia. Let's sweep this scum out of our Kursk!!!

Non-Orthodox identity appears the focus of several attacks on Protestants. In 2005 in Khanty-Mansiisk Autonomous region, for example, the man who fired a warning shot before aiming his gun at a Pentecostal bishop stated he was Orthodox and threatened to shoot all non-Orthodox. In 2010 in Khabarovsk region, a village administration chief led a gang who beat up a Baptist pastor and deacon; the chief had earlier warned that he would not tolerate any non-Orthodox in his village.<sup>41</sup> As with the Jehovah's Witnesses, however, there is some scope for confusion or ignorance regarding victims' religious identity. In an apparent failure to distinguish Protestants from Russian Orthodox, for example, a gang who beat up Baptist missionaries in the historically Buddhist republic of Tuva in 2002 claimed that the Tuvans had their own god, while the missionaries' was "the god of the Russians."

As with the Jehovah's Witnesses, attackers in 10 cases stated their actions were directed against a "sect" or "sectarians." Graffiti on both a Pentecostal church in Saratov region in 2005 and on Hare Krishna worship premises in Komi republic in 2011 warned that these were "sects." The youths who broke up a Pentecostal Easter concert in Kemerovo region in 2006 and beat up church members termed them "sectarians"; relatives supporting the attackers also claimed Pentecostals were "sectarians who should be fought against."

## HOW DID THE HOSTILITY TOWARD "SECTS" ARISE?

Of a total 112 incidents of violence and threatened violence in which the attackers' motivation was unmistakably faith-related, 25 (22 percent) featured explicit reference to "sects" or "sectarians." This was by far the most common explanation for violence articulated. In all but one case (Hare Krishnas), the terms were directed against Jehovah's Witnesses and Protestants.

While they may also be used in a neutral manner to describe an offshoot from an established faith, in Russian, the terms *sekta* ("sect") and *sektanty* ("sectarians") carry the negative connotations of the English word "cult." The immediate context for their use against particular religious believers is the backlash that followed the introduction of full religious freedom during the demise of the USSR.

Soviet and Russian Federation laws on freedom of conscience adopted in 1990, as well as Russia's 1993 Constitution, made all religious communities equal before the law.<sup>42</sup> The Russian Orthodox

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41. "V Khabarovskom krae chinovnik nakinulsya s kulakami na sluzhiteley tserkvi evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov," Russian Union of Evangelical Christian-Baptists, March 10, 2010, <http://baptist.org.ru/news/korotko/view/article/96832>.

42. "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations," USSR law no. 1689-1, October 1, 1990, Article 5; "On Freedom of Confession," RSFSR law no. 267-1, October 25, 1990, Article 10; Constitution of the Russian Federation, December 12, 1993, Article 14.2.

Church (Moscow Patriarchate) resisted the open religious pluralism that resulted. A resolution of the Church's 1994 Bishops' Council, for example, slammed "new religious movements" and "pseudo-religious sects."<sup>43</sup> Some faith groups specified by the resolution—the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and the Unification Church (colloquially and derogatorily known as Moonies)—were indeed novelties. In his address to the 1994 Council, however, then-Patriarch Aleksii II condemned others present in the Russian Empire prior to 1917: Lutherans, Methodists, and the Salvation Army, whose "'soldiers' stand guard at railway stations around the clock, giving aid to sick and homeless children."<sup>44</sup>

Junior clerics and lay activists went on to draw up effective blacklists of groups popularly referred to as "sects." Foreignness and alleged harmfulness continued to be the key criteria for inclusion, but consensus over who belonged in the category was lacking. Published in 1997 by the Moscow Patriarchate's missionary department, *New Religious Organizations of Destructive and Occult Character* contained more than 80 groups, among whom the best known not mentioned above by the Church's 1994 resolution are the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Baha'i faith.<sup>45</sup> Also in 1997, the notorious nationalist politician Vladimir Zhirinovskiy coauthored *Pseudo-Christian Religious Organizations of Russia*. This featured only five faith groups—the Jehovah's Witnesses being most familiar—alongside photos of Zhirinovskiy with Patriarch Aleksii II, a large Orthodox icon, and a choir of fair-haired children.<sup>46</sup>

The by-now-familiar faith groups appeared alongside hundreds of obscure names in *New Religious Organizations of Russia of Destructive, Occult and Neo-Pagan Character*, a multivolume work published in 1999. The author, Igor Kulikov, is a pseudonym for Igor Ponkin, better known as coauthor of the expert study used against members of feminist art collective Pussy Riot during their trial in 2012.<sup>47</sup> The Moscow Patriarchate's most prominent anti-"sect" campaigner, however, remains Aleksandr Dvorkin. Utilizing lecture material from the previous decade, his 2002 work *Sectarian Study: Totalitarian Sects* similarly catalogs marginal religious groups sprinkled with familiar names, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses and Hare Krishnas.<sup>48</sup> Dvorkin's significant addition, however, are "neo-Pentecostals," referring to congregations within the Pentecostal movement worshipping in a charismatic style. A fellow anti-sect campaigner, Orthodox priest Father

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43. "Opredelenie Arkhierarchyeskogo Sobora 1994 goda 'O psevdokhristianskikh sektakh, neoyazychestve i okkul'tizme,'" *Patriarchia*, January 18, 2009, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/530422.html>.

44. "Doklad Patriarkha Moskovskogo i vseya Rusi Alekseya II," *Arkhierarchyeskii Sobor Russkoy Pravoslavnoy Tserkvi 1994 goda*, (Moscow: Publishing House of the Moscow Patriarchate, 1995), 75–77.

45. *Novye religioznye organizatsii Rossii destruktivnogo i okkul'tnogo kharaktera* (Belgorod: Missionerskii Otdel Moskovskogo Patriarkhata Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, 1997).

46. Vladimir V. Zhirinovskiy and Nina V. Krivel'skaya, *Psevdokhristianskie religioznye organizatsii Rossii: informatsionno-analiticheskoe issledovanie* (Moscow: Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, 1997).

47. Igor Kulikov, *Novye Religioznye Organizatsii Rossii Destruktivnogo, Okkul'tnogo i Neoyazycheskogo Kharaktera: Spravochnik* (Moscow: Palomnik, 1999); Mark Feygin, "Ekspertiza Troitskogo-Abramenkovoy-Ponkina po delu 'Pussy Riot,'" *LiveJournal*, June 25, 2012, <http://mark-feygin.livejournal.com/89127.html>.

48. Alexander L. Dvorkin, *Sektovedenie. Totalitarnye sekty. Opyt sistematicheskogo issledovaniya* (Nizhniy Novgorod: Publishing house of the brotherhood in the name of St. Prince Alexander Nevsky, 2002).



Oleg (Stenyaev), goes further by applying the “totalitarian” epithet to Seventh-Day Adventists, Baptists, and all Pentecostals.<sup>49</sup>

It must be stressed that, while accusing such groups of aggression, the Moscow Patriarchate did not advocate a violent response; its 1994 Council resolution even insisted that “opposition to false views must not be accompanied by an intolerant attitude” toward those holding them. Church attempts since to counter the activities of so-called sects have usually been informational. Sometimes they are confined solely to doctrinal differences, as in leaflets produced by a parish in Voronezh.<sup>50</sup>

However, advocacy of this approach is not necessarily heeded. Alongside peaceful methods of opposing “sects” such as Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormons, popular Moscow priest Father Dimitry Smirnov advised a concerned Orthodox parishioner to “gather the people together, smash that sect, go there, understand?” during a TV phone-in in 2012.<sup>51</sup> In an interview the same year on national television, the same priest agreed that a brick thrown through the window of “sectarians” “can sometimes have an effect.”<sup>52</sup> While not explicitly calling for violence, some activists also describe “sects” in such harshly negative terms that violent treatment might appear a fitting response. Dvorkin associate Aleksandr Kuzmin, for example, authored a leaflet circulating in Khabarovsk in 2008 that accused Hare Krishna devotees of drug and arms trafficking, ritual murder, and child abuse.<sup>53</sup>

## OTHER “TRADITIONAL” FAITHS’ USE OF ANTI-SECT TERMINOLOGY

Anti-sect campaigners’ terminology has focused on perceived threats to the Russian Orthodox Church from alternative interpretations of Christianity, and so relies heavily upon Christian theological argument. Notably, however, this has not prevented such terminology from being adopted by Russia’s state-preferred non-Christian religious leaders in order to counter alternative interpretations of their own faiths. Comically, this can be the case even when the faiths concerned do not insist upon a single correct religious practice, as does Orthodox Christianity. Kremlin-loyal Buddhist leader Damba Aiusheev, for example, has dismissed as “sectarians” Russian adherents of Dzogchen, a Tibetan Buddhist tradition centuries older than, and not in conflict with, his own tradition.<sup>54</sup>

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49. “Protoierey Oleg Stenyaev: Termin ‘totalitarnaya sekta’ s podvokhom,” *Russkaya Liniya*, June 20, 2009, <http://rusk.ru/newsdata.php?idar=183575>.

50. “Pravoslavnyy otvet iegovistam,” “Pravoslavnyy otvet pyatidesyatnikam,” brochures available for download on the website of St. Elijah the Prophet Orthodox Church, Voronezh, <http://prorok-iliya.cerkov.ru/missiya/listovki-i-broshyury/>.

51. “RPTs Smirnov—sobirayte narod, gromite poganye sekty,” YouTube, June 7, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E2S3YDYhh0g>.

52. “Kirpich v okno sektantam vragam sem’i (RPTs),” YouTube, April 17, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=14SPWC0kZ9g>.

53. “Ostorozhno: sekta!,” *Molodaya Gvardiya*, July 28, 2008, <http://www.molgvardia.ru/mg/2008/07/28/975> (accessed April 10, 2009).

54. Hambo Lama Damba Ayusheyev, interview with Geraldine Fagan, Ulan-Ude, October 4, 1999.

Soviet-era Muslim leader Talgat Tadzhuiddin has likewise contrasted his practice of “traditional” Islam with dangerous “heretical-extremist sects” from abroad (despite lapses such as his opening of a new mosque in Nizhny Novgorod region by smashing a bottle of champagne against its walls).<sup>55</sup> Tadzhuiddin has also weighed in on the Russian Orthodox Church’s behalf against Jehovah’s Witnesses, even though Orthodoxy is hardly preferable to the Witnesses’ beliefs from an Islamic perspective (arguably the reverse, given the Witnesses’ rejection of both trinitarian doctrine and icons).<sup>56</sup>

Within Islam, hostile rhetoric similarly juxtaposing “traditional” with “nontraditional” practice underpins violence and threats of violence between adherents of different practices in Russia (see Chapter 7 by Sokolov and Oliker and Chapter 8 by Zhemukhov with Markedonov and Yarlykapov in this volume). We are not aware of any acts of violence against followers of Buddhism due to deviation of their practices from those of state-preferred “traditional” Buddhist leaders, however.

Within Judaism, the opposite situation exists, for purely political reasons. Here, it was a member of the establishment, Soviet-era chief rabbi Adolf Shaevich, who found himself abruptly sidelined in favor of Berel Lazar when Vladimir Putin rose to power in 2000.<sup>57</sup> Lazar, an Italian-born U.S. citizen then speaking halting Russian, represented a form of Judaism then barely present in Russia: Chabad-Lubavitch Hassidism. Shaevich’s misfortune was to be allied with pariah oligarch Vladimir Gusinsky, while Lazar’s backing came from pro-Kremlin oligarchs such as Roman Abramovich.<sup>58</sup> The authors are again unaware of any recent acts of violence against followers of Judaism due to the deviation of their practices from those of establishment Jewish leaders.<sup>59</sup>

## STATE REPRESENTATIVES’ USE OF ANTI-SECT TERMINOLOGY

The anti-sect rhetoric emanating from the Russian Orthodox Church has resonated with some state representatives, typically at the regional level, due to their shared wariness of foreign influence. Occasionally, this attitude is revealed by unguarded comments. In a local state radio interview in 1998, for example, the official dealing with religious affairs in Khakassia republic complained, “America—a sewage ditch—when it was created all sorts of rabble thronged there,

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55. Roman Silant’ev, *Noveyshaya istoriya islamskogo soobshchestva Rossii* (Moscow: Ikhtios, 2005), 445.

56. Irina Vinogradova, “700 chelovek soberutsya na bogoslužhenie zapreshchennoy sekty ‘Svideteli legovy,’” *Novyy Den*, March 31, 2004, [https://urfo.org/ekb/13\\_74745.asp](https://urfo.org/ekb/13_74745.asp).

57. Boris Viner, “Amneziya glavnogo ravvina,” *NG-Religii*, June 14, 2000, [http://www.ng.ru/ng\\_religii/2000-06-14/1\\_amnesia.html](http://www.ng.ru/ng_religii/2000-06-14/1_amnesia.html).

58. Geraldine Fagan, “Russia: Total eclipse of Soviet-era chief rabbi,” *Keston News Service*, July 24, 2001; Guy Chazan, “In Russia, a Top Rabbi Uses Kremlin Ties to Gain Power,” *Wall Street Journal*, May 8, 2007, [http://online.wsj.com/article/SB117858672536595256.html?mod=googlenews\\_wsj](http://online.wsj.com/article/SB117858672536595256.html?mod=googlenews_wsj).

59. This is distinct from violence and threats of violence against practicing Jews by non-Jews—a topic beyond the scope of this article. See, for example, Andrew E. Kramer, “Skinhead Stabs 8 in Attack on Moscow Synagogue,” *New York Times*, January 11, 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/11/international/europe/skinhead-stabs-8-in-attack-on-moscow-synagogue.html>.

and Protestantism and all sorts of nontraditional religions arose from there. These things came here from there.”<sup>60</sup> The equivalent official for Sakha republic told a local news website in 2006 that “a number of foreign states, above all the USA,” wished to weaken Russia “by forming a kind of ‘fifth column,’ nontraditional religious organizations,” the most dangerous being “Jehovah’s Witnesses and charismatic churches of neo-Pentecostals.”<sup>61</sup> In 2002, a Saratov regional official could envisage religious pluralism only as a security risk when suggesting that the registration of 19 religious denominations in his region had divided people into 19 groups, and thus provoked a “hidden civil war.”<sup>62</sup>

Anti-sect campaigners have fueled such concerns. In a 2012 interview with a local newspaper in Perm region, for example, Aleksandr Dvorkin claimed that “the U.S. State Department has an interest in the spread of sectarian activity around the globe (. . .) for the USA, it is a tool of influence and international pressure (. . .) members of sects are active agents of influence.”<sup>63</sup> In a less public example of direct lobbying, Igor Ponkin warned the State Committee for the Affairs of the North in 2000 of a “religious invasion” of the Russian Far East by large numbers of U.S., Canadian, and South Korean preachers, part of a long-term U.S. government plot to seize the region of Russia bordering Alaska, followed by the whole of the Russian Far East.<sup>64</sup>

State concerns over so-called sects have escalated with fears of a Russian analogy to Ukraine’s Orange Revolution of 2004–2005 and Maidan movement of 2013–2014. Sunday Adelaja, the pro-Orange pastor of Kiev’s Embassy of God charismatic church, was deported from Russia in 2006 as he traveled to participate in a TV talk show.<sup>65</sup> His substitute in the show’s polemic with familiar anti-sect campaigner Dvorkin was Aleksandr Dzyuba, the Ukrainian pastor of Moscow’s Embassy of God congregation. Dzyuba too was deported a month before Russia’s 2008 presidential election, when the Kremlin was particularly skittish about Orange-style opposition.<sup>66</sup> A few weeks earlier, FSB officers raiding an Embassy of God Bible school graduation ceremony in Samara region asked participants whether they were planning an Orange Revolution.<sup>67</sup>

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60. Lawrence Uzzell, “Provincial and local officials crack down on Pentecostal church in Abakan,” Keston News Service, March 20, 1998.

61. Elena Tikhonova, “Religiozny skandal kak sredstvo sobstvennogo piara,” *V-Yakutia*, December 14, 2006, <http://www.v-yakutia.ru/?id=4561>.

62. Susanna Oganezova, “Ayatskov pomozhet tserkvi den’gami,” *Izvestiya*, December 1, 2002, <http://izvestia.ru/news/270296>.

63. Yuriy Sofonov, “Ostorozhno: sekty!,” *Zvezda*, September 18, 2012, <http://www.zvezda.perm.ru/newspaper/?pub=8807>.

64. Letter no. 206/6 from M. N. Kuznetsov and I. V. Ponkin, professor and reader of the Russian Academy for State Service, to V. V. Goman, chairman of the State Committee of the Russian Federation for the Affairs of the North, February 28, 2000.

65. “Sandeyu Adeladzhe zapreshchen v’ezd v Rossiyu,” SOVA Center, December 26, 2006, <http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/harassment/intervention/2006/12/d9876/>.

66. Geraldine Fagan, “RUSSIA: Charismatics targeted as would-be Orange Revolutionaries?,” Forum 18 News Service, February 14, 2008, [http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article\\_id=1087](http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1087).

67. Pastor Ivan Semenets of Tolyatti’s Faith Harvest Church (Embassy of God), telephone interview with Geraldine Fagan, February 13, 2008.

In the aftermath of the Maidan protests, a special live TV talk show broadcast on Russia's state Channel 1, *The Evil Spirits of Maidan: Mysticism of Ukraine's Pogrom*, argued (again with prominent participation by Dvorkin) that "sectarians today number among the main wreckers of Ukraine's fragile statehood."<sup>68</sup> A 2016 documentary broadcast on local TV in Kaluga region similarly warned that "Radical Pentecostals and charismatics and other sectarians" were behind the Maidan protests. Its presenter asked fearfully whether the million "sectarians" in Russia—"Imagine, what an army!"—could do the same.<sup>69</sup>

## MEDIA USE OF ANTI-SECT TERMINOLOGY

Anti-sect rhetoric has featured extensively in Russian media, particularly at the local level. Searches of *Eastview* and *Integrum* databases of Russia-based media reveal that the term "totalitarian sect"—selected to exclude neutral references—appeared first in 1994, and only widely after 1997.<sup>70</sup> This coincides with the Moscow Patriarchate's formal attack on "sects" at its 1994 Council mentioned above, and lobbying for restrictions on religious freedom culminating in a new law on religion in 1997. According to the *Integrum* search of over 4,000 publications, media use of "totalitarian sect" rose from just seven instances in 1994 to a peak of 1,851 in 2007. The term's absence during the period of maximum religious freedom in Russia—late perestroika to the mid-1990s—further suggests that it did not emanate from grassroots public concern.

In one of the first examples of typical media coverage, the St. Petersburg edition of *Vedomosti* suggested in 1997 that "destructive sects" equaled "real spiritual expansion, the deliberate introduction of an alien ideology."<sup>71</sup> Characteristically dramatic headlines of such articles have included: "Opium for Mass Consumption," "Warning—Expansion!" and "Totalitarian Sects Threaten Society." In the early 2000s, media across Russia publicized events featuring Moscow Patriarchate clerics and/or anti-sect activists—typically Dvorkin—alongside sympathetic state representatives. In 2003, for example, *Pravda* reported on the participation of interior ministry representatives and Dvorkin at a Moscow roundtable on "Totalitarian Sects: Weapon of Mass Destruction."<sup>72</sup> In 2008, a newspaper in Chuvashia republic covered Dvorkin's meeting with local clergy, police, and students,

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68. "Rossiya 1 Pryamoy Efir 'Zlye dukhi maydana. Mistika ukrainskogo pogroma,'" YouTube, March 17, 2014, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y\\_sTIEPe-XU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y_sTIEPe-XU).

69. "Glavnoe: Otkrytyy pokaz 'Lovtsy dush,'" Nika TV, November 17, 2016, <http://nikatv.ru/tv/programs/glavnoe/u1ui2MDjhSuv8vHAOWme>.

70. Authors' searches of the term "totalitarian sect" in *Eastview* databases of 211 Russian regional newspapers, governmental publications, and military and security publications, December 1, 2016; *Integrum* search of the term "totalitarian sect" in Russian media databases of 4,103 publications, including national and regional newspapers and news agencies, June 6, 2010.

71. Aleksandr Rabkovskiy, "S chuzhim ustavom v nash 'monastyr' ne khodyat!," *SPB Vedomosti*, August 21, 1997, <https://dlib.eastview.com/browse/doc/2157155>.

72. "Rossiya zanimaet tret'e mesto po chislu totalitarnykh sekt," *Pravda*, October 29, 2003, <http://www.pravda.ru/news/society/29-10-2003/15944-0/>.

where he singled out Jehovah's Witnesses and "neo-Pentecostals" as dangerous "sects."<sup>73</sup> In 2014, *Ostrova*, a news agency covering Russia's Pacific region, highlighted the vice governor of Sakhalin region's greeting to participants—including Dvorkin and senior Moscow Patriarchate clerics—at a local conference on "Totalitarian Sects and Civil Society: Current Challenges to Spiritual Security."<sup>74</sup>

While there is no evidence of their direct incitement, media coverage and/or special events directed against "sects" have repeatedly preceded incidents of violence or threats of violence toward those so described. In Sverdlovsk region in 2004, for example, attackers who beat up Pentecostal church members said they had read about the "sectarians" in the local press.<sup>75</sup> In Chelyabinsk region in 2005, an arson attack on a Baptist church came three nights after local television news featured a press conference organized by regional official Yekaterina Gorina. The press conference warned of the dangers of "totalitarian sects" accompanied by footage of worship at the same Baptist church.<sup>76</sup> In Penza region in 2008, the gang who brandished a gun at and then beat up a Pentecostal pastor shouted, "You must be destroyed! Sectarians have overrun the place!" The attack came several weeks after the regional administration held a well-publicized meeting on "the sectarian factor" in local politics and society, and a local press article accused "sects" such as Pentecostals of trickery.<sup>77</sup>

Sometimes anti-sect rhetoric precedes repressive state action, and then anonymous violent action. In Moscow, the Emmanuel Pentecostal Church's previously successful planning application for a new house of worship stalled abruptly after Dvorkin, representing a Patriarchate-affiliated "sectarian studies" department, wrote to local government officials in 2001 claiming Emmanuel to be an "American neo-Pentecostal sect" engaged in "trance occult-mystic practices" dangerous to mental health.<sup>78</sup> Almost identical language later appeared in a local district newspaper's explanation of why officials decided not to support the construction project.<sup>79</sup> Emmanuel bought a former workers' club in a different Moscow neighborhood in

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73. N. Titova, "Sekty prikryvayutsya dobrymi delami," *Sovetskaya Chuvashiya*, March 4, 2008, <https://dlib.eastview.com/browse/doc/13546746>.

74. "V Yuzhno-Sakhalinske prokhodit mezhdunarodnaya konferentsiya, posvyashchennaya deyatelnosti totalitarnykh sekt," *Ostrova*, October 22, 2014, <http://www.tia-ostrova.ru/?div=news&id=301930>.

75. Pastor Andrei Berdishchev of Love of Christ Pentecostal Church, interview with Geraldine Fagan, Asbest, July 18, 2004.

76. "V paskhal'nyuyu noch' sovershen podzhog baptistskoi tserkvi v Chelyabinske", Portal Credo, May 9, 2005, <http://www.portal-credo.ru/site/?act=news&id=33195>. Human rights official Gorina also wrote a 1999 local newspaper article critical of Mormon rental of school premises for Sunday worship (entitled "Elders' from America 'Bomb' a School") and personally disrupted worship by a local congregation of deaf Jehovah's Witnesses in 2000.

77. "V Penzenskoy oblasti pod vidom bor'by s 'sektantami' nachali borot'sya s protestantskimi tserkviami i izbyvat' pastorov," Slavic Center for Law and Justice, April 23, 2008, [http://www.sclj.ru/news/detail.php?print=Y&SECTION\\_ID=169&ELEMENT\\_ID=1862](http://www.sclj.ru/news/detail.php?print=Y&SECTION_ID=169&ELEMENT_ID=1862).

78. Letter from Aleksandr Dvorkin to head of Vernadsky Prospekt administration Vladimir Ryazanov and chair of district assembly Valentina Starkova, March 6, 2001.

79. Konstantin Mayorov, "Pyatidesyatnikov obideli . . .," *NG-Religii*, December 11, 2001, [http://www.ng.ru/ng\\_religii/2001-12-11/5\\_temple.html](http://www.ng.ru/ng_religii/2001-12-11/5_temple.html).

2002, but was refused state permission to use it. This building was gutted in a suspected arson attack in 2007.<sup>80</sup>

In some cases, it appears anti-sect campaigners and state representatives not only share an ideological platform but actively collaborate to further it, including by co-opting local media. In 2008 in Kurgan region, for example, FSB officers interrogated a member of a Baptist church for several hours before attending the church's evening worship service. A local crime news program later broadcast footage secretly shot at the service, accompanied by commentary alleging that the "terrible Baptist sect" beats children and lives off illegal business.<sup>81</sup>

Occasionally, there is no attempt to conceal such collaboration. As soon as a Moscow court ruled to ban the city's Jehovah's Witness organization in 2004, Dvorkin was the first person to warmly embrace procuracy representative Tatyana Kondratyeva in the courtroom. The procuracy's original 1996 investigation had been initiated due to a complaint from a local group named the Moscow Committee for the Salvation of Youth from Pseudo-religions and Totalitarian Sects.<sup>82</sup> In 2011, the official website of Arkhangelsk regional government announced the deputy governor's participation with Dvorkin and the local Moscow Patriarchate bishop in a press conference to introduce a joint campaign against "sects," including Jehovah's Witnesses, Hare Krishnas and "neo-Pentecostals."<sup>83</sup> In Sverdlovsk region in 2009, a government official investigating an "active member of the Jehovah's Witnesses" wrote directly to a Moscow Patriarchate archbishop "requesting the Blessing of Your Eminence in the receipt of information from the missionary department about existing sects of a totalitarian nature within Your diocese."<sup>84</sup>

## "SECTARIAN EXTREMISM"

Anti-sect campaigners have had by far the most success in winning the state over to their agenda by depicting their targets as extremists. As we have seen, the state's formal designation of Jehovah's Witness literature and organizations as extremist heralded an exponential rise in violent attacks against Jehovah's Witnesses, in turn perceived by the public as criminals.

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80. Geraldine Fagan, "RUSSIA: Five-day prison for 'illegally' demanding believers' rights," Forum 18 News Service, June 13, 2005, [http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article\\_id=583](http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=583); "RUSSIA: Growing restrictions on rental by Protestants," Forum 18 News Service, August 19, 2005, [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=633](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=633).

81. Geraldine Fagan, "RUSSIA: Unregistered Baptists pressured," *Forum 18 News Service*, September 22, 2008, [http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article\\_id=1190](http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1190); "Vlasti Kurganskoy oblasti (RF) ispol'zuyut SMI dlya nastraivaniya naseleniya protiv veruyushchikh grazhdan MSTs EKHB," International Council of Churches of Evangelical Christian-Baptists, August 27, 2008, <http://iucecb.com/news/20080828-0129>.

82. Geraldine Fagan, "RUSSIA: Full Moscow court decision slams JW's," Forum 18 News Service, May 25, 2004, [http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article\\_id=327](http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=327).

83. "V regione nachata shirokaya kampaniya po aktivnomu protivodeystviyu sektam," Arkhangelsk Regional Government, November 14, 2011, <https://old.dvinaland.ru/prcenter/release/25739/>.

84. Letter no. 11270 from Kamyshlova Municipal District police chief Vladimir Shkayev to Archbishop Dimitri (Kapalin) of Tobolsk and Tyumen, August 26, 2009.

A Moscow Patriarchate representative proposed identifying “totalitarian sects” as extremist as early as 2002, when Russia adopted its Law On Combating Extremist Activity.<sup>85</sup> Also that year, a report on religious extremism drafted by a federal government working group coordinated by Minister Without Portfolio Vladimir Zorin and acting head of Chechnya Akhmad Kadyrov noted ongoing efforts to counter “totalitarian sects and organizations of a destructive character,” including Jehovah’s Witnesses and Pentecostals.<sup>86</sup>

The Zorin-Kadyrov report did not alter legislation, but the association of “sects” with “extremism” continued to gain traction. In 2005, Saratov region’s Moscow Patriarchate diocese and state university held a joint conference on “Neo-Pentecostal Sects in Russia: Threat of Religious Extremism.”<sup>87</sup> Asked to comment on a proposal to “defend citizens from religious sects” in September 2008, Valery Fedorov of the Federation Council thought it would reduce the spread of “sectarian and extremist ideology.” The same month, Duma speaker Lyubov Sliska suggested co-opting the educational services of “our main Russian confessions” to eradicate “sectarian extremism.”<sup>88</sup> All this preceded the first prosecutions of Jehovah’s Witnesses for extremism.

Isolated attempts to pursue others who have experienced violence as “sects” using the extremism law—including Hare Krishnas and evangelical Protestants—have so far met with little success.<sup>89</sup>

Restrictions on “missionary activity” in the so-called Yarovaya legislation of July 2016, however, may turn out to function in the same way the extremism law has against the Jehovah’s Witnesses. By also casting as lawbreakers other faith groups regarded as “sects,” particularly evangelical Protestants, these provisions could in the future similarly legitimize public violence against them. The Yarovaya provisions are already placing ordinary Protestant activity outside the law. A Baptist organization in Voronezh region effectively became illegal in late 2016, when local procuracy officials ordered it to cease functioning for as long as its lack of state registration put its public preaching at odds with the Yarovaya legislation.<sup>90</sup> In at least two cases, courts have ordered the confiscation and destruction of evangelical Christian literature distributed in violation of the

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85. Nikolay Mezintsev, “V Rossii net religioznogo ekstremizma,” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, November 20, 2002, [http://www.ng.ru/style/2002-11-20/8\\_duma.html](http://www.ng.ru/style/2002-11-20/8_duma.html).

86. “Na chto obidelis’ katoliki,” *Gazeta*, December 12, 2002, <https://www.gazeta.ru/2002/12/18/vrezkreligii.shtml>.

87. Yuliya Dombrovskaya, “Nuzhna zashchita ot sektantov,” *Radonezh*, May 31, 2005, <http://www.radonezh.ru/monitoring/10356.html>.

88. “Bez propagandistskikh usilii Rossii nikogda ne pobedit’ sektantov,” *Russkaya Liniya*, September 11, 2008, <http://www.rusk.ru/newsdata.php?idar=178455>.

89. Geraldine Fagan, “RUSSIA: Catholic and Protestant ‘extremism’?,” Forum 18 News Service, November 25, 2013, [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1899](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1899); Geraldine Fagan, “RUSSIA: Alternatives to ‘extremism’ charges to punish freedom of religion or belief,” Forum 18 News Service, December 2, 2013, [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1902](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1902).

90. Ekaterina Treshchikova, “V Voronezhskoy oblasti nelegal’nye baptisty popytalis’ navyazat’ gorozhanam svoi idealy,” RIA Voronezh, December 1, 2016, <https://riavr.ru/news/v-voronezhskoy-oblasti-nelegalnye-baptisty-popytalis-navyazat-gorozhanam-svoi-idealy/>.

Yarovaya legislation.<sup>91</sup> Destruction of outlawed religious literature is already a feature of extremism prosecutions.<sup>92</sup>

As in the mid-1990s, there are once again calls for special controls on “sects.” In November 2016, for example, Federation Council senator Elena Mizulina—seated alongside Dvorkin—called for legislation against “destructive social organizations and religious sects.”<sup>93</sup> The pair has a new ally in Communist deputy Sergei Gavrilov, appointed chair of the Duma’s committee dealing with religious affairs following the 2016 parliamentary elections. In late 2015, Gavrilov vowed to outlaw Seventh-Day Adventists and other “sects,” whom he considers to be “a serious threat to the national security of Russia.” Gavrilov has also claimed the Maidan protests were “in large part the initiative of militant groups of sectarians. Ukraine is a graphic example of how the state lost control over the activity of foreign totalitarian sects and essentially collapsed.”<sup>94</sup>

In February 2017, a working group headed by Mizulina was formed in the Federation Council with the express purpose of introducing “destructive sect” as a legislative term.<sup>95</sup> Besides government officials, the group’s members include Dvorkin and official representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate (but no other faith groups), as well as specialists in areas such as counterextremism, defense, and psychiatry.<sup>96</sup>

Developments in one of the separatist, pro-Russian areas of eastern Ukraine are worth noting here, as they point to what may happen if anti-sect sentiments have free rein. The 2014 Constitution of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People’s Republic declared Orthodoxy to be that territory’s “primary and prevailing” faith—the same terminology used by the late Russian Empire—and endorsed opposition to “religious sects.”<sup>97</sup> Local Protestants have since reported seizure of their

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91. “Vo Vladivostoke sud postanovil konfiskovat’ i unichtozhit’ teksty Biblii v russkom i angliyskom perevodakh,” SOVA Center, December 27, 2016, <http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/harassment/discrimination/2016/12/d36101/>; Victoria Arnold, “RUSSIA: Alleged ‘missionary activity’ prosecutions continue,” Forum 18 News Service, March 1, 2017, [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2261](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2261).

92. Victoria Arnold, “RUSSIA: 65 known ‘extremist’ religious literature cases in 2014,” Forum 18 News Service, March 31, 2015, [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2052](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2052).

93. “Mizulina predlagaet razrabotat’ proekt zakona po bor’be s destruktivnymi sektami,” TASS, November 17, 2016, <http://tass.ru/obschestvo/3791640>.

94. “Sergey Gavrilov: Zapretim sekty na urovne zakona,” *KPRF*, September 24, 2015, <https://kprf.ru/dep/gosduma/activities/146833.html>; Sergey Gavrilov, “Sektam rasstavayat seti!,” *Russkaya Narodnaya Liniya*, February 22, 2016, [http://ruskline.ru/analitika/2016/02/22/sektam\\_rasstavayat\\_seti/](http://ruskline.ru/analitika/2016/02/22/sektam_rasstavayat_seti/).

95. “Rabochaya gruppa Soveta Federatsii vo glave s Mizulinoy namerena borot’sya s sektami,” SOVA Center, February 13, 2017, <https://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/authorities/legal-regulation/2017/02/d36384/>.

96. “Sostav rabochey gruppy Soveta Federatsii po razrabotke zakonodatel’sstva o sektakh,” Slavic Centre for Law and Justice, March 7, 2017, [http://www.sclj.ru/news/detail.php?SECTION\\_ID=470&ELEMENT\\_ID=7509](http://www.sclj.ru/news/detail.php?SECTION_ID=470&ELEMENT_ID=7509).

97. Geraldine Fagan, “Ukraine’s Rebels Worship the Past, Not God,” *Moscow Times*, August 13, 2014, <https://themoscowtimes.com/articles/ukraines-rebels-worship-the-past-not-god-38317>; “Preamble, Articles 9.2, 21,” Constitution of the Donetsk People’s Republic, May 14, 2014, last accessed on May 24, 2014, <http://dnr-news.com/konstituciya-doneckoy-narodnoy-respubliki.html>. The text purporting to be the May 14, 2014, Constitution on the latest DNR website differs significantly: <http://dnrsovet.su/zakonodatelnaya-deyatelnost/konstitutsiya/>. The original text is at <http://worldconstitutions.ru/?p=1094>.



church buildings, as well as the Donetsk Christian University, previously among the largest Protestant institutions of higher education in the former USSR. In one particularly grave incident in 2014, four Pentecostal men known for their active mission work were reportedly kidnapped by separatists in the town of Slavyansk and later found shot dead, their bodies showing signs of severe beatings.<sup>98</sup>

## SOVIET PRECEDENT

We have seen how the immediate context for violence and threats of violence against faith groups regarded as alien “sects” was the introduction of full religious freedom during the demise of the USSR. Ironically, however, the groups so targeted are not in fact part of a perestroika-era foreign influx. The Jehovah’s Witness communities scattered across Russia are the consequence not of recent Western mission, but Stalin’s 1951 “Operation North” mass deportation of Jehovah’s Witnesses from the European fringes of the former Russian Empire, their home since the late nineteenth century. The families of current Russian Jehovah’s Witness representatives Vasily Kalin and Yaroslav Sivulsky were exiled to Siberia as part of this operation.<sup>99</sup> The Pentecostal movement in Russia also spans generations: the Pentecostal grandfather of Pentecostal leader Bishop Sergei Ryakhovsky, himself now a grandfather, spent terms as a religious prisoner under Stalin, Khrushchev, and Brezhnev.<sup>100</sup> During the early 1980s, some 50 Krishna devotees, including current Hare Krishna leader Sergei Zuyev (Radkhar Damodar), were repeatedly incarcerated in labor camps and psychiatric hospitals. Two Krishna devotees died in detention in 1986.<sup>101</sup>

Current aggressive treatment of these groups in Russia is in fact a throwback to Soviet practice, as acknowledged by Father Dimitry Smirnov in his television appearance on the eve of Putin’s 2012 inauguration: “We want our president to make things as they were in the Soviet Union, so that not a single filthy sect can operate here (. . .) earlier they were all in prison.”<sup>102</sup>

Post-Soviet anti-sect activists’ stoking of public hostility toward their targets is especially reminiscent of Soviet propaganda of the Khrushchev era, typified by the 1959 film *The Truth about Sectarian*

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98. Geraldine Fagan, “Putin is pushing the Patriarch to the brink,” *Catholic Herald*, February 19, 2015, <http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/issues/february-20th-2015/putin-is-pushing-the-patriarch-to-the-brink/>; “Secret Protestant Churches in Donetsk: Ukraine’s Religious War,” *Vice News*, <https://news.vice.com/video/secret-protestant-churches-in-donetsk-ukraines-religious-war>.

99. M. Burdo and Sergey Filatov, *Sovremennaya religioznaya zhizn’ Rossii, Opyt sistematicheskogo opisaniya* (Moscow: Logos, 2003), 441; Mikhail I. Odintsov, *Sovet Ministrov SSSR postanovlyayet “Vyselit’ navechno”* (Moscow: Art-Business Center, 2002), 45; Jehovah’s Witness representative Ivan Borshchevsky, interview with Geraldine Fagan, Pyatigorsk, September 30, 2004.

100. Tatyana Titova, “Ministry of Justice grants registration to Pentecostals,” *Keston News Service*, April 30, 1998.

101. Sergei Zuyev (Radkhar Damodar), telephone interview with Geraldine Fagan, March 13, 2006; Oxana Antic, “The Spread of Modern Cults in the USSR,” in *Religious Policy in the Soviet Union*, ed. Sabrina Petra Ramet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 261–266.

102. “RPTs Smirnov—sobirayte narod, gromite poganye sekty,” YouTube, June 7, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E2S3YDYhh0g>.

*Pentecostals*.<sup>103</sup> A 1961 Soviet newsreel, for example, triumphantly announced how the trial of Pentecostal “sect” leaders concluded with them receiving jail terms of up to six years for “preaching a religious teaching not tolerated by society and causing harm to the health of citizens.”<sup>104</sup> Just as for today’s anti-sect campaigners, a local newspaper was the medium of choice to oppose the activity of Protestants in the 1960 film *Storm-clouds over Borsk*, its front-page headline warning “Attention, Sectarians Crawling out of the Darkness!”<sup>105</sup> Also uncannily similar to today’s Russia, the 1962 Soviet film *Young and Green* even featured a scene where a Moscow Patriarchate priest, at first castigated by idealistic Komsomol youths, joins forces with them in “the fight against sectarianism.”<sup>106</sup>

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We have observed that violence against adherents of “nontraditional” faiths in Russia typically follows a pattern. Anti-sect campaigners first propagate aggressive hostility toward “nontraditional” faiths. Local media amplify their views, especially when these campaigners represent, or are peripheral to, the Russian Orthodox Church and/or government agencies. This fuels a public perception that “nontraditional” faiths are anti-Russian and unlawful. When senior government authorities fail to check the spread of this aggressive hostility, they affirm the assumption that “nontraditional” faiths are legitimate targets for violence.

If senior government authorities go on to endorse the pariah status of “nontraditional” faiths by restricting or banning their activity, public aggression is further legitimized, and a significant rise in violent attacks is likely to follow. This is clear from the use of counterextremism legislation against Jehovah’s Witnesses over the past decade. While some other “nontraditional” faiths considered here report an improvement in their situation over the same period, anti-sect campaigners’ unchanged hostility toward them and the initial implementation of 2016 restrictions on “missionary activity” indicate that they are similarly vulnerable.

Anti-sect campaigners typically dismiss international criticism of the Russian state on this issue as confirmation that “nontraditional” faiths are seeking to damage Russia. According to this view, “nontraditional” faiths are symptomatic of Western attempts to undermine Russia in the chaotic years following the Soviet collapse, and are thus naturally defended by the West. In countering this narrative, Western policymakers should be aware that aggressive hostility toward “nontraditional” faiths in Russia is not in fact a reaction to an aspect of post-Soviet democratization, but the persistence of attitudes current in the Soviet period (and even earlier), a time when the faiths concerned were already established in Russia and largely isolated from foreign influence.

With this in mind, we make the following recommendations:

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103. “Pravda o sektantakh pyatidesyatnikakh 1959,” YouTube, December 11, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ftpVXjqDHMg>.

104. “1961 god. Sud nad veruyushimi,” YouTube, June 10, 2009, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j4sF0oLO-\\_4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j4sF0oLO-_4).

105. “Tuchi nad Borskom (1960) Drama,” OK, June 30, 2017, <https://ok.ru/video/322429782677>.

106. “Tserkovno-gos. partnerstvo (smotret’ do kontsa!),” YouTube, October 21, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kGwOyxBKQk8>.

## To Russian state representatives:

- Revise the 2002 Law On Combating Extremist Activity and associated points of the Criminal Code so that “extremism” is contingent upon violence and/or threats of violence. In the meantime, follow the recommendations in this vein contained in the June 28, 2011, plenum resolution of Russia’s Supreme Court.
- Abolish the dysfunctional Federal List of Extremist Materials and annul court rulings banning religious texts based upon dubious “expert analysis.”
- Revoke the 2016 legislation restricting “missionary activity,” which punishes most unauthorized public advocacy of a religious community.
- Ensure that peaceful religious communities are able to function freely, particularly by simplifying registration procedures for local religious associations, with a view to normalizing their status in society.
- Speak and act in clear defense of the rights of “nontraditional” faith communities, particularly when they are subject to violence. While government representatives—including those at the highest level—have repeatedly voiced support for religious freedom in Russia, this has been in general terms and unaccompanied by demonstrative action.
- Refrain from endorsing anti-sect campaigners and so lending them credibility. Prominent such figures have been able to get their writings removed from the Federal List of Extremist Materials (almost impossible for others) and even received state grant funding for their activity.<sup>107</sup>
- Be more alert, and resistant to, violent attacks on followers of “nontraditional” faiths. Incidents such as the repeated threatening at gunpoint of Jehovah’s Witnesses by a government official in Irkutsk region should not go unpunished.
- Refrain from dividing religious organizations into “traditional” and “nontraditional,” as this helps to legitimize vigilante violence against the latter.
- Seek cooperation, not confrontation. We have found the informal practice of regional-level dialogue between government officials and all local religious communities generally positive in countering hostility toward “nontraditional” faiths. Communities typically aloof toward the state in certain areas—such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses regarding military service—have reported positive cooperation with local authorities in other areas, such as voluntary litter collection.

## To Russian educators:

- Emphasize the intrinsic and long-standing religious diversity of Russia in school classes on religious culture and secular ethics, and examine periods of religious persecution.

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107. “Iz federal’nogo spiska ekstremistskikh materialov iz’yata antikrishnaitskaya listovka,” December 25, 2009, SOVA Center, <http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/extremism/counter-extremism/2009/12/d17473/>; “Tsentr religiovedcheskikh issledovaniy im. sv. Irineya Lionskogo poluchit gosudarstvennyy grant na okazanie pomoshchi postradavshim ot ‘totalitarnykh sekt,’” Portal Credo, October 28, 2011, <http://www.portal-credo.ru/site/?act=news&id=87371&cf=>.

- Explain the concept of religious freedom, including with reference to Russia's pre-1917 attempts to enshrine it in law and her 1993 Constitution. Tolerance should be explained as requiring not agreement with others' beliefs, but full respect for the right to hold them. The etiquette of how to peacefully rebuff unwanted efforts at conversion should also be taught.
- Where possible, take older pupils to visit a variety of local places of worship and engage in discussion with their representatives.
- Encourage deeper understanding of pupils' own beliefs and their areas of commonality with and divergence from other faiths, with a view to working out religious disagreements through nonviolent discussion rather than reflexive hostility.

To Russian media:

When reporting on "nontraditional" religious communities:

- Seek authoritative commentary not from the Russian Orthodox Church and associated anti-sect campaigners, but from scholars of religion able to comment from a secular viewpoint.
- Feature the positions of "nontraditional faiths" in addition to representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church.

To policymakers outside Russia:

- Encourage all of the above where possible.
- Closely monitor and publicly condemn violence against "nontraditional" religions. While rarely tried, criticism may be more effective if targeted locally. During 2005, for example, the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe expressed concern directly to local officials over separate incidents of violence suffered by Protestants in Moscow region and Udmurtia republic, with some positive results.
- Encourage grassroots international contact in spheres such as education, media, and law enforcement, with a view to sharing strategies encouraging social cohesion found to be successful outside Russia. We have heard high praise from religious and ethnic minority representatives in Krasnodar, for example, for such an initiative organized in the early 2000s by the Metropolitan Police Service of London (UK).

## SCOPE FOR FURTHER STUDY

Given the sharp deterioration in the legal position of "nontraditional" faiths in Russia during 2016–2017, we believe further study is necessary. This, coupled with an assessment of the impact of the 2016 restrictions on "missionary activity" and the 2017 ban on the Jehovah's Witnesses, would benefit greatly from comparative study outside Russia. We propose an examination of violence toward "nontraditional" faiths in a range of localities with historical experience, religious diversity, and government policy that differs variously from Russia, such as that in Georgia, Germany, and Ukraine.

# Violence and the Defense of “Traditional Values” in the Russian Federation

Irina du Quenoy and Dmitry Dubrovskiy

## INTRODUCTION

Prior to 2012, violence carried out by self-identified members of the Orthodox Christian community in Russia was routinely interpreted by outside observers as stemming from intolerant xenophobia and/or nationalist aspirations. The events of 2012, however, introduced a new element into the picture that has yet to be assessed in the literature. Namely, that year saw the adoption of government policy emphasizing the defense of “traditional values” in the face of perceived threats from a secularized West, a policy embodied both in legislation aimed at protecting said values and in official federal-level documents outlining the regime’s governing priorities.<sup>1</sup> Since then, it has become increasingly clear that at least some instances of what would previously have been simply identified as “religious violence” (whether Orthodox or otherwise) can be understood through the lens of the defense of “traditional values.” This paper is, we believe, the first attempt to provide such an analysis, focusing on the way in which this happens in the specifically Orthodox context while suggesting lines for further research into the relationship between “traditional values” and violence within Russia’s other major religious confessions.

The chapter proceeds as follows. First, we discuss how the concept of “traditional values” is defined in Russia today, and which elements thereof are most relevant to understanding violence in that country. It should be noted that we understand violence itself to broadly include not just physical assault against persons but also vandalism/destruction of property (especially but not limited to cultural production). The second section of the chapter lays out a presentation of the

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1. For example, the law prohibiting the adoption of children by citizens of most Western countries, and the National Security Strategy of 2015, both of which will be discussed, along with other documents and legislation, in the second section of this chapter.

situation within the Russian Orthodox community. Finally, we draw some lessons from the case presented and propose some policy solutions aimed at lessening if not eliminating violence rooted in the defense of “traditional values” in Russia.

## TRADITIONAL VALUES

The concept of “traditional values” first emerged in popular discourse in Russia around the year 2012, gaining such widespread dissemination in the media so as to become as commonplace as the idea of the “American Dream” in the United States.<sup>2</sup> Today it remains an imprecise notion, although one in which certain themes keep recurring. Here, we sift through the variety of available definitions to arrive at this common ideational core, looking first at “official” understandings on the level of the Russian government and following this with a brief examination of how the concept is reflected within Russian society. The goal is not to claim that government definitions provide society with an ideological construct in this case or that, conversely, the regime has adopted a policy that reflects bottom-up demand for the defense of “traditional values” (this being a question for a separate paper). Rather, we wish to arrive at maximal definitional clarity. Having done so, we consider the extent to which “traditional values” should be understood to mean “religious values,” particularly those of the major confessions present on Russian territory. Finally, we pinpoint those aspects of the term that seem to us to have the most relevance for the question of its relationship to violence: in other words, of all the possible meanings that can be ascribed to “traditional values,” which ones are violent perpetrators “defending?”

Signs that government policy was moving in the direction of prioritizing “traditional values” could be discerned throughout 2011, in the wake of the nationalist riot on Moscow’s Manezh square in December 2010.<sup>3</sup> For example, the term appears in the 2011 Ministry of Regional Development report to the State Council of the Russian Federation, on measures to strengthen interethnic harmony; “traditional values” are assumed here to include “family and religious values.”<sup>4</sup>

By 2012, this turn was clearly evident in the rhetoric of Russian president Vladimir Putin, whose outsize role in the country’s governance renders his interpretation of the concept of particular interest. In early 2012, Putin published an article titled “Russia—National Question” in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, in which he describes the values he sees as common to all the “traditional religions” in Russia: charity, justice, truth, and family values. Crucially, he writes, “these values cannot be replaced by anything else, and we must strengthen them.”<sup>5</sup>

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2. See Chapter 2 by Alexander Verkhovsky in this volume for a cogent discussion of “traditional values” and “tradition” as central elements of Russian public life post 2012 (or more precisely, post the widespread anti-regime protests since December 2011).

3. Alexander Verkhovsky, “Doublespeak. The Rhetoric of the Far Right since 1945,” *Language of Authorities and Radical Nationalism* (Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2014), 271–300.

4. “On Measures to Strengthen Interethnic Harmony,” Russian Ministry of Regional Development, [http://www.minregion.ru/activities/interethnic\\_relations/national\\_policy/505/902.html](http://www.minregion.ru/activities/interethnic_relations/national_policy/505/902.html). Accessed January 3, 2017.

5. Vladimir Putin, “Rossiya—natsionalny vopros,” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, January 23, 2012, [http://www.ng.ru/politics/2012-01-23/1\\_national.html](http://www.ng.ru/politics/2012-01-23/1_national.html).

In the same article, Putin proposes to explain the crisis of multiculturalism in Europe through the frustration of the “native” European population, which is “shocked by aggressive pressure against their traditions, traditional way of life, and is seriously afraid of losing its national-state identity.” The result is a negative reaction—“xenophobia and harsh attempts to protect their interests, jobs, and social benefits from ‘foreign-born competitors.’”<sup>6</sup> Although the article does not mention “traditional values” per se, the strong correlation presented here between religious values, the current crisis in Europe (allegedly abandoning its traditions), and, in particular, the special role of Russians and Russian culture in the history of Russia, clearly suggests the idea of the necessity to protect “traditional values” (the common core values of Russia’s “traditional religions”) against “aggressive pressure” by newcomers.

Beyond the article in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, of special note is the emergence of “traditional values” as a trope in the Russian president’s annual address to the Federal Assembly. In the edition of this speech given on December 12, 2013, Putin positions Russia as a leading global champion of “traditional values” in the face of their decline in other countries (unnamed, but implicitly the United States and Europe). The values themselves are defined here as “the values of the traditional family, genuine human life, including religious life, life not only material but spiritual, the values of humanism and of the world’s diversity.”<sup>7</sup> They are global in scope, as they have “for thousands of years constituted the spiritual, moral basis of civilization, every nation.”<sup>8</sup> In 2014 “traditional values” once again appear in the annual speech, this time being listed as one of the government’s priorities;<sup>9</sup> they are defined here as “honest work, freedom of entrepreneurship . . . patriotism, respect of tradition, the culture of one’s country.”<sup>10</sup> By 2016, the term had taken on even loftier meaning: “The point of all our policies is the . . . multiplication of human capital as Russia’s greatest treasure. Because of this, our efforts are aimed at supporting traditional values and family, demographic programs [etc.]”<sup>11</sup>

Outside of Putin’s public pronouncements, the vector of the Russian government’s policies in specific areas are usefully traced through published documents outlining the regime’s priorities. The earliest appeal to something like “traditional values” here seems to be in the 2009 National Security Strategy, which identifies, in passing, a set of “common [Russian] values.” These include “freedom and independence of the Russian state, humanism, interethnic peace and the cultural

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6. Ibid.

7. “Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly,” The Russian President’s official website, December 12, 2013, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/19825>.

8. Ibid.

9. To be precise: “Здоровая семья и здоровая нация, переданные нам предками традиционные ценности в сочетании с устремленностью в будущее, стабильность как условие развития и прогресса . . . вот наши приоритеты,” (“Our priorities are healthy families and a healthy nation, the traditional values which we inherited from our forefathers, combined with a focus on the future, stability as a vital condition of development and progress”), “Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly,” The Russian President’s Official Website, December 4, 2014, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/messages/47173>.

10. Ibid.

11. “Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly,” The Russian President’s Official Website, December 1, 2016, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/messages/53379>.

unity of Russia's many peoples, respect for family traditions, and patriotism."<sup>12</sup> Even though the text here does not specify these values as "traditional," they resonate with the norms referenced by Putin in the abovementioned 2013 address, and indeed continue to sound as a common theme in government discourse on the subject.

By 2012 Russian policy documents had adopted the language of "traditional values" wholesale. The Nationalities Strategy implemented that year mentions the "degradation of traditional moral values" as a threat to the various peoples of Russia.<sup>13</sup> Two years later, the 2014 Fundamentals of State Cultural Policy includes the "intergenerational transmission of values and norms traditional to Russian civilization" as one of its main goals,<sup>14</sup> further in the document we find an emphasis on the need to "inculcate traditional values in society's consciousness."<sup>15</sup> Indeed, over time the frequency of references to the concept clearly rises: in the 2015 Strategy for Developing the Moral Education of Youth, "traditional values" show up at least seven times.<sup>16</sup> Significantly, a repeated emphasis on "traditional family values" throughout the text suggests the primary role played by "family" in the authors' conceptualization of "tradition."<sup>17</sup>

Similarly, in sharp contrast to the 2009 National Security Strategy, the 2015 iteration mentions "traditional values" nine times. According to the strategy's article 78, traditional spiritual and moral values encompass the following: "priority of the sacred over the material; protection of human life, rights and freedoms; family; creative labor; service to the Motherland; moral and ethical principles; humanism; justice; mutual aid; collectivism; mercy; historical unity of the people in Russian Federation; continuity of Russian history." Significantly, article 79 proceeds to define threats to Russian security as the "erosion of the traditional Russian morality and the undermining of the unity of Russia's multi-national population as a result of foreign cultural and informational expansion (including the dissemination of low-quality cultural production), propaganda of permissiveness and violence, racial, ethnic and religious enmity, attempts to falsify Russian and World history," and so forth.<sup>18</sup>

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12. "Ukaz Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii ot 12 maya 2009 g. N 537 'O Strategii natsional'noy bezopasnosti Rossiyskoy Federatsii do 2020 goda,'" *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, May 19, 2009, <https://rg.ru/2009/05/19/strategia-dok.html>.

13. "Ukaz Prezidenta RF ot 19 dekabrya 2012 g. N 1666 'O Strategii gosudarstvennoy natsional'noy politiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii na period do 2025 goda,'" *Garant*, <http://base.garant.ru/70284810/#ixzz4he6iEgJ0>.

14. "Osnovy Gosudarstvennoy Kul'turnoy Politiki," Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation, adopted December 24, 2014, <http://mkrf.ru/upload/mkrf/mkdocs2016/OSNOVI-PRINT.NEW.indd.pdf>, 10.

15. *Ibid.*, 16.

16. Throughout the text "traditional values" and "spiritual-moral values" are used interchangeably; the phrase "traditional values" shows up seven times.

17. The expanded list of values includes "love for humanity, justice, honor, conscience, will, personal dignity, belief in the good and desire to fulfill one's moral obligation before one's self, one's family, and one's Fatherland." "Rasporyazhenie Pravitel'stva Rossiyskoy Federatsii ot 29 maya 2015 g. N 996-r g. Moskva 'Strategiya razvitiya vospitaniya v Rossiyskoy Federatsii na period do 2025 goda,'" ("Order of the Government of the Russian Federation of May 29, 2015 N 996-r Moscow 'Strategy for the development of education in the Russian Federation for the period until 2025'"), *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, <https://rg.ru/2015/06/08/vospitanie-dok.html>.

18. "Ukaz Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii ot 31 dekabrya 2015 goda N 683 'O Strategii natsional'noy bezopasnosti Rossiyskoy Federatsii,'" ("Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of December 31, 2015 N 683 'On the



In short, the 2015 National Security Strategy essentially repeats the definition of “traditional values” of the 2009 version, but expands it to include other characteristics and identifies a (thinly veiled Western) threat to them as a fundamental threat to Russian security. Not coincidentally, the same presidential decree propagating the strategy also established the Presidential Administration’s Department for Social Projects, responsible, inter alia, for the strengthening of the “spiritual-moral” bases of Russian society.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, despite the seeming all-encompassing nature of the strategy’s treatment of “traditional values,” definitional questions continued to persist past 2015—for example, in the 2017 Strategy for the Development of Information Society (meant to regulate the online sphere). “The priority of traditional Russian spiritual-moral values and ensuring behavior based on these norms in the use of information and communication technologies” appear among this document’s founding principles. But the values themselves remain here unspecified.<sup>20</sup>

During this time period, the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation also meaningfully contributed to clarifying the concept of “traditional values” in Russian law. Thus, in its decision regarding a regional “anti-LGBT propaganda” law in Ryazan, the court stated that “family, motherhood and childhood in the traditional perception are those values that ensure the continuous change generations and the preservation and development of the entire multinational people of the Russian Federation.”<sup>21</sup> On the one hand, this statement gave unmistakable support to the positions of the conservative movement; on the other hand, it practically implemented the concept of “traditional values” into the legal discourse of the Russian Federation.

While the definitions presented above are evidently fluid, in practice the government has prioritized certain elements of the concept over others. As such, the legislative manifestations of the policy pronouncements and court opinion outlined above are particularly instructive. The Russian Duma has focused on legislation in support of two specific (intersecting and indeed inseparable) areas: traditional morality (itself poorly defined in the relevant rhetoric and therefore a relatively permeable concept, but one that seems to include at least the notions of sexual monogamy, premarital abstinence, and the eschewing of pornography) and the heterosexual family. Two pieces of legislation stand out as relevant for our analysis: the ban on the adoption of Russian children by citizens of countries where gay marriage is legal,<sup>22</sup> and the criminalization of homosexual “propaganda” aimed at Russian youth.<sup>23</sup> Both were adopted explicitly with the intent of defending Russia’s

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National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation”), *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, <https://rg.ru/2015/12/31/nac-bezopasnost-site-dok.html>.

19. “Presidential Executive Office subdivisions,” The Russian President’s official website, <http://en.kremlin.ru/structure/administration/departments#department-1024>.

20. “Ukaz Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii ot 09.05.2017 No. 203 ‘O Strategii razvitiya informatsionnogo obshchestva v Rossiyskoy Federatsii na 2017–2030 gody,’” *Pravo*, <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001201705100002>.

21. Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation, Ruling No. 151-O-O, (Jan. 19, 2010), 3.

22. “V Rossii zapretili usynovlenie v strany, gde razresheny odnopolnye braki,” (“Russia prohibits adoption in countries where gay marriage is permitted”), *Kommersant*, February 13, 2014, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2406998>.

23. “Federal’nyi zakon ot 29 iyunya 2013 g. N 135-F3 g. Moskva ‘O vnesenii izmeneniy v stat’yu 5 Federal’nogo zakona ‘O zashchite detey ot informatsii, prichinyayushchey vred ikh zdorov’yu i razvitiyu’ i ot del’nye zakonodatel’nye akty Rossiyskoy Federatsii v tselyakh zashchity detey ot informatsii propagandiruyuschey otritsanie traditsionnykh

“traditional values” from outside onslaught, suggesting that at least for a significant segment of the country’s political class it is these issues that stand at the concept’s core.

One other legislative episode is relevant here. In 2017, the Duma passed an amendment making first-time nonaggravated assault an administrative offense rather than a criminal one, a move that by implication included first-time instances of domestic violence. In doing so the Russian government actually moved existing legislation closer to Western norms, softening a notoriously onerous Criminal Code. However, the rhetoric of some of the legislators, and throughout the loud public discussion of the issue that accompanied the legislation’s passage, placed it squarely within the debate on “traditional values.” Among other things, the amendment’s proponents often used language suggesting that they see such behavior as an unproblematic family norm.<sup>24</sup>

Turning now briefly to the ways in which “traditional values” are understood within Russian society generally speaking, it should be noted that the situation seems to follow the same pattern as within government circles. Namely, while it is widely (though not universally) accepted that there *is* such a thing and that it is subject to attack by an aggressive West, the definition remains vague and open to wide interpretation.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, traditional moral and “family values” (especially but not exclusively opposition to homosexuality) stand somehow at the core of the concept. To take only one example, the popular social media portal VKontakte hosts a group titled “For Traditional Values,” with a current membership of over 135,000; according to the description on the main page, the group is made up of “people adhering to traditional values, prioritizing love between man and women and counteracting the onslaught of sexual minorities.”<sup>26</sup>

Generally speaking, despite their vagueness, “traditional values” have become a sort of *lingua franca* throughout various sectors of Russian society, appearing in such disparate contexts as education and business, to name but a few. On occasion this has led to some odd juxtapositions, such as an exhibit at the former Lenin Museum (now dedicated to the War of 1812) glorifying the wives of the Decembrists as examples of the “traditional Russian” love for the family and the unshakeable bonds of marriage.<sup>27</sup> At the same time, it should be noted that their proliferation has occurred with the support of Russian academia, in particular when it comes to juxtaposing

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semeynykh tsennostey,” (“Federal Law No. 135-FZ of June 29, 2013 “On Amending Article 5 of the Federal Law” on the protection of children from information harmful to their health and development, and certain legislative acts of the Russian Federation, to protect children from information advocating for the denial of traditional family values”), July 2, 2013, <https://rg.ru/2013/06/30/deti-site-dok.html>.

24. Vera Kholmogorova and Margarita Alekhina, “Shlepki Mizulinoy: K chemu privedet dekriminalizatsiya nasiliya v sem’e,” (“Flips of Missoulina: What will the decriminalization of domestic violence lead to?”), RBK, January 25, 2017, <http://www.rbc.ru/politics/25/01/2017/588727459a7947bde03fca37>.

25. V. N. Dezhnev and O.V. Novikova, “Traditsionnye Tsennosti: K Opredeleniyu Ponyatiya,” *Vestnik Shchadrinskogo Gosudarstvennogo Pedagogicheskogo Universiteta*, [http://shgpi.edu.ru/files/nauka/vestnik/2015/4\\_28/20.pdf](http://shgpi.edu.ru/files/nauka/vestnik/2015/4_28/20.pdf); Andrei Mishchukov, “Traditsionnye tsennosti v globaliziruyushchemsya mire,” *Vestnik Orenburgskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta*, no. 178 (2015): 3; see also a roundtable on the topic, moderated by Alexander Arkhangelsky on his TV show *Tem Vremenem*, [http://tvkultura.ru/video/show/brand\\_id/20905/episode\\_id/959913/](http://tvkultura.ru/video/show/brand_id/20905/episode_id/959913/).

26. “Za traditsionnye tsennosti,” VKontakte, [https://vk.com/v\\_o\\_g](https://vk.com/v_o_g).

27. Anna Norinskaya, “Institutki sem”i i braka,” *Kommersant*, March 25, 2016, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2939206>.

“traditional values” with such concepts as “universal human rights.” For example, Elena Lukasheva’s work has emphasized that particular civilizations have to follow their own normative and cultural frames when it comes to human rights, in practice seriously questioning the latter’s universality.<sup>28</sup> From another point of view, V. Kartashkin has developed the concept of “traditional values” in its “positive meaning,” insisting that universal traditional values have to include freedom, dignity, and responsibility.<sup>29</sup>

Standing somewhere in the nebulous space between government and society, the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation has contributed to the public discussion on “traditional values,” by hosting, in December 2016, a conference on the topic of “Traditional Values and Business: Faith and Enterprise.”<sup>30</sup> And while it is far from clear that Russian political parties function in a way that reflects the bottom-up concerns of society, their embrace—and understanding of—the “traditional values” trope is also of interest. For instance, United Russia responded to Putin’s call to protect traditional values by organizing a special project titled “The Sturdy Family” (*Krepkaya Semia*), which lists as its top two priorities “the strengthening of the institution of the family and family values” and the “development of the personality and patriotic education” within the context of family life.<sup>31</sup> For its part, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) has, since 2012, been actively discussing the role of CPRF in protecting “national, family values, the spiritual treasures (*natsional’nykh sviatyn*)” of the Russian people, which are being demolished and degraded by the bourgeois regime.<sup>32</sup>

The question is, to be sure, whether “traditional values,” in the term’s manifestations across various layers of Russian society and political discourse, should be understood in religious terms. The answer, from our point of view, is a qualified “yes.” On the one hand, the terminology has episodically appeared in Putin’s rhetoric in formulaic fashion without reference to religion.<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, one day after the seminal 2013 address to the Federal Assembly, Putin took advantage of a highly public forum to clearly identify “traditional values” as Biblical in their origin, if not explicitly Orthodox Christian.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, during a July 2014 meeting with members of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and representatives of other Orthodox Churches, he spoke of Russian “traditional values” in language that suggests he sees them as “Orthodox,” even though he

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28. E. A. Lukasheva, *Human Being, Law, Civilization: Legal and Valuable Dimensions* (Moscow, 2009).

29. V. A. Kartashkin, “Human rights and traditional values of humankind,” *Vestnik Rossiyskogo Universiteta Druzhby Narodov, Seriya: Yuridicheskie Nauki*, no. 3 (2012).

30. “Proekt rabochey gruppy ‘Predprinimatelstvo i Prvoslavie,’” *Opora-Sozidanie*, December 7, 2016, <http://opora-sozidanie.ru/?p=9861>.

31. Proekt Partii Edinaya Rossiya—Krepkaya sem’ya, <http://ks-er.ru>.

32. “Kommunisty i traditsionnye tsennosti. Obsuzhdaem doklad G.A. Zyuganova k Plenumu TsK CPRF,” Communist Party of the Russian Federation, [https://kprf.ru/party\\_live/111639.html](https://kprf.ru/party_live/111639.html).

33. “Putin: Rossiya budet protivostoyat” razmyvaniyu traditsionnykh tsennostey,” *Vzglyad*, October 31, 2016, <https://www.vz.ru/news/2016/10/31/841142.html>; “Putin: Traditsionnye tsennosti—predposylka k druzhbe narodov,” *Krasnaya Vesna*, December 23, 2016, <http://rossaprimavera.ru/news/traditsionnye-tsennosti-predposylka-k-druzhbe-narodov>.

34. “Press Konferentsiya Vladimira Putina,” The Russian President’s official website, December 13, 2013, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/19859>.

might avoid admitting so to secular/non-Orthodox interlocutors.<sup>35</sup> In doing so Putin echoed terminology long used by the members of the Synod themselves in various venues, for example during meetings of World Russian People's Council (*Vsemirnyi Russkii Narodnyi Sobor*), a public forum operating under the auspices of the ROC since 1993.

More importantly, as Alexander Verkhovskiy's contribution to this volume makes clear, the adjective "traditional" is most familiar to Russian citizens from its association, since the early 2000s, with the country's four major religious confessions: Orthodoxy, Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism. The linguistic construction "traditional Russian confessions" has been so ubiquitous in Russian political and societal discourse that the layering of this religious sense on the relatively newly invented "traditional values" is unavoidable. The more so since the latter term is often used interchangeably with the phrase "(traditional) spiritual-moral values," which are especially well known to the Russian public from "The Fundamentals of Spiritual-Moral Culture of the Peoples of Russia,"<sup>36</sup> the educational vehicle through which religion (of the four major confessions) was first legally introduced as a subject into the public school system.

Furthermore, at least within the ROC itself and among prominent representatives of Islam, there is a consensus that "traditional values" are in fact religious values. Significant here is an oft-cited speech to that effect by patriarch Kirill in January 2013, at the annual Christmas Readings in Moscow—whose theme that year was in fact "Traditional Values and the Contemporary World"—in which he advocated for a spiritual understanding of the term, prioritizing "moral values, whose source is God, not man."<sup>37</sup> Similar interpretations abound within the Russian Muslim community, with the life of the prophet Mohammad often referenced as the embodiment of "traditional values," themselves revealed by Allah.<sup>38</sup> At the same time at least on the level of official rhetoric, religious leaders have been careful to emphasize that fundamentally the Islamic and Orthodox faiths share the same values; characteristic here is a speech given by metropolitan Nikon of Ufa in 2016, to a primarily Muslim audience, in which he noted that "traditional values are religious values. And this unites us."<sup>39</sup>

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35. "Vstrecha s chlenami Svyashchennogo sinoda i predstavityami pomestnykh pravoslavnykh tserkvey," The Russian President's official website, July 18, 2014, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46247>.

36. "Prikaz Ministerstva obrazovaniya i nauki Rossiyskoy Federatsii ot 17 dekabrya 2010 g. N 1897 'Ob utverzhdenii federal'nogo gosudarstvennogo obrazovatel'nogo standarta osnovnogo obshchego obrazovaniya,'" *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, December 19, 2010, <https://rg.ru/2010/12/19/obrstandart-site-dok.html>.

37. "Doklad Svyateyshego Patriarkha Kirilla na otkrytii XXI Mezhdunarodnykh Rozhdestvenskikh chteniy," Official Website of the Patriarch of Moscow, January 23, 2013, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/2746897.html>. For other examples pertaining to the Orthodox understanding of traditional values being primarily of religious nature, see "V Rossii utverzhden spisok dukhovno npravstvennykh tsennostei," *Pravmir*, June 9, 2015, <http://www.ppravmir.ru/v-rossii-utverzhden-spisok-duhovno-npravstvennyih-tsennostey/>; and "Traditsionnye tsennosti i sovremennyy mir," *Russkaya Narodnaya Liniya*, February 8, 2013, [http://ruskline.ru/monitoring\\_smi/2013/02/9/tradicionnye\\_cennosti\\_i\\_sovremennyy\\_mir/](http://ruskline.ru/monitoring_smi/2013/02/9/tradicionnye_cennosti_i_sovremennyy_mir/).

38. Shamil Shovkhalov, "Traditsionnye dukhovnye tsennosti i sovremennaya obrazovatel'naya praktika v krasnoyarskom krae," *Islam v Sibiri*, December 13, 2012, <http://www.islamsib.ru/islam/verouchenie/591-traditsionnye-dukhovnye-tsennosti-i-sovremennaya-obrazovatel'naya-praktika-v-krasnoyarskom-krae>.

39. "Mitropolit Nikon vystupil na IX MNPk 'Idealy i tsennosti islama v obrazovatel'nom prostranstve XXI veka,'" Ufa Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church, November 2016, <http://eparхия-уфа.рф/news/mitr-nikon-vystupil-na-ix-mnpk-idealy-i-cennosti-islama-v-obrazovatel'nom-prostranstve-xxi-veka>.

