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Orthodoxy, Islam, and the Desecularization of Russia's State Schools

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Abstract: This article explores the social origins and consequences of Orthodox-Muslim tensions surrounding the attempts to find a place for religion in Russia's state schools. It demonstrates that the Orthodox-Muslim tensions are an inevitable outcome of what we define as Russia's pattern of "desecularization from above." The attempts to restore religious education are carried out by alliances of top religious and political elites, which almost by default focus on the state-run schools. These attempts run into serious social and institutional constraints, and generate considerable Orthodox-Muslim tensions and controversies spilling over to public opinion. On the surface, the Orthodox-Muslim tensions often appear in the form ironically resembling "culture wars" between religious traditionalists and secularists in the West. Our survey data indicate that public support for religious instruction in state-run schools has reached high levels and is infused with a noticeable element of religious intolerance. We predict that further attempts to desecularize Russia's state schools "from above" may have destabilizing effects in society and fuel ethno-religious tensions.

INTRODUCTION

This article explores the social origins and consequences of Orthodox-Muslim tensions surrounding the attempts to find a place for religion in Russia's post-atheist state schooling.[1] The tensions involve Orthodoxy and Islam's national and regional leaderships and are strikingly open and intense, especially amidst the artificially quiet political atmosphere of Putin's Russia. It is the argument of this article that these Orthodox-Muslim tensions are an inevitable outcome of what we define as

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Russia's pattern of "desecularization from above." Attempts to revive religious education are mostly carried out by alliances of religious and secular elites in the absence of a considerable desecularizing impetus "from below." Furthermore, reflecting more general re-centralizing trends in Russia's politics and education, desecularization efforts inevitably focus on state schools and are increasingly carried out in a top-down, nationally centralized fashion.

The top-down desecularization effort runs into serious institutional and social-structural obstacles including the formal-legal equality of Orthodoxy and Islam, and Russia's ethno-territorial diversity. The proponents of Orthodox instruction have offered Muslims the option to teach their children about Islam. Yet, Muslim leaders argue that in the ethnically mixed areas this is likely to result in ethno-religious discrimination and conflicts.

Facing such objections, Orthodox leaders have tried to mobilize popular support for their cause under the banners of moral and cultural traditionalism. In response, Muslim leaders remind their followers about the secularity of the Russian state and raise the issues of minority and human rights, which makes the entire debate look deceivingly similar to "culture wars" in the West.

Finally, using the data from our recent surveys,[2] we show that popular support for religious education has reached high levels and is infused with religious intolerance. This leads us to predict that further attempts to desecularize Russia's state schools "from above" may fuel ethno-religious tensions.

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL CONSIDERATIONS

The ongoing attempts to find a place for religion in Russia's schools are part of a broader process of the country's post-Soviet desecularization. Moreover, we suggest that Orthodox-Muslim tensions surrounding these attempts can be seen as inevitable consequences of Russia's prevalent pattern of "desecularization from above." This concept and its relationship to the idea of desecularization are discussed below.

Desecularization as Counter-Secularization: Towards an Analytical Approach

Desecularization has been defined as "counter-secularization," meaning a resurgence of religion in response to the uncertainties of modernity and

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widespread unpopularity of elite ideologies of secularism (Berger 1999). This concept has been used to describe multiple manifestations of the resurgence of religions around the world. However, there has been little attempt to approach desecularization analytically, which would include specification of its component processes, driving forces, and patterns. Meanwhile, Berger's (1999) original interpretation of desecularization as "counter-secularization" lays a foundation for precisely such an analytical approach. The approach can build on existing analytical conceptualizations of secularization. Specifically, as Casanova (1994, 211) suggested, the concept of secularization denotes three *unintegrated* (emphasis added) processes: differentiation of societal institutions from religious norms, a decline in religious beliefs and practices, and the privatization of religion (i.e., its marginalization form the public sphere). Accordingly, *desecularization* can be conceptualized as including three counter-secularizing processes. Thus, desecularization includes (1) a rapprochement between formerly secularized institutions and religious norms; (2) a resurgence of religious beliefs and practices, and (3) the return of religion to the public sphere (Casanova uses the term "de-privatization").

As was the case with Casanova's (1994) interpretation of secularization, an important consideration is that *these three processes may be uneven and unintegrated*. For instance, a resurgence of religious beliefs may or may not translate into a greater role of religion in public institutions. Or, conversely, a greater public role of religion does not necessarily imply a growing popular religiosity. The component processes of desecularization can develop incongruently and be differently paced. Theoretically, secularizing trends in one sphere (e.g., individual-level religious commitments) can even coexist with desecularizing tendencies in other domains (e.g., public institutions).

Desecularization "From Below" and "From Above"

The incongruence or temporal lag among counter-secularizing tendencies may reflect various factors that are beyond the scope of this article. For the purposes of this study, it is important to note that such incongruence may reflect the involvement of different social actors with divergent interests and unequal capacities. Indeed, as Smith (2003) shows, the decline in religion's role in and relevance to public institutions (including education) reflected the intentional effort of "secularizing activists." By analogy, the process of counter-secularization of a particular institution

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reflects the work of "desecularizing activists," and, more broadly, specific social actors with particular interests, ideologies, and levels of access to resources.

Depending upon the social actors involved, the desecularization of social institutions and de-privatization of religion can be seen as initiated and carried out "from below" and/or "from above." When the social actors involved are grassroots-level movements and groups representing the masses of religious adherents, we are dealing with a desecularization "from below." Whereas when the actors largely include religious and secular elites, a desecularization "from above" is taking place. The processes developing from below and from above will be as incongruent or congruent as the interests, ideological and cultural orientations of and resources available to the actors involved. For instance, a revival of popular religiosity may not lead to desecularization of public institutions because grassroots-level movements are weak and lack resources while elites are eager to preserve a secular *status quo*. Or, on the contrary, well organized and resourceful elites can desecularize public institutions even in the absence of a noticeable religious revival from below.

