Maksim I. Bogachev and Kirill V. Sorvin

Politics in the Church: Who Do Orthodox Priests Support?

Translated by Olivia Bowins

DOI: https://doi.org/10.22394/2311-3448-2021-8-1-90-112

Maksim I. Bogachev — National Research University Higher School of Economics (Moscow, Russia). mbogachev@hse.ru

Kirill V. Sorvin — National Research University Higher School of Economics (Moscow, Russia). ksorvin@hse.ru

The article provides a study of the relationship between politics and religion in contemporary Russia. The authors analyze the survey "Sociopolitical Preferences of Russian Society" (number of people identifying themselves as Orthodox believers N=2,735), which shows that at least 21.1 percent of the sample make decisions concerning their electoral choices under the direct influence of priests and fellow parishioners. The authors reveal that, although the ruling party, "United Russia," is the main political beneficiary of the Orthodox vote, political support largely depends on believers' church attendance. The authors show that priests' public and private advice on political preference is not effective in garnering support for the ruling party. Support for "United Russia" is most likely when believers discuss their electoral choices within their church community.

Keywords: sociology of religion, political science of religion, politics and religion in Russia, election, Orthodoxy, campaigning, "United Russia" party.

TODAY, the problematic relationship between religion and politics in Russia continues to be a poorly studied area, despite the large number of publications devoted to the topic. On the one hand, a significant proportion of this thematic industry is made up of works that are more journalistic than academic; on the other hand, theoretical research maintains a leading role in strictly scientific publications. Despite numerous publications about desecularization, state-confessional relations, the politicization of the Church, the struggle of patriarchates for spheres of influence, and so on, there is still an obvious shortage of works that address

the relationship between religion and politics: 1.) not on the scale of abstract social constructs and processes, distinguishable only at the level of concepts, but in the context of specific, directly observed and perceived phenomena; 2.) not at the macro- (the level of the patriarchy, state-confessional and international relations), but at the meso- (the level of metropolises and dioceses) and micro-levels (the level of deaneries and parishes); and 3.) not in historical, but in contemporary empirical material.

In recent years authors who have strove to eliminate the theoretical-empirical imbalance include: Iu. Sinelina and V. V. Lokosov, who studied believers' trust in various public and state institutions; A. V. Sitnikov and I. A. Papkova, who measured believers' attitudes to the most preferred form of government, democracy, etc. . .; M. I. Bogachev and M. V. Uhvatova, who studied Orthodox believers' party preferences; and A.Iu. Kulkova and D. V. Zhuravlev, who focused on political participation and social conservatism among various religious groups (Lokosov and Sinelina 2008; Lokosov 2007, Lokosov and Sinelina 2004; Sitnikov 2012; Papkova 2011; Shcherbak and Ukhvatova 2018; Ukhvatova 2017; Kulkova 2017; Kulkova 2015; Zhuravlev 2017).

These publications, however, only reveal the tip of the iceberg. Following previous researchers, the authors examine the interrelationships between religion and politics to consider the role of religion in contemporary Russia's electoral process through Orthodox priests' and parishioners' propaganda activities. From December 2014 to January 2015, the authors conducted a sociological survey, "Sociopolitical Preferences of Russian Society," among an unrepresentative, non-probabilistic sample of VKontakte users in various (mainly religiously oriented) communities. The sample consisted of 6,259 people, of which 2,735 identified themselves as Orthodox believers (Bogachev and Sorvin 2019). An increase in the sample size (compared to standard surveys) and attention to practicing Orthodox believers through disproportionate stratification made it possible to demarcate groups of Orthodox believers equally represented and comparable at different stages of churching.[1] The statistical error in the group indicators did not exceed 1.6 percent.[2]

1. Orthodox priests' campaigning activities are characterized by an uneven distribution among various groups of believers, but they are most common among the Orthodox group that frequently attends services. However, this group makes up a relatively small share in Russian society (according to various estimates, from 2 percent to 4 percent), and the standard sample used in all Russian polls is not large enough to make correct conclusions about the prevalence of certain political practices among practicing believers. Therefore, the authors focused on the most religious group of Russians when conducting the survey.
2. The statistical error is calculated using the standard formula provided by the FDF group MA Marketing Agency.

The authors operationalized churching, i.e. the process of assimilating one's way of life and thinking in the Church, by measuring believers' attendance of religious services (the minimalist concept of being churched). Depending on the degree of churching, the authors divided Orthodox respondents into five groups: I consider myself Orthodox but do not attend services (2.4 percent); I attend services once a year or less often (16.7 percent); I attend services several times a year (24.7 percent); I attend services from one to three times a month (25.4 percent); and I attend services once a week or more often (30.8 percent).[3] In the course of the study, the authors questioned believers about their religious practices and political preferences, how often they witnessed clerical political campaigning,[4] if they followed priests' political advice or community members' recommendations, and so forth.

The study identified three main channels of religious influence on Orthodox believers' electoral preferences, all of which are associated with attending services. The first channel is priestly political campaigning. Priests can agitate believers both in groups (preaching during services, preaching outside the church, public speaking, and so on), individually as part of counseling work (mainly confession), through out-of-service conversations with people, or during interactions with parishioners in the course of any joint parish activity) (Kollner 2013; Kormina 2019; Emel'ianov 2019; Krikhtova 2019). The study reveals that 18.4 percent of the Orthodox believers in the sample listened to priests' political sermons, and 7.4 percent of all respondents followed priestly political recommendations. The second channel is individual believers' appeals to the priest for advice "on whom to vote for." In the study, 7.1 percent of believers listened to priestly advice after independently requesting it. Lastly, the third channel is parishioners' interactions with other members of the community, generally without priests. In the sample, 6.6 percent made

3. For comparison, we present data from a Levada Center survey, representative for the entire population of Russia, conducted in April 2019 (N = 1600). In the sample, the groups of believers with similar indicators of church attendance responded: I consider myself Orthodox, but do not attend services (38 percent); I attend services once a year and less often (29 percent); I attend services several times a year (17 percent); I attend services from one to three times a month (7 percent); I attend services once a week or more often (5 percent). See: Obshchestvennoe mnenie 2020, 121.

4. In accordance with Article 48 of N67-FZ "On Basic Guarantees of Electoral Rights and the Right to Participate in a Referendum of Citizens of the Russian Federation" political campaigning refers to any action taken to induce voters to vote, or, conversely, not to vote for any candidate or list of candidates.

their choice not under the influence of a priest, but solely based on community members' opinions. Based on the results, religion has a tangible impact on believers' electoral preferences in modern Russia. At least 21.1 percent of Orthodox believers are under the direct influence of priests and community members when making their electoral choice.[5]

These results, however, do not exhaust the list of issues related to the influence of religion on believers' electoral preferences. In particular, the frequency of priests' and community members' political campaigning remains relatively unknown. This study searches for an answer to the question: which political forces benefit from clerical political activism and which of the above-mentioned channels of influence are most effective in mobilizing believers?