Finally, in May 2017 an interparty group of Duma deputies—including members of the CPRF—was formed for the “defense of Christian values” in Russia. “Christian” in this context clearly meant “Orthodox,” as the group’s first formal meeting heard from several representatives of the ROC, with no apparent input from the other Christian confessions present in Russia. While the word “traditional” was missing from the official discourse on this occasion, the themes raised by participants in the meeting were familiar: concerns over the weakening of moral constraints (*npravstvennye orientiry*), the need to safeguard national spiritual treasures, and fears regarding pernicious foreign influences on the family, among others.<sup>40</sup> Whether or not this signals a move by the regime to jettison any effort at making the case that “traditional values” are anything other than values understood to be embodied by the Orthodox Church, as such indicating a shift away from the prevailing official model of Russia as a multi-confessional society, is an open question—to date, this is the only government initiative of any significance that would seem to suggest this scenario.

To summarize, then, there is a broad consensus within/between Russian government and society that there is such a thing as “traditional values,” and that they are under (Western) assault and in need of defense. Despite the term’s admitted fluidity, certain elements stand out: “traditional values” are imbued with (often explicit) religious connotation,<sup>41</sup> and their primary meaning appears to revolve around principles associated with morality and the family. In practice, this means most obviously heterosexual marriage, but also extends to all moral and family values generally sanctioned by the “traditional confessions.” The Strategy for the Developing the Moral Education of Youth makes the link explicit, calling for the “renaissance of family and moral values, taking into consideration the role of religion and the traditional culture of local communities”;<sup>42</sup> the other documents examined above lend themselves to similar interpretation.

Ultimately, the concept of “traditional values” as described above lends itself to the construction of enemies based on a binary opposition. In the religious sphere, this manifests itself as the struggle between “traditional” and “nontraditional” religions. From a gender perspective, it becomes a battle between family values (equated with the heterosexual matrix) and homosexual relationships. Finally, in the sphere of morality, there is an implied contradiction between the “universal” (aggressively implemented by the West) and the “national” (which supports the traditions of the Russian people and traditional religion). Thus, in order to protect “traditional values” Russians are called upon to fight against foreign (Western) values, both religious and moral, with the line between religious and moral categories being often completely elided as the two are unquestioningly

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40. “Mezhfraktsionnaya deputatskaya gruppa Gosdumy po zashchite khristianskikh tsennostey ob’edinyayet parlamentariev, reshaet zadachi vo blago Rossii,” Communist Party of the Russian Federation, May 18, 2017, <https://kprf.ru/dep/gosduma/activities/165393.html>.

41. The question arises whether or not this is also true for Russian social/political actors on the left of the political spectrum, particularly the CPRF, which has historically been associated with an explicitly atheist worldview. In the case of the CPRF, at least, the party had by the mid-1990s disassociated itself from a Soviet-era commitment to atheism and/or full secularization of Russian society, meaning that there is nothing currently preventing the party members from interpreting “traditional values” from a religious standpoint.

42. *Strategiia razvitiia vospitaniia v Rossiiskoi Federatsii na period do 2025 goda*, <http://council.gov.ru/media/files/41d536d68ee9fec15756.pdf>.

assumed to be the same, at least within a particular community of Orthodox activists (as shall be seen below).

Therefore, in terms of potential links to violence, of interest to us are, first of all, violent actions undertaken in defense of the traditional family and religiously inspired moral values. In addition, given the evident close semantic relationship between “traditional values” and “traditional religions” in the Russian context—as well as the well-known post-Soviet tendency to frame the spread of “nontraditional” religions as a threat to the Russian Federation—we pay attention to the ways in which “anti-sectarian” violence plays into the overall dynamic we are exploring.

## TRADITIONAL VALUES, VIOLENCE, AND THE ORTHODOX COMMUNITY

On January 14, 2003, Moscow’s Sakharov Center museum and cultural center hosted *Caution, Religion! (Ostorozhno, Religiya!)*, an exhibition of artworks problematizing the relationship between church, state, and society in post-Soviet Russia. Four days later, the exhibit was torn apart by Orthodox activists affiliated with the parish of St. Nicholas in Pyzhy; the perpetrators justified their actions in terms of “offended religious feelings.” Famously, they were acquitted of wrongdoing, while the exhibit’s curator and several of the artists involved were charged with inciting national and religious hatred, found guilty, and fined. The episode achieved international resonance, and has since stood out as the “first” in a continuing series of often violent confrontations between Orthodox believers and secular Russian society.

In the intervening decade and a half, news reports of “Orthodox society” (*pravoslavnyaya obshchestvennost*) protesting against “blasphemous” cultural production, violently attacking members of so-called sects, and disrupting gay pride parades have become so common as to seem part of the ordinary fabric of Russian life. More recently, the vocal support of prominent clergy for military action in Syria and the visible support of segments within the Church for the separatist forces in Eastern Ukraine has further contributed to the image of a religious institution with a permissive attitude toward violence in general. Finally, the abovementioned vociferous debate around legislation governing nonaggravated assault caused the Moscow Patriarchate considerable embarrassment: in 2016, the patriarchate’s standing commission on questions of family, the protection of motherhood, and childhood expressed its opposition to the use of “domestic violence” as legal terminology; although it appears the commission was most concerned about possible criminalization of corporal punishment of children, the statement was broadly interpreted by outside analysts as also lending support to domestic battery against women.<sup>43</sup>

By default, any violent action or support thereof by Orthodox Christians has tended to be interpreted within the framework of the Church’s supposed penchant for ultranationalism; and indeed, ultranationalist ideology is commonly believed to include Orthodoxy as a core component. Yet, upon closer examination this framework does not easily hold up. First, the Russian far right is not

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43. “V RPTs nazvali bit’e detey ‘bogodannym’ pravom roditeley,” *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, July 4, 2016, <http://www.mk.ru/social/2016/07/04/v-rpc-nazvali-bite-detey-bogodannym-pravom-roditeley.html>.

at all uniformly Orthodox; second, the majority of violent nationalist actions on Russian territory since the early 1990s have been carried out by members of organizations either uninterested in religion entirely or neo-pagan in orientation.<sup>44</sup> Meanwhile, as will be discussed in more detail below, it turns out that some of the most significant cases of Orthodox-tinged violence over the post-Soviet period have been driven more by faith-related reasons than by a nationalist political agenda. At the same time, there *is* a demonstrable degree of overlap between ultranationalism and what has been identified as the specifically “fundamentalist” wing of the Orthodox Church, some of whose adherents have been unabashedly involved in violent activism.<sup>45</sup>

One other possibility is that violence in the name of Orthodoxy has occurred as a reaction against violence directed against the church itself. Since 1990, at least 42 priests have been murdered and numerous clergy have been physically assaulted; meanwhile vandalism against ecclesiastical property has become a commonplace occurrence.<sup>46</sup> However, of the instances of violence with an Orthodox motivation exhaustively examined for this paper, none seem to have been specifically motivated by revenge for this type of assault on the ROC.

How, then, to explain the very real phenomenon of violence in the name of Orthodoxy in Russia? The argument here is that it may be usefully understood through the lens of the emergence of “traditional values” as a component of the contemporary Russian popular imagination. Below, we expand on this proposition through an examination of selected organizations involved in violent incidents with an Orthodox “tinge,” chosen by virtue of the public resonance associated with them—all of the examples mentioned here have been relatively widely covered by the Russian, and sometimes Western, media, marking them as particularly relevant in forming social opinion about the ROC and its relationship to violent action.

### Caution, Religion!, the Committee for the Moral Renaissance of the Fatherland, and “Traditional Values”

For a number of reasons that will become clear below, it makes sense to begin the discussion with the Orthodox activists who attacked the Sakharov Center exhibit. Although little remarked upon at the time, in retrospect the theme of “traditional values in need of defense” can be discerned quite clearly at the core of this incident. As already mentioned, the offenders attended St. Nicholas in Pyzhi parish in Moscow. In an article published by *Russkaya Narodnaya Liniya* shortly after the affair, the parish’s rector, father Alexander Shargunov, outlined a worldview in which “a new barbarism” threatens to overwhelm the world, with only “traditional values” standing in its way: “If these traditional values stay in the past, we will not see either the present or the future.” The traditional

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44. Nikolay Mitrokhin, “Mezhdu pravom i pravom na bezopasnost,” *Neislamskiy ekstremizm v sovremennoy Rossii*, *Neprikosnovenny Zapas* 1 (February 2006): 64–79.

45. On the relationship between ultranationalism and the “fundamentalist” wing of the Russian Orthodox Church, see Irina Papkova, *The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

46. “Ubiistva i na padeniya na svyashchennikov v 1990–2009 gg.,” *Pravmir*, last updated 2016, <http://www.pravmir.ru/ubijstva-i-napadeniya-na-svyashchennikov-v-rossii-v-1990-2009-gg-spravka/>; one striking example of vandalism of Orthodox property was the so-called Krestopoval, or destruction of crosses across the country in the wake of the Pussy Riot incident: “Otvetstvennost’ za ‘krestopoval’ vzyala na sebya ‘Narodnaya Volya,’” *RBK*, August 28, 2012, <http://www.rbc.ru/society/28/08/2012/5703fc029a7947ac81a6b2a2>.

values here are clearly infused with moral content: "Let the defeat of Serbia and Russia bring after them our moral cleansing and return to true values (*istinnym tsennostiam*)."<sup>47</sup> In this context it is not so surprising that, nationwide, supporters of Shargunov's parishioners interpreted their act of vandalism as a case of the defense of traditional values against (secular Western) aggression.<sup>48</sup>

Perhaps more importantly, the very way in which "traditional values" and the defense thereof are framed in the present time may, we argue, be traced to the activities of Father Shargunov and his followers. Since the early 1990s, St. Nicholas in Pyzhy has been the headquarters of the Social Committee for the Moral Renaissance of the Fatherland (*Obshchestvennyi Komitet za Nravstvennoye Vozrozhdeniye Otechestva*); the perpetrators of the Sakharov Center disruption were in fact members of the organization. The ideology and activism of this group has been exhaustively examined elsewhere;<sup>49</sup> for our purposes, several circumstances are of fundamental importance.

First, conditioned by the chaotic Russian environment of the 1990s, and particularly by president Boris Yeltsin's violent confrontation with the parliament in 1993, members of the committee have espoused an apocalyptic worldview, in which the Antichrist is nigh; Russia, from their vantage point, is under attack by Satan, in the guise of Western values. Crucially, while any action aimed at drawing Russians away from Orthodoxy is understood here as part of this pernicious onslaught, the group's ideology blurs the line between sexually amoral behavior and satanism to such an extent that Satan's advance on Russia is seen as occurring primarily through the sexual corruption of the Russian people via Western-sponsored pornography and the like. Consequently, the battle involves three identifiable fronts: (1) preventing the Russian population's sexual degradation, (2) standing up to foreign sects apparently inundating the country and drawing its citizens away from their Orthodox roots, and (3) combating blasphemy against Orthodoxy in the artistic sphere (blasphemy here being understood both in terms of the sexual nature of some artwork and works that could be considered critical of Orthodox dogma).<sup>50</sup>

Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, the committee's tactics involved both licit and illicit means, including staging public protests against Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ*, suing popular magazines for purported pornographic content, and tearing down sexually explicit billboards under cover of night.<sup>51</sup> The three major vectors along which the defense of traditional values by Orthodox activists would be played out up to the present time can be seen clearly here: supporting (hetero)sexual morality, combating "nontraditional" religious groups, and protesting against allegedly anti-Orthodox cultural production. Also obvious is the prototype of the methods employed: peaceful protests, legal challenges, and nonconventional, at times violent, tactics.

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47. Protoierey Aleksandr Shargunov, "Itogi Novoy Yugoslavskoy Tragedii," *Russkaya Liniya*, April 4, 2004, [http://ruskline.ru/monitoring\\_smi/2004/04/14/itogi\\_novoj\\_yugoslavskoj\\_tragedii/](http://ruskline.ru/monitoring_smi/2004/04/14/itogi_novoj_yugoslavskoj_tragedii/).

48. Muftiy Farid Salman, "Otkrytoe zayavlenie po situatsii vokrug vystavki 'Ostorozhno, religiya!,'" August 18, 2003, [http://www.moral.ru/Sakh\\_musulman.htm](http://www.moral.ru/Sakh_musulman.htm); "Soyuz pravoslavnykh grazhdan prizyvaet k pokayaniyu ustroiteley vystavki 'Ostorozhno, Religiya!'" *Interfax-Religiya*, March 28, 2005, <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/cis.php?act=news&div=2285>.

49. Irina Papkova, *The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), Chapter 4.

50. *Ibid.*

51. *Ibid.*



It is also of note that the *Caution, Religion!* incident did not just mark the moment when violence in defense of Orthodox religious principles became a legally acceptable proposition in the Russian Federation.<sup>52</sup> It also served as a watershed for the emergence of “traditional values” from the margins of Orthodox discourse into the Church’s mainstream: prior to 2003, Shargunov and his followers were colorful but peripheral activists; after the Sakharov Center trial their concerns became widely accepted as those of self-respecting believers across the ROC. More than that, it was around this time that “traditional values” began to seep into the language of the political class, brought there by Duma members with strong Orthodox sympathies.<sup>53</sup>

## The Orthodox Standard-Bearers

The second group we looked at is the Union of Orthodox Standard-Bearers (*Soyuz Pravoslavnykh Khorugvenostsev*), active since 1992 and probably the most colorful and recognizable of the fundamentalist Orthodox groups on the Russian nationalist scene. In 2003, SPKh joined other Orthodox nationalist organizations in calling for the creation of an “all-Russian militia—whose goal is to free the Fatherland from all enemies and adversaries.”<sup>54</sup> Beyond rhetoric, examples of their less-than-peaceful activities include, but are not limited to, the disruption of gay pride parades in Moscow in 2006 and 2011; driving a wooden stake through portraits of the artist Madonna; and the burning of books by J. K. Rowling, the postmodernist writer Vladimir Sorokin, the historian Eduard Radzinsky, and others seen as contrary to Orthodox religious teachings.<sup>55</sup> And while the burning of books might seem relatively harmless, the group’s leadership has been clear about the fact that they would gladly harm undesirable authors and other artists personally: “for now, we can’t, unfortunately, openly burn heretics, but we will burn books and tapes [in their stead].”<sup>56</sup>

It is true that in the period post-2012 SPKh has been relatively inactive and nonviolent. But its name recognition remains high and indeed the organization may be considered the “ur”-prototype of fundamentalist Orthodox groups active on the ultranationalist scene; for example, SPKh was the source of the popular logo “Orthodoxy or Death” (banned by the Russian courts as extremist but still encountered among members of the Orthodox far right).<sup>57</sup> Moreover, to this day no ultranationalist gathering in Moscow passes without the participation of SPKh, whose activists have for years led the annual “Russian March” parade. As such their appropriation of the “traditional values”

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52. Yakov Krotov, “Pravoslavie i nasilie,” *Radio Svoboda*, August 1, 2015, <https://www.svoboda.org/a/27163441.html>.

53. “Spisok deputatov, voshedshykh v MDO,” Sova Center, January 22, 2003, <http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/authorities/legal-regulation/2003/01/d94/>.

54. “V Nizhnem Novgorode prazdnik Kazanskoy ikony Bogoroditsy otmetili pravoslavno-patrioticheskim krestnym khodom,” Portal Credo, November 11, 2003, <http://www.portal-credo.ru/site/print.php?act=news&id=14937>.

55. “Stolkoveniya militsii s seksmen’shinstvami i ikh protivnikami zamenili Moskve gei-parad,” *Lenta*, May 27, 2006, <https://lenta.ru/news/2006/05/27/parad3/>; “Pravoslavnye otpravili Garri Pottera na koster inkvizitsii,” *Kommersant*, October 10, 2007, <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/813242>.

56. “Leonid Simonovich: Eretikov szhigat’ ne mozhem, a knigi budem,” *Blagovest Info*, July 20, 2006, <http://www.blagovest-info.ru/index.php?ss=2&s=3&id=7751>.

57. “Pravoslavnyy khudozhnik-patriot: ‘Vremya amorfnykh simvolov zakanchivaetsya—im na smenu prikhodyat boevye znamena!’” *Baltija*, June 10, 2014, <http://www.baltija.eu/news/read/38592>.

terminology takes on importance beyond its specific relationship to their own violent actions and is worth noting here.

As it happens, “traditional values” began cropping up in news surrounding SPKh’s activities at least six years before the term achieved widespread national recognition. Among other things, the disruption of the Moscow gay pride parade of 2006 was framed approvingly by other nationalist organizations in terms of the defense of “traditional values,” even if SPKh’s leadership didn’t explicitly reference this.<sup>58</sup> By 2009 the organization was praising patriarch Kirill as a “fundamentalist defending the traditional values of Orthodoxy and the Russian people.”<sup>59</sup> In 2010, SPKh participated in the organization of a public prayer meeting (*molitvennoye stoyanie*) in Moscow “in defense of traditional spiritual-moral values.”<sup>60</sup> Generally speaking, their activities fall within the template exemplified by the Committee for the Moral Renaissance of the Fatherland—a focus on moral issues (homosexuality in this case) and “blasphemous” cultural production, and a preference for unconventional methods of protests, including violent action.

## BORN/Russian Image

While SPKh’s violent activities may be thought of as rather vegetarian in nature—destruction of books, scuffles during gay pride parades—the Militant Organization of Russian Nationalists (BORN, *Boevaya Organizatsiya Russkikh Natsionalistov*, also known as *Russkii Obraz* [Russian Image] after the eponymous journal headed by one of the group’s founders) distinguished itself between the years 2006 and 2009 with a series of gruesome murders of liberal activists and ethnic minorities, undertaken with the apparent intention of sparking a Russian nationalist revolution. In the view of some analysts, Orthodox Christianity was central to the group’s ideology.<sup>61</sup> Initial research that we undertook questioned the validity of this interpretation, as the two facts usually brought as evidence of its “Orthodox” nature are on the face of it circumstantial—BORN’s founders Ilya Goryachev and Nikita Tikhonov spent some time in Serbia in the company of Orthodox monarchists, while Goryachev worked for a while for the Orthodox television channel Spas.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, nowhere in their public statements did the group’s members ever claim specifically “Orthodox” theological motivation.

At the same time, closer examination of BORN’s explanations of their own behavior reveals that the defense of “traditional values”—here as elsewhere primarily understood in terms of

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58. It’s possible that SPKh members were already speaking in these terms in 2006—we were unable to find direct quotes. But they certainly reposted on their website (approvingly) the reportage of others concerning the event that did use the language of “traditional values.” “O nas pishut,” SPKh, 2006, [http://www.pyckie.org/onaspishut\\_2006/onaspishut-2006-27-05\\_2.shtml](http://www.pyckie.org/onaspishut_2006/onaspishut-2006-27-05_2.shtml).

59. “V preddverii Pomestnogo Sobora Russkoy Pravoslavnoy Tserkvi,” SPKh, January 21, 2009, <http://www.pyckie.org/novosti/2009/novosti-210109.shtml>.

60. “V Moskve proshlo molitvennoe stoyanie v sashchitu traditsionnykh dukhovno-nravstvennykh tsennostey,” SPKh, November 28, 2010, <http://www.pyckie.org/novosti/2010/novosti-281110.shtml>.

61. Robert Horvath, “Russkii Obraz and the politics of ‘managed nationalism,’” *Nationalities Papers* 42, no. 3 (2014).

62. “Lenta. Ru’ izuchila istoriyu odnoy iz samykh agressivnykh ul’trapravykh gruppirovok Rossii,” *Lenta*, February 17, 2014, <https://lenta.ru/articles/2014/02/17/born/>; “Otets Nikity Tikhonova zayavil, chto nauchil syna obnaruzhyvat’ slezhku,” RIA Novosti, March 3, 2011, <https://ria.ru/incidents/20110331/3596666668.html>.

heterosexual morality—contributes to framing the group’s self-understanding.<sup>63</sup> For example, BORN member Mikhail Volkov admitted to fatally attacking antifascist activist Feodor Filatov in 2008, on the basis that the victim was a gang leader whose “group consisted of punks, skin-heads . . . and attacked . . . activists defending traditional values,” framing his own actions as justified by the defense of such values.<sup>64</sup> Evgenia Khasis, convicted along with Tikhonov of killing human rights lawyer Stanislav Markelov and journalist Anastasia Baburova, explicitly sees the long-term goal of nationalism as “moving the vector of our state away from the abyss, ‘rightward,’ toward traditional values and the maintaining of Russia and her people for future generations.” This, in explicit opposition to (Western-led) globalization and “alternative marriages.”<sup>65</sup> Finally, Right Hook (*Khuk Sprava*), a rock band associated with BORN, also trades on the discourse of “traditional values,” here too understood apparently in heterosexual terms, and under attack by a (globalist) “System.”<sup>66</sup>

Equally significant, further research reveals that BORN’s members very likely did understand “traditional values” from an Orthodox vantage point that goes beyond the usual rhetorically ritualistic appeal of Russian nationalists to Orthodoxy as a source of their inspiration. For instance, far from being marginally connected to the Church, Goryachev was connected enough with the ROC elite to appear as an author on the popular website *Pravoslavie.ru*, founded by then-archimandrite Tikhon Shevkunov, abbot of Sretensky monastery in Moscow and purportedly the spiritual adviser of Vladimir Putin.<sup>67</sup> In the same jailhouse interview cited above, Khasis positions herself as a fervent Orthodox believer; her lover Tikhonov as well couches his interpretation of nationalist ideology in language that indicates possession of at least a rudimentary understanding of Orthodox theology.<sup>68</sup>

### Enteo and “God’s Will”

For all that the idea that Orthodox “traditional values” must be defended did play a role in BORN’s activities, it must be reiterated that the primary driver of violence in their case was secular ultranationalist ideology mixed in with racism, and that they saw/see their role in primarily political, not religious terms. Not so for the group known as “God’s Will” (*Bozhiya Volya*), which undertook a number of mass media-worthy violent actions from 2012 to 2016. Led by Dmitri Tsorionov, alias Enteo, the Moscow-based group was formed explicitly as a reaction against the Pussy Riot incident and consisted mostly of well-educated young men who attacked LGBT gatherings, disrupted

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63. Dmitriy Okrest, “Identifikatsiya BORN,” *Batenka*, January 25, 2017, <https://batenka.ru/protection/born/>.

64. “Ya v oruzhii ne razbirayus,’” Kasparov, December 23, 2014, [http://www.kasparov.ru/material.php?id=54983FA0E0F98&section\\_id=49BFBA87308D1](http://www.kasparov.ru/material.php?id=54983FA0E0F98&section_id=49BFBA87308D1).

65. Evgeny Levkovich, “Evgenii Khasis—Interv’yu zhurnalu *Rolling Stone*,” *Russkiy verdikt*, January 15, 2013, <http://rusverdict.com/rollingstone/>.

66. “Khuk Sprava: ‘My nauchim vas pravil’no stavit’ udar,’” text from 2008, <http://hooksprava.org/news/76>. Accessed July 15, 2017.

67. Il’ya Goryachev, “V chem obvinyayut generala Mladicha,” *Pravoslavie*, June 6, 2011, <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/46908.html>.

68. “Nikita Tikhonov pro islamskie tendentsii v Russkom dvizhenii,” *LiveJournal*, September 8, 2011, <http://e-hasis.livejournal.com/6219.html>.

the religious ceremonies of “nontraditional sects,” raided “anti-Orthodox” art exhibits, and closed down “blasphemous” theatrical performances, among other activities with a violent edge.<sup>69</sup> Among their most famous exploits was the partial destruction of a retrospective of the avant-garde Soviet sculptor Vadim Sidur, at Moscow’s Manezh exhibition hall.<sup>70</sup>

“God’s Will” framed its mission in essentially religious terms, purposefully eschewing nationalist rhetoric. Enteo himself was a parishioner of Father Daniil Sysoev, a young priest known for combining ultra-Orthodox missionary zeal with an explicit rejection of nationalism; Sysoev was ultimately gunned down in his own church, apparently by a militant Islamist. Despite denunciations by some prominent clergy within the ROC—who maintained that God’s Will’s ideology actually contained a great deal of vague New Age, semi-pagan influences—the group, and especially Enteo himself, successfully established a media image as militant defenders of a beleaguered Orthodox faith, spending four years as poster children for Orthodox activism before disbanding in 2016.<sup>71</sup> That year, most active members broke with Tsorionov, apparently over the question of tactics, and formed their own organization, “Orthodox Defense” (*Pravoslavnaya Oborona*), the very name of which suggested a continued focus on defending the faith; characteristically, their media presence so far indicates an unflagging concern with “traditional” moral values.<sup>72</sup>

Unsurprisingly, scratching the surface of Enteo’s rhetoric reveals “traditional values under attack” as an abiding concern. In this sense, it is worth quoting here his statement in an interview given to Pravda.ru, in response to the question “what sparked your . . . social activism?”:

My social activism began in the spring of this year [2012] after a series on unrelenting attacks on the Russian Orthodox Church [*in context, clearly referring to Pussy Riot*]. In general, many Christians, seeing what kinds of attacks are being carried out against the things we hold holy, ceased to be lukewarm; they understood that our spiritual values are being substantially undermined, and began to take more cohesive action.<sup>73</sup>

Finally, provocative as they were, Enteo’s activities taken in defense of said “traditional values” should be read as a continuation of the path trodden by the Committee for the Moral Renaissance of the Fatherland more than a decade earlier. We see here the same general objects of ire:

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69. “Na gey-parade v Moskve zaderzhali Enteo s Alekseevym,” Telekanal Rossiya, May 30, 2015, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K\\_ebXLKTTYo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K_ebXLKTTYo); “V Moskve zaderzhali posledovateley Letayushchego makaronnogo monstra,” *Lenta*, August 17, 2013, <https://lenta.ru/news/2013/08/17/pasta/>; “Pravoslavnyy aktivist izbezhal ugolovnogogo dela za sorvanuyu futbolku,” *Lenta*, September 24, 2012, <https://lenta.ru/news/2012/09/24/enteo/>; “Pravoslavnye aktivisty napali na sotrudnika muzeya GULAGa iz-za interv’yu,” *Lenta*, February 21, 2014, <https://lenta.ru/news/2014/02/21/davydov/>.

70. “V Moskve na vystavke sovetskogo avangarda proizoshel pogrom,” RBK, August 14, 2015 <http://www.rbc.ru/politics/14/08/2015/55ce15bb9a79474f19c056c8>.

71. “Krakh Enteo: O psevdokhristianskoy sekte “Bozh’ya Volya,”” YouTube, May 4, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SNtf2-ZoUWg>.

72. “Dvizhenie ‘Pravoslavnaya Oborona,’” VKontakte, <https://vk.com/pravoborona>.

73. “Dmitriy Tsorionov: my vpolnyaem sotszakaz,” *Pravda*, September 25, 2012, <https://www.pravda.ru/faith/faithculture/25-09-2012/1129252-tzorionov-0/>.

immorality broadly speaking, blasphemy, and “sects”; the tactics differ in that, unlike the committee, Enteo and his followers did not spend time looking to address their concerns through legal channels, instead ramping up the unconventional and violent approach previously immortalized by the *Caution, Religion!* incident.

## Sorok Sorokov

Bringing together around 200 Orthodox activists in Moscow and counting on the support of approximately 10,000 believers in the nearby regions, the Sorok Sorokov movement also emerged in the wake of the Pussy Riot scandal in 2012. Since then, Sorok Sorokov has garnered the reputation of an aggressively violent organization with fascist tendencies. The group’s notoriety has been reinforced by the fact that it provides security for patriarch Kirill, despite the known presence among its members of activists with ties to skinheads and other far-right associations. But Sorok Sorokov’s greatest visibility in the media has come about because of its willingness to use force against local residents opposed to the building of new churches in their neighborhoods through the “200 Churches” program jointly launched by the Moscow city government and the Russian Orthodox Church in 2009.<sup>74</sup> The most famous example here is the scandal surrounding Moscow’s Trofyanka park, in which Sorok Sorokov activists physically assaulted and otherwise intimidated local inhabitants protesting against plans to build a church that would take up a significant amount of the territory’s current green space.<sup>75</sup>

Whether or not Sorok Sorokov may be thought of in terms of Russian nationalism with fascist overtones is a question for other researchers;<sup>76</sup> for our purposes, the question of the movement’s integration of “traditional values” into its *raison d’être* is important in terms of supporting the chapter’s overall argument. And indeed, Sorok Sorokov counts as central among its goals “the defense of traditional values.”<sup>77</sup> To quote the movement’s leader, Andrei Kormukhin, “We decided to defend Orthodox values, and will strive to keep Russia as it was left to us by our Orthodox ancestors, with its thousand-year history and culture.”<sup>78</sup> Unsurprisingly, this includes the defense of Russia from “gay propaganda and blasphemy,” as well as from the aggressive intrusion of “foreign sects.”<sup>79</sup> At the same time, the violent defense of the “200 Churches” program is also justified in

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74. Nadezhda Guzheva, “Zashchitnik Torfyanki: Eti fashisty gotovy nas ubit!” *Sobesednik*, December 2, 2016, <https://sobesednik.ru/obshchestvo/20161202-zashchitnik-torfyanki-eti-fashisty-gotovy-nas-ubit>; “V parke ‘Torfyanka’ pravoslavnye aktivisty izbili devushku,” *Bol’shoy Gorod*, June 30, 2015, <http://bg.ru/city/news/4188/>.

75. Il’ya Kizirov, “40 Sorokov i 10 arestov,” *Radio Svoboda*, November 14, 2016, <https://www.svoboda.org/a/28116375.html>.

76. Nikolay Mitrokhin, “Rokovye ‘Sorok Sorokov,’” *Grani*, October 12, 2015, <http://graniru.org/opinion/mitrokhin/m.244957.html>.

77. Roman Lunkin, “Dvizhenie ‘Sorok sorokov’: pravoslavnyy fundamentalism vo vrazhdebnom okruzhenii,” Keston Institute, [http://www.keston.org.uk/\\_russianreview/edition71/01-Lunkin-40x40-71.html](http://www.keston.org.uk/_russianreview/edition71/01-Lunkin-40x40-71.html); “Andrey Kormukhin: ‘Yadernoe oruzhie russkogo naroda—eto ego dukhovnost,’” *Pravoslavnyy vzglyad*, November 13, 2014, <http://orthoview.ru/andrey-kormuxin-yadernoe-oruzhie-russkogo-naroda-eto-ego-duhovnost/>.

78. “Andrey Kormukhin: Spasat’sya nuzhno bandoy,” *Pravoslavie*, June 17, 2015, <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/80033.html>.

79. “Pravoslavnye prosyat zapretit’ deyatel’nost’ astrologov, uzhestochit’ otvetstvennost’ za gey-propagandu i koshchunstvo,” *Interfax-religiya*, August 14, 2015, <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=59796>.

part through an appeal to the values trope. For instance, according to Kormukhin, “every church [built] protects the boundaries of our moral values”; the defense of values is thus inextricably linked to the fight against those seeking to prevent the building of new churches.<sup>80</sup>

### “Matilda,” “The Orthodox State,” and Molotov Cocktails

Finally, in this section, a few words need to be said about the most recent widely publicized incident involving violence in defense of Orthodox traditions in Russia. The episode was still evolving as of the writing of this chapter, and as such we can do no more than describe it here while offering a few preliminary thoughts about its significance for the larger argument.

In May 2016, one Igor Smykov, head of an organization calling itself “Orthodox Mission for the Revival of the Spiritual Values of the Russian People” (*Pravoslavnaya Missiya po Vozrozhdeniyu Dukhovnykh Tsennostei Russkogo Naroda*), filed a complaint with the General Procuracy of the Russian Federation, asking it to investigate the then-unfinished film *Matilda*—a semi-fictionalized account of the romance between Nicholas II and the ballerina Matilda Kshesinskaya. Smykov accused the film’s creators of “inciting religious hatred” and “offending the feelings of religious believers,” as it allegedly portrayed the canonized Tsar in ways that cast doubt as to his saintliness.<sup>81</sup> Smykov’s complaint concerned the film’s trailer, as the full-length feature had not then been completed. By the summer of 2017, the controversy around *Matilda* had grown from one isolated complaint to a full-blown storm, in which heated rhetoric by anti-*Matilda* Orthodox activists was compounded by violent arson attacks on movie theaters across Russia that had agreed to screen the film, as well as the firebombing of a car belonging to the attorney of *Matilda* director Aleksei Uchitel.<sup>82</sup>

Several aspects of the *Matilda* episode should be highlighted here. First, the campaign against the film began, it appears, at the instigation of ultra-monarchist nationalist circles professing a theological understanding of Nicholas II’s martyrdom that equates his death with Christ’s salvific sacrifice, an interpretation rejected wholesale by the Moscow Patriarchate.<sup>83</sup> Whereas these Orthodox activists had remained on the margins of the ROC throughout the post-Soviet period, *Matilda* brought them to the forefront of Russian society as the image of Orthodoxy du jour.

Second, *Matilda* brought widespread media coverage to vigilante groups previously below the radar, among them the so-called Orthodox State (*Pravoslavnoye Gosudarstvo*), which sent open letters to theater owners across the country with veiled threats of arson in case of the film’s

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80. “Andrey Kormukhin: ‘Yadernoe oruzhie russkogo naroda—eto ego dukhovnost,’” *Pravoslavnyy vzglyad*, November 13, 2014, <http://orthoview.ru/andrey-kormuxin-yadernoe-oruzhie-russkogo-naroda-eto-ego-duxovnost/>.

81. “Glava ‘Pravoslavnoy missii po vozrozhdeniyu dukhovnykh tsennostey russkogo naroda’ pozhalovalsya v prokuraturu na treyler neokonchennogo fil’ma o Matil’de Kshesinskoy,” *Portal Credo*, May 11, 2016, <http://www.portal-credo.ru/site/print.php?act=news&id=120276>.

82. “Lider ‘Khristianskogo gosudarstva’ zaderzhan po delu o podzhoge iz-za ‘Matil’dy,’” *Interfax*, September 20, 2017, <http://www.interfax.ru/russia/579803>.

83. Aleksandr Soldatov, “Vosstanie ‘sekty tsarebozhnikov,’ otets Sergiy (v miru Nikolay Romanov) i Poklonskaya: Pochemu oni tak vliyatel’ny, khot’ i razdrzhayut RPTs,” *Novaya Gazeta*, August 15, 2017, <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2017/08/15/73480-tsarebozhniki-i-konets-sveta>.

screening.<sup>84</sup> Their appearance on the scene would suggest the need to further investigate the quickly changing landscape of Orthodox vigilantism, as at least some actors seem poised to ramp up levels of violence in defense of its ideological positions.

Third, and most important in the context of this chapter's overall argument, the anti-*Matilda* crusade has been couched in the terminology of "the defense of traditional values" almost from its inception. Of central importance here seem to be the tropes of family (as Nicholas II's successful marriage to Alexandra of Hesse-Darmstadt is held up by the ROC as an example worthy of emulation by the faithful) and the inviolability of Russia's sacred spiritual heritage ("Nicholas II is a saint, therefore any criticism/demonstration of him in a less-than-saintly light is an attack against said heritage"), both integral elements of the "traditional values" concept as we have described it.<sup>85</sup> At this stage our impression is that couching the campaign in "traditional values" terms has made the violence associated with it more palatable to some segments of the Russian public; given the still-evolving nature of this controversy we can only suggest the need for further research on this issue in the future.

## SOME CONCLUSIONS AND AVENUES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

### "Traditional Values" as a Useful Lens for Understanding "Orthodox" Violence

Certainly, the examples discussed above do not provide exhaustive coverage of how "traditional values" sit on the nexus of faith and violence within the Russian Orthodox community.<sup>86</sup> Still, even this brief overview indicates that, at a minimum, the theme of "traditional values" is an important one for understanding violence carried out in Russia by self-identified Orthodox Christians. Whether the perpetrators are primarily motivated by nationalist ideology or religious feelings (or other factors), "traditional values" almost invariably appear in the background of such events. Thus, the approach provides a lens useful for interpreting such seemingly disparate episodes as priests calling for violent pogroms of "sects" and Cossacks physically assaulting members of Pussy Riot during the Sochi Olympics.<sup>87</sup>

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84. Yulia Sapronova, Anna Kim, and Filipp Aleksenko, "Delo 'Matil'dy': kak fil'm Uchitelya stal samym skandal'nym v Rossii," RBK, September 15, 2017.

85. Among numerous examples, see "Glava 'Pravoslavnoi missii po vozrozhdeniu dukhovnyh tsennostei russkogo naroda' pozhalovalsia v prokuraturu na treiler neokonchennogo fil'ma o Matilde Kseshinskoi"; Nikolay Chumakov, "V MVD nazvali molitvennoe stoyanie protiv 'Matil'dy' v Omske aktsiei 'za traditsionnye tsennosti,'" *TJ*, September 17, 2017, <https://tjournal.ru/59545-v-mvd-nazvali-molitvennoe-stoyanie-protiv-matildy-v-omske-akciey-za-tradicionnye-tsennosti>; "V Moskve sostoyalos' molitvennoe stoyanie protiv fil'ma 'Matil'da,'" NTV, August 1, 2017, <http://www.ntv.ru/novosti/1881818/>; "Uchitel, 'Matil'da,' i IGIL," *Russkaya Narodnaya Liniya*, August 18, 2017, [http://ruskline.ru/news\\_rl/2017/08/18/uchitel\\_matilda\\_i\\_igil/](http://ruskline.ru/news_rl/2017/08/18/uchitel_matilda_i_igil/).

86. A comprehensive overview would have to account for such actors as *Russkiy Narodnyy Sobor*, the *RNE*, *Soyuz Pravoslavnykh Grazhdan*, and *Soyuz Pravoslavnoy Molodezhy*, among others; the constraints of this paper do not permit such exhaustive treatment.

87. "Protoierei Smirnov: Gromite poganye sekty!" *YouTube*, July 14, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ewcFzQil90> (Accessed August 20, 2017); "Uchastnits Pussy Riot v Sochi izbili kazaki s nagaykami," *YouTube*, February 19, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bi2dRyUHxeo>.

Furthermore, it should be evident from the above discussion that, when the government adopted the language of “traditional values” and their defense in 2012, it did so on the basis of a preexisting discourse that had been brewing within the Russian Orthodox Church since the 1990s. This discourse first appeared in rather marginal circles, emerging with the *Ostorozhno, Religia!* episode of 2003 into the Orthodox mainstream; from there it easily moved into wider society in 2012 once the regime gave the signal from the top. One might here draw an analogy with the idea of the “Russian World” (*Russkiy Mir*) developed by Patriarch Kirill in an effort to solidify the ROC’s hold on its Ukrainian parishes, an idea that was famously appropriated by the Kremlin during the annexation of Crimea. In any case, it is striking the degree to which the regime’s priorities in terms of “traditional values” have revolved around sexual morality and the “sectarian” threat, both themes central to the Orthodox discourse on the subject as far back as the early days of the Committee for the Moral Renaissance of the Fatherland; the only thing so far missing is a state-directed attack on blasphemous cultural production.

To be sure, domestically the regime’s defense of “traditional values” has taken the form of nonviolent legal measures. Internationally, however, it is hard not to notice the presence of the “traditional values” undertone in the confrontation with Ukraine, as opposition to that country’s Western choice has included concerns over the importation of “nontraditional” moral norms; in this context the rhetoric of “Gay-Ropa” takes on more than incidental significance. This chapter has concentrated on violence/Orthodoxy within Russia’s borders; future research should, in our view, explore how “traditional values” plays into justifying the Putin regime’s intrusion into the conflict in Donbas. The rather active involvement of Sorok Sorokov activists, as well as other nationalist organizations such as the Russian Imperial Movement (*Russkoye Imperskoye Dvizheniye*) and *Narodnyi Sobor*, in setting up the so-called Lugansk and Donetsk republics would be a good starting point for such an exploration.<sup>88</sup>

Furthermore, we must emphasize here that the symbolic attack against the artist—from the Pussy Riot incident to the destruction of Sidur’s sculptures—is an important part of the general “war of values,” given that perpetrators’ defensive rhetorical appeal to self-defense or the defense of religious feelings. Common to all Orthodox violent vigilantes is the idea of reasonable self-protection against blasphemy, which is rendered acceptable precisely because it is a gesture of self-protection. Thus, symbolic violence emerges as an important part of the general issue of violence in defense of “traditional values,” a potentially fruitful avenue for further research in other religious and cultural contexts.

Finally, it should be recalled from the second section of this paper that the discourse of “traditional values” is not exclusive to the Russian Orthodox community: it has found significant support among the country’s other three “traditional religions” (Islam, Judaism, Buddhism). Anecdotal evidence that we came across during our research suggests that violence at least in defense of “Islamic traditions” is a real problem across Russia, particularly though not exclusively in areas with

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88. “Pravoslavnye voyuyut i molyatsya za Igorya Strelkova i Novorossiyyu,” *Russkaya Vesna*, September 14, 2014, <http://rusvesna.su/news/1410708412>; see also, as a starting point, Alexander Verhovskiy, “Dinamika prestuplenii ne-navisti i deyatel’nosti ul’trapravnykh grupp i dvizhenii v Rossii v 2010–e gody,” *Put’ k Miru i Bezopasnosti* 52, no. 1 (2017): 116–124.



a highly concentrated Muslim population. In our view, the topic deserves to be developed in further research; among other things, one might ask whether, and if so to what extent, the government's emphasis on the defense of "traditional values" has contributed to the rise of violence within non-Orthodox religious communities.

### Mobilizing "Traditional Values": The State, Uncivil Society, and "Religious" Violence

Tackling the issue of "traditional values" and violence from the point of view of civil society—once upon a time understood as central to the construction of a functioning democracy in the post-Soviet space—we may consider that the case we have presented turns the question on its head. At least here, it is evident that not all "social activist" organizations may be considered "civil," and the issues they defend may end up supporting authoritarian tendencies. Indeed, contemporary Russia has witnessed a mushrooming of ultranationalist or religious fundamentalist vigilante organizations claiming to protect "traditional values" against enemies and seeking to restore a "traditional order" in the country. The short overview above (and it should be noted that the examples of such organizations can be extended) highlights a core issue: political mobilization in an authoritarian country like Russia has a price. The new public accord of Putin's government post-2012 is based on the "besieged camp" metaphor, and the politics of mobilization have required the activation of uncivil society's members. Here, we expand somewhat on how this dynamic functions.

First, these vigilantes of uncivil society—sometimes but not always directly connected with the Russian Orthodox Church—are uncontrolled and, despite the opinions of some Russian liberals, usually do not have ties to the regime. Sporadic contacts of the leaders of such groups with representatives of state authority is not proof that the Kremlin has inspired such activity. And while it is true that, on occasion, vigilante actions may elicit the sympathy and even support of local authorities, this does not seem to be a generalized pattern: if the illegality of a particular action is established, law enforcement has overall worked in favor of punishing the vigilantes. At the same time, the nationalistic shift in official narratives has clearly mobilized nationalists generally, and violent nationalists in particular. (An analogy here would be the positive reaction among the alt-right in the United States to the unexpected victory of Donald J. Trump in the 2016 presidential elections.) Most relevant to the topic of this paper, the idea of the protection of "traditional values" from various threats has, since 2012, been actively discussed at the government level, and disseminated through education, research, and mass media. This has had the effect of reinforcing the dynamics already present within uncivil society itself, as the proliferation of the "traditional values" trope inspires already active members of uncivil society to organize themselves in the protection of these values against enemies.

Second, particularly in 2012–2013, actively homophobic propaganda of state-controlled TV described LGBT people as morally or physically perverted people—also affiliated with the "West." "Traditional values" as a term has become ubiquitous in mass media calls for the protection of children from pedophilia and the traditional family from destruction. In the meantime, the Constitutional Court has declared that the so-called LGBT propaganda law does not violate the values and principles of the Russian Constitution, notably stating that the slogan "To be gay and love gays is normal, beating gays and killing gays is a crime" contained propaganda of a "nontraditional" sexual relationship. In this context it is not surprising that violence against LGBT people

based on the need to protect “traditional values” has found increasing legitimization in Russian society.

Additional state legitimization of violence by uncivil society against religious minorities could potentially be found in the regime’s policy against “nontraditional religious groups” in the framework of the recently adopted law on missionary activity. It is not a coincidence that the adoption of this law was followed by the designation of the Jehovah’s Witnesses as an extremist organization and continued everyday pressure against the Church of Scientology. It is true, however, that there has been no serious rise in incidence of violence against religious minorities in response to the adoption of the anti-missionary law; the question of why this is the case is worthy of further exploration.

Finally, we believe that the phenomenon discussed here—of uncivil society activists taking their cue from the state’s nationalistic turn and ramping up violence in defense of “traditional values”—cannot be fully understood without considering rhetorical signals from the Russian Orthodox Church itself, which in turn may intensify the problem. It should be emphasized that direct provocations to violence from clergy and bishops of the ROC are rare, and that when they do occur other clergy have been known to publicly denounce them.<sup>89</sup> Still, top officials of the ROC have occasionally expressed a kind of empathy to those who “cannot overcome their natural anger and beat up perverted people,” contributing to the perception that such behavior is socially acceptable; on at least one widely resonant occasion, a prominent clergyman led a physical attack against a secular concert on the grounds that it was disrupting Vespers at the nearby church.<sup>90</sup> Overall, the total atmosphere of hysteria and the charged discourse of the “besieged camp” make the real prevention of (Orthodox) violence in defense of “traditional values” in contemporary Russia highly problematic.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

For the Russian government:

First of all, serious corrections are needed in the sphere of official policy—all violent action, regardless of its goals, should be declared illegal as well as immoral. The “struggle of values” should not be converted into either physical violence or symbolic violation of artistic freedom. The vigilantes should be allowed no access to state support, and all groups involved in any kind of violence ought to be excluded from projects somehow supported by the Russian state.

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89. See, for example, the inter-Orthodox clergy debate around the occasionally violent rhetoric of Father Vsevolod Chaplin, and the more recent denunciations of Father Andre Tkachev’s public defense of domestic violence, on the Pravoslavie i Mir web portal.

90. One of the authors obtained documents in a criminal case in 2007–2008, when an unidentified Orthodox priest seemed to be actively ministering to a group of Nazi skinheads involved in a number of racist attacks. The name of the priest remains unknown, because of the lack of interest from the investigative officer (D. Dubrovskiy, private archive, circa 2007). See also “Protoierey Dmitriy Smirnov v roli doktora Khausa: ‘Vse Vrut,’” *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, July 6, 2015, <http://www.mk.ru/social/2015/07/06/protoierey-dmitriy-smirnov-v-rol-doktora-khausa-vse-vrut.html>.

To prevent hate and to reach more harmonious social relations, the following steps should be undertaken:

#### Law:

- Avoid the use of the term “traditional” in relation to religious organizations in official discourse, as it creates the discriminatory opposing category “nontraditional,” and cease discriminatory policies against the representatives of minority groups, especially Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Church of Scientology, and all independent Muslim groups; provide special protection for members of these communities.
- Reconsider the idea of the particular traditional values that are preventing the Russian Federation from applying the principles and values of universal human rights, especially in constitutional law.
- Ensure that counterterrorism police units prioritize all hate crime based on religious hatred.
- Repeal the Ministry of Justice’s list of extremist literature, which contains a significant proportion of religious texts, many of which have no relation whatsoever to politics, extremist or otherwise.
- Increase the transparency for the registration and re-registration process for all religious groups. The current process of registration for new religious groups is difficult and non-transparent.

#### Mass media:

Using existing legal tools, prevent the hysteria and false news about religious groups, which are currently inspiring violent vigilantes to physical and symbolic violent action. Give special attention to balanced information about the activity, basic values, and everyday life of Russia’s small religious communities. In general, organize public dialogue on the concept of “traditional values” and its content for the mass population.

#### Education, research, and science:

The scientific and academic community should use the standards of the OSCE, to which Russia nominally subscribes, in religious education—in particular the Toledo principles of religious education<sup>91</sup>—especially when it comes to training experts in religious affairs. Reserve funds for research and education in the field of religious minorities. Include courses devoted to the current debates in traditional values in the curriculum of the social sciences and humanities, especially gender studies and human rights.

#### For Russian NGOs:

Organize projects to include different religious minorities in Russia’s everyday social and cultural life, to overcome the current stigmatization and marginalization. Special attention should be paid

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91. “Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools,” ODIHR, 2007, <https://www.osce.org/odihr/29154?download=true>.

to the public representation of such communal activity, to increase the visibility and transparency of the religious minorities.

For the Russian Orthodox Church:

Representatives of the ROC should stop communicating and collaborating with vigilante groups, and clearly express the Church's negative attitude toward any kind of violence, even that meant to protect "traditional values." The Church should elaborate and propose a peaceful way to promote the ideology of "traditional values" without creating enemies and blaming the Western world for the alleged destruction of Russian "traditional values."

# Online Militant Jihadist Propaganda Targeting Russian-Speaking Audiences and the Russian Response

Jean-François Ratelle and Ekaterina Sokirianskaia

## INTRODUCTION

Militants from Russia have become a visible part of the global jihadist landscape. Since 2016, Russian-speaking militants associated with the Islamic State (IS)<sup>1</sup> were involved in terrorist attacks in the Philippines and Turkey; carried out suicide attacks in Mosul in Iraq; and have played a key role in the Syrian civil war. Although insurgent activities in the North Caucasus remarkably dropped in 2014 and 2015 because of the outflow of fighters to Syria, the region witnessed a slight increase in insurgent violence in 2016 and 2017. This is the result of the FSB's increased efforts since 2014 to prevent the outflow of Russian jihadists to Syria, the tightened control over the Turkish-Syrian border, and IS's loss of territory and generally deteriorated situation. The latter has made fighting and *hijra* to Syria and Iraq both more difficult and less attractive than was initially presented by IS recruiters. Moreover, IS's Russian-speaking ideologues who initially motivated fighters to come and join them in the Middle East now encourage waging jihad at home. Despite the significant improvement of the security situation in the Russian South, researchers have demonstrated that violent extremism remains a serious challenge across the Russian Federation while Russian security services acknowledge that the international terrorist organizations are increasing their activity in Russia.<sup>2</sup>

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1. IS was recognized a terrorist organization by decision of the Supreme Court of Russia, December 29, 2014.

2. "Bor'ba s terrorom v Rossii: internet-verbovka i 'zheny voynov,'" RIA Novosti, January 31, 2017, [https://ria.ru/defense\\_safety/20170131/1486877167.html](https://ria.ru/defense_safety/20170131/1486877167.html).

The problem of radicalization toward violent extremism in Russia is multifaceted and affects differently the various communities in the country. In the North Caucasus, two wars in Chechnya and their spillover to the neighbouring regions led to the emergence of powerful regional jihadi project of Imarat Kavkaz (IK).<sup>3</sup> The group, declared by Doku Umarov in 2007, aimed to establish radical Islamist (Sharia) rule across the North Caucasus. In 2015, most of the North Caucasus militant groups swore allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Bagdadi and now commit attacks on security services under its banner. As of March 2016, officially 3,417 Russian citizens were fighting in IS, hundreds of them hailing from the Russian regions outside the North Caucasus.<sup>4</sup> IS and other jihadist groups have increasingly recruited and created “sleeper cells” in Russian big cities, in the Volga-Ural region, and in Siberia. They also actively recruit from among the 5 million to 7 million Central Asian migrant workers in Russia, who often live in harsh conditions and face rights abuses and discrimination.<sup>5</sup> If previously all these radical factions were ideologically disconnected mainly because of their various ethnic backgrounds and the geographical distance, the rise of the Islamic State might have established a common narrative among Russian-speaking jihadists.

Based on extensive fieldwork in the North Caucasus and beyond, this chapter investigates the role and the importance of jihadist online propaganda targeted toward Russian-speaking audiences with an emphasis on the North Caucasus. It focuses on the role of online propaganda in the radicalization process toward violent extremism as well as its effect on terrorist and insurgent recruitment in Russia. Despite widespread acknowledgement of the problem, the understanding of the role played by online propaganda in the process of violent radicalization remains limited. It is clear that IS, and previously Imarat Kavkaz, has used the Internet for a variety of purposes: for propaganda, recruitment, cultivating a broad support base, internal communication, fund-raising, and sending threats to their potential victims. Conspirator members of militant jihadi groups use anonymous proxy servers, encrypted programs, anonymous sim cards and various social media, communication platforms, and mobile application milieus. The possibilities of the latter develop so fast that it is often hard for researchers and policy-makers to catch up. As scholars have noted, “generational and cultural gaps are a significant impediment that allow pro-IS propagandists to flourish in their work.”<sup>6</sup>

The chapter has four sections. Firstly, we address the issues surrounding the methodology and the concepts behind the study. Secondly, we offer a non-exhaustive literature review of the numerous debates in the field of radicalization studies, focusing primarily on the importance of the Internet and social media as a facilitating factor. Thirdly, we look in detail at the development and the evaluation of online propaganda among Russian-speaking jihadists, focusing mainly on IK and IS. In comparison with IK’s parochial jihadist ideology and its slow turn toward the global jihad, we

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3. Imarat Kavkaz was recognized as a terrorist organization by the decision of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, February 8, 2010.

4. “Rossiyane protiv rossiyan v Sirii,” *Meduza*, March 22, 2017. These numbers are disputed by experts. Some say the numbers are inflated and include people who live in Turkey and the Middle East; others say they are incomplete because the government is unable to track all the militants.

5. Noah Tucker, “Public and State Responses to ISIS Messaging in Central Asia” (CERIA Briefs 11–15, Central Asia Program, February 2016).

6. Peter Neumann and Tim Stevens, *Countering Online Radicalisation: A Strategy for Action* (London: International Centre for Study of Radicalisation, 2009), 11.

explain the rationales behind IS's success in recruiting thousands of Russian-speaking jihadists and outbidding IK in the North Caucasus. We emphasize the development of social media, the evolution of radicalization processes, and the availability of jihadist online material in Russia, explaining how IS has used the Internet for propaganda and recruitment. Finally, we analyze the Russian state's responses to the challenge.

## METHODOLOGY AND CONCEPTS

This paper is based on extensive ethnographic research conducted by the two authors in the North Caucasus over a 16-year period (2001–2017). Based on two completely independent networks in Russia and in the North Caucasus, we conducted several dozen extensive field trips in the different republics of the North Caucasus, lasting roughly between a few weeks and five consecutive years. Although many of those fieldwork trips were devoted to the Chechen wars and their consequences on the local population, in recent years we both have started to research the causes of jihadist radicalization and violent extremism in Russia. On this particular topic, we have conducted several hundred interviews with Imams, Salafi and Sufi believers, former insurgents, government and security officials, activists, experts, human rights workers, and ordinary citizens.

The interviews were conducted in all the republics of the North Caucasus (Karachevo-Cherkessia, Kabardino-Balkaria, North Ossetia, Ingushetia, Chechnya, and Dagestan) as well as in Moscow and in the North Caucasian diaspora in Western Europe and Turkey. For this specific research project, although the concept of online propaganda was already indirectly addressed in our interviews through our previous research, additional research was carried out in Dagestan (summer 2016 and winter 2017), Turkey, Chechnya, Ingushetia, North Ossetia, and Kabardino-Balkaria (winter 2017) focusing on online radicalization.

In this paper, we define violent radicalization as the process by which individuals progress toward violent extremism and extremist beliefs, including but not limited to the willingness to use, encourage, or facilitate violence.<sup>7</sup> By definition, radicalization is not linked to engagement in violence per se; it also encompasses the concept of nonviolent radicalization. Equating radicalism and violent radicalism is misleading and has dangerous policy implications. One can firmly hold radical views of the world (ideology) and adopt a rigid viewpoint without ever engaging in or promoting violence. The literature on terrorism has demonstrated that the link between radical beliefs and violent behaviors is weak.<sup>8</sup> The process of violent radicalization is a complex phenomenon that follows

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7. For a discussion about radicalization as concepts, see Mark Sedgwick, "The Concept of Radicalization as a Source of Confusion," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22, no. 1 (2010): 479–494; Peter R. Neumann, "The Trouble with Radicalization," *International Affairs*, 89 no.4 (2013): 873–893.

8. Jamie Bartlett and Carl Miller, "The Edge of Violence: Toward Telling the Difference between Violent and Non-Violent Radicalization," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 24, no.1 (2012): 1–21; Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskaleiko, "Toward a Profile of Lone Wolf Terrorists: What Moves an Individual from Radical Opinion to Radical Action," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26, no.1 (2014): 69–85; James Khalil, "Radical Beliefs and Violent Actions are Not Synonymous: How to Place the Key Disjuncture between Attitudes and Behaviors at the Heart of our Research into Political Violence" *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 37, no. 2 (February 2014): 198–211.

nonlinear, often idiosyncratic trajectories that are nonpredetermined based on existing sociopsychological factors and vulnerabilities.

For the sake of this chapter, we focus on one mechanism driving violent extremism: militant jihadist online propaganda and its role in violent radicalization of individuals and insurgent groups. In other words, we are not looking to identify a multifactor and contextually dependent model of violent radicalization, but rather trying to empirically assess the link between online ideology (propaganda) and violent behavior in the context of Russia's North Caucasus. By understanding such sociopsychological process, one can be better equipped to explain how jihadist online propaganda would lead to cognitive and behavioral radicalization leading to violence. To investigate such a link, we mainly look into homegrown insurgency and terrorism in Russia and the phenomenon of Russian foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq.

## UNDERSTANDING THE LINK BETWEEN ONLINE PROPAGANDA AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM: A LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding the impact of online propaganda on violent radicalization is a complex duty. After 9/11, an extensive literature has developed regarding the link between the concept of radicalization and violent extremism.<sup>9</sup> At first, it has insisted on challenging popular beliefs about the mental health of terrorists<sup>10</sup> or the importance of structural root causes such as poverty, lack of integration, nondemocratic regimes, or religion.<sup>11</sup> However, key contributions have suggested that studying radicalization also involves understanding the processes and the pathways toward violent extremism.<sup>12</sup> Early studies about violent radicalization have focused on identity crisis, emotional vulnerability, and social networks and face-to-face interactions in order to explain how individual beliefs can evolve toward extremism.<sup>13</sup> However, with the rapid development of online

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9. See, for example, Randy Borum, "Radicalization into Violent Extremism I: A Review of Social Science Theories," *Journal of Strategic Security* 4, no. 4 (2011): 7–36; Randy Borum, "Radicalization into Violent Extremism II: A Review of Social Science Theories," *Journal of Strategic Security* 4, no. 4 (2011): 37–62.

10. Andrew Silke, "Becoming a Terrorist," in *Terrorists, Victims, and Society: Psychological Perspectives on Terrorism and Its Consequences*, ed. Andrew Silke (Hoboken: Wiley, 2003), 29–54; John Horgan, *The Psychology of Terrorism* (London: Routledge, 2005).

11. Martha Crenshaw, "The Causes of Terrorism," *Comparative Politics* 13, no.4 (1981): 379–399.

12. John Horgan, *The Psychology of Terrorism* (London: Routledge, 2005); Max Taylor, and John Horgan, "A Conceptual Framework for Addressing Psychological Process in the Development of the Terrorist," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 18, no. 4 (Winter 2006): 585–601.

13. Donatella Della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence, and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Quinton Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005); Randy Borum "Radicalization into Violent Extremism I: A Review of Social Science Theories," *Journal of Strategic Security* 4, no. 4 (2011); Randy Borum, "Radicalization into Violent Extremism II: A Review of Social Science Theories," *Journal of Strategic Security* 4, no. 4 (2011); Michael King, and Donald M. Taylor, "The Radicalization of Homegrown Jihadists: A Review of Theoretical Models and Social Psychological Evidence," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 23, no. 4 (2011): 602–622.



propaganda and, subsequently, social media,<sup>14</sup> the vast majority of the scholarship has agreed on the importance of online activities on radicalization by insisting on its role as a key facilitator in the process of violent extremism.<sup>15</sup> For example, in terms of concrete mechanisms, the Internet provides easier access to ideological and radicalizing material,<sup>16</sup> including visual imagery<sup>17</sup> as well as online magazines. It also makes it easier to disseminate extremist messages and offers a unique advantage for organizations to reach individuals outside of their geographical range.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, scholars debate the exact nature of the mechanisms linking online propaganda with violent extremism. One of the first debates focusing on the role of online material in the radicalization process opposed Hoffman's vertical approach linking terrorist organizations and their leaders to local jihadists against Sageman's bottom-up theory focusing on social networks and homegrown terrorism.<sup>19</sup> Although the debate mainly addresses the risk factors regarding terrorism in the West, it also anchored a discussion about online vertical processes led by extremist organizations where the Internet acts as a means of communication and horizontal processes where the Internet can reinforce extremist networks.

Since then, radicalization studies have been faced with the complex task of understanding the role played by Internet and social media in the process of radicalization. Investigating such a question involves looking into whether online radicalization is a unique sociological process or simply an additional factor leading to violent extremism in conjunction with traditional factors (existing sociopsychological factors and sociopolitical vulnerabilities).<sup>20</sup> The former presupposes that online

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14. Initially, in the early 2000s, the research about the role of online propaganda has predominantly focused on static websites, virtual communities, and online forums. In many empirical cases, including the one under investigation in this chapter, websites and virtual communities played an important promotional role; however, they remained marginal with regards to recruitment. The development of social media has acted as a literal revolution for the democratization of the Web with the social media (Web 2.0) changing the face of extremist online activities and recruitment. Ordinary supporters through social media and fan websites have entered into the dissemination of extremist material, recruitment activities as well as established direct links with terrorist groups.

15. The Internet can play a role in various aspects of terrorism including information provision, training, fundraising, networking, and propaganda. In this chapter, we focus on the later. Regarding the other aspects, one can refer to Maura Conway, "Terrorism and the Internet: New Media—New Threat?" *Parliamentary Affairs* 59, no. 2 (2006): 283–298; Akil N. Awan, "Virtual Jihadist Media: Function, Legitimacy and Radicalizing Efficacy," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10, no. 3 (2017): 389–408. Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens and Nick Kaderbhai, *Research Perspectives on Online Radicalisation: A Literature Review 2006–2016* (Dublin: VOX-Pol Network of Excellence, 2017).

16. Gabriel Weimann, *Terror on the Internet: The New Arena, the New Challenges* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2006).

17. Peter Neumann, *Countering Online Radicalization in America* (Washington D.C.: Bipartisan Policy Centre, 2012).

18. *Ibid.*

19. Bruce Hoffman, "The Use of the Internet by Islamic Extremists," Testimony presented to the United States House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence: Washington, DC, May 4 2006; Bruce Hoffman, "The Myth of Grass-roots Terrorism," *Foreign Affairs*, 87, no. 1 (October 8, 2008); Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Marc Sageman, "The Next Generation of Terror," *Foreign Policy* 87, no. 1 (October 8, 2008).

20. Maura Conway, "Terrorism and the Internet: New Media—New Threat?" *Parliamentary Affairs* 59, no. 2 (2006): 283–298; Gabriel Weimann, *Terror on the Internet: The New Arena, the New Challenges*, (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2006).

propaganda and online activities alone can pull an individual to violent extremism, while the latter focuses on the synergetic link between sociopolitical vulnerabilities and online propaganda. Von Behr, Reding, Edwards, and Gribbon argue that the Internet can create opportunities for radicalization by providing an echo chamber among extremists, accelerating the engagement in violence without physical contact.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, cases of “self-radicalization” are rare.<sup>22</sup> For example, the number of cases in Russia is relatively limited; even if some of them have been extensively covered by the press, such as Varvara Karaulova. In order to make sense of such cases of radicalization, certain scholars claim that online social networks can have a similar effect to traditional networks inside the radicalization process;<sup>23</sup> however, more studies are required in order to validate such claims.

The greater proportion of the empirical cases under investigation in this chapter acknowledges the role of online influences without denying that offline face-to-face interactions are usually required. Such observation confirms what the literature about online propaganda and violent extremism has recently highlighted. Scholars have argued about the importance of deconstructing the intertwined role of networks and ideology in the process into extremism, trying to bridge the link between face-to-face and online radicalization.<sup>24</sup> For example, Conway and McInerney suggest that both processes act together as individuals without previous affiliations seek material online and terrorist organizations reach out to vulnerable youth through online contents.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, researchers were not able to clearly establish the level of significance of online propaganda on the process of radicalization.<sup>26</sup> For certain authors, the Internet is the “driver and enabler for the process of radicalization.”<sup>27</sup> According to the NYPD Intelligence Division, the Internet plays a role at every phase of the radicalization process. For others, one cannot claim that a causal link exists

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21. Ines Behr, Charlie Edwards, Luke Gribbon, and Anaïs Reding, *Radicalisation in the Digital Era: The Use of the Internet in 15 Cases of Terrorism and Extremism* (Brussels: RAND Europe, 2013).

22. Raffaello Pantucci, *A Typology of Lone Wolves: Preliminary Analysis of Lone Islamist Terrorists* (London: International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, King’s College, 2011); Seamus Hughes and Lorenzo Vidino, *ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa* (Washington DC: George Washington University Program on Extremism, December 2015).

23. Rachel Briggs, *Radicalisation: The Role of the Internet* (London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2011); Maura Conway, “From al-Zarqawi to al-Awlaki: The Emergence of the Internet as a New Forum of Violent Radical Milieu,” *Combating Terrorism Exchange* 2, no. 4 (2012): 12–22; Elizabeth Pearson, “The Case of Roshonara Choudhry: Implications for Theory on Online Radicalization, ISIS Women, and the Gendered Jihad,” *Policy & Internet* 8, no. 1 (2015): 5–33.

24. Mohammed Hafez and Creighton Mullins, “The Radicalization Puzzle: A Theoretical Synthesis of Empirical Approaches to Homegrown Extremism,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 35 (2015): 958–975.

25. Maura Conway and Lisa McInerney, “Jihadi Video and Auto-radicalisation: Evidence from an Exploratory YouTube Study,” *First European Conference on Intelligence and Security Informatics* 3, no. 5 (2008): 1–11. See also, Seamus Hughes and Lorenzo Vidino, *ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa* (Washington DC: George Washington University Program on Extremism, December 2015).

26. Maura Conway, “Determining the Role of the Internet in Violent Extremism and Terrorism: Six Suggestions for Progressing Research,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 40, no.1 (2017): 77–98.

27. Mitchell D. Silber and Arvin Bhatt, *Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat* (New York: City of New York Police Department, 2007), 83.

between online propaganda and radicalization to violent extremism.<sup>28</sup> The central issue remains that the scholarship lacks large-scale studies seeking to measure the saliency of the Internet as a causal factor to violent extremism.<sup>29</sup> More importantly, certain scholars challenge directly the assumption claiming that the Internet has led to an increase in terrorism.<sup>30</sup>

In order to better assess the role of propaganda, Neumann identifies several processes that can explain how online material and/or interactions can contribute to the radicalization process.<sup>31</sup>

- 1) Sustained exposure to propaganda can produce a process of “mortality salience” and increase the support for terrorism.
- 2) Online material can induce a sense of moral outrage or vicarious humiliation among local Muslims.<sup>32</sup>
- 3) Extremist forums or social media foster a community, reinforcing deviant and extreme behaviors (criminogenic environments) as well as increasing connectivity and networking, making it easier to find and meet extremists.<sup>33</sup>
- 4) Online anonymity increases disinhibition, leading to hostility, polarization, and reinforcement of extremist ideas.

On that matter, social media and online horizontal networks (Web 2.0) have widened the scope of the demographics as well as interactions between users. However, its effect might not be equal across all demographics or types of extremists. In recent years, the academic literature has blossomed regarding the use of social media by extremist groups for ideological and networking purposes.<sup>34</sup> However, as with the general theme of online propaganda, we know relatively little about the concrete effect of social media (online propaganda) on the process of violent recruitment.

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28. Anne Aly, “Brothers, Believers, Brave Mujahideen: Focusing Attention on the Audience of Violent Jihadist Preachers,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 40, no. 1 (2017): 62–76.

29. Maura Conway and Lisa McInerney, *Jihadi Video and Auto-radicalisation: Evidence from an Exploratory YouTube Study* (Dublin: School of Law & Government, Dublin City University, 2008), [http://doras.dcu.ie/2253/2/youtube\\_2008.pdf](http://doras.dcu.ie/2253/2/youtube_2008.pdf).

30. David C. Benson, “Why the Internet Is Not Increasing Terrorism,” *Security Studies* 23, no. 2 (2014): 293–328; Paul Gill and Emily Corner, “There and Back again: The Study of Mental Disorder and Terrorist Involvement,” *American Psychologist* 72, no. 3 (2017): 231–241.

31. Ibid.; Peter Neumann, “Options and Strategies for Countering Online Radicalization in the United States,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 36, no. 6 (2013): 431–459.

32. Regarding vicarious humiliation and moral outrage, see Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

33. See also, Raffaello Pantucci, *A Typology of Lone Wolves: Preliminary Analysis of Lone Islamist Terrorists* (London: International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, King’s College, 2011).

34. For example, see Shiraz Maher, Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens, and James Sheehan, *Lights, Camera, Jihad: Al-Shabaab’s Western Media Strategy* (London: International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, 2012); J. M. Berger and Bill Strathearn, *Who Matters Online: Measuring Influence, Evaluating Content and Countering Violent Extremism in Online Social Networks* (King’s College London: ICSR, 2013).

As demonstrated by this short literature review, the role of online propaganda and social media on violent extremism is critical, under-theorized, and requires further analysis. Contrary to previous literature focusing strictly on root causes, studying online propaganda requires a better understanding of the radicalization processes and mechanisms in order to situate precisely where and when it can play a concrete role. Throughout our most recent field research, online propaganda and social media have been identified as the most important factors linked to violent radicalization in the North Caucasus by most interviewees; this is a change from our previous fieldwork in 2010 and 2011, when individuals focused on state repression and socioeconomic conditions.<sup>35</sup>

In the next section, we put forward a historical assessment of the relationship between the insurgency and militant jihadist propaganda in Russia. We demonstrate how the North Caucasus and Russia in general has remained rather disconnected from global jihadist propaganda (specifically online propaganda), including al Qaeda's. Subsequently, we investigate how, in the last three years, IS and other extremist factions have strategically used social media to connect with Russian-speaking jihadists, bypassing and outbidding the Imarat Kavkaz, and integrating them tightly into the global jihadist cause.

## MILITANT JIHADIST ONLINE PROPAGANDA IN RUSSIA: A HISTORICAL ASSESSMENT

Throughout the second half of the 1990s and the early 2000s, the spread of militant jihadist ideology in Russia was directly linked to the wars in Chechnya. The Islamist wing of Chechen fighters and several key foreign combatants from Arabic countries were seen as the main factor leading to the spread of jihadist ideas in the North Caucasus and beyond. Contrary to what was predicted by certain scholars,<sup>36</sup> the diffusion of militant jihadism was mostly limited to the North Caucasus; radicals from the region committed terrorist acts also outside the region, including several waves of suicide attacks between 2002 and 2004 as well as 2009 and 2011.<sup>37</sup> Researchers have identified several factors explaining such spillover of the conflict outside of Chechnya, including the brutality of counterterrorist methods, deficit of democracy, bad governance, socioeconomic conditions in the North Caucasus,<sup>38</sup> and the spread of jihadi ideology through social

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35. Although not the objective of this paper, it is important to mention that online propaganda has achieved tangible effect in changing the landscape of violent extremist activities in the North Caucasus and in Russia. IS' online propaganda, its military success, and the continual theological debates between Caucasian militants in Syria and IK have gravely endangered the survival of the latter.

36. Gordon Hahn, *Russia's Islamic Threat* (New Haven: Yale University Press: 2007).

37. Cerwyn Moore, "Suicide Bombing: Chechnya, the North Caucasus and Martyrdom," *Europe-Asia Studies* 64, no. 9 (2012): 1780–807; Gordon Hahn, *The Caucasus Emirate Mujahedin* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2014); Aurélie Campana and Jean-François Ratelle, "A Political Sociology Approach to the Diffusion of Conflict from Chechnya to Dagestan and Ingushetia," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 37, no. 2 (2014): 115–134.

