Buddhism in Post-Soviet Russia: The Geographic Contexts of ‘Revival’

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BUDDHISM IN POST-SOVIET RUSSIA:
THE GEOGRAPHIC CONTEXTS OF ‘REVIVAL’

by

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B.A., Princeton University, 2002

M.A., University of Colorado, 2007

A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Colorado in partial fulfillment
of the requirement for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Geography

2012
This thesis entitled:
Buddhism in Post-Soviet Russia: The Geographic Contexts of ‘Revival’
written by Edward Christian Holland
has been approved for the Department of Geography

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John O’Loughlin

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Date ______________

The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

IRB protocol # 0709.10
Abstract

Holland, Edward Christian (Ph.D., Geography)

Buddhism in Post-Soviet Russia: The Geographic Contexts of ‘Revival’

Thesis directed by Professor John O’Loughlin

This dissertation is about religious practice and belief among Buddhists in the Russian Federation. Using the case studies of Kalmykia and Buryatia, two of Russia’s 21 ethnic republics, I explore contemporary opinion about the relevance of Buddhism through a multiple methods approach. In Kalmykia, I use elite interviews, focus groups, and a small-scale (N=300) survey as the primary methodologies. While religious elites generally view the region’s religious revival as broad but not deep, there is a genuine sentiment that religion is an important component of post-Soviet national identity as expressed by interlocutors in focus groups and in survey responses. These competing discourses around revival complicate a straightforward reading of the role of Buddhism in the republic. To frame this discussion, I also compare responses on the question of attendance at religious services to a 2005 sample conducted in the North Caucasus republic of Dagestan; I find that ethnic pride is an important predictor of frequent attendance at religious services among ethnic Kalmyks, while gender is the key independent variable in explaining higher levels of attendance in the Muslim republic.

In Buryatia, I rely primarily on a cross-national survey (N=143) to compare religious practice and belief among the titular Buryats and ethnic Russians (as well as members of other groups) who live in the republic. The key finding in this chapter is that Buddhism has consolidated its position as a key element of national identity—as measured through self-reported religiosity and attendance—among Buryats in the past two decades; this is specifically true in comparison to ethnic Russians.
Theoretically, the contribution of the dissertation is to explore new paths of research in the discipline of geography along two lines: a quantitative geography of religion that does more than map spatial patterns in religious practice but rather is attendant to the variation in that practice within countries and considers this diversity at the sub-national scale through survey work; and a formalized methodological approach to the geographical idea of context, one which draws on and advocates for the use of multiple methods, specifically surveys, interviews, and focus groups.
Acknowledgements

Any dissertation is a collaborative effort—this is particularly true for my project. In Russia, I owe a sincere debt of gratitude to Zhargal Ayakova, Valery Badmaev, Eldar Eldarov, and Vladimir Kolossov. This project would not have been completed without their support and interest. I also appreciate the time that local scholars in Buryatia, Kalmykia, and Tuva took to meet with me, to discuss my project, and help point me in the right direction during the fieldwork stage. Thanks go to Darima Amogolonova, Vladimir Antonov, Mergen Dzhevakov, Mergen Ulanov, and scholars at the Tuvan Institute of Humanitarian Research, among many others. I am grateful for financial support for this research from a variety of organizations, including the National Science Foundation, the Association of American Geographers, and the University of Colorado at Boulder.

John O’Loughlin has been an outstanding advisor and mentor. I appreciate the support that he gave this project from the beginning through the final revisions. I am also grateful for the opportunity to collaborate with him on projects in the North Caucasus of Russia, a productive distraction from dissertation writing. Thanks also to my other committee members—Jani Little, Lynn Staeheli, Christoph Stefes, and Gerard Toal—whose thoughtful readings of this dissertation improved the final version.

The Geography Department at the University of Colorado at Boulder has been an outstanding professional and intellectual home for the past seven years. Thanks to Marcia Signer, Darla Shatto, and Karen Weingarten for all that they do to help the Department run. The Department’s community of graduate students has provided a supportive environment in which to work. Thanks especially to Travis Klingberg, Adam Levy, Andrew Linke, and Frank Witmer for productive conversations and necessary distractions during hikes and orienteering meets and
over beers and Mexican food from a variety of establishments. I’ve enjoyed sharing the doctoral
experience with many others, especially those who have had Johno as an advisor: Marco
Antonsich, Meredith DeBoom, Natalie Koch, Clionadh Raleigh, and Meagan Todd. And long
ago, when I was wet behind the ears, Jamie Gillen, Chris McMorran, Dan Trudeau, and Luke
Ward all provide great advice and helpful guidance in navigating the Department and the
discipline of geography.

Lastly, I have to thank my family for their support during this process; it is exciting to be
the first in my family to earn a PhD! I truly could not have completed this journey without the
constant support and love of my wife, Mackenzie. She took a leap of faith to move to Boulder
seven years ago when she had exciting opportunities to pursue elsewhere. She has made the most
of our time here, and I am so thankful that she traveled this path with me. Though this journey
has taken longer than we both anticipated, I’m excited to move on to see what the next chapter in
our life brings.
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Chapter One: Introduction