This article consists of four parts. The first section defines the political beneficiaries of clerical agitation. The second part examines the political and ideological contradictions between the Russian Orthodox Church and secular authorities. The third section analyzes modern opinions on Orthodox priests and their attitudes to secular power, and the final part establishes the most effective way to mobilize believers.

The dangers of hasty conclusions, or the paradox of clerical political sermons

During the survey, the authors asked respondents about their party preference in the Federal Parliamentary Elections to the State Duma of the VI Convocation (2011–2016). The December 2011 elections were part of a proportional representation system, with all 450 seats in the lower house of parliament distributed on the basis of party lists. Therefore, the study considered only political parties that claimed to profit from political campaigning of the clergy. To identify which parties benefit most from this activity, we compared the party preferences of believers who were exposed to political sermons and those who were not. (Table 1).

5. This survey is significant not so much by the total indicators of religious influence on electoral choice, as by the tendency for various typological groups to encounter priestly political agitation. The authors found a positive correlation between the number of believers attending services and the proportion of Orthodox Christians who witnessed clerical political campaigning (from 8.8 percent in the group attending services once a year or less often to 26.8 percent in the group attending services once a week or more).

Table 1. Witness of priests' political sermons and believers' electoral choices (sample as a whole)

	United Russia	Communist Party	Liberal Democratic Party	A Just Russia	Patriots of Russia	Yabloko	Just Cause (now Party of Growth	I made a mistake	I don't remember	I did not vote
Witnessed a political sermon	25.9	8.9	4.8	6.2	1.6	5.9	0.5	7.1	7.3	31.8
Did not witness a political sermon	32.8	8.9	6.1	6	0.6	3	0.8	3	9.6	29.2
Difficult to answer	32.2	4.8	7.2	4.3	1	2.9	0	2.4	11.1	34.1
Total	31.5	8.6	6	5.9	0.9	3.5	0.7	3.7	9.3	30.1

The voting results differ significantly for only one political party, United Russia. Since clerical political sermons significantly affect only United Russia, this study focuses on Orthodox believers' voting patterns for this party only. The data indicate that political sermons led to a decrease in the vote for United Russia: 25.9 percent of believers who attended them voted for the party, while 32.8 percent did not.

In light of this distribution, it is logical to assume that the clergy campaigned against United Russia. This hypothesis is not unfounded, although it contradicts the widespread view on the relationship between the Russian Orthodox Church and secular authorities. Clearly, there is tension between the Church and the Russian secular govern-

ment, but is it serious enough to induce clergymen to negatively impact electoral support for United Russia?

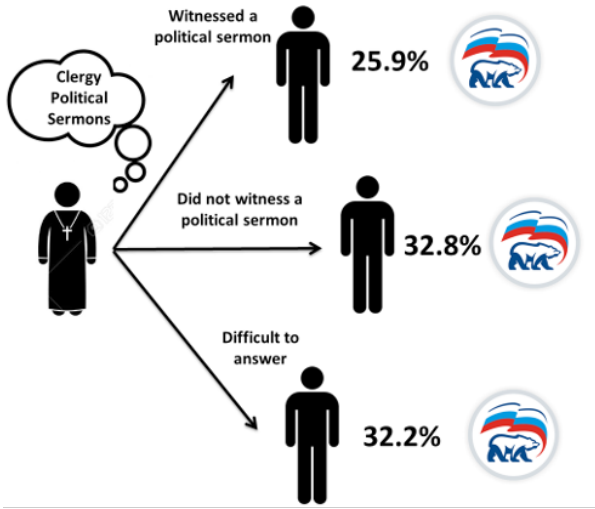


Figure 1. Voting for "United Russia" among those who witnessed political sermons

Unpublicized conflict: motivations behind the silence on church-state relations in modern Russia

There are several significant contradictions between secular and religious authorities in modern Russia. First, are conflicting ideas about the ideal political system. The secular government's ideal, established in the law, is a secular democratic state with a republican form of government. However, from the religious perspective, "... there is simply no political theology capable of justifying the existence of a secular democratic (albeit only nominally democratic) state, which arose in the very place where there was once (allegedly) "Holy Russia" <...> in the Russian Orthodox tradition" (Kaspe 2018). According to the "Bases of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church," the Church's political ideal is a theocracy. This social system is described in the Book of Judges, under which the state is ruled by the Invisible King, or God. Church hierarchs approve of a monarchy (under a monarchy, power remains God-given), but as a form of government resulting from the people's weak faith. In turn, "modern democracies, including those monarchical in form, do not seek the divine sanction of power. They are a form of power in secular society that presuppos-

es the right of every capable citizen to express will through elections" (Patriarch Alexy II 2000), and therefore democracy (used here in the ancient sense as a form of government) and the republic do not earn Church approval.

Three factors contribute to the clergy's dislike of modern (liberal) democracy: 1.) its refusal to seek divine sanction of power (that is, secularism), 2). its recognition of a person's inalienable rights and freedoms (including universal suffrage) (Arkhiereiskii Sobor Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi 2008), and 3.) its sanction of competition (according to the patriarch, "all competition carries the energy of division") (Patriarch Kirill 2017). However, the Russian Orthodox Church takes no issue with the election process itself, as the clergy regularly demonstrates when it calls on the flock to participate in civil elections (Patriarch Kirill 2016), or when it speaks of the elective monarchy as the most preferable government for modern society (*Pravmir* 2012).

This discrepancy in perspectives influences secular and religious authorities' ideological views. The secular authorities act as conservatives, while the clergy act as traditionalists (close, but not identical to conservatism). Indeed, "the conservative position of the authorities is to strive to maintain the existing order and balance of forces in society as long as possible, to protect the interests of the groups entrenched in power, and to apply innovations only in extreme cases, when the absence of reforms can lead to the imminent death of the existing system" (Bogachev 2016, 260). The secular government is unconcerned with issues of morality and religious permissibility. It will resort to any means necessary in order to maintain the status quo and preserve itself, be it universal suffrage, cultural liberalization, juvenile justice, legalization of abortion, or assistance from nontraditional religious associations in Russia.

The bishops' most important concern is to please God, and thus it conforms to whichever methods further the influence of the Church's views. The clergy considers many of the secular authorities' actions as pernicious and sinful, leading society to apostasy. Therefore, traditionally oriented bishops perceive the equilibrium that has developed in the political sphere as a temporary and transient state. The clergy want to change the current situation and shift the balance of power towards the Church. For the Church, however, taking harsh action against the current rulers (e.g. harsh criticism of the President or government decisions) is tantamount to abandoning its symbiotic relationship with secular authorities and relinquishing access to the pow-

er and economic resources the state provides. Therefore, the Church strives not to publicize the fissure between religious and secular authorities and continues its collaboration with what it views as a morally corrupt political system.

