

For God, Tsar and Fatherland? The Political Influence of Church

Ekaterina Travova (CEBI, University of Copenhagen)

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UNIVERSITY OF COPENHAGEN



Motivation

- How do political leaders, especially, autocrats manage to gain a wide public support and remain in power?

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 - violence and repressions (*Arce 2003*),
 - censorship and propaganda (*Durante and Knight 2012; Adena et al. 2015; Chen and Yang 2019*),
 - reactivation of collective memories (*Ochsner and Roesel 2017; Belmonte and Rochlitz 2019*),
 - economic reforms and advertisement of economic achievements (*Buendía 1996; Guriev and Treisman 2020*),
 - **religion** (*Bentzen and Gokmen 2020*).

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- Societies become less religious (*Inglehart 2021*)

Research Question and Main Results

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Results:

1. The wider Church network → the higher approval rating of the president and the greater share of votes for the government candidate
2. No effect on trust in the president and readiness to vote for government candidate
3. Potential mechanism: media presence

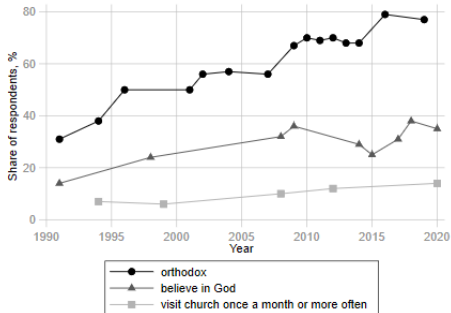
Research Framework

Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), 1997-2019:

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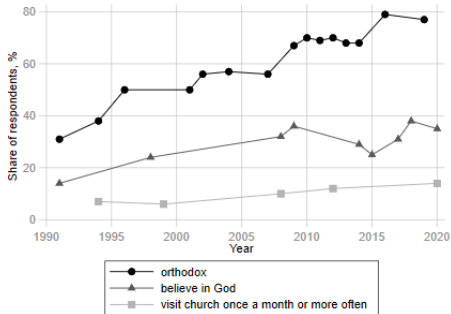
- The shares of orthodox Russians, believers, and churchgoers



Research Framework

Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), 1997-2019:

- The shares of orthodox Russians, believers, and churchgoers



- The Russian Revolution and more than 70 years of the Soviet Union as a natural experiment

Data

1. Orthodox religious organizations:

- Database “Spark”:
 - regional numbers of orthodox religious organizations at the end of the year (1997-2019) → Orthodox Density;
- Denisov, L. 1908. “The Orthodox Monasteries of Russian Empire”:
 - regional numbers of monks and nuns (1908).

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2. Political popularity:

- Russian opinion poll “Courier” (Levada Analytical Center):
 - approval of the actions of the current president (1997-2019),
 - trust in the current president (2000-2016),
 - readiness to vote for the government candidate (1997-2019, with gaps);
- The Central Election Commission of Russia:
 - regional shares of votes for the government candidate in presidential elections (2000, 2004, 2008, 2012, 2018),
 - regional shares of votes for the ruling party in parliamentary elections (2003, 2007, 2011, 2016).

Data (Continued)

3. Media:

- Russian media database “Integrum”:
 - regional numbers of mentions of “traditional family values” and “ROC” (1997-2019),
 - regional numbers of weather forecasts (1997-2019).

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4. Other data:

- Russian opinion poll “Courier” (Levada Analytical Center):
 - individual demographics (1997-2019);
- Federal State Statistic Service:
 - regional characteristics (1997-2019).

Empirical Strategy

Instrumental Variable approach:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Approval}_{ijt} = & \beta_1 \text{OrthodoxDensity}_{jt} + \mu_j + \delta_t + \\ & + \text{IndControls}_{ijt} + \text{RegControls}_{jt} + \epsilon_{ijt} \end{aligned}$$

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$OrthodoxDensity_{jt}$ is instrumented with:

$$IV_{jt} = OrthodoxDensity_{-jt} \cdot HistoricalExposure_j$$

$OrthodoxDensity_{-jt}$ - the overall density of Orthodox religious organizations in the country outside the region j in year t ,

$HistoricalExposure_j$ - the number of monks and nuns in the region j in 1908 divided by the regional population in 1997.

