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**Orthodox Religiosity as a Factor in the Electoral Process: The
Regional Dimension (Evidence from the 2011-2016 Federal Elections)**

SUMMARY OF THE DISSERTATION

for the purpose of obtaining academic degree

Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science

Academic Supervisor:

Candidate of Political Sciences

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Research design

Research problem statement. The study of the interaction of religion and politics is a well-developed and popular research area in the social sciences. Various issues are studied within the framework of this research, among which the most important include: how religious affiliation affects the political preferences of voters,¹ the ability of religious movements to mobilize collective action,² the use of religious symbols in public speeches of political leaders,³ and many others.

More modern studies of religion in political studies have appeared quite recently. This can be explained by the fact that for almost the entire 20th century, the concept of secularization has prevailed in the scientific community, which is based on the prediction that comprehensive processes of modernization and rationalization will supplant religion.⁴ It took significant time and numerous historical events⁵ that “revived” the significance of religion, both in the public and political spheres. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, there were often works in academic literature that tried to prove why comparative political science

¹ See Eg: Brooks, Clem, Paul Nieuwbeerta, and Jeff Manza. "Cleavage-based voting behavior in cross-national perspective: Evidence from six postwar democracies." *Social Science Research* 35.1 (2006): 88-128.

² Smith C. *Disruptive religion: The force of faith in social movement activism*. – Routledge, 2014

³ Fischer, Joshua. "Religious Rhetoric in US Presidential Inaugural Addresses: A Meta-analysis." *Emergence: A Journal of Undergraduate Literary Criticism and Creative Research* 4 (2013).

⁴ Lechner, Frank J. "The case against secularization: A rebuttal." *Social Forces* 69.4 (1991): 1103-1119.

⁵ Researchers cite various historical examples that prove that the proponents of the concept of secularization were wrong, predicting the decline of the influence of religion. For instance, in a paper “Gill, Anthony. "Religion and comparative politics." *Annual Review of political science* 4.1 (2001): 117-138” the author gives examples of the 1979 Iranian revolution, which showed a high mobilization of the Islamic movement, despite the processes of modernization in the country; the electoral mobilization of Protestant minorities in Peru allowed Alberto Fujimori to win an unexpected victory in the first round and become president. Also, after the September 11 terrorist attack in New York, the famous German philosopher J. Habermas in his public address announced that the world had entered a post-secular era in which a religious and secular worldview would coexist.

should take religion seriously.⁶ There are gaps in Russian academic literature regarding the understanding of the role of religion in the political sphere. This is largely due to the predominance of anti-religious propaganda and the prohibition of religion in the Soviet era, which led to the absence of research on the study of religion for many decades, as well as a population that adhered to religious regulations to a lesser extent. Nowadays, questions about the relationship between religion and politics, as well as how this relationship can be measured, are poorly studied, especially at the regional level.

Investigation of the surveys regarding the attitude to religion among the population of the Russian regions, as well as electoral processes in 2011-2016, might help to answer these questions. This time period was chosen due to several reasons. First of all, many researchers state 2012 as the beginning of a “conservative turn” in President V.V. Putin's political agenda.⁷ In his message to the Federal Assembly⁸ in 2012, the president pointed to the “lack of spiritual bonds” in Russian society, called for supporting the institutions of traditional values and the strengthening of a solid spiritual and moral foundation of society. After the president’s address, the political course of the “revival” of spiritual values began to be carried out by increasing programs for the construction of new churches,⁹ toughening legislation with regard to insulting the feelings of believers, including Orthodox hierarchs in government councils, etc.

Secondly, in 2012 a large-scale and so far the only all-Russian survey of religions and nationalities of Russians was carried out taking into account the number, geographical and administrative distribution, of citizens adhering to

⁶ See Eg: Grzymala-Busse, Anna. "Why comparative politics should take religion (more) seriously." *Annual Review of Political Science* 15 (2012): 421-442.

⁷ See Eg: Petrov, Nikolay, Maria Lipman, and Henry E. Hale. "Three dilemmas of hybrid regime governance: Russia from Putin to Putin." *Post-Soviet Affairs* 30.1 (2014): 1-26.

⁸ Message from the President to the Federal Assembly URL
<<http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/17118>>

⁹ See Eg: The program for the construction of Orthodox churches in Moscow URL
<http://www.200hramov.ru/index.php?option=com_templates&built=2>

religious practices, and philosophical and socio-demographic characteristics.¹⁰ Following this survey, an Atlas of religions and nationalities of Russia was compiled. This can help to measure the degree of religiosity among the Russian region's population.

