**Russian Readings in University of Oxford**

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**Ten-Year Pronatalist Population Policy in Russia (2007-2017): Modest Demographic Results at Federal Level and Increased Contrasts Between Regions**

Abstract

The idea of an extraordinary growth in fertility in Russia is widespread in the Russian expert community and media space. This increase is believed to be indicative of the positive results of the special financial measures taken by the government after 2006 to stimulate fertility. The author’s viewpoint is more reserved.

National (Federal) level.

The main conclusion from the analysis based on sample surveys conducted recently is that neither the intentions nor the behaviours of most Russians have changed significantly under the influence of pronatalist policies. There have been some positive developments in reproductive attitudes, but their significance is quite insufficient for an optimistic view of Russia’s future fertility. The use of better statistical indicators of fertility than the period total fertility rate (PTFR) for calendar years (for synthetic cohorts), which is often groundlessly used to measure the effect of the policy, has also dampened the excitement over the apparent “growth in fertility”. Findings, based on an analysis of “macro-demographic” and “macro-sociological” data, have received support from researchers who analyse current trends in fertility in Russia using econometric methods based on microdata of surveys. These and certain other studies have shown that the effect of the maternity capital programme and other measures enacted in 2007 on the reproductive behaviour of Russians, although positive, is quite weak. And, perhaps more importantly, the effects obtained are difficult to separate, on the one hand, from the so-called timing effects caused by a short-term change in the timing of successive births and not leading to a change in the lifetime fertility rates of cohorts and, on the other hand, from the effects associated with a long-term transformation of the age-fertility pattern, which in turn may or may not be linked to the change in total cohort fertility.

I remind you that the Russia’s period TFR had a historically low level in 1999 (1.16 births per woman), then it rose to 1.30 in 2006 and to 1.78 in 2015. At that, the growth absolutely exhausted. In 2016, we observed the first signs of a decline, and in 2017 TFR was 1.62, which means a rapid decline, which continued in 2018. We can expect TFR for the year of 2018 will reach 1.5.

As for prospective change in the fertility quantum of female Russian generations (ultimate life-long fertility), we have strong evidence to conclude that, most likely, Russia has passed the point of the historical minimum of fertility – the level of fewer than 1.6 births per woman achieved by the cohorts of the 1970s. Given the level and structure of fertility by birth order observed in the most recent years, the total fertility of generations born in the late 1970s will be higher, though not by much, than that of their immediate predecessors. Most likely, slow growth will continue in the generations of the 1980s with a tendency to stabilise at 1.7-1.75 births per woman.

Provincial (Regional) level.

Diminishing regional diversity in fertility indicators was the dominant trend in the second half of the 20th century. In the 1990s, a period of the most intense political and economic transformation, this trend was interrupted and Russia experienced a short-term increase in regional variations in fertility, which occurred against the background of the rapid fall in its average quantum. Soon, however, the differentiation of fertility once again continued to decline, and, by the early 2000s, the uniformity of the Russian regions returned to the level characteristic of the 1980s. It can be stated as a period of uniform compensatory increase in fertility with tendency pulling regions, where period fertility rates have fallen too low, up to the regions with an average fertility level.

The first five years of increase in total fertility rate (TFR) since 1999, not too change the regional heterogeneity, and it stagnated near the historically lowest level. But in 2007, the year when the new pronatalist measures started, regional differences in TFR increased sharply, especially for rural areas. In 2007-2017 for the rural populations standard deviation of the TFR has doubled, and the coefficient of variation (ratio of standard deviation to arithmetic mean) increase from 15% to 42%. By historical standards it should be recognized as very significant change. In fact, it is the return to the situation observed in Russia in the 1950s or even earlier, when rural populations in many Russian regions have been at the intermediate or even at the beginning stages of the transition from high to low fertility. We can say that the recent pronatalist policies in Russia mainly boosted period fertility indicators in rural area, and, above all, in national autonomous republics with fertility higher than the average level for the whole country.

Some more findings

The period of 1999-2006 can be characterized as a period of compensatory growth of completed fertility for generations born in the 1970s after they reach very low levels in the 1990s when they were at the beginning of their fertility career. At the heart of this growth lay the realization of births delayed during the most difficult years of economic and political transformation of the Russian society. The fundamental socio-economic changes in the Russian society initiated the transformation of the age pattern of fertility started among Russians born in the end of 1960s: the rejection of early family formation in favor of a later marriage and parenthood. The rapid fall in Russia’s TFR and the growth of regional heterogeneity of fertility in the 1990s explained by these factors.