38. Marat Shterin and Akhmet Yarlykapov, "Reconsidering Radicalisation and Terrorism: The New Muslims Movement in Kabardino-Balkaria and Its Path to Violence," *Religion, State and Society* 39, no. 2-3 (2011): 303–325; Jean-François Ratelle and Emil Aslan Souleimanov, "Retaliation in Rebellion: The Missing Link to Explaining Insurgent Violence in Dagestan," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 29, no. 4 (July-August 2017): 573–92.

networks and kin groups.<sup>39</sup> However, the question of the role of online propaganda in the process of recruitment and radicalization remained understudied among scholars focusing on the North Caucasus insurgency. Although the majority of the scholarship recognizes its existence and offers descriptive inferences of its nature, very few studies have sought to understand its causal role in recruitment into insurgency.<sup>40</sup>

### Imarat Kavkaz: The Regional Platform for the Local Cause

Imarat Kavkaz understood early on the importance of using the Internet in order to promote its struggle against the Russian state among its supporters and around the world.<sup>41</sup> Initially the goal was to socialize and mobilize support of journalists, the public, and the Caucasus diasporas in Turkey, the Middle East, and Western Europe, as well as more advanced Internet users among the North Caucasian Muslims. Created in order to bypass the mainstream media, IK's main website, Kavkaz Center, was aimed at communicating insurgents' strategic objectives and ideology, advertising their grievances, and providing a source of daily news.<sup>42</sup> Between 2009 and 2011, Kavkaz Center was regularly introduced by several interviewees in the North Caucasus as a reputable source for local and international news. One Dagestani Salafi explained:

Kavkaz Center is the only way to know the truth about the struggle of Muslims around the world. Putin and the enemies of Islam are blocking this website so we cannot learn about the struggle our brothers are facing . . . I have to connect through Ukraine in order to read it . . . However, for our local struggle against these evils, I also talk to people at the Mosque or in the surrounding villages. We cannot even study Islam independently from the DUMD. Only our brothers who travelled abroad know about proper Islam.<sup>43</sup>

In addition to Kavkaz Center, IK's individual most active "vilayats" ("provinces") outside Chechnya also created their own websites.<sup>44</sup> The idea was to bring the propaganda content closer to local

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39. Domitilla Sagramoso, "The Radicalisation of Islamic Salafi Jamaats in the North Caucasus: Moving Closer to the Global Jihadist Movement?" *Europe-Asia Studies* 64, no. 3 (May 2012): 561–595; Jean-François Ratelle and Emil Aslan Souleimanov, "Retaliation in Rebellion: The Missing Link to Explaining Insurgent Violence in Dagestan," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 29, no. 4 (July-August 2017): 573–92; see also International Crisis Group reports series *The North Caucasus, The Challenges of Integration* 1–4.

40. Aurélie Campana and Benjamin Ducol, "Voices of the "Caucasus Emirate": Mapping and Analyzing North Caucasus Insurgency Websites," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 27, no. 4 (2015): 679–700; Mark Youngman, "Broader, vaguer, weaker: The evolving ideology of the Caucasus Emirate leadership," *Terrorism and Political Violence* (2016), DOI: 10.1080/23761199.2016.1215055.

41. Cerwyn Moore and Paul Tumelty, "Assessing Unholy Alliances in Chechnya: From Communism and Nationalism to Islamism and Salafism," *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 25, no. 1 (March 2009): 73–94; Aurélie Campana and Benjamin Ducol, "Voices of the "Caucasus Emirate": Mapping and analyzing North Caucasus Insurgency Websites," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 27, no. 4 (2015).

42. Kavkaz Center is run by Movladi Udugov, a former separatist leader and the current main IK propagandist.

43. Interview (J. F. Ratelle), Salafi in Dagestan 2010.

44. IslamDin for Vilayat of Kabarda, Balkariya, and Karachay, VDagestan.com for Vilayat Dagestan, and Hunafa.com for Vilayat G1algajche (Ingushetia and North Ossetia).

communities and to partly delegate it to local jamaats. Each group wanted to control its own website and its content. Moreover, as explained by a former Chechen separatist activist and combatant who is now a refugee in Europe, the insurgency operated in very harsh military conditions and every group remained isolated from each other. Therefore, each used their own website as a mean of communication.<sup>45</sup>

Campana and Ducol demonstrate how IK websites “look like a virtual library of local and global jihadi materials and provide guides to arms, explosives, Islam, and jihad.”<sup>46</sup> For example, *Hunafa.com*, an insurgent website associated with Ingush fighters, provides extensive guidelines explaining the main principles behind guerrilla warfare and safety on the Internet, has a training manual for new fighters, and contains a doctrine of jihad. Kavkaz Center has regularly published statements, lectures, and discussions from international jihadi ideologues, including AQ leaders. Especially in IK’s early years, the emphasis was on regional leaders and ideologues such as Said Buryatskii, Shamil Basayev, Anzor Astemirov, Doku Umarov, and Aliaskhab Kebekov, individual groups’ statements, events, and some “analysis” of local developments rather than on the global jihad. It has always contained a very strong anti-Russian element covering news from Russia outside the North Caucasus and developing its own pejorative terminology that often mirrored the vocabulary of the Russian security services.

Although Hahn argues that IK ideology is simply a sub-product of AQ’s ideology,<sup>47</sup> other authors such as Sagramoso<sup>48</sup> and Youngman<sup>49</sup> have underlined important differences between the two. Al Qaeda’s propaganda did not play an important role in the rise of militant jihadism in the North Caucasus, as no official links existed between IK and AQ before 2014.<sup>50</sup> Salafi-jihadism ideology was mainly imported during the interwar period in Chechnya (1996–1999) by Arab foreign fighters with existing links to AQ leadership as well as North Caucasian radicals who studied in the Middle East. Although foreign fighters networked with AQ central in Afghanistan in the 1980s and were seen as being part of the AQ transnational network, the struggle in Chechnya has always been positioned as a local struggle against the Russians<sup>51</sup>.

IK was a local product, whatever (experts) say about the international ties with al-Qaeda it remained a local phenomenon . . . In Chechnya, once all the Arab fighters were killed, there were no members of al-Qaeda left. AQ and the Taliban were respected among militants due to shared ideas about decolonization in the Islamic world. He (Kebekov) later secretly swore an oath to al-Qaeda.<sup>52</sup>

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45. Interview (E. Sokirianskaia), 2017.

46. Aurélie Campana and Benjamin Ducol, “Voices of the “Caucasus Emirate”: Mapping and Analyzing North Caucasus Insurgency Websites,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 27, no. 4 (2015): 692.

47. Gordon Hahn, *The Caucasus Emirate Mujahedin* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2014).

48. Domitilla Sagramoso, “The Radicalisation of Islamic Salafi Jamaats in the North Caucasus: Moving Closer to the Global Jihadist Movement?” *Europe-Asia Studies* 64, no. 3 (May 2012).

49. Mark Youngman, “Broader, vaguer, weaker: The evolving ideology of the Caucasus Emirate leadership,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* (2016), DOI: 10.1080/09546553.2016.1229666.

50. Aliaskhab Kebekov (June 2014), cited in Youngman, “Broader, vaguer, weaker: The evolving ideology of the Caucasus Emirate leadership.”

51. Ibid.

52. Interview (E. Sokirianskaia) with expert from Kabardino-Balkaria. Nalchik, February 2017.

Similarly to Kavkaz Center, the main focus of the vilayat websites was on insurgent activities, news, and speeches given by local insurgent leaders. The material changed over time and was shaped by the leaders' priorities. Earlier content (when the first leaders of *Imarat* were still alive) was less violent; it became gradually more graphically brutal as the insurgency radicalized itself. *Islamdin* was the first one to post a very brutal video in which a victim was executed. At the time this was a highly shocking innovation indicating a breach with the first generation of post-Soviet IK jihadists:

A fountain of blood, the cop had been shot in the head and had torn a large piece out—they filmed it artistically, close up; the first such video was posted on *Islamdin*. The old generation would have just killed the cop, but posting it, filming it even from the distance—they would have never done something like this. They were yesterday's komsomols!<sup>53</sup>

Another expert talking about Kabardino-Balkaria explained to us that online propaganda became more extreme with the radicalization of the movement:

Initially, on the site of *Islamdin*, [Anzor] Astemirov [former leader of the Kabardino-Balkarian underground] was responsible for choosing content on the website. Of all this multifaceted underground, he was the most erudite. He spoke high-quality Russian. *Islamdin* posted the first video with "flying brains" but this was already after Astemirov's death. He did not target the precinct police, he was against it, and believed that this would only increase the level of violence. After his death, "the crazy Balkar," Dzhappuev, was in charge of the cause and behaved like a criminal, the quality of content changed accordingly.<sup>54</sup>

With advances in Internet technology, militants very actively used YouTube and other video-sharing websites such as Daily Motion to distribute promotional and propaganda videos. The static websites, important as they were at the time, could not offer an interactive platform where sympathizers could bond and potentially interact with insurgents. Militant and extremist circles functioned offline, and so did the recruitment. This situation started changing with what is known as the Web 2.0, which emphasizes the interactive nature of online communications and the development of peer-to-peer platforms, from forums to social media and instant messaging.

In terms of social media, IK's involvement was rather limited mainly due to its slow mastering of the new technology and the high risk associated with the activity. While in hiding in the North Caucasus, real-time online activities drastically increased the risk that the Federal Security Service (FSB) would track insurgents' communication channels and identify the location of their safe haven in the North Caucasus. However, their supporters, especially those abroad, actively turned to forums and bulletin boards such as Ansar al-Mujahidin, which is available in Arabic, Russian, and English. The forums supplemented and disseminated militant photos, fighters' eulogies, and

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53. Interview (E. Sokirianskaia) with Orhan Dzhemal, journalist, *Forbes* contributor, expert on the North Caucasus insurgency, Moscow, February 2017.

54. Interview (E. Sokirianskaia) with expert from Kabardino-Balkaria. Nalchik, February 2017.

insurgent action videos and other information posted on static websites and opened the door for greater engagement with a support base across Europe, Turkey, and Russia and development of an online community and network. They also increased interactions between the supporters. At the same time, the limited outreach of such forums and the risk associated with infiltration and vetting limited their influence outside of the sympathizers of the jihadi communities.

Notwithstanding IK's operational success between 2009 and 2012, online activities played a minimal role in recruitment compared to offline activities.

IK didn't need online recruitment. The main goal was to let the supporters know that IK was close to them and it was active. That's why it was so important to post videos of attacks and armed clashes as soon as possible. Sometimes people would be killed on the way, forgetting about precautions, eager to deliver the video as soon as possible and make it available online.<sup>55</sup>

In terms of recruitment, until 2014, the quantity of local fighters available to various *jamaats* in the different republics was sufficient to fully replenish insurgent forces; not only that, but IK perceived that online recruitment activities were superfluous as they were already part of local communities. A Chechen ex-fighter explains:

At that time, IK was just behind the corner. It was very close; you had to make one step to get to a secret flat or to reach out to a group in the hills. IK did not need recruiters, their propaganda was simple: "Russia is the enemy, the federals are the enemy." They just had to inform potential recruits about their activities and the possibility to join. IS needed recruitment, they needed to sell their narratives, to show their cities, to tell about their life. Because they are hell knows where. And IK was there, everybody knew who they were.<sup>56</sup>

IK's regional embeddedness and ideological focus on the struggle in the Caucasus significantly limited its appeal to potential jihadists beyond the region. IK had no country-wide ambitions; its aim was to separate from Russia, rather than infiltrate it. With a handful of exceptions of recruits from non-Caucasus ethnic backgrounds who joined the fighting in the Caucasus or committed terrorist acts in other regions, the non-Caucasian jihadists in Russia remained disconnected from and uninspired by this regional jihad, to say nothing of transnational and global jihadist causes. Doku Umarov many times addressed North Caucasians in Europe, Turkey, and Arab countries, urging them to come back home and join militant jihad. However, these calls didn't have much resonance either. Only late in 2010 can one observe a gradual evolution toward a transnational understanding of the struggle in the North Caucasus and in Russia, which spurred Russian radicals and prepared them for the idea of global jihadist engagement.

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55. Interview (E. Sokirianskaia) with a former Ichkeria combatant, now a refugee in Europe, October 2017.

56. Interview (E. Sokirianskaia) with a former Ichkeria combatant, now a refugee in Europe, October 2017.



## From Regional Insurgency to Global Jihad: IS, Social Media, and the Rise of Transnational Jihad in Russia

In his extensive study of Umarov's speeches between 2006 and 2013, Youngman demonstrates how IK ideology and its online propaganda have slowly aligned with the struggle of the Muslim world, integrated elements of salafi-jihadism, and finally turned toward a more transnational jihad. Since its establishment in 2007, IK has defined Russia as its immediate enemy.<sup>57</sup> Rather than being a facilitator into the distribution of jihadi propaganda, IK has acted as a gatekeeper prioritizing its own interest over the global jihad.

Starting in 2010 and 2011, one can observe new ideological trends emerging in Russia. Youngman explains that IK has started to adopt a hybrid ideology targeting Russia, but increasingly engaging with the broader issues of transnational jihad.<sup>58</sup> Umarov's communiqué focused extensively on the struggle of other Muslims across the world, connecting IK's fight in Russia with them. The North Caucasus was slowly connecting with the transnational jihad even if Umarov remained rather silent about the West and its status as a far enemy. Furthermore, Umarov extended the call for an individual obligation to jihad (*fard al-ayn*) beyond the Caucasus, to include the Volga and the Urals region.<sup>59</sup> Jihadist ideology has incrementally become advertised as a cause beyond the North Caucasus. However, according to one of our interviewees, attempts to expand beyond the North Caucasus were inspired by ideologues outside Russia rather than an authentic grassroots decision:

Doku Umarov's declaration of new vilayat Idel Ural in Tatarstan in 2010 was a propaganda bluff, aimed to please his donors. Ideology was under Udugov's control and he was striving to expand IK's influence. Udugov's ambitions were behind the declaration of the nonexistent vilayat in Tatarstan.

In any case, without an extensive online propaganda campaign and an overarching appeal, the organization remained unable to mobilize non-Caucasian Muslims across the Russian Federation in any significant numbers.<sup>60</sup>

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57. Youngman explains that IK defined Russia as an intermediary enemy between AQ's traditional dichotomy of the Near (the local regimes) and the Far enemy (the West). Fighting Russia could not be seen as fighting a transnational jihad, as AQ was advertising; however, it was also conceptually different from fighting heretic Muslims. During this period, IK remained independent from AQ's network. See, Youngman, "Broader, vaguer, weaker: The evolving ideology of the Caucasus Emirate leadership."

58. Ibid.

59. Ibid., 12.

60. Said Buryatskii remains one of the most influential ideologues to gain traction outside of the North Caucasus. As one of the most important IK operatives in the North Caucasus with a non-Caucasus background, Buryatskii's influence was extended outside the region. Even after his death in March 2010, his lectures and videos remained highly popular inside parts of the radical Islamist community. See Hahn, *The Caucasus Emirate Mujahedin*. Buryatskii became an icon among the Russian-speaking jihadist community in Russia, Syria, and Iraq, and even in Central Asia. Buryatskii developed a more extensive influence on Russian-speaking militants compared to AQ's key ideologues, such as Anwar al-Awlaki. The concept of charismatic preachers appears important in establishing a link between online propaganda and offline radical communities. See: David C. Hofmann and Lorne L. Dawson, "The Neglected Role of Charismatic Authority in the Study of Terrorist Groups and Radicalization," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 37, no. 4 (April 2014): 348–368.

It is in this context that the Syrian civil war represents a game changer for online propaganda and jihadism in Russia. Several thousand individuals answered IS's call for *hijra* (often translated as emigration) to the Islamic State. The number of Russian-speaking jihadists who traveled to Syria and Iraq is difficult to assess precisely; however, people from the territory of the former Soviet Union represent the third-largest contingent of foreign fighters, making Russian the third-most important language in IS after Arabic and English. The majority of these fighters, roughly 4,500, are Russian citizens or have transited on the Russian territory.<sup>61</sup> This wave of foreign fighters is often portrayed as the result of the Islamic State's online propaganda and its powerful appeal to jihadists around the world. However, one needs to understand such appeal in the particular context of the North Caucasus and IK's leading role regarding online propaganda targeting Russian-speaking Islamist radicals.

First of all, the beginning of the Syrian civil war coincides with IK's growing interest in the global jihad. Syria is the first major conflict to be perceived as a valid alternative to the jihad in the North Caucasus and as combat training ground; at first, IK encouraged North Caucasians to fight in Syria if they could not return to the North Caucasus.<sup>62</sup> Secondly, the civil war in Syria and its internationalized characteristics have broadened online propaganda targeted toward Russian-speaking militants and challenged IK's quasi-monopoly on its dissemination. Umarov and later Kebekov were naturally unable to retain control over several Russian-speaking militant factions.<sup>63</sup> Many independent groups played an increasingly important role in the Syrian war and gained popularity on social media. Based on their military deeds, they were perceived as the main Islamic vanguard in the fight against *Kuffar*, apostates, and other oppressors, in comparison to a weakened IK unable to effectively fight the Russian forces.

Russian-speaking fighters in Syria quickly gained momentum and fame, attracting more recruits from Russia and the North Caucasus and weakening the North Caucasus insurgency. Capitalizing on their military successes in Syria, the jihadists gained instant notoriety and prestige within the online world. Building on their reputation, they entered into recurrent online debates with insurgent groups associated with IK advocating for a global jihad over the regional issues of the North Caucasus.<sup>64</sup> Suddenly, IK found itself in a competitive situation with other Russian-speaking jihadi militant groups as it was trying to cater to the growing ideological demands and engagement of Russian-speaking radicals.

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61. As a facilitating factor, the Russian government, in the summer of 2014, exploited the rise of IS propaganda and the establishment of the Caliphate in order to get rid of several hundred North Caucasian Islamists before the Sochi Olympics, helping to crush the insurgency. Jean-François Ratelle, "North Caucasian Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq: Assessing the Threat of Returnees to the Russian Federation," *Caucasus Survey* 4, no. 3 (2016): 218–238; International Crisis Group (ICG), *The North Caucasus Insurgency and Syria: An Exported Jihad? Europe Report N°238* (Brussels: International Crisis Group, March 16, 2016); "Patrushev nazval chislo voyuyushikh v Sirii i Irake zhiteley Severnogo Kavkaza," *Lenta*, April 19, 2017, <https://lenta.ru/news/2017/04/19/nortcaucasus/>.

62. Mark Youngman, "Between Caucasus and Caliphate: The Splintering of the North Caucasus Insurgency," *Caucasus Survey*, DOI: 10.1080/23761199.2016.1215055.

63. Jean-François Ratelle, "North Caucasian Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq: Assessing the Threat of Returnees to the Russian Federation," *Caucasus Survey* 4, no. 3 (2016).

64. Mark Youngman, "Between Caucasus and Caliphate: The Splintering of the North Caucasus Insurgency," *Caucasus Survey*, DOI: 10.1080/23761199.2016.1215055.

IK had no strong ideologues or charismatic leaders left to cope with this challenge. Doku Umarov, very ill and isolated before his death in 2013, had never been a strong speaker or ideologue in the first place, and in his late years he was superseded by Dagestani emir Magomedali Vagabov and Chechen challengers such as Aslambek Vadalov, Khusein, and Muslim Gakkaev. Crushed by a massive law enforcement operation prior to the Sochi Olympics, IK's resources were depleted, its logistics and communications strongly constrained. While its main competitor was composed of IS militants personally engaged in social media propaganda, IK fighters could not afford such operations due to security risks. That context greatly limited its ability to challenge Russian-language IS propaganda coming from Syria, leading to a drastic drop in IK's online charisma.

## IS Russophone Propaganda Machine

IS created its own brand of Russian-speaking jihadist propaganda that competed with local insurgent groups in Russia. Militants, mostly Caucasians and Central Asians, have launched an independent Russian-language propaganda channel named *Furat media*, seeking to disseminate IS propaganda across the former Soviet Union, as well *Istok*, a high-quality publication aimed directly at Russian-speaking militants and the group's supporters abroad. In its propaganda, IS and its leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, officially proclaimed that Russia and the United States are the main enemies of the Muslim world.<sup>65</sup> In September 2014, IS started to openly threaten Russia and Vladimir Putin, announcing its intentions to liberate the Caucasus and to retaliate against Russia for its support of Syria.<sup>66</sup> *Dabiq*, IS's official magazine, directly referenced the struggle in the Caucasus.<sup>67</sup> Using foreign fighters from Russia as well as IK defectors in Syria, IS has developed an entire structure dedicated to producing propaganda that targets Muslims in Russia and in Central Asia.

Most attractive products by *Furat Media* were short and crisp visualized clips with effective emotional footage and sound effects, reproducing threats, speeches, battle scenes, and interviews with Russian-speaking militants (Russian and Central Asians). Many young people interviewed for this chapter emphasized the popularity of graphic material and violent scenes. *Furat Media* has also publicized speeches coming from fighters in the North Caucasus who pledged allegiance to IS and its caliph. IS's propaganda focused mainly on "Caliphate-building," and to that end employed strategies aimed at bringing Muslims under its rule.<sup>68</sup>

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65. Andrei Ostalskiy, "Khalifat vse blizhe," *Radio Svoboda*, October 21, 2015, <http://www.svoboda.org/content/article/26644660.html>.

66. "ISIS threatens to 'liberate' Chechnya and Caucasus," RT, September 3, 2014, <https://www.rt.com/news/184836-isis-putin-kadyrov-syria/>.

67. Islamic State, "The Qawqazi Caravan Gains Peace," *Dabiq 10*, Al Hayat Media Center, July 13, 2015, <https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2015/07/the-islamic-state-e2809cdc481biq-magazine-1022.pdf>, quoted in Celine Marie I. Novenario, "Differentiating Al Qaeda and the Islamic State Through Strategies Publicized in Jihadist Magazines," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 39, no. 11 (2016): 953–967.

68. Celine Marie I. Novenario, "Differentiating Al Qaeda and the Islamic State Through Strategies Publicized in Jihadist Magazines," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 39, no. 11 (2016): 961.

*Dabiq* and *Istok* have put forward a narrative surrounding the definition of a good Muslim, including the need for *hijra* and the sinful act of abstaining from jihad.<sup>69</sup> Themes such as new beginnings and religious duties surrounding *hijra* in the Middle East are rather new for the North Caucasus and Russian radicals outside the region. AQ never confronted its Russian-speaking supporters with these issues; instead, as Novenario has demonstrated, AQ online propaganda has focused on the concept of attrition and the war against the far enemy, as compared to IS and its focus on the near enemy.<sup>70</sup> As elsewhere, IS's success among Russian-speaking Islamists could be explained by its promotion of the "Caliphate brand" of "five-star jihad" as well as the prophetic *hadith* about the apocalyptic battle in Sham.<sup>71</sup> One can see the effectiveness of the discourse, its importance of the establishment of the Caliphate, and its superiority over other jihadist factions.

IS's online magazine places emphasis on religious, military, and social issues in the Caliphate. All the issues offer individual narratives about Caucasian foreign fighters traveling to Syria, as well as biographies of martyrs or Russian converts fighting for IS. *Istok* also addresses the traditional narrative put forward by *Dabiq* focusing on issues related to sectarianism, the schism with AQ (*Jabhat al-Nusra*), the obligatory duty for *hijra* and waging jihad in the Middle East, and Abu Muhammad Al-Adnan's messages.<sup>72</sup> It is not surprising to see these themes discussed in *Istok*, as they were also central to the debate between Russian-speaking members of IS and IK supporters about the split between AQ and IS.

Furthermore, *Istok* sought to threaten Russia and position itself as the potential protector of Muslim populations in Russia, aiming to outbid IK. For example, the third issue contains *Istok*'s editorial comments on the Russian plane crash in Sinai (justifying the attack to Russian-speaking audiences) and a digitally manipulated image of Putin and Obama as war prisoners. This theme underlines the struggle of IS for the liberation of the Caucasus and its challenges to the Russian state seen as a Far enemy similar to the United States. Already in the second issue (June 2015) and the third issue (November 2015), *Istok* calls for lone-wolf attacks in Russia when individuals cannot migrate to the Caliphate. They also challenge the legitimacy of spiritual boards of Muslims in Russia by labeling them as polytheists and decrying their links to the Russian government (Russian security services). Moreover, *Istok* eulogizes individuals who engaged in lone-wolf attacks in the Western world and in the Middle East, attempting to connect the struggle with Russia to a larger fight to preserve the Caliphate.

IS's message in Russia is targeted toward a broader audience and is more direct compared to IK, AQ, or other transnational jihadist organizations. Tucker and Ratelle explain that the Caliphate utopian views build on the many struggles Russian-speaking Islamists faced in Russia, including

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69. Ibid.

70. Ibid.

71. Mariam Karouny, "Apocalyptic prophecies drive both sides to Syrian battle for end of time," Reuters, April 1, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-crisis-prophecy-insight/apocalyptic-prophecies-drive-both-sides-to-syrian-battle-for-end-of-time-idUSBREA3013420140401>.

72. For an extensive content analysis of *Istok*, refer to Alisa Fainberg, *The Islamic State speaks Russian—a new market for ISIS propaganda* (Herzliya: International Institute for Counter Terrorism, 2016).

religious repression and resentment of marginalization.<sup>73</sup> It aimed not just to convince the potential members, but to cultivate sympathizers. News about IS's achievements and daily life in Syria and Iraq and Russian audio recordings of lectures given by IS preachers and ideologues were aimed at grooming these broader audiences. Our research has shown that individuals assign greater value to social media and peer-to-peer "propaganda" than to existing magazines and official propaganda disseminated by IS. One reason could be that magazines' longer reads are harder to consume and are oftentimes quite boring. Interviewees have told us that social media and the "real" social connection is what makes all the difference between IS propaganda and that of IK. As one young radical in Makhachkala explained to Jean-François Ratelle:

*Dabiq* and *Istok* are general information and we don't learn much about Islam in them. They are mostly aimed at people who know nothing about Islam. I prefer to connect directly with the brothers abroad. I have several friends in Syria and in Iraq. Before they used to tell me about their life over there almost every day on WhatsApp, I felt I was almost part of the group . . . These days it is more difficult to receive news from them . . . It is not that IK did not provide us with valuable material about Islam; however, our fighters in Syria and Iraq provide a different sense of community . . . The real life of a Muslim is abroad in the Caliphate and not here . . . Talking my Islamic brothers really reinforces my will to leave.<sup>74</sup>

As underlined by this interview, many young radicals are interested in life in the Caliphate rather than the general propaganda. They seek to understand what represents *hijra* and what are the daily routines of good Muslim in the Caliphate, and to hear stories of the different battles or daily activities.

### Factors Behind the Success of IS Propaganda

Russian security services first argued that IS propaganda was aimed at uneducated and disenfranchised youth; however, they soon recognized that its messages resonate with wealthy, successful individuals, families, and representatives of different ethnic, gender, and age groups. There are several factors that are conducive to IS's impressive online propaganda success among Russian radical Muslims.

First and foremost, it can be explained by IS successfully manipulating the numerous grievances of Muslim communities, especially in the North Caucasus, the region from which an overwhelming majority of Russian jihadists originate. IS and its propaganda have found fertile ground among economic migrants and repressed Salafis in the North Caucasus and Central Russia. Unresolved conflicts, especially the one in Chechnya, along with heavy-handed counterinsurgency tactics, egregious corruption, economic underdevelopment, and clanship—coupled with failing state

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73. Noah Tucker, "Public and State Responses to ISIS Messaging in Central Asia," CERIA Briefs 11–15, Central Asia Program, February 2016; Jean-François Ratelle, "North Caucasian Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq: Assessing the Threat of Returnees to the Russian Federation," *Caucasus Survey* 4, no. 3 (2016).

74. Interview (JF Ratelle) with IS sympathizer in Makhachkala, Dagestan 2016.

services—produce a Molotov cocktail of frustrations that are masterly exploited by recruiters seeking to agitate angry youth.

A charismatic Ingush imam, Khamzat Chumakov, put it in the following way:

What kind of youth can we have if for the last twenty years they have been observing explosions, humiliations, security servicemen in masks breaking into [their] house, pushing the father aside, throwing the mother on the floor, shooting around (. . .) The most terrible is the deprivation of rights (. . .) Any different opinion or idea is suppressed by force (. . .) Imams thrown in prison (. . .) Have you ever heard of an Orthodox priest having drugs planted on him and being sentenced? And our imams (in the North Caucasus) are all drug addicts! Imagine, if my spiritual leader is seized and thrown in jail for nothing, of course I will radicalize! How can they grow [moderate] if there are no positive examples around?<sup>75</sup>

The second factor is ever-growing interest in religion among the North Caucasus youth. Especially in Dagestan, Chechnya, and Ingushetia, the secular space has visibly shrunk. Islam is everywhere: on television, social media, at the workplace, in universities and schools. The lack of secure and effective channels to communicate discontent, and the lack of democratic procedures and legal mechanisms to hold authorities accountable, result in a situation in which angry youth are looking for ways to exact revenge. Salafi dissent becomes the leading and most consistent critic.

Third, the restriction of freedoms of the press and of assembly, the suppression of open public discussion, and the crackdown on moderate Salafi mosques lead to most independent public life moving online, into social media and communication platforms. These platforms disseminate alternative news and analysis, provide a forum where opinions clash and discussions are possible, and allow popular charismatic leaders critical of the regime can speak to their audiences.

Finally, the absence of conditions for critical debates and the dramatically deteriorated quality of education in the North Caucasus in the last two decades have resulted in a deficit of critical thinking among modern youth. Coupled with a lack of knowledge of Islam, the emotional and intellectual environment is made ripe for manipulation. An Ingush educator, Maret Tangieva-Dzeitova, explained:

Recently I received a circulated message in WhatsApp, a parable story of a girl who retells her night dream. In the dream the angels are asking her whether she prayed, or wore the hijab. She is telling how she was finding excuses and saying that her mother told her to wear an Ingush-style headscarf instead of hijab. And there comes the voice of God: you should not listen to such parents! They are not parents! And then the parable brings *ayats* from the Koran, fully dismantling the authority of the parents. This parable was very actively circulated on mobile applications. And what is this? Manipulations.

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75. Khamzat Chumakov, imam of Nasyr’Kort mosque, the Republic of Ingushetia, presentation, roundtable on prevention of violent extremism, Moscow, May 2017.

Replacement of values. They speak to youth in the name of God! Most of the young are uneducated and this makes distant manipulation much easier.<sup>76</sup>

The father of a Dagestani jihadist, who went to Syria in 2013 to persuade his son to return home, noted a similar problem when he observed his son and his comrades for an extended time period while living with their group. "I sometimes witnessed their spontaneous discussions. The degree of primitivism of these discussions and their heated radicalism were quite striking. You [could] light a match and the room would explode."<sup>77</sup>

## How Online Recruitment Works

The role of online propaganda in recruitment varies depending on the individual psychosocial characteristics and the phase of the socialization into violent extremism. One way to simplify this complex process is to focus on Silber and Bhatt's four phases of radicalization: "pre-radicalization," "self-identification," "indoctrination," and "jihadization."<sup>78</sup> During pre-radicalization and self-identification, individuals are interested in learning about the ideology rather than being directly recruited for terrorist activities. The Internet can simply be a source of inspiration or knowledge for individuals. In Russia as elsewhere, many young people often directly search online about Islam without requiring direct contact with imams or local communities. If one searches important terms like *hijra*, *jihad*, *shirk* on Russophone YouTube, they would find at the top of the search list plenty of videos by IK ideologues and those who later joined IS. One of our interviewees, the father of a disengaged former IS member from Dagestan, explains: "'Google sheikh' is the new expression describing the root of this problem. Today's youth get their knowledge of Islam from the Web, they don't turn to the people of knowledge."<sup>79</sup>

In the phase of indoctrination, individuals seek ways to enter in contact with jihadist organizations or online recruiters. In Russia, IS has created a powerful system of recruitment targeting Russian youth, especially North Caucasians. According to an official representative of Russia's National Anti-Terrorist Committee (NAC), over 80 percent of recruits to insurgency groups are young people.<sup>80</sup> He claims that the Internet has become the main instrument for the recruitment of young people into terrorist activity and noted the dramatic increase in terrorist activity on the Internet. A Dagestani official provides the same estimate, noting that "around 80 percent of the Dagestani men and women who left for IS have been recruited over the Internet." As specialist of the insurgency in the North Caucasus explained to us,

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76. Interview (E. Sokirianskaia) with Maret Tangieva-Dzeitova, Genesis NGO involved in training youth, Nazran, Ingush-etia, February 2017.

77. Interview (E. Sokirianskaia) with father of disengaged IS member, Moscow, May 2017.

78. Mitchell D. Silber and Arvin Bhatt, "Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat," (New York: City of New York Police Department, 2007).

79. Interview (E. Sokirianskaia) with father of disengaged IS member, Moscow, May 2017.

80. Andrey Przhezdomskiy, "Press conference of the National Anti-terrorism committee," National Antiterrorist Committee, January 31, 2017, <http://nac.gov.ru/press-konferencii-i-brifingi/v-press-centre-mid-rossii-proshla-press-0.html>.

IK has local goals and local specialists in mass media. IS, on the other hand, has high-quality scum from Western Europe: YouTubers, bloggers, marginal elements from various groups. There everything is done at a higher level of sophistication. The administrative resource is more powerful . . . Therefore, their (online) content is qualitatively different.<sup>81</sup>

According to the Ombudsman of Ingushetia, “it is more effective to recruit via social media: no one sees you and your audience is a thousand times larger.”<sup>82</sup> Clearly, the Internet provides greater anonymity and some protection to recruiters, which is crucial given the very tight security controls in the North Caucasus. Safiyat Magomedova, a Dagestani defense lawyer who works with suspected IS-affiliated detainees, explained the advantages of Internet-based recruiting.

These days the recruiters can’t freely operate in the North Caucasus. Most of them are already on the wanted list or in Syria. They just physically cannot wander around the cities and villages and search for accomplices. They work through the Internet, through their remaining contacts on the ground. They first identify a potential recruit, then [they] check him and test what he is capable of and then more serious people start to contact him with assignments.<sup>83</sup>

Such an approach confirms what recent studies have identified as the modus operandi for online recruiters. They first contact individuals on social media.<sup>84</sup> This is followed by an attempt to create a micro-community and isolate potential targets from others, and then they gradually shift to private communications through encrypted communication applications such as Telegram or Signal. In the final stage, they encourage the recruit to engage in violence domestically or travel to Syria. Magomedova describes the process in similar terms:

If I put a like under an article [on Facebook] with jihadism content I have immediately attracted the attention of a recruiter. The one who monitors sees that I put a like and he starts watching, and commenting [on my activity], then goes into private communication.<sup>85</sup>

According to NAC, in 2016, 69 of the so-called moderators-recruiters were arrested in Russia. North Caucasus officials claim these people ran discussions on social media along with 34 suspected actual recruiters, most of whom are located abroad and are hard to access.<sup>86</sup> The father of Varvara Karaulova, a student of Moscow State University who fell in love with an online jihadist, self-radicalized, and tried to follow him to IS, analyzed his daughter’s online communications as presented in her criminal file. He shared with us his observations:

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81. Interview (E. Sokirianskaia) with expert from Kabardino-Balkaria. Nalchik, February 2017.

82. Interview (E. Sokirianskaia) with Djambulat Ozdoev, Ombudsman of Ingushetia, February 2017, Magas, Ingushetia.

83. Interview (E. Sokirianskaia) with Safiyat Magomedova, lawyer, Dagestan, May 2017.

84. J. M. Berger, “How terrorists recruit online (and how to stop it),” Brookings Institute, November 9, 2015, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2015/11/09/how-terrorists-recruit-online-and-how-to-stop-it/>.

85. Interview (E. Sokirianskaia) with Safiyat Magomedova, lawyer, Dagestan, May 2017

86. “Bor’ba s terrorom v Rossii: internet-verbovka i ‘zheny voynov,’” RIA Novosti, January 31, 2017, [https://ria.ru/defense\\_safety/20170131/1486877167.html](https://ria.ru/defense_safety/20170131/1486877167.html).



All communication takes place in groups. Every day in these groups something new will be posted, for example in WhatsApp, such that the origins of the post will not be revealed, the IP address will just redirect you. They program the victims . . . And one of the most frequent phrases that the recruiter repeated in his private conversations with my daughter was “Don’t tell your father.”<sup>87</sup>

Those interactions usually produce what Weimann calls a “jihadist virtual community”<sup>88</sup> where “extremists attitudes and violence are no longer taboos but rather seen as positive and desirable.”<sup>89</sup> Closed groups create selective content that produces a distorted picture of the reality. Ducol has coined the term “Jihadisphère” when talking about a virtual community of like-minded individuals and groups that support global militant jihadism. The credibility of the messenger is very important offline, but not as important online; exposure to the group creates an impression of a vibrant community, which appeals to new recruits.<sup>90</sup>

If you choose friends and groups as an IS supporter, no matter where you look you’ll see: “Everyone is being killed, we need to defend them.” Gay activists think that everywhere gays are harassed, Islamic radicals think that Muslims are subjugated everywhere . . . Facebook selects content according to your interests. It affects everyone in the same way.<sup>91</sup>

Such recruiting activities remain extremely risky. At the same time, IS recruiters are usually located outside the country and they have learned how to mitigate risks in Russia. A Dagestani lawyer explained to us:

“They (recruiters) have their own intelligence. They will check through their contacts or sympathizers from the same village [of a potential recruit] or the neighboring settlement. They will come to an offline meeting with the new recruit only if they are very confident in the security [of the meeting] or those who [don’t mind being killed by security services as they] are eager to die. Oftentimes they work on each recruit for an extended time period until they offer him to participate in terrorism, having offline contacts every six months or even once a year.”<sup>92</sup>

At the last stage (jihadization), the recruit is using online contacts for logistics and planning of the departure to Syria or attacks at home. The new tactic applied by IS across Russia is the use of so-called sleeper cells; they are usually disconnected from each other, are mostly recruited via the Internet by people located outside of Russia (usually in IS), and can be set up for the purpose of a

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87. Interview (E. Sokirianskaia) with Pavel Karaulov, father of Varvara Karaulova, Moscow, February 2017.

88. Gabriel Weimann, “New Terrorism and New Media,” *The Wilson Center, Research Series 2* (2014): 1–16.

89. Peter Neumann, *Countering Online Radicalization in America* (Washington, DC: Bipartisan Policy Centre, 2012).

90. Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Nathaniel Barr, “Social science of Online Radicalization” *War on the Rocks*, October 29, 2015, <https://warontherocks.com/2015/10/the-social-science-of-online-radicalization/>.

91. Interview (E. Sokirianskaia) with Rustam Matsev, attorney, Moscow-Nalchik.

92. Interview (E. Sokirianskaia) with Sapiyat Magomedova, lawyer, Dagestan, May 2017.

single terrorist act. According to Vladimir Putin, in 2016 the FSB prevented 45 terrorism-related crimes, including 16 terrorist acts<sup>93</sup>. These potential attacks by sleeper cells had reportedly been planned across the country, in places such as Moscow, St. Petersburg, Krasnoyarsk, Yekaterinburg, Tula, Ufa, Sochi, Novosibirsk, and Nizhny Novgorod.<sup>94</sup> They involved potential terrorists with various ethnic and social backgrounds. According to the National Anti-terrorism Committee, 140 terrorists were killed and another 900 arrested in 2016.<sup>95</sup> Gradually the insurgency is resurrecting, but the independent clandestine cell system remains the prevailing one because maintaining large groups is both dangerous and costly.

### IS's Tailor-made Propaganda Aimed at Russian Audiences

IS deploys a great variety of targeted online messages to attract and cultivate a broad range of supporters. Its propaganda is very well tailored according to age, gender, region, and ethnic background of the audience. IS specifically targets each age group and quickly identifies its religious strivings. According to a Chechen activist, "recruiters know that everybody has their weaknesses and especially at the ages of 15 and 16 (. . .) they are very easy to identify." In his book *Vasatya—Path to Life*, a famous Uzbek Sheikh, Muhammad Sadyk Muhammad Yusuf, analyzed how the post-Soviet atheist community transformed into a passionate Muslim society without knowledge of Islam. He explains that "excessiveness" is a distinctive feature of such a society and is accountable for post-Soviet radicalism. His work has had a strong influence on the thinking of parts of the official Islamic clergy. Deputy Mufti in one of the republics explained the growth in radicalism in such terms:

Greed or avarice, a rush to achieve the desired. In the Koran this is expressed by the term "hasty person." Such a person wants to achieve lofty goals quickly and before everyone else, including the approval of the Almighty Allah. And it seems to him that a calm and thorough path toward his goal is ineffective. Excessively zealous in religion, [they are] most often young and ambitious people who are inclined toward youthful maximalism and the desire to prove themselves. The second category of fanatics is older people, those who have lived a life of sin. When a man stands on the right path, he thinks that the fastest way to achieve forgiveness is to die on the way to Allah.

IS propagandists know that in the North Caucasus grievances differ among each ethnic group. In the last two years, some of the propaganda has been produced in local vernaculars like Chechen, Avar, and Karachay, and contained specially tailored messages. Of all the Russian citizens, Chechens are especially vulnerable to IS online propaganda, given the unhealed traumas of the wars. Heroization of IS jihadists as fighters against oppressive states is a key feature of their recruitment.

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93. Those numbers should not be taken at face value because they include cases opened against Hizb ut-Tahrir or potentially fabricated by local authorities.

94. "V Moskve proshlo zasedanie Natsional'nogo antiterroristicheskogo komiteta," Natsional'nyy antiterroristicheskii komitet, April 11, 2017, <http://nac.gov.ru/nak-prinimaet-resheniya/v-moskve-proshlo-zasedanie-nacionalnogo-6.html>.

95. "Zasedanie kollegii Federa'noy sluzhby bezopasnosti," Kremlin, February 16, 2017, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/53883>.

A deep moral erosion of the Chechen system of social relations and a highly abusive incumbent regime makes the search for heroes especially relevant. A former university professor from Grozny explains:

When you ask them they can name Dudaev, Maskhadov, Gelaev (separatist leaders of Chechnya). I tell them that I am against what is happening now, but I am also against these people. I lived during that time and they brought a lot of grief to our people. These personalities are mythologized by the youth, but no one has a proper public discussion with them about these figures. Still, they need heroes and they find them in the wrong places, including IS.<sup>96</sup>

When state and nonstate actors are unable to react with efficient counternarratives, IS's propaganda remains unchallenged in the spaces where it unfolds. The Ingush Ombudsman recalled:

I recently read a post about a young man: 27 years old, married to a young wife, two children, worked as a private minibus driver. By honest work, he provided for his family. And there he sells his "Gazelle" (minivan brand) and goes to "holy war." I read the comments and it is all complete glorification. I write: "what about this is heroic? The noble cause is to drive people! Wouldn't it be better and more useful, from the perspective of Islam, for him to stay at home and be useful to his family and people [around him]. Instead he was killing and was himself killed. What kind of a hero is he?" I received a flurry of hysterical reactions. Someone fiercely argued, someone cursed me. The only negative comment was mine. You argue your opinion, but they do not listen. They have no patience for dissent. An alternative opinion is immediately rejected. And this was on a well-known site, not a closed group. Anyone could join in there.

IS women-specific online propaganda is notorious, but also tailor-made for Russian Muslim and non-Muslim women. The growing evidence suggests that the Internet, with its anonymity and easy access from home, offers greater opportunity for women, especially in traditional societies, to become active within extremist and jihadist circles.<sup>97</sup> As Pearson underlines, online networks have created support structures for women and produce a "gender ideology of the Jihad."<sup>98</sup> According to NAC, 10 percent of recruits from Russia are female.<sup>99</sup> Messages for women are diverse, catching different sets of women-specific push factors.

A good example of such enticing videos targets the average North Caucasian woman who is deeply immersed in Turkish soap operas and sees a good marriage as a social lift. The propaganda video features an image of a sunset over the desert, an expensive car, a loving husband, and the

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96. Skype interview (E.Sokirianskaia) with former professor from Chechnya, March 2017.

97. Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Nathaniel Barr, "Social science of Online Radicalization" War on the Rocks, October 29, 2015, <https://warontherocks.com/2015/10/the-social-science-of-online-radicalization/>.

98. Elizabeth Pearson, "The Case of Roshonara Choudhry: Implications for Theory on Online Radicalization, ISIS Women, and the Gendered Jihad," *Policy & Internet* 8, no. 1 (2015): 17.

99. "Bor"ba s terrorom v Rossii: internet-verbovka i "zheny voinov," RIA Novosti, January 31, 2017, [https://ria.ru/defense\\_safety/20170131/1486877167.html](https://ria.ru/defense_safety/20170131/1486877167.html).

romantic promise of great love. “It’s a whole soap opera reproduced in one video. She (the potential recruit) becomes part of something grandiose, but she can also enjoy daily life at the same time.”<sup>100</sup>

“Russian women are taught from childhood that they should sacrifice for their men or for a cause; this is the role model many women have internalized,” claims a Dagestani gender expert.<sup>101</sup> A video clip featuring Aza Bataeva, a Chechen pop star who used to perform in quite revealing clothes and had numerous rich suitors, is a fine example. Aza left everything behind, joined IS, and made a passionate statement calling for others to join. She pronounces her speech in a black *niqab* with a machine gun next to her, and then theatrically burns all her Russian documents and awards in front of the camera, with subtitles running that one should get awards on the way of Allah, not *Iblis*.<sup>102</sup> For a broader audience, she is someone who used to be a sinner, but set her feet on the path of Allah, who sacrificed herself for her religion and cause; for those in Chechnya who know her biography, she is also someone who is exacting revenge for her militant brother, allegedly killed in an FSB operation a few years earlier.<sup>103</sup>

“There isn’t a single reason why women are attracted to IS propaganda. For some [it is] emancipation: ‘I reject all your traditions, which I’m fed up with. I also have some rights, I can choose to get married to a jihadist and forget all about you,’” a Chechen activist explained a rights-based motivation, emphasizing that in some cases the burden of traditional pressure in families is so strong that joining IS feels like an act of emancipation.<sup>104</sup> IS aggressively recruits Russian women on dating services. According to the FSB, 99 percent of such acquaintances happen at the website *nikah.com*, the largest Muslim dating service in the world.<sup>105</sup> In the North Caucasus, marrying a fighter looks cool and exciting for some women, whose prospects for self-realization at home are bleak. Some married women bored with their husbands have escaped, looking for ways to radically change their environment. A women’s rights activist explained their motivation: “My husband can go to hell. I’m taking my four children, I’m leaving to love the cool guys, not those schmucks who pound the computer keys in the office; and I curse those who married me out.”<sup>106</sup>

IS online propaganda framing “jihadi cool” is appealing to men as much as to women. Many see jihad as a “cool” way of expressing dissatisfaction with the existing conditions or the ruling elites. Such a rebellion garners the support of many adventurers. A defense lawyer from Kabardino-Balkaria who works on insurgency-related cases explains how men are attracted to the subculture of “jihadi cool” and its aesthetics:

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100. Interview (E. Sokirianskaia) with Orkhan Dzhemal, Forbes contributor, expert on North Caucasus insurgency, Moscow, March 2017.

101. Interview (E. Sokirianskaia) with Svetlana Anokhnina, women’s rights activist and editor of Daptar women’s magazine.

102. Iblis refers to the primary devil in Islam.

103. Recruiting celebrities has been important to IS. Along with Bataeva, IS managed to recruit a popular Moscow actor, Vadim Dorofeev.

104. Interview (E. Sokirianskaia) with Svetlana Anokhnina, editor of Daptar women’s magazine.

105. Daniel Turovskiy, “Sledy ‘Islamskogo gosudarstva’—o tom, kak krupneyshaya terroristicheskaya organizatsiya pronikaet v Rossiyu,” *Meduza*, June 30, 2015, <https://meduza.io/feature/2015/06/30/sledy-islamskogo-gosudarstva>.

106. Interview (E. Sokirianskaia) with Chechen women’s rights activist, Karabulak, Ingushetia, March 2017.

beautiful photos with weapons, young people are drawn to this. Any Caucasian likes photos with weapons. Beautiful video, with *nasheed* (song with Islamic messaging) in the background . . . And the message: “our guys are here, why are you sitting at home? We need you, brothers are killed here.”<sup>107</sup>

## THE RESPONSE OF THE STATE AND SOCIETY

With the spread of terrorist violence becoming a growing threat, the Russian state responds to the challenge of IS’s online propaganda and its recruitment with a great variety of measures. One can separate such measures into two categories: hard approaches based on repressive measures such as crackdown against nontraditional mosques or criminal prosecutions, and soft approaches based on counternarratives.

### Hard Measures: A Temporary Solution

Early efforts by the Russian government have included removing content, filtering, restricting users’ access, and controlling exchange of information. According to the National Anti-terrorism Committee, in 2016 more than 26,000 extremist and terrorist Internet resources were disclosed, double the number of 2015.<sup>108</sup> This strategy is successful in limiting the outreach of IS radicals, but it cannot prevent their recruitment on the dark Web. As terrorists turn to encrypted communications and to the dark Web more generally, security services lose a precious access to online intelligence and exacerbate the danger to aggravate social grievances by profiling entire communities such as Salafis. Finally, removing content is particularly useful against vertical content posted on static website, but as Klausen underlines, the hard approaches’ reach is limited due to the increasingly horizontal nature of the new media environment.<sup>109</sup>

In response to this challenge, security services in Russia have their own networks to disrupt online recruitment. Once they suspect a person’s involvement they open an individual file, develop their profile, and then oftentimes formally arrest the individual on suspicion of a different offense and try to obtain information by exerting various types of pressure.<sup>110</sup> The new package of antiterrorism amendments adopted in 2016, the so-called Yarovaya law, will allow security services to get access to metadata stored for up to three years, thereby significantly increasing their capacities. In recent years, Russian courts have delivered hundreds of sentences for reposting extremist content on social media. This usually creates social media outcry and plays into the hands of recruiters.

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107. Interview (E. Sokirianskaia) with lawyer, Kabardino-Balkariya, Nalchik, March 2017.

108. The Russian government considers posts on social media as extremist content, see: “Bor’ba s terrorom v Rossii: internet-verbovka i “zheny voinov,” RIA Novosti, January 31, 2017, [https://ria.ru/defense\\_safety/20170131/1486877167.html](https://ria.ru/defense_safety/20170131/1486877167.html).

109. Jytte Klausen, “Tweeting the Jihad: Social Media Networks of Western Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 38, no. 1 (January 2015): 1–22.

110. Interviews (E. Sokirianskaia), lawyers and human rights activists, Dagestan, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria.

## Soft Measures: Online and Offline Counter-narratives

The Russian government is also aware of the necessity to ideologically confront the growing prevalence of cyberspace recruitment, but the amorphous character of the Internet and the uniqueness of every individual's radicalization path make prevention of cyber-radicalization a challenging task. Counter-narratives are aimed at "directly or indirectly challeng[ing] extremist narratives either through ideology, logic, fact or humour."<sup>111</sup> They seek to educate online users and communities about the dangers of extremist material and challenge terrorist propaganda.

The security services in Ingushetia have been most creative in trying to provide online counter-narratives. A popular project called "Hard Ingush" was started by a blogger-security officer who garnered a significant following for his posts, which covered security operations and other events in the republic. Hard Ingush revealed some insider information from security services with the aim of disclosing the criminal and destructive nature of the insurgency and thereby legitimizing the actions of the law enforcement.<sup>112</sup> The blog "Search Ingushetia" is meant to bridge communication between the greater society and law enforcement agencies in the region. It highlights stories of individuals—recruits and victims—and provides photographs that evidence their participation in violent jihadist groups and features other relevant articles.<sup>113</sup>

Elsewhere in the North Caucasus, apart from a handful of creative exceptions, online counter-narratives are limited to local authorities setting up accounts and posting content on social media. Most of these online counter-narratives are static and lacking in creativity, tailored messages, and credible messengers. An official in Dagestan told us:

There is no systematic work [related to creating online counter-narratives]. In our reporting template there is an item titled "Work in Social media." So we post videos on YouTube and open social media pages. What sort of systematic work should there be? If a group is created you should work, engage youth. One of the republican websites, *IslamDag*, has been engaged in social media and arguing with extremists for ten years now. But this work is done by only a few people, they need to be paid. We don't have such resources.<sup>114</sup>

At the same time, it is not just resources, but innovation and methodological vigor that they are lacking in. As Braddock and Horgan explain, it is central to understand the appeal of terrorist narratives in order to produce effective counter-narratives.<sup>115</sup> Furthermore, counter-narratives need to be delivered by credible sources for specific audiences. Recently practitioners have argued in favor of alternative narratives, rather than counter-narratives, as being more efficient. Many of our interlocutors emphasized that counter-narratives should not be only rational, but also

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111. "Proposed Policy Recommendations for the High Level Conference," Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN), December 2012, [www.counterextremism.org/download\\_file/59/134/308/](http://www.counterextremism.org/download_file/59/134/308/).

112. Molonlabe, *Live Journal*, October 15, 2012, <http://molonlabe.livejournal.com/>.

113. Rozysk06, *Live Journal*, April 2, 2016, <http://rozysk06.livejournal.com/>.

114. Interview (E. Sokirianskaia), Dagestani official, Makhachkala, February 2017.

115. Kurt Braddock and John Horgan, "Toward a Guide for Constructing and Disseminating Counternarratives to Reduce Support for Terrorism," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 39, no. 5 (May 2016): 381–404.

emotional, as IS messages are. They should be able to pull the emotional strings that would increase resilience or facilitate disengagement. Dagestani students suggested that videos featuring stories of terrorism destroying families could be a powerful counter-narrative and prevention tool. A 23-year-old Dagestani student told us,

Five-six guys from our village who I grew up with left [for Syria]. They were all classmates, boys who were two-three years younger than me. They crossed paths with the same recruiter and he told them about the “sweet life” [in IS]. I know all of their mothers. One of them lived next door to me, her only son left. I see his mother every time I go home to my village. She does not live anymore, she is dead. My heart bleeds to see her and I keep thinking, how could he do this to his own mom?! I wish he could see her.<sup>116</sup>

However, most ideological prevention and counter-radicalization still happens offline. In Russia, various institutions produce numerous anti-IS leaflets and methodological recommendation manuals, put up billboards with slogans, and carry out conferences and roundtables. The Chechen authorities are most active in organizing meetings with parents of teenagers “on the necessity of due control of their children”; offer media programs “on the destructive influence of extremism and terrorism”; and together with the republican media and bloggers strengthen the practices for countering extremism and terrorism in the Internet.

As an alternative to IS ideology, the Chechen government put forward state-sponsored Sufi Islam and work to “preserve and popularize” what it labels as “traditional values, customs and rituals.” To this end, the Chechen government employs an entire arsenal of ideological weapons such as the use of mass media; ethno-cultural holidays and festivals; meetings and other educational events with the youth; support for academic research of traditions and customs of the peoples of Chechnya; publishing literature; and researching and compiling methodological recommendations. The spiritual-moral efforts also rely heavily on the promotion of a “fitness culture” and sports among the youth. According to our Chechen interlocutors, this propaganda is usually carried out in an aggressive, threatening tone and closely intertwined with praise for the incumbent regime and promotion of the personality cult of Ramzan Kadyrov. Unfortunately, the mullahs have become the main ideological force of the Chechen regime, which does not help build trust with the youth and often makes their narratives counterproductive.<sup>117</sup>

Similar events are carried out in other republics, if on a smaller scale and in a less aggressive fashion. A vocational college student from Dagestan explained: “We have such lectures, they come from the Spiritual Board of Muslims together with the inspectors for underage crime and give lectures. I get bored. Those from the spiritual board were stammering and had no talent for speaking.”<sup>118</sup> Other respondents explained that the official clergy lacks in legitimacy, which makes potentially radicalizing youth deaf to their messages.

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116. Interview (E. Sokirianskaia), resident of Dagestan, Makhachkala, February 2017.

117. Interviews (E. Sokirianskaia) with students, university professors, government officers, activists in/from Chechnya.

118. Ekaterina Sokirianskaia’s group discussion with youth, college students, Makhachkala, February 2017.

The Russian government's strategy has been supporting traditional clergy represented by the Spiritual Boards as alternatives to Salafis in the framework of a wider counter-radicalization strategy. This type of strategy has been popular both in the Islamic world and in the West; however, studies show that it has generally not proved successful.<sup>119</sup> In the North Caucasus, the youth that is most at risk of radicalization rejects the authority of the official Islamic clerics for dogmatic reasons and for cooperating with a state that they perceive as repressive. A Salafi Muslim from Kabardino-Balkaria who has successfully talked his son out of going to Syria explains:

Unfortunately, our Spiritual Board has lost the trust of the [Salafi] Muslims back in 1990s [for alleged misuse of funds for hajj and alleged cooperation with security services against fundamentalist Muslims] and now the youth does not want to go to their mosques, they will not be sincere with them. In our town, 80 percent of young people who go to mosque support IS. Many young men left for Turkey and then to Syria (. . .) they are outside the scope of influence of the official clergy.<sup>120</sup>

The society is also searching for ways to respond to the challenge. Some prominent Salafi leaders offer counter-narratives to IS; however, they are being harassed by the security services. The chair of the public council of Tangim Mosque in Makhachkala told us,

For 2.5 years we were teaching them in the khutbas (Friday sermons) that they should not blow up people, this is the deadliest of sins. In parallel we are trying to defend their rights when police pressure them. I meet with the Director of the Center for Combating Extremism. I told him these people (Salafi imams) are doing your job, but they are unprotected, living with their family in a shack, harassed by security services and threatened by IS.<sup>121</sup>

Furthermore, Salafi imams who speak out against IS are being threatened by IS North Caucasian militants. "They have received text messages, direct threats. They [IS] said that 'we will return your [chopped-off] heads, that you will be the first ones hung here, you are the traitors who should be dealt with as a priority,'" an activist of Makhachkala Tangim Mosque told us.<sup>122</sup> In 2016, IS published a table with portraits of Salafi leaders from across the North Caucasus titled, "who betrayed their religion." Among them was the charismatic Ingush imam Khamzat Chumakov, who, according to his supporters, convinced up to 70 people not to join IS.

These 70 people who reconsidered going to Syria after talking to Khamzat, they either sought his advice themselves or their relatives brought them to him. During khutbas (Friday sermon) he several times explained that Muslims are being used to incite war in the Middle East, and that where there is *fitna* a

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119. Tore Bjorgo and John Horgan, *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

120. Interview (E. Sokirianskaia) with Salafi Muslim, Nalchik, Kabardino-Balkaria, March 2017.

121. Interview (E. Sokirianskaia) with Akhmed Chililov, December 2016.

122. Interview (E. Sokirianskaia) with Tag'im mosque activist, December 2016.



Muslim has no right to go. He is very open with everyone who has questions; you can stay after the prayer and talk to him. This really helps to persuade.<sup>123</sup>

Secular civil society actors implement projects promoting tolerance and counter-radicalization. Some work hard to come up with creative counter-narratives, including through caricatures and video addresses. Parents whose children have been radicalized online by IS told us in interviews that the power of concrete others, families and friends, are by far the strongest emotional counterbalance to IS ultra-radical propaganda. However, to be able to intervene effectively, gatekeepers should be able to recognize the possible early signs of (violent) radicalization. The symptoms can be very context-specific across Russia; they will be different for neophytes and people raised in Islam.

For example, according to the father of Varvara Karaulova, the Moscow student sentenced for failed attempt to join ISIS, in her case the signs were very subtle—changed habits such as waking up at different hours, eating different foods, and losing enthusiasm in celebrating secular holidays.

She started to wear different clothes—headscarves and long skirts instead of jeans. But no one paid attention at the university, she was a very good student, at home we paid no attention either. One day my wife noticed that she is not wearing her golden cross anymore. She spent lots of time with her social media, but all the young people are like that these days. She became interested in cooking, she learned to knit. Back then I thought she wanted to surprise me with a new salad recipe, but actually she was preparing for marriage.<sup>124</sup>

These habits will not serve as warning signs in Chechnya or Dagestan, where a significant part of the population are family-oriented conservative people who demonstrate such mannerisms but have no thoughts of violent jihadism. A resident of Grozny who lost her cousin in IS explains her concerns about two other close relatives:

When they radicalize they become very religious, they stop listening to music, they stop coming to relatives' gatherings; from such signals you begin to understand. They oftentimes are good to their parents, because Islam requires you to be good to your parents. But you can still tell.<sup>125</sup>

Some local experts say it is very dangerous to try to formalize the signs of radicalization; security services reportedly did so by putting together a list of the "signs of Wahhabis," which included "not smoking and not drinking," thereby contributing to the indiscriminate harassment of conservative Muslims.<sup>126</sup>

Local experts disagree on how much, if at all, one can influence an individual radicalizing toward IS, even if the signs are correctly identified. Both traditional and Salafi Islamic leaders emphasized the challenge. The Mufti of North Ossetia explains:

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123. Interview (E. Sokirianskaia) with Bagaudin Khautiev, civic activist, Nazran, March 2017.

124. Interview (E. Sokirianskaia) with Pavel Karaulov, Moscow, February 2017.

125. Interview (E. Sokirianskaia) with Chechen journalist, Grozny, February 2017.

126. Interview (JF Ratelle) with human rights activists and an antiterrorist officer in Dagestan, July 2016.

IS is the passion of the heart, if you are in passion's hold, logic does not work. One young man came to me who was quite openly supportive of this ideology (of IS); we brought five imams who graduated from higher Islamic schools; we explained things to him; we provided examples from the Koran, the hadith; we explained why the Prophet was saying that one should not do it. I talked to him, but he did not hear me. He never left, but was later arrested and sentenced for something else.<sup>127</sup>

"If a person has IS in his head, he is hopeless, I do not even talk to them,"<sup>128</sup> a Salafi leader from Dagestan said. However, we know of several Salafi imams, including the abovementioned Khamzat Chumakov, who have successfully dissuaded youth offline and on social media. Such different views among religious actors demonstrate that more can be done in improving cooperation with key actors in order to better understand this radicalization process. It is crucial to understand that depicting radicalized individuals as hopeless and doomed risks marginalizing them even further and pushing them toward jihadism.

Although the threat of violent jihadism drastically morphs with the Web 2.0; we believe that effective ideological countering is possible. However, as young Dagestanis we talked to emphasize, the effect of counterpropaganda without systemic change is limited: "The people here are very angry with the government; they should first improve the situation in this republic . . . One cannot convince radicalizing youth with just words."<sup>129</sup> A Moscow-based expert echoed such views: "the state tries to provide ideological alternatives, but they cannot compete because it is limited by the acute deficit of . . . justice and efficiency." The first step to reduce the influence of online jihadist propaganda starts with resolving the basic grievances among the Muslim population, including those related to religious repression, socioeconomic grievances, and respect of basic human rights.<sup>130</sup>

## CONCLUSION, POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS, AND AGENDA FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This chapter aimed at providing an assessment of the role and the evolution of online propaganda among Russian-speaking jihadists, focusing mainly on IK and IS. We explained how jihadist propaganda evolved in Russia, focusing on the different strategic objectives between Imarat Kavkaz and IS. We explained how the civil war in Syria and its internationalized characteristics have broadened online propaganda targeted toward Russian-speaking militants and challenged IK's quasi-monopoly on its dissemination. After that, we analyzed IS's online propaganda and its ability to create overarching and tailor-made narratives aimed at various Russian audiences, including disenfranchised youth, middle-aged citizens, women, and thrill-seeker individuals, as well as pious Muslims. We explained the role of online propaganda in different phases of the radicalization

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127. Interview (E. Sokirianskaia) with the Mufti of North Ossetia, Vladikavkaz, February 2017.

128. Interview (E. Sokirianskaia) with Salafi leader in Dagestan, Makhachkala, February 2017.

129. E. Sokirianskaia's group discussion with youth, Makhachkala, March 2017.

130. Interview (E. Sokirianskaia), Orkhan Dzhemal, Moscow, March 2017.

process in Russia, focusing mainly on pre-radicalization, indoctrination, and jihadization. Finally, we assessed the response, the challenges, and the limitations of the Russian state and the civil society in facing militant jihadist online propaganda. Social media and encrypted communication have visibly modified counterterrorist practices in Russia. We looked into hard methods such as removing and filtering content, restricting users' access to such extremist material, and controlling exchange of information between users, as well as soft measures including online and offline counter-narratives.

The next step into the research agenda focusing on online propaganda and violence will have to focus on data collection at the micro level in order to better understand the mechanisms behind the success of IS online propaganda. Future research should analyze the psychological mechanisms behind its tailor-made messages targeting audiences of specific ages, genders, and ethnicities. The interplay between online and offline radicalization mechanisms will likewise benefit from further investigation. Gaining better knowledge of how online radicalization works will allow the scholarship to try answer the question of whether online de-radicalization is possible, and, if so, which mechanisms should be employed.

The Russian government would benefit from supporting such independent multidisciplinary research as well as from analyzing the best domestic and international practices in countering violent extremism online. In today's Russia, counter-narratives to IS online propaganda are state initiated and controlled. There is overall too much reliance on government officials and official traditional clergy, which makes these efforts often formal and uncreative. The official clergy lacks credibility with the radicalizing youth and is seen as a tool of government propaganda. Entrusting counter-narratives to credible messengers from independent religious organizations and civic actors will greatly improve their efficiency. Civil society has to play a greater role in raising awareness of online violent radicalization and providing ideological alternatives. At the same time, any counter-narratives in conflict zones will be short-lived if the root causes of violence are not addressed. The Russian government needs to actively work to alleviate and eliminate the factors that feed the conflict and are conducive to violent radicalization.



Part III

# Regional Dynamics



# Uses of “Radicalism”: Elite Relationships, Migration, Religion, and Violence in the Volga Region and Central Russia

**Denis Sokolov and Olga Oliker**

This chapter assesses how religion and violence combine and overlap in three regions of Russia. The regions we examine are all ones with substantial multiethnic communities. None are either in or directly border the North Caucasus. Specifically, we discuss the conditions and evolving environment in Tatarstan, Tyumen (which we split into a discussion of Southern Tyumen and a shorter look at the situation in Khanty-Mansiisk and Yamalo-Nentetsk), and Astrakhan. In all of these regions, we seek to describe what forms of religious tension exist and whether and how they translate into violence. We also hope to draw some conclusions regarding what factors might (or might not) help explain that violence (both the forms it takes and its frequency). The factors we examine include:

1. Competition between religious groups
2. The use of religion in political and other local conflicts and competitions
3. Law enforcement/government responses to religious groups and organizations
4. Violent actions by religious groups
5. Violent oppression of and discrimination against religious groups, whether by the state or by other actors
6. Relationships between regional actors and radical Islamist groups in the North Caucasus
7. Relationships between regional actors and global conflict with religious components, including individuals choosing to go abroad (Syria, Ukraine) to fight.

Our analysis is based heavily on field interviews with local experts, members of various religious, ethnic, and political communities, government representatives, and others. It is also informed by the existing literature on these issues, which is comparatively scant for the regions in question.

We chose these three regions for several reasons. First, we wanted to examine regions that varied according to several factors we thought might be relevant to questions of religion, violence, and their intersection. Therefore, we sought regions with different mixes of religion and ethnicity, economic situations, and rates of trade migration. We do not, of course, include all possible variations. However, by selecting these three regions, we are able to consider situations with substantial differences. Tatarstan's population is fairly evenly split between Tatars, an ethnic group historically tied to Islam and its practice, and other groups, with a large minority comprising historically Russian Orthodox ethnic groups. Tatarstan also has a high level of economic development and comparatively lower rates of migration from other parts of Russia. Astrakhan's population is majority ethnic Russian, but has experienced substantial migration, especially from the North Caucasus, atop a long history as a diverse region with a large Muslim community. Tyumen and its autonomous regions are energy producers with a large quantity of labor migrants, many of whom are Muslims. Further research should consider large urban areas and more economically disadvantaged regions. However, the present analysis is sufficient to draw some preliminary conclusions.

We consider each region in turn in the analysis that follows. We are struck by several key similarities between the three. Importantly, our research into the phenomenon of religious violence in these regions of Russia suggests that while violence manifests in various ways, no less important is the perception of the threat of violence and the ways in which groups instrumentalize and even construct such perceptions. This is to say that while religious violence exists throughout Russia, its prevalence is consistently exaggerated by individuals, communities, and others, including religious groups. This exaggeration appears to, at least in part, serve parochial interests to a range of political, social, and economic ends. For example, we note the tendency of individuals to seek to leverage narratives of religious violence in the context of competitions in the business sphere or for influence. The most obvious examples are accusations of religious extremism intended to discredit competitors. Because we see examples of this in all of the regions we studied, we suspect that this phenomenon may well hold throughout Russia—though of course, further study would be needed to confirm this hypothesis. Moreover, while we do not have clear evidence of this, we are concerned that such tactical accusations of extremism can, in fact, be something of a self-fulfilling prophecy (or fallacy, in this case), in that these exaggerations create a perception of a problem both greater and different than what exists, which in turn engenders responses that can actually make violence more likely in the future.

Our research also strongly suggests that migration matters. While there exists substantial variation in the responses of local authorities, migration and the "newness" of a group to a region has an impact on how authorities view it and interact with it. Such views often have religious undertones, which occasionally manifest in violent ways. Moreover, because much of the migration within Russia is from the Northern Caucasus, we see a tendency for conflicts from that region to be exported elsewhere.

Finally, and relatedly, we observe that the competition for followers between local religious elites and those espousing alternative approaches can contribute to violence. The close relationships that



often exist between established religious elites and local authorities gives those elites substantial input into how policies are defined and implemented. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that the policies in question often limit the activities of less-established religious leaders and groups, and may feed violence. This phenomenon is, of course, related to our first conclusion, that these relationships are one mechanism by which the threat of religious violence is instrumentalized: less established groups are presented as threatening, and treated as such. We also note that it is possible that some of these narratives are then socialized within communities, diluting the ability to differentiate between motivations and hardening social divides.

There are a number of other dynamics we find to be of interest, but in regards to which we are unable to reach clear conclusions without further research. We are curious about the impact of interaction between various communities, including conversions. We are also very interested in the relationships between organized crime and certain migrant and ethnic/religious communities, a topic on which we have been able to collect only preliminary evidence. In the same vein, we draw attention to the phenomenon of prison radicalization, observed in the Muslim prison community, but perhaps exaggerated.

In the discussions that follow, we explore how these factors manifest in the regions under consideration. We also note as a critical caveat that this overview is incomplete. Its focus is first and foremost on conflict related to Islam, and secondarily on that related to various Christian groups. The reasons are several. First, Russian state authorities are most concerned about the potential threat of violence from radicalized Muslim individuals and communities. As a result, state responses, violent and otherwise, target Muslims far more than they do other groups. Second, the academic literature also tends to pay most attention to Islamic groups. So does the advocacy community, although it has also taken up the plight of minority Christian groups in Russia. The fact is that for a preliminary overview, concerns related to Islam are far easier to report on with some adequacy, although we are also able to say a few things about Christian groups. We feel strongly that further research is needed to adequately assess the situation regarding other confessions in Russia. We note other papers in this volume that address these questions, including Fagan and Sibireva, du Quenoy and Dubrovskiy, and Mankoff and Miller.

An additional caveat is that our examination of these three regions should not be taken as the final word on the situation in Russia as a whole. Of course, the North Caucasus is addressed in Chapter 8 of this compendium. Beyond that, we are confident that further study of other parts of Russia, and particularly comparative looks at urban and rural areas throughout Russia, is needed to present a fuller picture and affirm or adjust our conclusions.