Finally, the Church's tacit cooperation with secular authorities can be explained not only by its private corporate interests, but also by the fact that electoral authoritarianism is more palatable for the higher priesthood than liberal democracy. Russia's political system is only nominally democratic; the state's real mechanism for making political decisions is much closer to Church rather than constitutional ideals. Therefore, the Church's encroachment on the existing political system, expressed through statements of dislike, does not guarantee that a theocracy will be established in Russia. Delegitimizing the existing political system may not only eliminate the de facto privileged position of the Orthodox Church in multiconfessional Russia, but also lead to a new government even more distant from the Church's ideal than the current one. As a result, the Church, which sees itself as an enduring part of society, prefers to silently wait for better times without raising concerns about the proper relationship between the political and the sacred.

Thus, there are differences between the Russian Orthodox Church and the secular authorities regarding the ideal political system, ideological views, and political methods. At the moment, the Church and the secular authorities find themselves in the same predicament, where they "are not so much allies as fellow travelers who, constantly expecting the other party to violate their agreement, try to maximize their usefulness for their own sake" (Bogachev 2016, 258). And, although high-ranking clergy demonstrate an explicitly positive attitude towards the authorities (for example, they publicly proclaim the state's divine nature and irremovability) (Ukhvatova 2018), ordinary clergymen may deliver sermons that differ significantly from official Church rhetoric. Experience shows that there may be a tangible discrepancy between an organization's public position, especially one as large as the Russian Orthodox Church, and the behavior of its rank-and-file members.

Clerical attitudes towards secular power

To date, systematic studies devoted to Orthodox sermons and their reflection of political theology do not exist. However, based on a number of studies that analyze clergy speeches and sermons in the context

of other research, clerical discourse expresses at least three points of view on the existing authorities and the United Russia Party (Verkhovsky 2003; Kollner 2013; Østbø 2015; Briskina-Muller 2015; Suslov 2016; Knorre 2016; Knorre and Kharish 2018; Knorre and Kumankov 2019; Adamsky 2019). These positions are characterized as explicitly positive (the existing power is good and bestowed by God), latently positive (the existing power is bad but it is not and never will be better), and negative (the existing power is bad and commits godless deeds).

Archpriest Dmitry Smirnov, who has repeatedly spoken publicly about the goodness and divine origin of the Russian authorities, provides an example of an explicitly positive attitude towards secular power:

> Smirnov: The very principle of power is a divine institution. It is necessary. Otherwise, people will destroy each other. <…>
> Interviewer: It turns out that sometimes the authorities destroy a country's statehood and terrorize the people. Is this power from God?
> Smirnov: All power is from God! But each individual person may not be from God … (tvsouz 2015)
> Is all authority from God? If so, can you resist and not accept it? — asks the Muscovite, Alexander. Or consider another question: What do you think about the many thousands of rallies against the rigged elections of the United Russia Party on December 4, 2011? <…> — Of course, those people who outwardly protest and advocate fair elections are known to everyone. For example, if we peacefully move those who are in the Kremlin to the opposition, and those who are in opposition to the Kremlin, I think that the general state of affairs in Russia will deteriorate dramatically. That is, all people who are obsessed with protest should understand perfectly well that if we manage to overthrow the existing power, then we will all have a lot of problems. This must be understood. <…> If a person wants to reach the pinnacle of power, he must be ready for anything. Putin has a huge advantage. He received this power without fighting for it and now he has to keep it. He didn't fight for it, and for good reason, because there is a certain process. People often overturn those in power for trivial reasons. The question is why? Change makes sense in some circumstances. For example, if you have the money, buy a car so that people do not think you are poor. But what is the point of a change in power if the power is supported by only half of the people? Is it worth it to do something because of this (Archpriest Dmitrii Smirnov 2011)?

As an illustration of the priesthood's latently positive view on the powers that be, one can cite Bishop Evtikhii's statement: "Although I, like many of you, find many things wrong with our government <...> I ask you to go and vote for Putin in the upcoming elections" (Dmitrii Kraiukhin: svoe i chuzhoe 2012)! Similarly, in the words of Deacon Vladimir Vasilik:

> Power guarantees stability; it is a wall that blocks the path of chaos, civil strife, and mutual extermination. In addition, power keeps enemies from attacking the country. In Soviet times, the Church denounced the state, but, nevertheless, declared that Orthodox Christians were praying for it. The Soviet government was not formally godless because the Constitution did not contain a written statement about the prohibition of religion. Also, the Church and the faith were subjected to persecution and oppression because of communism's atheistic message. But the righteous men of the twentieth century, Vladyka Benjamin (Fedchenkov) and Father John (Krestiankin), fervently prayed for the Soviet regime. <...> Thanks to these prayers, Russia miraculously revived because the government, though perhaps not completely, turned to faith and the Church. <...> This commandment has not lost its relevance even now, when Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin leads our country — a believer and church-going President who regularly confesses and partakes of the Holy Mysteries of Christ (Deacon Vasilik 2015).

An example of a negative attitude towards the authorities is Archpriest Yevgenii Sokolov's speech, which reproaches government leaders for their hypocrisy and lack of faith:

> During a Presidential press conference, someone asked a question about the one million signatures collected against abortion procedures funded through the compulsory medical insurance system. <...> And what did our leader answer? He said: "The question is difficult. In all countries of the world, this operation is performed, so one must think and decide. You can't answer right away." Well then, do not claim to be a believer because from the Orthodox point of view this is murder. <...> We have baptized people sitting in the Duma who thwarted the vote on banning abortion by simply not showing up to the meeting. Such an ostrich policy. Hypocrisy. <...> I repeat, there are no true believers in the Duma, in the Federation Council, or in our government offices, including the Presidency. I repeat, there are no believers. Because if there were, they would not legalize what is happening (News.ru 2018).

Consequently, it is reasonable to assume that the Orthodox clergy is agitating believers to vote against United Russia due to discrepancies between the secular and ecclesiastical authorities on a wide range of issues. However, media documentation of clergy campaigning for United Russia (Vinokurova 2011; Sova-Center.ru 2015; Credo.ru 2011; Kam24.ru 2015; Mel'nikov 2018; Sova-center.ru 2018), official Church documents, speeches showing Church representatives' traditionalist attitudes (Zhuravlev 2017, 4), and the Church's public stance on maintaining the status quo in the political sphere (Ukhvatova 2018) testify to the inconsistency of this (albeit not unfounded) hypothesis. But how then can we explain the fact that the parishioners who witnessed clerical political campaigning demonstrated a lower percentage of support for United Russia than those who did not?