Prerequisites for a Desecularization from Below

Theoretically, public institutions can be desecularized by popular demand, i.e., from below. This, however, would presume a high level of mass involvement in the attempts to bring religion back into the institutions, which, in turn, would be possible if the following three conditions existed. First, a broad grassroots movement to desecularize public institutions (e.g., schools) is possible when and where there is a high level of religious adherence; after all, it is hard to expect a non-religious populace to insist on bringing religion back into the school. Second, such a movement would involve organized efforts, and thus the emergence of voluntary associations promoting the agenda of desecularization. Third, the emerging religious movement would need considerable resources to achieve its goals. The resources would need to include both the material means and political leverage. The latter includes the opportunities to exert political influence provided by the structure of governance, representative institutions, democratic procedures, and so on. In the absence of these three conditions, masses of ordinary believers can play at most a passive role in desecularization by consenting to elites' efforts to magnify religion's role in society.

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DESECULARIZATION FROM ABOVE IN POST-ATHEIST RUSSIA

The post-Soviet Russian case does not fully meet any of the above prerequisites for a desecularization from below. The first obstacle to successful desecularizing initiatives from below is ordinary Russians' low rate of participation in organized religion. As sociological studies have shown, the recent growth of religious adherence in Russia has been inconsistent. Specifically, while religious belief is on the increase, religious participation has stagnated at relatively low levels comparable to those of the deeply secularized countries of Western Europe with their pattern of "believing without belonging" to borrow a term used as a subtitle in Grace Davie's study of Britain (Davie 1994). Fifteen years after the demise of the official Soviet atheism, roughly one in 10 Russians purports to regularly (at least once a month) attend religious services (Furman, Kaariainen and Karpov 2007, 55), and some observational studies put the actual percentage of attendees considerably below this survey-based estimate. For instance, Mitrokhin's estimates are in low single digits (Mitrokhin and Sibireva 2007). Understandably, this low level of religious participation precludes the formation of communities of believers. As a result, the largely private, unorganized nature of Russia's prevalent popular religiosity prevents the formation of grassroots-level organizations and broad-based religious movements that could spearhead desecularization efforts.

The second factor precluding desecularizing efforts from below relates to religious elites' strategies. One could argue that the formation of communities and broad-based movements in post-Soviet Russia is unlikely since both the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) hierarchy and official Muslim leaders have been apprehensive of their respective laities' self-organization and activism. According to Mitrokhin (2004a), the ROC parishioners "play the role of theatre-stage extras [*statisty*] whose obligation to attend services is in no way balanced by their right to participate in making decisions pertinent to their parish or the Church in general" (221). The ROC hierarchy, as Mitrokhin further suggested, has resisted any attempts to increase the role of the laity in the governance of the Church. This resistance can be attributed to a fear of losing strongly centralized organizational power to competitors emerging from within the ROC, as well as to alternative Orthodox churches (such as the ROC outside of Russia prior to unification of 2007 or the Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church) (Mitrokhin 2004a, 221–231;

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Burdo and Filatov 2004, 21–23, 67–68). The tendency to fear and resist self-organization from below is perhaps even stronger among official Muslim leaders whose centralized control (through the councils of muftis and territorial "spiritual boards") is in contradiction with the decentralized nature of Islam and whose legitimacy is inseparable from support of the Russian state. For the official Muslim leadership, the growth of "unofficial Islam" including its salafi and Wahhabi currents represents an especially grave danger (Makarov and Mukhametshin 2003, 117–182; Borogan 2008).

Next, the likelihood of successful desecularizing initiatives from below is further reduced by the general social and political circumstances of Russia's transition from communism. In particular, an underdeveloped and non-influential civil society has been commonly regarded as a powerful impediment to the country's movement toward democracy. When communism with its official collectivist ideology was gone, it left behind a highly atomized society where citizens' voluntary associations are not easily formed or trusted. In this atmosphere, the formation of vibrant communities of believers and initiatives developing from below becomes even more problematic. Moreover, Russia's initial post-Soviet movement toward a more visible and influential civil society has been blocked and reversed by political reaction and the increasingly authoritarian tendencies of the Putin era. Even if grassroots movements of believers emerged in Putinist Russia, their opportunities to exert political influence on public institutions would be handicapped by the absence of democratic elections or a free press.

Under these circumstances, the only way Russia's public institutions, including schools can be desecularized is from above, by the religious and secular leadership, with the ordinary believer's role reduced to passively consenting to the elites' initiatives or to passively resisting them. The fall of communism and official atheism created a very favorable atmosphere for the top-down desecularizing initiatives. The idea that the harm caused by the discredited atheistic ideology could be remedied by a revival of the country's religious traditions has been highly popular since the last years of communism (especially since the 1988 magnificent celebrations of the millennium of Russia's baptism). Liturgies and sermons televised by state-controlled channels, collaboration agreements between federal ministries and religious organizations, blessings of newly built warships, clergy working in the army and prisons, and other manifestations of the enthusiastic rapprochement between secular and religious authorities did not (until relatively recently) face any serious

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opposition in the Russian society. This atmosphere also favored religious and secular elites' efforts to infuse religion into Russian education.

DESECULARIZING EDUCATION FROM ABOVE: OPTIONS AND CONSTRAINTS

The Options and Non-Options for Developing Religious Education From Above

Thus far we have focused on the reasons why post-Soviet Russia has been prone to a desecularization from above rather than from below. Given the prevalence of this pattern, what options do secular and religious elites have for desecularizing the country's education? Theoretically, the elites could demand religious education in congregations (e.g., in Sunday schools). This, however, is not a viable option in the Russian context. A price to pay for the official religious leaders' aversion to laity self-organization and activism is the virtual non-existence of religious instruction in congregations. When parishioners are treated as theatre-stage extras, they are unlikely to engage in the time consuming work of religious instruction. One also needs to keep in mind the strikingly low attendance numbers. Unsurprisingly, therefore, only one percent of all Russia's state school students are said to receive any instruction in Sunday schools (Kazakov 2008).

A second (theoretical) option is the development of a non-state (private) confessional school system. However, for a variety of socioeconomic and political reasons, private schools in general and religious ones in particular have remained rare in post-Soviet Russia and beyond the reach for most of its citizens (Lisovskaya and Karpov 2001). Where Orthodox gymnasia appeared, they received remarkably little if any material support from the ROC hierarchy.