## TATARSTAN

Tatarstan, a majority Muslim region in central Russia, is often described, including by its own local government officials, as a model for interreligious and interethnic tolerance (as well as of a balance between local self-rule and central control).<sup>1</sup> Some have explicitly posited the region as an

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1. See Guzel Yusupova, "The Islamic Representation of Tatarstan as an Answer to the Equalization of the Russian Regions," *Nationalities Papers* 44, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 38–54, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2015.1061983>. For

antithesis to the Northern Caucasus, given the latter's reputation for violence and unrest.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, examples of both radicalization and violence in Tatarstan are comparatively scant and the numbers of individuals affected small. However, not only does tension exist, and occasionally percolate into violence, but the situation appears to have deteriorated in recent years.

Where conflict has emerged, however, it is notable the extent to which fear of violence, even where violence did not previously exist, appears to be self-fulfilling in Tatarstan. As concerns about religious radicalization and violence have heightened in recent years, a disturbing trend has emerged. Historically, entrenched close collaboration between Muslim and Orthodox religious officials and local government institutions has been seen as a means to prevent tension and keep conflict from escalation. More recently, however, these ties appear to enable established religious officials to suppress their rivals and advance their own political and economic goals. We heard repeatedly that establishment figures leverage their ties with secular authorities such that their accusations of religious "extremism" lead to the silencing of opponents and rivals by the state, including through violence or threat thereof.

Meanwhile, migration may be changing the dynamics of both relationships between elites and between elites and broader populations. Migrants, primarily from Central Asia, have long been prominent as religious leaders in Tatarstan. Today, their larger numbers, and the factor of labor migration, create two new phenomena. One is the prevalence of Central Asian congregants in certain mosques, which has led to more law enforcement attention to those mosques. The second is that one mechanism by which Central Asian migrants enter Russia is by acquiring student visas, including for Islamic education. This practice has been particularly prevalent in Tatarstan, with the Muhammadia Madrasa and the State Islamic Institute experiencing an influx of students from abroad, especially Central Asia. This, combined with the rise of Internet-educated Islamic scholars among the overall population, may make it increasingly difficult for elites to preserve that status quo by relying on the Islamic expertise of formal religious authorities and references to what is traditional for Russia as a whole and each region specifically.

Finally, it is worth noting that while conflicts within and relating to Islam are the main focus of the discussion below, minority Christian groups also face substantial pressure in Tatarstan, although we do not see the levels of violence associated with Islam and Muslims.

## Ethnicity and Religion

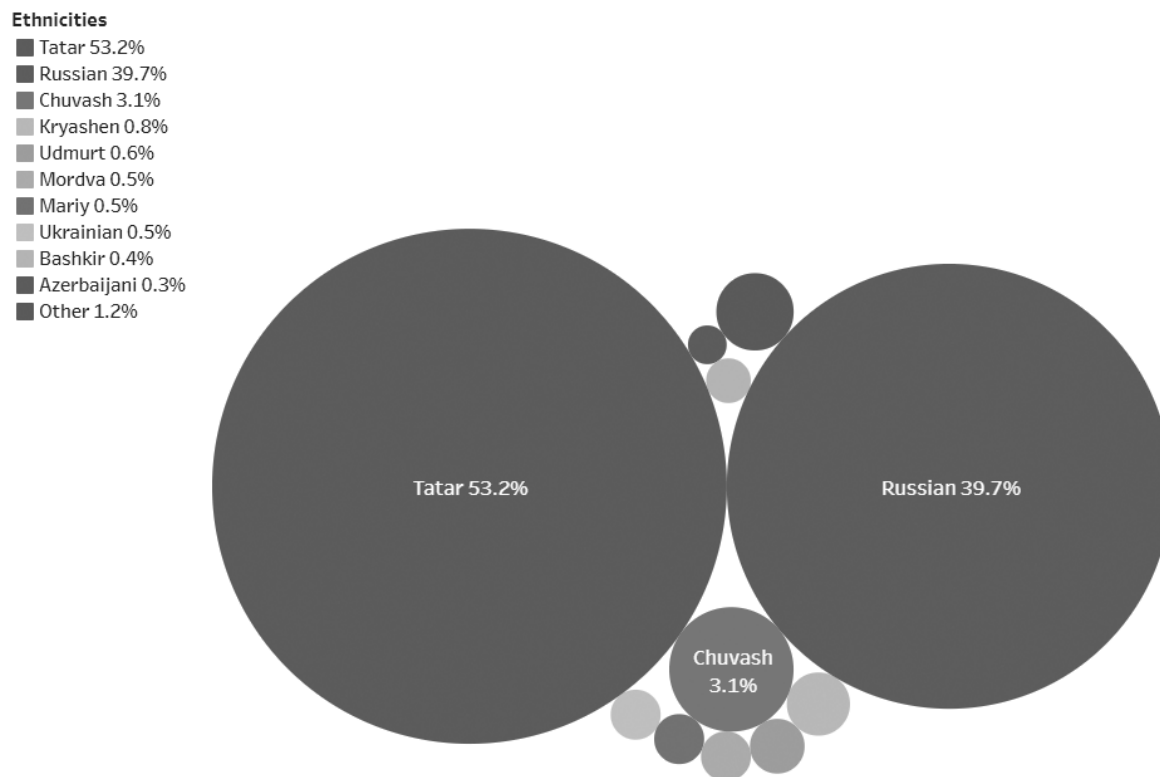
Tatarstan's ethnic tapestry, like that of all of Russia, is changing as a result of migration, although available statistical data may not fully reflect these changes. The 2010 census reported Tatarstan's population as comprising over 2 million ethnic Tatars and over 1.5 million ethnic Russians. It also reports substantially smaller numbers of other ethnic groups.

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some specific statements of this sort, see <http://history-kazan.ru/kazan-vchera-segodnya-zavtra/retrospektiva/novejshaya-istoriya-s-avgusta-1990-goda/8561-1141>. Even Western officials have echoed this line: [https://www.rferl.org/a/Clinton\\_Calls\\_Tatarstan\\_A\\_Model\\_For\\_MuslimChristian\\_Relations\\_/1851934.html](https://www.rferl.org/a/Clinton_Calls_Tatarstan_A_Model_For_MuslimChristian_Relations_/1851934.html).

2. Fred Weir, "Tatarstan, a Muslim Oasis of Calm in Russia," *The Christian Science Monitor*, March 31, 2003, <https://www.csmonitor.com/2003/0331/p13s01-woeu.html>; Fred Weir, "In Russia, How One Mainly Muslim Region Beat Back Radicalism," *The Christian Science Monitor*, August 22, 2016, <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2016/0822/In-Russia-how-one-mainly-Muslim-region-beat-back-radicalism>.

**Figure 1. Republic of Tatarstan: Ethnic Composition<sup>3</sup>**



The ethnic breakdown in the capital city of Kazan is, according to the census, slightly different, with the city evenly split between ethnic Tatars and ethnic Russians, supplemented by small numbers of other groups.

What this data from 2010 does not account for, however, is recent migration. This has, among other things, meant more residents from Central Asia, especially in urban areas. Uzbekistan is the largest source of immigrants, with two or three thousand arriving annually. In recent years, large numbers have also left, creating a smaller net gain than in, say, 2011 and 2012, when Tatarstan's population welcomed a net of over 3,000 Uzbek residents each year. In 2015, although there were 2,860 immigrants from Uzbekistan into Tatarstan, 2,269 people left the republic for that country, for a net gain of only 591.<sup>4</sup>

The above represent official figures. Other estimates exist. While these vary greatly, they generally suggest far larger numbers of migrants in the region. For instance, representatives of the Uzbek community in Tatarstan believe that these numbers underestimate migration from Uzbekistan and other parts of Central Asia, and that some 80,000 Uzbeks live in Tatarstan.<sup>5</sup> And even other officials provide alternative assessments. The Press Secretary of the Tatarstan Federal Migration Service

3. "Informatsionnye materialy ob okonchatel'nykh itogakh Vserossiyskoy perepisi naseleniya 2010 goda," Federal'naya sluzhba gosudarstvennoy statistiki, [www.gks.ru/free\\_doc/new\\_site/perepis2010/perepis\\_itogi1612.htm](http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/perepis2010/perepis_itogi1612.htm).

4. "Okonchatel'nye itogi Vserossiyskoy perepisi naseleniya 2010 goda," Territorial'nyy organ federal'noy sluzhby gosudarstvennoy statistiki po Respublike Tatarstan, January 29, 2013, <http://www.tatstat.ru/digital/region1/default.aspx>.

5. Sokolov and Oliker interviews and discussions in Tatarstan, fall 2016.

reported in late 2015 that some 59,000 migrants were living in Tatarstan (a different figure in the same article cites 70,000 migrants). Of these, the service reports that 40 percent are from Uzbekistan (so some 23,600); 18,000 from Tajikistan, 8,000 from Kazakhshtan, and 7,900 from Azerbaijan.<sup>6</sup>

Whatever the number of migrants from Central Asia, it is notable that, unlike the other regions discussed in this chapter, Tatarstan is neither source nor destination for large-scale internal migration from or to other parts of Russia. What internal migration there is, is predominantly characterized by population exchange with neighboring regions.

Ethnicity in Tatarstan does not, of course, perfectly correspond to religious belief. Most residents of Tatarstan, particularly those of older generations, remain comparatively secular, in large part due to the legacy of the Soviet Union. In contrast to the North Caucasus, where religious traditions were often preserved, especially in villages, the situation in Tatarstan was more similar to that in predominantly ethnic Russian areas—religion has long been, and remains, consistently practiced at major life milestones (birth, marriage, death) but not on a daily basis. Nonetheless, it is fair to say that to the extent they identify with any religion, most ethnic Tatars are Muslim and most ethnic Russians are Russian Orthodox. Most migrants from Central Asia are also Muslim, as are those from predominantly Muslim parts of Russia. Other ethnic groups in Tatarstan tend to also practice either Islam or Russian Orthodoxy, if they practice religion at all, although there are also practitioners of other branches of Christianity, Judaism, and animist religions.

Individuals who came of age after the collapse of the USSR did so at a time of increasing interest in religion. In Tatarstan, such interest was, initially at least, more notable among Muslim Tatars, for whom the rebirth of ethnic identity and that of religious identity were linked in the final years of the USSR and the early years of the Russian Federation: Tatar nationalist movements of that period emphasized the religious aspects of Tatar history and culture.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps in part due to the limited local familiarity with Islamic practice, the region may have been particularly welcoming of religious activists from the Middle East in the 1990s. These visitors had some success proselytizing to young people, especially in urban areas—and convinced not a few to themselves embark on religious study in the Middle East. In addition, religious activists from Central Asia and Turkey also found their way to Tatarstan (and elsewhere in Russia).

The rebirth of Islam in Tatarstan also had an institutional aspect, with a proliferation of Islamic societies and organizations, the construction of new mosques, and the establishment of regional muftiates.<sup>8</sup> Soon, Tatarstan had nine madrasas and an Islamic Institute (university level).<sup>9</sup> However,

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6. Yuliya Yakovleva, "Operatsiya Nelegal'nyy Migrant: V Tatarstane Proveryat Zakonnost' Nakhozhdeniya Tsyach Inostrantsev," *Kazanfirst*, November 23, 2015, <https://kazanfirst.ru/article/118215>.

7. Guzel Yusupova, "The Islamic Representation of Tatarstan as an Answer to the Equalization of the Russian Regions," *Nationalities Papers* 44, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 38–54, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2015.1061983>. We recognize the questions Zhemukhov with Markedonov and Yarlykapov raise in Chapter 8 of this compendium regarding the use of "renaissance" and "rebirth" in relation to the growth of interest in religion in post-Soviet Russia. However, for purposes of our chapter, we continue to use this terminology.

8. Il'nur Minnullin, "Fenomen 'rodiny' mordovskikh platkov: sovetskie biznesmeny, pokhishchenie nevest i podpol'nye imamy," *Real'noe vremya*, January 17, 2017, <https://realnoevremya.ru/articles/53518>.

9. Rustam Batyr, "'Mukhammadiya' mozhet byt zakryta," *Businessonline*, July 23, 2016, <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/blog/317695>.

foreign education also played a crucial role, as many of those who sought Islamic training went abroad, even as foreign religious scholars came to Tatarstan (and elsewhere in Russia) to teach. Because initially Central Asia was most accessible to Tatar students, in the 1980s and 1990s, the region's religious establishment came to be dominated by graduates of the Bukhara (Uzbekistan) Mir-i Arab madrasa, which had been allowed to continue to operate during the Soviet period. Many of the students were natives of the Tatar village of Sredniia Eliuzan' (Penza oblast). During the 1990s and 2000s, however, muftis from abroad and, increasingly, Tatar religious leaders trained in Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and elsewhere, became more prevalent. Russian graduates of the Islamic University in Medina report that there were, on average, some 60 students from Tatarstan studying there at any given time starting in the mid-1990s until early in the current decade (indicating that hundreds of graduates returned to Tatarstan). Although courses of study varied tremendously in depth and length, it seems reasonable to surmise that the majority of Tatar religious leaders born after the mid-1960s spent at least some time studying abroad.

Today, Tatarstan has a strong institutionalized system of Islamic teaching and observance. In addition to the universities and madrasas discussed above, there is a formal network of mosques subordinate to the Tatarstan Muslim Spiritual Board. This board is independent of the Central Muslim Spiritual Board of the Russian Federation, having broken away in the mid-1990s.<sup>10</sup> But these systems are challenged by two main factors. One is the influx of foreign students, noted earlier. The other is the recent emergence of Internet-based Islam and Islamic learning. The Internet has become a way for young people with an interest in Islam to begin their education—an alternative to Tatarstan's mosques, madrasas, and other formal structures. Some individuals who begin their search online go on to study in formal religious institutions, in Russia or elsewhere. Others, however, form their own study circles and networks.

### Competition and Conflict Within Tatar Islam

The wars in Chechnya and unrest elsewhere in the North Caucasus led authorities in Tatarstan (to say nothing of analysts, journalists, and other observers), as elsewhere in Russia, to grow increasingly concerned about the evolution of Islam in the region. Their fears were not entirely unfounded, as some individuals and groups active in Tatarstan indeed had links to North Caucasus radical groups. However, the numbers of people with such connections were low. While some radical-minded individuals no doubt met while studying abroad and through the networks of organizations such as Hizb ut-Tahrir, few Tatar citizens went to Chechnya to fight alongside the separatists (exceptions are discussed in the section that follows).

More important to Islam in Tatarstan was the influx of a variety of Islamic leaders and scholars from around the world and increasing numbers of Tatars studying Islam in the Middle East and Central Asia. Access to a broad range of perspectives led to disagreements between various schools of thought, as well as competition for followers and leadership posts. Moreover, throughout Russia, religious and secular authorities sought to limit the influence of groups with links to North Caucasus violence (although, as noted, these links were minimal in Tatarstan). Over time,

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10. "TsDUM Rossii i DUM RT podpisali soglashenie," Tsentral'noe dukhovnoe upravlenie musul'man Rossii, June 18, 2012, <http://www.cdum.ru/news/44/799/>.

the competition between religious authorities trained in the Soviet Union and those with links to post-Soviet Central Asia or the Middle East has come to be presented by state officials as a conflict between “traditional” Islam and “nontraditional” Islam. As discussed in other papers in this compendium, the terminology is not well defined, nor consistently used. For the most part, those who use these terms will say that “traditional” Islam refers to practices that have been common among Russian Muslims. What this actually means, however, is rarely spelled out, in part because there is no clear concept of what is “traditional” for Russian Muslims—or even Russian Muslims from a given region, such as Tatarstan. If pressed, those who use the term will often reference approaches rooted in Sufi traditions, the Hanafi school, and/or (especially in Tatarstan), Jadidist concepts. In reality, what is “traditional” not only varies from place to place, but has evolved over time, with elements of different practices manifesting in the many communities that exist. “Nontraditional” Islam, for its part, is everything else, including, notably, most “Salafi” movements. The terms “Salafi,” “Wahhabi,” and sometimes “extremist” are used as descriptors generally synonymous with “nontraditional” and with similarly little consistency regarding the belief structures themselves. The implication is that “nontraditional” approaches are undesirable.

This attitude is well encapsulated in this 2010 statement by Mintimer Shaimiev, President of Tatarstan from 1991 to 2010:

Over the course of centuries, Tatars have developed a flexible and intellectually coherent model of Islam based on the Hanafi Madhab, which allows for the co-existence of tolerance and fear of god. Moreover, in the thousand year Muslim history of our ancestors there were no theological shifts. They accepted the Hanafi Madhab, and they continued to follow it . . . So while it may seem that we theoretically have a choice, practically we do not. The Statutes of the Spiritual Board state that the Muslims of Tatarstan follow the Hanafi Madhab. Our religious leadership needs to remain firm on this point.

There is evidence of negative trends in Tatarstan’s Muslim community: court cases involving participants in radical religious groups and numerous reports of citizens that imams in the regions and cities are carrying out rituals and read sermons in ways that are not traditional to our people . . . Questionable literature continues to arrive in bookstores and educational facilities . . . Youth, with their tendency toward youthful maximalism, may be more attracted, sad as this may be, to simplified approaches to religious values. The Hanafi Madhab is theologically and intellectually rich. We need to work more substantively with Muslim youth, teaching them not only to read prayers, but to think and fully understand today’s realities.<sup>11</sup>

Of course, the lines are not as clearly drawn as Shaimiev’s statement would suggest. For instance, his reference to Hanafi traditions, as opposed to, say, Jadidist teachings or Sufi practice suggests a cleaner view of Tatar “tradition” than actually exists. It would be more accurate to say that in Tatarstan,

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11. Mintimer Shaymiev, “Vystuplenie prezidenta RT M.Sh. Shaymieva na IV s’ezde musul’man RT,” Gosudarstvennyy sovetnik Respubliki Tatarstan, February 27, 2010, <http://shaimiev.tatarstan.ru/pub/view/8983>.

as elsewhere, “traditional” Islam is most often defined as whatever is state-sanctioned, and “Salafism,” “Wahhabism,” and “extremism” are everything else. After all, most of the “traditional” religious leaders studied abroad, or were taught by foreign teachers, just as did most of the “nontraditional” ones. A group or individual termed “traditional” at one time may be considered extremist at a later time, without themselves changing views or beliefs. Thus, accusations of “Salafism” and the like have been increasingly used by Tatar religious authorities in the twenty-first century to consolidate their control over, and right to define, “traditional” Islam in the region. As a result, religious leaders who were seen as expounding positions that differed from the mainstream lost their positions at mosques, madrasas, and other institutions. Some found themselves subject to police harassment and arrest, as did human rights defenders who sought to document and protest these developments. As discussed throughout this compendium, including later in this chapter, this chain of events was not unique to Tatarstan. Because of the substantial Muslim population of the republic, however, its impact was notable.

Here it is important to differentiate between the treatment of two different types of “nontraditional” approaches. On the one hand, there are groups and organizations that are formally banned in Russia. Membership and participation in banned organizations is a crime, and the state prosecutes affiliates. Two banned organizations that have been particularly relevant in Tatarstan are Hizb ut-Tahrir and Nurculuk. By the time Hizb ut-Tahrir was banned in 2003, the party was fairly active in Tatarstan, as well as in neighboring Bashkortostan. Nurculuk was similarly banned in 2008, long after the writings of Said Nursi, the movement’s inspiration, had been promulgated throughout Tatarstan. In both of these and other cases of bans (e.g., Tablighi Jamaat), some activists and followers of these organizations in Tatarstan have been arrested and imprisoned, while others have fled the country.

The Gülen movement, or Hizmet, which includes a network of educational institutions supported by the U.S.-based Fethullah Gülen, is not banned, despite its links to the teachings of Said Nursi. Indeed, for many years, Hizmet organizations had been encouraged, as they supported the building of schools through the university level and provided free education for students. However, recently, following the rapprochement between Russia and Turkey in 2016, pressure on these institutions has increased (Turkey’s leadership blames Gülen and his followers for the attempted coup that same year).

Indeed, while legal bans lead to arrests and have forced many into exile, our discussions with both clerics and experts in the region indicate that what is more pervasive is a less formal but very real campaign against people and organizations that are legal, but which are deemed, as discussed above, “nontraditional,” “Salafi,” or “Wahhabis.” Pressure on “nontraditional” imams in Tatarstan appears to have stepped up substantially around 2010. Whether that can be attributed to leadership transitions (Shaimiev having stepped down as president that year), a general mood in Russia as a whole, or something else, imams were removed from mosques in Kazan and throughout the region. Educational institutions, as discussed above, purged instructors deemed insufficiently in line with “traditional” Islam, including those who had been trained abroad. Surveillance of supporters of alternative Islamic approaches increased.<sup>12</sup>

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12. Sokolov and Olikier interviews and discussions in Tatarstan, fall 2016.

In recent years, the Internet has added further complications, as self-taught (Internet-taught) religious leaders challenge long-standing networks of scholars and muftis, both by drawing congregants and followers and by raising questions about the value of existing structures. Establishment Muslim leaders, for their part, often equate Internet-based self-education with Salafism, and argue that most Internet-educated Muslims tend to be more fundamentalist, although it is not clear that this is adequately documented (for more on this topic, see Chapter 6 by Ratelle and Sokirianskaia in this compendium).

In keeping with this general mood, we noticed in our fieldwork a phenomenon of stories and narratives that describe clashes between “traditional” and “Salafist” Muslims across Tatarstan. For example, several sources told us of a conflict in a small town over control of a mosque. According to some of our interlocutors, immigrants had joined forces with the local imam to push the community in a “Salafist” direction. This led to violent clashes between the community and the “Salafists” after which the “Salafists” stepped back, and “traditionalists” claimed victory.<sup>13</sup> For the most part, stories such as these exist as oral or social media histories, and details vary and can be confusing. Related news media accounts, if they can be found, track poorly with what is presented. Whatever the actual facts of any individual case, the prevalence of these narratives indicates that the notion of Islamic fundamentalism as a threat to local communities plays into enough of the local zeitgeist to be seen as plausible by residents.

Several high-profile cases are better documented. The most prominent was likely the 2011 removal of then-chief Mufti Gusman Iskhakov after he was accused of Wahhabism. Also important was the replacement of Ramil’ Iunusov of the Qul-Sharif mosque on the Kazan Kremlin grounds in 2012. Iunusov was highly popular and well known for his defense of pluralism in Islam. He was removed not on grounds of extremism in his own right, but of support for others accused of ties to Hizb ut-Tahrir. His removal was met with protests from both congregants and the Tatar nationalist youth organization Azatlyk. To quell dissatisfaction, the mosque was closed, ostensibly for repairs.<sup>14</sup> The al-Ilhas mosque in Kazan was also shut down in 2013. Its followers and imam had been involved in political protests and many were (likely accurately) accused of membership in Hizb ut-Tahrir. Imam Rustem Safim was sentenced to two years in a penal colony in September 2013. Following his release, he left for Turkey.<sup>15</sup>

Another well-documented case was that of Kamal’ Az-Zant, originally from Lebanon but living in Tatarstan since the early 1990s and a popular preacher with a following and a line of DVDs, books, and CDs of his teachings (as well as a medical career). In 2013 he was forced out of the mosque where he most often spoke (the mosque’s imam was also removed) and left Russia.

A recent small wave of transitions of imams at the village level may also play into a conflict between the establishment and newer, younger preachers. Several of the cases appear, anecdotally

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13. Sokolov and Oliker interviews and discussions in Tatarstan, fall 2016. One of our interlocutors reported a substantial role for Russian nationalists in resolving the situation. Others disputed this.

14. Sokolov and Oliker interviews and discussions in Tatarstan, fall 2016; in Antalya, fall 2017.

15. Sokolov and Oliker interviews and discussions in Tatarstan, fall 2016; Ayrat Galimzyanov, “Mechet’ islamistov v Kazani zakryli po nastoyaniyu federal’nykh vlastey: mnenie,” Regnum, January 16, 2013, <https://regnum.ru/news/polit/1613538.html>.



at least, to have removed younger, more independent religious leaders.<sup>16</sup> Sometimes, imams are replaced after they ostensibly fail their certification by the Spiritual Board, which requires periodic testing. Imams who have been removed for this reason are often sent for further schooling. Some of them are, for example, studying at the Kazan Federal University Department of Religion. According to university faculty, they include individuals who had undergone prior study in Saudi Arabia and worked as imams for some years, only to be removed in 2013.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, we were able to speak with one person who fit this description.<sup>18</sup> It is too early to tell if individuals removed in this way will be reinstated.

In addition, we heard numerous reports that forbidden (Islam-related) literature was planted on the property of those arrested by authorities on grounds of terrorism or extremism, and that charges brought against individuals were otherwise falsified.<sup>19</sup> In some cases, of course, the forbidden literature is truly found, but many have questioned whether government lists of what is forbidden have any correspondence with truly “extremist” thought. A village imam, who had been replaced for reading the wrong books, noted to us that books were, apparently, more dangerous than bombs.<sup>20</sup>

Our field interviews revealed that many in Tatarstan’s expert and Muslim communities believe that what is described above has less to do with theology and more to do with control and resources. A number of our interlocutors argued that both arrests and prosecutions (which in past years were usually on terrorism charges, but are now more commonly on charges of extremism) and many of the removals of religious leaders described above are not based on the beliefs, statements, or actions of those affected. Rather, they have emerged as a means by which establishment religious leaders discredit competing preachers, whether or not the latter espouse more fundamentalist approaches to Islam. To do this, establishment figures rely in large part on their ties with local police and government, broadening the conflict and increasing their literal and figurative ammunition.

Indeed, the close relationship between the state and Muslim religious authorities (the Muslim Spiritual Board and Muftiate) in the republic is often remarked upon, although it remains poorly defined or delineated by scholars.<sup>21</sup> What we know is that Tatarstan’s elite community is small and

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16. Sokolov and Oliker interviews and discussions in Tatarstan, fall 2016; Arslan Minvaleev and Vladimir Kazantsev, “Kul Sharif: perezagruzka. Opal’nomu imamu kul’tovoy mecheti nashli zamenu v ‘Al-Mardzhani,’” *Businessonline*, April 12, 2013, <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/article/78485>; Mar’yam Arslanova, “Eks-imama Kul Sharif podderzhali v goss-ovete RT,” *Vechernyaya Kazan*, June 19, 2013, <http://www.evening-kazan.ru/articles/eks-imama-kul-sharif-podderzhali-v-gossovete-rt.html>.

17. “Imam-Mukhtasib Nizhnetskamska stal glavoy mukhtasibata Privolzhskogo i Vakhitovskogo rayonov Kazani,” *Businessonline*, June 25, 2017, <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/news/349732>; Timur Rakhmatullin and Evgeniy Kalashnikov, “Mansur khazrat: ‘Nuzhno nayti kraynego, chto imam Zakabannoy mecheti ne smog proyti attestatsiyu,’” *Real’noe vremya*, November 8, 2016, <https://realnoevremya.ru/articles/47630>.

18. Sokolov interviews and discussions in Tatarstan, fall 2015; Sokolov and Oliker interviews and discussions in Tatarstan, fall 2016.

19. Sokolov and Oliker interviews and discussions in Tatarstan, fall 2016.

20. Sokolov and Oliker interviews and discussions in Tatarstan, fall 2016.

21. Rezeda Galikhuzina and Marat Mardanshin, “Religioznyy ekstremizm na pochve islama v privolzhskom federal’nom okruge,” *Izvestiya Saratovskogo Universiteta* 14, No. 4 (2014): 78–85, <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/religioznyy>

long-standing. Thus, the existence of established, self-reinforcing networks is not entirely surprising. Residents and experts we spoke with described a division of labor based in part on ethnicity (and concomitantly religion, at least notionally), in which certain roles (including senior roles in security forces) were primarily occupied by ethnic Russians, while government leadership posts were filled by a mix of ethnic Tatars and ethnic Russians. Orthodox and Islamic clergy are also an integral part of this network, with educational and kinship ties linking those involved. Our interlocutors posited that all of these were in constant and consistent coordination to maintain the status quo, and their own leadership roles. One regional specialist told us that it is loyalty to the government, more than any ideology, that determines which Islam is the “right kind” of Islam.<sup>22</sup>

In summary, the evidence supports the existence in Tatarstan of a general campaign against religious leaders deemed “nontraditional.” Although interest in alternative approaches may be growing, and in some cases ties to banned and violent groups exist, it also appears that at times, suppression efforts target individuals who are not so much “nontraditional” as they are challengers to existing elites. Indeed, one can argue that the less formalized, globally respected Islamic education a member of that elite has, the more likely this person is to seek to leverage support from law enforcement and other authorities to maintain their power and position. And, in an environment of increasing concern about “nontraditional” Islam, it is these coalitions between mostly Soviet-trained clergy and state officials that may have a certain advantage over other perspectives. This is worrying particularly given the increase in raids and detentions, and thus of the involvement of security forces in these competitions, since 2010.

Meanwhile, the official narrative espousing “traditionalism,” and the ways it is used to maintain the status quo, is likely bolstered by the work of journalists, academics, and others who help shape opinion. Indeed, insofar as media and analytical actors with ties to the government are likely to repeat government perspectives in their work (and may fear repercussions for too much coverage of alternative views and perspectives), they can end up fostering the narrative in which the official approach to Islam is both “traditional” and acceptable, and everything else is not. A 2012 analysis of the press in Tatarstan confirmed that local newspapers, at least, tended to closely toe the line provided by both government officials and established religious leaders. News outlets’ discussions of court cases against banned groups and “extremism” were written with a seeming intent to discourage others from following such paths.<sup>23</sup> The expert community may be under similar pressure. Indeed, while some in that community avoid alarmism and hyperbole, others do not, and

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-ekstremizm-na-pochve-islama-v-privolzhskom-federalnom-okruge. See also Guzel Yusupova, “The Islamic Representation of Tatarstan as an Answer to the Equalization of the Russian Regions,” *Nationalities Papers* 44, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 38–54, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2015.1061983>.

22. Sokolov and Olikier interviews and discussions in Tatarstan, fall 2016. See also Guzel Yusupova, “The Islamic Representation of Tatarstan as an Answer to the Equalization of the Russian Regions,” *Nationalities Papers* 44, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 38–54, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2015.1061983>.

23. Liliya G. Egorova, “Problematika mezhkonfessional’nykh otnosheniy v regional’nykh pechatnykh SMI,” *Informatsionnoe prostranstvo regiona: istoriya, sovremennost’ i aktual’nye problemy* (2012): 83–89, <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/v/reprezentatsiya-religioznyh-konfessiy-i-mezhkonfessionalnyh-otnosheniy-v-regionalnyh-pechatnyh-smi>.

some seem swayed by their own religious background.<sup>24</sup> One tendency we have noted is, for example, to dismiss all youth interested in “Salafism” as “high risk.”<sup>25</sup> This asserted equivalence also, of course, reflects a narrative that equates fundamentalism with violence.

This said, the fact that persecution, while undeniable, is selective and related at least as much to alignment to other individuals as to beliefs also means that fundamentalist approaches continue to gain adherents. Specific approaches are not marginalized until and unless those who espouse them fall out of favor. Only a few organizations and groups are technically forbidden. As one interlocutor pointed out to us, nothing stops radicals from getting degrees from Tatarstan’s secular and religious institutions of higher learning.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, little prevents young people from seeking more information on the Internet, and sharing what they learn. After two decades of exposure to myriad approaches from around the world, and with much of the “traditional” elite also having been somewhat influenced by these “nontraditional” teachings, including through education, it is difficult to shut off the stream.

## Islam and Violence

The discussion above lays out one form of emerging religious violence in Tatarstan—the conflict over what forms of Islam are acceptable has led to both deaths and arrests and detentions. But is there any cause for the concerns that justify this behavior? The threat of extremism tends to attract substantial news coverage, as noted above. Specific cases are somewhat sporadic.

We have evidence that while few Tatars went to fight in Chechnya, in either the first or second wars, some did, and other Tatarstan citizens were implicated in attacks elsewhere in Russia during that period. For example, in January 2001, the Ioldyz madrasa in Naberezhnye Chalny was shut down by the government. Several of the madrasa’s former students were said to have gone to Chechnya as violent extremists, including Denis Saigakov, suspected in the 1999 Moscow bombings. Closer to home, other former students from the same madrasa were tied to a 2000 bombing of a gas pipeline in Tatarstan.<sup>27</sup>

Some sought violent jihad abroad. The Jamaat Bulgar was a group of Tatarstan Muslims, mainly from Naberezhnye Chalny, who went first to Tajikistan and later to Afghanistan. There, they reportedly fought with the Taliban against the U.S.-led coalition alongside Turkic-speaking Muslims from

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24. Kristina Koval’skaya, “Traditsionnyy Islam i religioznyy ekstremizm kak pole peresecheniya nauchnogo i ekspertnogo znaniya,” in *Islam v mul’tikul’turnom mire* (Kazan: Izdatel’stva Kazanskogo universiteta, 2014), 504–512, [http://kpfu.ru/portal/docs/F271163889/71\\_1\\_.\\_Islam.v.multikulturnom.mire.\\_.21.03.2014.pdf](http://kpfu.ru/portal/docs/F271163889/71_1_._Islam.v.multikulturnom.mire._.21.03.2014.pdf).

25. Damir Shagaviev, “Islamskaya bogoslovskaya literatura salafitskogo tolka v sovremennom Tatarstane,” in *Islam v mul’tikul’turnom mire* (Kazan: Izdatel’stva Kazanskogo universiteta, 2014), 128–143, [http://kpfu.ru/portal/docs/F271163889/71\\_1\\_.\\_Islam.v.multikulturnom.mire.\\_.21.03.2014.pdf](http://kpfu.ru/portal/docs/F271163889/71_1_._Islam.v.multikulturnom.mire._.21.03.2014.pdf).

26. Sokolov and Oliker interviews and discussions in Tatarstan, fall 2016.

27. Shamil’ Idiatullin, “Prokuratura Kazani suditsya s medrese kotorogo ne sushchestvuet,” Old.memo, January 17, 2001, <http://old.memo.ru/hr/hotpoints/N-Caucas/ch99/010117/k0117a.htm>; Shamil’ Idiatullin, “Boevik-poslushnik—Podozrevaemykh uchili v medrese,” *Kommersant*, September 23, 1999, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/226065>; Rimma Akhmirova, “Ya gotov popast’ v ad, chtoby dokazat’ lozhnost’ vakhkhabizma,” *Komsomol’skaya pravda*, May 17, 2000, [https://www.neweurasia.info/archive/2000/extrem/05\\_17\\_kp17.05.htm](https://www.neweurasia.info/archive/2000/extrem/05_17_kp17.05.htm).

a variety of countries (including Uighurs from China).<sup>28</sup> One Jamaat Bulgar member was Airat Vakhitov (Salman Bulgarskii), who was arrested by the Taliban on suspicion of spying for Russia. He later found himself in Guantanamo, was turned over to Russian Federation authorities, and freed in Russia (where he was briefly rearrested later). Having now made his way to Turkey, he has become a prominent figure in the Russian-language Islamic Internet, writing about the war in Syria from an anti-ISIS perspective. Another group member, Ravil' Mingazov, was also freed from Guantanamo in 2016.<sup>29</sup>

If we focus in on the last five years, we identify very few relevant cases of violence in Tatarstan. The most notable took place in 2012. Valiula Iakupov, former deputy Mufti and a prominent activist against what he saw as Wahhabism, was assassinated in Kazan. Soon after, the new Chief Mufti, Ildus Faizov, was injured by a car bomb. These cases aroused much debate. Many speculated that fundamentalists were behind the attacks, due to Iakupov's activism. But the stories that emerged as authorities investigated were confusing. In January 2013, authorities reported that the culprit in the Iakupov murder, Robert Valeev, had been killed in a special forces operation in Kazan in October of the previous year, although others were also wanted in the case.<sup>30</sup> Soon after, the wanted men were said to be hiding out in the Middle East.<sup>31</sup>

In later years, authorities provided more information. In our discussions in November 2016, we heard of a group of young men in a Tatarstan village who had been preparing to carry out an attack. They were discovered by an elderly neighbor, who found their comings and goings suspicious and alerted authorities.<sup>32</sup> This case is fairly well documented, and the accused have been termed the "Chistopol' Jamaat." Two of this group's purported members were killed by police in 2014. Six were sentenced to prison terms that year, and the remaining nine in March of 2017. Police evidence linked the group to a series of arsons at Orthodox churches as well as the intention to launch missiles at a local chemical plant, among other crimes. Notably, one of the men killed in 2014, Rais Mingaleev, was also deemed responsible for the 2012 attacks on Faizov and Iakupov. Mingaleev was also among those reported in 2013 to be somewhere in the Middle East.<sup>33</sup>

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28. Rais Suleymanov, "Kart-blansh. Tatarskie dzhamaaty v Afganistane i Sirii zhдут popolneniya," *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, December 14, 2016, [http://www.ng.ru/faith/2016-12-14/3\\_6884\\_kartblanshe.html](http://www.ng.ru/faith/2016-12-14/3_6884_kartblanshe.html).

29. Oleg Moskvina, "Posledniy rossiyskiy uznik Guantanamo vydyet na svobodu," *Vzglyad delovaya gazeta*, July 26, 2016, <https://vz.ru/world/2016/7/26/823619.html>.

30. Svetlana Braylovskaya, "Ozvuchili Imya Ubiytsy Valiully Yakupova," *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, January 11, 2013, <https://rg.ru/2013/01/11/reg-pfo/valiulla.html>.

31. Svetlana Braylovskaya, "SK: Podozrevaemye v Terakte v Kazani Skryvayutsya Na Blichnem Vostoke," *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, January 22, 2013, <https://rg.ru/2013/01/22/reg-pfo/rozisk-anons.html>.

32. Sokolov and Olikier interviews and discussions in Tatarstan, fall 2016.

33. Vladislav Mal'tsev, "V Tatarstane nachalsya sud nad podzhigavshimi tserkvi terroristami," *Life*, October 20, 2016, [https://life.ru/t/%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%B3%D0%B8%D1%8F/919570/v\\_tatarstanie\\_nachalsia\\_sud\\_nad\\_podzhigavshimi\\_tsiervki\\_tterroristami](https://life.ru/t/%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%B3%D0%B8%D1%8F/919570/v_tatarstanie_nachalsia_sud_nad_podzhigavshimi_tsiervki_tterroristami); Eleonora Rylova, "Delo Chistopol'skogo Dzamaata: Skandal Za Skandalom," *Vechernyaya Kazan*, October 26, 2016, <http://www.evening-kazan.ru/articles/delo-chistopolskogo-dzhamaata-skandal-za-skandalom.html>; "High-Profile Terrorism Trial Starts In Russia's Tatarstan," RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, October 20, 2016, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-tatarstan-terror-trial-faizov-attackers/28065280.html>; Maksim Kirilov and Aleksey Luchnikov, "Prigovor pod dulami OMONa: Chistopol'skiy dzamaat provedet za reshetkoy 170 let," *Biznes*

In addition, press reports noted that the group, which had pledged allegiance to the Caucasus Emirate, was also accused of planning attacks in Moscow. In the course of the most recent trial, human rights organizations suggested that the defendants may have been tortured. They also noted a number of irregularities during the trial itself. Attorneys have promised appeals.<sup>34</sup> But the long list of accusations also leads one to wonder whether, if the men on trial, in prison, or dead are indeed guilty as charged, recent Islamist violence in Tatarstan in fact begins and ends in Chistopol.

Other evidence suggests the problem is broader and perhaps a bit different. Russian officials estimate that some 50–60 individuals have traveled from Tatarstan to Syria in recent years to take up arms with ISIS, al Qaeda, or related groups. Expert estimates tend to double the figures.<sup>35</sup> In the past, Tatarstan citizens also traveled to Chechnya and Afghanistan. Syria numbers, however, appear to dwarf those handfuls. Indeed, most of the specialists we spoke with could personally name instances of individuals or groups they knew of who had traveled to Syria. Some believed that hundreds have gone to fight from the region.<sup>36</sup>

Finally, we want to turn our attention to the question of Islam in criminal communities. Anecdotally, there are reports of criminal actors who turned to Islam in Tatarstan, even in some cases becoming religious or community leaders.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, we heard reports that Sharia law was at times used to resolve criminal disputes in Tatarstan, but this claim may also be exaggerated, or even an effort to discredit fundamentalist Muslims. The tone of not a few of the reports on this phenomenon suggests just that, for instance a 2016 article on the ostensible spread of Islam into the criminal world that cites such striking parallels between criminal and Muslim communities as the tendency in both to use the terms “brother” and “sister” among friends and compatriots.<sup>38</sup>

Similarly, we are somewhat skeptical of reports of the Islamicization of prisons in Russia as a whole, and Tatarstan in particular. These reports describe substantial fundamentalist communities cropping up in Russia’s prisons, seeking to convert not just their fellow Muslims, but also those of other religions to “Salafi” or “Wahhabi” approaches.<sup>39</sup> We are doubtful in part because the numbers of Muslims in the prisons seem too low to create such a phenomenon. In 2013, of 585,000 people

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*Online*, March 23, 2017, <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/article/340744>; Andrey Smirnov, “Terroristov ne pustili na Kazanskiy vokzal,” *Kommersant*, March 24, 2017, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3250245>.

34. *Ibid.*

35. Egor Sozaev-Gur’ev, “V Tatarstane zaveli ugovolnye dela na vsekh zhitel’nykh, voyuyushchikh v IGIL,” *Izvestiya iz*, July 5, 2016, <https://iz.ru/news/620711>.

36. Sokolov and Oliker interviews and discussions in Tatarstan, fall 2016.

37. Sokolov and Oliker interviews and discussions in Tatarstan, fall 2016.

38. Roman Ilyushchenko, “Romantizatsiya dzhikhada, ili Kak islamizm pustil korni v prestupnyuyu sredu,” *Shchit i Mech*, no. 7 (February 2016): 10, [https://xn--b1aew.xn--p1ai/upload/site1/document\\_journal/Schit\\_i\\_mech\\_\\_07\\_2016\\_skleyka.pdf](https://xn--b1aew.xn--p1ai/upload/site1/document_journal/Schit_i_mech__07_2016_skleyka.pdf).

39. Vasilii Ordynskiy, “Russkie v Tyur’makh i na ‘zonakh’ primayut islam i stanovyatsya vakhkhabitami,” *Russkaya Narodnaya Liniya*, April 2, 2012, [http://ruskline.ru/analitika/2012/04/02/russkie\\_v\\_tyurmah\\_i\\_na\\_zonah\\_prinimayut\\_islam\\_i\\_stanovyatsya\\_vahkhabitami/](http://ruskline.ru/analitika/2012/04/02/russkie_v_tyurmah_i_na_zonah_prinimayut_islam_i_stanovyatsya_vahkhabitami/); Rais Suleymanov, “Vakhkhabizm v Rossiyskikh Tyur’makh: Rasprostranenie i Posledstviya,” *Russkaya Narodnaya Liniya*, January 16, 2014, [http://ruskline.ru/analitika/2014/01/16/vahkhabizm\\_v\\_rossijskih\\_tyurmah\\_rasprostranenie\\_i\\_posledstviya/](http://ruskline.ru/analitika/2014/01/16/vahkhabizm_v_rossijskih_tyurmah_rasprostranenie_i_posledstviya/).

incarcerated across Russia, 10,600, or less than 2 percent, considered themselves religious Muslims.<sup>40</sup> A more recent article cited 9,000 Muslims of a prison population of 600,000—an even smaller figure.<sup>41</sup> Both proportions are far lower than most estimates of the proportion of Muslims in Russia as whole, which tend to fall between 7 and 15 percent. As of 2016, Tatarstan authorities reported that of some 16,000 people incarcerated in the region’s facilities, some 7–8 percent of them represent ethnic groups traditionally associated with Islam.<sup>42</sup> This number is, of course, far below the proportion of Muslims in Tatarstan. Even though Russian prisoners may serve their sentences far from home, we should assume that some stay close, suggesting, again, a lower overall incarceration rate for both Muslims and people of Muslim ancestry. Thus, even if we accept substantial underreporting, Muslims still appear underrepresented in the prison population.

With the arrests of large numbers of fundamentalist Muslims accused of a variety of crimes and violations, as well as of members of illegal groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir,<sup>43</sup> it is certainly plausible that fundamentalist Muslim prison communities exist and have substantial influence over Muslim inmates as a whole. However, we have doubts that they are as prevalent as reported. Moreover, the role such groups do or do not play in spreading both fundamentalism and violent radicalism is worthy of further study.

## The Russian Orthodox Church in Tatarstan

Historically, Russian Orthodoxy and Islam have coexisted in Tatarstan with few problems. Just as the Muftiate and the Spiritual Board are the arbiters of acceptable Islam, the Orthodox Church has something of a monopoly on acceptable Christianity in the region, with similar linkages to local government and authorities. As noted above, Church officialdom is part of the same elite networks as Muftiate officialdom.

Some tension between Islam and Orthodoxy has emerged as a result of conversions of ethnic Russians to Islam, according to our interviews. One local specialist suggested that Islam and Orthodoxy had had something of a mutual nonconversion agreement for decades, which was recently breaking down, in part due to mixed marriages between Muslim men and Russian women, with the wives seeking to convert. These cases appear to be individual ones at this point, so it is difficult to draw conclusions, or even assess whether this pattern can be confirmed. Similarly, while there are also reports of some concerns about Muslims converting to Christianity, we do not have the data to draw conclusions. However, we can note reports of tensions within the Church between people privileging Tatar and Slavic backgrounds, for instance over whether services should be conducted in Tatar or Russian.<sup>44</sup>

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40. Sergey Mel’nikov, “Islam strogogo rezhima,” *Ogonek* 33 (August 26, 2013): 31, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2259024>.

41. Grigoriy Tumanov, “Zelenaya zona,” *Kommersant*, January 26, 2016, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2901612>.

42. Guzel’ Mukhametshina, “Islam v koloniyakh: v Tatarstane zadumalis” o tselesoobraznosti dukhovnoy podderzhki zaklyuchennykh,” *Info-Islam*, May 31, 2016, [http://www.info-islam.ru/publ/stati/aktualno/islam\\_v\\_kolonijakh\\_v\\_tatarstane\\_zadumalis\\_o\\_celesoobraznosti\\_dukhovnoj\\_podderzhki\\_zaklyuchennykh/49-1-0-39721](http://www.info-islam.ru/publ/stati/aktualno/islam_v_kolonijakh_v_tatarstane_zadumalis_o_celesoobraznosti_dukhovnoj_podderzhki_zaklyuchennykh/49-1-0-39721).

43. Sokolov and Olikier interviews and discussions in Tatarstan, fall 2016; in Antalya, fall 2017.

44. Sokolov and Olikier interviews and discussions in Tatarstan, fall 2016.

## Christianity and Violence

In line with the discussion in Chapter 4 (Fagan with Sibireva) and Chapter 5 (du Quenoy and Dubrovskiy) in this volume, Orthodoxy is one tenet of Russian nationalism, including in Tatarstan. Not surprisingly, the conflict in Ukraine has galvanized some Russian Orthodox/nationalist activists in the region. Some joined the fight on the side of the separatists, including Kazan-based journalist Aleksei Toporov, who headed up the public affairs office of the Luhansk People's Republic. Some of those saw themselves as taking up arms in support of "Orthodoxy against Catholicism." Others, meanwhile, went to Ukraine to fight in volunteer battalions to support the Kyiv government. Local experts estimate that about 100 people from Tatarstan have fought on each side, although there appears to be little data behind these figures.<sup>45</sup>

## Other Religions and Ethnicities

Generally speaking, conflict relating to other religious groups is overshadowed by both real competition and perceptions of competition and violence within Islam and, to a lesser extent, between Islam and Christianity. This is not to say that these problems do not exist in Tatarstan, but rather that evidence of them is difficult to find.

## Bottom Lines

For the most part, it is important to remember that while radicalism, competition within and between religious groups, and even related violence exist in Tatarstan, as we have described above, the rates of these phenomena are very low. We were also struck by the extent to which these dynamics are described even by those involved as relating less to religion than to other sorts of tension and competition. The most important aspect of this is competition for influence within Islamic communities. This said, radical Islamist views do have adherents in Tatarstan, and these adherents do face oppression, which tends to drive them underground. Moreover, even if we were to discount all government prosecutions as spurious (which we do not), the flow of fighters to Syria and to Ukraine indicates that violent ideologies with some religious components have been able to gain footholds in this region.

## TYUMEN (EXCLUDING KHMAO AND IANAO)

Tyumen Oblast, excluding the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug and the Yamalo Nenets Autonomous Okrug (which it administers but which are discussed separately later), is in the southwest of Siberia. It borders the Sverdlovsk, Kurgan, Tomsk, and Omsk Oblasts of Russia, the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug, and Kazakhstan. As in the rest of the region, Tyumen's economy is heavily dependent on energy resource extraction. The city of Tyumen is the oblast's capital. It was imperial Russia's first stop in its expansion across Siberia in the sixteenth century. From the standpoint of religion and violence, Tyumen has been comparatively quiet. However, the religious/ethnic population mix of Muslims, Russian Orthodox, other kinds of Christians, and others makes this a

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45. Sokolov and Oliker interviews and discussions in Tatarstan, fall 2016.

region worth considering for this paper. What conflict exists is mainly within-group competition, both for the allegiance of congregants and for control of religious organizations and concomitant access to resources. However, Tyumen has seen some of its young people join rebellions in Syria and Ukraine. Meanwhile, local authorities have attempted a variety of approaches to mitigating what are seen throughout Russia as emerging threats, with similarly varying results.

## Ethnicity and Religion

The casual observer may not expect to find quite the extent of religious diversity that exists in Tyumen Oblast (excluding the autonomous oblasts). Indeed, the region remains predominantly populated by people of Russian and Ukrainian ethnic backgrounds (85 percent in southern Tyumen). The indigenous population of Siberian Tatars is comparatively tiny. Volga Tatars, whose ancestors came to the region as part of Russian settlement waves, are a substantially larger group. Many villages are predominantly Tatar. In addition, recent years have brought large numbers of migrants both from other parts of Russia, including the North Caucasus, and from other countries, notably Central Asia. The bottom line is that many religious groups are multiethnic. Ethnic Russians and Ukrainians are predominantly Russian Orthodox, although some follow other Christian faiths. Traditionally Muslim ethnicities in the region include Siberian Tatars, Volga Tatars, native ethnic Kazakhs, as well as migrants and descendants of migrants from Central Asia, Azerbaijan, Bashkortostan, and the North Caucasus. Tens of thousands of Tyumen's immigrants and their descendants from Azerbaijan and the North Caucasus are ethnic Lezgin. Among the other Caucasian ethnic groups represented are ethnic Azeris, Nogais, Kumyks, and Ingush, most of whom are also, at least nominally, Muslim.

A number of experts argue that the number of migrants is higher than this data, taken from the 2010 census, suggests. As a result, they argue that a more accurate assessment of numbers for various ethnicities from the North Caucasus, Azerbaijan, and Central Asia, for example is as represented in the chart below.

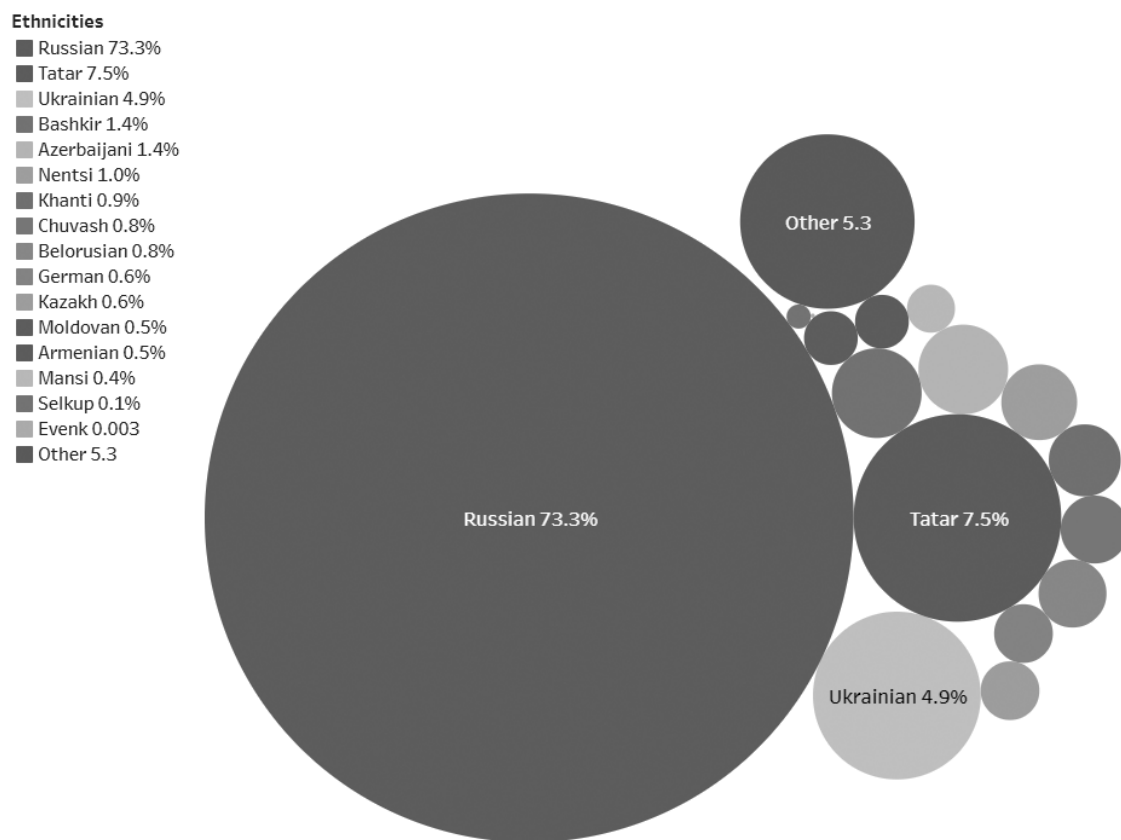
Like Russia, Tyumen experienced a period of religious rebirth in the 1990s. One aspect of this was the influx of missionaries (predominantly Muslim and Christian) from around the world. International Islamic groups also paid for the construction of mosques in southern Tyumen villages. Moreover, while Russian Orthodoxy was able to supply congregations with priests, Muslim communities faced a lack of qualified imams to lead congregations. This created a demand for foreign preachers. The Independent Administration of Muslims of Tyumen, one of several religious societies that had formed, put out a call for assistance. It was met first by Uzbeks from Andijon and Namangan in the Ferghana Valley. A number of the newcomers were imams and teachers forced out of Uzbekistan by increased government pressure on fundamentalist Islamic preachers in the valley. While they did not initially face the same pressure in Russia, they did find their approaches at odds with those of local clerics, who were grounded in a combination of Sufism and folk beliefs. Generally speaking, however, more fundamentalist approaches took hold in the region and became comparatively mainstream. Some local Muslim youth also traveled to Uzbekistan, mainly to receive training directly with instructors in their homes (i.e., not through formal institutions).<sup>46</sup> In addition to Uzbeks, preachers and teachers from around the world also came to Tyumen to work

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46. Sokolov interviews and discussions in Tyumen, 2014.



**Figure 2. Republic of Tyumen: Ethnic Composition**



with local communities. Today, local youths continue to travel abroad to study Islam, and some foreign imams remain active in Tyumen mosques.

A variety of other communities, including Christians, Jews, and Pagans, have also been active in Tyumen in the past, and many received an influx of congregants since the 1990s. Although some will suggest that Adventists, Pentecostals, and others are newcomers to the region, in fact these faiths have had adherents in Tyumen for many years.<sup>47</sup> These groups remain small in number, but some have faced discrimination and harassment, as will be discussed below.

A 2016 survey in Tyumen found that nearly half of residents (49 percent) identified as Russian Orthodox and 7 percent as Muslim. Twenty-six percent stated that they were believers without affiliation, and 14 percent that they were not believers at all. All other groups (Jews, Catholics, Protestants) were so small in number as to fall below the 1 percent threshold, which, as local scholars note, casts some doubt on the veracity of this data.<sup>48</sup> As of 2007, experts assessed that

47. See V. P. Klyueva, ed., *Gosudarstvenno-konfessional'nye otnosheniya i religioznye ob'edineniya v Tyumenskoy Oblasti* (Tyumen: Tyumen Publishing House, 2009); See also I. V. Bobrov, *Protestantizm v Tyumenskom Krae: Istoriya i sovremennost* (St. Petersburg: St. Petersburg University Press, 2006).

48. M. S. Cherepanov, *Issledovanie religioznykh soobshchestv Tyumeni v 2015—pervoy polovine 2016 g.* (Tyumen: institut razvitiya regional'nogo sotsiuma, 2016), citing data from VTsIOM-Ural Survey.

**Table 1. Official and Expert Assessments of the Sizes of Key Ethnic Groups in Tyumen<sup>49</sup>**

Sizes of Population in Tyumen Oblast		
Ethnic Group	2010 Census	Assessment for 2014
Avar	3,783	7,566
Dargin	3,722	7,444
Ingush	2,994	5,988
Kumyk	18,668	40,000
Lezgin	16,247	50,000
Nogai	8,888	30,000
Chechen	10,502	21,004
Azerbaijani	43,610	300,000
Central Asian	Not calculated	100,000

the region as a whole had at least 8,000 Protestants.<sup>50</sup> Ethnic groups mix, for the most part, in their attendance of religious facilities, although we were told that Lezgins tend to center on their own religious leaders.<sup>51</sup> Also, it should be noted that most, although not all, of Tyumen's ethnic Azeri community are Shia Muslims, in contrast to most Muslims in the region.

Today, religious observance appears to be higher among Tyumen's Muslims and Pentecostals, proportionately, than Russian Orthodox Christians. Specialists at Tyumen's Institute of the Problems of Northern Development of the Russian Academy of Sciences have been tracking attendance at religious services for several years. They counted over 11,000 people in attendance at Palm Sunday services on April 24, 2016, at various Russian Orthodox facilities in the city of

49. "Informatsionnye materialy ob okonchate'nykh itogakh Vserossiyskoy perepisi naseleniya 2010 goda," Federal'naya sluzhba gosudarstvennoy statistiki, [http://www.gks.ru/free\\_doc/new\\_site/perepis2010/perepis\\_itogi1612.htm](http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/perepis2010/perepis_itogi1612.htm). This assessment reflects Sokolov's interviews with community leaders and representatives in Tyumen in 2011 and 2014; see also Denis Sokolov, "Ugra, the Dagestani North: Anthropology of Mobility Between the North Caucasus and Western Siberia," in *New Mobilities and Social Changes in Russia's Arctic Region*, ed. Marlene Laruelle (Abington and New York: Routledge, 2017), 176–193.

50. Vladimir Makarov, "Nauchnyy vzglyad na protestantizm v Tyumenskom krae," *Tyumenskie izvestiya*, January 10, 2007, <http://old.t-i.ru/article/3104/>.

51. Sokolov and Olikier interviews and discussions in Tyumen, fall 2016.

Tyumen—approximately 1.5 percent of the city’s population. Roughly one-third as many, or about 3,000 people, were counted at Sunday services. Russian Orthodox churchgoers tend to be older, and are disproportionately female. By comparison, these researchers estimate that up to 7,000 people attend services on Muslim holidays (despite the substantially smaller Muslim population) and some 2,000 attend weekly Friday services.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, it appears that between two-thirds and four-fifths of the congregants at Tyumen city mosques are recent migrants from Central Asia or the Caucasus. Mosque congregants tend to be middle-aged or younger and the proportion of men among them is extremely high.<sup>53</sup> Also notable is Pentecostal attendance, which researchers told us is quite high, including at weekly services, despite the small size of the community.

Local authorities often provide funds to build and repair buildings for religious communities. Although this is, in principle, out of line with concepts of separation of religion and governance, it is a commonplace occurrence, usually classified as cultural and educational activity. In doing this, the preference is strongly in favor of “traditional” religions: Russian Orthodox churches and selected Muslim groups and mosques benefit the most. The Orthodox Church hierarchy in Tyumen is subordinate to the Moscow Patriarchate, as are all Orthodox Church groups discussed in this chapter. Tyumen’s Muslim Spiritual Board is an independent Muftiate of the Council of Muftis of Russia. It is not subordinate to Russia’s Central Muslim Spiritual Board.

Religious groups and institutions also carry out a good deal of social and charitable work, some with political undertones (e.g., efforts to make abortion illegal). Moreover, political activists and politicians sometimes use their ties to religious groups and affiliations in their political rhetoric.<sup>54</sup> Meanwhile, the Congress of Religious Societies of Tyumen includes a broad range of organizations and faiths, and provides an opportunity for smaller groups, such as Protestants and Jews, to interact with each other and larger communities, and to have their voices heard by local government.

Authorities in Tyumen express concern about the potential for religious tension. Some local governments have programs meant to address relations within and between religious groups. These programs tend to emphasize tolerance and the need to counter “radicalism” and “extremism.” Interviews conducted by local scholars indicate that “Salafism” raises the most concerns among government officials, most of whom are nominally Russian Orthodox. Not a few also express fear of conflict within Muslim communities and of migrants bringing dissent into the region.<sup>55</sup>

## Competition and Conflict within Islam in Tyumen

Tyumen’s Muslim community continues to include a number of different organizations and groups. There is competition both within and between them, both for influence in Muslim communities and for official recognition, which often comes with a variety of financial and other

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52. M. S. Cherepanov, *Issledovanie religioznykh soobshchestv Tyumeni v 2015—pervoy polovine 2016 g.* (Tyumen: institut razvitiya regional’nogo sotsiuma, 2016).

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid.

55. M. S. Cherepanov, *Issledovanie religioznykh soobshchestv v Tyumenskoy Oblasti: Ishim i Yalutorovsk* (Tyumen: institut razvitiya regional’nogo sotsiuma, 2015).

supports.<sup>56</sup> In general, Muslim organizations in Tyumen do not cooperate with one another, and have shown little interest in doing so.<sup>57</sup>

The Muslim Spiritual Board of Tyumen has been at the center of some of this competition. The board's history, which involved several splits from various Islamic organizations in Russia through the 1990s, both reflects and contributes to the diffusion of allegiances.<sup>58</sup> Experts assess that the board represents only a small proportion of the Muslim community, mainly older Muslims who came of age before the collapse of the USSR and whose Muslim identity is more cultural than religious. Indeed, the board and a number of other organizations across Tyumen also sometimes take a cultural/ethnic approach to Islam. For many participants, the difference may be difficult to parse, particularly as they get involved in charitable or social activities undertaken by a given mosque or organization.<sup>59</sup>

Muslim Spiritual Board-affiliated religious leaders tend to describe themselves as "traditional." In Tyumen this combines Sufi approaches, folk religion, and a preference for interpretations of religious texts. At odds with them are fundamentalist leaders and believers, often termed "Salafists," who continue to enjoy large numbers of adherents in Tyumen.<sup>60</sup>

"Salafist" approaches tend to find greater favor with younger members of the community and are at the core of tension between Muslims in Tyumen. Sometimes, the "Salafist"/"traditional" divide manifests as tension between imams for control of mosques, although in other cases these competitions may have little to do with approaches to faith. This said, tensions of both sorts have for the most part been handled peacefully, with a few exceptions (discussed below).<sup>61</sup>

Migration plays an important and increasing role in this dynamic. While senior imams in most mosques remain of Tatar background, increasingly, deputy imams are not native to Tyumen. Neither, in many cases, are increasing proportions of the congregants. Insofar as the latter are more prone to fundamentalist views, tension often results. Even if they are not, North Caucasus "traditionalists," who tend to align with Sufi approaches, may still find themselves at odds with those from Tyumen.

## Islam and Violence

The overall Russian crackdown on fundamentalist Islamic leaders described in the section on Tatarstan has parallels in Tyumen. Officials have spoken of an "Islamic rebellion." Local

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56. M. S. Cherepanov, *Issledovanie religioznykh soobshchestv Tyumeni v 2015—pervoy polovine 2016 g.* (Tyumen: institut razvitiya regional'nogo sotsiuma, 2016).

57. Ibid.

58. "Dukhovnoe upravlenie musul'man Tyumenskoy Oblasti," *Musul'mane Rossii*, August 24, 2011, <http://www.dumrf.ru/common/org/1257>.

59. M. S. Cherepanov, *Issledovanie religioznykh soobshchestv Tyumeni v 2015—pervoy polovine 2016 g.* (Tyumen: institut razvitiya regional'nogo sotsiuma, 2016).

60. M. S. Cherepanov, *Issledovanie religioznykh soobshchestv Tyumeni v 2015—pervoy polovine 2016 g.* (Tyumen: institut razvitiya regional'nogo sotsiuma, 2016)

61. Ibid.

parliamentarians have voiced fears of extremism and “Salafism.”<sup>62</sup> As a result, Tyumen mosques and religious communities have found themselves under surveillance, with searches of buildings, arrests of people who had come for religious services, and, as in Tatarstan, reports that authorities were planting forbidden literature to enable arrests. Tyumen Muslims report constraints on practices, such as the absence of prayer rooms in universities and prohibitions on wearing the hijab in schools. Organizations such as the Muslim Spiritual Board take pains to clarify their positions as “traditional” and to make public arguments against more fundamentalist approaches, although, given their general audience, this may be geared more toward gaining government approval (and resources) than changing minds.<sup>63</sup>

At the same time, Tyumen is unusual in Russia in having experimented with some tolerance of fundamentalism, driven in part by ties between local authorities and the expert community. Indeed, one of the region’s (and, indeed, Russia’s) top academic specialists on religion in the region, Igor Bobrov, held a senior local government post, with responsibility for policies related to religion. Over the course of the several years Bobrov was in office (until 2016), he oversaw an effort to mix carrots and sticks and build ties with the Muslim community, including those with “Salafi” leanings. Although Moscow placed increasing pressure on local authorities to ramp up inspections and there was a general mood throughout Russia that tied support for the government and its policies to the success of local religious institutions (indeed, in some cases to their very legal existence), Tyumen authorities initially sought to temper their implementation of these approaches.<sup>64</sup> Individuals deemed undesirable due to their activity were more likely to be encouraged to leave than face violent reprisals. A spate of harassment of shops that sold alcohol and the like by young people who had recently become more religious was effectively dealt with through communication with the ulema, with academic specialists playing a key role alongside authorities. Experts’ own knowledge of Islam made them more effective interlocutors with local Islamic leaders than authorities would have been on their own.<sup>65</sup> This softer approach from local government was matched by willingness of at least some local religious authorities to meet them halfway. One key figure was Sheikh Kadrshaev Makhsoud Gaibulaevich, who returned to Tyumen after study in Egypt with a fundamentalist approach to Islam, but also a belief that religious observance was not incompatible with cooperation with authorities and alignment with secular laws.

The situation changed around 2010, with increasing pressure first on religious leaders from Central Asia and the Middle East. Many of them left the oblast voluntarily. Others were deported. One of Makhsoud’s followers was arrested and imprisoned after narcotics were found in a vehicle he had rented. Twenty-one others were detained for spreading “extremism.” While Makhsoud himself continued to teach at a local mosque until he had a falling out with its leaders, whom he accused of being out of line with Sharia, his group no longer exists.<sup>66</sup> In line with Russian laws, Hizb

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62. Ibid.

63. Ibid.

64. Ibid.

65. Sokolov interviews and discussions in Tyumen, 2014.

66. M. S. Cherepanov, *Issledovanie religioznykh soobshchestv Tyumeni v 2015—pervoy polovine 2016 g.* (Tyumen: institut razvitiya regional’nogo sotsiuma, 2016).

ut-Tahrir activists face arrest and prison. Despite this, they continue to recruit at local mosques. For at least some in the community the crackdown on Hizb ut-Tahrir is seen as a part of a broader, anti-Muslim campaign, as Hizb ut-Tahrir propaganda itself argues.<sup>67</sup>

Government actions targeting fundamentalist Muslims are not the only forms of violence related to Islam in the region. Experts estimate that at least 150 individuals have left Tyumen to fight with ISIS. Most, if not all of them are assessed as having been “self-radicalized.” That is, they learned what they knew of Islam from the Internet and one another, rather than following a specific local leader or imam.<sup>68</sup> Most appear to be urban Muslims and some proportion of them were not native to Tyumen, but originally from Central Asia or the North Caucasus.<sup>69</sup> In October 2015 local police arrested several young men responsible for a series of robberies who indicated that they were affiliated with ISIS and were sending the proceeds of their crimes to that organization (whether in Syria or elsewhere is not clear). They reportedly had ties with at least one local individual who had traveled to Syria to fight with the group.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, communities in Dagestan and Tyumen report that previously secular young people from the North Caucasus (and KhMAO) have become fundamentalist, and sometimes espouse violent ideologies, after studying in Tyumen Oblast.<sup>71</sup> In this environment, it is perhaps unsurprising that Muslim students in Tyumen have faced university opposition to their efforts to create prayer rooms, which some report are also meeting places for radicals.<sup>72</sup>

Here the role of migration becomes particularly important, as there is some evidence that both Caucasus Emirate and ISIS recruiters have come to Siberia from the North Caucasus, and may be particularly active among other migrants (although, of course, not only). Furthermore, in some cases, support for these groups is coerced. For instance, we were told that migrants from Dagestan working in Tyumen received thumb drives with videos of their families back home, implying a threat to their children if they did not provide funds in support of fighters.<sup>73</sup> Reportedly, some fundamentalist-linked Muslim groups in Tyumen (and KhMAO) collect information and funds and provide organizational support to violent radicals in Dagestan.<sup>74</sup>

As law enforcement in both the North Caucasus and Tyumen seek to investigate and apprehend perpetrators of these and related crimes (as well as to pressure out-of-favor religious leaders) these investigations cross Russian internal borders. Individuals wanted in Tyumen may be arrested when they return to their home villages in the North Caucasus. Tyumen authorities may monitor individuals and groups, placing them on watch lists and/or arresting them, on the advice of their

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67. Ibid.

68. Ibid.

69. Sokolov and Olikier interviews and discussions in Tyumen, 2016.

70. M. S. Cherepanov, *Issledovanie religioznykh soobshchestv Tyumeni v 2015—pervoy polovine 2016 g.* (Tyumen: institut razvitiya regional'nogo sotsiuma, 2016).

71. Sokolov interviews and discussions in Dagestan and Tyumen, 2011–2016; Sokolov and Olikier interviews and discussions in Tyumen, 2016.

72. Sokolov interviews and discussions in Tyumen, 2011–2016; Sokolov and Olikier interviews and discussions in Tyumen, 2016.