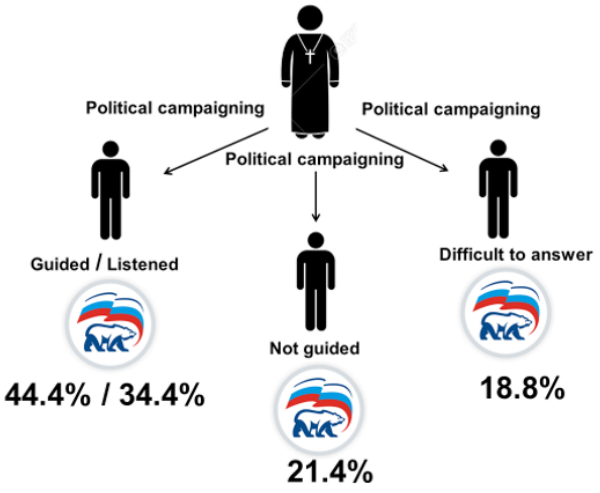


Figure 2. Attitudes towards priests' advice and voting for "United Russia"

The true beneficiary of clerical campaigning and the most effective way of agitating believers

This paradox can be explained by the fact that parishioners themselves perceive clerical political agitation ambiguously. Modern believers are a complex community differentiated according to various characteristics, such as the frequency of attending religious services. As recent studies show, church attendance (being churched) is interconnected with many social, economic, and political behavioral char-

acteristics (Berghammer 2012; Wright 2014; Baro and McCleary 2006; Tienen, Scheepers, Reitsma, and Schilderman 2011). Thus, the authors hypothesized that believers who differed in their degree of churching would have dissimilar reactions to priestly political campaigning. According to the study's results, priests mainly campaign in favor of United Russia, but these actions cause different reactions among believers in different stages of churching.

Believers who listened to or were guided by priests' advice should have shown greater loyalty to United Russia and lower rates of absenteeism in comparison with other categories of respondents. The data supports this assumption: 44.4 percent of those guided by priestly advice voted for United Russia, while 27.8 percent did not, and 34.4 percent of those who listened to clerical advice voted for United Russia, while 23 percent did not. However, participants' refusals to follow this advice and difficulties in answering the question lowered the ruling party indicators (21.4 percent and 18.8 percent), while increasing absentee behavior (34.6 and 50 percent, respectively). (See Table 2.)

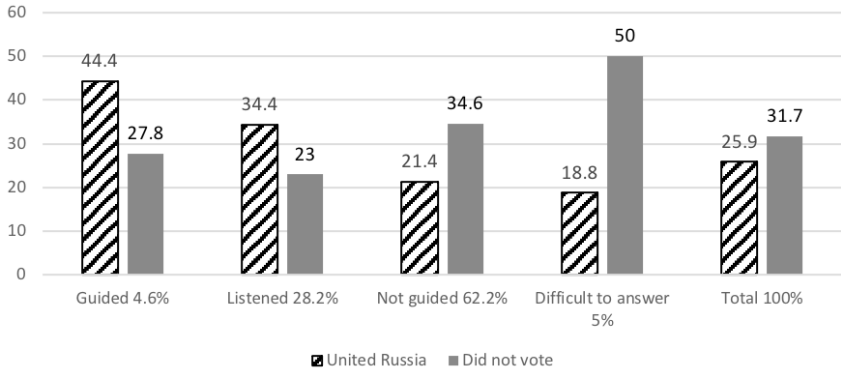


Table 2. Electoral preferences of believers who witnessed political sermons (18.4 percent of those in the sample), and their adherence to the priest's advice

Clearly, United Russia benefits from clerical political campaigning only among believers who rely on priests' opinions.[6] For believers who

6. Respondents were asked: "Were you guided by the priest's advice / hints /opinions when deciding whether to vote for this or that party / candidate?" The scale of answers included the options: "was guided / not guided", "I find it difficult to answer", and "listened to the opinion of the priest, but made the final decision independently." The answer "was guided by the priest's opinion" marks the believer's unquestioning adherence to the priest's will and means that the believer voted for the political party the clergyman indicated. The an-

do not, mass campaigning is ineffective. Given the fact that the share of believers who listen to and rely on priestly opinions (the sum of the answers "guided" and "listened") is only one-third (32.8 percent), and those who do not (answer "not guided") is two-thirds (62.2 percent), believers who witnessed political sermons were less loyal to the United Russia Party than those who did not (25.9 percent and 32.8 percent respectively). This negative effect is not connected with the fact that the priests are campaigning against United Russia, but with the fact that the majority of believers have a negative attitude towards campaigning in general. Thus, clerical campaigning is effective for United Russia in terms of intensity, but not in terms of breadth.

Indeed, a significant part of secularized Russian society negatively perceives clerical political campaigning as an invasion of spheres that are outside the Church's purview. According to a survey by the Levada Center in 2017, 58 percent of Russians agreed that the Church should not influence state policy (Interfax.ru 2017). In a similar survey by the FOM that same year, 35 percent of Russians believed that the Russian Orthodox Church intervenes in social spheres that it should not, while 29 percent answered that this does not happen, and 37 percent found it difficult to answer (Fom.ru 2017).

Faced with priestly political activities that, according to societal ideas, go beyond the tasks assigned to the Church (maintaining public morality, satisfying spiritual needs, giving charity, and so forth), believers in early stages of churching may make decisions that differ from those that priests prescribe. When their ideas clash with the clergy, believers do not rely on the priest's opinion and refuse to participate in elections (Table 2.).[7] Archbishop Panteleimon, who in 2000-2009 headed the Maikop and Adyghe diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church, spoke about this category of believers as follows:

swer "I listen to the opinion, but I make the final decision on my own" demonstrates the believer's high level of trust in the priest while maintaining a certain level of reflection. This option made it possible to capture the effect of the clergy's indirect campaigning and to take into account believers who were uncomfortable admitting that, in some cases, they relied on someone else's opinion. For many believers, the answer "listened" is preferable to "guided", since the suggestion of independence allows believers to convince themselves that they are making their own decisions. In reality, their decisions are based on the priest's judgments and recommendations. As a result, the answers to "guided" and "listening" are considered as the sum of the shares of believers who, to one degree or another, rely on a priest's opinion. They will be collectively referred to as "believers who rely on priests' opinions."

7. When asked "what would you do if the priest delivered a political sermon?" one of the believers replied: "I would send this priest away — because the gospel is supposed to be godly, not worldly. I would not vote for the party he recommended!"

> They take into account the priest's opinion, but only in those matters that they themselves consider to be spiritual. The priest cannot forbid much if they consider something to be "not his business" (Filatov 2014).