Thus, neither congregational instruction nor parochial schools were realistic options. Under these circumstances, the reliance on state-run schools emerged as the only viable strategy for official leaders of both the ROC and Islam. Consequently, recent history demonstrates a series of attempts by religious leaders to induce the process of state schools desecularization from above.

From Local to Centralized Desecularizing Efforts

There are two logical possibilities for desecularizing state schools from above. One possibility is for a religious leadership to direct organizational

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resources (e.g., local churches and clergy) to work with local schools and school districts to enact curricular change in a decentralized fashion. An alternative way is for religious leaders to work with the federal authorities in order to implement a degree of desecularization in a more centralized fashion. The first strategy would be more fitting for decentralized school systems with strong local control whereas the second strategy is more efficient in highly centralized school bureaucracies.

The difficulty with the post-Soviet Russian case is that its school system in the last 19 years has undergone a zigzag-like change from a near-anarchic decentralization of the revolutionary 1990s to the reemergence of a Soviet-style, centralized administrative and ideological control in the last 10 years under the Putin regime (for a detailed analysis of this pattern of change see Karpov and Lisovskaya 2005). In the first post-communist decade, school principals and even individual teachers had practically unlimited capacities to determine what and how to teach in their schools and classes. If they chose to, they could open the schools' doors to clergy teaching children the foundations of religion. Regional and district authorities could influence such decisions in a very limited way, and federal authorities had almost no influence at all. Yet, since the end of 1990s, regional educational authorities, school districts and individual schools have been increasingly limited in their curricular choices. Central authorities have regained much of their once lost administrative power and used it to restore a much more centralized curriculum.

Not surprisingly, desecularization efforts reflected these changes. In the early years of post-Soviet transition, attempts to bring religion into public education focused mostly on influencing local teachers, schools, districts, and regional educational establishment (Krotov 2002; Mitrokhin 2004b). According to the Ministry of Education, all of Russia's regions had experimented with teaching religion long before any relevant legislation was put in place. Kursk, Orel, Volgograd, Samara and Smolensk regions did the most in this area (Shcipkov 2002). At one point, efforts to introduce religion focused on regional components of school curricula. Yet, the latest desecularization attempts have concentrated largely on the centralized, federal levels. For religious leaders, such a shift in their strategy was quite rational given the restructuring of post-Soviet education itself. These trends reflected a broader process of restoration of the power of central government that under Putin has greatly curbed the authority of regional and local leaders (e.g., since 2004, Russia's regional governors have no longer been elected but appointed by the president).

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Institutional and Social-Structural Constraints

The attempts to introduce school desecularization in a more centralized fashion face serious institutional and social limitations. The limitations relate to the official institutional (normative) principles of church-state-school interactions and interfaith relations in post-Soviet Russia as well as with its religious demography and ethno-territorial and religious-territorial organization. *Institutional limitations* to a centralized, top-down desecularization of state schools stem from existing legal and other officially proclaimed norms. First, Russia is by law a secular state that, according to its Constitution (article 28) grants religious freedom. Second, its schools are by law separated from religion. While the 1992 Law on Education emphasized educational freedom and pluralism, it also prohibits the activities of any religious movements and organizations in the schools and administrative organs. Third, the 1997 Law on the Freedom of Consciousness and Religious Associations gives Orthodoxy, Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism formally equal status as the traditional religions of Russia's peoples. Fourth, although Russia's political regime since the end of 1990s has become increasingly authoritarian, it has not formally annulled the country's previously made commitments to the international norms of protection of and respect for human and minority rights.

Under these formal-legal constraints, a top-down centralized desecularization of schooling becomes a tricky business. To comply with the aforesaid norms, religious subjects cannot be taught in an openly religious fashion as part of the state-run school curriculum. They need to be "packaged" to fit the requirement of school secularity. As shown below, this is indeed how the introduction of religious themes has been attempted: not as a straightforward instruction in the foundations of faith, but rather as courses dealing with history, culture, and the moral teachings of religious traditions. At the same time, the introduction of religious subjects must avoid privileging one faith at the expense of others; formal equality of traditional religions has to be taken into account. Furthermore, the introduction of such subjects needs to be mindful of ethnic and religious minority rights. For instance, if a school's majority group (e.g., Christians) is offered a course in the history and culture of its tradition, its minority students (e.g., Muslims) need to be given an equal opportunity to learn about their tradition.

Yet, the last two requirements (equality of religions and concern for minority rights) are hard to address when top-down desecularizing efforts face powerful *social-structural constraints* such as Russia's

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ethno-religious demography and ethno-territorial organization. Nearly 80% of Russia's overall population and 85% of ethnic Russians identify themselves as Orthodox (a sizable proportion of them also describe themselves as non-believers and atheists). Although estimates of the number of Muslims in Russia vary, a combination of census and survey data-based calculations gives a ballpark figure of 7–8% of Russia's population identifying themselves with Islam. Of them about one-fifth can be described as practicing more or less regularly (Karpov and Lisovskaya 2008; Walters 2006).

Both among ethnic Russians and historically Muslim peoples (Tatars, Chechens, Kabardins, and others) religious identifications typically signify ethno-cultural belonging rather than a commitment to doctrinal beliefs and traditional practices. This means that ethnic divisions in the country pretty much coincide with religious ones, and the matter of targeting particular religious constituencies in state schools is indistinguishable from targeting particular ethnicities. For example, in an ethno-religiously mixed school, offering instruction in Orthodoxy and Islam means separating students along ethnic lines. Indeed, offering a "separate but equal" instruction in religious history and culture means separating ethnically Russian (and presumably Orthodox) children from their Tatar, Chechen, Tajik, and other presumably Muslim counterparts. In other words, it means reinforcing separation at the school level of the country's dominant ethnic majority from its ethnic minorities. Where ethnic relations are tense and prejudice is widespread (which, as shown below, is the case in Russia), such a separation becomes problematic.