73. Sokolov interviews and discussions in Surgut, Tyumen, and elsewhere, 2011, 2014, 2016 (some with Olikier).

74. Sokolov interviews and discussions in Dagestan, 2011; in Surgut, 2014.

North Caucasus colleagues. Finally, there are reports that loyalists of Chechen strongman Ramzan Kadyrov maintain lists of Chechens in Tyumen who do not follow Kadyrov's line, including with regard to Islam. Some of them are reported to work through cultural groups, such as student organizations seeking rights for Muslim students. Reported actions include kidnappings, threats to relatives, and so forth. In some cases, the link to religion appears somewhat tangential, but religion unquestionably plays a role.<sup>75</sup>

Criminal violence in general is also worth discussing here because it, too, has an ethnic component, which, in turn, is also tied to religion. The question of Islam in prisons was discussed in the section above on Tatarstan. In Tyumen we also heard about the role of Islam in ongoing criminal activity. For example, many members of the Lezgin community who came to Tyumen from Azerbaijan did so after experiencing repression, including imprisonment, in Azerbaijan, as a response to their nationalist activities. Some became more serious Muslims while in prison. The conventional wisdom in Tyumen holds that at least some religious Muslim Lezgins are involved in organized crime in the region. Similar stories are told about other Muslim communities. These reports suggest that some of these groups may even view (or at least portray) their racketeering as a form of *zakat* (charity). While we cannot assess the veracity of these claims, it is true that many local criminal groups are based on kinship and community ties, including ones rooted in Muslim communities. Moreover, some of these groups are also linked to legitimate businesses, including ones related to Islam. The result is that conflicts between criminal groups and authorities can also exhibit religious undertones. One example is the case of the Absheron Café, which was targeted by local police in the 2000s. The owners were ethnic Lezgin from Azerbaijan, and alleged to hold high levels of authority in organized crime. The café itself followed Islamic dietary practices, did not serve alcohol, and became a gathering place for local Muslims, making attacks on it seem like attacks on the Muslim community. Individuals we talked to furthermore believed that police attention to the café had less to do with either Islam or criminal activity than with a continuing struggle for control over a petroleum-extracting products factory in which the Absheron's owners had an interest.

## Christianity and Violence

The Russian Orthodox Church in Tyumen enjoys a substantial amount of privilege and support. As already noted, religious institutions often receive financial outlays from the local government. Various Russian Orthodox Church institutions, including specific cathedrals, are major beneficiaries.<sup>76</sup> In general, Church influence over local politics appears lower than, for example, in Tatarstan, but influence exists nonetheless.

Other Christian groups have a more difficult time of it. Pentecostals are sometimes perceived by authorities and Russian Orthodox communities as a product of foreign (usually U.S.) influence. This is in part the product of past experience with Western missionaries, who were active in the 1990s, but have no relationship with Tyumen's Pentecostals today. Problems became particularly acute in

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75. Sokolov interviews and discussions in Tyumen and elsewhere, 2016 (some with Oliker).

76. M. S. Cherepanov, *Issledovanie religioznykh soobshchestv v Tyumenskoy Oblasti: Ishim i Yalutorovsk* (Tyumen: institut razvitiya regional'nogo sotsiuma, 2015).

2005 and 2006. According to locals who witnessed these events, local authorities placed increasing administrative restrictions on non-Russian Orthodox religious groups, with support from the Russian Orthodox Church. One manifestation was damage done to cars parked while their owners attended a Pentecostal meeting. We were also told of a case where a Muslim family with an adult daughter who had converted to Pentecostalism threatened the daughter and the Pentecostal Community with violence (specifically, that her father would shoot everyone responsible). The Congress of Religious Societies of Tyumen (noted above) was formed in response to these problems.

Two events are more recent. We were told of a case in which a local television program accused Pentecostals of seeking to convert those who took advantage of soup kitchens provided by the Pentecostal community. A follow-up program brought together church leaders and government officials to set the record straight.<sup>77</sup>

The second case was of a 2008 public lecture on religion by the dean of the Tyumen State Oil and Gas University, who also had ties to the missionary arm of the Russian Orthodox Church. Reportedly, the lecture was offensive not only to Pentecostals, but also to other Protestants, Catholics, Muslims, and Jews.

The Christian group that experiences the greatest pressure is the Jehovah's Witnesses, whose challenges across Russia as a whole are well-documented in Chapter 4 (Fagan with Sibireva) in this volume. In Tyumen, Jehovah's Witnesses are subject to arrest and harassment, with a variety of incidents documented. Moreover, Orthodox groups have been involved in attacks on this community. For example, one Russian Orthodox club's social media page refers to Jehovah's Witnesses as waging a war on "us" and urges readers to report to the police any contact with Witnesses. This page also expresses pride in having forced the community out of parts of town. A Russian Orthodox organization's leaflet described the Witnesses as fomenting religious differences and aggression against Russian Orthodox people.<sup>78</sup> This said, when local right-wing activist Valentin Tiapkin tried to organize a broader campaign against Jehovah's Witnesses, he found little support,<sup>79</sup> and Witnesses report that they also have been able to take part, including as congregations, in formal town and city activities in the Oblast.<sup>80</sup>

The Ukraine conflict also has religious repercussions in Tyumen Oblast. While it is difficult to find reliable data on numbers for Tyumen, Russia as a whole counts over 200,000 Ukrainian refugees. A variety of religious communities, including Russian Orthodox, Baptist, and Pentecostal, have provided support to the refugees, who also represent a range of faiths. At the same time, tension and nervousness among host communities about the presence of displaced persons exists.<sup>81</sup> Aside from support to refugees, Russian Orthodox Church groups organize collections in support

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77. Sokolov interviews and discussions in Tyumen, 2014.

78. M. S. Cherepanov, *Issledovanie religioznykh soobshchestv v Tyumenskoy Oblasti: Ishim i Yalutorovsk* (Tyumen: institut razvitiya regional'nogo sotsiuma, 2015).

79. M. S. Cherepanov, *Issledovanie religioznykh soobshchestv Tyumeni v 2015—pervoy polovine 2016 g.* (Tyumen: institut razvitiya regional'nogo sotsiuma, 2016).

80. M. S. Cherepanov, *Issledovanie religioznykh soobshchestv v Tyumenskoy Oblasti: Ishim i Yalutorovsk* (Tyumen: institut razvitiya regional'nogo sotsiuma, 2015).

81. Sokolov and Oliker interviews and discussions in Tyumen, fall 2016.



of the people of the Donbas. Moreover, analysts report that at least one Russian Orthodox sermon in Tyumen characterized the war in Ukraine as being a war for the Russian people, and a way of keeping the war out of Russia.<sup>82</sup> Some Tyumen residents (perhaps 100, according to our interlocutors, although as in other cases, we have no data to support this figure) have gone to fight with the separatists in Ukraine. Valentin Tiapkin, noted above, may have played a role in recruitment (he certainly declared his willingness to do so to news media), and reportedly has ties with those who have gone.<sup>83</sup>

## Other Religions and Ethnicities

We unfortunately were not able to collect sufficient data on other religions and ethnicities in Tyumen to develop a coherent narrative. Further study is recommended to assess the role of religion and violence involving both indigenous and other groups in this region.

## Bottom Lines

Local authorities in Tyumen are working to balance federal pressure and a general zeitgeist characterized by concerns about fundamentalist Islam in a region whose Muslim community has long favored more fundamentalist tenets. These challenges are exacerbated by migration, which has increased the number of Muslims in the region, and brought with it competition between groups from the North Caucasus as well as tension in communities where either spiritual leaders or congregations may have different experiences and/or approaches. Government crackdowns, however, are comparatively recent, although increasing. Most of the tension that exists remains between clergy, whether Russian Orthodox or Muslim, for influence over congregants and control of resources. This said, some young people have gone to fight in Syria and Ukraine. Most of those with whom we spoke felt that recruitment to violent jihad had taken place largely independently of any local groups, with high reliance on the Internet. Religion is also one motivating factor for individuals who have gone to fight in Ukraine. Meanwhile, pressure on Pentecostals and, to a greater extent, Jehovah's Witnesses is generally nonviolent, although certainly problematic. Moreover, it is often phrased in a religious narrative and disseminated through Church-linked mechanisms.

## KHMAO AND IANAO

Having looked at the situation in Tyumen Oblast, we now turn briefly to the two autonomous okrugs administered by the oblast. Both the Khanty Mansiisk Autonomous Okrug and the Iamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug have attracted labor migrants due to their substantial energy resources. Khanty Mansiisk is crucial to Russia's oil industry, while Iamal-Nenets is the source of the majority

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82. M. S. Cherepanov, *Issledovanie religioznykh soobshchestv v Tyumenskoy Oblasti: Ishim i Yalutorovsk* (Tyumen: institut razvitiya regional'nogo sotsiuma, 2015); M. S. Cherepanov, *Issledovanie religioznykh soobshchestv Tyumeni v 2015—pervoy polovine 2016 g.* (Tyumen: institut razvitiya regional'nogo sotsiuma, 2016).

83. Sokolov, Sokolov and Oliker interviews and discussions in Tyumen, 2016; "V tsentre Tyumeni proshel nabor dobrovol'tsev v Ukrainu," *Znak*, July 11, 2014, [https://www.znak.com/2014-07-11/v\\_centre\\_tyumeni\\_proshel\\_nabor\\_dobrovolcev\\_v\\_ukrainu](https://www.znak.com/2014-07-11/v_centre_tyumeni_proshel_nabor_dobrovolcev_v_ukrainu); M. S. Cherepanov, *Issledovanie religioznykh soobshchestv Tyumeni v 2015—pervoy polovine 2016 g.* (Tyumen: institut razvitiya regional'nogo sotsiuma, 2016).

of Russia's natural gas production. Geographically large, both regions are sparsely settled. All of Yamalo-Nenetsk AO is estimated to host just slightly over 500,000 people, while Khanty Mansiisk has a population roughly three times that size. Both regions have a diverse ethnic and religious mix, and have thus experienced many of the same debates and challenges that affect other parts of central Russia. There has been little in the way of violence. However, tension in Surgut and elsewhere in the region has had religious undertones. We are therefore not undertaking a full assessment of these parts of Russia, but providing some available evidence, which focuses predominantly on the region's Muslim minority. Further study would be helpful to provide better consideration of other groups and dynamics. For example, there exist some reports of pressure on Pentecostals. Specifically, the authors were told of a schoolgirl who offered religious literature to a friend and found herself faced with the threat of a juvenile court charge of extremism. An appeal from higher authorities closed the case, however.<sup>84</sup> We are also interested in the role and treatment of indigenous religious groups, regarding which we found little data during our preliminary fieldwork.

### Islam in the Religious and National Contexts of KhMAO and IaNAO

While ostensibly the national homelands of their titular ethnic groups (Khanty, Mani, and Nenets, respectively), in KhMAO and IaNAO those groups are very much in the minority in both regions compared to other ethnicities. Ethnic Russians are the largest ethnic group in both areas, according to the 2010 census. Of groups that have migrated more recently, Tatars and Bashkirs, who have been particularly active in energy sector labor in Siberia, form large communities. Nogais and Kumyks dominate the population of migrants from the North Caucasus specifically. Migrants from Central Asia have also been very important, although some have left Russia in the face of the economic downturn that began in 2014.

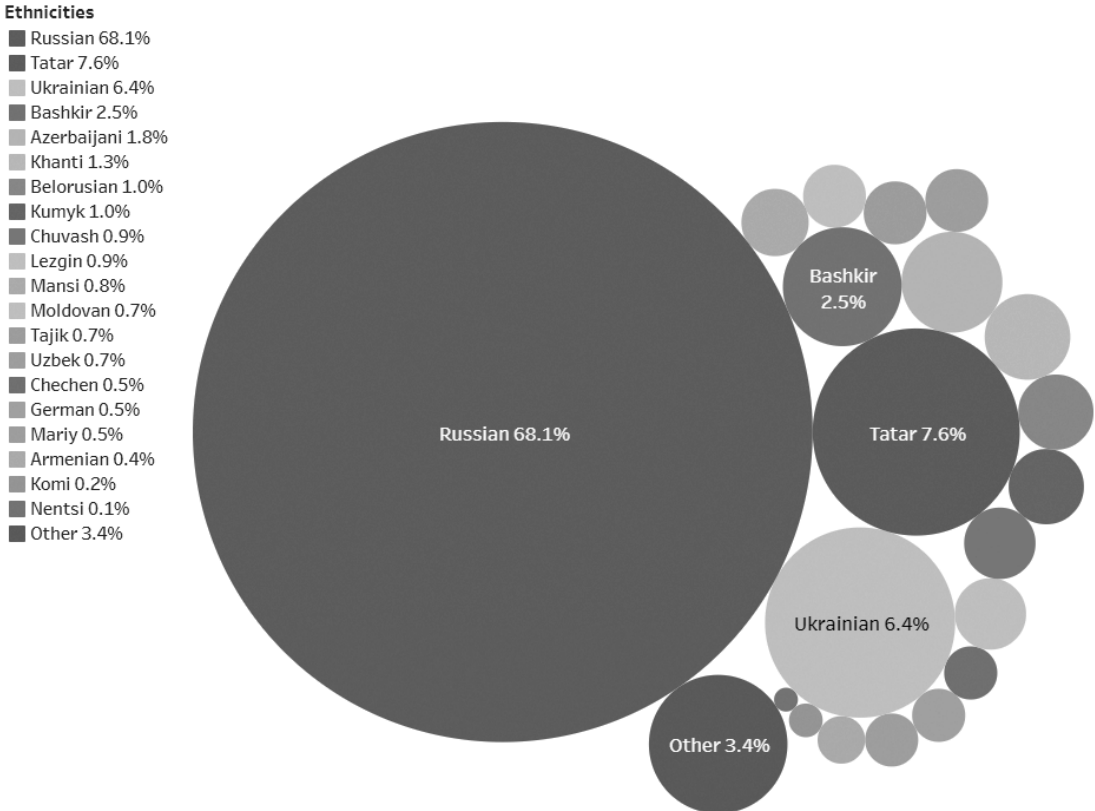
For the most part, religion aligns partially with nationality, with many people not identifying with a specific religion. We have little data regarding the pre-Christian religions that have historically been identified with this part of the world. More attention has been paid to the Muslim minority. The substantial migration from predominantly Muslim parts of Russia and Central Asia means that there are sizable Muslim populations in both regions, although insofar as people identify with a religion at all, Russian Orthodoxy remains more popular.<sup>85</sup> Our data on observance is spotty. One independent assessment suggests that migrants may be more likely to attend Muslim religious services. One count of persons coming to Friday services in Nizhnevartovsk (KhMAO) found that 20 percent were migrants from the North Caucasus and 10 percent were ethnic Russian converts. Another assessment, this one in Nefteugansk (KhMAO), estimated that up to 70 percent of participants in a given Friday service were Uzbeks and Tajiks (who impressed locals with their mastery of

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84. Sokolov and Oliker interviews and discussions in Tyumen, fall 2016. We were also told of a Baptist church in the Urals that was accused of missionary work because its playground was open to all local children.

85. "Glavnaya stranitsa proekta 'Arena,'" *Nekommercheskaya issledovatel'skaya sluzhba "Sreda" (blog)*, October 19, 2012, <http://sreda.org/arena>.

**Figure 3. Ethnic Composition of KhMAO<sup>86</sup>**



the service).<sup>87</sup> It is difficult to judge how representative this data is, or how accurate. This said, there is evidence that Central Asian migrants have taken on important roles in mosques, as assistants to imams and sometimes imams.<sup>88</sup>

Several of those interviewed felt that imams and communities in the region followed ethnic divides at least somewhat. The Nogai community, for example, was described as having a tendency to remain separate. It has its own leadership, including religious leadership, and sometimes undertakes fund-raising among Nogais in the region.<sup>89</sup> Some assess that Nogais and migrants from Dagestan more generally are more religious, on average, than Volga Tatars in KhMAO.<sup>90</sup> This said, in Novaia Fedorovka the Nogai community has been involved in the building of a new mosque intended to serve the larger population, ostensibly in the belief that they will be able to have their “own” imam installed. Meanwhile, migrants from Dagestan and their descendants continue to turn

86. “Informatsionnye materialy ob okonchatel’nykh itogakh Vserossiyskoy perepisi naseleniya 2010 goda,” Federal’naya sluzhba gosudarstvennoy statistiki, [www.gks.ru/free\\_doc/new\\_site/perepis2010/perepis\\_itogi1612.htm](http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/perepis2010/perepis_itogi1612.htm).

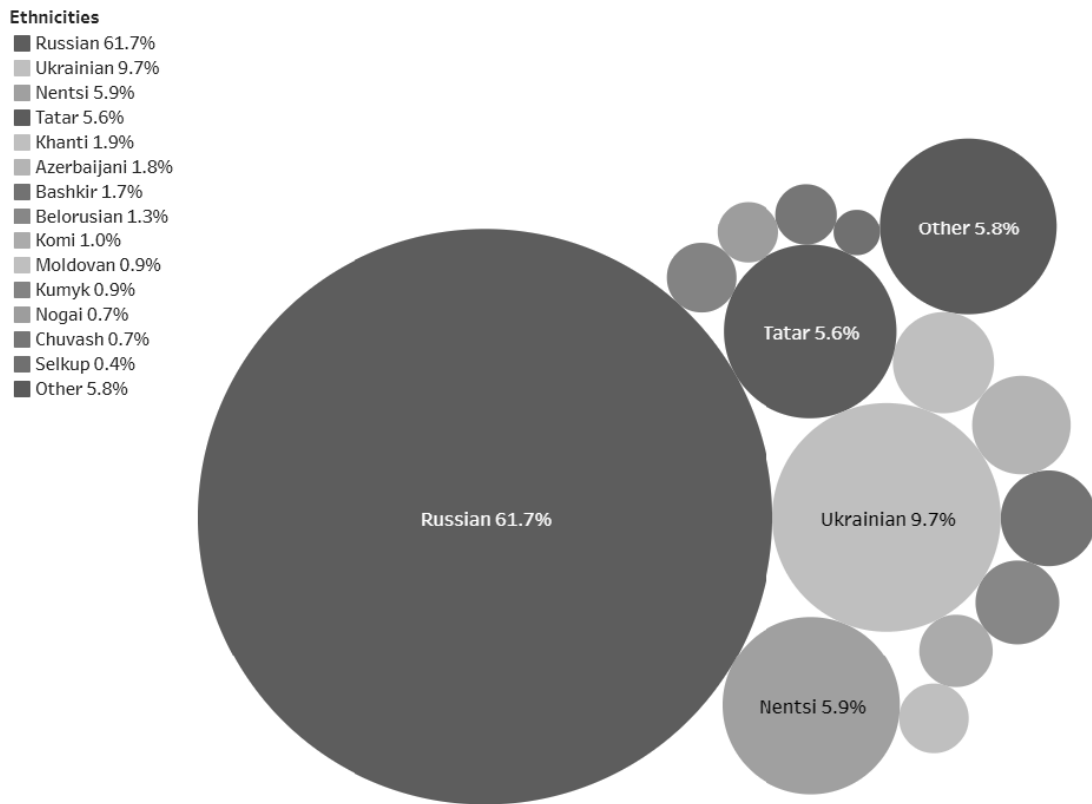
87. Sokolov interviews and discussions in Nefteyugansk, 2014.

88. Sokolov interviews and discussions in Nizhnevartovsk, 2014 and 2015.

89. Sokolov interviews and discussions in KhMAO, 2011 and 2014; Denis Sokolov, “Ugra, the Dagestani North”

90. Sokolov interviews and discussions in KhMAO, 2011 and 2014. Note that Nogais are sometimes referred to as Tatars in vernacular speech. We do not use this formulation.

**Figure 4. Ethnic Composition of IaNAO<sup>91</sup>**



to religious leadership in Dagestan, while attending mosques as convenient in the north. Many also return to Dagestan for religious education. Ties also work in the reverse direction: the Dagestan Spiritual Board got involved in lobbying for a new imam in Pyt-lakh.<sup>92</sup> Ethnic Azeri migrants are, of course, primarily Shi'a, leading to a certain differentiation on their own part.

A certain amount of local Muslim religious practice is centered not on mosques, but private prayer houses, with their own hierarchies of learned persons and preachers. These individuals organize services, talks, and so forth in private homes, although some also preach elsewhere. Many if not most religious leaders who have emerged in this way are at least partly self-taught and rely on Internet-based sources, which may contribute to a tendency on their part to lean toward "Salafi" approaches. Members of Hizb ut-Tahrir and followers of Said Nursi also appear to fit this pattern of Internet-based learning. Finally, it has been noted that some number of migrants from the North Caucasus to the far north may develop their interest in religion, whether through the Internet or by other means, after they arrive in this new environment.<sup>93</sup> The reverse is also true—as noted above, some Surgut residents reported that young people from that city became radicalized in Tyumen while there for study.<sup>94</sup>

91. Ibid.

92. Sokolov interviews and discussions in Novaya Fedorovka, 2014; and Novy Urengoy, 2014.

93. Sokolov, "Ugra, the Dagestani North."

94. Sokolov interviews and discussions in Dagestan and Tyumen (some with Olikier), 2011–2016.

More formal local religious leaders are opposed to the home-based “Salafi” preachers and their followers. While they may speak out against them, however, they do not brand these preachers as apostates. A wide variety of religious literature is available in local Islamic shops, with no seeming effort to monitor or prevent its sale.<sup>95</sup> Some formal religious leaders are frustrated by local authorities’ disinterest in taking on this mission, as they do in other parts of Russia. They argue that the radicals receive [foreign?] financing and support, while they themselves have no assistance or resourcing to educate youth and battle these trends.<sup>96</sup> Both regions’ formal Islamic institutions are subordinate to Russia’s Central Muslim Spiritual Board, although that of KhMAO has recently claimed the authority to independently hire and fire imams.<sup>97</sup>

## Competition, Conflict, and Violence Within and Relating to Islam

If one focuses on formal mosques and approaches, local authorities report that KhMAO and IaNAO Kumyks and other north Caucasus natives in the region tend to follow the Shafi’i madhab of Sunni Islam, while Tatars and Bashkirs are mostly adherents of the Hanafi madhab. Nogais and Uzbeks are also Hanafi, most often, although they often have closer ties with Dagestanis and one another than with Tatar communities. One local imam indicated that overall, the region tends to walk a line between the two schools—but that line seems poorly demarcated.<sup>98</sup> Regional religious authorities rarely get involved in competition between various schools of Islam. Because of the large numbers of Tatars and Bashkirs in the region, Tatar, and, to a lesser extent, Bashkir religious leaders have become prominent. Often, their leadership is unofficial, keeping them away from the awareness of authorities.

Incidents of violence and threat of violence have not been frequent. This said, and despite the complaints of religious authorities noted above, there are some examples of pressure on “Salafi” preachers. In 2010 in Pokachi (KhMAO), Dagestani “Salafis” had effective control of the local mosque, with the support of the local imam. The Mufti of KhMAO replaced the imam with a more “traditional” alternative, Rustam Rakhmatullin. Rakhmatullin and his family soon faced threats from “Salafis” in the local community. Meanwhile, the former imams began to hold Friday services at the same mosque after the “official” ones had ended. In spring of 2013, “Salafi” adherents reportedly removed all religious literature from the mosque and later set fire to a garage in which Rakhmatullin’s car was parked. In early 2014, authorities arrested some 20 persons for participation in these actions. Some report that those arrested were ridiculed (in one case, a man’s beard was pulled out) and question the appropriateness of the arrests (as well as the initial choice to replace the imam).<sup>99</sup>

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95. Sokolov interviews and discussions in Novaya Fedorovka, 2014.

96. Sokolov interviews and discussions in Pyt’-lakh, 2014.

97. Khafiz Andzerzhanov, “RDUM KhMAO-Yugry vyshlo iz sostava TsDUM Rossii i bol’she ne podchinyaetsya Ufe,” *IslamRB*, February 2, 2017, <http://www.islamrb.ru/рдум-хмао-югры-вышло-из-состава-цдум-ро/>.

98. Sokolov interviews and discussions in Pyt’-lakh, 2014 and 2015.

99. Dzhahal Abdurzagov and Vagif Kerimov, “Gospodstvo bolezni est’ fakt, no tsel’ est’ zdorov’e,” *Informatsionnoe agentstvo rex*, February 22, 2014, <http://www.iarex.ru/articles/45484.html>; “Yugorskie siloviki zaderzhali v Pokachi dvukh vakhabitov-podzhigateley mecheti. Ikh arest otmetili nadpisyami na stenakh: ‘Smert nevernym!’,” *Ura*, June 20, 2013, <http://ura.ru/news/1052159838>; Aleksey Malashenko and Aleksey Starostin, “Islam na sovremennom Urale,” *Carnegie Moscow Center*, April 23, 2015, <http://carnegie.ru/2015/04/23/ru-pub-59854>.

Another instance involves the Nur Islam (followers of Said Nursi) organization, in existence in Novyi Urengoi since the 1990s. It included a mosque with a multiethnic congregation. In the 2000s, authorities branded Nur Islam a center of radicalism. In 2010, the imam of the mosque, Uzbekistan (Namangan) native Ismotdin Akbarov, was brutally murdered in Tyumen (the case remains unsolved). His son Muhammad, who had taken his place, subsequently faced threats, arrest, and was reportedly tortured. The mosque itself was searched repeatedly in 2010, with 70 parishioners arrested at one service (all were released). Authorities sought to shut down the mosque first through the courts in 2011, but failed. They succeeded in 2014, and the mosque was closed.<sup>100</sup> Muhammad Akbarov left Russia in 2016. The chairman of the mosque, Dmitrii Chernomorchenko (who also edits the “Voice of Islam” online news site), also left the region and later the country.

An odd case is that of the mosque in Pyt'-lakh. It was built after something of a legal battle, but its leaders were on good terms with authorities. In April 2014, a car bombing near the mosque was described as a terrorist act and in 2016, authorities declared that it had been carried out by followers of ISIS. This is curious, particularly as ISIS did not have many adherents in Russia prior to the summer of 2014 (see the discussion in Chapter 6 by Ratelle and Sokirianskaia of this volume).

The activity of the *Sovest* group in Surgut since 2013 adds another dimension.<sup>101</sup> The group bills itself as a cultural organization, dedicated to the promotion of athletic and other activities. However, many see it as an anti-migrant organization. It is accused of a number of attacks, including armed attacks, on people from the Caucasus over a multiday period in June 2014. Whether we can code this as anti-Muslim violence (and if we can differentiate between ethnic and religious motivations in this instance) is not clear.

Witnesses report that local police not only failed to provide adequate support, but actually appeared to take the side of the *Sovest* group. They arrested witnesses and bystanders to the violence. Three people were kidnapped in early July, reportedly with the involvement of local police special forces. Two were later found near local trash bins, beaten and with bags over their heads. Some in the region believe that *Sovest* is funded by local business leaders, who also ensure its protection. They speculate that there may also be financial interests involved, as well. However, more recently, law enforcement organs have taken steps against *Sovest*.<sup>102</sup>

It is not clear what numbers of local residents have gone to fight with ISIS in Syria over the last few years. Reports indicate that up to 100 persons may have done so, but, as elsewhere, there is little corroborating or additional information regarding true numbers, the paths these individuals might have taken, their own origin, or much else.

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100. Aleksey Malashenko and Aleksey Starostin, “Islam na sovremennom Urale,” Carnegie Moscow Center, April 23, 2015, <http://carnegie.ru/2015/04/23/ru-pub-59854>.

101. *Sovest* was active in Surgut between 2012 and 2014. After 2014, group members appear to have aligned themselves with other nationalist movements in Ekaterinburg and Tyumen. Sokolov interviews and discussions in Surgut 2014 and 2016. See also Anton Stepygin, “V Surgute likvidirovali radikal'nyy proekt,” *Ura*, March 11, 2015, <https://ura.news/articles/1036264250>; “Rol' 'Sovesti' v neftegazovoy politike,” *Kavpolit*, July 20, 2014, [http://kavpolit.com/articles/rol\\_sovesti\\_v\\_neftegazovoj\\_politike-7452/](http://kavpolit.com/articles/rol_sovesti_v_neftegazovoj_politike-7452/).

102. Sokolov interviews and discussions in Surgut 2014 and 2016. See also Anton Stepygin, “V Surgute likvidirovali radikal'nyy proekt,” *Ura*, March 11, 2015, <https://ura.news/articles/1036264250>.

As we were completing this chapter, in late August of 2017, 19-year-old Artur Gadzhiev, originally from Dagestan, stabbed seven people with a knife in central Surgut, prior to being shot by police. Although authorities initially indicated that the action was not connected with any terrorist group, ISIS later released a video of Gadzhiev pledging his fealty and announcing his intention to carry out an attack. The group also announced that it had been responsible for attacks in Dagestan that month.<sup>103</sup>

## Bottom Lines

While we can say little about other religions in KhMAO and IaNAO, we can summarize the situation relating to Islam as follows. A large influx of migrants pulled to Siberia by work in energy extraction has led to a comparatively large Muslim population. The ethnic and religious differences between these groups, as well as their diverse histories in the region (some are newcomers, some are not), meant that while there is interaction, there is also a certain amount of segregation. Various groups have their own elites. Meanwhile, the formal Islamic elite structure is, as elsewhere in Russia, facing a challenge from homegrown and self-taught religious authorities, including more fundamentalist ones, but there has been less involvement of local authorities than in other parts of Russia, despite notable incidents. Russian nationalists have also targeted Muslim migrants in Surgut, reportedly with the acquiescence of authorities, but the extent to which this has had a religious motivation is not clear. More recently, there is evidence that not only are radical groups such as ISIS recruiting young people to fight in Syria from this region, but that they have also inspired at least one local attack to date.

## ASTRAKHAN REGION

Astrakhan Oblast borders on the Caspian Sea and Kazakhstan, as well as Volgograd Oblast. Its economy is partly centered on the energy industry, as the region hosts a large gas condensate field. The region is also an agricultural center, and fisheries and fish processing have historically played important roles. None of this is sufficient to make Astrakhan wealthy—of the regions we examine in this chapter, it is the poorest. Close enough to the North Caucasus to draw migrants from the latter region, Astrakhan is diverse, as will be discussed below. The oblast as a whole has a population of just over one million, about half of whom live in the city of Astrakhan. Once the seat of the Tatar Astrakhan Khanate, it has historically had a small if substantial Muslim community, and reports of radical Islamist activity and violence have appeared and reappeared sporadically over the last decade. Protests over the construction of mosques also drew some attention in 2011.

### Ethnicity and Religion

Astrakhan Oblast's diverse population comprises more than 140 ethnic groups. Ethnic Russians remain the majority population of these, claiming nearly 68 percent of the population in the 2010 census. The next largest group are ethnic Kazakhs (nearly 15 percent, and with an upward growth

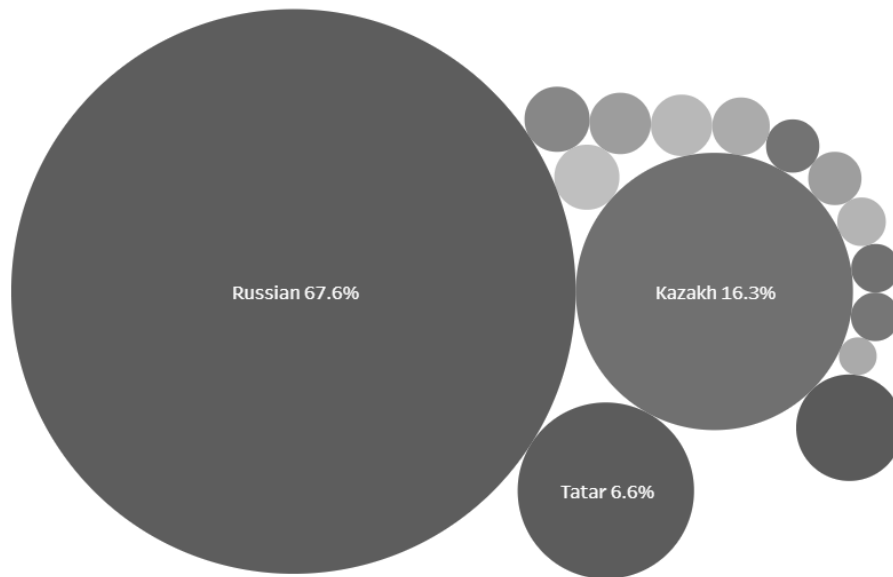
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103. "Videozapis' prisyagli Gadzhieva protivorechit vyvodom sledstviya o rezne v Surgute," Kavkazskiy Uzel, August 22, 2017, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/308150/>; "Terakty v Surgute, Kaspyske i Evrope ukazali na smenu taktiki IG," Kavkazskiy Uzel, August 31, 2017, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/308790/>.

**Figure 5. Ethnic Composition of Astrakhan<sup>104</sup>**

**Ethnicities**

- Russian 67.6%
- Kazakh 16.3%
- Tatar 6.6%
- Ukrainian 0.9%
- Azerbaijani 0.9%
- Nogai 0.8%
- Chechen 0.8%
- Kalmyk 0.7%
- Armenian 0.6%
- Roma 0.6%
- Avar 0.5%
- Lezgin 0.5%
- Dargin 0.5%
- Korean 0.3%
- Other 2.4%



trendline). Tatars were estimated at 6 percent, a shrinking proportion over time, although some portion of that trajectory may be explained by Nogais previously identified as Tatar now choosing to self-identify as Nogai. More of the change, however, is probably explained by Tatars leaving the region.<sup>105</sup> Meskhetian Turks are a small but historically notable population: In the autumn of 1989, 1,200 of them were evacuated from Uzbekistan, where they had faced violence motivated by ethnic hatred, to the Astrakhan region.

Astrakhan has long had substantial populations of groups and communities indigenous to the proximate North Caucasus region. Their numbers have been growing in recent years, including substantial populations of Chechens (about 1 percent of the population) and various Dagestani ethnicities (Avars, Dargins, Lezgins, Laks, and Kumyks). In addition to labor migrants, there are a large number of students from the North Caucasus studying in the region's institutions of higher learning.

Students aside, migrants from Dagestan to Astrakhan have tended to remain in close communities corresponding to their home villages in Dagestan. They often return to Dagestan for important life

104. "Informatsionnye materialy ob okonchatel'nykh itogakh Vserossiyskoy perepisi naseleniya 2010 goda," Federal'naya sluzhba gosudarstvennoy statistiki, [www.gks.ru/free\\_doc/new\\_site/perepis2010/perepis\\_itogi1612.htm](http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/perepis2010/perepis_itogi1612.htm).

105. El'dar Idrisov, "V Astrakhanskoy oblasti chislo nogaytsev za vosem' let uvelichilos' v poltora paza," *Kavkazkiy Uzel*, January 6, 2012.



events. Three villages in particular—the Bagvalal village<sup>106</sup> of Kvanada, the Andi village<sup>107</sup> of Kvankhidatli, and the Karata village<sup>108</sup> of Verkhnee Inkhello—play important roles in the city of Astrakhan. The 1,500 households that make up this community live in the city of Astrakhan in the district of the Bolshiye Isady market. They have made a practice of purchasing dilapidated properties in the area and constructing new homes. The result is that there is now a distinctive “little Dagestan” neighborhood, with halal cafés, shops, and vendors in the local markets and neighboring streets. The neighborhood also hosts several mosques, reconstructed with the financial contributions of recent migrants, although the congregations tend to be more diverse. Indeed, efforts to create more ethnically specific congregations (something that some Kazakh groups have attempted) in the formally recognized mosques have met with opposition from the Muftiate, possibly because the dominance of ethnically mixed mosque communities helps established authorities maintain influence. Private, unofficial mosques are in some cases affiliated with specific ethnic groups, however.<sup>109</sup>

The influx of migrants has had implications for Astrakhan’s religious mix. Although data for the present day is not available, at the turn of the century, 30 denominations and 149 religious communities were officially registered—40 percent of them Russian Orthodox, 27 percent Muslim, 18 percent Protestant, and the remainder representing other faiths. Changes since most likely include the relative growth of Muslim communities, registered and otherwise.

A city with a substantial Muslim population (and several historic mosques), as noted above, Astrakhan became a center for Russia’s fundamentalist Muslim community just prior to the collapse of the USSR, when the short-lived Russian Islamic Renaissance Party Nakhdat held a conference there in 1990.<sup>110</sup> Throughout the 1990s, Astrakhan experienced the same sort of Islamic revival as other parts of Russia, with mosques returned to Muslim communities and people of all ages pursuing their interest in religious learning. Some Astrakhan residents became influential in Muslim movements across Russia. There is some evidence, and certainly many local specialists argue, that migrants from the North Caucasus and their descendants were particularly prone to

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106. Prior to the waves of migration that took place in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the Bagvalal people (Bagulal people) had settled the north slope of the Bogoskyi Range at the right bank of the Andi Koysu river. They live in the neighbouring villages of Hushtada, Tlondoda, Kvanada, Ghimerso (Tzumadinskyi district), Tlibisho, and Tlissi (Akhvakhskyi district). The Bagvalal people speak the Bagvalal dialect of the Andi language.

107. The Andis are the largest of the groups who lived at the southern spurs of the Andi Range on the left bank tributary of the Andi Koysu river in northwest Dagestan prior to the waves of migration of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Andis can include not only native Andi speakers, but also members of neighboring groups.

108. The Karata people settled in the Akhvakh district of Dagestan in the villages of Karata, Anchikh, Tzumali, Archo, Verkhnee Inkhello, Mashtada, Ratzil, Rachabulda and Tukita before the migration movements of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. They speak the Karata language, also attributed to the Andi language group.

109. See the discussion of who goes to which mosque in S. Filatov and R. Lunkin, “Astrakhanskaya Oblast: Osobennosti istoricheskogo razvitiya religii,” The Keston Institute, January 2012, <http://www.keston.org.uk/encyclopaedia-vol1.php>; Robert G. Landa, *Islam v istorii Rossii* (Moscow: Vostochnaya literatura RAN, 1995), 254–255.

110. A.V. Syzranov, “Severokavkazskie migranty-musul’mane v polietnichnom regione yuga Rossii,” *Caspian-Eurasia* (blog), September 21, 2016, <http://caspien-eurasia.com/2016/09/21/severo-kavkazskie-migranti-v-polietnicheskom-regione-uga-rossii/>.

fundamentalist approaches.<sup>111</sup> According to Syzranov, a “Salafi” community of some 300 people formed a jamaat in the 1990s, which split during the first Chechen war. Most of the community returned to the North Caucasus to fight. The remainder made up the core of a fundamentalist group led by Anguta Omarov, also known as Ayub Astrakhanski, who forbade participation in the jihad against Russia. It gained followers throughout Russia and in Central Asia.<sup>112</sup> Some also report that it received foreign financial support. International groups like the Tablighi Jamaat, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Hizb ut-Tahrir also gained adherents in the region. So did fundamentalist Saudi-style “Salafis,” who often identified themselves as simply Sunni. Some of these groups worshipped at existing mosques, others built new houses of prayer.

Today, the various Muslim communities that are formally registered compose the Astrakhan Regional Spiritual Board of Muslims. The board is subordinated to Russia’s Central Spiritual Board of Muslims.

Most Astrakhan Muslims follow either the Hanafi madhab or the Shafi’i madhab of Sunni Islam. Ethnic Tatars, Nogais, and Kazakhs tend to align with the Hanafi madhab, as do most emigrants from Central Asia. Shafi’i followers are more commonly migrants from the North Caucasus. They have been gathering in Mosque No. 3, also known as the Red Mosque, near the Bolshiye Isady market since 1989. Although formally part of the Spiritual Board, it is arguably comparatively independent in its decisionmaking and operations. In addition, one mosque in the city hosts Shia congregants, mainly those of Azerbaijani and Iranian background. Astrakhan residents with their origins in the Dagestan village of Nizhnee Inkhello have built their own mosque, known as the “Sufi” or “Inkhello” mosque, as this community follows Sufi traditions.

Astrakhan’s Ethno-Religious Council was created in 2007. Its current membership consists solely of representatives of the Orthodox Church and the Clerical Board of Muslims. However, the Astrakhan Interreligious Consultative Council, established in 2006 under the auspices of the city administration, includes representatives of other faiths, including the chief rabbi of Astrakhan, the pastor of the Lutheran parish, the abbot of the Armenian Apostolic Church, the senior pastor of the Russian Church of Christians of Evangelical Faith in the Nizhne-Volzhskiy Krai, the pastor of the Adventist Church, and the pastor of the Full Gospel Church. However, the Catholic Church, the Church of the Gospel Christian missionary union “Transfiguration,” and one of the largest Christian religious communities of Astrakhan, the Pentecostal Church of Jesus Christ, whose religious services were attended by 400 Astrakhan citizens of a broad range of ethnic groups, are not part of either council.

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111. Joanna Paraszczuk, “Chechen Fighter Explains Battle for Hearts & Minds,” From Chechnya To Syria, September 17, 2013, <http://www.chechensinsyria.com/?p=10752>; A. V. Syzranov, “Gosudarstvennaya politika Rossii po bor’be s islamskim ekstremizmom na territorii Povolzh’ya v kontse 20—nachala 21 veka,” *Caspian-Eurasia* (blog), April 28, 2016, <http://caspien-eurasia.com/2016/04/28/gospolitika-against-extremizm/>.

112. A. V. Syzranov, “Severokavkazskie migranty-musul’mane v polietnichnom regione yuga Rossii,” *Caspian-Eurasia* (blog), September 21, 2016, <http://caspien-eurasia.com/2016/09/21/severo-kavkazskie-migranti-v-polietnicheskom-regione-uga-rossii/>.

## Competition and Conflict within Islam in Astrakhan

Fundamentalist Muslims in Astrakhan face the same challenges as like-minded believers elsewhere in Russia. In 1999, after Dagestan passed a law prohibiting “Wahhabism,” the Central Spiritual Board backed efforts to introduce similar legislation in Astrakhan. While this initiative failed, fundamentalist imams and mullahs report that they face discrimination, and some believe that they have been dismissed from positions because of their beliefs—and their unwillingness to align themselves with the Spiritual Board. Indeed, in the early and mid-2000s, some Astrakhan imams sought to break from the Central Spiritual Board, hoping to join instead the newly created Spiritual Board of Muslims in European Russia or the Spiritual Board of Muslims of Saratov.<sup>113</sup> Opposition to this move manifested in violent clashes between spiritual leaders and congregants at Mosque No. 15.<sup>114</sup> Then and since, when religious leaders have tried to establish mosques independent of the board, local authorities have sided with the board,<sup>115</sup> demonstrating that in Astrakhan, as elsewhere in Russia, government officials are willing to intervene on behalf of the “established” Muslim order.

The evolution of the Islamic institute “Hajji Tarkhan” reflects these same tendencies. The institute was established in Astrakhan in 1999, using the historical madrasa of the Chernaya (Bukharskaya) mosque. As in other parts of Russia, the shortage of local scholars meant that many of the instructors hailed from abroad, including Algeria and Egypt. More recently, in response to government pressure, this has shifted. As religious scholars were forced out from the institute, many aligned themselves with “opposition” mosques and communities, uncomfortable with the Central Clerical Board. Also in this coterie were some of the key figures behind the Islamic Renaissance Party, who remain active. They have been accused of “provocative and aggressive content” in their sermons by Sergey Filatov and Oleg Lunkin.<sup>116</sup>

Today, fundamentalist teachers and preachers remain in competition with mosques affiliated with the Spiritual Board for the support of congregants, especially youth. As in Tyumen, the substantial number of migrants has played a role in this intra-Islamic competition, exporting tensions from within that region to Astrakhan. Unlike Tyumen, migration of this sort has a much longer history. Authorities get involved in this tension in several ways. First, even more so than in Tyumen, North Caucasus law enforcement consistently pursues groups and individuals into Astrakhan, either by working with local authorities or directly. Second, distrust of fundamentalists is particularly pointed when it comes to migrants from the North Caucasus, who are often assumed to be aligned with radical viewpoints and approaches and therefore potentially violent and dangerous.

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113. A. V. Syzranov, “Raskol dukhovnogo upravleniya musul'man evropeyskoy chasti SSSR i Sibiri (DUMES) i obrazovanie regional'nykh muftiyatov v postsovetskoy Rossii,” *Vestnik Kalmytskogo instituta gumanitarnykh issledovaniy RAN*, no. 4 (2013): 13–17, [kigiran.com/pubs/index.php/vestnik/article/view/496/486](http://kigiran.com/pubs/index.php/vestnik/article/view/496/486).

114. A.V. Syzranov, “Islam Astrakhanskoy Oblasti,” *Caspian-Eurasia* (blog), May 6, 2016, <http://caspian-eurasia.com/2016/05/06/islam-astrakhanskoy-oblasti/>.

115. Mairbek Vatchagaev, “Religious Tensions Grow in Astrakhan Region,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, August 2, 2013, <https://jamestown.org/program/religious-tensions-grow-in-astrakhan-region-2/>; A. V. Syzranov, “Islam Astrakhanskoy Oblasti,” *Caspian-Eurasia* (blog), May 6, 2016, <http://caspian-eurasia.com/2016/05/06/islam-astrakhanskoy-oblasti/>.

116. S. Filatov and R. Lunkin, “Astrakhanskaya Oblast: Osobennosti istoricheskogo razvitiya religii,” The Keston Institute, January 2012, <http://www.keston.org.uk/encyclopaedia-vol1.php>.

Fundamentalist Muslims we spoke with in Astrakhan expressed frustration with the unwillingness of authorities to respect their religious approaches. They noted that Mosque No. 3 (as mentioned above, a large proportion of this mosque's worshippers are migrants from the Caucasus) was often subject to police visits, during which men and women were harassed and often detained (as well as, of course, placed on police "prophylactic" lists). We were also told that many fundamentalists no longer attend the formal mosques, but gather in private homes for prayer services, and that they also face harassment. In the context of how religious Muslims are treated in day-to-day life, the community near Bolshye Isady appears to be established as an observant one, with most women in head scarves and many men sporting traditional facial hair. We were told that throughout the region, attitudes vary, however. Some schools allow girls and young women to wear head scarves while others do not, suggesting that a 2013 effort by the Astrakhan Ethno-Religious Council to ban hijabs in schools has not been fully implemented.<sup>117</sup>

## Islam and Violence

Ethnic tension was considered more of a problem in Astrakhan in the 1990s than religious tension. According to residents, racist signs were posted on trolleybuses and trams in the cities, mainly directed against people of Caucasian background. Taxi drivers would refuse to drive those they suspected of Caucasian ancestry. Prevailing stereotypes that Caucasians were involved in criminal activity (and some were, as were those of other nationalities) further fed tension.

While these manifestations were only tangentially related to religion, others were more overtly linked to Islam. One resident remembers:

When they came in mosque for the Friday namaz, they cut off the telephone net, the connection with Dagestan . . . They jumped off the fence with weapons in hand and people started to leave the mosque and run away. At that time one murder had already been committed, and everything was ransacked . . . In the Bolshiye Isady market all goods were scattered everywhere: trousers torn up, carpets cut up with knives.<sup>118</sup>

This memory, too, reflects a complicated reality. In fact, there were several attacks on mosques during this period. In some cases, Muslims were among the attackers, a manifestation of clashes between North Caucasus origin communities in the 1990s. These conflicts incorporated elements of both religious disagreement and commercial competition. When it came to religion, followers of Anguta Omarov (see above) and other fundamentalists on the one hand and adherents of Sufism on the other had pronounced one another infidels. This fight had echoes not just in Astrakhan, but in Dagestan and elsewhere in Russia. But the same groups, as Syzranov notes, were also

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117. Sokolov and Olikier interviews and discussions in Astrakhan, November 2016; Mairbek Vatchagaev, "Religious Tensions Grow in Astrakhan Region," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, August 2, 2013, <https://jamestown.org/program/religious-tensions-grow-in-astrakhan-region-2/>.

118. Sokolov's field materials, 2015. This story referenced an attack on the Red Mosque in 1993. We have not been able to find corroborating data of such an attack, but Mairbek Vatchagaev references a 1996 attack on a mosque.

in competition for market stalls in Astrakhan.<sup>119</sup> In addition, some of the violence during this time can also be attributed to reprisals by criminal groups against those who were not paying “protection money,” and who could be easily targeted when gathered at the mosque. The murky question of what entrepreneurial activity was and was not legal in the 1990s, when Russian law and law enforcement were far from transparent and accountable, also plays into this dynamic.

The situation was further complicated by the distrust many Muslim communities from the North Caucasus, particularly those of Dagestani origin, felt toward the police. Some were, as noted above, involved in criminal activity. Others were not, but were likely to protect relatives and compatriots who were.

As discussed, Syzranov estimates that over 200 people of North Caucasian origin left Astrakhan to join in the first Chechen War, splitting the fundamentalist community.<sup>120</sup> Based on testimony from community members, perhaps another 100 did the same in 1999, for the second war. Omarov, meanwhile, reportedly came under increasing pressure and fled first the region and then the country, eventually seeking asylum in Belgium (his mosque in his home village of Kvanada was destroyed). His followers became less and less cohesive over time, until the group had largely disintegrated.<sup>121</sup> In the early 2000s, the clashes between board-affiliated Muslims and those who sought to break from the board, noted above, presented yet another example of violence within the Muslim community.

Law enforcement, meanwhile, was increasingly suspicious of fundamentalist Muslims. Police visits, as noted, are frequent occurrences at Astrakhan mosques, and sometimes they cross the line into violence. While this occurs throughout Russia, we were told that police violence and threats against local Muslims are a longer-standing phenomenon in Astrakhan than elsewhere, a factor community members attribute to proximity to the North Caucasus. For example, Sokolov was told of a Friday service in autumn of 2000 when OMON forces disrupted prayer at a local mosque, and ordered everyone (including children and the elderly) to lie down. Afterwards, the congregants were marched to the local Ministry of Internal Affairs offices, where they were forced to remain standing for a lengthy period and then fingerprinted before being released.<sup>122</sup>

For their part, local authorities allege a consistent, if low-scale, pattern of violence by Islamic radicals in Astrakhan. A 1999 attempted railroad bombing that killed four was attributed to Chechen militants,<sup>123</sup> although it is not clear whether they had any connections to local communities or groups. In 2001, a bombing in a central market in the city of Astrakhan killed five and

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119. A. V. Syzranov, “Gosudarstvennaya politika Rossii po bor’be s islamskim ekstremizmom na territorii povolzhya v kontse 20—nachala 21 veka,” *Caspian-Eurasia*, April 26, 2016, <http://caspien-eurasia.com/2016/04/28/gospolitika-against-extremizn/>.

120. *Ibid.*

121. *Ibid.*

122. Sokolov field materials, 2015.

123. Simon Saradzhyan, “Botched Terrorist Attack in Astrakhan Leaves 4 Dead,” *The Moscow Times*, October 20, 1999, <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/sitemap/free/1999/10/article/botched-terrorist-attack-in-astrakhan-leaves-4-dead/271138.html>.

injured more than 30.<sup>124</sup> Syzranov reports various other attempted attacks that were thwarted by authorities in the 2000s. He notes three prominent arrests in 2003, 2004, and 2005 for illegal possession of weapons and armaments, dissemination of extremist literature, fomenting interreligious tension, and so forth.<sup>125</sup> In 2003, a suspect in the Kaspiisk bombing in Dagestan in 2002 was arrested in Astrakhan, where he had taken shelter with local Muslims, including a cofounder of the Islamic Renaissance Party, Magomehadji Abdrazakov.<sup>126</sup> In 2006, police arrested six people, accused of planning terrorist acts to disrupt the New Year's holiday. In 2009, three were arrested and accused of supporting North Caucasus terrorism. In 2010 and 2011, Astrakhan saw several cases of attacks on police and government buildings that authorities said were the responsibility of various extremist groups. A number of arrests for these crimes, as well as for possession of weapons and extremist literature, followed. In at least two cases, suspects were shot while being detained.<sup>127</sup> More arrests followed in 2013 and authorities that year reported that some 60 women in the region were viewed as possible terrorists, due to being married to or widows of extremists.<sup>128</sup> In April 2017, the deaths of two police officers were said to be the work of radical Islamists seeking to gather weapons, as well as to commit a violent act against law enforcement. Shortly thereafter, police undertook operations that reportedly killed several suspects, although details were unclear, and there were discrepancies between various reports (including between photographs of suspects released initially and those provided later).<sup>129</sup>

The arrested have been mainly fundamentalists and "Salafis," although in many cases, the accused deny any guilt.<sup>130</sup> Among the specific groups targeted by these efforts (or linked to them after the fact) are the Tablighi jamaats, Hizb Ut-Tahrir, and Caucasus Emirate and ISIS supporters. In one case, authorities accused five local residents of belonging to the otherwise unknown "Muvakhid

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124. "Astrakhan Bomb Kills Five," BBC News, August 19, 2001, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/1499377.stm>.

125. A. V. Syzranov, "Severokavkazskie migranty-musul'mane v polietnichnom regione yuga Rossii," *Caspian-Eurasia* (blog), September 21, 2016, <http://caspian-eurasia.com/2016/09/21/severo-kavkazskie-migranti-v-polietnicheskom-regione-uga-rossii/>; A. V. Syzranov, "Gosudarstvennaya politika Rossii po bor'be s islamskim ekstremizmom na territorii Povolzh'ya v kontse 20—nachala 21 veka," *Caspian-Eurasia* (blog), April 28, 2016, <http://caspian-eurasia.com/2016/04/28/gospolitika-against-extremizm/>.

126. In January 2000, another Islamic Renaissance Party cofounder, Pashid Lhalikov, was convicted of illegal possession of ammunition, although he was sentenced only to two years of probation. In 2004 he again faced charges, this time of possession of illegal material (it is unclear what materials) and of unsanctioned instruction in military activities to youth.

127. "V Astrakhani osuzhdeny religioznye ekstrimisty," Rosbalt, May 29, 2012, <http://www.rosbalt.ru/russia/2012/05/29/986420.html>; A. V. Syzranov, "Gosudarstvennaya politika Rossii po bor'be s islamskim ekstremizmom na territorii Povolzh'ya v kontse 20—nachala 21 veka," *Caspian-Eurasia* (blog), April 28, 2016, <http://caspian-eurasia.com/2016/04/28/gospolitika-against-extremizm/>.

128. Mairbek Vatchagaev, "Religious Tensions Grow in Astrakhan Region," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, August 2, 2013, <https://jamestown.org/program/religious-tensions-grow-in-astrakhan-region-2/>.

129. "Okhota na silovikov: astrakhanskiy epizod," Kavpolit, April 6, 2017, [http://kavpolit.com/articles/okhota\\_na\\_silovikov\\_astrakhanskiy\\_epizod-32905](http://kavpolit.com/articles/okhota_na_silovikov_astrakhanskiy_epizod-32905).

130. "V astrakhani osuzhdeny gotovivshie mirovoy dzikhad," SOVA Center, September 22, 2014, <http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/extremism/counter-extremism/2014/09/d30258/>.

Jamaat.”<sup>131</sup> Sokolov was later told that the individuals in question were tied to followers of Ayoub Omarov (see above).<sup>132</sup> In some cases, human rights groups have gotten involved. In the 2005 case cited by Syzranov, Mansur Shangareev, a local entrepreneur, was convicted of possession of ammunition, drugs, and extremist literature. Shangareev’s supporters argued that the charges were politically motivated, related to his opposition to the regional mufti, and human rights groups sought to intercede, to no avail (indeed, Shangareev’s sentence was extended in 2006, from three years to five). Human rights groups also got involved in the prosecution of suspects for 2011 bombings at the entertainment center “Dair”—one of the cases in which a suspect was killed by police. The defendants’ lawyers and human rights groups alleged the use of torture and falsified evidence of an additional terror plot by law enforcement authorities.<sup>133</sup>

This said, there is no question that both the Caucasus Emirate and ISIS have had supporters in Astrakhan. One component of this may be students from the North Caucasus who come to Astrakhan for their university studies. Some are reportedly affiliated with Caucasus Emirate and ISIS, although the evidence is anecdotal. Other affiliates are migrant or local youth. Community leaders estimate that some 100 people from the region have died in Dagestan and Chechnya after having joined the emirate. Officials report that between 2013 and 2016, some 70 people left Astrakhan for Syria to fight with ISIS. This figure might, however, include people who merely immigrated to Turkey, and it might fail to include people whose whereabouts police do not know. One imam we spoke with estimated that some 140–200 people had gone to Syria from the region.<sup>134</sup>

Community leaders attribute the problem in part to the fact that youth who seek more knowledge of Islam receive insufficient guidance from formal structures. Authorities, we were told, tended to treat young people with suspicion simply because they had evidenced an interest in religion, growing a beard or wearing a head scarf. Parents might contact religious authorities for advice and find law enforcement at their door. As a result, youth are more likely to keep their searches for information quiet, leaving them vulnerable to Internet propaganda and individual outreach from recruiters. Indeed, young people from the region may seek to go to Syria not to fight, but because they believe they can live there, as Muslims, under a Caliphate. Meanwhile, imams who take other approaches, we were told—for instance those who try to engage with youth and approach the question from fundamentalist but nonviolent perspectives—are silenced and constrained by authorities. An imam who worked primarily in an unofficial capacity told us of a somewhat innovative approach he had taken to de-radicalization in at least one case: he had married the young woman in question as a second wife.<sup>135</sup>

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131. “V Astrakhani vynesen obvinitel’nyy prigovor uchastnikam organizatsii ‘Dzhamaat muovakhidov,’” SOVA Center, August 13, 2008, <http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/extremism/counter-extremism/2008/08/d13908/>

132. Sokolov interviews and discussions in Istanbul, 2016 and 2017.

133. “‘Memorial’ schitaet zhitelya Astrakhani Maksima Panfilova politzaklyuchennym,” *Hrcmemorial* (blog), April 12, 2016, <http://hrcmemorial.livejournal.com/267133.html>; See also Sergey Titov, “Volgogradskuyu militsiyu khoteli napugat,” *Kommersant*, June 28, 2011, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1668810>.

134. Sokolov and Oliker interviews and discussions in Astrakhan, November 2016.

135. Sokolov and Oliker interviews and discussions in Astrakhan, November 2016. On recruiting of young women, especially, and for an example of how these phenomena are reported on by the mainstream Russian press, see Elena

Finally, incidents of mob violence against Muslims have also continued. One example took place in 2011 when several dozen veterans concluded their celebrations of Paratroopers Day with attacks on two Astrakhan mosques (including Mosque No. 3) and the nearby market. Attackers vandalized Muslim symbols and their verbal insults focused on both the ethnicity and religion of their victims. After a second attack on the mosque, congregants fought back. In the resulting melee at least 20 were injured (including a child). According to members of the Muslim community, local police did not intervene, with few exceptions (a market security guard reported that while some police helped, others took away his baton, which he was using to attempt to protect the market). Some speculated that police did not get involved because their colleagues were among the attackers. It was also suggested that economic factors relating to the market were at least partially at the core of these attacks, as they had been in past incidents.<sup>136</sup> Other incidents are more difficult to judge: for example, a likely arson at a prayer house in Kapustin Yar in September of 2013 may have been a hate crime, although the local imam reported no problems in the broader community.<sup>137</sup>

### Competition and Conflict Related to Christianity in Astrakhan

The Christian community in Astrakhan has also experienced cleavages. Orthodoxy, like Islam, experienced a rebirth with the collapse of the USSR, and over time, the Church rose in prominence and influence. The appointment in 1992 of Bishop (later Metropolitan) Iona (Karpukhin) led to dissatisfaction in the community. Iona replaced many respected clergy and slowed the construction of new churches. He was accused by local clergy of corruption, and a move to replace him was underway at the turn of the century.<sup>138</sup> However, he stayed in the role until the summer of 2016, when he retired at the age of 75.

Meanwhile, Catholicism was making inroads in Astrakhan, which at least one expert attributed to the failings of the Orthodox Church in the region. However, the poisoning death of Catholic priest and community leader Father Kshishtof Nemiskii in 2000 greatly weakened the community, which now includes some 100 parishioners. Pentecostal congregations also drew new adherents, with Lutherans particularly active in charitable works.<sup>139</sup> Today, the Pentecostal community numbers some 1,000 people. In 2015, the pastor of the Istina Pentecostal Church in Astrakhan, Obert Chelenga, was removed after having been fined for violating immigration law (he was from Zimbabwe).<sup>140</sup>

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Erofeeva, "Terroristy prevratili verbovku devushek v industriyu," *Vesti*, February 5, 2017, <http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=2851371>.

136. Vyacheslav Yashchenko, "V Astrakhani pogromy v den' desantnika kosnulis' dvukh mechetey," *Kavkazskiy Uzel*, August 4, 2011, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/190228/>.

137. Felix Corley, "Unsuccessful Orthodoxy in Russian Heartlands," *Religion, State, and Society* 28, no. 1 (2000): 37–52.

138. "Podzhog musul'manskogo molel'nogo doma v Astrakhanskoy oblasti," SOVA Center, March 30, 2017, <http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/extremism/vandalism/2013/09/d28028/>.

139. S. Filatov and R. Lunkin, "Astrakhanskaya Oblast: Osobennosti istoricheskogo razvitiya religii," The Keston Institute, January, 2012, <http://www.keston.org.uk/encyclopaedia-vol1.php>.

140. Olga Sibireva, "Problemy realizatsii svobody sovesti v Rossii v 2015 godu," SOVA Center, March, 2016, [http://www.hro.org/files/Dokltd\\_Sova\\_220316.pdf](http://www.hro.org/files/Dokltd_Sova_220316.pdf).



In 2007, the Astrakhan city government ordered the demolition of the main Pentecostal Church in the city, to make way for a musical theater (a mosque was threatened in the same time frame, but the case went before the European Court of Human Rights and demolition was postponed). As of the time of this writing, the church's website lists the same address as it had in 2007.<sup>141</sup>

Outside of Christianity, there is little of note. In 2017, the leader of the region's unregistered Scientology community was fined for illegal missionary work.<sup>142</sup>

## Bottom Lines

Astrakhan has a long history as a multireligious and multiethnic region. For the most part, the tension that exists is within broad religious groups, as both Muslims and Christians compete among themselves for congregants. Economic competition also plays a role and can be impossible to differentiate from religious tension, as the phenomena overlap. At the same time, interethnic violence has been a factor, including quite recently. Moreover, authorities have entered into these competitions. Their involvement, however, is not as organized as it appears to be in other parts of Russia. Rather, authorities continue a general campaign against fundamentalists, and when conflict occurs, tend to side with established and formalized structures. However, they do not appear to play a particular shaping role.

The role of migration is important to the equation in Astrakhan. Although the main divide among regional Muslims is between fundamentalists and groups tied to the Central Spiritual Board (with the leadership of Mosque No. 3 occupying a somewhat intermediate space), many of the region's most prominent Muslim fundamentalist leaders and actors have been migrants from the North Caucasus or descendants thereof. Moreover, because Caucasian communities have remained cohesive, they play important roles when tension and conflict emerge, ensuring that divides also follow these allegiances and community members are shielded from opponents or authorities. Indeed, in some cases, conflicts in the North Caucasus may transform into conflict in Astrakhan, as well as vice versa.

## CONCLUSION

This overview of three regions of Russia provides only a series of snapshots of the situation. Nonetheless, we feel it is useful, in that parallels and differences between these regions allow us both to draw some preliminary conclusions and to identify areas for further study.

Islam dominates this chapter, as it does much of the narrative about religion and violence in Russia. We are uncomfortable about this, and worry that it is self-perpetuating. The more Islam is viewed through the prism of potential violence, either by or against Muslims, the more it is securitized, by definition. This precludes more nuanced, multifaceted analysis and policy. Moreover, the

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141. "Tserkov 'preobrazhenie,'" Evangel'skiy khristianskiy missionerskiy soyuz, <http://exmc.ru/tserkvi-soyuza/povolzhskaya-eparhiya/tserkov-preobrazhenie/>.

142. Olga Sibireva, "Problemy realizatsii svobody sovesti v Rossii v 2016 godu," SOVA Center, March 30, 2017, <http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/publications/2017/03/d36694/>.

focus on Islam may lead all of us, the authors included, to overlook violence that affects or is affected by other religious groups.

We also find, as noted in the introduction, that the focus on religious violence by Muslims contributes to a broader narrative of fear of Islam and/or Islamic radicalism and extremism. This manifests in several ways. First, we were struck by the extent to which these fears have been instrumentalized by elites, who use them to constrain and even eliminate competition. The narrative of “traditional” Islam vs. “Salafis” or “Wahhabis” is a narrative of peace vs. violence, with existing elites casting themselves as peaceful traditionalists and their competitors as violent extremists. While theological differences play a role, they are dwarfed by what seems a competition for resources and muddied by a willingness to tar a wide range of belief systems with the “Salafi” brush. Moreover, this instrumentalization of the fear of Islam further draws attention to the phenomenon of violence by (and to a lesser extent against) Muslims, exacerbating the tendency described above.

The instrumentalization of fear of Islam also increases violence against Muslims by heightening law enforcement attention to mosques, formal and informal, and Muslim religious leaders and congregants. Although we were struck by the comparatively low numbers of Muslims in Russia’s prisons, large numbers seem to have found themselves on local police “prophylactic lists,” being watched for no reason other than attendance at religious services or the wearing of visible markers of Islam, such as head scarves or beards. We wonder if some of the attention to the relationship between Islam and crime in Russia, and Islam in Russia’s prisons, is part of a broader campaign to discredit targeted Muslim communities.

This said, violence within, by, and toward Muslim groups is a factor in all three of these regions. Here, we highlight the importance of migration. While in Tatarstan most migrants come from Central Asia, in Astrakhan and Tyumen we see an influx of migrants from Russia’s North Caucasus region. In both cases, distrust toward these newcomers feeds into schisms within the broader Muslim community. Some evidence suggests that newcomers may be more prone to violent radical ideas, either arriving with them or developing them in their new environment. Substantial further study, however, is needed to assess whether this is, in fact, the case, and to define what mechanisms lead to this phenomenon, and under what conditions. We have also observed how, particularly in the case of migrants from the North Caucasus, conflicts from within that region are exported to places emigrants settle, affecting power dynamics in the destination region. We believe that this bears long-term watching as well.

Both of these factors feed a third common thread, which is the importance of relationships between local religious and secular elites. In all three regions, long-term religious leaders who face emerging competition (either from a new generation, from newcomers from elsewhere, or both) have leveraged combination of the fear of “radicalism” and their ties to secular authorities to eliminate rivals. This phenomenon is not unique to Islam—we observe the same phenomenon in the context of Russian Orthodox Church responses to other forms of Christianity. The results have varied from lost jobs to violence and death. They have also forced a swathe of the more fundamentalist Muslim preachers and teachers underground. Whether these developments further contribute to violence remains an open question. In all three regions, however, we saw an uptick of pressure on various sorts of outsiders first after 2010, and in some cases again after 2013. We

believe these to be driven largely by Russia-wide phenomena, amply described in other chapters of this compendium, which have targeted so-called extremists of various stripes. In the case of Muslims in these three regions, they have, of course, contributed to pressure first and foremost on fundamentalists.

All of this leads us to think that from both a scholarly and policy standpoint, understanding religious and ethnic tensions in Russia requires also considering elite relationships and the implications of economic and social competition between various groups. Moreover, given the several cases documented above of these competitions turning violent, and turning against communities as a whole, it seems likely that such clashes will manifest again.

We feel that much remains to be studied, including the dynamics of conversion, the true role of religion in criminal groups and prisons, and the gender implications of religious violence in different parts of Russia. One critical gap in this paper, particularly, is a clear differentiation of trends and processes in urban vs. rural environments. We were not able to collect enough data this time to draw this out, but we feel strongly that future work should focus on the dynamics that have emerged in Russia's large and multiethnic cities, as well as how relationships are changing in the countryside. The impact of regional wealth is also worth more attention, as is the question of how social mobility limitations affect both religious radicalization and propensity toward violence. We also feel that the question of ISIS's growth in Russia is worthy of further analysis. While we have many doubts about the estimates of numbers of young people who have gone to fight with ISIS, there is no question that the group has reach—and retains it to this day. Speaking about Muslim youth in Russia as a whole, one Caucasus Emirate leader who had left Russia, and with whom Sokolov met in late 2017, indicated that ISIS propaganda and appeal remains strong despite their battlefield losses among youth who seek to take active violent action. The Caucasus Emirate and al Qaeda, he reported, cannot compete.<sup>143</sup> Despite these gaps, our assessments do lead us to make some recommendations addressed to the various actors involved in religion and violence in Russia as a whole and these regions in particular.

For religious leaders (all faiths):

- Recognize the dangers of aligning with political actors and groups, and of getting involved in political contests.
- Preach consistently against violent ideologies and violence. Condemn those religious leaders who voice support for violent ideologies.
- Maintain transparent accounting practices to ensure that neither political nor illegal funds can subvert your mission or community.
- Share best practices for working with youth to prevent the spread of violent ideologies.
- Be available to law enforcement, community leaders, and local government regarding best practices to prevent the spread of violent ideologies.

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143. Sokolov field materials, 2017, Turkey.

- Provide a safe space to youth who are high risk, with clear and transparent guidelines regarding what will and will not be reported to authorities, in line with the tenets of your faith and local law.

#### For journalists and experts:

- Maintain neutrality. Avoid fanning the flames of conflict. Utilize peer review where relevant and seek a wide range of perspectives.
- Focus on understanding the roots of conflict and tension, including political and economic motivations.

#### For regional authorities:

- Avoid favoring groups or communities in religious conflicts. Practice separation of religion and governance. Any involvement of religious groups in public actions and fora should involve as many as feasible.
- Facilitate the creation of independent councils and other mechanisms to independently resolve conflicts between and within religious groups and communities.
- Prevent the formation of confession-based political groups within government.
- Study best practices for interaction between government and religious groups, community consultation, and so forth.
- Law enforcement: draw on existing expertise and reach out to community leaders. This will help with investigations and inform policies, making both more effective.

#### For the government of the Russian Federation:

- Amend or eliminate current laws on extremism such that they cannot be abused. Ensure that religious fundamentalism in and of itself is not banned.
- End the practice of favoring ill-defined “traditional” forms of religion.
- Study global best practices for regulating religion and separation of religion and government.

We recognize that our recommendations to the government of the Russian Federation would be a substantial break from present practice. On the one hand, softening laws on extremism will seem counterintuitive in the face of real fears. On the other, asking authorities to walk away from ties with “traditional” faiths may appear a return to Soviet-style policies. However, the evidence strongly indicates that current policies are insufficient to Russia’s needs, and new approaches are needed.

# The North Caucasus and Nearby Border Regions

Sufian N. Zhemukhov with Sergey Markedonov and

Akhmet A. Yarlykapov

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter analyzes the situation relating to religious violence in nine North Caucasus regions, including seven republics with ethnically non-Russian titular nationalities and two ethnic Russian Krai. The seven non-Russian republics we examine are Adygea, Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachaevo-Cherkessia, and North Ossetia (see Figure 6). The term *titular nationalities*, inherited from the Soviet era, refers to ethnic groups that give the republics their names, except in Dagestan, where the name of the republic derives from the name of the place. The Constitution of the Russian Federation guarantees the titular nationalities the right to establish their own official languages in their republics. The two historically ethnically Russian regions covered here are Krasnodar Krai and Stavropol Krai.<sup>1</sup> While the evolution of these nine regions over the course of the post-Soviet era has varied significantly, there also exist similar patterns. Both differences and similarities can provide insights into how these parts of Russia may evolve in the future.

Religious factors play important roles in the contemporary politics in Russia's North Caucasus, especially in the dynamics of violence and conflict. The North Caucasus significantly differs from the rest of the Russian Federation in terms of religion. The North Caucasus is the Russian region with the greatest density of followers of Islam. The Muslim population forms the majority in Chechnya (96 percent), Dagestan (94 percent), Ingushetia (98 percent), Kabardino-Balkaria (70 percent), and Karachaevo-Cherkessia (63 percent). Two other North Caucasus republics have significant Muslim minorities: North Ossetia (21 percent), and Adygea (24 percent). Stavropol and Krasnodar Krai, which border the North Caucasus, also have small but significant Muslim populations.

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1. *Constitution of the Russian Federation*, Article 68.

Figure 6. The North Caucasus and Border Regions Map



Source: Peter Fitzgerald. ([http://mapsof.net/uploads/static-maps/caucasus\\_regions\\_map.png](http://mapsof.net/uploads/static-maps/caucasus_regions_map.png))

The practice of Islam in the North Caucasus was shaped by the Soviet era's atheist ideology and totalitarian regime. The aggressive Soviet antireligious policy caused religious decay in the country, including in the North Caucasus.