It is possible to assume that the “conservative turn” is not a momentary shift in the official ideology, but partly a reaction to changes in society. Part of Russian society has become more susceptible to traditional values, which emphasize respect for authority, religion, tradition, family, and obedience in general.¹¹ Possible manifestations of a conservative turn in political behavior can be observed in voting, an increase in the level of participation in religious NGOs, and a change in the political course in a number of areas of legal regulation (for example, the inclusion of religious courses in educational programs, the regulation of demographic issues). In a post-industrial society, consistent changes are occurring that encompass political, religious, and social norms. Sociologists R. Inglehart and Ch. Welzel in their study, which is devoted to a new look at modernization processes, demonstrate that the value orientation of society plays a key role in the emergence and development of democratic institutions.¹² Therefore, if this is a profound change in society, it is logical to expect that it will affect society, including at the level of political geography.

If this “turn” is just a momentary passion, then there should be no evidence of an earlier trend. We suggest that a deep value transformation in society should be reflected in the spatial differentiation of political behavior. Thus, in this work, we will examine the relationship between Orthodox religiosity and electoral processes. The relationship between religion and politics will be studied on the evidence of electoral processes in a regional context in

¹⁰ ARENA Atlas of religions and nationalities of Russia URL <<http://sreda.org/arena/about-project>>

¹¹Inglehart, Ronald, and Christian Welzel. *Modernization, cultural change and democracy*. New Publishing House, 2011.

¹² ib.

two electoral cycles - the federal elections to the State Duma in 2011 and 2016, as well as the presidential elections in 2012.

Existing studies of the Russian case show that the relationship itself is present to a certain extent, however, we are not aware of works that focus specifically on the regional dimension. Thus, the dissertation research is dedicated to answering the question: *what are the features of the relationship between Orthodox religiosity and electoral processes in Russian regions?*

To begin with, we have to define the main concepts. This dissertation examines "Orthodox religiosity." The majority of the population of the Russian regions identify themselves with Orthodoxy; therefore, it is precisely Orthodox religiosity that is considered in the work. There are many approaches to the concept of religiosity (which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 1). In this work, "religiosity" is considered as a complex phenomenon that includes both the identification of an individual with a certain official religion and the observance of religious precepts (a detailed description of the Orthodox dimension religiosity is presented in chapter 2).

The concept of the "electoral process" includes the results of voting in federal elections, as well as forms of mobilizing voters, such as the formation of political machines, etc.

Literature review. The focus of this dissertation research is on the features of the interaction of Orthodox religiosity and electoral processes in the Russian regions. As a result, the study is based on two areas of literature. The first area describes the operationalization of the concept of "religiosity" and measurement methods. The second part of the work is devoted to the study of the relationship between religion and politics. In turn, this literature can also be divided into two groups: the first examines how religion affects the political preferences of voters; the second group consists of research that analyzes the role of religious leaders in the political process.

Classical works on religious issues belong to famous sociologists and philosophers, such as M. Weber,¹³ who demonstrated the connection between belonging to the Protestant faith and economic development; E. Durheim,¹⁴ who was interested in the practical side of religion. Other studies written in the framework of the theory of secularization, which portended the diminishing role of religion in society, belong to such authors as P. Berger,¹⁵ D. Martin¹⁶, G. Cox,¹⁷ etc. The next generation of research, published at the end of the twentieth century, is devoted to refuting the theory of secularization. The same scientists were some of the first to refute this theory which several decades ago they had supported- the diminution of the role of religion, among them P. Berger¹⁸ and D. Martin.¹⁹ More modern works belong to R. Stark,²⁰ F. Gorsky and A. Altinord,²¹ D. Philpott,²² C. Taylor,²³ P. Norris, R. Inglehart,²⁴ and others.

Another part of the literature is devoted to the analysis of factors of religiosity and primarily focuses on the operationalization of this concept. Methods for measuring the level of “religiosity” were proposed by many

¹³ Veber, Maks. "Politika kak prizvaniye i professiya." *Izbrannyye proizvedeniya* (1990): 644-706.

¹⁴ Dyurkgeym, Emil'. "Elementarnyye formy religioznoy zhizni. Totemicheskaya sistema v Avstralii." *Mistika. Religiya. Nauka. Klassiki mirovogo religiovedeniya. Antologiya*. M.: Kanon 432 (1998).