Furthermore, the situation is complicated by diverse patterns of Russia's ethno-territorial organization. Most of Russia's regions have vast majorities of ethnically Russian residents. However, in the Caucasus some regions have only small Russian minorities. For instance, in the multi-ethnic and historically Muslim Dagestan, the proportion of ethnic Russians (and, by tradition, Orthodox) is 5–6%. It is quite likely less than that in Ingushetia, where the ongoing violence has often targeted ethnic Russians forcing them to leave the region. In Kabardino-Balkaria, Orthodox Russians make up 25% of the region's population. In the historically Muslim Tatarstan and Bashkortostan Orthodox Russians make up 42% and 50%, respectively, and ethno-religious compositions of specific cities and rural districts vary a great deal (Karpov and Lisovskaya 2008). In some regions that are traditionally defined as prevalently Orthodox, there is a huge Muslim representation. For instance, the Nizhnii Novgorod Diocese of the ROC lists 329 active parishes (Nizhegorodskaya Eparhiya 2007) while the Spiritual Board of

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Muslims of the same region claims 57 functioning Islamic parishes with 10,000 believers regularly attending Friday prayers (Mukhetdinov 2009).

Thus, even the regions historically known as Orthodox or Islamic actually have mixed populations and diverse patterns of ethnic heterogeneity. This makes it extremely difficult to craft a uniform, centralized top-down approach to bringing religion into their schools.

Complicating Factors: Informal Norms and Popular Sentiment

In addition to the aforesaid laws, official norms, and social-structural factors, desecularization from above is further constrained by the unofficial yet important rules of the game in the area of church-state relations, as well as by popular sentiment surrounding inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations. While constitutionally Russia is a secular state, the existing practices of church-state relations have raised questions as to whether or not the ROC is *de facto* becoming the country's official church (Codevilla 2008). Commentators both in Russia and in the West have suggested that the collaboration between the Russian state and the ROC goes beyond anything that the country's constitution and laws would envision. While Russian leaders rarely miss an opportunity to demonstrate their benevolence to all of the country's traditional faiths, it is quite obvious that the ROC is treated as "the first among equals." This treatment extends from the allocation of state material resources (e.g., for the restoration of churches) to an uninhibited and largely unchallenged collaboration between the ROC and various branches of federal and local government, including the military and security services. Under these circumstances any attempts to desecularize schools by manipulating the federal government will be inevitably seen as further signs of a reemerging symbiosis between the ROC and the state, and of a creeping "clericalization" of education and society. Furthermore, such attempts will be (and already are) just as unavoidably perceived as further privileging the ROC with regard to other faiths, traditional or not.

Another complication deals with popular beliefs and attitudes surrounding inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations in Russia today. These beliefs and attitudes constitute the climate of opinion in which Orthodox and Islamic instruction is supposed to be offered in schools, presumably to ethnically distinct categories of students. Numerous studies have shown that this climate of opinion is marked by strikingly high levels of xenophobia and ethnic prejudice. For instance, according to Levada-Center surveys conducted in 2007, 55% of Russians support the slogan "Russia is for the

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[ethnically] Russian." Of those, 14% say that the idea "should have been put into practice long ago," and 41% say that it should be implemented "within reasonable limits," 41% believe that ethnic minorities have too much power in the country, and 33% think that ethnic Russians are discriminated against and oppressed. Unsurprisingly, 38% reported feelings of irritation, dislike, or fear toward immigrants from Southern regions settling in their towns, and less than a quarter thought that no nationalities should be restricted in their right to live in Russia (Levada-Center 2009, 106–108).

In addition to ethnic prejudice, Russian public opinion is characterized by a considerable degree of negativity toward religions other than Orthodoxy. This includes negative perceptions of Islam. In our 2005 survey, 35–39% of ethnic Russians characterized Islam as intolerant, reactionary and inhumane religion, and 47% described it as a militant faith. Furthermore, as our 2005 survey shows, over a quarter of ethnic Russians (26%) openly acknowledged having negative or very negative feelings toward Muslims.

Thus, Russian public opinion combines high levels of ethnic and religious prejudice. In this explosive atmosphere, a centralized effort to offer mandatory religious subjects to separate ethnic constituencies of students is bound to be perceived as potentially dangerous and destabilizing, and to be exacerbating ethnic tensions.

This brief review of the dominant pattern of Russia's desecularization and its institutional, social-structural, and attitudinal environment logically leads to the following *expectations* with regard to the nature and consequences of the attempts to introduce religious subjects in state schools. First, in contemporary Russia, attempts to desecularize public education are inevitably carried out from above, and over time increasingly focus on federal government and the centralized educational bureaucracy. Second, given legal constraints, religious subjects need to be introduced so that the requirement of school secularity is addressed (e.g., in the form of historical and cultural studies of religion). Furthermore, religious subjects need to be introduced in a manner that takes into account religious minorities' rights. Third, the fulfillment of the aforementioned legal requirements is impeded by the convergence of ethnic and religious divisions, the diverse patterns of ethno-religious demography of Russia's regions, and by an atmosphere of ethnic tensions and prejudice. Given these impediments, centralized desecularization efforts will inevitably face resistance by religious minority groups, including Muslims. Finally, given the unofficial norms of church-state relations, the ROC as "the first among equals" can be expected to play an especially active role in the attempts to influence state schools. The

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more centralized and therefore far-reaching such ROC efforts become, the more opposition and resistance from Muslim leaders one will see. Such a resistance can effectively appeal to the official norms of secularity, church-state-school separation, and minority rights.

The recent history of the attempts to desecularize Russian state schools lends factual support to the above outlined logical expectations. Below we provide a brief overview of this history. Given the limits of this article, we will restrict the overview to the history's landmark episodes.