Because of the dramatic influence of atheism in the Soviet era, we define the evolution of post-Soviet Islam as post-atheistic Islam. Such a definition differs from the popular description of the post-Soviet rapid increase of religiosity as the "Renaissance of Islam in Russia."<sup>2</sup> The positive connotation of the term "renaissance" implies that the post-Soviet increase of religiosity in the North Caucasus took place in the same territory and among the same ethnic groups that practiced Islam during the pre-Soviet time. However, the contemporary religious trends are different from the past, and the term "renaissance" could be misleading while analyzing the conflicts between the state and church as well as within different Islamic movements that emerged in the post-Soviet North Caucasus. The new post-Soviet Islamic movements do not necessarily have direct historical connections to pre-Soviet Islamic practices in the North Caucasus. The worldview of the Muslims in the North Caucasus has been more influenced by the Soviet atheist legacy than by forgotten pre-Soviet Islamic practices.

Within the North Caucasus, Islamic practices differ between eastern and western regions that follow different Sunni schools, Shaafi and Hanafi. The Sunni schools of Muslim law (Madhabs) do not clash ideologically, and are different only in technicalities concerning such specific aspects of Islamic practices as ablution, prayer positions, and pilgrimage rituals. The Shaafi school

2. Uwe Halbach, "Islam in the North Caucasus," *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 115 (2001): 93–110.

is represented in three eastern republics, including Chechnya, Dagestan, and Ingushetia. The population of the eastern republics is highly religious and homogenously Islamic, with only a small non-Muslim population. Muslim leaders in the eastern republics actively participate in politics and are part of the local political machines. The political elites of Chechnya, Dagestan, and Ingushetia openly demonstrate their religiosity and attend mosques and publicly perform religious rituals, including public namaz (prayer).

The Hanafi School is represented in the four western republics of Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachaevo-Cherkessia, Adygea, and North Ossetia. Muslims form the majority of the population in two of these republics, Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachaevo-Cherkessia, while Christians form significant minorities. In the two other republics, Adygea and North Ossetia, Orthodox Christians represent the majority of the population while Muslims are the biggest minority group. State and church are more separated in the western republics; religious leaders are not part of the local political machines and are not directly involved in politics. Political elites in these republics exercise secular lifestyles and very seldom practice religion publicly.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF ISLAM IN THE NORTH CAUCASUS

### Spiritual Boards of Muslims

Spiritual Boards of Muslims (SBM) form the main Islamic organizations represented in all North Caucasus regions. The Soviet legacy influenced the development of post-Soviet Islamic official institutions. After the fall of the Soviet state, the existing Spiritual Boards of Muslims of the North Caucasus could not function without the government's support. In their place, several independent Spiritual Boards of Muslims emerged in the North Caucasus republics.

As the post-Soviet Russian leadership shifted toward increasing authoritarianism, SBMs became more closely tied to the state. The SBMs' state connections developed in two ways. First, the SBMs established connections and collaborated with local authorities. Second, they collaborated with the federal authorities by uniting into centralized organizations on the federal level as well as on the level of the Federal District, namely the North Caucasus Federal District and Southern Federal Districts. In 1998, a state-controlled news structure, Coordination Center of Muslims of the North Caucasus (CCMNC), was created to unite the seven SBMs of the North Caucasus republics, as well as the SBMs of Stavropol Krai and Krasnodar Krai. The CCMNC, however, never gained real control over the regional SBMs. Today, regional authorities maintain direct control, in the case of Chechnya, or strong influence, in the case of other regions, over the regional SBMs. On the federal level, the North Caucasus SBMs are not subordinated to the so-called Central SBM of Russia. Also, not all North Caucasus Muftis are members of the Russian Council of Muftis.<sup>3</sup> A short-lived Russian Association of Islamic Agreement promoted by Stavropol Krai authorities represented another unsuccessful attempt to unite North Caucasus Muslim organizations.<sup>4</sup>

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3. The Russian Council of Muftis includes Muftis of Adygea, Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia, and North Ossetia.

4. Maya A. Astvatsaturova, "Stavropol'skii Krai" in *Etnopoloticheskaya Situatsiya v Rossii i Sopredel'nykh Gosudarstvakh v 2014 godu: Ezhegodny Doklad* (Moscow: Russian Academy of Sciences Institute of Anthropology and Ethnography, 2016), 630.

North Caucasus SBMs promote a form of Islam known as “traditional Islam.” The term “tradition” refers to the Islamic practices of pre-Soviet and Soviet eras. It is mostly used to emphasize the importance of a Russian version of Islam in the region and counter Middle Eastern influence, which is promoted by a new generation of Muslim leaders who received religious education in the Middle East. The concept of post-Soviet development of Islam as if it is a continuation of (pre-) Soviet religious tradition also justifies defining it as “Islamic Renaissance.” The term “tradition” also justifies the mixture of local non-Islamic traditions (Adat) with Islamic practices. Such a broad definition of Islam allows SBMs to widen their base, identifying as Muslims the majority of the population even if they do not practice the Five Pillars of Islam. Mufti of Kabardino-Balkaria, Anas Pshikhachev, defined the concept of “traditional” Islam in his statement, “Everyone who acknowledges Allah, Koran, Sunna, and the Prophet is a Muslim even if he does not observe any practices.”<sup>5</sup>

## Sufism

About 60 percent of Muslims in the eastern part of Russia’s North Caucasus—that is, in Chechnya, Dagestan, and Ingushetia—practice Sufism, a mystical trend of Islam.<sup>6</sup> Sufism preaches humility, concentration on goodness, and piety, and is passed to a student from a teacher, sheikh, or a person who has higher knowledge of the faith. North Caucasus Muslims have practiced Sufism since before the Soviet era, which interrupted the Sufi movement. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Sufism has not simply reemerged in the North Caucasus, but rather developed in patterns different from those of pre-Soviet Sufism.<sup>7</sup>

Sufi trends in the eastern republics mostly coincide with ethnic borders. Such a phenomenon can be explained as an indication of strong correlations between Islam and nationalism. For example, the Shadhiliya and Naqshbandiya Tariqas in multiethnic Dagestan are divided into Sufi brotherhood subgroups along ethnic lines. A branch of Qadiriya Tariqa, called Kunta-haji order, became popular in Chechnya during the separatist conflicts thanks to its fascinating practice of Zikr, an ecstatic religious dance.

Sufism is less widespread in the western part of the North Caucasus that includes Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachaevo-Cherkessia, Adygea, and North Ossetia. It is also less present in the Krasnodar and Stavropol Krajs.

## Salafism

Salafism is another Islamic trend that has spread broadly in the North Caucasus, though it does not have any historical roots in the region. Some experts define Salafis as “puritan Muslims.”<sup>8</sup> In the 1990s, Russian authorities mistakenly identified North Caucasus Salafists as Wahhabis. Salafism and Wahhabism, however, differ in their attitudes toward the Muslim schools. Wahhabis recognize

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5. Larisa Shadueva, “Vakhabyty—bandity? Interview S Predsedatelem DUM KBR A.M.Pshikhachevym,” *Kabardino-Balkarskaia Pravda*, February 11, 2006.

6. Alexei Malashenko, *Islamskie Orientiry Sevenogo Kavkaza* (Moscow: Gendalf, 2001).

7. Charles King, *The Ghost of Freedom: A History of the Caucasus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

8. Wes Williams, ed., *Religion and Rights: The Oxford Amnesty Lectures* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011).



four Sunni schools (Madhabs) and identify themselves as part of the Hanbali school; the other three schools include the Hanafi, Shaafi, and Maliki Madhabs. Many Salafis, however, do not recognize the Sunni schools on the ground that the school division emerged after the death of the Prophet. Salafis also generally oppose Muslim ideas and trends that developed after the Prophet's death.

More importantly, Salafism clashes with "traditional" Islam in the North Caucasus. Salafis do not identify as Muslims those who do not practice the Five Pillars of Islam, including the obligatory acknowledgment of God, five-times-a-day prayers, charity, fasting, and Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca.

Most prominent Salafis remain informal leaders and are not included in formal Muslim structures, such as SBMs and mosque leadership. The clash between the Salafis and the followers of "traditional" Islam coincides in many cases with the clash between the formal SBM leaders and the local informal Salafi leaders that oppose them. The competition between SBMs and Salafis is represented differently in the North Caucasus republics. In Kabardino-Balkaria, the SBM is considered weaker than in other North Caucasus republics because it failed to develop an Islamic doctrine that would become popular among the local Muslims. Meanwhile, the SBM of Dagestan successfully developed a popular Islamic doctrine based on Sufism, and the local "traditional" Islam is more competitive with Salafism.<sup>9</sup>

## SOURCES OF VIOLENCE IN THE NORTH CAUCASUS

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the North Caucasus has turned into one of the most problematic and insecure parts of the post-Soviet world. For many years, international and local media connected the image of the North Caucasus with conflict, instability, and terrorism. But the factors driving conflict in the region have changed over the years. In the 1990s, the intelligentsia was the driving force of discontent, mostly with nationalistic ideology and separatist attitudes. They witnessed the fall of the Soviet Union and vividly imagined that the same could happen to the new and still weak countries that succeeded the USSR, including Russia. In the 2000s, insurgents were mostly self-educated in Islam. They witnessed the wide spread of Islam in the North Caucasus and religious ideals drove their actions. The new insurgents of the 2010s belong to "Putin's generation"; they grew up during the strong authoritarian regime of today's Russia and cannot imagine the fall of the state the same way that the "separatists" of the 1990s can. Rather, they are motivated by feelings of injustice, which inspire them to hopeless and suicidal fights against the mighty state, which cannot be defeated.

In the 1990s, ethnic conflicts and wars challenged Russian statehood and society. Two out of the nine post-Soviet military conflicts took place in Russia's North Caucasus. First, the 1992 Ossetia-Ingush conflict erupted and was "frozen" after a week of military clashes, but it has not been resolved since then. Second was the confrontation in Chechnya that developed into a war between the Chechen insurgents and the Russian army, in 1994–1996, with some terrorist actions undertaken by Chechen rebels, but most of the conflict being better categorized as insurgency. During

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9. Konstantin Kazenin, "Kabardino-Balkaria: Skil'ko Stoin Tishina," Carnegie Moscow Center, January 26, 2017, <http://carnegie.ru/commentary/?fa=67769>.

the same decade, violence and human rights violations accompanied other ethnic and nationalist clashes in the North Caucasus region.

Chechnya remained the most turbulent Russian republic into the early 2000s. The second Chechen conflict began in 1999. Russian authorities called it a “counterterrorist operation,” although the terms “conflict” and “war” were also used.<sup>10</sup> Again, although terrorist acts took place, including outside of Russia, the bulk of fighting was more conventional. In 2004 Chechnya was the only republic in the North Caucasus where the number of victims of military violence increased. However, the Kremlin was eager to stabilize the situation in Chechnya. The desire to host the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, which is part of the Southern Federal District, as is the entire North Caucasus region, created a deadline. By the time Russia won the bid for the Sochi Olympics in 2007, the Kremlin considered the Chechen problem solved.<sup>11</sup>

Alongside Chechen separatists, however, violent jihadists had emerged as a new threat to the Russian state. Among other things, this changed the “hot spot geography” within the North Caucasus. Rather than being concentrated in Chechnya, the violent jihadist movement spread through most North Caucasus regions and, in most cases, came into conflict with ethnic nationalist and separatist movements.

In the second half of the 2000s, Dagestan, the largest and most populated North Caucasian region, became the most unstable. It has remained so since then (see Figure 7). But underground insurgent activities and sympathies grew in many regions of the North Caucasus, including in Ingushetia, the closest neighbor of Chechnya, and even in Kabardino-Balkaria, considered the most peaceful republic in early post-Soviet years.

The end of the second Chechen war and the emergence of jihadist insurgency also brought with it more terrorist acts. In 2007, soon after Russia won the bid for the Sochi Olympics, Chechen resistance leader Doku Umarov denounced his previous separatist ideology and embraced violent jihadist ideology. Umarov founded the Caucasus Emirate (CE), a militant jihadist organization with networks in most of the North Caucasus regions and, eventually, ties to al Qaeda. With the establishment of CE, its terrorist activities became the biggest challenge to regional and federal security.<sup>12</sup> Though the organizers of the 2014 Sochi Games successfully prevented any terrorist acts in Sochi, terrorist attacks took place in other parts of Russia, well beyond the North Caucasus. These attacks included the 2010 explosions in the Moscow subway, the 2011 series of terrorist attacks in Volgograd, and the 2014 New Year’s Eve terrorist attack in Pyatigorsk, the capital city of the North Caucasus Federal District. The assassination of the vice consul of the Russian embassy in Abkhazia, Dmitry Vishernev, and his wife on September 9, 2013, was another attack of this sort. It was organized by the North

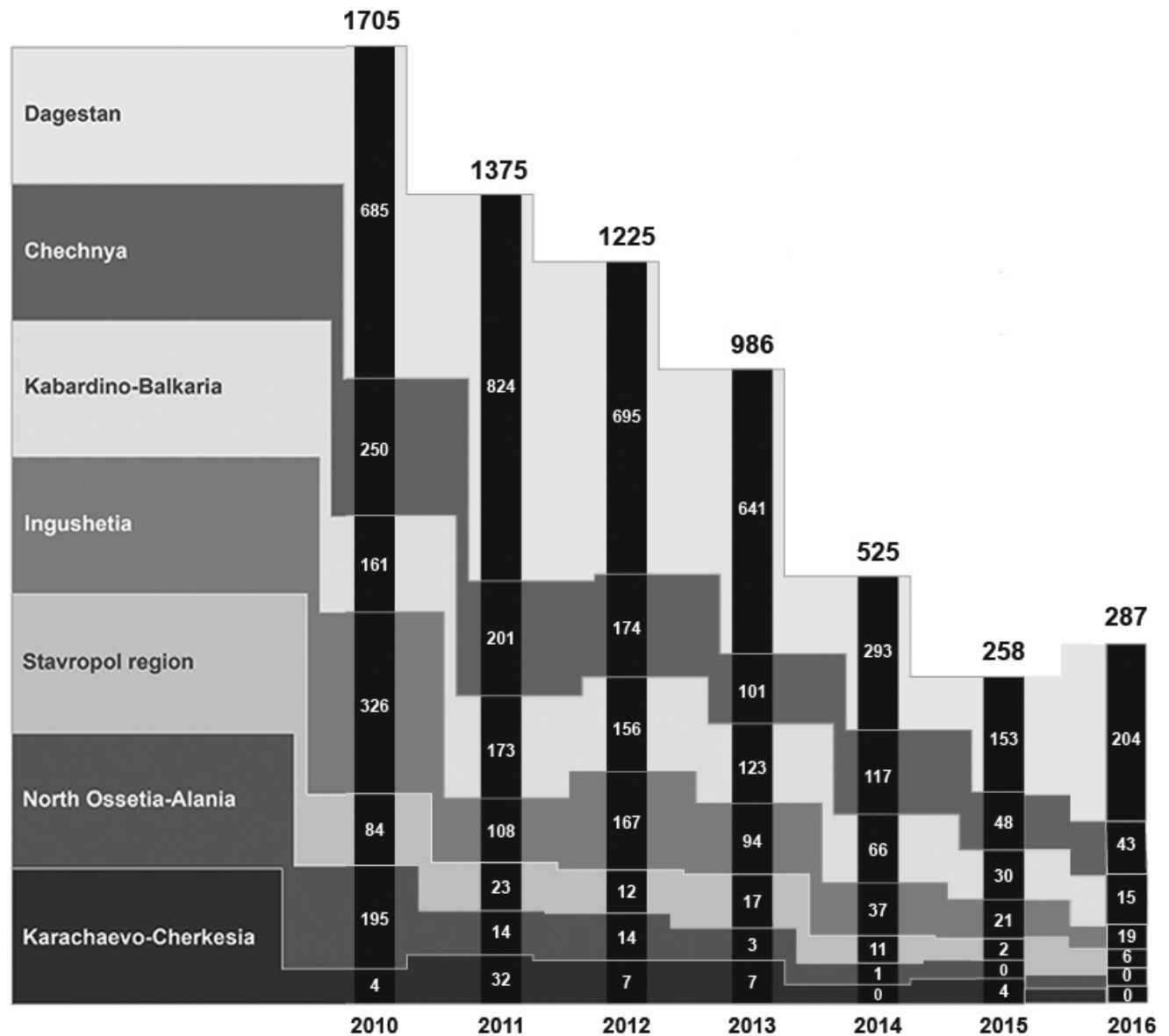
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10. Vladimir Putin, “Interview with ORT Channel,” President of Russia, January 15, 2000 <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24123>

11. David Wills and Cerwyn Moore, “Securitising the Caucasus: From Political Violence to Place Branding in Chechnya,” *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 4, no. 3 (2008): 252–262.

12. This was also a global phenomenon, related at least in part to U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and Russia seeking to frame itself internationally as a leader in the fight against terrorism.

**Figure 7. The number of people killed in acts of terrorism and insurgent activity in the North Caucasus in 2010–2016**



Source: *Caucasian Knot*.<sup>13</sup>

Caucasus terrorist network and executed by a Chechen citizen, Yusup Lakaev.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, overall numbers of terrorist attacks generally dropped off from 2010 onward.

13. "Infographics. The statistics of the number of victims in the North Caucasian Federal District regions for a period of 6 years," *Caucasian Knot*, February 10, 2017. <http://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/34546/>. *Caucasian Knot* identifies these numbers as counts of victims of terror. However, as total figures include civilian, militant, police, and military casualties, rather than only civilians, it may be more accurately described as calculating the numbers of dead as a result of both terrorist and insurgent attacks.

14. Sergei Markedonov, "Severnyi Kavkaz v 2013 godu: Osnovnyae Itogi," *Politcom*, December 24, 2013, <http://www.politcom.ru/16961.html>.

Russian security services seriously defeated CE after the 2014 Sochi Olympics, interrupting its network infrastructure. Doku Umarov, the founder of the Caucasus Emirate, was reported dead in April 2014, and his successor, Aliaskhab Kebekov, was killed in April 2015, though other leaders have emerged since then. At the same time, many insurgent commanders and would-be fighters moved to Syria and Turkey and/or developed ties with Middle Eastern groups. Some, perhaps thousands, went to fight in Syria, either with ISIS or with other groups. With the Caucasus Emirate under pressure, ISIS began to gain popularity in the North Caucasus, as well.

The North Caucasus jihadist insurgents were split. Some, who remained affiliated with the Caucasus Emirate, retained primarily domestic goals. Others viewed their goal as a global violent jihad and were aligned with ISIS. These new insurgents do not identify themselves as “liberators of Chechnya” or as Mujahids. They regarded their struggle as a campaign against non-Muslims (Kafirs) and false Muslims (Munafiks).

The ISIS followers see Russia as an obstacle on the road to establishing “the right faith.” They look similarly at North Caucasus Muslim leaders with their unorthodox Islamic practices. Researchers note a high proportion of North Caucasians among Islamic State adherents. On one Salafi Internet forum in late 2014, their share was from 7 to 10 percent.<sup>15</sup>

In 2015, the Ministry of Youth Affairs of Dagestan conducted a sociologic survey among young people of the republic. It found that 8.1 percent of young people indicated readiness to join ISIS and 30.8 percent reported uncertainty on the topic. About 15 percent regarded ISIS as a real caliphate and about the same number were unsure. Many young people also noted frustration and a lack of opportunities. Forty-three percent indicated that they would not be successful in Dagestan under current conditions. Fifteen percent regarded Salafism as the best religion for Dagestan. According to a 2016 survey conducted by Z. M. Abdulgalatov and other Dagestan-based scholars, 3.8 percent of young people supported insurgents from Dagestan who fought in Syria for ISIS and 8.7 percent were uncertain. Some 3.5 percent indicated that they were ready to join ISIS and 7.2 percent were uncertain. And 19.8 percent of young Muslims claimed that they could not be patriots of a non-Sharia country.<sup>16</sup>

The independent *Caucasian Knot (Kavkazsky Uzel)* website collects military incidents statistics and monitors human rights violations. It states that the number of victims of terrorism dropped almost twofold in 2015 compared to 2014. The number of terrorist acts decreased by 33 percent. Terrorist attacks continued, however, including outside the North Caucasus republics, in Stavropol Krai, St. Petersburg, and Surghut. The number of people killed in acts of terrorism and insurgency in the North Caucasus, moreover, increased in 2016 compared to 2015 (see Figure 7). Though data for 2017 have not yet been published, there is no evidence indicating any negative dramatic change of the situation in the North Caucasus.

According to official statistics, in 2017, the flow of young Muslims leaving Russia in order to join ISIS stopped. The religious violence issue has not been resolved.

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15. Akhmet Yarlykapov, “Islamskoe Gosudarstvo i Severnyi Kavkaz v Blizhnemostochnoi Perspektive: Vyzovy i Uroki Dlya Rossii,” *Mezhdunarodnaya Analitika* 3, no. 17 (2016): 118–119.

16. Zaur Gaziev, “Statisticheskii Shok,” *Svobodnaya Respublika*, September 2, 2016.

## Violent Actors

The North Caucasus Federal District (NCFD) is considered one of the most problematic regions in the Russian Federation. The NCFD is unique in that, besides having a Russian presidential envoy similar to other federal districts, it is also under the supervision of a special Ministry of North Caucasus Affairs within the Russian government. The multi-hierarchical state management of the region, however, has not been able to stabilize the North Caucasus, which comprises only one percent of Russia's territory and seven percent of its population. Since 2010, NCFD has had three presidential envoys: Alexander Khloponin (2010–2014), Sergey Melikov (2014–2016), and Oleg Belaventsev (since 2016).

Several actors participate in the power struggle and ideological competition in the North Caucasus. Those political and ideological actors interact differently in each region. We identified twelve types of actors that we see as most critical for understanding violence in the North Caucasus.

The first three types are local political elites, *Siloviks*, and oligarchs. These represent the secular state structure and tend to interact with and incorporate each other. *Local political elites* consist of politicians and bureaucrats of the republics/Krais, counties/raions, and towns/villages. *Siloviks* is a unifying informal name for the numerous Russian law enforcement agencies, including police, antiterror agencies, FSB, and militaries; these agencies are separate from each other as well as from the local political elites and are directly subordinated to the Kremlin, except in Chechnya, where law enforcement agencies are directly incorporated into the political elite. The fact that the law enforcement agencies remain independent from the local political elites elsewhere often creates clashes between the local elite and *Siloviks* and causes violence by itself. *Oligarchs* are the local and federal businessmen; they seek the protection of the political elites/*Siloviks* against harassment from other political elites/*Siloviks*, as well as from violent jihadists. Oligarchs often occupy high bureaucratic and political positions, as was the case with Hazret Sovmen, the governor of Adygea in 2002–2007, Arsen Kanokov, the governor of Kabardino-Balkaria in 2005–2013, and many others on both the city/village and county level.

The second group is religious actors: the Muftiate, Sufis, and Salafis. *Muftiate* is the Muslim term for the Spiritual Boards of Muslims that represent followers of "traditional Islam." *Sufism* represents teacher-student pairs and networks; Sufi networks in Chechnya, Dagestan, and Ingushetia are incorporated into Muftiate structures but remain separate in other regions. *Salafis* represent younger Muslims and local religious leaders educated in the Middle East, who accuse the Muftiate and, in some cases, Sufis, of tolerating anticlericalism, heresy, indifference, skepticism, pantheism, deism, and atheism.

The third group includes mixed actors, ethnic nationalists, followers of folklore-inflected Islam, and superstitious healers. Though less politically engaged, this group is often targeted by terrorist violence for religious reasons. *Nationalists* represent ethnic activists advocating for recognition of grievances on that basis. In some cases, nationalists are incorporated into the religious groups; Muftiate, Sufi groups, and, in rare cases, Salafis can bear features of nationalism. Ethnic preferences in religion usually include conducting sermons in mosques in native languages instead of Arabic or Russian. *Folklore Islam* represents a revivalism of mixed Islamic and Pagan/Christian traditions. Some followers of folklore-inflected Islam, especially among the ethnic intelligentsia, actively distance themselves from the Muftiate; however, the Muftiate tries to incorporate most

followers of folklore-inflected Islam, treating them as followers of “traditional” Islam—that is, a mixture of Islam with ethnic traditions/customs. *Local healers* usually exercise superstitious and folklore-based health-care practices.

The fourth group represents militants, including warlords and two violent jihadist movements. *Warlords* were active during the Chechen wars, conducting militant attacks against Siloviks and kidnapping civilians for ransom. *Caucasus Emirate jihadists* form a network of insurgents in each region and organize terrorist acts and selectively target all other actors. *ISIS jihadists* leave the North Caucasus and go to Syria and Iraq to join ISIS, although some remain in the region and others have gone to Syria and have now returned or are seeking to return.

Each of these twelve types has been involved in conflicts at some point as perpetrators or targeted victims of violence. Their interactions, charted and compared, make it possible for us to draw a conceptual map of the North Caucasus regions.

## CONCEPTUAL MAP OF THE NORTH CAUCASUS REGIONS

The North Caucasus is a diverse region in many ways, including differences in the size of the territories of the regions, ethnic populations, economies, politics, and religion. Having tiny territories, Adygea, Ingushetia, and North Ossetia have major territorial and border concerns that shape their political agendas, in contrast to the large regions of Krasnodar Krai and Stavropol Krai (see Table 1, North Caucasus Region). Interethnic political turmoil is another issue in some

**Table 1. North Caucasus Region**

Regions	Territory, km <sup>2</sup>	Population
Adygea	7,800	440,000
Chechnya	17,300	1,269,000
Dagestan	50,300	2,946,000
Ingushetia	3,600	492,000
Kabardino-Balkaria	12,500	859,000
Karachaevo-Cherkessia	14,100	472,000
Krasnodar Krai	75,485	5,227,000
North Ossetia	8,000	706,000
Stavropol Krai	66,160	2,791,000

regions—namely in Adygea, Dagestan, Karachaevo-Cherkessia, and Kabardino-Balkaria—that have ethnically diverse populations. There is no interethnic split among the mono-ethnic political elites in Ingushetia, Chechnya, and North Ossetia.

The North Caucasus is also diverse in terms of religious tension. Interreligious issues have arisen between Orthodox Christians and Muslims in North Ossetia, Stavropol Krai, and Krasnodar Krai, where Orthodox Christians represent the majority of the population while Muslims are a minority. Clashes inside the Muslim community have occurred in most of the regions, including constant tension between the Muftiate and Salafis, as well as violent jihadist attacks against representatives of the Muftiate, Sufis, followers of folklore-inflected Islam, and healers.

The Russian state generally supports the Muftiate and confronts Salafi groups. However, nuances exist, as illustrated by Table 2, which juxtaposes state positions on the Muftiates and Salafis with levels of violence. (See Figure 7 for statistics on levels of terrorist and insurgent violence in 2010–2016.)

In the following subsections we will analyze in more detail the main issues in each of the North Caucasus regions, including the northeastern republics Dagestan, Chechnya, and Ingushetia and the northwestern republics Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachaevo-Cherkessia, North Ossetia, and Stavropol Krai, as well as the border regions of Adygea and Krasnodar Krai.

### A Case of Aggressive Religious Policy: Chechnya

The Chechen approach represents an extreme case of aggressive pro-Muftiate/anti-Salafi policy, when the state controls all local Muslim actors and, in a totalitarian way, dominates Islamic practices. Chechnya is the only republic among the North Caucasus regions with a zero-tolerance policy for Salafism and with the Muftiate de facto incorporated into government structures. Such an aggressive approach has not been successful in eliminating violence, however. Indeed, Chechnya remains the second-most violent region in the North Caucasus, though terrorist and insurgent violence has significantly declined between 2010 and 2016 (See Figure 7). While the Kremlin fully supports the Chechen leadership's religious policy, this approach is criticized throughout Russia and the Kremlin refrains from enforcing the same methods in other North Caucasus republics.

Nonetheless, postwar Chechnya is presented as an "exemplary" region in Russia's North Caucasus in official propaganda, which forwards a narrative of a successful and peaceful resolution of long-standing and dramatic military conflict. But while there is truth to the peaceful façade, both open and concealed unrest remains. In spite of the official propaganda, Chechnya is not truly stable.

For one thing, Chechnya has unresolved territorial disputes with its neighboring regions. Chechnya has not established an official border with Ingushetia, though the two formerly united republics were meant to abide by their 1934 borders.<sup>17</sup> The Chechen Republic's leadership has expressed numerous territorial claims vis-a-vis Ingushetia regarding villages in Malgobek and Sunzha

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17. "On establishment of Ingushetia as part of Russian Federation," Russian Federal Law of June 4, 1992, number 2927-1; "On establishment of Chechnya," Russian Parliament's Decree on December 10, 1992.

**Table 2. State Policy and Violence (see the legend for Table 2)**

Regions	State's support for Muftiate	State's tolerance for Salafism	Terrorist and insurgent violence in 2016 (See Figure 7)
Chechnya	● 4	○ 0	43
Dagestan	◐ 1	◐ 1	204
Ingushetia	◐ 1	● 4	19
Kabardino-Balkaria	◑ 3	◑ 2	15
Karachaevo-Cherkessia	◑ 2	◑ 3	0
Adygea	◐ 1	◐ 1	0
North Ossetia	◐ 1	◐ 1	0
Krasnodar Krai	◐ 1	◐ 1	0
Stavropol Krai	◐ 1	◐ 1	6

**Legend for Table 2**

Scale	State's support for Muftiate	State's tolerance for Salafism
● 4	Muftiate de facto is incorporated into the political machine	Local elite directly take sides with Salafi Imams against Muftiate
◑ 3	Local government strongly supports Muftiate, influences the elections of Mufti, and exercises its policy toward Salafism through Muftiate	Local government accommodates Salafi demands but does not directly side with Salafi Imams against Muftiate
◐ 2	Local government strongly supports Muftiate, influences the elections of Mufti, and sometimes mediates negotiations between Muftiate and Salafis	Local government does not interfere with the Salafis and deals with them via the Muftiate
◐ 1	Local government's support for Muftiate is weak; there were instances when mosque Imams were arrested and the governor openly criticized the Muftiate	State takes efforts to marginalize Salafi followers
○ 0	Local government does not support Muftiate	State exercises a zero-tolerance policy toward Salafism



counties.<sup>18</sup> The territorial issue is further complicated by the Chechen settlement of lands added to what was then Chechen-Ingush territory in 1957 (following both peoples' return from deportation), although the territory was added in recompense for land lost by the Ingush. Chechnya also has territorial disputes with Dagestan. In 2006, the speaker of the Chechen Parliament, Dukvakha Abdurakhmanov, asked in an interview,

How are [Dagestan ethnic groups] Avars or Lezgins related to Khasavyurt, Kizlyar, or Novolak? They have no historical relations to those cities. Our [Chechen] ancestors used to live next to the Caspian Sea and we used to have free access to the sea, and via it, to the Orient. So, why we are unnaturally blocked [from the Caspian Sea], today? Why is that zone closed for us but open for the Dagestani people? Why do Chechens pay ransom on those nonexistent borders? The ethnic Russian people have not given up on the Baltic Sea, and Chechens are not going to give up on the Caspian Sea.<sup>19</sup>

Unlike the rest of the North Caucasus, Chechnya is quite homogenous. The years of armed violence and authoritarian rule in Chechnya have led to a substantial decline in the non-Chechen population of the republic, such that today some 95.3 percent of the population is identified as ethnic Chechens. According to the 2010 census, ethnic Russians comprise 1.9 percent; Kumyks, Avars, and Nogais comprise 1 percent, 0.4 percent, and 0.3 percent, respectively. More than 98 percent of those living in Chechnya are Sunni Muslims. One percent are Orthodox Christians, and almost no followers of Judaism live in the republic. Sunni Muslims follow Shaafi Madhab, with the exception of Nogais in the north and northeast of the region who belong to Khanafi Madhab.

Homogeneity might be thought to contribute to stability and/or consistent policy. In Chechnya, however, the situation is different. For example, Chechen authorities have not been consistent in their policy toward faith healers and others who follow superstition and folklore-based health-care practices. On the one hand, a media propaganda campaign labeled such practitioners as "black magicians and charlatans" and law enforcement agencies were tasked with finding "sorcerers, magicians, and healers." Many healers in Chechnya have been forced to stop their practice. On the other hand, some of the healers became officially employed at the Islamic Medical Center, which was built and sponsored by the Regional Community Trust (named after Akhmad-hajji Kadyrov) and opened in 2009. Some treatment methods at the center are similar to superstitious health-care practices, including treatment by reading chapters from the Koran in order to cure patients possessed by mystical genies, who are considered the cause of many health issues.<sup>20</sup>

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18. "Territorial'nye Spory Mezhdru Ingushetiei I Chechney," *Kavkazskii Uzel*, April 19, 2013, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/223104/>.

19. Natalia Antipova, "Dukvakha Abdurakhmanov: Chechnya Spaset Rossiyu on NATO," *Memorial*, August 22, 2006, [www.memo.ru/hr/hotpoints/caucas1/msg/2006/08/m60225.htm](http://www.memo.ru/hr/hotpoints/caucas1/msg/2006/08/m60225.htm).

20. Muslim Ibragimov, "Tsentru Islamskoi Meditsiny v Groznom soobchshaey ob Izlechenii Tsyachi Chelovek," *Kavkazskii Uzel*, March 6, 2009, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/150492/>; Gapur Gaisulaev, "Tsentru Islamskoi Meditsiny v Chechne Prodolzhaet Svoyu Raboru 4-I God," *Serdce Chechni*, <http://www.serdce-chechni.ru/index.php/component/k2/item/280>.

Chechen authorities demand that all Chechens be followers of Sufism. The regime even tried to expand its regional policy to the federal and international levels. In 2016, the Chechen Parliament voiced an initiative to issue “spiritual-moral passports” for citizens younger than 35 that would identify their “ethnicity, Teip/tribe, and Vird/Sufi group.”<sup>21</sup> The concept of spiritual-moral passports did not imply any other form of Muslim identification beside Sufism. This initiative has since been disavowed. During the same period, a conference of Muslim scholars invited to Chechnya from abroad issued the so-called Grozny Fatwa, which proclaimed Sufism to be the only true version of Islam. Later, Chechen authorities clarified that Chechnya respects Islamic diversity.<sup>22</sup> However, within the republic, followers of different approaches to Islam continue to risk persecution by law enforcement agencies.

The SBM of Chechnya condemned the distribution of the Iranian film *Muhammad: The Messenger of God* (2015), objecting to the film’s Shia perspective on the Prophet’s life. The Mufti of Chechnya, Salakh-Haji Mezhiev, stated that Chechnya would tolerate “neither Wahhabism nor Shiism.”<sup>23</sup>

The Chechen government has developed a structured hierarchy of “enemies of the people.” One of the enemy categories is “easily recognizable enemies of the people,” which means criminals, including insurgents. This category of criminals could be pardoned, if they were willing to “understand” their wrongdoings and be ready to “change.” Another category, “those who are invisible,” includes dissidents, human rights activists, and independent journalists.<sup>24</sup>

Relatives of those who are suspected of terrorism also become subject to persecution. Local authorities have embraced a policy of collective punishment and have persecuted entire families for the actions and beliefs of relatives.<sup>25</sup> This approach reached its peak in 2008 when local law enforcement agencies destroyed 27 houses that belonged to insurgents’ relatives.<sup>26</sup> These policies were addressed by President Putin during his annual news conference on December 18, 2014:

I’m referring to what Kadyrov said about the relatives of terrorists, their homes, expelling them from the republic and so on. Naturally, I can have only one view on this: in Russia everyone must obey the existing laws and nobody is considered guilty until this is proved by court. This is the first point. Second, I’ve already said that life is complicated. I’ll tell you something from the practical experience of counterterrorism units. Generally—I won’t say always—the

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21. Sergei Titov, “Kadyrov Beret Chechentsev na Religiozno-Teipovyi Uchet?” *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, February 19, 2016, <https://www.kp.ru/daily/26496.7/3364640/>.

22. Maaz Bilialov, “Groznskaya Fetva Zastavila Obyasnatca S Saudovskoi Araviei,” *Kavkaz: Realii*, November 28, 2016, <https://www.kavkazr.com/a/groznskay-fetfa-zastavila-kadyrova-obysnyatysya-s-saudovskoy-araviei/28144117.html>.

23. Salakh Mezhiev, “Obrashchenie Po Povodu Zapreta rasprostraneniya Shiitskikh Knig,” *Kavpolit*, June 24, 2017, <http://kavpolit.com/blogs/grozny/34162/>.

24. “Chechnya: Izviliysti Put’ Bor’by Za Istinnuyu Rerligioznist,” *Memorial*, January 16, 2014, <https://hrctrmemorial.livejournal.com/201015.html>.

25. Vladislav Trifonov, “Doma Boevikov Sgoreli Tikhim Plamenem,” *Kommersant*, December 11, 2014, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2630515>.

26. Karina Gadzhieva and Aida Magomedova, “Eksperty Schitayut Situatsiyu Na Severnom Kavkaze Opasnoi i Prognoziryuyut Eskalatsiyu Konflikta,” *Kavkazskii Uzel*, January 7, 2015, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/255197/>.

relatives of people who commit acts of terror know about them in the overwhelming majority of cases, if not more.<sup>27</sup>

The need to protect Chechen and Islamic traditions has also justified violent actions against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual (LGBT) and other gender-nonconforming Chechen residents. Since February 2017, Chechnya witnessed at least two waves of repression of this sort, during which dozens of people, mainly gay men, were killed. These murders included several “honor killings” or “shame killings” by family members, with the victim accused of having brought shame upon the family in the eyes of the community/state.<sup>28</sup> An investigation by the independent Russian newspaper *Novaya Gazeta* featured interviews with representatives of Chechnya’s LGBT community and shed light on these activities, which can be seen as a contribution to the tightening of state control. If families can be induced to execute their own “shameful” members, authorities may have more freedom to persecute those they see as anti-regime elements without fear of violent revenge, a custom still common in Chechen society.

Authoritarianism and repression have not been enough to guarantee security for Chechnya. One high-profile attack by the deteriorated Caucasus Emirate in December 2014 in Grozny can be seen as something of a last stand. CE group members seized the downtown buildings of the State Publishing House and a school and engaged in crossfire with authorities across the capital’s market.<sup>29</sup> Even more worrying was an attack on Chechen law enforcement officers by about a dozen young men (aged 18–20) in December 2017. Officials described the results as an antiterrorist operation, killing seven of the men and arresting four.<sup>30</sup> However, in contrast to previous attacks, these young men appeared to have no connection to any underground or insurgency networks. This suggests a greater potential for future violence in Chechnya than might previously have been thought. The slight uptick in terrorist and insurgent violence in 2016 compared to 2015, already noted, which reverses previous trends, further feeds these concerns (see Figure 7).<sup>31</sup>

## A Case of Inconsistent Religious Policy: Dagestan

Dagestan, Russia’s most violent region, represents an extreme case of a failed pro-Muftiate/anti-Salafism policy. Local authorities exercise a combination of inconsistent support for the local Muftiate together with similarly inconsistent attempts to marginalize Salafism. In 2010–2013, under governor Magomedislam Magomedov, the state initiated a dialogue with Salafis and sought to be

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27. Vladimir Putin, “News Conference,” President of Russia, December 18, 2014, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/47250>.

28. Elena Milashina, “Ubiystvo Chesti,” *Novaya Gazeta*, April 2, 2017, <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2017/04/01/71983-ubiystvo-chesti>.

29. “Napadenie na Grozny: Kak Razvivalis’ Sobytiya,” RBK, December 4, 2014, <http://www.rbc.ru/special/society/04/12/2014/54803de3cbb20fd929a58b90>.

30. Elena Milashina, “Napadenie na Grozny: Chto Eto Bylo?” *Novaya Gazeta*, December 20, 2016, <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2016/12/20/70958-napadenie-na-groznyy-chto-eto-bylo>.

31. “Infographika: Reiting Regionov SKFO po kolichestvu Zhertzv za 7 Let,” February 10, 2016, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/277404/>.

more inclusive of law-abiding members of that community. In 2013–2017, however, the next governor, Ramazan Abdulatipov, reversed that policy and not only publicly crusaded against Salafism but also publicly confronted the local Muftiate.

While conflict raged in Chechnya, many explained problems in Dagestan as spillover. The continued high rates of violence in the latter republic after Chechnya's stabilization suggest that other factors are in play, however. For many years the level of terrorist and insurgent violence in Dagestan has remained the highest in the North Caucasus. A total of 204 people, including civilians, law enforcement officers, and militants, were killed as a result of such violence in 2016, more than in all other regions combined; even though the number of victims of violence that year marked a significant decline since 2011, when 824 were killed (see Figure 7).

Dagestan's political elite is more ethnically divided than any other regional political elite in the North Caucasus.<sup>32</sup> These splits have often resulted in violence toward political actors. On the other hand, the diversity of Dagestan's elite has had positive effects on the freedom of the local media, which remained for years the only one in the North Caucasus classified as "relatively free" by the *Glasnost Defense Foundation*. Other republics have been described as either "relatively nonfree" (Adygea, North Ossetia) or "nonfree" (KBR, KChR, Ingushetia, and Chechnya).<sup>33</sup>

The split inside the Muslim community is also more prominent in Dagestan than in any other region. Clashes have taken place between the Muftiate and Sufis on one side and Salafis on the other side. The official Dagestan clergy is integrated with the Sufi movement more than in any other North Caucasus region; in fact, they are integrated to such an extent that it is hard to tell the difference between them. The Muftiate considers Sufism a historical version of Islam in Dagestan and remains its strongest supporter to this day.

Mosques have become an arena for clashes between the Muftiate/Sufism on one side and Salafis on the other. In the 1990s, young Muslims who studied Islam abroad (later identified as Salafis) began returning to their villages and challenging older religious leaders in local mosques who remained subordinated to the Muftiate. Another factor became new mosques that were not tied to the Muftiate.<sup>34</sup> In some cases, entire villages declared themselves "Sharia republics," including two Dagestani villages on the Chechen border that also sought to join Chechnya, from which they had received political support. The early tension between the Muftiate/Sufism and Salafi followers led to the 1998 assassination of the Mufti of Dagestan, Saidmukhammad Abubakarov, a Sufi.<sup>35</sup> Said-Afandi al-Chikrawi, the most prominent Sufi leader in Dagestan, was assassinated in 2012 by an ethnic Russian suicide terrorist who had converted to Islam.

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32. Konstantin Kazenin, "Kavkazskaya Demokratiya: Pochemu Dagestan Ne Povtoril Put' Chechni," Carnegie Moscow Center, October, 19, 2015. <http://carnegie.ru/commentary/?fa=61666>.

33. No author, "Glasnost Map for March 2009–February 2010," Glasnost Defense Foundation, April 21, 2010, <http://www.gdf.ru/map/list/2010>.

34. Eduard Emirov, "Islam I Grazhdanskoe Obshchestvo v Dagestane," *Slavic Centre for Law and Justice* 1–2 (39) (2006), [http://www.sclj.ru/analytics/magazine/arch/detail.php?ELEMENT\\_ID=1264](http://www.sclj.ru/analytics/magazine/arch/detail.php?ELEMENT_ID=1264)

35. Andrei Zolotov Jr. "Moslem Leader Killed in Dagestan Car Bomb," *The Moscow Times*, August 22, 1998, <http://old.themoscowtimes.com/sitemap/free/1998/8/article/moslem-leader-killed-in-dagestan-car-bomb/286114.html>

The local ex-nomenklatura elite was afraid to interfere in grassroots religious conflicts during the 1994–1996 Chechen conflict. However, the Chechen insurgents' incursions into Dagestan in 1999, under the leadership of Shamil Basaev, changed the situation. The local elite combined efforts with the Russian federal military forces in order to prevent a spillover of the war from Chechnya into Dagestan. In return for its loyalty to the Russian federal authorities, the Dagestan elite received political and economic support from the Kremlin, which restrained itself from directly interfering in Dagestan's local politics until 2013.

After 1999, the Dagestan political elite also took sides with the local clergy against the Salafi movement. The interference of the local elites expedited the polarization of the conflict inside the Muslim community. The political elite in Dagestan being split itself, however, its interference in religious affairs only increased the violence. Different factions inside the fragmented political elite have divided and politically engaged the local clergy, Sufis, law enforcement agencies, and even Salafis, the same way the political elite have been interfering in local business, ethnic movements, and even the criminal world.

In the 1990s the Dagestan authorities' measures against Salafi communities were characterized by a refusal to register their mosques. As a result, of 1,270 mosques in Dagestan in 1995, 480 were not officially registered. Believers would be labeled as extremists just for attending unregistered mosques. Many young Muslims thus labeled were arrested and disappeared, which arguably led to increased numbers of local insurgents. Dagestan authorities, however, did not take their anti-Salafi policy to the same level as in Kabardino-Balkaria, where the local authorities closed all mosques in 2002 (see below).

These repressions against Salafis provoked retaliation against law enforcement agencies. One of the active supporters of the 1999 Chechen invasion in Dagestan, Rasul Makasharipov, established a militant group, Jennet, that assassinated dozens of senior law enforcement officers, judges, and prosecutors, including the head of counterintelligence and counterterrorism of Dagestan, 28 officers of the anti-extremism department, and the minister of national policy, information, and external relations.<sup>36</sup> In 2004, Jennet transformed into a new organization, Shariat Jamaat, which continued its violent activities even more successfully, engaging in military battles against Russian regular army forces. In 2005, Shariat Jamaat became a subdivision of the Caucasian Front, subordinated to the leader of the Chechen resistance, Sheikh Abdul Halim. After the death of Makasharipov in 2005, the new leader, Rappani Khalilov, successfully recruited more insurgents. After Khalilov's death in 2007, the next leader, Ilgas Malachiyev, took an oath to not attack civilians; he was killed in a Russian-Azeri joint operation on the border between Russia and Azerbaijan. In 2007, Shariat Jamaat became known as Vilayat Dagestan and subordinated to the Caucasus Emirate. Each of its next several leaders were killed within a year after taking on that role. At the same time, Vilayat Dagestan carried out numerous terrorist attacks, including the assassinations of Major General Valery Lipinsky, deputy commander of the Russia's Interior Ministry forces in the

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36. Emilia Kazumova, "Shariat organization succeeds to Dzhennet rebel group," *Caucasian Knot*, January 14, 2005, <http://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/3853/>

North Caucasus;<sup>37</sup> General Adilgeri Magomedtagirov, Dagestan's Interior Minister; and the explosion in the Moscow metro in March 2010.<sup>38</sup>

After Shariat Jamaat transformed into Vilayat Dagestan, insurgents developed an elaborate underground infrastructure dividing Dagestan into four sectors, which were subdivided into smaller groups corresponding with villages. Similar subdivisions emerged in large towns like Makhachkala, Kaspiisk, and Buinaksk that consisted of numerous cells corresponding to city districts or neighborhoods.

Alongside Vilayat Dagestan, there existed other smaller independent groups with different goals, such as Yasin in Makhachkala, which carried out assassinations of "hypocrites" and "treacherous Imams," including a deputy head Mufti of Dagestan in 2007.<sup>39</sup>

Changes in local politics came after the Kremlin appointed Magomedislam Magomedov as the governor of Dagestan. During his tenure (2010–2013) Magomedov initiated a public dialogue between Salafi and Muftiate/Sufi leaders and created a commission on militants' amnesty. The local community, however, met both initiatives with skepticism, experts pointing out that such rhetorical measures would be fruitless unless the main problems of post-Soviet Dagestan were addressed, including corruption among the political elites, the violence of the Siloviks, and the clan system.<sup>40</sup> Thus, while Kremlin support and approval enabled some North Caucasus authorities to test "soft measures," these did not prove effective in Dagestan.

The "soft power" approach was unsuccessful in Dagestan partly because it was combined with military operations by Russian federal troops. Using the pretext of the Sochi Olympics, the Kremlin concentrated military troops in the region.

On the eve of the Olympics, Dagestan remained the most violent region in Russia. Three deadly attacks killed 71 people in Volgograd, a city outside the North Caucasus, on October 21 and December 29 and 30, 2013.<sup>41</sup> Instead of Vilayat Dagestan, however, it was Ansar al-Sunna, a militant group previously unknown to the Russian authorities, that took responsibility for these actions and issued a video threatening to conduct more attacks during the Sochi Games. At the time it was not evident why Ansar al-Sunna operated separately from the Caucasus Emirate, but the split between Ansar al-Sunna and Vilayat Dagestan proved to be the first indication of the split between Caucasus Emirate jihadists and ISIS jihadists. It became evident that the organizers of the 2013

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37. "Russian general fatally wounded in Dagestan attack," Reuters, December 29, 2008, <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSLT662803>.

38. Valery Dzutsati, "Assassination of Interior Minister Marks a new Level of Political Violence in Dagestan," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 6 (110), June 9, 2009, <https://jamestown.org/program/assassination-of-interior-minister-marks-a-new-level-of-political-violence-in-dagestan/>.

39. Mairbek Vatchagaev, "The Dagestani Jamaat," *North Caucasus Weekly* 8 (48–49), December 13–21, 2007, <https://jamestown.org/program/the-dagestani-jamaat-part-1/>.

40. Akhmed Magomedov, "Experts doubt that Dagestani commission on militants' amnesty will be efficient," *Caucasian Knot*, November 6, 2010, <http://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/15087/>.

41. Timothy Heritage, "Militant Islamist Video Threatened Winter Olympics," Reuters, January 20, 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/russia-olympics-militants/update-1-militant-islamist-video-threatens-winter-olympics-idUSL5N0KU17X20140120>.

attacks in Volgograd had named themselves after Ansar al-Sunna, a paramilitary association fighting against the United States in Iraq.<sup>42</sup>

The situation inside the Dagestan political elite deteriorated further after the Kremlin's direct interference in Dagestan politics in 2013. The Kremlin appointee, Ramazan Abdulatipov, became the first post-Soviet Dagestan governor who made his career outside of the region and did not have connections with the local elite, though such a practice already was in place in many other republics. The Kremlin arrested several of Abdulatipov's most prominent competitors on corruption charges. Most notable of these was the mayor of Makhachkala, Said Amirov, who had turned the capital of Dagestan into a totalitarian business empire during his 15 years in power. Amirov had survived nine attempts on his life, gaining a reputation as the second-most powerful official in the North Caucasus after Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov. In spite of the Kremlin's interference, the political machine in Dagestan did not change and remained "multipolar," without one center of power.<sup>43</sup>

Meanwhile, the authorities continued to support the loyal Muftiate against Salafi followers, with varying degrees of success. In 2015, efforts to appoint Sufi imams at Salafi mosques in Makhachkala, Khasavyurt, and Derbent failed.<sup>44</sup> But the Muftiate's support of authorities was precarious. Tension first developed in 2016 as a result of an Internet contest for the title of "People's President of Dagestan." The Mufti of Dagestan, Akhmad Abdullaev, received 23,000 votes, while governor Abdulatipov received only 617 votes. Later, the Muftiate criticized Abdulatipov's reckless statement, "Throw Salafis into the river," claiming that it could provoke Salafis into targeting pro-government Muslims. Disagreement between the local officials and clergy became politicized when the first deputy of the Mufti of Dagestan, Magomedrasul Saaduev, announced his candidacy in the local Dagestan parliamentary elections for the political party People Against Corruption (PAC). Saaduev became known for his efforts to bring together all Muslims who followed the Russian law, including Sufis and Salafis. Political experts expected that with Muftiate support PAC could challenge the main political party, United Russia. The authorities, however, managed to negotiate with the Muftiate, which decided not to support PAC during the elections.<sup>45</sup> The Muftiate has since started to play a role in federal politics: in the 2018 presidential elections in Russia, the Mufti's wife, Aina Gamzatova, was nominated. Russian authorities refused to register her as a candidate based on technicalities.<sup>46</sup>

Dagestan has an indigenous Shia minority, which is concentrated in the ethnic Lezgin village of Miskinzha, as well as an ethnic Azerbaijani diaspora community. The local Muftiate does not

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42. "Experts: grouping 'Ansar al-Sunna,' which claimed responsibility for terror acts in Volgograd, was not earlier known in Caucasus," *Caucasian Knot*, January 20, 2014, <http://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/27035/>.

43. Konstantin Kazenin, "Kavkazskaya Demokratiya: Pochemu Dagestan Ne Povtoril Put' Chechni," *Carnegie Moscow Center*, October, 19, 2015. <http://carnegie.ru/commentary/?fa=61666>.

44. Konstantin Kazenin, "Severnyi Kavkaz: Istoki Novykh Konfliktov," *Regnum*, February 20, 2016, <https://regnum.ru/news/polit/2083551.html>.

45. Nazhmudin Aliev, "Narod Protiv Korruptsii: Dagestanskije Sufii na Vyborakh Brosayut Vyzov Vlasti," *EADaily*, May 18, 2016, <https://eadaaily.com/ru/news/2016/05/18/narod-protiv-korruptcii-dagestanskije-sufii-na-vyborah-brosayut-vyzov-vlasti>.

46. Mansur Mirovalov, "Aina Gamzatova: The Muslim woman challenging Putin," *Al Jazeera*, December 31, 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/12/aina-gamzatova-muslim-woman-challenging-putin-171230123254169.html>.

exclude Shia Muslims in the region and appoints their representative as one of the deputies of the Mufti. In contrast to Chechnya, discussed above, the SBM of Dagestan agreed to show the 2015 film *Muhammad: The Messenger of God*, and even promoted it through the SBM's representatives. The film became a topic of debate among local Muslims, including some anti-Shia statements in social media.

### A Success Story of "Soft Power": Ingushetia

Alongside the "hard power" policy traditional for the North Caucasus, "soft power" plays a significant role in local politics. Ingushetia represents the most successful case of a "soft power" policy. The leadership of the republic articulated a policy of no direct interference into the clashes inside the local Muslim community. After the adoption of this policy in 2010, violence in Ingushetia significantly dropped, from 161 victims of terrorist and insurgent violence in 2010 to 19 in 2016. The current governor, Yunus-Bek Yevkurov, has publicly distanced himself from the local Muftiate, although he has tried to pressure, albeit unsuccessfully, the Mufti of Ingushetia to resign from his position. Unlike in Dagestan, the leadership of Ingushetia does not try to marginalize the local Salafi activists. Rather, the policy of no direct interference applies to them as well. According to the Ingushetia president Yunus-Bek Yevkurov's statement, the states' preventive work with citizens, and especially with youth, is considered the most effective antiterrorism tool. Yevkurov said in his interview with the *Caucasian Knot (Kavkazsky Uzel)*, "Ninety-nine percent of success depends on the ability [of the state] to help confused young people to find a way to return to peaceful life. At the same time, however, the people should not let their confused relatives [pursue the wrong path], but should try to [positively] influence the young people, and help them to realize the danger of such a bad way."<sup>47</sup> The leadership of Ingushetia took advantage of the local clan system, which has helped mediate between the authorities and the Salafis.

The Salafi movement emerged in Ingushetia around the same time as in other North Caucasus regions. At the end of the 1990s, young Salafi activists educated in the Middle East challenged the followers of the local Muslim practices, accusing them of abandoning "pure" Islam. The political elite's reaction was the same as in other regions, and they tried to prohibit the new Islamic movement. Unlike in other regions, however, the prohibition of the new Islamic practices in Ingushetia did not provoke any unrest, thanks to the local clan system. Ingush social structure is based on the strong relations between close and distant relatives who form neighborhood communities in villages and towns. Clan networks penetrate the Ingush economy, politics, and religion. Local Muslim traditions are blended with Sufi teachings and embedded into age-based hierarchies of the local clans.

In 2002, Ingushetia's second governor, Murat Zyazikov, took over from the first, Ruslan Aushev. During his term, tension emerged among political actors and between them and the government. Zyazikov, with close ties to the Kremlin, tried to pursue a rigid anti-Salafi policy. The new leadership's attempt to redistribute economic resources alienated ethnic Ingush businessmen. The local political elite became divided into rival groups. The Ingushetia leadership also alienated influential

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47. "Protiv Semei Boevikov Nel'zhya Primenyat' Nezakonnnye Metody," *Kavkazskii Uzel*, December 27, 2014, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/254793/>.



federal-level Ingush politicians and businessmen in Moscow. Corruption among the leadership and illegal violent action by law enforcement exacerbated the situation. The Human Rights Center Memorial noted, "A couple of years ago the population of Ingushetia was ready to support the government in its fight against militants, but the latter has incited the Ingush society against itself by use of irresponsible and frankly lawless methods—tortures and kidnappings."<sup>48</sup> The most extreme examples of violence took place in 2002 and 2004. In 2002, a 300-strong Chechen regiment invaded Ingushetia from Georgia, attacked Russian federal troops, and retreated to Chechnya. In 2004, about 200 Ingush insurgents occupied Nazran, Ingushetia's largest city, and attacked 15 government buildings, executing almost a hundred people, mostly law enforcement officers, including the acting minister of internal affairs and his deputy. The deterioration of the situation led Zyazikov to resign in 2008.

The current governor, Yunus-bek Yevkurov, is a retired military officer who made his career outside the region. Yevkurov came to office hoping to effect reconciliation. Initially he faced violent opposition, including several attempts on his life—one of which, a 2009 car bomb attack on his motorcade, caused him serious injury.<sup>49</sup>

Over time, however, Yevkurov had more success, most notably in his religious policy. Equally distancing himself from all religious groups, Yevkurov's administration has stood out among North Caucasus regions where the political elites tend to support the local Muftiate against Salafis. But while levels of violence have dropped significantly, most of Ingushetia's problems remain unresolved.

Besides ongoing disputes inside its Muslim community, Ingushetia still faces the problems of inefficiency of its law enforcement agencies, economic stagnation, corruption, and legacies of the 1992 Ingush-Ossetia war. The subordination of law enforcement agencies directly to the Kremlin, instead of the local government, is another problem in Ingushetia, as in all other North Caucasus regions except Chechnya. Local law enforcement agencies often use unlawful methods against suspects, as illustrated by the high-profile case of Magomed Daliyev, 50, who was accused of a bank robbery and died while under police interrogation in 2016. After a federal investigation at Yevkurov's request, several law enforcement personnel were arrested, including the head of the Ingushetia Counter-Extremism Center.

A series of corruption scandals and charges of embezzlement for several senior officials, including the security council secretary and the construction minister, led to the dismissal of the cabinet and the appointment of a new prime minister. Unemployment in Ingushetia is over 30 percent, though it has dropped during Yevkurov's tenure. The level of federal subsidies remains over 80 percent, though lower than in 2009 when they were at 96 percent.

With the smallest territory among the North Caucasus regions (see Table 1), Ingushetia has unresolved border disputes with neighboring North Ossetia and Chechnya. While almost all North Caucasus regions have border issues, Ingushetia was the only region that has initiated a war over

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48. "HRC 'Memorial': authorities incite the society of Ingushetia against themselves," Caucasian Knot, February 12, 2008, <http://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/7064/>.

49. "Russian Ingush Republic's leader attacked," Russia Today, October 23, 2011, <https://www.rt.com/news/ingushetia-president-assassination-yevkurov-537/>.

disputed territory—that of the Prigorodny raion, which became part of neighboring North Ossetia when Stalin deported the Ingush people in 1944. The lost territory also included the village of Angusht. The 1992 Ingush-Ossetia conflict shaped Ingushetia’s political agenda for decades and caused the displacement of more than 40,000 Ingush from North Ossetia to Ingushetia.<sup>50</sup> An agreement between the two republics decreased the tension. However, grievances against Ossetia resurfaced when unconfirmed reports of the appointment of an ethnic Ossetian as Ingushetia’s deputy prime minister triggered outraged protests on local social media, after which Yevkurov publicly denied having even considered it.<sup>51</sup>

The Chechen-Ingush border issues were described above, in the section about Chechnya. The Chechen leadership also interferes in Ingush internal politics, supporting a particular Ingush Sufi group, the Batal-Haji followers in Surkhakhi village. The Chechen leadership also supported Ingushetia’s Mufti, Isa Khamkhoev, who refused to resign from his position in spite of open demands from the governor and parliament.

The problems of the Russian Orthodox Church in Ingushetia are not articulated in media and expert society. However, according to informal interviews conducted by Safeguard, “An initiative to build inter-confessional rapprochement by Muslim and Christian Orthodox clergy ended in a fiasco,” after acts of violence. These included the killing of an ethnic Ingush woman who converted to Christianity and several machine gun shootings at a local Orthodox church in Orjonikidzevskaya village in 2009–2011.<sup>52</sup>

### Moderate Pro-Muftiate/Anti-Salafism Policy: Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachaevo-Cherkessia

Two of the North Caucasus republics, Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachaevo-Cherkessia, have developed less aggressive pro-Muftiate/anti-Salafism policies, including dialogue with the Salafi movement. The governments of these two regions combine reasonable support for the Muftiate with compromise with Salafi followers; though with regional nuances. The difference between the two republics is that Karachaevo-Cherkessia has been exercising such a policy longer than Kabardino-Balkaria.

#### *Kabardino-Balkaria*

After the fall of the Soviet Union, Kabardino-Balkaria first faced challenges posed by ethnic strife, most notably the Kabardian and Balkar national movements. Valery Kokov, who had come to power before the USSR’s collapse, remained in office as head of the republic from 1992 through 2005. His tenure shaped the ex-nomenklatura elite into a secular and closed political machine that lacked enough flexibility to accommodate new ideological trends and

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50. Sergei Markedonov, “Osetino-Ingushskii Konflikt: Istoriia i Sovremennost,” Politcom, October 30, 2007, <http://politcom.ru/5276.html>.

51. Liz Fuller, “Kremlin Seemingly Deaf To Calls To Replace Republic of Ingushetia Head,” *RFE/RL*, June 2, 2017, <https://www.rferl.org/a/caucasus-report-kremlin-deaf-calls-replace-ingushetia-head/28525575.html>.

52. Anna Matveeva and Igor Savin, “Ingushetia: Building Identity, Overcoming Conflict,” *Saferworld*, March, 2012, <http://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/view-resource/636-north-caucasus-views-from-within>.

movements.<sup>53</sup> The local elite's propaganda described the stability in Kabardino-Balkaria as a historical choice and an alternative to Chechnya's separatist war. Elites praised themselves for wisely preserving power and successfully stabilizing the region after the fall of the USSR.<sup>54</sup> The inflexibility of the Kabardino-Balkaria elite, however, prevented it from recognizing the importance of the new challenges emerging from the split in the Islamic community in the beginning of the 2000s.

The split in the Muslim community in Kabardino-Balkaria did not initially have the Muftiate-versus-Salafism context evident elsewhere in the North Caucasus. The first major conflict in the Muslim community involved a loss of public money raised for the construction of a mosque in Nalchik. Critics of the Muftiate leadership emerged among the local Muslim intelligentsia, namely Anzor Astemirov and Musa Mukozhev, both deputy directors of the Nalchik Islamic Institute; they were employed by the founder of the institute, Ruslan Nakhushev, a former KGB officer.<sup>55</sup> Instead of helping to resolve the conflict inside the Muslim community, authorities initiated a discrimination campaign against young Muslims, using the same political tools that they used for marginalizing ethno-nationalist movements. In 2000, local law enforcement agencies registered 382 young Muslims in Kabardino-Balkaria as supporters of "Wahhabism." The government closed the Islamic Institute in Nalchik, claiming that it was operating without a license.<sup>56</sup> Law enforcement agencies arrested Muslims attending mosques; later, the authorities closed all mosques in Kabardino-Balkaria. In response, young Muslims organized into an underground organization they called Jamaat, opposing the Muftiate, which they perceived as a part of a corrupt local political elite.<sup>57</sup> The leader of the SBM since 1990, Shafi Pshikhachev, resigned in 2002, and his relative, Anas Pshikhachev, took over his position. Law enforcement agencies persecuted both Mukozhev and Astemirov, and later killed both;<sup>58</sup> Nakhushev also disappeared after being summoned for investigation.

By the time Kokov resigned, law enforcement agencies had alienated and enraged many young Muslims with their policies of torture, forced shaving of beards, and even shaving crosses onto Muslims' heads. On October 13, 2005, groups of young Muslims attacked the headquarters of law enforcement agencies in Nalchik. More than 130 people died. The new governor, Arsen Kanokov, called the event "a national tragedy" and took a number of conciliatory measures, including

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53. Georgi M. Derluguian and Sufian N. Zhemukhov, "Making and Breaking the Political Machine in Kabardino-Balkaria," *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 21, no. 4, (2013): 531–557.

54. Georgi M. Derluguian, *Bourdieu's Secret Admirer in the Caucasus: A World-System Biography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

55. Anna Politkovskaya, "Skol'ko Shagov Ot Molitvy Do Boya?" *Novaya Gazeta*, July 11, 2005, <http://politkovskaya.novayagazeta.ru/pub/2005/2005-096.shtml>.

56. Musa Alibekov, "Nalchik Authorities Launch Wahhabi Witch-hunt," Institute for War and Peace, November 17, 2000, <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/nalchik-authorities-launch-wahhabi-witch-hunt>.

57. Konstantin Kazenin, "Kabardino-Balkaria: Skil'ko Stoin Tishina," Carnegie Moscow Center, January 26, 2017, <http://carnegie.ru/commentary/?fa=67769>.

58. Louisa Orazaeva, "Information about murder of Musa Mukozhev in Kabardino-Balkaria confirmed," Caucasus Knot, May 11, 2009, <http://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/10069/>; Mairbek Vatchagaev, "Death of Anzor Astemirov Does not Mark the End of the Insurgency in Kabardino-Balkaria," *North Caucasus Weekly*, September 14, 2010, <https://jamestown.org/program/death-of-anzor-astemirov-does-not-mark-the-end-of-the-insurgency-in-kabardino-balkaria/>.

reopening mosques and firing the head of the local law enforcement agency.<sup>59</sup> The situation, however, was already out of hand. One of the lessons of the 2005 events in Kabardino-Balkaria was that they revealed the same problems and clashes inside Kabardino-Balkaria as existed throughout the North Caucasus.

The leader of the 2005 terrorist attack, Astemirov, became one of the founders of the Caucasus Emirate, and the leader of Vilayat of Kabarda, Balkaria, and Karachai (KBK). Following the 2005 attack and until Astemirov's death in 2010, the level of violence in Kabardino-Balkaria remained low, with the exception of the high-profile assassination of a senior law enforcement official in 2008. *Radio Free Europe* claimed that Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachaevo-Cherkessia "have in recent years been an oasis of relative calm and stability compared with Ingushetia and Dagestan, where insurgent attacks on police and security forces occur almost daily."<sup>60</sup>

After Astemirov's death in 2010, the level of violence increased dramatically. Under a new leader, Asker Jappuev, Vilayat KBK intensified attacks on Siloviks and targeted civilians, including Muslims labeled as "Muslim hypocrites" and "idolatry followers." The assassination of Mufti Pshikhachev widened the clash between the insurgents and the Muftiate. The assassination of Aslan Tsipinov, a prominent folklore scholar and ethnic activist, marked the start of a conflict between the local intelligentsia and the insurgents. The assassination of Mikhail Mambetov, a county governor, indicated that the Vilayat KBK had started targeting not only law enforcement agencies but also bureaucrats. The assassination of tourists from Moscow and an explosion at a local power plant disrupted the government's economic policy. A new split among the insurgents in Kabardino-Balkaria emerged between the Caucasus Emirate jihadists and the followers of ISIS. The leader of the Vilayat KBK, Zalim Shebzukhov, refused to pledge allegiance to ISIS and issued an audio statement appealing to militants who joined ISIS to return to the North Caucasus. Some experts interpreted the statement as a sign that the Caucasus Emirate was disoriented because of its rivalry with ISIS jihadists. However, there have not been any open clashes between CE and ISIS supporters in Kabardino-Balkaria.<sup>61</sup> Shebzukhov was killed during an antiterrorist operation in St. Petersburg in 2016, and it remains unclear what new policy his successor will develop.

The new Mufti of Kabardino-Balkaria, Khazretali Dzasezhev, turned out to be a less controversial figure than his predecessor, and his appointment in 2011 eased the clashes between the Muftiate and Salafis. The new Mufti also developed relations with Sufism that differed from those in the eastern republics of Chechnya, Dagestan, and Ingushetia. Sufism in Kabardino-Balkaria arrived through Circassian diaspora channels. Traditionally oriented toward teacher-student relations, local Sufis adopted religious educational goals and became initially involved with the Nalchik Islamic Institute where the local Salafi movement had originated. Though the Sufi movement distanced itself from the conflict between Salafis and the Muftiate, Sufism indirectly served as

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59. Sufian N. Zhemukhov, "One Thousand Years of Islam in Kabarda: An Experiment in Periodization," *Anthropology and Archaeology of Eurasia* 49:4, 2011, 54–71.

60. "Kabardian Insurgent Leader Killed In Nalchik," RFL/RL, March 25, 2010, [https://www.rferl.org/a/Kabardian\\_Insurgent\\_Leader\\_Killed\\_In\\_Nalchik/1993551.html](https://www.rferl.org/a/Kabardian_Insurgent_Leader_Killed_In_Nalchik/1993551.html).

61. Oleg Krasnov, "Experts link Shebzukhov's statement with weakening of Imerat Kavkaz," *Caucasus Knot*, January 6, 2016, <http://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/34201/>.

mediator between the two. The new generation of locally educated religious leaders became incorporated in Muftiate structures and helped to prevent clashes with young Salafis. In 2017, a former Nalchik Islamic Institute teacher, Anzor Shkhanukov, was appointed as deputy Mufti; he became known for preaching Islam in the local language and founding a religious website in the native language.<sup>62</sup> Shkhanukov's appointment indicated a reconciliation of the Muftiate with Salafism and Sufism.

Different groups in the political elites used ethnic nationalist organizations in their struggle for power. The clashes between Kabardian and Balkar nationalist organizations were territorial, centered on a Russian federal law<sup>63</sup> that gives the county municipalities control over land. Tensions arose around the disputed informal inner border between historical Kabarda and Balkaria. The Council of Elders of the Balkar People (CEBP) advocated for the redistribution of territory in favor of Balkar-majority municipalities.<sup>64</sup> The issue was sensitive to both Kabardian and Balkar activists because both ethnic groups regarded any contemporary redistribution of land between municipalities as changing their future borders. The main strategy of the CEBP included organizing sitting protests of several Balkar elders in Moscow in order to bring the Kremlin's attention to the fact that the leadership of KBR supposedly refused to implement the federal law. In response, the authorities labeled CEBP as an extremist group.

### *Karachaevo-Cherkessia*

As one of the most ethnically diverse regions in the North Caucasus, Karachaevo-Cherkessia developed a political elite that constantly negotiates over ethnic representation in government structures. The dual name of the republic reflects the fact that it has two titular ethnic groups, Karachais and Cherkes, who make up 41.0 percent and 11.9 percent, respectively; other ethnic groups with state languages include ethnic Russians (31.6), Abazins (7.8), and Nogais (3.3). Ethnic issues in Karachaevo-Cherkessia have been the main cause of the split inside the local political elite, which did not raise levels of violence, unlike in Dagestan. The annual level of violence in Karachaevo-Cherkessia consistently remained among the lowest in the North Caucasus, reaching 32 victims in 2011 and declining to zero victims in 2014 and 2016 (see Figure 7).

Ethnic groups inside the local political elite have not been able to negotiate representation in state structures. The political situation remains unstable, similar to that in Dagestan. It has manifested in assassinations of local politicians, unlike in Kabardino-Balkaria where the political elite resolved the ethnic balance issue in the 1990s.