¹⁵ Berger P. *Religiya i problema ubeditel'nosti*. Neprikosnovenny zapas, 2003, № 6(32) [Elektronnyy resurs]. – Rezhim dostupa: <http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2003/6/berger.html> (provereno 20.05.2019).

¹⁶ Martin, David. "Towards eliminating the concept of secularization." *Penguin survey of the social sciences 1965* (1965): 169-82; Martin D. *A general theory of secularization*. – HarperCollins Publishers, 1979.

¹⁷ Cox H. *Religion in the secular city: Toward a postmodern theology*. – 1984

¹⁸ Piter, Berger. "Fal'sifitsirovannaya sekulyarizatsiya." *Gosudarstvo, religiya, tserkov' v Rossii i za rubezhom* 2 (30) (2012).

¹⁹ Martin, David. "What I really said about secularisation." *Dialog* 46.2 (2007): 139-152.

²⁰ Stark, Rodney. "Secularization, rip." *Sociology of religion* 60.3 (1999): 249-273.

²¹ Gorski, Philip S., and Ateş Altınordu. "After secularization?." *Annu. Rev. Sociol* 34 (2008): 55-85.

²² Philpott, Daniel. "Has the study of global politics found religion?." *Annual Review of Political Science* 12 (2009): 183-202.

²³ Taylor C. *A secular age*. – Harvard university press, 2007.

²⁴ Norris P., Inglehart R. *Sacred and secular: Religion and politics worldwide*. – Cambridge University Press, 2011.

authors, both Russian and foreign: Y. Fukuyama,²⁵ C. Glock,²⁶ S.B. Filatov²⁷ and R.N. Lunkin, E.V. Prutskova,²⁸ O.Y. Breskaya,²⁹ Y.Y. Sinelina,³⁰ and others.

Also in the literature, there are many works that demonstrate a connection between the religious affiliation of voters and electoral behavior. American and European researchers, using the example of many electoral cycles, find evidence of a connection between the specific behavior of religious communities and their political choice. Studies related to this direction belong to J. McTague and J. Layman,³¹ J. Manza and C. Brooks,³² J. Guth,³³ W. Van der Brug, B. Hobolt S., De Vreese,³⁴ J. Spenkuch, P. Tillmann,³⁵ and many others.

Among the studies devoted to Russia, one can single out the work of both foreign and Russian researchers. Among them are the most comprehensive studies of the American political scientist Irina Papkova,³⁶ which include several monographs on the influence of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) on federal policy in the Russian Federation after the fall of communism; Russian

²⁵ Fukuyama, Yoshio. "The major dimensions of church membership." *Review of Religious Research* 2.4 (1961): 154-161.

²⁶ Glock C. Y. On the study of religious commitment. – 1962

²⁷ Filatov S, Lunkin R. "Statistika rossiyskoy religioznosti: magiya tsifr i neodnoznachnaya real'nost'." *Rossiya i musul'manskiy mir* 10 (2005)

²⁸ Prutskova Y. "Operatsionalizatsiya ponyatiya «religioznost'» v empiricheskikh issledovaniyakh." *Gosudarstvo, religiya, tserkov' v Rossii i za rubezhom* 2 (30) (2012).

²⁹ Breskaya O. "Izucheniye religioznosti: k neobkhodimosti integral'nogo podkhoda." *Sotsiologicheskiye issledovaniya* 12 (2011): 77-87.

³⁰ Sinelina, Y. "Pravoslavnyye i musul'mane: sravnitel'nyy analiz religioznogo povedeniya i tsennostnykh oriyentatsiy." *Rossiya i musul'manskiy mir* 7 (2009).

³¹ McTague J. M., Layman G. C. Religion, Parties, and Voting Behavior //The Oxford handbook of religion and American politics. – 2009.

³² Manza, Jeff, and Clem Brooks. "The religious factor in US presidential elections, 1960–1992." *American Journal of Sociology* 103.1 (1997): 38-81.

³³ Guth, James L., et al. "Religious influences in the 2004 presidential election." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 36.2 (2006): 223-242.

³⁴ Van der Brug, Wouter, Sara B. Hobolt, and Claes H. De Vreese. "Religion and party choice in Europe." *West European Politics* 32.6 (2009): 1266-1283.

³⁵ Spenkuch, Jörg L., and Philipp Tillmann. "Elite influence? Religion and the electoral success of the Nazis." *American Journal of Political Science* 62.1 (2018): 19-36.