BRINGING RELIGION BACK INTO THE SCHOOL: A BRIEF HISTORY

True to the genre of historical presentation, we follow the events chronologically, beginning from the last years of communism and the early post-communist years. As was mentioned above, the societal atmosphere of transition from communism was very favorable for the secular and religious elites' efforts to introduce religion into Russian education. Although initially civil and religious authorities emphasized their own fields, acting independently from each other, both made considerable efforts to move the school and religion closer to each other. In particular, Russia's top political elites and educational officials took the leading role in designing and implementing religious education reforms and *de facto* became crucially important "desecularizing activists." Thus, already under Gorbachev considerable enthusiasm was expressed regarding the prospects of using religion for the purposes of moral and spiritual amelioration of Russia's youth (Halstead 1992). This enthusiasm was taken up by Yeltsin's government (1991–1999), whose education Ministry proclaimed that Russian education was "open for Christian values," and in 1992 invited American Christian teachers (primarily of Protestant denominations) to collaborate with Russian educators in addressing the problem of moral decay among young Russians (Van Den Bercken 1994; Glanzer 1999, 285).

The ROC's Expansion

The Moscow Patriarchate's aspirations for Orthodoxy's return to secular schools grew considerably in the early years of post-communism. Initially, the ROC's efforts were directed at the expansion of the system of private and congregational religious education, such as

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Orthodox gymnasia, theological institutions, and Sunday schools. The Department for Religious Education and Catechization created in 1990 developed religious education programs for all school levels and published textbooks in religious instruction. However, already in 1992 the Patriarchate "proposed that optional lessons in religion at state schools should be given" (Van Den Berken 1994, 174). Although the Patriarchate did not yet openly lobby for teaching any particular religion including Orthodoxy, this proposal signaled a shift in focus from congregational and private education toward the state-run educational establishment.

Yet, by the mid-1990s, the focus of the ROC efforts shifted considerably from parochial and voluntary institutions to the public sector of education. The Moscow Patriarchate's efforts to utilize state schools for religious instruction purposes became obvious and intense. The shift toward the state-run schools was quite logical. The ROC leadership apparently realized that relying exclusively upon religious educational institutions (Sunday schools, Orthodox gymnasia, and seminaries) would not allow the church to ensure large scale catechization of Russia, and ensure its privileged status. Furthermore, the ROC leaders grew fearful of losing this status in the face of the relentless activity and growing popularity of Protestant churches practicing on Orthodox "canonical territory," and engaging in religious education efforts (Glanzer 1999). As was suggested earlier in this article, the only viable option left for the ROC to resolve these issues was to desecularize state schools with the support of federal government and educational bureaucracy. These efforts were rewarded when the ROC had gained sufficient strength and confidence to confront the liberally-minded leadership in Yeltsin's government (e.g., 1991–1992 deputy minister of education Asmolov) on the issue of Protestant assistance in Russian education and to get rid of its religious competitors. The task was facilitated by the enactment of a more restrictive law on religion in 1997, which privileged Orthodoxy along with Islam, Buddhism and Judaism and disadvantaged religious newcomers. Under ROC pressure, the notion of "Christian" values was narrowed down to the notion of Russian Orthodox values, and all collaborative work with westerners was severed. By the end of the decade, no question remained about what particular form of Christianity or religion should be encouraged for spiritual-moral upbringing and teaching in schools, and *de facto* teaching of Orthodoxy in state schools in much of the country began after 1997. Accordingly, in 1999 the Ministry of Education officially established a partnership with the ROC, which paved the way for active church-state collaboration in the sphere of introducing religion into the state school curriculum.

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The same year, an open declaration about the need to introduce studies in Orthodoxy was made by Patriarch of Russia Alexy II. In his letter to the local archbishops (*archierei*), the Patriarch stressed the importance of "paying special attention to organizations of Orthodox Christian education of children in state and municipal schools." In this letter, he suggested that "... if there will be obstacles for teaching Orthodox religion (*verouchenie*) the course should be named Foundations of Orthodox Christian Culture" (cited in Nedumov 2002). Subsequently, the Patriarch unambiguously spoke in favor of teaching such a course at every meeting of the annually held all-Russian Christmas Readings until his death in 2008.

These views of the Patriarch seemed prophetic. In 2002, Putin's Minister of Education Filippov signed an order providing for introducing a course in Foundations of Orthodox Culture [*Osnovy Pravoslavnoi Kul'tury*] (FOC hereafter) first into local (school-based) and then into the regional curricular of state schools. This course was developed in close collaboration with and under the guidance of the ROC, becoming a landmark event in strengthening the post-communist state-Orthodox Church alliance in education. At the same time, such an alliance and such a course were viewed by their critics as problematic in a secular state where the church, state, and schools are separated by Constitution. This opposition was voiced by individual officials within the government (e.g., Duma) and its Ministry of Education, by representatives of intelligentsia, and discenting clergy (e.g., Yakunin), and was widely publicized in the media (see, for example, *Mir Religii*, *Pervoie Sentiabria*, NEWSru.com, etc. for December 2002). These probably were the "obstacles" the Patriarch meant in his letter. To overcome those obstacles, religious and civil authorities insisted that the course would be culture-oriented ("culturological"), and strictly elective. In his numerous declarations, the education minister insisted that the course would be offered on a voluntary basis and limited to teaching *about* religion's culture and history as opposed to teaching the basic tenets of Orthodox faith.

Another type of "obstacle" the Patriarch could have had in mind, were concerns reflecting the multi-ethnic and multi-religious composition of the Russian state. This made it very difficult for the ROC to insist on exclusively Orthodox instruction or on the privileged status of Orthodox education in the country where four traditional faiths were considered equal by the law. Therefore, the ROC agreed in principle that "in the places where there are many people who belong to other religions, such as Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, and other, these religions can be

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taught" (Sergii 2002). However, the 2002 initiative of the Ministry of Education strongly lobbied by the ROC developed no program for teaching courses other than Orthodox culture. Thus, no Foundations of Muslim Culture course was either offered or even mentioned in the Ministry's document. In 2003, the education minister Filippov compromised and suggested to develop a course about all four traditional religions. The Orthodox hierarchs "corrected" this "oversight" arguing in favor of confessional education, i.e., teaching particular faiths to non-Orthodox students thus segregating them on religious grounds. Thus, Metropolitan Kliment strongly articulated this idea in January 2005 during the XIIIth Christmas Readings (Vasilenko 2005).