At the same time, not all respondents who rely on priests' opinions witnessed political sermons. In other words, religion is not limited to only one (the first on our list) channel of influence. Many believers turned to clergy on their own initiative with questions about which political party they should support. Indeed, 73 percent of Orthodox believers in the sample did not witness priests' political sermons, but 9.7 percent of this group decided to independently contact the clergy with questions about voting. This category makes up a significant proportion of believers who rely on priestly opinions in political matters. If we consider the entire group of believers who relied on the opinion of clergy when voting, only 41.6 percent of them witnessed political sermons. At the same time, 48.4 percent of the believers, who relied on pastoral advice, initiated conversations with priests on political topics and privately asked for their advice.

The authors traced the second channel of religious influence by examining the category of parishioners who did not witness priests' political sermons.

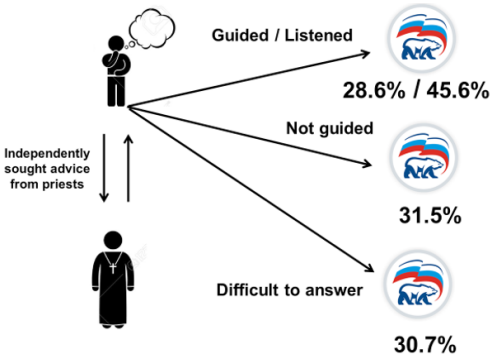
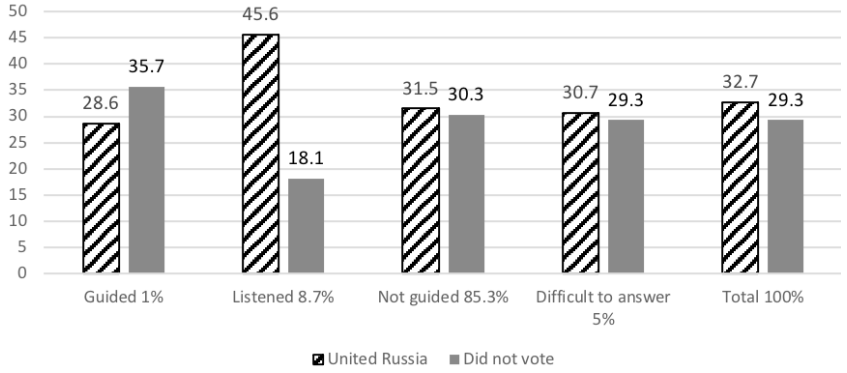


Figure 3. Voting for "United Russia" among believers who received private counseling by a priest (of their own free will)

In Table 3 (below), the highest percentage of support for United Russia is from believers who independently sought advice from priests and listened to them (45.6 percent). They are also the most active in the elections (in this group, only 18.1 percent refused to participate in the elections). If this data is in line with expectations,

those few respondents who did not just listen, but were guided by priestly advice (28.7 percent) gave the least support for the ruling party, which requires a separate explanation. "Guided by" advice and "listening" to it are fairly close categories, but the respondents who answered them demonstrated opposite voting behaviors. Moreover, among the parishioners who witnessed priests' political sermons, the ratio of these categories was reversed: the "guided" provided more support for United Russia than the "listening." How can this be explained?

Table 3. Electoral preferences of believers who did not witness political sermons (73 percent in the sample), and their adherence to the priest's advice

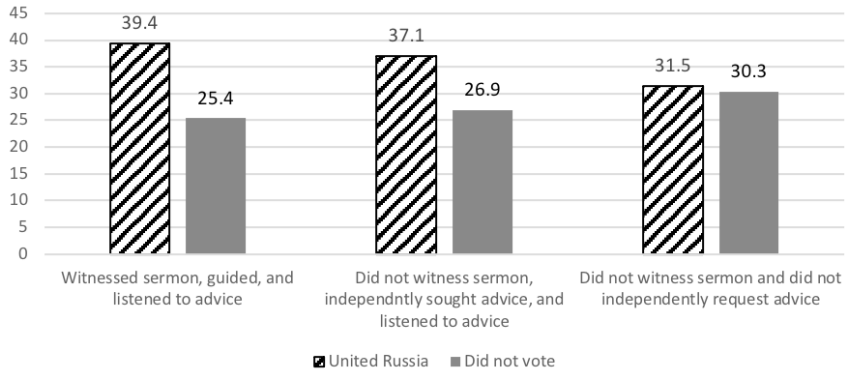


This is presumably due to the fact that priests who agitate the flock during sermons and those who answer believers' political questions on an individual basis broadcast different attitudes towards power.[8] It is highly likely that the former express an explicitly positive point of view on power (the existing power is bestowed by God and the good), giving United Russia a greater result than "listening." The latter more often voice a latently positive position (the existing power is bad, but it is not and never will be better). Therefore, support for United Russia among believers who rely on priests' public opinions is, on average, slightly higher than the level of support among Orthodox Christians who rely on priestly opinions voiced in private (39.4 percent and 37.1 percent) (See Table 4). In general, this

8. Cases where believers seek advice from a priest who previously conducted public campaigning for the flock during the service are not considered in this case.

channel of influence turns out to be more effective than the first one, because it does not cause a negative reaction among the majority of parishioners.

Table 4. Comparison of electoral preferences of believers who followed a priest's advice after public sermons and individual counseling



The third channel of influence on believers' electoral choice is the direct interaction of parishioners with community members. At this level, the priestly role as formal Church representatives is minimized, and the importance of parishioners who are involved in community life as opinion leaders increases. Data shows that participation in a religious community was associated with an increase in electoral support for United Russia.[9]

The distribution shows that 37.2 percent of Orthodox Christians involved in parish life voted for United Russia while 28.6 percent of uninvolved believers supported the ruling party. Of the respondents who found it difficult to answer, 32.8 percent expressed loyalty to United Russia. In turn, the absentee indicators in all typological groups were approximately equal, in the region of 30 percent (Table 5).

9. It should be noted that Orthodox Christians who do not participate in the activities of religious communities more often than their fellow believers, vote for the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (10.3 percent and 5.2 percent), the Liberal Democratic Party (7 percent and 4.3 percent) and Yabloko (4.4 percent and 2.2 percent).