³⁶ Papkova I. The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics. – 2011

sociologists S.B. Filatov and R.N. Lunkin,³⁷ who issued several volumes of publications devoted to the description of the situation of religious communities in each region of the Russian Federation; sociologist and historian N.A. Mitrokhin,³⁸ the author of several monographs on the scope of the Russian Orthodox Church's activities as a social and economic institution. Also worth noting is the work of young researchers M.I. Bogachev,³⁹ who explores the relationship between church and party preferences of voters, and A.Yu. Kulikova⁴⁰ whose research is devoted to the investigation of the relationship between religiosity and political participation in Russia and European countries.

The aim of this study consists in identifying the links between Orthodox religiosity and voting in federal elections in 2011-2016 at the regional level. To reach this aim the following **objectives** were put forward:

- To analyze the literature on the relationship between religion and politics;
- identify indicators for measuring religiosity in the Russian regions;
- test the hypotheses of the study and determine whether there is a connection between Orthodox religiosity and electoral processes in 2011-2016 in the Russian regions;
- demonstrate the features of the relationship between the Russian Orthodox Church and the political elite at the regional level, as a possible explanation of the electoral results (on the example of three cases).

³⁷Filatov S.B., Lunkin R. N. (2014) Religiozno-obshchestvennaya zhizn' rossiyskikh regionov. – Letniy sad.

³⁸See Eg: Mitrokhin N.A. (2003) Russkaya pravoslavnaya tserkov'-itogi desyatiletiya // Neprikosnovenny zapas

³⁹See Eg: Bogachev M. I. "Vzaimosvyaz' stepeni votserkovlennosti i politicheskikh predpochteniy pravoslavnykh veruyushchikh." Vestnik Permskogo universiteta. Seriya: Politologiya 4 (2014): 193-216.

⁴⁰Kul'kova, A. YU. "Religioznost' i politicheskoye uchastiye: rol' politiki v rossiyskikh religioznykh obshchinakh." Vysshaya shkola ekonomiki. Seriya WP14.«Politicheskaya teoriya i politicheskii analiz 02 (2015).

Methodological foundation. In the empirical part of the study, factor analysis is used to identify the spatial differentiation of regions. This method arose in connection with the solution of problems in psychology, and, first of all, this concerned hypotheses about the nature of mental abilities prompted by the study of the correlation matrix between specially selected indicators. In this work, factor analysis allowed us to identify the most relevant questions for the study, which are related to Orthodoxy and traditional values, and also allowed us to identify factors that could affect the voting. To search for the relationship between religious indicators in the regions and support for the party in power as well as President V.V. Putin's work, the OLS regression method is applied.

Chronological framework of research. The focus of the study is on the elections to the State Duma of the Russian Federation in 2011 and 2016 as well as the presidential elections in 2012. It was during this period, after the election of President V.V. Putin for a third term, that many researchers noted a “conservative turn” in the president’s political agenda. In addition, work on the ARENA project (Atlas of Religions and Nationalities of Russia), in the framework of which a study was conducted on the religious and spiritual state of affairs in Russian society, took place in 2012, which allows us to correlate the analysis of electoral statistics with the religious factor.

Hypotheses. The main hypothesis of the study lies in the fact that the regions that are more likely to identify with Orthodoxy will have a higher number of votes for “United Russia” and V.V. Putin than less religious regions of the Russian Federation.

In addition to this hypothesis, the following assumptions are also tested in the study:

- Believers who observe religious precepts will cast more votes for United Russia and V.V. Putin;

An alternative hypothesis.

Voting for United Russia and V.V. Putin will be influenced by the level of GRP (Gross regional product), the predominance of the rural population and pensioners in the region; with a high level of GRP, but a low proportion of the population of retirement age and rural population, support for United Russia and V.V. Putin will decline, and belonging to the Russian Orthodox Church / following religious regulations will be insignificant variables, or with negative values.

An alternative hypothesis is based on the concept of “political machines”, the main idea of which is that the formation of strong governor's “political machines”, which mobilize the electorate to vote for the party in power, took place in rural and ethnic centers.