As soon as economic conditions improve, there is increased activity of the families in the implementation of pending marriages and births, and we begin to fix the expected relationship of absolute and relative changes in regional TFRs with baseline level of fertility which is specific to regions: the lower fertility level was before the fall, so then we had more compensatory growth. Equally logically it looks the positive relationship between TFR changes ranking and social and economic development ranking of regions (the higher the educational level of the population, the better the socio-economic situation, the higher the gain in TFR). Generalized portrait of the region with the greatest chance of a significant increase in the total fertility rate in 1999-2006 demonstrates previous baseline fertility level lower than the average, share of the urban population there is higher than the average, the ethnic structure of the local population heavily biased in favor of the peoples with fertility below the average level, the education level is higher than the average level. As for overall economic development and social infrastructure development regions with higher TFR increase had better, above the average level, housing and financial conditions for families with children. Increased regional diversity in fertility rates in this period did not occur.

For the period of 2007-2017 the picture changed fundamentally. It is safe to state that measures of demographic policy, launched in 2007, had unequal response in the Russian regions and ethnic groups of people, as evidenced by the sharp and significant increase in inter-regional variation in total fertility rate, especially among people in rural areas. In contrast to the previous period the increase was positively related to baseline fertility: what it was once higher, the greater the increase appeared after 2006, i.e. fertility has increased more significantly in those regions where it previously, despite the upheavals of recent decades, remained relatively high compared with other regions. Accordingly, the new measures of pronatalist policy adopted in 2006-2007 has changed socio-demographic portrait of the spatial differentials of the Russian population showing the different propensity to increase fertility. Higher increase rates of TFR we find in those regions where we have concentration of people with fertility higher than the average and where the level of education of the population below the average for Russia.

It is important to emphasize that the rank correlation coefficients show a very weak link, or lack thereof between the recent increase of TFR (*tempo of change*) in Russia’s regions and economic parameters for regional development, as well as regional differences in the economic situation of families with children. Also for the GDP per capita, for the average salary and for average cash income per capita, no significant correlation with *the level of TFR* was found.

At the same time, a significant negative correlation was revealed with the level of economic activity of the population and with square meters of living arrangements per capita in the region, as well as a significant positive correlation exists with the share of the population with incomes below the subsistence minimum in the region.

Discussion

Deep differences in fertility evolution between Russia and the Western countries are related to Russia's lagging in matrimonial and reproductive behavior modernization. A most controversial question of Russian demography is whether this lag is a temporary event or a specific mode of evolution. Indeed, there seems to be no categorical answer. While Russia differs little from the Western, primarily European, nations in birth level today, its very young age model of marriage and fertility isolates Russia from these countries. It can be supposed that, with the appearance of a similar economic and social system in the future, Russia will emulate the developed countries in this respect, too.

Russia in last two decades going through the hardest the socioeconomic and political changes, when destroying mechanisms often prevails over constructing them. Therefore, the temporal deviation of regional differentiation from the general vector of evolution in the 1990s is not that surprising. The question is, to what extent will the regional typological structure formed in the previous developmental period prove elastic or steady in the crisis period? The demographic behavior of regions in the nearest future cannot be predicted with confidence. Researchers have not yet elaborated clear ideas about the extent of regional autonomy in the demographic and socioeconomic spheres of man's vital activity. Judging by the empirical experience of foreign countries, a trend toward regional convergence in birth and death levels will most probably be restored in the foreseeable future, and differentiation will decrease even faster than in the previous decades.

How strengthening the regional dimension of demographic policy affects the differences in the direction and pace of change in the birth rate in the Russian expanses have yet to understand. We look forward to expanding and deepening in the future research in this area. At the same time today, in our view, it is obvious that Russian efforts to increase the focus of pro-natalist family policy have a positive response first of all among the social and ethno-demographic groups that either have not yet forgotten the historical experience of high fertility, or for whatever reasons (religious, in particular) continue to be guided by the ideals of a large family. The higher proportion of these social groups in the population of the region, especially among the rural populations, the more significant increase in fertility was observed after 2006, and without any connection to the economic opportunities of the region. It is clear that in the long run we can hardly be to rely on a such mechanism for increasing the birth rate in the country. Strengthening the demographic heterogeneity of the regions, it has more negative than positive points. It is well known that the growing confrontation between the poor regions with high fertility and rich regions with a low birth rate is always a great challenge for society and the economy.