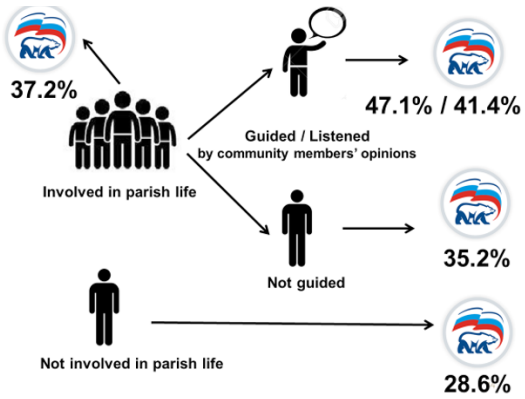
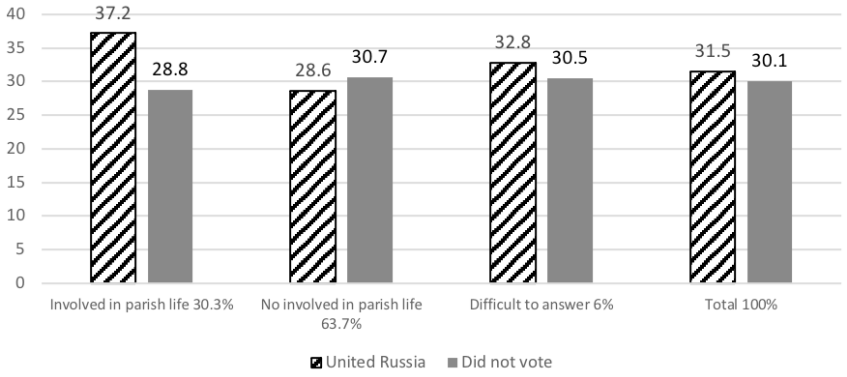


Figure 4. Voting for "United Russia" among believers taking part in parish life

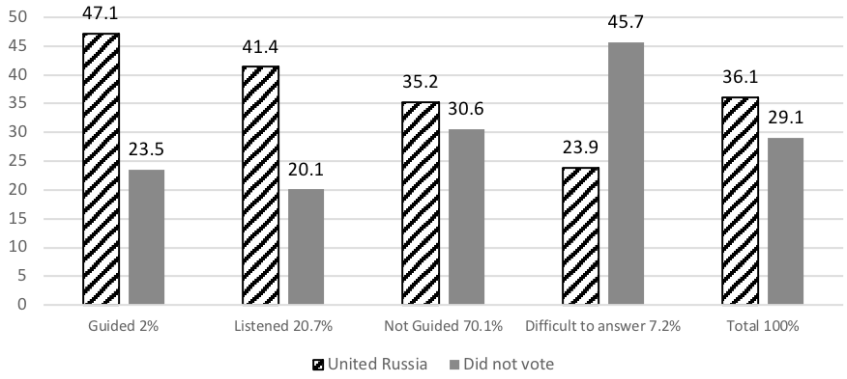
Table 5. Believers' parish participation and their electoral choices



Of course, a believer's increased loyalty to United Russia is not an accurate indicator of the third channel's influence on electoral choice. A more important indicator of party choice is community members' opinions, which is coupled with an increase in support for United Russia. Among the Orthodox believers who were guided by their community members' opinions, 47.1 percent voted for United Russia, while among those who "listened" the same indicator was 41.4 percent. In turn, among those "not guided" and "those who found it difficult to answer," votes for the ruling party were 35.2 percent and 23.9 percent, respectively (Table 6). The indicators of nonparticipation in elections among believers involved in parish life and reliant on the opinions of the community members (23.5 percent and 20.1 percent) were lower

than among their fellow believers who were not guided by community members' opinions when voting (30.6 percent), and those who found it difficult to answer the question (45.7 percent).

Table 6. Electoral choice of believers who are members of the Parish community and reliance on community members' opinions when voting



Accordingly, the United Russia Party is the main beneficiary of priests' political influence on Orthodox believers' electoral preferences. The clergy's effectiveness, however, largely depends on the extent to which believers trust their priest, which is related to their degree of churching (frequency of attending religious services).

At the same time, the most effective mechanism of influencing believers' party choice is through fellow parishioners' opinions. The greatest loyalty to United Russia is among believers who take part in the religious community and, when deciding to vote, seek advice from their parish neighbors. These results are consistent with other researchers' conclusions. The American researchers P. Jupe and K. Gilbert argue that it is not priestly advice that most influences believers, but the social interactions that occur between believers within the church community. In other words, interpersonal and group discussions that take place within the community determine believers' political preferences to a greater extent than priests' words (Djupe and Gilbert 2009).

The results indicate that among Orthodox Christians who discuss political issues with their neighbors in the parish, support for United Russia is higher than support from believers who are "guided" or "listen" to priestly opinions. Considering parishioners' influence on par-

ty choice, it should be remembered that in Russia the share of Orthodox believers who participate with varying intensity in the life of the parish is relatively small (Sreda.org 2011). At the same time, in conditions of low voter turnout, religious communities' electoral potential (among other things, characterized by relatively high mobilization rates) may well provide the necessary percentage for both a single-mandate (which can be confirmed by V. V. Milonov's experience) and a political party on the federal scale (an interesting example is the party "Rodina," which in the 2003 elections brought 29 deputies to the State Duma, 12 of whom were members of the "Union of Orthodox Citizens") (Toshchenko 2007, 341).

Conclusion

This study reveals that there are three significant channels of religious influence on parishioners' electoral preference: priests' public political campaigning, believers' independent appeals to the clergy for advice, and the views and opinions of other members in the community. In all three cases, the main beneficiary of such influence is the United Russia Party.

At the same time, these various channels of influence are characterized by unequal indicators of the effectiveness of political propaganda. Thus, successful clerical political campaigning largely depends on a believer's degree of churching. Political sermons have a strong positive effect for United Russia, but within a rather limited audience of believers. Campaigning during the sermon is effective among the relatively few categories of believers who often attend religious services (those who attend services from one to three times a month or attend services once a week or more often). Among the large group of Orthodox Christians in the early stages of churching (those who do not attend services, attend services once a year or less often, or attend services several times a year), political sermons provoke a backlash and lower support for United Russia. In addition, priests' targeted advice to undecided believers who voluntarily turn to the Church with political questions is a more effective method of campaigning for United Russia than public sermons, since it does not lead to a decrease in support from the Orthodox Christians in early stages of churching. Lastly, the study reveals that those Orthodox believers who take part in the religious community and discuss political issues (seek advice) with their fellow believers demonstrate the greatest loyalty to United Russia. In this group of believers, votes for the party

in power are higher than the support for United Russia among Orthodox Christians, who rely on priests' public political opinion. Thus, parishioners in the religious community have a stronger influence on the electoral choice of Orthodox believers participating in parish life than priests.

References

Adamsky, D. 2019. *Russian Nuclear Orthodoxy*: *Religion, Politics, and Strategy*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.

Archpriest Dmitrii Smirnov. 2011. "Protoierei Dmitrii Smirnov: revoliutsiia ili pokaianie?" ["Archpriest Dimitri Smirnov: revolution or repentance?"]. *Pravovrns.ru*, http://pravovrns.ru/?p=4806.

Arkhiereiskii Sobor Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi. 2008. "Osnovy ucheniia Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi o dostoinstve, svobode i pravakh cheloveka" ["Fundamentals of the teaching of the Russian Orthodox Church on dignity, freedom, and human rights"]. Patriarcha.ru. June 26, http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/428616.html.

Barro, R., and R. McCleary. 2006. "Religion and Political Economy in an International Panel." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 45(2): 149–75.