These developments show that attempts to desecularize public education during the first decade of post-atheism were increasingly carried out from above and, over time, relied upon more and more centralized means of control over education. This trend strengthened during the second decade of post-atheism and culminated in another landmark event, the 2007 amendments to the law on education. By this law, regional and local components of the educational curriculum were abolished leaving schools bound only by the federal curricular component. The latter, in its turn, was expanded by a new substantive block of courses in Spiritual-Moral Culture [*Dukhovno-Nravstvennaia Kul'tura*] (SMC hereafter), which pleased the Moscow Patriarchate, and significantly broadened the opportunities for religious studies. Inclusion of religious studies in the federally controlled curriculum has considerably increased the status of the subject and, at the same time, effectively weakened local and/or regional resistance to its introduction (Verkhovskii 2008).

This brief history of the attempts to bring Orthodoxy back into the school reveals patterns predicted by our preceding conceptual analysis. Indeed, these attempts have been carried out by and in close collaboration with the top civil and religious elites, represented by the federal government and the Moscow Patriarchate of the ROC, respectively. We have also seen that this process has progressively focused on federally controlled parts of the state-run educational establishment (federal curricular component) as opposed to local or regional public educational institutions or parochial schools; and that it revolved around the federal as opposed to regional legislation.

This brief history also shows that in order to comply with the legal norms of secularity and church-state separation, religious studies had to be represented either as cultural or historical studies of religion (i.e., as in the FOC initiative of 2002), or as education for moral and spiritual

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growth (the SMC of 2007). To comply with the norms of equality of religions and respect for minority rights, they were officially offered on a voluntary basis, in that students of all traditional religions were supposed to be accommodated. At the same time, as was noted above, in the context of social-structural and social-psychological constraints, adequately addressing the official norms of secularity and equality proved extremely difficult, and the violation of these norms are likely. In turn, violation of these norms strengthens opposition to the desecularization efforts. Moreover, as shown below, the more centralized and therefore far-reaching such efforts became the more opposition they generated. The case in point is Muslims' resistance to the desecularization push of the ROC.

Muslim Reaction

The initiatives of the Ministry of Education and the ROC and especially the actual practices and outcomes of their implementation have generated a wave of harsh criticism from Muslim leaders. They construed the FOC and subsequent initiatives as a threat to the secular character of Russia's education decreed by the Constitution, and as a potentially explosive issue for the fragile interfaith relationships in the country. Initially, mainstream Muslim leaders showed cautious but consistent support for the idea of providing religious education in principle and in Orthodoxy in particular. This was despite unequal treatment of Orthodox and Muslim concerns by the Ministry of Education. This support could be attributed, at least in part, to self-interest. Apparently, by allying themselves with the ROC and its causes, non-Orthodox leaders hoped to retain and enhance their privileged status as one of the "traditional" religions. More importantly, such an alliance was, probably, viewed by the Muslim leaders as a window of opportunity for establishing their own system of education in Foundations of Islamic culture in the predominantly Muslim regions. On the other hand, given the decentralized nature of Islam, Muslim leaders were concerned with the kinds of religious education children might receive, and with the possibility of the resulting growth of unofficial and radical Islamic influences.

However, this support from Muslim leadership started to crack in the mid-2000s after the infamous declaration by Metropolitan Kliment mentioned above, and the Recommendations prepared by *Obschestvennaia Palata* in 2006 — an unelected advisory Council created by Putin — to establish mandatory, faith based, and confessionally organized

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religious studies (Mozgovoi 2006). This eventually turned into an open confrontation with the ROC leadership, which reached its high point after the federal curriculum in Spiritual-Moral Culture was introduced in 2007.

Muslim opposition to Orthodox expansion has emphasized all forms of constraint on desecularization. First, it has appealed to the constitutional norms of secularity and church-state-school separation in view of the rapid spread of the FOC course in much of the country after 2002 (when it was still optional) and especially since September 2006, when it became mandatory in some places. Indeed, by 2004 the FOC was already an option in 26 regions of Russia (Bunimovich 2004), and since the beginning of 2006 school year it became mandatory in four regions (Verkhovskii 2008). This opposition culminated after the decree of 2007, which made religious studies officially mandatory and federally controlled, and, at this writing, is expected to be launched in 2009–2010. The head of the Council of Muftis of Russia argued that FOC "violates the Constitution," and establishes the "superiority of one culture and people and diminishes the others" (quoted in Gainutdin 2007). Another Muslim leader suggested that "in a secular state it is prohibited to build chapels on the territory of state-run schools and to introduce the FOC in the schools as a mandatory subject, breaking peoples' backs, disregarding Muslims and others. If you want to do all these, change the Constitution!!!" (Idrisov 2006).

Second, Muslim opposition has challenged the official claims that the FOC course was a secular and strictly voluntary one. To what extent the content of the course was indeed meant to be culture oriented has remained a highly debated issue to this day. Thus, the textbook for this course published by Alla Borodina (2002), was characterized by its critics as promoting nationalistic and ethnocentric views, including anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim passages, and overall more suitable for religious instruction than for the study of culture (Shaburov 2003).

This course also was supposed to be an option taken only with student and parental consent. However, it has been observed by many press reports that the FOC course has increasingly become mandatory and involved coercion in spite of all assurances of the Ministry of Education and the ROC to the contrary (e.g., Mozgovoi 2006).

Next, Muslim leaders have questioned the alliance between the federal government and the ROC, and its privileged role in promoting education in Orthodoxy at the expense of other faiths given to the latter. Thus, Muslims appealed to the President and the Ministry of Education to

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defend the Russian Constitution, to prohibit introducing Orthodoxy classes, and to involve Muslim and other non-Orthodox communities and organizations in the development and implementation of courses in the history of world religions. Muslims also appealed to the ROC to "review its course of actions" and reminded it that "Slavic peoples are not the only citizens of Russian Federation" and that there are "many Muslims who have been living on the lands of their ancestors (Declaration of "Russia's Islamic Heritage" movement 2008).