Data selection. To measure the level of religiosity in the regions of the Russian Federation, the work uses the Atlas of Religions and Nationalities of the Russian Federation (ARENA). The survey was made by the research service SREDA in 2012. The project is based on data obtained in the course of a nationwide survey, which is a representative sample of the Russian Federation and 79 regions. This survey does not cover the following districts: Chechenskaya Respublika, Respublika Ingushetiya, Chukotskiy autonomous okrug, and the Nenetskiy autonomous okrug. The questionnaire includes questions regarding religion, the performance of religious rituals, traditional values, attitudes toward the state, laws, trust in others, etc. Also, the answers were distributed by age, gender, education, income, and occupation. Interview methodology: a) urban and rural population of the Russian Federation aged 18 years and older; b) the sample was 56,900 respondents; in each subject of the Russian Federation, 500–800 people were surveyed; statistical error for the Russian Federation is less than 1%; c) the geography of the survey: 79 constituent entities of the Russian Federation where 98.8% of the population lives (according to the 2010 census). To build the models in the empirical part of

the research for the independent variable, data consisted of electoral presidential and parliamentary elections from the official website of the Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation, as well as control variables used in the socio-economic data, combined with a unified database of the Federal State Statistics Service.

Contribution to the subject field.

1. Among existing studies on the influence of the religious factor on political processes in Russia, there are works examining the relationship between the level of “churching” and party preferences of voters, describing voting in ethnic republics and the situation in the post-Soviet space in the late 90s and early 2000s. Despite this, there are no works devoted to the analysis of the influence of the religious factor on the electoral processes at the regional level of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation. This paper presents an attempt to identify a new political/electoral geography in Russia, which is based on empirical data from the last two cycles of federal elections.

2. Based on the results, this study confirms the trend that has been observed in the CIS countries after the fall of communism - the former communist regimes are becoming the most religious in the modern world. In this work, it was proved that the regions of the Russian Federation that provided the greatest support to the Communist Party in the 1990s are now the most Orthodox regions of Russia.

Statements to be defended:

1. According to the results of the study, a regional diversity of the relationship between Orthodox religiosity and electoral behavior in Russia between 2011-2016 was revealed. A group of neighboring regions was identified that are distinguished by a high level of religiosity and a vote for power. These regions were defined as the “Orthodox belt,” in which the majority

of the population identifies with Orthodoxy and the Russian Orthodox Church. It was also revealed that the “Orthodox belt” largely coincides with the regions of the “red belt,” whose population supported the Communist Party in the 1990s.

2. The study identified factors characterizing the regional diversity of regions on religious grounds. A statistical relationship between these factors and electoral results was also found. The first factor is “believing activists,” a group of people who are less interested in faith and Orthodoxy, but who are more focused on social activity: community service, charity, volunteering, and traditional foundations. The second factor is “ritual believers,” to whom the ritual aspect of the Orthodox faith is more important: to observe religious precepts, to confess, and to pray. It is with this factor, using statistical analysis, that the relationship was determined with the election results for United Russia and V.V. Putin, therefore, the main models are built with this factor.

3. The paper describes the mechanisms of interaction between regional authorities and the Russian Orthodox Church. Two cases of the Lipetsk and Tambov regions demonstrate the political role of the Russian Orthodox Church at the regional level.

Work Approbation

50th Annual ASEES Convention, presentation: Religious Diversity and Electoral Performance in Russia’s Regions: The Case of Presidential Elections, 2012-2018 and Parliamentary Elections, 2011-2016. Boston, USA, December, 6-9, 2018.

CREECA Young Scholars Conference, presentation: Religious Factor in the Russian Federal Elections, 2011-2018. Madison, WI, USA, June, 26-27, 2018.

17th Annual International Aleksanteri Conference: Russia’s Choices for 2030, presentation: Orthodoxy and Voting Behavior in Russia. Helsinki, Finland, October, 25-27, 2017.

FRRESH (The Finnish Russian Network in Russian and Eurasian Studies in the Field of Social Sciences and Humanities) Spring Seminar, presentation: ROC and Voting Behavior in Russian Regions. European University at St. Petersburg, March, 14, 2017.

16th Annual International Aleksanteri Conference: Life and Death in Russia, presentation: Religion and the Russian Voters in the 2011 and 2012 Federal Elections. Helsinki, Finland, October, 26-28, 2016.

Fifth Annual Conference the October Readings “Development of Russia in the Framework of Global Politics”, presentation (in Russian): The Impact of Religion and the Church on the 2011 and 2012 Federal Elections. St. Petersburg, October, 20-22, 2016.

Works published in journals approved by HSE

Ukhvatova M.V. Religion and Voting behavior in Russia: a Regional aspect [Religiya i elektoral'noye povedeniye v Rossii: regional'nyy aspekt]. *Vestnik Permskogo Universiteta. Seriya: Politologiya*. 2017. № 4. P. 26-48.