Berghammer, C. 2012. "Church Attendance and Childbearing: Evidence from a Dutch Panel Study, 1987–2005." *Population Studies* 66(2): 197–212

Bogachev, M. I., and K, V. Sorvin. 2019. "Politika v Tserkvi: vozdeistvuiut li sviashchenniki na elektoral'nye predpochteniia pravoslavnykh veruiushchikh?" ["Politics in the Church: Do priests affect the electoral preferences of Orthodox believers?"]. *Mir Rossii: Sotsiologiia, etnologiia* 28(4): 68–91.

Bogachev, M. 2016. "Curriculum vitae: Religiozno-obshchestvennaia zhizn' rossiiskikh regionov" ["Curriculum vitae: The religio-social life of Russia's regions"]. *Gosudarstvo, religiia, tserkov' v Rossii i za rubezhom* 34(4): 251–265.

Briskina-Muller, A. 2015. "Power and Victory as Central Categories of the Russian Orthodox Public Discourse Today." Paper presented at the Conference of Political Orthodoxy and Totalitarianism in a Post-Communist Era, Helsinki, Finland, 2015, May 28–31.

Credo.ru. 2011. "Vybornyi skandal v Kurske" ["Election scandal in Kursk"]. *Portal-credo.ru*. March 24, http://www.portal-credo.ru/site/?act=news&id=83111.

Deacon Vasilik, V. 2015. "Pochemu tserkov molitsia za vlast?" [Why is the church praying for power?"]. *Pravoslavie.ru*. October 24, http://www.pravoslavie.ru/87082.html.

Djupe, P. A., and C. P. Gilbert. 2009. *The Political Influence of Churches*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Dmitrii Kraiukhin: svoe i chuzhoe [Dmitrii Kraiukhin: him and other's]. 2012. "Episkop Evtikhii (Kurochkin) agitiruet za Putina" ["Bishop Evtikhii (Kurochkin) campaigning for Putin"]. February 26, video, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0772sCgCzOM.

Emel'ianov, N. 2019. *"Zhatvy mnogo, a delatelei malo": Problema vzaimodeistviia sviashchennikov i mirian v sovremennoi Rossii* [*"The Harvest is plentiful but the workers are few": the problem of the interaction of priests and laity in modern Russia*]. Moscow: Izd-vo PSTGU.

Filatov, S., ed. 2014. *Religiozno-obshchestvennaia zhizn' rossiiskih regionov,* vol. 1. [*The religio-social life of Russia's regions*, Vol. 1]. Moscow: Letnii sad.

Fom.ru. 2017. “Otnoshenie k RPTs i ee uchastiiu v raznykh sferakh zhizni strany” [“Attitude towards the ROC and its participation in different spheres of the country’s life”]. *Fom.ru*. November 11, https://fom.ru/posts/13846.

Grishaeva, E. I. 2018. “Tserkovnye diskursy i identichnost’. potentsial primeneniia diskursivnykh podkhodov v sotsiologicheskom izuchenii religioznykh identichnostei v khristianskih obshchinakh” [“Church Discourses and Identity. The potential of applying discursive approaches in the sociological study of religious identities in Christian communities”]. *Vestnik RGGU. Seriia: filosofiia. sotsiologiia. Iskusstvovedenie* 1(11): 50–64.

Interfax.ru. 2017. “V Rossii za tri goda stalo vdvoe men’she ateistov” [“In three years atheists in Russia fell by half”]. *Interfax.ru*. July 24, https://www.interfax.ru/russia/571819.

Kam24.ru. 2015. “Kommunisty: v mil’kove za kandidatov ‘Edinoi Rossii’ agitiroval sviashchennik” [“Communists: in Milkovo a priest campaigned for ‘United Russia’ candidates”]. *KAM 24*. December 21, https://www.kam24.ru/news/main/31921.html.

Kaspe, S. I. 2018. “Zagovor molchaniia: sopriazheniia sakral’nogo i politicheskogo v diskursivnykh praktikakh sovremennoi Rossii” [“A conspiracy of silence: the conjugation of the sacred and the political in the discursive practices of modern Russia”], *Sotsiologicheskoe obozrenie* 17(2): 9–38.

Knorre, B. K. 2016. “The Culture of War and Militarization within Political Orthodoxy in the Post-soviet Region.” *Transcultural Studies* 12(1): 15–38.

Knorre, B. K., and T. Kharish. 2018. “Political Language of the Church in the Post-Soviet Period.” *KnE Social Sciences* 3(7): 365–383

Knorre, B. K., and A. D. Kuman′kov. 2019. “’Bogoslovie voiny’ v postsovetskom rossiiskom pravoslavii” [“The Theology Wars” in Post-Soviet Russian Orthodoxy”]. In *Politicheskoe bogoslovie* [*Political Theology*], edited by A. Bodrov and M. Tolstolzhenko, 52–76. Moscow: Izdatel′stvo Bibleĭsko-bogoslovskogo instituta sv. apostola Andreia. Gl. 4.

Kollner, T. 2013. “Businessmen, Priests and Parishes. Religious Individualization and Privatization in Russia.” *Archives de Sciences de Sociales des Religions* (162): 37–52.

Kormina, Zh. V. 2019. *Palomniki: Etnograficheskie ocherki pravoslavnogo nomadizma* [*Pilgrims: Ethnographic essays on Orthodox nomadism*]. Moscow: Izd. dom Vysshei shkoly ekonomiki.

Krikhtova, T. 2019. “Raspredelenie rabochikh vremiazatrat sovremennykh pravoslavnykh sviashchennikov” [“Distribution of working time and the costs of modern Orthodox priests”]. *Monitoring obshchestvennogo mneniia: Ekonomicheskie i sotsial'nye peremeny* (3): 223–238.

Kul’kova [Kulkova], A. Iu. 2015. “Religioznost’ i politicheskoe uchastie: rol’ politiki v rossiiskikh religioznykh obshchinakh” [“Religiosity and political participation: the role of politics in Russian religious communities”]. *Preprinty. Vysshaia shkola ekonomiki. Seriia WP14. “Politicheskaia teoriia i politicheskii analiz”* [*Preprint. High school of economics. Working Paper series. “Political theory and political analysis”*] 2.

Kulkova, A. 2017. “Religiosity and Political Participation across Europe.” In *Values and Identities in Europe: Evidence from the European Social Survey*, edited by Michael J. Breen, 36–57. New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Lokosov, V. V. 2006. “Vliiaet li religioznost’ na politicheskuiu konsolidatsiiu obshchestva?” [“Does religiosity influence the political consolidation of society?”] *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia* (11): 83–89.

Lokosov, V. V., and Iu. Iu. Sinelina. 2004 *Religioznaia situatsiia v Iaroslavskoi oblasti* [*The Religious situation in the Yaroslavl region*]. Moscow: ISPI RAN.