Last but not least, the opposition has also been fueled by routine disrespect for minority rights and equality of religions. In some places schools provided no alternative to non-Orthodox students, including Muslim students, who were left with no choice other than taking a course in Orthodoxy under peer and/or blatant administrative pressure (e.g., Shul'ga 2004). This pressure was reported to be especially strong on those Muslim students who grew up and attended schools in non-Muslim regions of Russia. In the schools where Muslims constitute a minority, the administration is reluctant to hire additional instructors for a few non-Orthodox students, thus privileging Orthodox instruction over other religions. At the same time, where courses in Islam are available, assigning students to classes may be based on questionable criteria for establishing students' religious identity as Muslim or Orthodox. Thus, the criteria *de facto* implied by the Moscow Patriarchate initiatives, equate ethnic and religious identity, which disadvantages students of ethnically mixed origins and mixed identities. More importantly, the criteria for establishing ethnicity need clarification in their own right.

Of special concern for the Muslim leaders is the principle of faith-based or confessional education strongly lobbied by the ROC to comply with the norms of respect for minority rights and equality of religions. The principle of confessional organization of education within the SMC federal standard was ascertained by the initiative of 2007 and generated the most recent and ardent expression of Muslim opposition to the governmental and ROC's policies and practices in the sphere of religious studies. Muslim leaders argue that this principle (1) unavoidably limits the opportunity for non-Orthodox confessions to adequately organize their education in non-Muslim regions; and (2) leads to separation of students into majority and minority groups within one and the same classroom, discrimination against minority students and, eventually into ethno-religious tensions. Muslim leaders argue that the atmosphere surrounding introduction of Orthodox education has already contributed to the growth of alienation, hostility, and distrust among nations and to a

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rise in radicalism. The Declaration of Russia's Islamic Heritage movement characterizes this atmosphere as xenophobic, and cautions against separation of students into classes by denomination, which would grow into interfaith feuds, fights and prosecution of "heretics" and "infidels" (Declaration of "Russia's Islamic Heritage" movement 2008).

The ROC leaders have responded to all of those accusations in a harsh way. Characteristically, the archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin, the vice chair of the Department of External Relations of the ROC, referred to Orthodoxy as the cultural foundation of Russian civilization, and the need for every student to "know the history of ROC and its art." If, he continued, someone does not want to comply, "he should better find himself another country" (Chaplin 2006).

To summarize, recent attempts to bring religion back into the school in a centralized, top-down fashion have been challenged by Russia's ethno-religious diversity and the formal-legal equality of Orthodoxy and Islam as the nation's "traditional" faiths. The proponents of Orthodox instruction say that they would give Muslims the option to teach their children about Islam. Yet, in the ethnically mixed areas this results in the artificial separation of children along religious lines and, eventually, as Muslim leaders argues, to discrimination and ethno-religious conflict. Furthermore, given the decentralized nature of Islam, Muslim leaders are concerned with the kinds of religious education children might receive, and with the possibility of the resulting growth of unofficial and radical Islamic influences. Facing the apprehension of their Muslim counterparts, Orthodox leaders are mobilizing public opinion in support of their cause under the banners of a return to historical roots, and moral and cultural traditionalism. In response, Muslim leaders appeal to the principles of separation of church and state, constitutionally secular nature of the Russian state, protection of minority rights and, more generally, human rights. Thus, on the surface, Orthodox-Muslim tensions appear in the form ironically resembling "culture wars" between religious traditionalists and secularists in the West.

Public Opinion about Religion in School: Survey Data

We have seen that the desecularization of Russia's education has been initiated and strongly supported "from above." We also know that considerable tensions exist among the leadership of Russia's Orthodox and Muslims regarding religion's place in state schools. Are these tensions limited to the narrow circles of religious elites, or are they representative

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of much broader divisions in society? What are Orthodox and Muslim opinions regarding Orthodox education? And what do both of them think about teaching Islam in state-run schools? A look at ordinary Russians' opinions regarding religious education *vis-à-vis* opinions expressed by the leaders will help us assess the spread of inter-ethnic and inter-religious tensions and predict their future dynamics.

Our data on public support for religious education in state schools come from questions included in the surveys of 2002 ($n = 2{,}848$) and 2005 ($n = 2{,}972$). Both surveys included over-samples in four predominantly Muslim regions (see Appendix). Respondents were asked if they would support teaching foundations or science of religion; Orthodoxy and Islam or all major world religions; and if they would support mandatory or optional teaching of such courses.

We found that support for teaching either one of the religions (Orthodoxy or Islam) and in any form (mandatory or electively) in state schools had increased from 2002 to 2005 by 12.5%. The number of those opposing it or undecided had dropped by 6% (see Table 1).

This support increases for all regions and both faith groups. Regional comparisons show that support steadily increases as the proportion of people belonging to a particular religion in the overall population of a region increases. At the same time, only fractions of respondents, both Orthodox and Muslims, support education in the religion of the other, and this support is especially weak in the regions where "the other" are in a small minority. The Orthodox in this respect appear to be less tolerant than Muslims. Only 13% of the self-identified Orthodox would allow Islamic education in Russia. By contrast, Muslims in Dagestan are almost twice as likely to allow Orthodox education, even though Orthodox Russians account for no more than 7% of the region's population. Overall, however, these data show that in comparison to an increase in support for religious education in one's own faith, support for religious education of those belonging to other faiths is low.

Table 1. Support for Religious Education in State Schools, Russia, 2002–2005 (%)

	2002	2005	Change
Religious education in some form	63.0	75.5	+12.5
No religious education at all	23.8	17.3	−6.5
Hard to say	13.3	7.1	−6.2
	100%	100%	

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We tested the hypothesis that this intolerance of education in the faith other than one's own may be a manifestation of a more general religious intolerance of religious out-groups characteristic for the Orthodox and Muslims in Russia. Our data confirmed this expectation. It shows that religious tolerance plays an important role in building stronger acceptance of and support for education in the faith of the other. The more tolerant the Orthodox and Muslims are toward each other and other religions (Judaism, and Western churches), the more accepting they are of education in the faith of the other (see Table 2).