Ukhvatova M.V. "Blessing of the Guardians": Religious Rhetoric at Inauguration of Governors in Russia [“Naputstviya okhraniteley”: Religioznaya ritorika na inauguratsiyakh gubernatorov v Rossii]. *Politiya*. 2018. № 2. P. 84-101.

Scherbak A. N., Ukhvatova M. V. From the “red belt” to the “biblical”: historical prerequisites for shifts in the political geography of Russia [Ot “krasnogo poyasa” – k “bibleyskomu”: istoricheskiye predposylki sdvigov v politicheskoy geografii Rossii]. *Obshchestvennyye nauki i sovremennost'*. 2018. №6. P. 98-113.

II. Analysis of data and findings

In this paper, we analyzed the influence of the Orthodox factor on political processes in the Russian regions between 2011 - 2016. At the first stage

of the study, the most religious subjects of the Russian Federation were identified. These entities include Tambovskaya oblast,' Lipetskaya oblast,' Nizhegorodskaya oblast,' Kurskaya oblast,' Penzenskaya oblast,' Ryazanskaya oblast,' Tul'skaya oblast,' Bryanskaya oblast,' Kostromskaya oblast,' Krasnodarskiy kray and Astrakhanskaya oblast.' These regions, for the most part, border each other, which allow us to speak about the existence of a kind of religious belt. The study revealed the coincidence of a majority of the most religious regions with the former communist "red belt."

Using factor analysis, two groups of Orthodox were identified. The first group can be described as "conservative activists," who are less involved in faith and Orthodoxy, but who are more oriented towards social activity: community service, charity, volunteering, and traditional foundations. The second group of Orthodox believers is "ritual believers," to whom the ritual part of the Orthodox faith is more important: observing religious precepts, confessing, and praying. It was with the second group of "ritual believers" that a connection was found with voting for United Russia and V.V. Putin.

In the second chapter, the statistical analysis confirmed the main hypothesis of the study, which was the assumption that religion affects the electoral behavior of voters. It was assumed that the regions, the population of which is more likely to identify with Orthodoxy, will have a higher number of votes for "United Russia" and V.V. Putin than less religious regions of the Russian Federation. In other words, there will be more support for Putin than in less religious regions of the Russian Federation. Regression analysis showed a weak, but still significant relationship between religiosity and the voting results between 2011-2012, as well as in the 2016 parliamentary elections. Religiosity is positively associated with voting for the party in power in 2011, 2016 and V. V. Putin in 2012. Moreover, Orthodoxy is not identical with "Russianness." The results of the analysis may indicate that regions with populations adhering to rituals can bring additional votes to the ruling party and the president, while

“non-religious activism” does not play a role. The analysis also showed that voters who believe without a particular religious association give less preference to United Russia and V.V. Putin. Significant support for the party in power and President V.V. Putin is also found among Muslim regions.

At the final stage of the study, the question is examined, how is politicized religiosity manifested except at the electoral level? The socio-demographic portrait of the regions of the “Bible belt” is presented in paragraph 3.1. Based on these data, it can be concluded that religiosity does not affect the sphere of family and marriage, at least not yet. Fertility, mortality, marriage, divorce, abortion - all these indicators in these regions do not differ much from the national average. Most likely, even in the Russian "Bible belt" we should talk about the predominance of ritual religiosity. Over the past decade, the Russian Orthodox Church has been actively involved in politics, both putting forward its conservative initiatives and supporting the ones put forward by secular guards.

In addition, the analysis of two cases of the Tambov and regions were presented. The case studies of the Lipetsk and Tambov regions examined how political religiosity is institutionalized at the regional level. Firstly, the Russian Orthodox Church has contractual relations in almost all the main areas in the regions: in education, healthcare, culture, etc. The Russian Orthodox Church often tries to lobby its interests with the help of the authorities, demanding the return of property, the inclusion of religious studies in the mandatory program, etc. Secondly, the analysis of socio-demographic data showed that religiosity almost does not affect the sphere of family and marriage, but at least not yet. Fertility, mortality, marriage, divorce, abortion - all these indicators in these regions do not differ much from the national average. Given the number of areas into which the ROC legally penetrates, one can expect an increase in the share of conservatism and a reflection of this in socio-economic indicators in the future. In addition, it is important to note that we are talking not only about the individual religiosity of the population, but also about the institutionalization of

the political influence of the Russian Orthodox Church - agreements, interventions in various fields, etc.