Lokosov, V. V., and Iu. Iu. Sinelina. 2008 "Vzaimosviaz' religioznykh i politicheskikh orientatsii pravoslavnykh rossiian" ["The relationship of religious and political orientations of Orthodox Russians"]. In *Religiia v samosoznanii naroda (Religioznyi faktor v identifikatsionnykh protsessakh* [*Religion in the consciousness of the nation (religious factors and the identification processes*], edited by M. P. Mchedlov, 135–158. Moscow: Institut sotsiologii RAN.

Mel'nikov, A. 2018. "Dukhovnik patriarkha Kirilla agitiruet za lidera prezidentskoi gonki" [Confessor of Patriarch Kirill campaigns for the leader of the presidential race"]. *Nezavisimaya gazeta*. March 15, http://www.ng.ru/faith/2018-03-15/100_elections150318.html.

News.ru. 2018. "Arkhangel'skii sviashchennik zhestko raskritikoval Putina za 'zapredel'noe litsemerie', pripomniv provalennoe obrazovanie, aborty i pensionnuiu reform" ["An Arkhangelsk priest harshly criticized Putin for "outrageous hypocrisy", recalling the failed education, abortion, and pension reforms"]. *News.ru*. June 27, https://www.newsru.com/religy/27jun2018/kritika.html.

Obshchestvennoe mnenie — 2019 [Public Opinion — 2019]. 2020. Moscow: Levada-Tsentr.

Østbø, J. 2015. *The New Third Rome: Readings of a Russian Nationalist Myth*. Stuttgart: Ibedem Press.

Papkova, I. A. 2011. *The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Patriarch Alexy II. 2000. "Osnovy sotsial'noi kontseptsii RPTs" ["Bases of the social concept of the Russian Orthodox Church"]. Mospat.ru, https://mospat.ru/ru/documents/social-concepts/.

Patriarch Kirill. 2016. "Sviateishii Patriarkh Kirill prinial uchastiie v golosovanii na vyborakh v Gosudarstvennuiu Dumu FS RF" ["His Holiness Patriarch Kirill took part in voting in the elections to the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation"]. *Patriarchia.ru*. September 18, http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/4616882.html.

Patriarch Kirill. 2017. "Sviateishii Patriarkh Kirill prizval pastvu k uchastiiu v vyborakh Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii" ["His Holiness Patriarch Kirill called on the flock to participate in the presidential elections of the Russian Federation"]. *Patriarchia.ru*. December 26, http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5089386.html.

Pravmir [Orthodox World]. 2012. "Protoierei Dmitrii Smirnov v efire Vladimira Poznera" ["Archpriest Dmitrii Smirnov on air with Vladimir Pozner"]. *Pravmir.ru*. March 20, https://www.pravmir.ru/protoierej-dmitrij-smirnov-v-efire-u-vladimira-poznera/.

Shcherbak, A. N., and M. V. Uhvatova. 2018. "Ot 'krasnogo poiasa' — k 'bibleiskomu': istoricheskie predposylki sdvigov v politicheskoi geografii Rossii" ["From the 'red belt' to the 'biblical': the historical background of shifts in the political geography of Russia]. *Obshchestvennye nauki i sovremennost'* 6(6): 98–113.

Sitnikov, A. V. 2012. *Pravoslavie, instituty vlasti i grazhdanskogo obshchestva v Rossii* [*Orthodoxy, institutions of power, and civil society in Russia*]. Saint Petersburg: Aleteiia.

Sova-center.ru. 2015. "V Voronezhe 'Edinaia Rossiia' dlia predvybornoi agitatsii ispol'zovala khram" ["In Voronezh, 'United Russia' used a church for election campaigning"]. *Sova Information and Analytical Center*. September 14, https://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/authorities/elections/2015/09/d32794/.

Sova-center.ru. 2018. "Vpreddverii vyborov v nekotorykh eparkhiiakh poiavilis' broshiury s 'molitvoi za prezidenta'" ["On the eve of the elections, brochures with a 'prayer for the president' appeared in some dioceses"]. *Sova Information and Analytical Center*. February 20, https://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/authorities/elections/2018/02/d38893/.

Sreda.org. 2011. "prikhodskaia zhizn'" ["Parish Life"]. *Sreda Research Service*. December 30, https://sreda.org/opros/31-prihodskaya-zhizn.

Suslov, M., ed. 2016. *Digital Orthodoxy in the Post-Soviet World: The Russian Orthodox Church and Web 2.0*. Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag.

Tienen, M., P. Scheepers, J. Reitsma, and H. Schilderman. 2011. "The Role of Religiosity for Formal and Informal Volunteering in the Netherlands." *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 22(3): 365–389.

Toshchenko, Zh. T. 2007. *Teokratiia: fantom ili real'nost'?* [*Theocracy: phantom or peality?*]. Moscow: Academia.

tvsoyuz. 2015. "Vsia li vlast' ot Boga?" ["Is all power from God?"]. June 2, video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zz_9jCZ9IcQ.

Ukhvatova, M. V. 2017. "Religiia i elektoral'noe povedenie v Rossii: regional'nyi aspect" ["Religion and electoral behavior in Russia: a regional perspective"]. *Vestnik Permskogo universiteta. Seriia: Politologiia* (4): 26–48.

Ukhvatova, M. V. 2018. "Naputstviia okhraniteleii (Religioznaia ritorika na inauguratsiiakh rossiiskih gubernatorov)" ["Parting instructions of the guardians (Religious rhetoric at the inaugurations of Russian governors)"], *Politiia: Analiz. Khronika. Prognoz* (2): 84–101.

Verkhovskii, A. M. 2003. *Politicheskoe pravoslavie: Russkie pravoslavnye natsionalisty i fundamentalisty, 1995–2001 gg*. [*Political Orthodoxy: Russian Orthodox nationalists and fundametalists, 1995–2001*]. Moscow: Tsentr "Sova".

Vinokurova, E. 2011. "I Bog s nimi. Regional'nye vlasti ubezhdali sviashchennikov agitirovat' prikhozhan za 'Edinuiu Rossiiu'" ["And God is with them. Regional authorities urged priests to agitate parishioners for 'United Russia'"]. *Gazeta.ru*. November 17, https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/elections2011/2011/11/17_a_3838690.shtml.

Wright, N. 2014. "Attendance Matters: Religion and Ethical Affirmation of Gay and Lesbian Sexuality." *Review of Religious Research* 56(2): 245–273.

Zhuravlev, D. V. 2017. "Pravoslavnaia identichnost' kak traditsionalizm: konstruirovanie politicheskikh smyslov v aktual'nom publichnom diskurse RPTs" ["Orthodox identity as traditionalism: the construction of political meanings in the current public discourse of the Russian Orthodox Church"]. *Politiia: Analiz. Khronika. Prognoz* (4): 82–100.