To summarize, our public opinion surveys have shown that there is considerable support for religious education (albeit elective, not mandatory) in all Russia's regions, and that this support has increased from 2002 to 2005. We have also learnt that the issue of religious education in state schools divides Russia's society on all levels, not just its elites. Thus, only tiny minorities would support education in the religion of the other, and the Orthodox appear to be less supportive of Muslim education than Muslims of Orthodox education. Finally, our data show that the lack of support for religious education of the other may be a function of a more general syndrome of intolerance of religious out-groups.

Based on these data, it may be anticipated that further attempts to desecularize Russia's state schools "from above" described in this article, may

Table 2. Correlations Between Religious Tolerance and Support For Religious Education by Russia's Orthodox and Muslims by Region, 2005 (Upper Coefficient is for Teaching Foundations of Orthodoxy/Islam, Lower Coefficient is for Scientific Studies of Orthodoxy/Islam). Statistically Insignificant Correlations are Omitted

	In Russia		**In Muslim regions**	
	Orthodox support Muslim education	**Muslims support Orthodox education**	**Orthodox support Muslim education**	**Muslims support Orthodox education**
Orthodox/Muslim tolerance	0.34**	0.35*	0.23**	0.11**
	0.27**	—	0.31**	0.10**
Tolerance toward the Jews	0.28**	—	—	0.17**
	0.25**	—	0.16**	0.17**
Tolerance toward Western churches	0.19**	—	—	0.13**
	0.19**	—	0.11*	—

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed test).
*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed test).

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have destabilizing effects in society and fuel serious ethno-religious tensions. Thus, if the ROC continues its course of action in promoting mandatory Orthodox education by putting more and more pressure on federal and regional administrations, this might generate an even stronger backlash from Muslim populations and eventually lead to painful political and social consequences.

CONCLUSION

Our theoretical and historical analyses have demonstrated that the Orthodox-Muslim tensions surrounding the re-introduction of religious subjects in state schools are inevitable products of Russia's "desecularization from above." This desecularization pattern is rooted in a fundamental contradiction between the spectacular scope and pace of religions' acceptance in the country's public sphere and the virtually stagnating process of ordinary Russians' return to traditional religious beliefs and practices. Reflecting atheist legacies and current religious elites' strategies, low levels of popular religiosity and religious mobilization at the grassroots level preclude the formation of a desecularizing impetus "from below." Under these circumstances, attempts to desecularize public institutions are carried out "from above." The main actors of Russia's desecularization are religious and secular elites while broad-based, grassroots-level movements "from below" are nearly absent from the scene.

This fully applies to the attempts to bring religion back into the school, which have intensified over the last two decades. Low rates of church/mosque attendance severely limit the congregations' educational capacity while parochial schools are rare and beyond reach for most Russians. Thus, attempts to bring religion back into schools practically by default focus on the state-run educational establishment. Yet, these attempts run into serious social and institutional constraints. Religious elites' efforts are hampered by Russia's ethno-religious diversity and the formal-legal equality of Orthodoxy and Islam as the nation's "traditional" faiths. The proponents of Orthodox instruction offer Muslims the option to develop a separate but formally equal system of instruction about Islam. Yet, in the ethnically mixed areas this is likely to result in the artificial separation of children along religious lines and, eventually, as Muslim leaders argue, to discrimination and ethno-religious strife. Furthermore, given the decentralized nature of Islam, Muslim leaders are concerned with the kinds of religious education children might receive, and with the possibility of the

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resulting growth of unofficial and radical Islamic influences. Facing the apprehension of their Muslim counterparts, Orthodox leaders are mobilizing public opinion in support of their cause by presenting it as a return to Russia's historical, cultural, moral, and religious roots. In response, Muslim leaders appeal to the principles of separation of church and state, constitutionally secular nature of the Russian state, protection of minority rights and, more generally, human rights. Thus, on the surface, the Orthodox-Muslim tensions appear in the form ironically resembling "culture wars" between religious traditionalists and secularists in the West. Symptomatically, Muslim leaders have expressed solidarity with atheist and secularist opponents of Orthodox instruction.

Having escalated in the last decade, the ongoing debate has had repercussions in public opinion. Specifically, there has emerged a considerable popular support for the introduction of religious subjects. Yet, this support is noticeably associated with religious intolerance. If the top-down desecularization of state schools continues, it will likely lead to a further aggravation of Orthodox-Muslim tensions with lasting destabilizing effects on society.

Finally, we find that our conceptual elaboration on the idea of desecularization proved to be a useful analytical tool in the study of the rapprochement between religion, state, and school in Russia. It may prove equally instrumental in the study of other institutional spheres and nations. In turn, systematic comparative studies of the patterns, actors, and outcomes of desecularization would contribute to the advancement of the theory of religion's resurgence.

NOTES

1. The term "state schools" in this article refers to all non-private schools. These include both municipal and *gosudarstvennye* ("state") schools that are publicly funded by either local or regional and federal governments.
2. Unless otherwise indicated, survey data used in this article come from two national representative studies conducted in 2002 and 2005 (nearly 3,000 interviews each), which included large over samples in Russia's predominantly Muslim regions (see Appendix).

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APPENDIX

This article utilizes data from two international collaborative studies in Russia. The first one was a 2002 study conducted by Church Research Institute of Finland ($n = 2{,}848$ in-person interviews. Principal investigator Dr. Kimmo Kääriäinen). The second one, "Religious Intolerance among Orthodox Christians and Muslims in Russia: How Strong is it and why?" was funded by the National Council for Eurasian and East European Research in 2004–2006 (Principal investigator Dr. Vyacheslav Karpov). The analysis and interpretations contained herein are those of the authors. The study involved a national probability area sample of the adult household population of Russia ($n = 2{,}972$ in-person interviews total; $n = 1{,}651$ Russian national sample) with four over samples from the predominantly Muslim regions of Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Kabardino-Balkaria, and Dagestan ($n = 1{,}321$). The response rate (measured as the ratio of completed interviews to the total number of contacts) was 64%. The sample was drawn and the interviews administered by the Moscow-based Institute for Comparative Social Research in June 2005.

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