The 1999 election of Vladimir Semenov, a retired Russian army general, to the presidency of the republic caused a major political crisis. Ethnic clashes among the political elite culminated in high-profile assassinations of local politicians, including two members of the local parliament. Only the Kremlin's direct mediation helped to resolve the conflict. The tenure of the next

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62. *Dinri Duneiri*, <http://dinri-duneiri.ru>

63. "Federal Law 131-FZ of the Russian Federation, On General Principles of Local Self-governing in the Russian Federation," *Rossiiskaia Gazeta*, October 8, 2003, <https://rg.ru/2003/10/08/zakonsamouprav.html>.

64. Sergei Markedonov, *De-fakto Obrazovaniia Postsovetskogo Prostranstva: Dvadsat' Let Gosudarstvennogo Stroitel'stva* (Yerevan: Caucasus Institute, 2012).

governor, Mustafa Batdyev (2003–2008), did not resolve the split between Karachai and Cherkess political elites. High-profile assassinations continued, including the killing of several members of the local parliament and the vice premier minister, Ansar Tebuev. A mixture of political and oligarchic clashes brought the republic to a new crisis in 2004, when a member of the local parliament, Rasul Bogatyrev, and six businessmen were assassinated in a house belonging to the governor's son-in-law. The relatives of the victims stormed the governor's office and Batdyev fled the building. The Kremlin intervened once again, firing the local chief of police, minister of interior affairs, and the district attorney, but leaving the governor in power. In 2008, the Kremlin appointed a new governor, Boris Ebzeyev, former judge of the Russian Constitutional Court. This did not stop the assassinations, however; Islam Krymshkhalov, a member of the local parliament and the governor's close political ally, was killed in 2009. The political elite went through another major crisis after Ebzeyev appointed a non-Cherkess prime minister. Although officials took steps to replace ethnic Greek Vladimir Kayshev, the man chosen for the post, Fral Shebzukhov, was murdered before he could take the job. Experts argued that the governor failed to build effective connections with the local elites.<sup>65</sup>

Alongside these conflicts inside the political elite, new ones emerged between the Siloviks and Salafis, much as in neighboring Kabardino-Balkaria. In 2005, law enforcement agencies started detaining and torturing followers of Salafism. In response, radicalized Muslims led by Vakhtang Aliev organized a group of so-called police assassins, killing local police officers suspected of torturing young Muslims.<sup>66</sup> The Muftiate aligned with the Siloviks against Salafis. In the ensuing violence, several religious leaders were killed, including the deputy Mufti, Abubakir Kurbizhev, who publicly preached that Salafis/Wahhabis were the main enemies of Islam.<sup>67</sup> In 2006, law enforcement agencies killed several members of Vakhtang Aliev's group<sup>68</sup> and announced the region "free from any terrorist Jamaats—either Karachai or Cherkess ones."<sup>69</sup> The violence, however, did not stop, and the local insurgents joined the ranks of Vilayat KBK of the Caucasus Emirate. Shortly after the Kremlin appointed Ebzeyev in 2008, jihadists killed the local head of the anti-extremist department, Alibek Urakchiev, in his own home. The following year, jihadists killed the deputy Mufti, Ismail Bostanov.

The Kremlin dismissed Ebzeyev in 2011—before the end of his term—citing unsatisfactory performance.<sup>70</sup> The Kremlin's choice for the next governor was a young businessman, Rashid Temrezov.

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65. Karina Gadzhieva, "Obstanovka v Karachaevo-Cherkessii Zavisit ot Rezul'tatov Rassledovaniya Gromkikh Ubiistv, Schitayut Mestnye Eksperty," *Kavkazskii Uzel*, April 2, 2012, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/204096/>.

66. Murat Gukemukhov, "Spetsnaz Unichtozhil Karachaevsky Jamaat," *Kommersant*, April 28, 2006, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/670693>.

67. Yulia Latynina, "Attack on Mufti Was No Commercial Dispute," *The Moscow Times*, July 24, 2012, <https://themoscowtimes.com/articles/attack-on-mufti-was-no-commercial-dispute-16507>.

68. "Attack on Cherkessk Prevented in Karachayev-Cherkessia," *Caucasian Knot*, March 13, 2007, <http://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/5529>.

69. Alexander Semyonov, "FSB Branch Head: Extremism Liquidated in Karachaevo-Cherkessia," *Caucasian Knot*, March 23, 2007, <http://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/5575/>.

70. "Glava Karachaevo-Cherkessii Dosrochno Pokinul Post," *RIA Novosti*, February 26, 2011, <https://ria.ru/politics/20110226/339368750.html>.

The relative youth of the new governor, who was 34 years old at the time of his appointment, and his close connections with ex-governor Batdyev led to worries that violence would increase.<sup>71</sup> Temrezov's government, however, managed to bring many conflicting sides to agreement. Though the political elite remains divided, ethnic groups have reached a relative consensus that has helped to reduce the political and ethnic turmoil in the region.

In the religious sphere, the new administration continued to support the Muftiate, at the same time seeking compromise with the Salafis. Experts assess that this approach helped to resolve conflict between different trends of Islam in Karachaevo-Cherkessia. During conflicts between the Muftiate and Salafi followers, the local authorities usually step in and mediate negotiations. Successful examples of negotiations included compromises such as maintaining a pro-Muftiate Imam at a given mosque while allowing an informal Salafi leader to lead the Friday community prayers.<sup>72</sup> Local officials thus partly accommodate Salafi followers' demands instead of harassing them. The tension between the younger generation of Salafi followers and the older Muftiate clerics remains high, but it is restricted to theological debates rather than violence.

### Religious Dynamics in Muslim Minority Regions: Stavropol Krai, North Ossetia, Adygea, and Krasnodar Krai

Regions with Muslim minorities have developed a different dynamic from those regions discussed above. The four discussed here include Adygea and North Ossetia, where Muslims remain a significant minority at around 20 percent, and Stavropol and Krasnodar Krai, where Muslims are an even smaller fraction of the population. In all four cases, the state's support for the local Muftiate has been rather weak. Indeed, in some instances, local law enforcement personnel have arrested pro-government Imams of local mosques. As elsewhere, in these regions state policy remains intolerant toward Salafism.

#### *Stavropol Krai*

Stavropol Krai occupies a unique geographical position bordering all of the regions in the North Caucasus Federal District (NCFD), with the exception of Ingushetia (see Figure 6). The capital of the NCFD, Pyatigorsk, is in Stavropol Krai. During the Soviet era, Stavropol Krai included Karachaevo-Cherkessia, just as Krasnodar Krai included Adygea. In post-Soviet Russia, there was a single Muftiate covering both regions for many years. After Stavropol Krai became the center of the newly created NCFD in 2010, local authorities established the Stavropol Muftiate, which included 16 of the region's 22 Muslim communities, with the rest forming the Muftiate of Karachaevo-Cherkessia.<sup>73</sup>

Muslims represent small and divided minority groups in Stavropol Krai, with only ethnic Dargins from Dagestan comprising more than one percent of the population. All ethnic non-Russians in Stavropol

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71. Fatima Tlisova, "Prezidenty i Klany," *Voice of America*, February 26, 2011, <https://www.golos-ameriki.ru/a/karachayevo-cherkessiya-president-02-26-2011-116984808/216568.html>.

72. Konstantin Kazenin, "Selo Vmesto Goroda: Kak Sokhranili Mir V Karachaevo-Cherkessii," Carnegie Moscow Center, February 3, 2016, <http://carnegie.ru/commentary/?fa=62652>.

73. Natalia Bykova, "Musul'mane Stavropolia Ob'edinilis," *Stavropol'skaya Pravda*, May 5, 2010, [http://www.stpravda.ru/20100505/prinyato\\_reshenie\\_o\\_sozdanii\\_dukhovnogo\\_upravleniya\\_musulman\\_sta\\_44664.html](http://www.stpravda.ru/20100505/prinyato_reshenie_o_sozdanii_dukhovnogo_upravleniya_musulman_sta_44664.html).

Krai, including the indigenous ethnic groups Nogai and Turkmen, are labeled as “diaspora” groups despite being Russian citizens.<sup>74</sup> The indigenous status of Nogai and Turkmen is not officially recognized and their proportion of the population is only 0.79 and 0.54 percent, respectively.<sup>75</sup>

Muslim minorities of Stavropol Krai have had to overcome a number of challenges in order to build mosques, including passive-aggressive resistance from local authorities and ethnic Russian nationalists. This is compounded by a tendency of the government’s Committee for Ethnic and Cossack Affairs to take pro-ethnic Russian positions in its approaches to interethnic and interreligious issues. In 2014, ethnic Russian nationalists and Cossack activists lobbied for an administrative decision to take down an almost-finished mosque in Pyatigorsk; instead, the authorities issued a permit for building a new mosque in the settlement of Vinsady. Vinsady translates as “Vine Orchards,” which might be seen as inappropriate considering the Islamic prohibition of alcohol. Two more mosques in Muslim Karachai settlements in suburban Kislovodsk, Industriia and Belorechensk, were pronounced “illegal” and courts ordered them to be taken down. Sergey Popov, a former member of the Russian presidential staff who now leads the ethnic nationalist organization Russian Unity of the Caucasus (REKA), has argued that mosques pose potential terrorist threats and proposed that any decisions to build new mosques be taken via referendums.<sup>76</sup>

Beginning in 2012, a series of unsolved murders of local Muslims took place in Stavropol Krai. First, the deputy Mufti, Kurman Ismailov, was killed in Pyatigorsk by a bomb attached to his car.<sup>77</sup> In 2013, Ibragim Nurov, a Muslim activist from the village of Abram-Tube, was kidnapped from a mosque and found dead with evidence of torture on his body.<sup>78</sup> Mansur Ajigisiev, a deputy imam of village Kangly, died as a result of lack of medical care while in detention. He was detained after police found a weapon in his house, though his relatives claimed that the weapon was placed there by authorities.<sup>79</sup> In 2014, Zamir Taibov, a teacher of the Koran for children in the village Tukui-Mekteb and a former police officer, was killed. According to his relatives, his body was found next to the local police station bearing evidence of torture, a day after he was summoned for investigation by the local FSB. A community gathering questioned the investigators. Alexander Oldak, head of the main office of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs in Stavropol Krai, promised to send a monthly investigation report to the community, but did not do so and avoided further

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74. Maya A. Astvatsurova, “Stavropol’skii Krai” in *Etnopoloticheskaya Situatsiya v Rossii I Sopredel’nykh Gosudarstvakh v 2014 godu: Ezhegodny Doklad* (Moscow: Russian Academy of Sciences’ Institute of Anthropology and Ethnography, 2016), 628.

75. Vitaly Belozerov, A. N. Panin, R. A. Prikhod’ko, V. V. Chikhichin, A. A. Cherkasov, *Etnicheskii Atlas Stavropol’skogo Kraia* (Stavropol: FOK-Yug, 2014), 17.

76. Maya A. Astvatsurova, “Stavropol’skii Krai,” 631; Alexandr Masalov, “Za Chto V Stavropol’e Pressuyut Sergeya Popova?” *Yuzhny Federalny*, November 19, 2014, <http://u-f.ru/Article/u330/2014/11/19/694792>.

77. No author, “Pokhorony Ubitogo Zamestitelya Muftiia Stavropolckogo Kraia Namecheny Na 15 Fevralia,” *Kavkazskii Usel*, February 14, 2012, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/201129/>.

78. No author, “Ubitiy V Stavropol’skom Krae Ibragim Nurov ranee Byl Pokhishchen Iz Mecheti,” *Kavkazskii Usel*, December 31, 2013, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/236089/>.

79. “Mansur Adzhigisiev Umer V Gorodskoi Bol’nitse Georgievskaya,” *Kavkazskii Usel*, December 26, 2013, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/235767/>.



meetings.<sup>80</sup> Later that year, Almaz Abdalnasyrov, a Muslim activist from Kara-Tube and a Chechen war veteran, was found dead with evidence of torture on his body, including damaged internal organs and toes burned practically to ashes.<sup>81</sup> In 2015, Zamirbek Makhmutov, a deputy of the imam of Irgakly village and a graduate of the Russian Islamic University of Kazan, was killed on his way to the mosque for morning prayer.<sup>82</sup> In 2016, Ravil Kaibaliev, a deputy of the imam of Kara-Tube village and known for his advocacy for the rights of school students to wear hijab, was shot on a highway; his body was discovered next to his car.<sup>83</sup>

Stavropol Muslims accuse local government of encouraging nationalistic and Islamophobic sentiments among the local ethnic-Russian majority. In 2014, the Kremlin replaced the long-time communist governor, Alexander Chernogorov, with a new one, Vladimir Vladimirov. Policies, however, have not changed.

### *North Ossetia*

North Ossetia stands out from other regions of the North Caucasus Federal District as an ethnic republic (of the Ossetian ethnic group) with an Orthodox Christian majority, the faith of most ethnic Russians. Ethnic Ossetians are followers of three different religious traditions: Orthodox Christianity, Islam, and “traditional” Ossetian beliefs. Many Ossetians regard the third set of beliefs as part of their ethnic identity rather than a religion. Surveys among Ossetians indicate many people who identify as Rodnovery, or ethnic Neo-Pagans. In 2012, 29 percent of Ossetians stated that they “follow traditional religion of their ancestors, worship gods and forces of nature”; 49 percent identified themselves as Orthodox Christians; and 4 percent as Muslims. About 30 percent of Ossetians have Muslim ancestors,<sup>84</sup> but less than half of those practice Islam.<sup>85</sup> According to research by Dzeranov and Oleinikov, 22–34 percent of Ossetians combine Christian and Pagan traditions.<sup>86</sup> Anthropologic observations also affirm that Ossetians tend to combine religions; Ossetians who identify as Muslim often perform Pagan prayers at their family shrines.<sup>87</sup> Religious syncretism is one of the factors that help Ossetian society maintain religious tolerance and avoid conflicts and clashes.

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80. “Na Stavropolie Uchastniki Narodnogo Skhoda Razoshlis Posle Obeshchaniya Silovikov Rassledovat’ Ubiistvo Zamira Taibova,” *Kavkazskii Uzel*, June 16, 2014, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/244352/>.

81. “V Neftekumskom Raione Prokhodiat Pokhorony Ubitogo V Novoselitskom Raione Muzhchiny,” *Kavkazskii Uzel*, July 23, 2014, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/246297/>.

82. Magomed Tuvaev, “Religiozny deatel’ Ubit Na Stavropolie,” *Kavkazskii Uzel*, August 20, 2015, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/267520/>.

83. Magomed Tuvaev, “Na Stavropolie Ubit Zamestitel’ Imama Ravil’ Kaibaliev,” *Kavkazskii Uzel*, September 26, 2016, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/289955/>.

84. Nadezhda Emelianova, *Musul’mane Osetii: Na Perekrestke Tsivilizatsii* (Moscow: RIK, 2003), 6.

85. Mikhail Poshchin, “Islam V Osetii,” *Keston Institute: Russkoe Review* 34 (2009), [http://www.keston.org.uk/\\_russianreview/edition34/03-roschins-muslim-osetia.html](http://www.keston.org.uk/_russianreview/edition34/03-roschins-muslim-osetia.html).

86. Timur Dzeraniv, Olga Oleinikova, “Religioznaia Situatsiia V Respublike Severkaia Ossetiia-Alaniia,” *Keston Institute: Russkoe Review* 34 (2009), [http://www.keston.org.uk/\\_russianreview/edition34/02osetia-religious-statistics.html](http://www.keston.org.uk/_russianreview/edition34/02osetia-religious-statistics.html).

87. Nadezhda Emelianova, *Musul’mane Osetii: Na Perekrestke Tsivilizatsii* (Moscow: RIK, 2003), 18–22.

Ingush-Ossetian border tensions, discussed above, remain a factor of concern. This conflict, however, does not have a religious component, in spite of the fact that the Ingush are Muslims while the majority of Ossetians are Orthodox Christians. The conflict is instead rooted in territorial and ethnic disputes between the neighboring republics.

The first manifestation of local violent jihadists in North Ossetia was the 2004 Beslan tragedy, when insurgents took more than 1,100 people, including 777 children, hostage in the local school. The struggle between the insurgents and Russian military led to the deaths of 385 people, including 186 children. The fact that among the insurgents was an Ossetian, Vladimir Khodov from the village of Elkhotovo, raised concerns that “Wahhabism” had spread to North Ossetia. Later, a number of ethnic Ossetians joined North Caucasus terrorist networks. Some joined Salafi Jamaats, including Kataib al-Khaul, which was suspected of organizing terrorist attacks in North Ossetia.

In response, North Ossetia law enforcement agencies have cracked down on local Muslims suspected of sympathies toward insurgents. Most notably, the Mufti of North Ossetia, Ali-haji Evteev, was accused of being a Wahhabi follower and forced to leave the Russian Federation.

Meanwhile, anti-Islamic rhetoric was on the rise and itself met with violent backlash. In 2008, Shamil Dzhigkayev, an Ossetian poet and dean of the local university, wrote an anti-Muslim poem titled “Wolf Cubs Doing the Hajj,” which created a scandal in the region. In 2011, Dzhigkayev was killed by his nephew, allegedly on religious grounds.<sup>88</sup> Those tragic events were followed by a series of arrests of local Muslims. The Muftiate condemned Dzhigkayev’s murder, but also accused law enforcement officers of planting weapons and narcotics on arrested Muslims and using torture during investigations. An “anti-Wahhabi” group called on people to take up arms, arguing that authorities could not guarantee security.<sup>89</sup> In 2012 and 2014, two deputies of the Mufti, Ibragim Dudarov and Rasul Gamzatov, were killed. Both murders remain unsolved.

The election of a new Mufti, Khadzhimurat Gatsalov in 2016, decreased tension between Muslims and other groups. Nonetheless, heated anti-Islamic discussions on the Internet, including on neo-pagan social media, contribute to what remains an unstable situation.

### *Adygea Republic and Krasnodar Krai*

This section analyzes two regions, Adygea and Krasnodar Krai, which are not part of the North Caucasus Federal Districts administratively, but have the same tendencies as other regions, being part of the North Caucasus geographically. Adygea is enclosed within Krasnodar Krai (see Figure 6). Its ethnic composition is different from other regions, with the titular nationality, Adyge, forming a minority (24.3 percent) while Russians represent the majority (61.5 percent). Under the USSR, Adygea was formally a part of Krasnodar Krai, but is now a separate entity. In Krasnodar Krai, ethnic Russians form the majority of the population (88.3 percent). Armenians, Ukrainians, and Greeks represent sizable minority groups. Adyge represents only 0.3 percent of the Krai’s population.

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88. Svetlana Emelianova, “V Severnoi Osetii Ubit Izvestny narodny Poet Shamil’ Dzhigkaev,” *Possiiskaia Gazeta*, May 26, 2011, <https://rg.ru/2011/05/26/reg-kuban/poet-anons.html>.

89. Valery Dzitsev, “Severnaia Osetiia Stanovitsia Chastiu Severokavkazskoi Real’nosti,” *Kavkazskii Uzel*, June 16, 2011, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/187358/>.

Post-Soviet Islamization took place in Adygea in the context of no previous Islamic educational system or religious practices. The republic did not have a single mosque; all previous mosques had been destroyed during the Soviet era. Post-Soviet Islamization in Adygea included the active building of mosques, Hajj pilgrimage, distribution of Islamic literature, and translation of the Koran into the Adygean dialect. Adygea and Krasnodar Krai represent a rare case in the Russian North Caucasus because the local Muftiate was able to preserve unity in the Muslim community and prevent generational and ideological splits. The local Muftiate conducted a balanced policy toward young Muslims and included them in Muftiate structures. It also firmly opposed Siloviks' harassment of local Muslims. The combination of these two approaches helped to prevent the sort of Muftiate-versus-Salafism split seen elsewhere.<sup>90</sup> The number of violent jihadists from Adygea who have joined ISIS remains low.<sup>91</sup>

Adygea and Krasnodar Krai have a single combined Muftiate, with headquarters in Adygea. Though Adygea and Krasnodar Krai became separated from the North Caucasus Federal District in 2010, the Muftiate remained a member of the Coordination Council of Muslims of North Caucasus (CCMNC). In 2010, the Muftiate established a branch in Krasnodar. Prior to that, Krasnodar Muslims used to gather in one of the city's movie theaters, Gorizont. After the establishment of a Muftiate office in Krasnodar, it became a place where the local Muslims conducted their prayers. In 2014, Krasnodar authorities refused to prolong the lease of the building to the Muftiate. The imam of Krasnodar, Nejmetdin Abazi, expressed the general frustration of local Muslims: "We feel foreign in our own country. Such a state of affairs disturbs all believers."<sup>92</sup>

Only five mosques exist in Krasnodar Krai, all of them in villages and none in towns. The capital of the region, Krasnodar, does not have a mosque, although the majority of the Muslim population lives in the capital. In 2010, Russian president Dmitry Medvedev publicly promised to build a mosque in Sochi; however, the local authorities refused to give permission to do so. The absence of mosques in Krasnodar towns forces many Muslims to commute from Krasnodar Krai to Adygea in order to perform Friday and holy day prayers.

## CONCLUSIONS AND AVENUES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The discussion above describes two kinds of policies undertaken in and near the North Caucasus toward Salafi groups. One approach combines support of the local Muftiate with suppression of Salafism. The second seeks to initiate public dialogue between the Muftiate and Salafis. The outcomes of both approaches have varied in different regions. Further research is needed to assess, for example, to what extent inconsistency in both support for the Muftiate and dialogue with

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90. Akhmet Yarlykapov, "Musul'mane Adygei: Opyt Etnograficheskogo Issledovaniia," *Religiovedenie* 1 (2005): 23–37.

91. Naima Nefliasheva, "Adygeia: Protsessy Reislamizatsii I Vyzovy Islamskogo radikalizma, 1990–2015," *Vestnik Volgogradskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta*, 21, no. 2 (2016), 112.

92. Magomed Tuaev, "Krasnodar Territory Has Secret Ban on Building Mosques, Said Source From Muslim Community," *Caucasian Knot*, September 24, 2014, <http://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/29433/>; Magomed Tuaev, "Na Kubani Deistviet Neglasnyi Zapret Na Stroitel'stvo Mechetei," *Kavkazskii Uzel*, September 24, 2014, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/249591/>.

Salafis has contributed to Dagestan's position as the most insecure region in the North Caucasus. Chechnya represents the most aggressive state policy against Salafism combined with the strongest support for the Muftiate, which is de facto incorporated into the state. The level of violence in the region remains high, including substantial human rights violations. Ingushetia presents the most dramatic case of successful "soft power" policy. Thanks to the government's noninterference in religious policy, the level of violence in this region dropped significantly. The moderate approach in Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachaevo-Cherkessia, where authorities indirectly support the Muftiate and passive-aggressively oppose Salafism, has also proven effective. Muslim-minority regions evidence different dynamics. Small and divided Muslim communities in Stavropol Krai and Krasnodar Krai suffer from ethnic Russian nationalism, marginalization, and anti-Muslim violence. State support for the Muftiate is rather limited in Adygea and North Ossetia, where Muslim minorities belong to the titular ethnic groups.

The Russian state's involvement in religious affairs throughout these regions remains strong, but the state does not exercise direct control over religion as it did in the Soviet era. Official religious policy, however, is inconsistent and varies from region to region. Siloviks and political elites often act overly aggressive towards religious groups. This may increase sympathy toward violent jihadists among the local population. With too many actors and political-economic-religious-ethnic factors involved, however, it would be incorrect to claim a direct correlation between the state's policy and violence in the region. Nevertheless, it is evident that the Russian state has so far failed to develop regional policies that would help establish and maintain security in the North Caucasus.

More research into the Russian state's methods would contribute to a better understanding of the effectiveness and practical value these approaches have had in different regions. Further research is needed in order to understand why the North Caucasus has remained the most unstable part of Russia for a quarter of a century. Numerous factors contribute to conflict, including separatism, economic troubles, corruption, and radical/extremist ideologies. The Kremlin's use of excessive military and law-enforcement measures in order to resolve challenges to the Russian state represents a legal and moral problem in and of itself. It is unclear whether Russian use of force has helped build security or exacerbated violence. Fieldwork and micro-level studies are needed to evaluate the effect of the state's involvement in disputes between pro-government Muftiates, which have espoused local versions of Islam, and young followers of Salafism, a puritan version of Islam—and specifically, how state-church relations affect the violent radicalization of young people.

## Recommendations

Unemployment and the absence of social mobility are often seen as among the main causes of young people's violent radicalization. Certainly they are part and parcel of the region's continuing poverty. More needs to be done to improve educational and employment opportunities in the North Caucasus.

Local authorities should avoid interfering in disputes between local Muftiate structures and followers of Salafism. Instead, they should help facilitate dialogue between them.

Improved Islamic education of formal religious leaders would help resolve the problem of their perceived legitimacy among the Muslim community, one of the main sources of tension between

Muftiates and Salafis; Islamic education should be developed in the contexts of both Shaafi and Hanafi schools, which have historically been least prone to conflict in the region.

The current state of affairs, of regional Muftiates unsubsordinated to any federal and/or federal-district structures, seems most effective. It helps Muftiates to remain connected to the Muslim community at the grassroots level and avoid dependencies on hierarchical bureaucratic structures.

Instead of trying to use the Muftiate to suppress religious grassroots movements, as is the case in Chechnya, the state should encourage the Muftiate to engage in dialogue with all religious actors, since such a policy has reduced tension in several republics. Such cooperation could also help to develop civil society.

Regional diversity of Muftiates enables the development of different approaches, which can help identify more effective ways to cooperate with Salafism, which is itself a grassroots movement and differs from region to region.

Human rights violations in Chechnya remain of great concern and also represent a challenge to regional stability. The Russian government should adopt a no-tolerance policy and prosecute perpetrators of such violations.

The practice of punishing relatives of suspects, which is openly practiced in Chechnya and to a lesser extent in other regions, is unlawful, a substantial human rights violation, and risks provoking retribution. It should be stopped.

The government should strongly implement state-church separation in Chechnya and end the de facto incorporation of the Muftiate into local government structures.

Government authorities should not discourage recent positive cooperation between Muftiates and Sufism in Kabardino-Balkaria, where it has contributed to reducing tension inside the Muslim community as it has in Chechnya, Dagestan, and Ingushetia.



Part IV

# Implications Beyond Russia





# Ukraine's Church Politics in War and Revolution

Jeffrey Mankoff and Alexei Miller

Religious identity and religious institutions remain understudied components of Russian efforts to influence political outcomes in neighboring countries. Religion is particularly salient in Russia's relations with Ukraine, whose population is majority Orthodox and where the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) has long been an important actor. Even at the best of times, however, this lever has never been an easy one for Moscow to operate, given the pluralism of Ukraine's Christians (both Orthodox and non-Orthodox) and the different models of church-state relations existing in the two countries. The outbreak of the "Revolution of Dignity" and the conflict in Donbas have, if anything, made Russian efforts to instrumentalize religion for foreign policy goals more difficult.

The ROC, which maintains close connections to the Kremlin and has come to play a larger role in Russian domestic politics under Vladimir Putin, is an important component of Moscow's soft power, especially in the post-Soviet region.<sup>1</sup> While the Church and the Kremlin do not always have identical objectives, they have developed an increasingly symbiotic relationship centered on the promotion of "traditional values" and the notion of a Moscow-centric "Russian World (*russskiy mir*)."<sup>2</sup> Both the Kremlin and the ROC view Ukraine as part of the *russskiy mir* and have discussed the conflict there in specifically religious terms.<sup>2</sup> Yet Ukraine's religious diversity and the growth of anti-Russian nationalism over the past few years limit the effectiveness of Russian soft power, including the influence of the ROC.

In addition to its role inside Russia, the ROC is the mother church for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP), Ukraine's canonical Orthodox church, and consequently

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1. Irina du Quenoy, "Russian Orthodox Concordat? Church and State under Medvedev," *Nationalities Papers* 39, no. 5 (September 2011): 667–683; Jeffrey Mankoff, "Russian Soft Power in West Asia," in Mehran Kamrava, ed., *The Great Game in West Asia: Iran, Turkey, and the South Caucasus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 141–160.

2. In his 2014 address to parliament, Vladimir Putin likened Crimea to the Temple Mount in its spiritual significance to followers of Russian Orthodoxy; Vladimir Putin, "Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly," The Russian President's official website, December 4, 2014, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/47173/videos>.

a direct stakeholder in Ukraine. The ROC worries that Ukraine's anti-Russian backlash or the outbreak of widespread disorder inside Ukraine could be detrimental to its Ukrainian affiliate and to its own influence in Ukraine. The leadership of the ROC has thus sought to walk a fine line in Ukraine, rhetorically supporting the *russkiy mir* concept that Kirill himself has long promoted while seeking to avoid actions that could be interpreted as overtly political.<sup>3</sup>

While the ROC hierarchy's role in the conflict is limited, other actors have sought to manipulate religious sentiments in Ukraine to advance Russian strategic objectives. These include some clerics within the UOC-MP, along with figures like the oligarch Konstantin Malofeev, whom the Ukrainian authorities charge with funneling money and supplies to the Donbas separatists, leading to his inclusion on U.S. and EU sanctions lists. An avowed monarchist, "Orthodox businessman," and proponent of restoring the Russian empire, Malofeev has long maintained close ties with hardline elements within the ROC as well as many of the figures who went on to become central players in the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk "people's republics."<sup>4</sup> Malofeev has frequently coordinated his actions with ROC clerics, notably Bishop Tikhon (Shevkunov) of Yegoryevsk, as well as Patriarch Kirill himself.<sup>5</sup> These activities suggest that Orthodox identity, if not necessarily Orthodox spirituality, plays an important role in Russian efforts to keep Ukraine within Moscow's political and cultural orbit. These efforts have had some impact, particularly in Crimea and the separatist-controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, where adherents of the ROC and UOC-MP are more numerous, and which are now under de facto Russian political control. Elsewhere in Ukraine though, the situation is more complicated.

As an arena for Russian religious influence, Ukraine remains somewhat *sui generis*. Above all, Ukraine is unique in the region because of the degree of pluralism within its Christian community. Though Ukraine has a politically powerful church linked to Moscow, it also includes a range of competing Christian groups that contest the right of the UOC-MP to speak for the nation. Religion has been an important component of the struggle to define a distinct Ukrainian national identity since the nineteenth century, and some of the most influential Christian groups in Ukraine embrace an openly anti-Russian stance that makes them immune to Russian outreach (in contrast to Belarus or Georgia, whose Christian communities are both more homogeneous and whose

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3. Patriarch Kirill, "Obrashchenie Svyateyshego Patriarkha Moskovskogo i vseya Rusi Kirilla k mestoblyustitel'yu Kievskoy mitropolich'ey kafedry mitropolitu Chernovitskomu i Bukovinskomu Onufriyu, arhipastyryam, pastyryam i vsem vernym chadom Ukrainskoy Pravoslavnoy Tserkvi v svyazi s situatsiyey na Ukraine," Russian Orthodox Church, March 2, 2014, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/3588256.html>; George Soroka, "Putin's Patriarch: Does the Kremlin Control the Church?" *Foreign Affairs*, February 2, 2016, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russian-federation/2016-02-11/putins-patriarch>.

4. Oleg Kashin, "Iz Kryma v Donbass: priklyucheniya Igorya Strelkova i Aleksandra Borodaya," *Republic*, May 19, 2014, [https://republic.ru/russia/iz\\_kryma\\_v\\_donbass\\_priklyucheniya\\_igorya\\_strelkova\\_i\\_aleksandra\\_borodaya-1099696.shtml](https://republic.ru/russia/iz_kryma_v_donbass_priklyucheniya_igorya_strelkova_i_aleksandra_borodaya-1099696.shtml).

5. Christo Grozev, "The Kremlin's Balkan Gambit: Part I," *Bellingcat*, March 4, 2017, <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2017/03/04/kremlins-balkan-gambit-part/>; Courtney Weaver, "Malofeev: The Billionaire Linking Moscow to the Rebels," *Financial Times*, July 24, 2014, <https://www.ft.com/content/84481538-1103-11e4-94f3-00144feabdc0?mhq5j=e1>. Tikhon is frequently described as Malofeev's, as well as Putin's, spiritual adviser or confessor.

principal churches are more sympathetic to Moscow). The more nationally inclined churches in Ukraine, notably the UOC-Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP) and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC), have benefitted numerically and reputationally from their role in Ukraine's political upheaval, while the UOC-MP has lost ground.

Ukraine's churches, meanwhile, have responded in vastly different ways to the challenges posed by the "Revolution of Dignity" and the outbreak of war in eastern Ukraine. Many Ukrainians have come to view the upheaval of the past few years through a religious prism, emphasizing in the process themes of sacrifice and redemption drawn from Christian tradition. At the same time, church politics in Ukraine have become inextricably bound up with questions of nationalism and national identity. With multiple churches—each interpreting the arc of Ukrainian history in different ways—competing for members and resources, religious identification for Ukrainian Christians has become increasingly politicized, while interdenominational violence has become more common than it was prior to 2014. Moreover, governments in both Kyiv and Moscow have sought to assert their authority over particular churches as part of their struggle for power and influence in Ukraine. The results for individual churches have been mixed; the one consistent pattern since the start of the conflict has been growing public support and state backing for churches with a distinctly Ukrainian identity that combine spiritual appeals with support for Ukrainian nationhood and the "Anti-Terrorist Operation" being waged by the Ukrainian government against Russian-backed separatists in Donbas.

## UKRAINE'S RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE

While a majority of Ukrainians across the country self-identify as Orthodox, the religious landscape is highly fragmented. To a much greater extent than in Russia, Ukraine's Christian churches exist in a dynamic and competitive environment that forces them to contend for adherents. At least since the 2013–2014 "Revolution of Dignity," the Ukrainian government has sought to avoid favoring any particular denomination. Instead, it has maintained a dialogue with representatives of numerous churches, which it has encouraged to play a more active role in addressing the country's social and political challenges. Questions of national identity have come to play a prominent role, with churches committed to a distinctive Ukrainian state and national identity winning new adherents and finding a larger voice in public debates, while the UOC-MP in particular has been hampered by perceptions that it remains overly dependent on the Kremlin. Despite the politicization of confessional politics, Ukraine's churches largely agree on the importance of ending the conflict in the east and maintaining Ukraine as an independent state within its internationally recognized borders.

Reflecting the country's other demographic divisions, Ukraine has no less than four churches that claim descent from the ancestral church established with Grand Prince Volodymyr the Great's adoption of Christianity in 988. The three most visible Christian churches in Ukraine are the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Moscow Patriarchate, Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyiv Patriarchate, and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. The smaller Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC) is strongest among diaspora Ukrainians who fled the Soviet Union, but has reestablished its presence in independent Ukraine too. At independence in 1991, the UOC-MP was the only Orthodox church in Ukraine. The UOC-KP (founded in 1992) and the UGCC (which was proscribed

by the Soviet government in 1946 and reemerged from underground in the last years of Soviet rule) have both seen their size and influence expand greatly since independence, while the UAOC (reestablished in 1990) also enjoys an influence that outstrips its size. The UOC-MP has, meanwhile, struggled to maneuver between the competing demands of its parishioners, the Ukrainian state, and the Russian Orthodox Church, of which it is a self-governing adjunct.<sup>6</sup> Ukraine also has significant numbers of non-Eastern Rite Christians, notably Baptists and other evangelical Protestants, as well as Roman Catholics (many of them Polish), but it is the four Eastern Rite churches that have been at the center of Ukraine's struggles and which claim in their different ways to be the authentic voice of the Ukrainian people.

According to official data, the UOC-MP has over 12,000 parishes and 191 monasteries, with almost 10,000 priests. The UOC-KP claims almost 4,500 parishes, 50 monasteries, and more than 3,000 priests. The UGCC has about 3,700 parishes, 117 monasteries, and over 2,500 priests. The Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church has over 1,000 parishes, 9 monasteries, and over 700 priests inside Ukraine. In the early 1990s, its leadership agreed to join with the breakaway faction of the Moscow Patriarchate that ultimately became the UOC-KP. Not all of the UAOC hierarchy supported this decision, however, and the church was soon reestablished inside Ukraine, though its center of gravity today remains in the diaspora, which follows the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople directly rather than the head of the UAOC inside Ukraine. The most dynamic denominations in Ukraine today are the various Protestant groups that have emerged since independence, which have in total over 5,000 organizations and over 5,000 pastors. The Jehovah's Witnesses have over 1,000 communities and almost 2,000 clerics.<sup>7</sup> Relations between the various Christian churches, and between the different churches and the Ukrainian state, have often been turbulent.

As on questions of nationality, the revolution and conflict with Russia appear to have forced a significant number of Ukrainians to more explicitly define their religious identity, reinforcing the Russian-Ukrainian binary. Prior to the outbreak of the crisis in late 2013, many Orthodox churchgoers often did not differentiate or even notice the affiliation of their parish church or priest. Many attended services at a particular church as a result of factors like convenience or their preference for a particular cleric. For most Orthodox Ukrainians, the choice of which church to attend was not an issue of politics or national identity.<sup>8</sup>

Ukraine's "Revolution of Dignity" (beginning with the Euro-Maidan protests of late 2013) and the conflict between Ukraine and Russia saw both the mobilization of church organizations in general and a shift of public sentiment toward the UOC-KP and the UGCC, which are seen as the most nationally minded of Ukraine's Christian churches. Many individual churchgoers, as well as priests and even whole congregations, have switched their affiliation since the start of the crisis, typically from the UOC-MP to the UOC-KP.

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6. "Samoupravlyaemye tserkvi," Russian Orthodox Church, <https://mospat.ru/ru/documents/ustav/xi-2/>.

7. Orthodox Church Newspaper, "Religiya v Ukraine: tsifry i fakty," *Unian*, May 14, 2012, <http://religions.unian.net/state/648249-religiya-v-ukraine-tsifry-i-fakty.html>.

8. Tamila Varshalomidze, "A Conflict of Faith between Russia and Ukraine," *Al Jazeera*, December 27, 2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2015/11/conflict-faith-russia-ukraine-151103065457830.html>.

According to nationwide surveys carried out by the Razumkov Center, the percentage of Ukraine's Orthodox population that self-identifies as belonging to the UOC-MP grew from 9.2 percent in 2000 to a peak of 23.6 percent in 2010. In the aftermath of the "Revolution of Dignity" and the start of the conflict in Donbas, the percentage of self-proclaimed UOC-MP adherents fell to 15.0 percent of the total Orthodox population in 2016. Meanwhile the percentage of adherents of the UOC-KP increased from 12.1 percent in 2000 to 18.3 percent in 2013, subsequently rising to 25.0 percent in 2016. The biggest shift in the Razumkov polls came among those who identified as "just Orthodox," falling from 38.6 percent of the population in 2000 to 21.2 percent in 2016.<sup>9</sup> Figures for the UGCC and the UAOC, meanwhile, remained largely the same. In 2016, adherents of the UGCC comprised an additional 5.9 percent of the population, while just 0.8 percent claimed adherence to the UAOC.<sup>10</sup> While the UGCC remains strongest in western Ukraine, the country's overall religious geography has gradually become less differentiated. According to Razumkov, the percentage of UOC-MP adherents among all Orthodox believers in western Ukraine more generally grew from 9.5 percent in 2005 to 19.8 percent in 2013, while UOC-KP adherents in eastern Ukraine increased from 3 percent of all Orthodox believers to 13.9 percent in the same period.<sup>11</sup>

To the extent these surveys paint an accurate picture of religious life in Ukraine, they indicate both some growth in overall religiosity and significant differentiation among followers of the two major Orthodox patriarchates, with a pronounced shift toward the Kyiv Patriarchate. Whereas in the past, many Ukrainians defined themselves as Orthodox without strongly adhering to either the Moscow or Kyiv patriarchates, the "Revolution of Dignity" and the war with Russia have brought the divide between the two patriarchates into sharper relief, forcing more and more individuals to pick a side. During the political upheaval of the past several years, the major churches, along with several smaller denominations—Christian and non-Christian—have largely cooperated at the macro level, even as the conflict has sharpened the rivalry between the two UOC patriarchates over status and influence, resources, and relations with Russia.

## Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church

The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, which emerged in the eastern part of the old Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as a result of the 1596 Union of Brest, had been a repository of national consciousness in the centuries following the partitions of Poland by Austria, Prussia, and Russia. While it remained strong in Austrian-ruled Galicia, it faced persecution from Tsarist authorities in Russia, who viewed it as a foreign-inspired tool to fragment the Orthodox East Slavs. The Tsarist government reunited the Greek Catholic Church in the Belarusian and Lithuanian gubernias

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9. Razumkov Centre, "Religiya, tserkva, suspil'stvo i derzhava: Dva roki pislya maydanu," *Razumkov Centre*, 2016, 23, [http://old.razumkov.org.ua/upload/Religiya\\_200516\\_A4.compressed.pdf](http://old.razumkov.org.ua/upload/Religiya_200516_A4.compressed.pdf).

10. Olena Bogdan, "Religiyna samoidentichnist' i molitva v Ukraini," *Kiev International Institute of Sociology*, July 18, 2016, <http://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=ukr&cat=reports&id=638&page=1>.

11. Razumkov Centre, "Religiya, tserkva, suspil'stvo i derzhava," *Razumkov Centre*, 31. According to one of the most careful observers of ROC, Mikhail Suslov, "from the spring of 2013 to April 2014, the UOC-MP's flock shrank from 28% to 25% of Orthodoxy in Ukraine, while the UOC-KP's flock increased from 26% to 32%"; See Mikhail Suslov, "The Russian Orthodox Church and the Crisis in Ukraine," in Andrii Krawchuk and Thomas Bremer eds., *Churches in the Ukrainian Crisis* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016): 136.

to the Russian Orthodox Church in 1839, and the rest of the Russian empire followed suit in 1876. When Nicholas II was forced to proclaim freedom of conscience after the 1905 revolution, large numbers of Ukrainians left the Orthodox Church, but could not rejoin the Greek Catholic Church, which at the time no longer formally existed in the Russian empire. Instead, more than 200,000 people (mainly Belarusians and Ukrainians) became Roman Catholics.

In interwar Poland, many Greek Catholic priests associated themselves with the Ukrainian nationalist movement that was gaining strength in Ukrainian-majority eastern Poland. During World War II, some Greek Catholic clergy were involved in the radical Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and its armed wing, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), though other clerics opposed these groups as well. After the war, the lands of what had been eastern Poland came under Soviet control, and in 1946 Soviet authorities forced the UGCC to unite with the Russian Orthodox Church, confiscating all its church and parish buildings, and imprisoning numerous priests. The UGCC continued to operate underground until the last days of the Soviet Union. Today, the UGCC regards the 1946 meeting where Stalin's NKVD forced its leadership to accept reunification with the Russian Orthodox Church on the grounds of alleged collaboration with the Nazi occupiers of western Ukraine as illegitimate.

The UGCC resurfaced in 1989 during the period of *glasnost*, and soon seized almost 400 church buildings that were under the control of ROC. This process continued with growing intensity up to and after the Soviet collapse, often accompanied by the use of force, with activists from nationalist organizations in the forefront. The UGCC also undertook a slow process of expansion into the central and eastern regions of the country (Donetsk exarchate was established in 2002, and Kharkiv in 2014), but the power base of the UGCC remains in western Ukraine, where the overwhelming majority of almost 4,000 parishes and almost 4.5 million believers are located. The UGCC also maintains its own institution of higher learning, the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv (with a satellite campus in Kyiv), which trains UGCC clergy as well as lay scholars, and ensures that, in contrast to the Orthodox churches, UGCC clerics are uniformly well educated.<sup>12</sup>

The UGCC's difficult history with Russian and Soviet state authorities was in some ways repeated during the Yanukovich era in Ukraine (2010–2014). Western-looking and strongly national in its outlook, the UGCC found itself almost inevitably at odds with the Russian-backed Yanukovich regime. Agents of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) pressured the UGCC leadership and the administration of the Ukrainian Catholic University to support the government and not to allow antigovernment protests among its adherents. According to sources within the church, Yanukovich's Minister of Education, Dmytro Tabachnyk, aimed to eradicate the UGCC from Ukraine entirely. When Tabachnyk's anti-Ukrainian approach sparked protests at the university, police demanded that the administration turn over lists of participating students. Boris Gudziak, then the

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12. The university was founded as a seminary in then-Polish Lwów in 1926. It was shuttered after the region's annexation by the USSR. It was refounded in Rome in 1963 by the exiled head of the Greek Catholic Church, Cardinal Josyf Slipyj, and moved back to Soviet Lviv in 1990.

university rector, openly criticized Tabachnyk, and believed he had been placed under police surveillance.<sup>13</sup>

## Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyiv Patriarchate

The Orthodox Church that Ukraine inherited upon independence in late 1991 was the same one it had as part of the Soviet Union, and its center remained in Moscow. The longtime leader of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Filaret, had emerged as a leading candidate for the post of Patriarch of Moscow and all Rus (the head of the Russian Orthodox Church) when Patriarch Pimen died in May 1990. Filaret however ultimately lost out to the man who would become Patriarch Alexii II. He was later removed from his position as Metropolitan of Kyiv, in part over a sex scandal. With the support of President Leonid Kravchuk as well as various Ukrainian nationalist organizations, Filaret and other disaffected clerics joined a faction of the UAOC to establish a new patriarchate independent of Moscow's supervision. Filaret would become patriarch of this new body in 1995; two years later, Alexii II excommunicated him. Filaret's critics then and now allege that sour grapes over not being chosen to succeed Pimen motivated his support for the decision to break away from Moscow.<sup>14</sup> Some critics of the UOC-KP refer to it as "the Church of Filaret (*Filaretovskaya tserkov*)" and its followers as "Filaretovites (*Filaretovtsy*)."

The UOC-KP is not in communion with the wider Orthodox community, which continues to regard the UOC-MP as the sole legitimate Orthodox church in Ukraine. The canonical status of the Kyiv Patriarchate is an important political issue in the wider Orthodox world; the UOC-KP, as well as the current Ukrainian authorities, are pressing for Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew II to grant canonical status to the Kyiv Patriarchate. The Russian Orthodox Church, the largest and most influential Orthodox church, is staunchly opposed, as is the Russian government. Both have pressured Bartholomew, as well as other Orthodox churches in their orbit, not to enter into communion with the UOC-KP. Meanwhile, many voices within the UOC-KP would like to see it established as the "local" (i.e., official) church of the Ukrainian state, analogous to most other Eastern Orthodox states that have a single church based within the country, and serve as a magnet around which Ukraine's other Orthodox denominations reunite.<sup>15</sup>

After the establishment of the UOC-KP, most of the parishes in the east and south of Ukraine, as well as many in the center of the country, remained loyal to Moscow. In Galicia, conversely, the overwhelming majority of parishes changed their loyalty to the UOC-KP, with only 200 remaining with the UOC-MP. In the early 1990s, conflicts over control of church property became a frequent source of tension and occasional violence. After a period of quiet, such tensions flared up again in the post-Maidan period. In western Ukraine, these conflicts are mostly between supporters of the

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13. George Weigel, "Trouble for the Church, and Democracy, in Ukraine," Ethics & Public Policy Center, n.d., <https://eppc.org/publications/trouble-for-the-church-and-democracy-in-ukraine/>.

14. Cyril Hovorun, "Churches in the Ukrainian Public Sphere," *Toronto Journal of Theology* 31, no. 1 (2015): 3–14.

15. Mikhail Omel'yan, "V odnii Ukraini ne mozhe buti dvi Pomisni Cerkvi," Ukrainian Orthodox Church—Kyiv Patriarchate, March 17, 2013, <http://berezne-cerkva.rv.ua/v-odnij-ukra%D1%97ni-ne-mozhe-buti-dvi-pomisni-cerkvi/>.

Kyiv Patriarchate and the UGCC, while in the rest of the country, they are typically between the UOC-KP and the UOC-MP.<sup>16</sup>

For example, in early 2014, 325 out of 382 adults in the congregation of the historic St. Michael's Church in the village of Novostav in Ternopil Oblast signed a petition requesting the church's transfer from the UOC-MP to the UOC-KP. The petition was approved by the local authorities and the church formally registered to the UOC-KP, which hired a new priest. The original priest, however, remained loyal to the UOC-MP, and a significant minority of the congregants also opposed the transfer. Local officials attempted to intervene, suggesting that the church building host services for both congregations sequentially, but the congregants supporting the Moscow Patriarchate objected on the grounds that the agreement could still deprive them of the real property associated with the church. Their efforts to obtain a judicial injunction were denied, and eventually local officials sealed off the church building, leaving both congregations to conduct services in the courtyard.<sup>17</sup> In other cases, these conflicts have turned violent. The Moscow Patriarchate in particular cites instances of Kyivan "schismatics," along with members of nationalist organizations such as Right Sector, forcibly seizing church buildings and attacking parishioners loyal to the Moscow Patriarchate.<sup>18</sup>

The UOC-KP portrays itself as the religious expression of Ukrainian nationhood, a position that former Presidents Leonid Kravchuk and Viktor Yushchenko also endorsed, and calls for the unification of all Orthodox believers in Ukraine into a single church headed by the Kyiv Patriarch.<sup>19</sup> The UOC-KP strongly supported the 2004 Orange Revolution and Ukraine's Western political orientation. Patriarch Filaret issued a proclamation in November 2013 in support of Ukraine's association agreement with the European Union that Yanukovych rejected, sparking the first protests on the Maidan.<sup>20</sup>

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16. Under Ukrainian law, church property belongs to specific parishes rather than to national-level organizations. Individual congregations have the right to affiliate with any church—disputes tend to arise over control of the church building and other property once a congregation has switched its affiliation. The process is often chaotic, and the Rada is reportedly considering a law to establish set procedures for transferring a parish's affiliation.

17. Vladimir Moroz, "Mezhpravoslavnyy konflikt v novostave: Dve obshchiny ne mogut priyti k ponimaniyu, poetomy provodyat bogosluzheniya vo dvore," Religious Information Service of Ukraine, October 21, 2014, [https://risu.org.ua/ru/index/exclusive/journalistic\\_investigations/57964](https://risu.org.ua/ru/index/exclusive/journalistic_investigations/57964). Because of the historic status of the church in Novostav, it remains the property of the state; the dispute between the congregations is thus only over access and control rather than formal ownership.

18. "Ternopil Province: Schismatics Terrify Faithful during Violent Seizure of Church," Ukrainian Orthodox Church, December 15, 2015, <http://news.church.ua/2015/12/15/ternopil-province-schismatics-terrify-faithful-during-violent-seizure-of-church/?lang=en>.

19. "Molitva za ob'ednannya Ukrayns'koy Pravoslavnoy Tserkvi," Ukrainian Orthodox Church—Kyiv Patriarchate, January 3, 2014, <http://kolomija.com/bbloteka/molitvoslov/423-molitva-za-obyednannya-ukrayinskoyi-pravoslavnoyi-cerkvi.html>; Patriarch Filaret, "Appeal of the Holy Synod of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Kyiv Patriarchate to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate)," Ukrainian Orthodox Church—Kyiv Patriarchate, February 22, 2014, <https://www.cerkva.info/publications/zvernennia-sviashchennoho-synodu-ukrainskoi-pravoslavnoi-tserkvy-kyivskoho-patriarkhatu-do-ukrainskoi-pravoslavnoi-tserkvy-moskovskoho-patriarkhatu>.

20. Patriarch Filaret, "Statement by the Patriarch of Kyiv and All Rus-Ukraine Filaret 'Regarding public appearances in support of Ukraine's European integration,'" Press Service of the Diocese of Khmel'nitsky, November 26, 2013, <http://cerkva-km.info/p3034/>.



Officials of the UOC-KP describe the institutional UOC-MP as a tool of Russian imperialism, the Russian Church, and ultimately, the Kremlin and the Russian security services.<sup>21</sup> They openly question whether the UOC-MP, and, by extension, Moscow, recognize the existence of a separate Ukrainian state and Ukrainian people.<sup>22</sup> The Kyiv Patriarchate believes that its noncanonical status is the result of pressure on the wider Orthodox community (including the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople) from Moscow and the Moscow Patriarchate. While the UOC-KP would like to see Ukraine's Orthodox churches unify under its leadership, it recognizes the legitimacy of the other denominations (including the UOC-MP) and is willing to engage with them on an equal basis.

Conversely, critics accuse the UOC-KP of being a political rather than religious entity, driven by narrow nationalism rather than a quest for Christian unity, and worry that its aspiration to become the sole official church in Ukraine will deprive others of access to resources and constrain their ability to operate. They also point to the UOC-KP's general lack of trained personnel. In contrast to the UGCC and the UOC-MP, the Kyiv Patriarchate does not have a long-standing network of institutions to train its clergy; even sympathetic observers note that many UOC-KP priests are poorly educated.

## Russian Orthodox Church

The fundamental challenge facing the UOC-MP centers on reconciling its status as a Ukrainian church and its ties to Moscow at a time when relations between Ukraine and Russia are as bad as they have ever been. The UOC-MP's basic assumption has always been that no contradiction exists between its Ukrainian identity and its fealty to the ROC, of which it is a self-governing branch. With the outbreak of conflict between Ukraine and Russia in 2014 (a conflict that the UOC-MP, like the Kremlin, describes as an intra-Ukrainian civil war), that position has become less and less tenable.

This challenge is partially structural. The UOC-MP is a self-governing, self-funding branch of the Russian Orthodox Church; it is not, however, autocephalous (a formal status of independence recognized in canon law). The UOC-MP has various ties to the ROC: priests often move from UOC-MP parishes to Russia and vice versa, the Russian Patriarch is mentioned in UOC-MP prayers, and the Metropolitan of Kyiv and all Ukraine (currently Onufriy) is a member of the ROC's Holy Synod and the second-ranking bishop in the ROC after the Patriarch.<sup>23</sup> The nature and extent of the UOC-MP's subordination to the Russian Church is nevertheless debated; its detractors in Ukraine and abroad see it as a tool of the Kremlin (if not the Russian intelligence services), which has steadily asserted its influence over the ROC during Putin's presidency.<sup>24</sup> This perceived

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21. Metropolitan Epifaniy, "How long the hand of Moscow will scour in Ukrainian souls?" Ukrainian Orthodox Church—Kyiv Patriarchate, December 25, 2015, <http://rivne-cerkva.rv.ua/news/2618-how-long-the-hand-of-moscow-will-scour-in-ukrainian-souls.html>.

22. Vladimir Moroz, "Vse, chto delaet Moskovkiy Patriarkh, rabotaet na Ukrainskuyu pomestnost," Religious Information Service of Ukraine, February 26, 2016, <http://risu.org.ua/ru/index/exclusive/reportage/62653>.

23. "Zhurnaly zasedaniya Svyashchennogo Sinoda ot 19 marta 2014 goda," Russian Orthodox Church, March 19, 2014, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/3609112.html>.

24. Svetlana Solodovnik, "Russia: The Official Church Chooses the State," *Russian Social Science Review* 55, no. 6 (November–December 2014): 55–83.

politicization of the ROC and its role in the conflict with Ukraine has an obvious impact on the way Ukrainians view the UOC-MP. The Russian Orthodox Church has been an important pillar of the Kremlin's efforts to emphasize the moral and cultural divide with the West, claiming in the process to be defending "Orthodox values" in the face of Western decadence and seeking a larger role for Orthodox culture in daily life inside Russia.<sup>25</sup> As part of this *Kulturkampf*, the ROC's role in both Russia and the wider region has taken on a more overtly political cast.

In particular, the ROC has been the chief proponent of the "Russian World (*russskiy mir*)," a concept positing the supranational unity of the Orthodox East Slavic community, which it differentiates from the liberal West.<sup>26</sup> According to the Russian World concept, the shared history and culture of the Orthodox East Slavs in Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine creates among them a common identity and political fate that transcends the fragmentation of the East Slavic community into separate states. Indeed, the head of the ROC is titled Patriarch of Moscow and all Rus—signifying his claim to jurisdiction over not just Russia but over all the historical lands of Rus (i.e., the earliest East Slavic state based in Kyiv that was the historical antecedent for the Belarusian and Ukrainian, as well as the Russian, state and people).

Kirill, the current Patriarch of Moscow and all Rus, was one of the first proponents of the *russskiy mir* concept—though he also makes reference to the related (but distinct) concept of Holy Rus at times.<sup>27</sup> In the early 2000s the leading figures from the ROC talked about a Moscow-centered "Orthodox civilization."<sup>28</sup> Since 1993, Kirill has headed the World Russian People's Council (*Vsemi-rnyy russskiy narodnyy sobor*), a foundation "called to head the coalition of ethical, responsible, and patriotically oriented forces in civil society" and to promote Russian civilization, while the ROC itself joined the Russian World Foundation (*Fond Russskiy Mir*) in 2009.<sup>29</sup> Kirill, and the ROC as a whole, try to walk a careful line between acknowledging the reality of Ukrainian and Belarusian statehood and their claim that the historical and political fate of the entire Orthodox East Slavic world is intertwined. According to Kirill, "Of course we must acknowledge that these borders [between Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine]—at least at present, with all these border situations as they are—create unnecessary barriers among the peoples of the Russian world."<sup>30</sup>

Kirill's vision of *russskiy mir* encompasses a moral and theological component centered on the promotion of "traditional" values and the "second Christianization" of Rus more than the

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25. Irina du Quenoy and Dmitry Gorenburg, "The Russian Orthodox Church and Russian Politics: Editors' Introduction," *Russian Politics and Law* 49, no. 1 (January-February 2011): 3–7.

26. Thomas Bremer, "How the Russian Orthodox Church Views the 'Russian World,'" *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* 35, no. 3 (July 2015): 43–49, <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1942&context=ree>; Igor Zevelev, *Russian National Identity and Foreign Policy* (Washington DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, December 2016), <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russian-national-identity-and-foreign-policy>.

27. Suslov, "The Russian Orthodox Church and the Crisis in Ukraine," 133–162.

28. A. V. Mitrofanova, "Politicheskoe pravoslavie i problema religioznosti," *Filosofiya i obshchestvo* 42, no. 1 (2006): 78–96, [http://www.socionauki.ru/journal/files/fio/2006\\_1/078-095.pdf](http://www.socionauki.ru/journal/files/fio/2006_1/078-095.pdf).

29. "O sobore," World Russian People's Council, n.d., [http://vrns.ru/o\\_sobore/](http://vrns.ru/o_sobore/).

30. Patriarch Kirill, "Address at the Grand Opening of the Third Assembly of the Russian World," *Russian Politics and Law* 49, no. 1 (January-February 2011): 57–64, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.2753/RUP1061-1940490104>.

geopolitical interests of the Russian state.<sup>31</sup> In 2009, immediately after Kirill was elected Patriarch, the ROC began actively propagating the concept of *russskiy mir*. Kirill aimed at making the *russskiy mir* as broad and multifaceted as possible, and separating it from the activity of the Kremlin and the Russian state. His speech at the Third Russian World Assembly in November 2009 was the most programmatic discussion of this concept by any leading figure in Russia. Among other observations, Kirill said:

The core of the Russian world today is Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. Saint Lavrentii of Chernigov expressed it with a well-known phrase—“Russia, Ukraine, Belarus—this is the Holy Rus.” Such understanding of *russskiy mir* is reflected in the name of our Church. The Church is called Russian not according to the ethnic principle. This name points to the fact that the Russian Orthodox Church carries her mission among those peoples who accept Russian spiritual and cultural tradition as the foundation of their national identity, or, at least, as its very important part. That is why we also consider Moldova to be a part of this *russskiy mir*. The Russian Church is the most multinational Orthodox community in the world, and aims at developing its multinational character . . . *Russskiy mir* is based on the Orthodox faith, which we got in baptism in Kiev . . . Another foundation of *russskiy mir* is Russian culture and the Russian language. Everybody can belong to Russian culture—a Russian, a Tatar, a Georgian, because this culture has absorbed the traditions of many peoples. Russian culture is a phenomenon which is broader than the borders of any state or any ethnos, it is not linked to the particular interests of one state. It is very important to understand this: *Russskiy mir* is not an instrument of political influence of the Russian Federation. The tasks of Russian culture are quite different . . . Finally, the third foundation of *russskiy mir* is a common historical memory and a common perspective on social development. The peoples of Rus, in their common effort, had created a way of social cohabitation, which in the whole world is associated with the Russian tradition.<sup>32</sup>

Equating the concept of “Holy Rus” to the concept of *russskiy mir*, Kirill put the ROC at the center of the Russian World and claimed a leading role in the promotion of *russskiy mir* for himself. In the following years Kirill made regular pastoral visits to Ukraine, and, less frequently, to Belarus and Moldova.

In his November 2009 speech Kirill nonetheless addressed the concerns of political elites in the neighboring countries that the ROC was a tool of Russian political domination, while also cautiously promoting the idea of the *russskiy mir* as a form of anti-Western solidarity:

It is important to establish solid relations between the elites of the countries of the *russskiy mir*. The ethics of inter-elite relations become of crucial importance. We should develop respectful relations, free from any

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31. George Soroka, “Putin’s Patriarch: Does the Kremlin Control the Church?,” *Foreign Affairs* 95, no. 1 (February 2016), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russian-federation/2016-02-11/putins-patriarch>.

32. Patriarch Kirill, “Speech of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill at the Opening Ceremony of the Third Assembly of the Russian World,” Russian Orthodox Church, November 3, 2009, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/928446.html>.

paternalism, any attempts to play the role of the “elder brother.” The national interests of every country should be respected, while we should unite our efforts in building social life based on a common spiritual and cultural tradition. Separately even the biggest countries of *russskiy mir* will not be able to protect their spiritual, cultural and civilizational values in the globalizing world.<sup>33</sup>

The ROC has been a strong proponent of post-Soviet integration and of politicians like Putin who support it. At the same time, it has had to tailor its message to be effective in the more pluralistic and less statist milieu of Ukraine. Kirill has visited Ukraine every year since he was elected Patriarch, often more than once, and at times proved willing to deviate from the Kremlin’s official position. In 2009 he visited the Holodomor memorial in Kyiv with Ukrainian president Viktor Yushchenko, something then-Russian president Dmitry Medvedev had refused to do a few months earlier. He also conducted well-attended religious ceremonies in Ukraine and met with much of the country’s political leadership. Kirill’s visible presence in Ukraine communicated the Yanukovych-era authorities’ closeness to the Russian Orthodox Church and, by extension, the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine. Yet when Yanukovych was overthrown in February 2014, Kirill struck a cautious tone. He sought to position the ROC as outside the ongoing political struggle in Ukraine. Rather than blame the violence in Kyiv on a “fascist coup” as many Russian officials did, Kirill argued that it was “the result of an internal political crisis [and] the inability of different sociopolitical forces to agree on the need for nonviolent resolution of problems existing in society,” and acknowledged that “the children of our church . . . are on opposite sides of the barricades.”<sup>34</sup>

Despite his close connection to the Russian state, Kirill’s description of a multinational *russskiy mir* is also at odds with the irredentist rhetoric employed at times by Vladimir Putin and other Russian officials. Thus, in his March 18, 2014, speech announcing the incorporation of Crimea into Russia (a speech Kirill chose not to attend), Putin referred to the Russian people as “one of the biggest, if not the biggest divided peoples on the planet.” The focus on the Russian nation in Putin’s speech was at odds with Kirill’s emphasis on a *russskiy mir* that relies on soft power and accepts the sovereignty and territorial integrity of neighboring states. Nevertheless, in the aftermath of the Crimean annexation, Kirill also started to stress the *russskiy mir* as a civilization that needs protection from an aggressive West, in response perhaps to Moscow’s decision to prioritize hard power in its dealings with Ukraine.<sup>35</sup>

### Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Moscow Patriarchate

While the UOC-MP has not experienced the same degree of state domination or politicization as its Russian parent, Moscow and the ROC have attempted to co-opt it in their larger efforts to define the boundaries of a Russian World that also includes Ukraine. Former Ukrainian president Viktor

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33. Ibid.

34. Patriarch Kirill, “Address of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill to the fullness of the Russian Orthodox Church in connection with the events in Ukraine,” Russian Orthodox Church, February 21, 2014, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/3575247.html>.

35. “His Holiness Patriarch Kirill: The Russian world is a special civilization that must be saved,” Russian Orthodox Church, September 8, 2014, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/3730705.html>.

Yanukovych also sought to establish the UOC-MP as a kind of official church on the Russian model, even though it never claimed the adherence of anything like a majority of Ukraine's population, or even of its Christian population, since the establishment of the rival Kyiv Patriarchate in 1992.

The UOC-MP is recognized by the rest of the Orthodox world as the canonical Orthodox church in Ukraine. It consequently regards the Kyiv Patriarchate as illegitimate; official statements from the UOC-MP refer to the "so-called Kyiv Patriarchate" and the "schismatics."<sup>36</sup> The UOC-MP excommunicated, and later anathematized, Filaret for heading the breakaway church. The UOC-MP is also critical of the Greek Catholic Church, toward which it maintains a longstanding mistrust. It regards the 1946 Lviv Council that liquidated the formal structure of the UGCC as a legitimate response not only to alleged Greek Catholic collaboration with the Nazis, but also to the 1596 Union of Brest itself, which, according to the UOC-MP, resulted in the forcible incorporation of Orthodox believers into the Catholic Church under pressure from the then-Polish government.<sup>37</sup>

The UOC-MP inherited the property and status of the united pre-1991 UOC, but did not acquire the status as an established church in the newly independent (and secular) state of Ukraine. As an institution associated with the former metropole and lacking a base within the Ukrainian nationalist movement, the UOC-MP has often faced grassroots pressure, especially in the Western part of the country. At the same time, it has enjoyed the patronage of presidents Leonid Kuchma and, especially, Viktor Yanukovych, who openly favored the Moscow Patriarchate and was accused by his opponents of pressuring rival churches.

For most of Ukraine's history as an independent state, the UOC-MP benefited from the leadership of Metropolitan Volodymyr, a figure of great moral authority who sought to navigate between the competing pressures of Ukrainian nationhood and the reality of a church hierarchy loyal to Moscow. Volodymyr was a consistent critic of what he termed "political Orthodoxy" as well as the interference of the Russian Orthodox Church in the religious life of Ukraine. He had refused to endorse Yanukovych's reelection campaign or to allow church buildings to be used for political purposes, leading Yanukovych to seek his removal. In 2011, he even excommunicated the leader of the Union of Orthodox Citizens (*Soyuz pravoslavnykh grazhdan*), a radical pro-Russian group backed by Yanukovych with links to the Russian Orthodox Church.

Volodymyr, however, was seriously ill during the months of the Euro-Maidan and the "Revolution of Dignity," and died in June 2014 at the very beginning of the military conflict with Russia. During Volodymyr's illness, Yanukovych appointed one of his own business partners as a "supervisor" over the affairs of the church in a renewed effort to sideline the recalcitrant metropolitan. Volodymyr's successor, Onufriy, is seen within Ukraine as Moscow's man, who might have strong

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36. "Address of Council of Bishops of UOC to the clergy, religious and laity of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church," Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), February 10, 2016, <http://news.church.ua/2016/02/10/address-of-council-of-bishops-of-uoc-to-the-clergy-religious-and-laity-of-the-ukrainian-orthodox-church/?lang=en>.

37. "Otsenku L'vovskogo sobora 1946 goda sleduet delat' tol'ko v kontekste posledstviy dlya Ukrainy Brestskoy unii," Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), March 11, 2011, <http://news.church.ua/2016/03/11/ocenku-lvovskogo-sobora-1946-goda-sleduet-delat-tolko-v-kontekste-posledstvij-dlya-ukrainy-brestskoj-unii/?lang=ru>.

convictions of his own but lacks the charisma and authority of his predecessor. Notably, Onufriy refused to stand when the Rada honored Ukrainian soldiers fighting in Donbas.<sup>38</sup> According to reports in the Russian press, in early 2014 Onufriy sought to establish a dialogue with the UOC-KP in response to the Maidan protests, with the aim of pursuing reunification between the two churches, but abandoned his efforts under pressure from the ROC, which excludes any reconciliation with “the schismatics” until they get rid of the anathematized Filaret and ask for forgiveness.<sup>39</sup>

## Ukraine’s Churches in the Euro-Maidan and “Revolution of Dignity”

Participants in the dramatic events unfolding between the outbreak of protests on Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square) in November 2013 and the ouster of former president Viktor Yanukovich in February 2014 have frequently remarked on the religious and spiritual dimension of the protests. Religious services (primarily but not solely Christian) conducted under the auspices of the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations (AUCCRO) were a visible component of the demonstrations on the Maidan, while local parishes—mostly those belonging to the UOC-KP and the UGCC—played an active role in supporting and protecting the protestors from Yanukovich’s riot police (*Berkut*). The physical space of the Maidan included religious places, including an interdenominational prayer tent established by a Protestant group. According to the scholar and theologian Cyril Hovorun, the Maidan “explained itself in religious terms and articulated its demands through religious symbols.”<sup>40</sup> At the same time, the leadership of the principal religious organizations, working through the AUCCRO, joined together to call for a peaceful resolution of the crisis and to enjoin the Yanukovich government from using force against the protestors.<sup>41</sup> Individual churches and monasteries belonging to all the major denominations also opened their doors to protestors during the events on the Maidan, providing shelter and in some cases supplies.

While much of the grassroots organization on the Maidan had a religious dimension, the church hierarchies were in general slower to respond to these dramatic developments.<sup>42</sup> Of the major churches, the UGCC was the most consistently supportive of the protests, and the most firmly opposed to the Yanukovich regime. The UOC-KP treaded cautiously at first, but gradually came around to supporting the demonstrators, especially after some of its clergy based close to the Maidan took matters into their own hands. The Moscow Patriarchate largely remained neutral,

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38. Vitaly Shevchenko, “Russian Orthodox Church lends weight to Putin patriotism,” BBC News, August 21, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-33982267>.

39. Anatoliy Khlivnyy, “Boevoe kreshchenie ‘Svyatoy Rusi,’” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, June 4, 2014, [http://www.ng.ru/ng\\_religii/2014-06-04/5\\_kreshenie.html](http://www.ng.ru/ng_religii/2014-06-04/5_kreshenie.html).

40. Cyril Hovorun, “Churches in the Ukrainian Public Square,” *Toronto Journal of Theology* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 3–14, <https://doi.org/10.3138/tjt.3110>.

41. “AUCCRO: ‘The government, the opposition and the civil society activists should stop violence and start negotiations,’” Information Resource of Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, January 25, 2014, [http://news.ugcc.ua/en/news/auccro\\_the\\_government\\_the\\_opposition\\_and\\_the\\_civil\\_society\\_activists\\_should\\_stop\\_violence\\_and\\_start\\_negotiations\\_\\_69009.html](http://news.ugcc.ua/en/news/auccro_the_government_the_opposition_and_the_civil_society_activists_should_stop_violence_and_start_negotiations__69009.html).

42. For an overview, see Cyril Hovorun, “The Church in the Bloodlands,” *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion & Public Life*, October 1, 2014, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2014/10/the-church-in-the-bloodlands>.

apart from calling on authorities and demonstrators to eschew violence. Only once Yanukovich had fled to Russia in February 2014 did the UOC-MP declare its support for the new interim government. After Yanukovich's flight, the AUCCRO, chaired at the time by a representative from the UOC-MP, met with interim president Anatolii Turchynov (a practicing Baptist) and Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk to confer legitimacy and encourage a peaceful resolution of the crisis.

## Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church

The UGCC quickly came out in support of the demonstrators on the Maidan and in favor of the ill-fated Association Agreement with the European Union. On December 2 the Catholic church of Saint Alexander and all four UGCC churches in Kyiv opened their doors around the clock for protesters who needed sleep, warmth, or food. UGCC priests operated a chapel on the Maidan, which conducted regular services and provided support and counseling to the protestors gathered on the square. The UGCC's nearby Cathedral of the Resurrection also served as a collection point for clothes and supplies donated to the Maidan protestors. Clerics and participants note that the collection of provisions and supplies was a grassroots effort that involved not only parishioners and not only Greek Catholics, but a wide range of people sympathetic to the Euro-Maidan movement.

The UGCC hierarchy was strongly supportive of the Euro-Maidan phenomenon. It portrayed the protests as civil society demanding respect for basic human values, rather than the narrowly political activity opponents saw. The Ukrainian Catholic University's general assembly passed a resolution in late November 2013 criticizing Yanukovich's decision to back away from the Association Agreement with Brussels and supporting Ukraine's deeper integration with Europe.<sup>43</sup> For its efforts, the UGCC faced particular harassment from the state authorities. In January 2014, Yanukovich's Ministry of Culture threatened to revoke the church's legal registration if UGCC leader Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk and other UGCC clerics continued holding prayers and public meetings outside of church buildings on the Maidan.<sup>44</sup>

Throughout the protests, Shevchuk issued statements emphasizing human dignity and solidarity, which he believed the Euro-Maidan protestors embodied. While aiming to be apolitical in the strictest sense, Shevchuk and the UGCC suggested that Yanukovich had failed to uphold these basic values.<sup>45</sup> Some individual priests went further. As tensions escalated, a few Greek Catholic priests became prominent among the radical nationalist groups on the Maidan. Mikhail Arsenich, a UGCC priest from the Ivano-Frankivsk region, called for an armed uprising against the enemies of

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43. "Statement by the Ukrainian Catholic University on the closure of the European integration process by the Government of Ukraine," Ukrainian Catholic University, November 22, 2013, <http://ucu.edu.ua/news/10714/>.<https://ucu.edu.ua/news/zayava-ukrajinskoho-katolytskoho-universytetu-z-pryvodu-zhortannya-uryadom-ukrajiny-jevointehratsijnoho-protsesu/>.

44. George Weigel, "The Exhaust Fumes of Stalinism," *National Review*, January 14, 2014, <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/368420/exhaust-fumes-stalinism-george-weigel>.

45. George Weigel, "Ukraine Rising," *National Review*, November 10, 2014, <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/392368/ukraine-rising-george-weigel>.

the people in a sermon on the Maidan. In response, the UGCC hierarchy sentenced Arsenich to a monthlong period of repentance in a monastery.<sup>46</sup>

As the situation on the Maidan deteriorated into violence, the UGCC leadership laid the blame squarely at the feet of Yanukovich. Following the crackdown on peaceful protestors by the *Berkut* forces on the night of December 10, the Ukrainian Catholic University's general assembly adopted a resolution calling for civil disobedience and stating, "When from the Maidan dozens of innocent people, beaten, were taken in police vans to an unknown destination, President Yanukovich stopped being the President of Ukraine and his cronies, the government of our country."<sup>47</sup> After snipers shot unarmed protestors on February 18, Shevchuk issued a statement read on the Maidan the following morning; it placed "total responsibility" for the violence on the state authorities, and called for Greek Catholic churches across Kyiv to ring their bells to protest what appeared to be a war declared by the Ukrainian state on its own people.<sup>48</sup> After Yanukovich fled to Russia on February 25, a representative of the UGCC spoke on the Maidan, praising those who died "so that this evil would not touch us, because we know what evil was pressed down on all the Ukrainian people." Shevchuk's Easter sermon in mid-April directly equated the sacrifice of the "Heavenly Hundred" who died on the Maidan with that of Jesus.<sup>49</sup>

## UOC-Kyiv Patriarchate

Perhaps the most dramatic example of church involvement in the Maidan events themselves was the role of the St. Michael's Golden-Domed Monastery (belonging to the UOC-KP). When the initial crackdowns began, students and others took refuge on the grounds of the monastery, with the monks closing the gates when *Berkut* forces came looking for protestors. When the violence escalated in mid-January following the Rada's passage of a law, modeled on one existing in Russia that criminalized protest activity, the monks climbed the monastery's bell tower and rang the bells in a sign of warning and defiance. According to officials at the monastery, the last time this gesture was performed was when Mongol forces attacked Kyiv in 1241. Pictures of the "Heavenly Hundred," as well as Ukrainian soldiers killed in the conflict with Russia, still adorn the outer walls of the monastery, which has become a place of pilgrimage for those seeking to commemorate the deceased.

The UOC-KP hierarchy was more cautious, especially at first. It issued no official statements about developments on the Maidan and Filaret was careful to note that the church's support for the EU

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46. Roman Lunkin, "The Ukrainian Revolution and Christian Churches," *East-West Church Ministry Report* 22, no. 3 (Summer 2014): 1–5, <http://www.eastwestreport.org/pdfs/ew22-3.pdf>.

47. Ukrainian Catholic University, "Declaration by the Ukrainian Catholic University of Civil Disobedience," Ukrainian Institute London, December 11, 2013, [http://ukrainianinstitute.org.uk/news\\_423/](http://ukrainianinstitute.org.uk/news_423/).

48. George Weigel, "Ukraine in Flames," *National Review*, February 18, 2014, <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/371405/ukraine-flames-george-weigel>.

49. "Bishop Bohdan (Dziurakh): 'The fallen heroes themselves stopped the evil so that it would not touch all of us,'" Information Resource of Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, February 27, 2014, [http://news.ugcc.ua/en/news/bishop\\_bohdan\\_dziurakh\\_the\\_fallen\\_heroes\\_themselves\\_stopped\\_the\\_evil\\_so\\_that\\_it\\_would\\_not\\_touch\\_all\\_of\\_us\\_69435.html](http://news.ugcc.ua/en/news/bishop_bohdan_dziurakh_the_fallen_heroes_themselves_stopped_the_evil_so_that_it_would_not_touch_all_of_us_69435.html); "Christ—the first Heavenly hundred Victim, His Beatitude Sviatoslav," Information Resource of Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, April 16, 2014, [http://news.ugcc.ua/en/news/christ\\_the\\_first\\_heavenly\\_hundred\\_victim\\_his\\_beatitude\\_sviatoslav\\_70143.html](http://news.ugcc.ua/en/news/christ_the_first_heavenly_hundred_victim_his_beatitude_sviatoslav_70143.html).



association agreement did not imply opposition to Yanukovych.<sup>50</sup> As violence escalated, the leadership of the Kyiv Patriarchate increasingly sided with the protestors but, in contrast to the UGCC, did not call preemptively for the ouster of the Yanukovych regime.

### UOC-Moscow Patriarchate

The UOC-MP was in a more difficult position. Before the outbreak of unrest on the Maidan, the UOC-MP had, like the other main Ukrainian churches, supported efforts to sign an association agreement with the European Union, something that the Russian Orthodox Church and the Kremlin strongly opposed. Unlike the other churches, whose parishioners overwhelmingly supported the protests, adherents of the Moscow Patriarchate were on both sides. Some more nationally minded bishops saw the unrest as an opportunity to pursue further emancipation from Moscow. But others insisted on neutrality in the unraveling confrontation. Institutionally, the UOC-MP also found itself torn between its vocation as a Ukrainian church and its strong institutional linkages with both the Yanukovych regime and the Russian Orthodox Church—and thence to the Kremlin—which was urging Yanukovych to use force to clear the streets.

The ranks of the UOC-MP itself were also divided. Numerous individual parishioners came out onto the Maidan. While some clerics, such as Metropolitan Pavel, head of the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra, openly backed Yanukovych, others condemned both Yanukovych and the Russians. Metropolitan Sofrony of Cherkassk referred to Putin as a “bandit,” while Metropolitan Aleksandr of Pereiaslav-Khmelnytskyi sent a letter to ROC Patriarch Kirill urging him not to bring religion into the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. The letter noted that “Even today when we are witnessing the crimes of the previous regime, we still have those who are ready to justify cruelty to effect the supposedly right ‘civilization choice’—restoration of Holy Russia’s unity.”<sup>51</sup> Most bishops, though, supported the position of Metropolitan Onufriy, who did not call for pro-Maidan actions, but in letters to Putin and Kirill condemned what he viewed as Russia’s attempts to split Ukraine.<sup>52</sup>

During a lull in the fighting, three Moscow Patriarchate monks from St. Andrew’s Monastery walked carrying a crucifix into the no-man’s-land between the protestors and *Berkut* outside the Rada building, calling for an end to the violence. They were eventually joined by representatives from other denominations. In early December 2013, following moves by representatives from other denominations to provide refuge for demonstrators in church buildings, the UOC-MP also opened its churches for anyone in need of shelter. According to officials of the patriarchate, individual UOC-MP parishes also provided food and supplies during the Maidan events, without regard to religious or political affiliation. The UOC-MP leadership sought as much as possible to remain apolitical during the uprising, a stance that its critics charge implied asserting a moral equivalence

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50. “Filaret: if the authorities act unfairly, the church cannot support it,” *Radio Liberty*, December 7, 2013, <http://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/25192868.html>; Cyril Hovorun, “Churches in the Ukrainian Public Square,” *Toronto Journal of Theology* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 3–14, <https://doi.org/10.3138/tjt.3110>.

51. Quoted in Roman Lunkin, “The Ukrainian Revolution and Christian Churches,” *East-West Church Ministry Report* 22, no. 3 (Summer 2014): 1–5, <http://www.eastwestreport.org/pdfs/ew22-3.pdf>.

52. Vladislav Mal’tsev, “Tserkvi vyshli na maydan,” *Religiya v Ukrayni*, December 19, 2013, [http://www.religion.in.ua/zmi/ukrainian\\_zmi/24334-cerkvi-vyshli-na-majdan.html](http://www.religion.in.ua/zmi/ukrainian_zmi/24334-cerkvi-vyshli-na-majdan.html).

between the protestors and Yanukovich's security forces. That said, the UOC-MP, like the other Christian denominations, called for nonviolence, and also publicly supported Ukraine's territorial integrity (which, after all, meant the integrity of its own territory as well).

Complicating matters further was Metropolitan Volodymyr's illness. As the situation on the Maidan escalated, Volodymyr offered his services as a mediator and personally urged Yanukovich not to use force, relying on his own moral standing as well as the fact that the UOC-MP at the time held the rotating six-month presidency of AUCCRO. Yanukovich dismissed his offer. As a result of Volodymyr's declining health, his eventual successor, Metropolitan Onufriy, was installed as *locum tenens* of the Kyiv metropolitanate the day after Yanukovich fled the country. Onufriy lacked Volodymyr's personal authority, and was perceived by other figures as being overly dependent on Moscow.<sup>53</sup> During the Maidan events, Onufriy had acted cautiously. He refused to endorse the actions of the protestors, but did condemn what he viewed as Russian attempts to sow dissension. During the denouement of the fighting on the Maidan, as Russian troops massed on the border, Onufriy sent an open letter to Putin criticizing the Russian president's statement to the Federation Council authorizing the use of Russian troops in Ukraine and calling for him to "stop [this] human tragedy and prevent the division of our Ukrainian state and holy Church."<sup>54</sup>

## UKRAINE'S CHURCHES AND THE DONBAS CONFLICT

The outbreak of armed conflict in Crimea and Donbas reinforced the nationalist inclinations of the UGCC, UAOC, and the UOC-KP, while further exacerbating the split within the UOC-MP between pro-Russian and pro-Ukrainian elements. All four churches condemned the violence and pressed for reconciliation, though they assessed responsibility for the conflict differently. The war with Russia also reinforced the larger trend of parishioners and local congregations shifting their affiliation to the more nationally minded churches, particularly the UOC-KP. Russian-backed separatists also attempted to shift the religious geography of the occupied territories in Crimea and Donbas, seizing buildings and forcibly expelling clergy affiliated with denominations other than the UOC-MP (notably the Muslim Crimean Tatars, but also the UGCC and, to a lesser extent, the UOC-KP).<sup>55</sup> At the same time, the surge in nationalist sentiment touched off by the conflict accelerated the wave of church property seizures targeting the UOC-MP. These seizures placed the Ukrainian authorities in a difficult position, caught between their commitment to the rule of law and pressure from the nationalist grassroots.

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53. Mikhayl Omel'yan, "V UPTs MP loyal'ni Moskvi sili perekhodyat' do nastupu?," Ukrainian Orthodox Church—Kyiv Patriarchate, June 24, 2014, <https://www.cerkva.info/publications/v-upts-mp-loialni-moskvi-syly-perekhodiati-do-nastupu>.

54. Metropolitan Onufriy, "Vazhno! Mestoblyustitel' UPTs mitropolit Onufriy napravil pis'mo Prezidentu RF V. Putinu," Pravoslavia Ukraini, March 2, 2014, <http://orthodoxy.org.ua/data/vazhno-mestoblyustitel-upc-mitropolit-onufriy-napravil-pismo-prezidentu-rf-vputinu.html>.

55. Halya Coynash, "New Muftiat and Mosque Seizures as Divide and Rule in Crimea?" Prava Lyudini, September 12, 2014, <http://khpg.org/index.php?id=1410122385>.

The hierarchies of the UGCC, UAOC, and UOC-KP in particular took strong stances against Russia's military intervention and annexation of Ukrainian territory, in line with their existing commitment to Ukrainian statehood and territorial integrity. The UOC-MP remained divided and cautious, backing away from statements affirming support for Ukraine's territorial integrity while emphasizing its political neutrality and support for peace and reconciliation, as well as for Ukraine's independent statehood. The Russian Orthodox Church, meanwhile, denounced the other churches for fomenting a religious conflict aiming to disrupt the unity of the Russian World.<sup>56</sup>

All four of the Eastern Rite Ukrainian churches condemned the Russian seizure of Crimea in February 2014. An official statement issued by the AUCCRO at the beginning of March 2014 following the Russian Duma's authorization to use force against Ukraine argued that, "Bringing foreign military forces to Ukraine is a threat not only to our country but to peace and tranquility on the European continent as a whole."<sup>57</sup> Once unmarked Russian troops ("little green men") had seized control of key infrastructure in Crimea, the AUCCRO issued a cautious statement on social reconciliation that also called for "strengthening . . . the territorial integrity of our country."<sup>58</sup>

The different churches also, to varying degrees, became parties to the conflict both as participants and as victims. The churches all provided pastoral support for soldiers (both those on the front lines and those convalescing in the rear), collected supplies, and intervened on behalf of families to seek the release of POWs. Of course, the churches other than the UOC-MP also worked to defend their parishioners and property in the occupied regions, usually with limited success (the UOC-MP, meanwhile, reported instances of harassment and confiscation in other parts of the country). Representatives of the UGCC and Kyiv Patriarchate faced persecution at the hands of Russian forces and Russian-backed militias, who also targeted Protestant, Jehovah's Witness, and other "nontraditional" Christian groups in the occupied territories, not to mention Muslims and Jews. These armed groups seized and destroyed church property while intimidating, arresting, and occasionally killing representatives of the churches they identified with the Ukrainian nationalist movement. While the institutional UOC-MP condemned these actions, some local UOC-MP clerics, especially within the occupied regions, provided overt support for Russian-backed fighters who often employed religious imagery and depicted themselves as defenders of (canonical) Orthodoxy against heretics, apostates, and nonbelievers.<sup>59</sup>

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56. Center for Civil Liberties/International Partnership for Human Rights, "When God Becomes the Weapon: Persecution based on religious beliefs in the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine," Center for Civil Liberties/International Partnership for Human Rights, April 2015, [http://iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/when\\_god\\_becomes\\_the\\_weapon\\_may2015.pdf](http://iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/when_god_becomes_the_weapon_may2015.pdf).

57. Metropolitan Onufriy, "Council of Churches Statement on Decision of Russian Military Invasion," All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations, March 2, 2014, <http://vrciro.org.ua/ua/statements/380-council-of-churches-statement-on-decision-of-russian-military-invasion>.

58. Metropolitan Onufriy, "Council of Churches Address on Socio-Political Situation in Ukraine," All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations, March 24, 2014, <http://vrciro.org.ua/ua/statements/382-council-of-churches-address-on-socio-political-situation-in-ukraine>.

59. Center for Civil Liberties/International Partnership for Human Rights, "When God Becomes the Weapon: Persecution based on religious beliefs in the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine," Center for Civil Liberties/International Partnership for Human Rights, April 2015, [http://iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/when\\_god\\_becomes\\_the\\_weapon\\_may2015.pdf](http://iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/when_god_becomes_the_weapon_may2015.pdf).

## Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church

The UGCC was unequivocal in its description of the conflict as Russian aggression and in calling on Ukrainians of all faiths to stand up for their freedom, as well as for the values encapsulated in the Euro-Maidan. The church sought to spread this message within Ukraine, but also to rally the diaspora in support of the government's war effort. In a speech in Canada, Shevchuk called Russia's aggression against Ukraine the "most dangerous development since World War II," accompanied by the "most twisted informational assault since Goebbels pontificated that if you brashly lie long enough, loudly enough some will inevitably believe you."<sup>60</sup>

The UGCC also sought to aid the Ukrainian forces directly. Given its nationalist bona fides, the church became a focal point for Ukrainians who wanted to pitch in and contribute in some way to the military effort. The liturgy in many UGCC churches came to include prayers for the troops while, beginning in late March 2014, the church began dispatching priests on pastoral visits to frontline army units in southern and eastern Ukraine.<sup>61</sup> Individual UGCC churches collected supplies for the military and militia forces fighting the Russian invasion. In the early months of the conflict, many of these supplies were sent to the various popular militia units bearing the brunt of the fighting. As these militias were gradually incorporated into the Ukrainian army, supplies collected by UGCC parishes increasingly went straight to the military. The UGCC also supports hospitals and rehabilitation centers for wounded veterans of the conflict, and works with fighters suffering from PTSD and other psychiatric effects of the war.

The forces occupying Crimea and Donbas tended to regard the UGCC in the peninsula as a hostile force, a message that the UGCC claims Russian media reinforced. Clergy and congregations in the occupied regions, who according to church officials sought to stay in place as long as possible, were subjected to various forms of intimidation. Three Greek Catholic priests were reported kidnapped by militants shortly before the March 16 referendum on Crimea "rejoining" the Russian Federation. All were later freed; one of the clerics subsequently told Vatican Radio that he had been interrogated by local militia as well as Russian intelligence agents, who accused him of inciting a riot against the occupying forces. The UGCC also reported instances of vandalism during the takeover of Crimea.<sup>62</sup> Similar cases were reported in the areas controlled by the Donetsk and

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60. Bishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, "Speech of His Beatitude Sviatoslav at the Institute Metropolitan Andrey (Sheptytskyi) (Toronto, Canada, May 2, 2014)," Ukrainian-Greek Catholic Church, May 2, 2014, [http://news.ugcc.ua/en/articles/speech\\_of\\_his\\_beatitude\\_sviatoslav\\_at\\_the\\_institute\\_metropolitan\\_andrey\\_sheptytskyi\\_canada\\_toronto\\_may\\_2\\_2014\\_70326.html](http://news.ugcc.ua/en/articles/speech_of_his_beatitude_sviatoslav_at_the_institute_metropolitan_andrey_sheptytskyi_canada_toronto_may_2_2014_70326.html).

61. "UGCC army chaplains support army troops at hot points," Information Resource of Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, March 28, 2014, [http://news.ugcc.ua/en/news/ugcc\\_army\\_chaplains\\_support\\_army\\_troops\\_at\\_hot\\_points\\_69876.html](http://news.ugcc.ua/en/news/ugcc_army_chaplains_support_army_troops_at_hot_points_69876.html).

62. "Ukrainian Catholics fearful of persecution Church leaders in region and in U.S. await next move after Russian forces take over Crimea," Information Resource of Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, March 28, 2014, [http://news.ugcc.ua/en/articles/ukrainian\\_catholics\\_fearful\\_of\\_persecution\\_church\\_leaders\\_in\\_region\\_and\\_in\\_us\\_await\\_next\\_move\\_after\\_russian\\_forces\\_take\\_over\\_crimea\\_69877.html](http://news.ugcc.ua/en/articles/ukrainian_catholics_fearful_of_persecution_church_leaders_in_region_and_in_us_await_next_move_after_russian_forces_take_over_crimea_69877.html).

Luhansk “people’s republics” in eastern Ukraine, including the kidnapping, beating, and mock execution of a UGCC priest by separatist forces in Donetsk in July 2014.<sup>63</sup>

## UOC-Kyiv Patriarchate

The UOC-KP consistently supported the Ukrainian government’s “antiterrorist operation” against the Russian-backed separatists in Donbas. In contrast to the UGCC, which portrayed the conflict in eschatological terms depicting the conflict with Russia as one manifestation of a larger struggle between good and evil, the UOC-KP’s appeal was more overtly nationalist. Both the church hierarchy and many individual clerics played an active role in rallying support for the government’s war effort. The conflict also played into the UOC-KP’s struggle for influence and resources with the Moscow Patriarchate. Officials of the UOC-KP blamed the UOC-MP for fomenting division in Ukrainian society, fueling the conflict and providing aid and comfort for the enemy. In that sense, the fighting exacerbated the struggle for control of individual parishes, with the UOC-KP accelerating its efforts to take over congregations in unoccupied areas of Ukraine, while many of its parishes in the occupied territories were seized by pro-UOC-MP militants.

The leadership of the UOC-KP was unequivocal in describing the conflict as a war of Russian aggression against Ukraine and calling for armed resistance. These calls began with Patriarch Filaret, who has throughout the conflict adopted an uncompromising position in support of the Ukrainian government and its military efforts. Filaret referred to the occupied territories in Donbas as “Ukrainian land, where all other people, including Russians were intruders,” and expressed his conviction that all of the occupied areas, including Crimea, would eventually be restored to Ukrainian state control.<sup>64</sup> He also compared the seizure of Crimea to the Nazis’ *Anschluss* with Austria, and suggested that Putin should face a Nuremberg-style trial for crimes against humanity.<sup>65</sup> At other times, he compared the actions of the Kremlin to those of the so-called Islamic State.<sup>66</sup>

This criticism was not limited to the Kremlin, as Filaret and other leaders accused the Russian Orthodox Church and the Moscow Patriarchate of collaborating in the Russian war of aggression, dismissing as hypocritical and self-serving their calls for peace. Filaret charged that ROC Patriarch

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63. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, “Ukraine 2014 International Religious Freedom Report,” U.S. Department of State, n.d., <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238656.pdf>.

64. Patriarch Filaret, “Donbass—ukrainskaya zemlya, russkie tam prishlye,” *Polit Navigator*, January 27, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VtheCVJeEw0>; Mikhayl Omel’yan, “Viyna sakinchit’sya i Krim povernet’sya,” Ukrainian Orthodox Church—Kyiv Patriarchate, January 12, 2016, <https://www.cerkva.info/patriarch/viina-zakinchytsia-i-krym-povernetsia-patriarkh-filaret>.

65. Mikhayl Omel’yan, “Patriarkh Filaret: Bog—na botsi pravdi,” Ukrainian Orthodox Church—Kyiv Patriarchate, April 4, 2014, <https://www.cerkva.info/patriarch/patriarkh-filaret-boh-na-botsi-pravdy>; Mikhayl Omel’yan, “Patriarkh Filaret: Putin i ego terroristy dolzhny otvetit’ pered sudom, kak natsisty v Nyurberge,” *Ukrainian Orthodox Church—Kyiv Patriarchate*, April 4, 2016, <https://www.cerkva.info/patriarch/patriarkh-filaret-putyn-y-eho-terroristy-dolzhny-otvetyt-pered-sudom-kak-natsisty-v-nyurnberhe>.

66. “The head of the UOC-KP spoke about the parishes in the Crimea and the Donbas and the perspectives of the association with the UOC-MP and the UAOC,” *Religiya v Ukraini*, April 15, 2015, <https://www.religion.in.ua/news/vazhlivo/28888-glava-upc-kp-rasskazal-o-prixodax-v-krymu-i-donbasse-i-persektivax-obedineniya-s-upc-mp-i-uapc.html>.

Kirill's appeal for peace between the warring sides was really an appeal for surrender, for "a peace of slavery and occupation."<sup>67</sup> Similarly, the UOC-KP has condemned the ROC and the Moscow Patriarchate for referring—like the Russian government—to the conflict in Ukraine as a civil war and refusing to describe the seizure of Ukrainian territory as an occupation.<sup>68</sup>

The UOC-KP's attitude to the civilian population of the occupied territories has been somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, it saw them as victims of the Russian war of aggression; on the other, representatives of the church sometimes intimated that the people of Donbas had brought their fate upon themselves. In a controversial speech (one widely reported in Russia) in the government-controlled part of Donetsk Oblast, Filaret argued that inhabitants of Donetsk and Luhansk who had voted to break away from Ukraine in the May 2014 Kremlin-sponsored referendum had sinned, and that their sin had to be expiated with blood.<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, Filaret and other clerics typically blamed Russian-inspired propaganda for sparking the fratricidal conflict in Donbas, arguing the divisions that led to war would not have existed without the role of Russian disinformation.

The UOC-KP also worked to support the government's war effort in practical terms. Its parishes conducted a concerted campaign to collect money and food for Ukrainian military units. Filaret announced in a June 2014 press conference that the UOC-KP had to that point collected around 2 million hryvnias (then around \$170,000) for the "antiterrorist operation" in Donbas, while individual parishes and clerics had done more.<sup>70</sup> Over the course of 2014, the church claimed to have provided frontline troops with more than 5,000 tons of assistance in the form of food, clothing, medicine, and equipment, along with eight automobiles. It also struck a medal for both soldiers and civilians who contributed to the war effort.<sup>71</sup> UOC-KP priests frequently visit soldiers in the front lines, while many units also have permanent chaplains. According to church officials, these chaplains provide pastoral care to soldiers, including family and psychological counseling and support for the wounded.

The war has also exacerbated the struggle for control of church buildings and congregations between the Kyiv and Moscow Patriarchates. Supporters of the UOC-MP charge that the conflict has provided cover for the Kyiv Patriarchate to go on the offensive in the unoccupied regions of Ukraine, while the UOC-KP in turn accuses its rival of expropriating its property in occupied Crimea and Donbas. The wartime environment and growth of anti-Russian sentiment among much of the population facilitated the seizure of Moscow Patriarchate facilities by groups claiming loyalty to the UOC-KP, including extreme nationalist organizations like Right Sector. According to

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67. Ibid.

68. Mikhayl Omel'yan, "Komentar: Kolaborant russkogo mira," Ukrainian Orthodox Church—Kyiv Patriarchate, July 18, 2015, <https://www.cerkva.info/publications/komentar-kolaborant-russkoho-myra>.

69. Andrey Vasil'ev, "Raskol'nik Filaret opravdal ubiystvo zhiteley Donbassa," *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, May 11, 2016, <https://rg.ru/2016/11/05/raskolnik-filaret-opravdal-ubiystvo-zhitelej-donbassa.html>.

70. "Kyiv Patriarchate helps ATO forces in Donbass," *Novosti Donbassa*, July 3, 2014, <http://novosti.dn.ua/news/211570-kyevskyy-patryarkhat-pomogaet-sylam-ato-na-donbasse>.

71. "UOC Kyiv Patriarchate has established a medal 'for self-sacrifice and love of Ukraine,'" TSN, January 4, 2015, <http://ru.tsn.ua/ukrayina/upc-kievskogo-patriarhata-uchredila-medal-za-samopozhertvovanie-i-lyubov-k-ukraine-403935.html>.

the U.S. State Department, these seizures were often abetted by official indifference or even support at the local level. Even officials of the UOC-KP acknowledged that groups like Right Sector were involved, because, they suggested, parishioners sometimes turned to them for protection.<sup>72</sup> In the occupied areas of Crimea and Donbas, it was the UOC-KP that suffered the brunt of such expropriations. In the spring of 2014, for instance, the UOC-KP released a statement condemning the occupying forces in different parts of Crimea for blocking access to church facilities and preventing the conduct of religious services.<sup>73</sup>

## UOC-Moscow Patriarchate

The UOC-MP, meanwhile, continued its policy of balancing its loyalty to the Ukrainian state and society (itself split by the conflict) with its affiliation with the Russian Orthodox Church. The UOC-MP sought to distance itself as much as possible from the annexation of Crimea and the Russian intervention in Donbas. Some observers suspect that this approach was coordinated with or at least approved by the Kremlin, which prioritized maintaining the UOC-MP's influence over having its voice added to the chorus of approval for the Russian invasion. At the same time, even the Russian Orthodox Church itself maintained some distance from the Kremlin's approach. Kirill, for instance, did not attend the March 18 signing ceremony confirming Russia's annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol, while the ROC has so far avoided making a decision about the status of parishes in Crimea, which as before remain under the jurisdiction of the UOC-MP rather than the ROC.

This balancing act on the part of the UOC-MP required it, more than the other Ukrainian denominations, to actively eschew politics, or at least the appearance of politics. While making appeals for peace and providing humanitarian aid, it in particular did not criticize either the Russian government or the separatists. Unlike the other churches, the UOC-MP did not assign blame for the conflict and did not speak of an "invasion." It continued to operate both in the occupied territories and in the rest of Ukraine, where it became increasingly vocal about efforts by loyalists of the Kyiv Patriarchate (sometimes with the collusion of local officials) to seize its facilities. To some observers, the UOC-MP's policy of neutrality is less a reflection of its difficult position in a divided society and more the consequence of its leaders' ambitions to play the role of mediator in the conflict.

Of course, the UOC-MP could not avoid being touched by the conflict and the larger political issues driving it. As a church for Ukrainians, moreover, the UOC-MP almost inevitably took steps that contributed to Kyiv's war effort. It thus worked with the Ukrainian government to secure the release of POWs captured by the separatists. Individual parishes, including some in the east, also organized assistance packages not only for displaced persons, but also for the Ukrainian armed forces. And the UOC-MP continued to maintain support for Ukraine's territorial integrity, a stance that of course put it at odds with Moscow.

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72. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, "Ukraine 2014 International Religious Freedom Report," U.S. Department of State, n.d., <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/256465.pdf>.

73. Mikhayl Omel'yan, "Will the Kiev Patriarchate stay in the Crimea?," Ukrainian Orthodox Church—Kyiv Patriarchate, April 24, 2014, <https://www.cerkva.info/publications/chy-zalyshtsia-v-krymu-kyivskiy-patriarkhat>.

Instead, the church focused on calling for an end to the conflict and sponsoring humanitarian activities in territory controlled by the Ukrainian government (rather than the Moscow-backed separatists). The most notable aspect of the UOC-MP's activity after the start of the conflict was its consistent calls for an end to the fighting without, for the most part, reference to the larger political questions driving it. Most consistently, the UOC-MP's hierarchy reiterated its calls, dating from the days of the anti-Yanukovych protests, to resolve Ukraine's conflicts peacefully. Leaders from Metropolitan Onufriy on down emphasized peace and reconciliation in their sermons (which the UOC-KP and UGCC criticized for prioritizing peace over victory). During holidays, church leaders conducted special services to pray for peace, and UOC-MP clergy even led a religious procession (supported by the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense) from western Ukraine to Donbas in late 2014 to promote peace.<sup>74</sup>

Similarly, the UOC-MP organized a religious procession in July 2016 with columns of believers with icons marching to Kyiv both from the east and the west of the country. The procession was billed as a march for peace, again prioritizing an end to the fighting over victory or the restoration of Ukraine's territorial integrity. This approach put the marchers on a collision course with much of the Ukrainian population, and indeed, the march came under assault several times along the way. President Petro Poroshenko, who had been an open supporter of the UOC-MP before 2014, was highly critical of the march. In a July 28, 2016 speech, Poroshenko criticized the UOC-MP for referring to the events in Donbas as "conflict" instead of "Russian invasion," going so far as to claim this position reflected a "non-Ukrainian voice." For the first time in this speech he unequivocally supported the creation of a single Orthodox church for Ukraine (reflecting the demands of the Kyiv Patriarchate to be recognized as Ukraine's local church), and supported the Rada's appeal to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew on behalf of this demand.<sup>75</sup>

The UOC-MP leadership has also been explicit that peace requires reconciliation between pro-Russian and anti-Russian elements in Ukrainian society, and within the Church itself. The UOC-MP was more constrained than the other churches in taking a political stance in part because its own parishioners remain divided on the key, even existential questions facing Ukraine. The only way the UOC-MP could maintain its standing in society and claim to be a church for all Ukrainians was to avoid taking a stance on the issue that split its own flock. As Onufriy noted in a May 2014 speech following the firebombing of the House of Trade Unions in Odessa that killed many pro-Russian activists (presumably including adherents of the UOC-MP), "the Church of Christ does not divide its flock based on nationality or political views."<sup>76</sup>

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74. "Donets'ka oblast. Zavershivsyia Khresniy khid za mir v Ukraini," Ukrainian Orthodox Church, November 17, 2014, <http://news.church.ua/2014/11/17/donecka-oblast-zavershivsyia-xresnij-xid-za-mir-v-ukrajini/>.

75. Petro Poroshenko, "Zverennya Prezidenta z nagodi Dnya khreshchennya Kiivs'koi Rusi—Ukraini," President of Ukraine—Petro Poroshenko: Official Website, July 28, 2017, [http://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/politics/2016/07/160729\\_poroshenko\\_church\\_vc](http://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/politics/2016/07/160729_poroshenko_church_vc).

76. Metropolitan Onufriy, "Zvernennya Mistsebyustytelya Kyivys'koyi mytropolychoyi kafedry mytropolyta Chernivec'koho i Bukovyns'koho Onufriya u zv'yazku z ostannimy podiyamy v Ukraini," Ukrainian Orthodox Church, May 4, 2014, <http://news.church.ua/2014/05/04/zvernennya-miscebyustitelya-kijivskoj-mitropolichoji-kafedri-mitropolita-cherniveckogo-i-bukovinskogo-onufriya-u-zvyazku-z-ostannimi-podiyami-v-ukrajini/>.



In contrast to the Kyiv Patriarchate and UGCC, the Moscow Patriarchate's connection to the ROC and the wider Orthodox world meant that its own existence was not tied to the current Ukrainian government or, indeed, to the existence of the Ukrainian state. It was therefore able to maintain some distance between itself and the state authorities. In the aftermath of Yanukovich's flight and the onset of conflict in the spring of 2014, Onufriy remarked that "we must not descend to the political level in our service. Because when the Church becomes part of the political system . . . its path of life ends together with the collapse of the political system whose interests it serves."<sup>77</sup>

Yet because the Ukrainian state and its own parishioners were under threat, the UOC-MP at times found itself pulled into the political arena, albeit in a more limited way than the other Eastern Rite churches. De facto, the UOC-MP frequently ended up supporting the efforts of the government in Kyiv even if its rhetorical stance was more restrained than that of the other churches.

Much of this activity originated at the local level rather than with the metropolitanate. Individual UOC-MP parishes, for instance, collected warm clothes and supplies not only for civilian victims of the conflict, but also for members of the Ukrainian army.<sup>78</sup> Local clerics and members of the hierarchy carried out prayer services for members of the armed forces. The Archbishop of Sumy, located near the Russo-Ukrainian border, even sent a letter to President Putin criticizing the mobilization of Russian forces along the border, warning the Russian president that starting a "fratricidal" war would weigh on his name long after the current crisis had passed.<sup>79</sup> At times, the UOC-MP even provided support to members of the militia forces that bore the brunt of the fighting in the early stages of the war, and which Russian propaganda typically portrayed as fascists. Onufriy himself conducted the funeral for the militia fighter Oleh Mikhniyk, who had helped protect UOC-MP facilities around the Maidan before being killed in Donbas while fighting for the nationalist Aidar Battalion in August 2014.<sup>80</sup>

UOC-MP activities also included intervening with the separatists to secure the release of Ukrainian service members who had been taken captive. The Church was acting on behalf of its captured parishioners and their families, but also on behalf of the Ukrainian state. Indeed, President Poroshenko appealed personally to Onufriy to intercede with the separatist forces on behalf of Ukrainian POWs. The UOC-MP metropolitan agreed, at one point describing efforts to help such prisoners

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77. Metropolitan Onufriy, "To, chto proiskhodit seychas—ispytanie nashey lyubvi k Bogu i blizhnemu," Ukrainian Orthodox Church, March 13, 2014, <http://news.church.ua/2014/03/13/mitropolit-onufrij-to-chto-proisxodit-sejchas-ispytanie-nashej-lyubvi-k-bogu-i-blizhnemu/>.

78. "Zhitomirs'ka eparkhiya vidpravila tepli rechi dlya ukrajyns'kykh viys'kovykh ta mirnix zhiteliv na skhid Ukraini," Ukrainian Orthodox Church, November 11, 2014, <http://news.church.ua/2014/11/11/zhitomirska-jeparxiya-vidpravila-tepli-rechi-dlya-ukrajinskix-vijskovix-ta-mirnix-zhiteliv-na-sxid-ukrajini/>.

79. Archbishop Evlogiy, "Arkhiepiskop Sums'kiy i Okhtirs'kiy Evlogiy zvernuvsya z listom do Prezidenta Rosiys'koy Federatsiy Putina V. V.," Ukrainian Orthodox Church, August 7, 2014, <http://news.church.ua/2014/08/07/arxijepiskop-sumskij-i-oxtirskij-jevlogij-zvernuvsya-z-listom-do-prezidenta-rosijskoji-federaciji-putinu-v-v/>.

80. "Kiyv, Predstoyatel' UPTs zvershiv vidspivuvannya sotnika Olega Mikhnyuka," Ukrainian Orthodox Church, August 23, 2014, <http://news.church.ua/2014/08/23/kijiv-predstoyatel-upc-zavershiv-vidspivuvannya-sotnika-olega-mixnyuka/>.

as the Church's "sacred duty."<sup>81</sup> Notably though, the UOC-MP did not appeal, at least not publicly, on behalf of separatist fighters captured by the government. At the level of the hierarchy, interaction with separatist forces appears quite limited.

The UOC-MP also spoke out on behalf of Ukraine's territorial integrity (which, of course, also implied defending its own parishes in the occupied territories). Along with representatives of other denominations, the UOC-MP signed onto statements issued by AUCCRO supporting Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.<sup>82</sup> In a message welcoming Poroshenko to the presidency following his June 2014 inauguration, the UOC-MP strongly emphasized Ukraine's independence and territorial integrity, criticizing efforts to "undermine state sovereignty or to split the single, unified Ukraine."<sup>83</sup>

Some UOC-MP clerics went further in their support for Kyiv's efforts and their criticism of Russia and the separatists. In a recent account, Lidiya Lozova describes the activities of an energetic and devoted UOC-MP priest from a parish about 50 miles outside of Kyiv, Archimandrite Filaret.<sup>84</sup> According to Lozova's account, Filaret remained neutral during the events on the Maidan, leaving his parishioners to make up their own minds how to respond, prohibiting political discussions in his church and insisting merely on responsibility, reflection, and the avoidance of violence. After the shootings on Maidan in mid-February 2014, Filaret went to Maidan several times to pray for the dead, bringing food and medicine collected by parishioners. Later the priest and parish organized help for those wounded on Maidan, using their foreign connections.

Archimandrite Filaret condemned the annexation of Crimea and the separatist actions in Donbas. He organized special night vigils to pray for peace. Starting from March 2014 some parishioners donated considerable sums of money "to buy uniforms, special shoes, protective equipment, and medicine to support the Ukrainian army." His church sent numerous food parcels to the war zone in the east, while Filaret and some of his parishioners took to visiting the wounded in hospitals in Kyiv. In spite of all these activities, Lozova reports that Filaret became a target of "public and quite aggressive accusations that he provoked Russian aggression in Ukraine" on the part of people who didn't belong to the UOC-MP. He even suffered physical harassment.

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81. "His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufry: We will continue to help in the liberation of the Ukrainian military," Ukrainian Orthodox Church, December 19, 2016, <http://news.church.ua/2016/12/20/blazhennejshij-mitropolit-onufrij-my-budem-i-v-dalnejshem-pomogat-v-osvobozhdenii-ukrainskix-voennyx/?lang=ru>.

82. Metropolitan Danilo, "Appeal of the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations Regarding the Normalization of the Socio-Political Situation in Ukraine in Respect of Internal and External Challenges," Ukrainian Orthodox Church, March 24, 2014, <http://news.church.ua/2014/03/24/zvernennya-vseukrajinskoji-radi-cerkov-i-religijnix-organizacij-shhodo-normalizaciji-suspilno-politichnoji-situaciji-v-ukrajini-z-oglyadu-na-vnutrishni-ta-zovnishni-vikliki/>.

83. Metropolitan Onufrij, "Zvernennya Svyashchennogo Sinodu do Prezidenta Ukraini P.O. Poroshenko u zvyazku z ostannimi podiyami v Ukraini," Ukrainian Orthodox Church, June 19, 2014, <http://news.church.ua/2014/06/19/zvernennya-svyashchennogo-sinodu-do-prezidenta-ukrajini-p-o-poroshenka-u-zvyazku-z-ostannimi-podiyami-v-ukrajini/>.

84. Lidiya Lozova, "The Role of the Church in the Ukrainian Crisis: The Experience of One Parish," in Andrii Krawchuk and Thomas Bremer, eds. *Churches in the Ukrainian Crisis* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 123–128.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The political upheaval of the past few years has created a fundamentally new landscape for Ukraine's Christian churches. In the short term, the events surrounding the protests on the Maidan, the "Revolution of Dignity," and the Donbas conflict have reinforced the position of the more nationally minded UGCC and UOC-KP, while creating new difficulties for the UOC-MP. While longer-term dynamics are harder to predict, at a minimum, the more fluid environment that has prevailed since late 2013 has reopened some basic questions about the relationship of the different Eastern Rite churches to the Ukrainian state, and to one another.

Despite the cross-cutting conflicts that have roiled Ukraine since 2013, religiously motivated violence between Christian denominations has been more the exception than the rule. Yet all of Ukraine's Eastern Rite churches face the prospect of further polarization and violence as the situations both in Ukrainian society and in Donbas remain unresolved. While fundamental questions about Ukraine's position in the wider Orthodox world will not be resolved in the short run, the leadership of all the major churches (Orthodox as well as non-Orthodox) has to play a more prominent role in reigning in the worst impulses of their respective followers while emphasizing the need for interreligious peace and reconciliation.

One of the ironies of the increasingly polarized struggle among the Eastern Rite churches is that many officials and laity still see the path ahead in greater unification. Of course, unification on whose terms will remain the critical question, one whose answer will likely be determined by forces external to the churches themselves. Negotiations for the remainder of the UAOC to join the Kyiv Patriarchate continue, though they are difficult and have made little progress to date.<sup>85</sup> During the months leading up to the death of UOC-MP Metropolitan Volodymyr in late 2014, some UOC-MP bishops began openly considering the possibility of a union with the UOC-KP and the creation of a united UOC. This window of opportunity was gone soon after Onufriy became the head of the UOC-MP. The Ukrainian government has also recently become very active in attempts to push forward the creation of a unified Orthodox Church, but it is difficult to see how Poroshenko can force the UOC-MP to recognize Filaret as a legitimate partner given the anathema pronounced on him by the Russian Orthodox Church.<sup>86</sup>

Meanwhile, the UOC-MP faces mounting difficulties in its efforts to balance between the demands of Ukrainian nationalism and fealty to the Russian church. One point of tension is over language. The UOC-MP, the church of most of Ukraine's Russian speakers, has not yet taken a stance on the language issue, but faces pressure from its parishioners (and from Moscow) to push back against government efforts at de-Russification. Officials of the Moscow Patriarchate (and many outside observers) have sharply criticized a law introduced into the Rada in the spring of 2017 to require religious denominations based in a state identified as an "aggressor" to publicly commit to

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85. UOJ Editorial, "The UAOC Blames Kiev Patriarchate for Disrupting the Process of Unification," Union of Orthodox Journalists, July 19, 2015, <http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/otnosheniya-konfessij/the-uaoc-blames-kiev-patriarchate-for-disrupting-the-process-of-unification>.

86. Filaret was born in 1929, but he demonstrates good health and energy, and categorically excludes the possibility of stepping down as patriarch.

“respecting Ukraine’s sovereignty, territorial integrity and laws,” and allowing the Ukrainian government to appoint its metropolitan and bishops. They argue that the bill would, if passed, allow the Ukrainian government to essentially liquidate the UOC-MP in Ukrainian territory by forcibly removing its clerics and replacing them with figures beholden to Kyiv.<sup>87</sup>

The position of the UGCC is not easy to predict. On the one hand, a significant part of the clergy remains strongly opposed to reconciliation with Moscow. On the other hand, relations between the Vatican and Moscow Patriarchate got a new impulse after Pope Francis and Patriarch Kirill met on February 12, 2016 in Havana. Given the Roman Catholic Church’s efforts dating from the papacy of John Paul II to improve relations with the Orthodox world, the UGCC could find itself in a difficult position if these efforts bear fruit, caught between its loyalty to Rome and its commitment to Ukraine. Should the UGCC go along with Rome’s pursuit of rapprochement, it could even find itself lined up alongside the UOC-MP in pursuing a negotiated peace for Ukraine, one that leaves it at odds with the Kyiv Patriarchate.

Of course, it is for political leaders in and outside Ukraine to find a solution to the conflict in the east of the country. Even if and when a political solution is found, the mutual hostility accumulated between pro-Ukrainian and “separatist” populations during years of fighting will not go away by itself. Ukraine’s churches could then play an important role in promoting reconciliation and healing among their adherents. An end to the conflict, or at least a path toward ending it, would also create more opportunities for the churches themselves to cooperate.

In a less polarized environment, Ukraine’s church structures could provide a platform for efforts by civil society organizations to promote peace, and for civic dialogue prior to and during a peace process. Currently the main task for all the churches is to work to change the public mood and to support any shift from militant spirit, which prevails on both sides of the front line, to a peace-oriented agenda. Church hierarchs are better positioned than politicians to initiate such discourse changes, as they are—at least in theory—less directly beholden to public opinion.

The Russian and Ukrainian states also have a role to play in preventing a slide into sectarian conflict, though, of course, both Kyiv and Moscow are likely to approach the religious dimension of the conflict through the prism of their wider strategic objectives. That is, they are likely to take steps to promote interreligious harmony only to the extent that they have decided to pursue a more general peace agreement. If, however, Kyiv and Moscow make a concerted push to end the conflict, they will need to take steps to mitigate the consequences of the religious polarization that has become a feature of Ukrainian society since the outbreak of the “Revolution of Dignity.”

#### Russian government and Russian Orthodox Church:

- The ROC should continue its line of quiet nonrecognition of the Russian annexations, keeping Crimea under the jurisdiction of the UOC-MP rather than seeking to bring it under the auspices of the ROC itself. The ROC should also continue to respect the autonomy of the

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87. DECR Communication Service, “Ukrainian Hierarchs and Religious Leaders Comment on Anti-Church Bills to be Considered by Supreme Rada,” The Russian Orthodox Church: Department for External Church Relations, May 16, 2017, <https://mospat.ru/en/2017/05/16/news145988/>.

UOC-MP, avoiding financial transfers and limiting to a minimum the transfer of personnel between the two churches.

- The conflict in and around Ukraine is a major challenge to Russian national identity. The biggest danger is the growth of irredentist ambitions in Russia toward other parts of the *russskiy mir*, particularly in Belarus and Ukraine (even if official discussion of the *russskiy mir* conflict has declined since 2014–2015). While the ROC has thus far portrayed its approach to the *russskiy mir* concept as being compatible with the existence of the Belarusian and Ukrainian states, directly or indirectly it lends legitimacy to those who seek to revise the territorial status quo. Such revisionism not only contributes to mistrust between the three states, it also raises the danger of conflict, not only in Donbas, but throughout the putative *russskiy mir*. Ideally, the ROC would reconsider its views of Holy Rus and *russskiy mir*, prioritizing reconciliation within Ukraine and condemning irredentist claims against Belarus and Ukraine. That means being clear that the war in Donbas has nothing to do with the creation of a *russskiy mir*, whose success must come to rely on cultural, religious, and ethical activity, rather than by military means. Given the political and spiritual capital the ROC has spent promoting the existence of a *russskiy mir*, and the role of Patriarch Kirill in developing and advancing it even before his elevation to the patriarchal throne, the Church cannot realistically abandon its advocacy on behalf of *russskiy mir*. Its challenge thus lies in making *russskiy mir* a force for unity rather than division within the East Slavic world.

#### Ukrainian government:

- Kyiv should make an effort to remain even-handed in disputes between and among religious denominations in the country. Leading figures, including President Poroshenko, should speak out against efforts to legally handicap particular denominations (i.e., the UOC-MP). The Ukrainian state should also rigorously enforce its own laws when it comes to disputes over church property. Given the involvement of local political figures in many of these disputes, Kyiv will have to take the lead in speaking out against efforts to seize religious property and in prosecuting violations through the courts.
- Continue engaging the AUCCRO. The AUCCRO remains the most representative forum for addressing religious disputes and for involving religious figures in the political process in a constructive way. It also ensures that all of the country's major religions (Christian and non-Christian) have a voice and a stake in the political process.

#### Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church:

- The UGCC should take steps to dissociate itself from nationalist militancy in its name, condemning both clerics calling for violence and members of nationalist organizations espousing a religious justification for acts of violence.
- It should also reach out to other denominations, especially the UOC-MP, to launch informal discussions on conditions for establishing a joint reconciliation commission. While such a body would ideally also include the Kyiv Patriarchate, suspicions between it and UOC-MP are too strong at the moment to envision a formal process encompassing both. It would be

better to start by focusing on areas of agreement between the UGCC and the UOC-MP, whose bases of support are in different parts of the country and are not, for the most part, competing for the same parishioners or property. The ongoing efforts to promote better relations between the ROC and the Vatican offer an opportunity as well as a danger for the UGCC, which ought to coordinate in advance with the leadership in Rome to avoid finding its own position in Ukraine overtaken by events.

#### Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyiv Patriarchate:

- The UOC-KP ought in the first instance to tone down its nationalistic rhetoric and support for laws that appear designed to place other denominations at a disadvantage. Top leadership, starting with Metropolitan Filaret, should set an example for lower-level clerics and not seek to exacerbate polarization within Ukrainian society. That includes being less openly supportive of the government's "Anti-Terrorist Operation" in Donbas, and attempting to be a church for all Ukrainians.
- Over the longer term, the UOC-KP's biggest weakness lies in its lack of institutional capacity. Without abandoning its aspiration to become Ukraine's "local" church, the UOC-KP should in the meantime focus on building its capacity to train clerics, minister to parishioners, and act in the public interest. The more the other actors see the UOC-KP as a constructive force in society, the more they will be inclined to work with it.

#### Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Moscow Patriarchate:

- Subordination to the Russian Orthodox Church limits the UOC-MP's freedom of action, especially on questions of basic identity. Nevertheless, the leadership of the UOC-MP should make an effort to demonstrate that it is a *Ukrainian* church, including through the recruitment and promotion of more Ukrainian-speaking clergy to improve its outreach to Ukrainian speakers and lessen the impression that it is a tool of Moscow's imperial ambitions. To the extent possible, its leadership should also speak out against violations of Ukrainian sovereignty, especially but not exclusively in the sphere of religion. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church Moscow Patriarchate should publicly criticize acts of religious violence and calls for violence carried out in its name, including the seizure of property and assaults on clergy in Crimea and the occupied regions of Donbas. Other religious groups, including the Kyiv Patriarchate and the UGCC, should similarly condemn violence and calls for violence in their name, including the seizure of property.

# Conclusion





# Recommendations and Avenues for Further Research

Olga Oliker

The chapters in this volume look at the ways in which religion and conflict intersect in the Russian Federation through eight different perspectives. Several provide new research findings and insights on how the challenges of religious violence are evolving in that country. Notably, they identify existing government policies and societal attitudes as part of the problem: the narrative of “traditionalism” and “extremism” that frames so much of the discussion of religion in Russia has made it more, rather than less, difficult to battle violent manifestations of religious tension and conflict.

The task we set ourselves was not simply to diagnose the problem, but to also ask what can be done better. As part of our mandate, the team of authors and contributors undertook to develop actionable recommendations for authorities, communities, and others who seek to make Russia and Russians safer from religious violence. Moreover, while we hope that our contributions to these discussions and debates will be valuable, we also recognize that this volume is far from comprehensive. Indeed, in the course of our research, we found a substantial number of topics that we feel deserve additional data collection and analysis. That sort of work can, in turn, further inform policy choices and actions.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations presented in this chapter are condensed from those that appear in the individual papers composing this volume, sometimes verbatim or nearly so, in other cases adapted to take account of the views of project team members. In many cases the recommendations in several chapters echo one another, for instance by emphasizing clearer legal frameworks and forwarding ways in which religious leaders and organizations can play mediating rather than exacerbating roles in conflictual relationships. When several chapters make similar recommendations, they are combined below. In other cases, different authors have reached somewhat different conclusions, which we note. Not all project participants agree with all of these recommendations.

In offering these recommendations, we recognize that many of them, particularly those directed to the government of the Russian Federation, but also some of those focused on religious leaders, would require substantial changes to existing policies and fly in the face of many assumptions that Russian authorities have made regarding what is and is not effective. Moreover, because many such actions would be described by their opponents as softening Russia's approach to dangerous groups, we recognize the challenges inherent in attempting to develop a political constituency for such shifts and implement these changes. We are also very aware that our recommendations for more separation between religious authorities and state authorities run counter to long-term trends in the Russian Federation. One way in which modern Russia has broken with its Soviet past is by fostering closer, albeit still largely informal, links between established religious leaders and officials, a sharp contrast to its ultra-secular Soviet past. While adapting policy as we recommend would be difficult, the fact remains that the analyses throughout this volume indicate quite convincingly that today's approaches are not meeting Russia's needs. Moreover, the recommendations we present are informed not only by what we see in Russia, but also by what we know of effective global practices. We believe that if Russia is serious about responding to the challenges it faces, its leadership can find ways to implement better policies as recommended here.

Finally, and relatedly, we forward these recommendations while urging those who might implement them to attend not only to putting policies into action, but also to study and evaluate effects, in Russia and around the world. Too often, an emphasis on implementation ignores the important question of assessing effectiveness, and implementers face incentives to report that their efforts are successful, so that they may continue to act. This can perpetuate bad policies. We therefore emphasize the importance of incorporating effective and long-term evaluation mechanisms into policy development.

For Russian authorities at all levels:

- Avoid the use of the term "traditional" in relation to religious organizations in official discourse, as it creates the discriminatory opposing category "nontraditional" and helps to legitimize vigilante violence against the latter.
- Exclude groups involved in or supporting any kind of violence from projects supported by the Russian state (this might be caveated to exclude sanctioned violence, such as hunting clubs).
- Study and adapt global best practices for regulating religion and separation of religion and government.
- Study and adapt best domestic and international practices in countering violent extremism online, including understanding and addressing its causes. Collaborate with other governments to do so and share lessons.
- Allow and in some cases support civil society and religious actors to play a role in developing and deploying counternarratives against radicalization. Support independent evaluation of the effectiveness of these efforts.
- Cease discriminatory policies against representatives of nonviolent religious minority groups, especially Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Scientology, and independent Muslim groups;

provide special protection for members of these communities (some team members believe that certain restrictions regarding what may or may not be termed a religious group, and thus receive attendant benefits, are warranted).

- Refrain from endorsing anti-sect campaigners and so lending them credibility.
- Speak and act in clear defense of the rights of minority faith communities, particularly when they are subject to violence. While government representatives—including at the highest level—have repeatedly voiced support for religious freedom in Russia, this has been in general terms and unaccompanied by demonstrative action.
- Be more alert, and publicly resistant to, violent attacks on followers of minority faiths. Incidents such as the repeated threatening at gunpoint of Jehovah's Witnesses by a government official in Irkutsk region should not go unpunished.
- Refrain from using religious leaders as proxies to promote political aims in Russia and abroad.
- Adopt a zero-tolerance policy toward human rights violations by regional officials and prosecute those who violate human rights, including in Chechnya.
- End policies of collective punishment.
- Do not interfere in approaches that appear to be resolving tensions, such as positive cooperation between the Muftiates and Sufis in Kabardino-Balkaria
- Put more resources toward economic development and educational and employment opportunities in the North Caucasus.

For Russian federal officials:

- Consider a formal commission to study the issues of Islamic dress code and mosque construction, and develop lines of communication on these questions with the Muftiates.

For Russian local and regional officials:

- Avoid favoring groups or communities in religious conflicts. Practice separation of religion and governance: any involvement of religious groups in public actions and fora should involve as many as feasible (some team members, however, are wary of quota systems for representation).
- Facilitate the creation of independent councils and other mechanisms to independently resolve conflicts between and within religious groups and communities.
- Prevent the formation of confession-based political groups within government (some members of our team believe that confession-based caucuses in local legislatures and similar organizations are appropriate).
- Seek cooperation, not confrontation. Informal regional-level dialogue between government officials and all local religious communities is generally positive in countering hostility toward minority faiths and community distrust of authorities.

- Study and adopt Russian and global best practices for interaction between government and religious groups, community consultation, and so forth.
- Do not block the registration of Muslim communities unsubsordinated to federal and/or federal-district structures for that reason alone.

#### For Russian lawmakers and jurists:

- Apply globally accepted principles and values of universal human rights.
- Revise the 2002 Law on Combating Extremist Activity and associated points of the Criminal Code so that “extremism” is contingent upon violence, threats of violence, and/or incitement to violence. In the meantime, follow the recommendations in this vein contained in the November 3, 2016, plenum resolution of Russia’s Supreme Court.
- If the term “extremism” is to remain in use in Russian law, Russian legislators need to establish a clear and accurate definition that takes into account scholarly research on the different meanings of the term. An appropriate definition might limit the term to acts that relate to violence, including public calls for violence and financing of related activities. This change would bring the definition in line with the understanding of extremism reflected in the documents of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization—the only international agreements ratified by Russia that include the notion of “extremism.”
- Revoke legislation restricting “missionary activity” that punishes most unauthorized public advocacy of a religious community and increases risk for anyone practicing religious activity outside buildings owned by religious organizations.
- Annul court rulings banning books and other materials (including religious texts) for “extremist content” and dispense with the ineffective Federal List of Extremist Materials.
- Abandon the requirement for informal communities of believers to present information about themselves to government bodies if they do not wish to obtain official status.
- Avoid making religion-specific laws where other and existing civil protections can be understood to apply to religion. Ensure that civil protections are enforced in relation to religious freedom.
- Avoid making laws that restrict religious freedoms specifically. Instead, equally enforce restrictions in line with other laws and regulations (e.g., against hate speech, violent action, etc.) regardless of whether an entity in violation of those laws and regulations is religious in nature.
- Ensure that counterterrorism police units prioritize all hate crime based on religious hatred.
- Simplify registration procedures and increase the transparency of registration and reregistration processes for religious groups.
- Cease blocking bank accounts of those included in the list of individuals involved in or suspected of involvement in extremist or terrorist activity (the list is appropriate for use for monitoring purposes).

- Consider a federal-level legal definition regarding what forms of “hijab” are prohibited and permitted and under what conditions. This would help avoid ad hoc decisions taken by local authorities or individuals (some members of our group argue that bans on “hijab” are counterproductive, and authorities should instead be clear that neither bans on hijab nor the requirement to wear hijab should be legally formulated or enforced).

#### For Russian law enforcement:

- Draw on existing expertise and reach out to community leaders. This will help with investigations and inform policies, making both more effective.
- In line with Supreme Court recommendations, do not interpret religious polemics that lack any violent component as inciting religious hatred and thus criminalize religious debate.
- The office of the General Prosecutor should collect additional information to develop cases for the Supreme Court geared toward reversing past decisions on banning religious groups and organizations that were based on incomplete evidence.
- Arrest and prosecute perpetrators and instigators of violent attacks on followers of minority faiths.

#### For Russian religious leaders and organizations:

Formal religious structures and prominent religious figures should avoid the appearance of taking sides in conflicts, lest they exacerbate them. In some cases, religious structures can serve to bring broader communities together, particularly if they cooperate across divides and with civil society. Religious structures could provide platforms for efforts by civil society organizations to promote peace, and for civic dialogue prior and during a peace process. This will in many cases be most effective if it is supported by the state. Some specific recommendations include:

- Condemn fellow clerics who call for violent action or support violent ideologies, whether within Russia or abroad.
- Preach consistently against violent ideologies and violence, even those meant to protect “traditional values.”
- Recognize the dangers of aligning with political actors and groups, and avoid getting involved in political contests and power struggles
- Refrain from endorsing anti-sect campaigners and so lending them credibility.
- Maintain transparent accounting practices to ensure that neither political nor illegal funds can subvert missions or communities.
- Develop, assess, and share (with other religious leaders, law enforcement, community leaders, and local government) best practices to prevent the spread of violent ideologies, including through work with youth.
- Provide safer spaces for youth, including high-risk youth, with clear and transparent guidelines regarding what will and will not be reported to authorities, in line with the tenets of faith and local law.

- Define and ensure adequate Islamic education of formal religious leaders.
- Learn from the experience of various Muftiates and their interaction with Salafi and other groups by charting experiences and assessing effectiveness.
- For Muftiates: Improve outreach and coordination with local Islamic associations to better fulfill the role of intermediary between Muslim communities, local institutions, and the general public.

For Russian educators (including those responsible for educational policy):

- Emphasize the intrinsic and long-standing religious diversity of Russia in school classes on religious culture and secular ethics, and examine periods of religious persecution.
- Explain the concept of religious freedom, including with reference to Russia's pre-1917 attempts to enshrine it in law and the 1993 Constitution. Tolerance should be explained as requiring not agreement with others' beliefs, but full respect for the right to hold them. The etiquette of how to peacefully rebuff unwanted efforts at conversion should also be taught (some of our participants do not feel that this is appropriate for inclusion in a formal curriculum, although teachers should be provided with guidance for how to address such questions in the classroom).
- Where possible, take older pupils to visit a variety of local places of worship and engage in discussion with their representatives.
- Encourage deeper understanding of pupils' own beliefs and their areas of commonality with and divergence from other faiths, with a view to working out religious disagreements through nonviolent discussion rather than reflexive hostility.
- Use the standards of the OSCE in religious education, particularly the Toledo principles of religious education, to guide training experts in religious affairs. Reserve funds for research and education relating to Russia's many religious minorities. Include courses devoted to current debates regarding "traditional" values in the curricula of the social sciences and humanities, especially gender studies and human rights.

For Russian civil society and NGOs:

- Organize projects to include different religious minorities in Russia's everyday social and cultural life, to overcome stigmatization and marginalization. Special attention should be paid to the public representation of such communal activity, to increase the visibility of religious minorities.
- Play an increased role in raising awareness of online violent radicalization and providing ideological alternatives.

For journalists, media organizations, and analysts:

- Using existing legal tools and platforms, fight hysteria and false news about religious groups, which are currently inspiring vigilantes to physical and symbolic violent action. Give special attention to balanced information about the activity, basic values, and everyday life of Russia's smaller religious communities and more informed writing about larger groups, including the Russian Orthodox Church.

- Maintain neutrality. Avoid fanning the flames of conflict. Utilize peer review where relevant, seek a wide range of perspectives, and so forth.
- Focus research on understanding the roots of conflict and tension, including political and economic motivations.
- Feature the positions of representatives of minority faiths and scholars of religion able to comment from unbiased secular and faith-based viewpoints in addition to those of the Russian Orthodox Church, Muftiate, and others.

#### For foreign (non-Russian) policymakers:

- Closely monitor and publicly condemn violence against followers of minority religions in Russia. While rarely tried, criticism may be more effective<sup>1</sup> if targeted locally. During 2005, for example, the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe expressed concern directly to local officials over separate incidents of violence suffered by Protestants in Moscow region and Udmurtia republic, with some positive results.
- Encourage grassroots international contact in spheres such as education, media, and law enforcement, with a view to sharing strategies encouraging social cohesion found to be successful outside Russia. We have heard high praise from religious and ethnic minority representatives in Krasnodar, for example, for such an initiative organized in the early 2000s by the Metropolitan Police Service of London (UK).

#### In the context of Ukraine:

- As noted above, the Russian government should refrain from using the Russian Orthodox Church leadership to promote their political aims in Ukraine, particularly seeking to invest the Church's symbolic capital in support of separatist entities in Donbas.
- The Russian Orthodox Church should maintain Crimea's current status under the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.
- The Russian Orthodox Church should continue to respect the autonomy of the Moscow Patriarchate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, ensuring full transparency of financial transfers and transfer of personnel between the two churches.
- The Ukrainian government should strive to remain evenhanded in disputes between and among religious denominations in the country. Leading figures, including the president, should speak out against efforts to legally handicap particular denominations.
- The Ukrainian state should rigorously enforce its own laws when it comes to disputes over church property. Given the involvement of local political figures in many of these disputes, Kyiv will have to take the lead in speaking out against efforts to seize religious property and in prosecuting violations through the courts.

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1. "Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools," ODIHR (2007), <https://www.osce.org/odihr/29154?download=true>.

- The Moscow Patriarchate and other Church organizations in Ukraine should collaborate, for instance by launching informal discussions on conditions for establishing a joint reconciliation commission.
- Religious groups should continue to engage the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations in their disagreements and disputes, which helps ensure that all of the country's major religions (Christian and non-Christian) have a voice and a stake in the political process.
- All religious organizations and groups in Ukraine should disassociate themselves from nationalist militancy, condemn clerics that advocate or justify violence, and eschew nationalist rhetoric. They should work to recruit and promote clergy speaking a wide range of languages and representing Ukraine's diversity.
- The Ukrainian Orthodox Church Moscow Patriarchate should publicly criticize acts of religious violence and calls for violence carried out in its name, including the seizure of property and assaults on clergy in Crimea and the occupied regions of Donbas. Other religious groups, including the Kyiv Patriarchate and the UGCC, should similarly condemn violence and calls for violence in their name, including the seizure of property

## A CONTINUING RESEARCH AGENDA

As noted above, the process of preparing this volume revealed to us a number of important questions that we believe merit further research and analysis. The ultimate goal of helping Russia and other countries around the world limit the dangers of religious violence behooves a continuing course of study to shed light on an evolving and overlapping set of challenges and situations. The following list of research areas reflects those that study participants identified as most critical to better informing policy and action, either in their chapters or in the course of discussions related to this project. We have grouped them loosely in four categories.

### How Ideologies Spread

- Conversions between religions appear to play a role in driving frustration and sometimes violence. However, the information we have about this phenomenon remains largely anecdotal. Further research could undertake to explain the extent to which conversions to and from Orthodoxy, Islam, Judaism, Protestantism, and other faiths affect relationships between spiritual communities and the ways in which they interact with the state. This research, which might take the form of interviews with members of these communities, including converts, local authorities, and other stakeholders, would need to be undertaken throughout Russia, as dynamics are likely to be different in different parts of the country. The role of the Internet in conversions is also of interest.
- As discussed in Chapter 7, an accepted wisdom has emerged in Russia that suggests that Islam, especially, plays an important role among criminal groups and in prisons. Some anecdotal evidence also suggests that Orthodox Christian groups are also present among



organized criminals and in prison communities. Yet, available data is inconsistent in describing the situation. We believe that more research and analysis is needed to better understand the trend lines of religious observance in prisons and among criminal groups, and to assess the implications of these developments for religious violence and Russian policies.

- Are historically Muslim regions less prone to Islamophobia than are regions whose Muslim communities are new and/or rapidly growing? This subject ties in to both the question of conversion and that of rural/urban differences in how religious violence may manifest.
- Russia's Muslims are not a monolith, to say the least. In this time of substantial change, Russia's Islamic communities continue to engage in debates regarding what it means to "be Muslim," whether in the context of religious practices, life choices, or other questions. This includes how Muslims participate in secular public spaces; relations with the Orthodox Church and other religions, the place of religion in collective identity, and attitudes toward what is termed "nonconformist," "foreign," or "dangerous" conceptions of Islam. A useful study would map the different positions in these debates, identifying the characteristics of those who hold different views and assessing the implications for policy.
- Social mobility in Russia varies substantially across social, religious, ethnic, gender, and other divides. There has been little work done to date about how access to social mobility, and lack thereof, affect religious radicalization and propensities toward violence.

## Evaluating Policies

- Russia's many regions and their experiences present a rich data set for evaluating how policies do and do not attain desired effects. While the two regional chapters in this compendium provide useful preliminary thoughts, further study could compare state and local policies over time, including use of force, efforts to foster dialogue, and the involvement of authorities in local disputes, in terms of their stated goals and the evolving dynamics in each region.
- Specific policies should also be evaluated on their own merits. Studies could undertake to follow and process-trace state, civil society, and religious initiatives undertaken at federal, regional, and local levels to evaluate their effects, intentional and otherwise.

## Does Geography Matter?

- Chapter 8 by Zhemukhov with Markedonov and Yarlykapov and Chapter 7 by Sokolov and me indicate that the dynamics behind religious violence are different in urban and rural areas. Migration to Russia's cities may play an important role in this phenomenon and we suspect that Russia's large and multiethnic cities will manifest very different dynamics than will its rural communities. Further study is needed to better understand how religious violence develops and is countered in Russia's cities, villages, and countryside.
- The question of how the wealth and economies of different parts of Russia might impact propensity toward and types of religious violence is one that deserves further study, both to identify correlations and to define causal pathways.

- Large numbers of Muslims have left Russia in recent years, either due to fear of persecution, pressure from authorities, the desire to live in a majority-Muslim country, or recruitment by political (and sometimes violent) groups abroad. In countries such as Turkey, they have joined with emigrants from other post-Soviet countries to create a multiethnic but increasingly cohesive community of Russian-speaking Muslims. The implications of this social development, the evolution of these communities, and their attitudes toward Russia, their countries of settlement, and Islam remains poorly understood.

## Identifying and Protecting the Vulnerable

- Several of the papers in this volume have described the ways in which phenomena related to religious violence are gendered in their manifestations. This includes the focus on women's dress in efforts to counter "radicalism" and in the development of Islamophobia, the use of religion to justify laws that decriminalize some forms of domestic violence (which is far more common against women than men), and gendered recruitment targeting by ISIS and other violent Jihadi groups. These topics, although linked, are also disparate, and deserve substantial attention in their own right.
- Increasing attention has been devoted to ISIS's growth in Russia. While we have many doubts about the quality of existing estimates of numbers of young people who have gone to fight with ISIS, we have plenty of evidence that ISIS has not only recruited successfully throughout Russia, but that it continues to do so. Better estimations of ISIS's reach and better descriptions of its strategies and assessing their effectiveness can help inform the efforts of policymakers, religious communities, and civil society to counter this group and its activities. A multidisciplinary approach is called for. Specifically, researchers must address both online and offline recruiting and include micro-level data collection to parse the mechanisms behind the success and failure of IS online propaganda. From the demand side, it is critical to better understand how targeted messages do and do not hit home with various age, gender, and ethnic audiences. Moreover, an improved sense of how online radicalization works and fails can guide efforts to design online de-radicalization tools—and indicate whether or not such tools are a valuable use of resources.
- To better understand the impact of Russia's 2016 restrictions on "missionary activity" and its 2017 ban on the Jehovah's Witnesses, we would propose a comparative study that examines the situation in several other countries as well as Russia itself. Specifically, this could take the form of an examination of violence toward followers of minority faiths in a range of localities with historical experiences, religious diversity, and government policies that differ variously from those in Russia, such as Georgia, Germany, and Ukraine.
- Despite our efforts to be balanced in our own study, concerns about Islamic radicalism overshadow analysis of other sorts of religious violence in Russia, including in our own volume. In general, we believe that more attention needs to be paid to discrimination against, and the challenges faced by, other groups.

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