Bartik-style IV (1991)

- Time-varying component $OrthodoxDensity_{jt}$

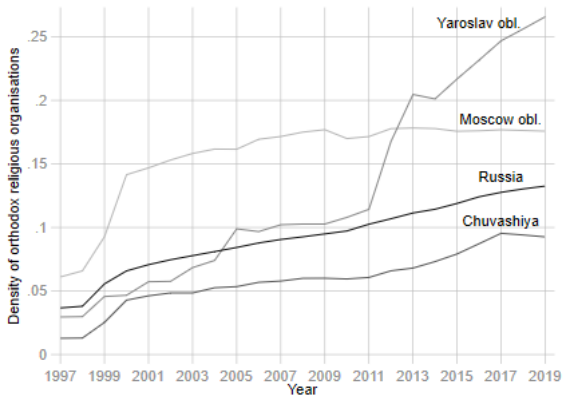


Figure 1: Density of Orthodox religious organisations

Bartik-style IV (1991) (Continued)

- Time-invariant weights $HistoricalExposure_j$

Table 1: Correlations between the density of monks and nuns in 1908 and regions' characteristics in 1990

	Density of monks and nuns	
	(1) without district FEs	(2) with district FEs
Fixed capital investments, pc	-322.014** (135.847)	-101.941 (109.318)
Income, pc	-0.025*** (0.009)	-0.017 (0.011)
Employment rate	-4.010 (3.744)	-1.713 (1.693)
Housing, sq.m pc	1.727*** (0.331)	0.542 (0.375)
Urban population	-0.013 (0.021)	-0.064* (0.034)
Paved roads, km per sq.km	3.935 (2.502)	2.633 (3.035)
Elderly population	5.275*** (0.674)	1.755** (0.750)
Women	1.566*** (0.257)	0.368 (0.222)
Birth rate	-2.171*** (0.512)	-0.374 (0.542)
Life expectancy, years	0.606** (0.248)	0.040 (0.220)
Students, pc	-6.101 (12.610)	-32.548 (34.323)
Museum visits, pc	156.739 (135.690)	-372.635 (348.994)
Theatre visits, pc	-34.835 (24.612)	-126.432* (64.109)
Published newspapers, pc	-4.2e+04 (3.6e+04)	-2.1e+05 (2.1e+05)
Marriage rate	-0.533*** (0.127)	-0.239 (0.161)
Divorce rate	-0.490*** (0.181)	-0.297 (0.184)
Crime rate	-198.238*** (65.033)	49.023 (69.570)
P-value of the joint significance test	0.000	0.143

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Results. Main Effects

Table 2: The density of Orthodox religious organizations and approval of president

	Approval of president			
	(1) OLS	(2) OLS	(3) OLS	(4) 2SLS
Orthodox density	0.599*** (0.218)	0.593*** (0.216)	0.568*** (0.208)	0.840** (0.341)
Individual controls		✓	✓	✓
Regional controls			✓	✓
Region FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓
1st stage coef.				0.809*** (0.242)
R^2	0.276	0.281	0.281	
Kleibergen-Paap F				11.168
Anderson-Rubin 90% CI				[0.306, 1.543]
N	35395	35341	35341	35341

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Results. Mechanisms

Murphy K., and A. Shleifer. 2004. "Persuasion in Politics." AER:

- networks can be organized around core beliefs that bind members together,
- leaders can rent out these networks to politicians seeking support in exchange for resources. State Support Crimea Effect

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(At least) two ways state-supporting ideas can be spread by the Church:

- local communities of believers, especially, churchgoers,
- media.

Results. Mechanisms

Table 3: Religious affiliation and approval of the current president

	Orth. believer		Approval of president			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
			Rural		Urban	
			Orth. believers	Others	Orth. believers	Others
Orthodox density	-0.770 (1.878)	2.086* (1.084)	6.012* (3.534)	6.558** (2.646)	1.969* (1.090)	-3.273 (2.157)
Orthodox believer		0.072*** (0.016)				
Other believer		0.039* (0.022)				
Individual controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Regional controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Region FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Kleibergen-Paap F	20.728	20.663	11.784	17.739	18.671	15.868
Anderson-Rubin 90% CI	[-3.707, 2.476]	[0.390, 3.961]	[1.100, 14.391]	[2.894, 11.946]	[0.266, 4.031]	[-8.051, -0.265]
N	8531	8422	1485	755	4544	1634

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Results. Mechanisms

Table 4: The density of orthodox religious organizations and media

	Mentions, scaled		Approval of president	
	(1) total	(2) regional	(3) with total mentions	(4) with regional mentions
Orthodox density	6.546*	-0.207	0.875**	0.874**
	(3.289)	(0.258)	(0.336)	(0.336)
Total mentions, scl			-0.0005	
			(0.001)	
Regional mentions, scl				0.006**
				(0.003)
Media coverage	✓	✓	✓	✓
Individual controls			✓	✓
Regional controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
Region FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓
Kleibergen-Paap F	30.617	30.617	11.456	11.415
Anderson-Rubin 90% CI	[1.424, 12.207]	[-0.694, 0.153]	[0.349, 1.567]	[0.348, 1.566]
N	1820	1820	35334	35334

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Concluding Remarks

- A denser ROC network does increase the approval rating of the current president and the shares of votes for the government candidate
- Nation-building role of the Church?
- Media channel → further investigation

Trust and Electoral Preferences

Table 1: The density of Orthodox religious organizations, trust in president and electoral preferences

	Trust in president (1)	Vote for gov. candidate (2)	Vote for ruling party (3)
Orthodox density	-0.612 (1.563)	0.514 (0.651)	0.735 (1.126)
Individual controls	✓	✓	✓
Regional controls	✓	✓	✓
Region FEs	✓	✓	✓
Year FEs	✓	✓	✓
Kleibergen-Paap F	15.642	10.662	21.015
Anderson-Rubin 90% CI	[-3.572, 1.8322]	[-0.3392, 1.658]	[-0.842, 2.868]
<i>N</i>	23128	17062	15505

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Election Results

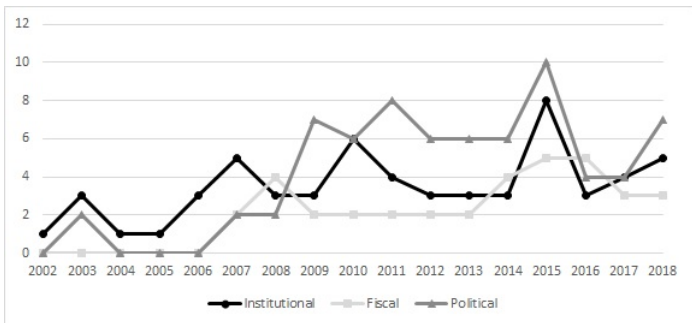
Table 2: The density of Orthodox religious organizations and election results

	Shares of votes			
	(1) for gov. candidate	(2) for ruling party	(3) combined	(4) combined
Orthodox density:	0.090 (0.353)	-0.295 (0.678)	-0.091 (0.394)	
2000, presidential election				0.926* (0.540)
2003, Duma election				0.608* (0.343)
2004, presidential election				0.444 (0.366)
2007, Duma election				0.410 (0.288)
2008, presidential election				0.585** (0.288)
2011, Duma election				0.236 (0.301)
2012, presidential election				0.395 (0.268)
2016, Duma election				0.320 (0.317)
2018, presidential election				0.600** (0.286)
Regional controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
Region FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓
Kleibergen-Paap F	26.781	20.588	24.935	8.474
Anderson-Rubin 90% CI	[-0.516, 0.638]	[-1.459, 0.869]	[-0.834, 0.522]	
N	398	318	716	716

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Instances of Preferential State Support

based on data from *Rosenthal (2019)*



Crimea Effect

Table 3: The annexation of Crimea and impact of church network on the approval of president

	Approval of president		
	(1)	(2) Rural/urban individual	(3) Rural/urban region
Orthodox density, 1997-2013:	1.058** (0.448)		
rural		1.083** (0.481)	1.214** (0.482)
urban		1.049** (0.447)	1.095** (0.452)
Orthodox density, 2014-2015:	0.669 (0.439)		
rural		0.671 (0.481)	0.943** (0.455)
urban		0.668 (0.434)	0.540 (0.454)
Orthodox density, 2016-2019:	1.008*** (0.342)		
rural		1.044*** (0.382)	1.168*** (0.366)
urban		0.997*** (0.337)	1.013*** (0.346)
Individual controls	✓	✓	✓
Regional controls	✓	✓	✓
Region FEs	✓	✓	✓
Year FEs	✓	✓	✓
Kleibergen-Paap F	2.563	1.280	1.361
N	35341	35341	35341

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Robustness Checks

Table 4: Robustness checks

	Approval of president			
	(1) year x fed. unit FEs	(2) clusters by year x fed. unit	(3) fed. unit FEs, robust s.e.	(4) without Moscow, St.Petersburg
Orthodox density	1.301*** (0.399)	0.840** (0.385)	0.247*** (0.091)	0.690* (0.397)
Individual controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
Regional controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
Region FEs	✓	✓		✓
Year FEs		✓	✓	✓
Fed. unit FEs			✓	
Year x Fed. unit FEs	✓			
Kleibergen-Paap F	5.234	10.562	8534.105	9.679
Anderson-Rubin 90% CI	[0.808, 2.843]	[0.237, 1.634]	[0.104, 0.390]	[0.069, 1.507]
N	35341	35341	35341	31498

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Believers and Churchgoers

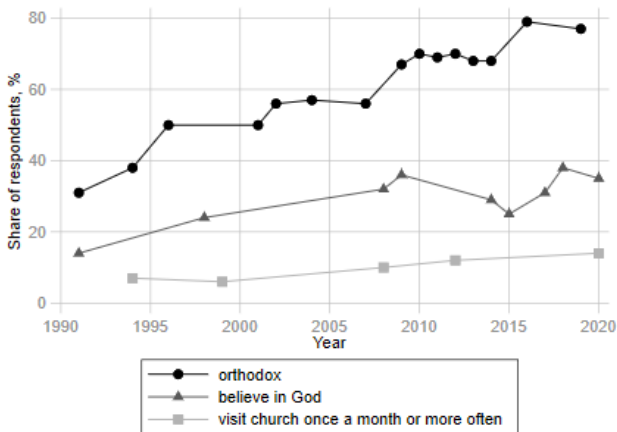


Figure 1: The shares of orthodox Russians, believers, and churchgoers