This dissertation is about religious belief and practice among Buddhists in the Russian Federation. My approach is wide-ranging, considering theoretical, methodological, and empirical concerns related to the topic of religion as currently discussed in the disciplines of geography, sociology, and religious studies. Theoretically and empirically, the main aim is to more fully develop two related ideas—the benefits of a geographically situated approach to the study of religious belief and practice and the interaction of religion and identity in geographic context. Methodologically, I consider the value of a multiple methods approach—one which combines interviews, focus groups, and surveys—in developing the idea of context-as-place, a term I use as shorthand for the revivified regional geography that emphasizes ‘a robust, broad-ranging, but analytically sophisticated’ approach to the generation of geographical knowledge (Murphy and O’Loughlin 2009: 247; see also Toal 2003). The dissertation examines the understudied topic of religious minorities in the Russian Federation, focusing particularly on Buddhists in the regions of Buryatia and Kalmykia. Drawing primarily from survey data collected in the two republics in the summer and fall of 2010 (supplemented in the case of Kalmykia with interviews and focus group discussions), I argue that the resurgence in practice and belief among Buddhists in these two republics is substantial, with high numbers of respondents identifying themselves as Buddhist and actively practicing the religion. Beyond these findings, the main argument that this dissertation makes is that religion is the basis for a revivified cultural nationalism among the two national groups considered in detail, the Kalmyks and the Buryats.
This introductory chapter opens with a brief statement regarding the dissertation’s two main research questions of interest. I then provide a summary of the main theoretical, methodological and empirical ideas considered: the contemporary position of religion in the Russian Federation and the important concept of geographic context. Next introduce Buryatia and Kalmykia, the two regions investigated in detail, before offering a summary of the remaining chapters, which outline the state of the literature on religion in the social sciences, and then use context as a methodological entry point into an exploration of the interplay of religion and identity for two of Russia’s Buddhist populations.

**Research Questions**

The dissertation engages with two related research questions. First, I ask: *what is the nature of religious practice in contemporary Russia, both at the country-wide scale and for three of the country’s traditional religions, Russian Orthodox, Islam, and Buddhism?* In answering this question, I present a broadly framed picture of religious life in contemporary Russia among three of the country’s principal religious groups. I situate this discussion in the history of religious policy in the Soviet Union and Russian Federation, thereby providing the historical context for contemporary, geographic distinctions. Russian Orthodoxy and Islam, as well as country-level data from the World Values Survey (WVS), are included as points of comparison to the sample collected in Kalmykia (see the chapter outline below and Chapter Four for the analysis). My main motivation for asking this question is to unsettle the common practice of country-level analyses of religious practice that are commonly conducted in the literature on the sociology of religion, including work on the Russian Federation since 1991.
This question also leads in to the more focused discussions of Kalmykia and Buryatia presented in Chapter Five and Six. As such, my second research question asks: *to what extent is the nature of religious practice in these two Buddhist republics comparable, and are they affected by questions associated with regional politics, national identity, and demographic difference?* In answering this question, I privilege the idea of comparison as developed by Ragin (1987). Though such comparison is partially undermined by the failure to strictly reproduce research methodologies in both republics, I rely on the survey measures to make this case (see Appendix Two for the differences between the Buryatia and Kalmykia surveys). I next provide an initial review of the central theoretical and empirical ideas on which the answers to these two questions rest.

**Introducing Two Theoretical-Empirical Foundations: Religion in Russia and Context as Methodological Concept**

**Religion in Russia**

The assumption that modernity would weaken the appeal of religion was endorsed by the key social thinkers of the 19th century—Durkheim, Weber, and Marx, among others (Norris and Inglehart 2011). Known as the secularization thesis, this view has been widely critiqued in the past two decades. Arguing against his previous position—first put forward in the late 1960s (Berger 1967)—the influential sociologist of religion Peter Berger (1999: 2) writes: ‘the world today…is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever.’ Other scholars have suggested that cultural and religious divides would replace the Cold War binary of communism and capitalism in structuring international relations. In his ‘clash of civilizations’ thesis, Samuel Huntington (1993: 29) ascribes a confrontational role to religion as cultural
as people define their identity in ethnic and religious terms, they are likely to see an “us” versus “them” relation existing between themselves and people of different ethnicity or religion.’ Benjamin Barber’s (1992) rubric of ‘Jihad vs. McWorld’ posited that world politics would be defined by either tribalism—the fracturing of political space along cultural lines—or globalism—characterized by increasing, economically induced homogeneity.

While in some instances modernization resulted in the secularization of societies—particularly in the case of Western Europe—elsewhere this process has reaffirmed the importance of religious belief. Religion is recognized as successfully combating the trends of secularization in those contexts where specific religious organizations have rejected compromise: in the Islamic world and among Protestant missionaries in Latin America. These movements have thrived, Berger (1999) argues, because of the certainties they offer in the modern world, itself characterized by change and attendant uncertainty. What results is an interaction between the discourses of secularism and counter-secularism, which illustrates Berger’s (1999: 3) understated point that ‘the relation between religion and modernity is rather complicated.’

This complicated interaction is particularly true of religion in the Soviet Union and Russian Federation. The policies of the Communists towards religion can be broadly characterized as ‘a 70-year war on religious belief’ (Froese 2004b: 35). The Soviets’ war against religion employed a diverse set of tactics: the appropriation, closure, and destruction of churches, mosques, and temples; the imprisonment and execution of religious figures; the production of anti-religion propaganda; and the construction of alternative atheist institutions and ceremonies (Froese 2008). Yet forced secularization failed, according to Froese (2004b: 35-36), because

---

1 A more nuanced reading of the Soviet’s policy towards religion should acknowledge Stalin’s appropriation of religion during the Great Patriotic War (World War II), to serve as a focal point for the revival of Russian nationalism to aid the war effort (Walters 1986, Sidorov 2006).
‘scientific atheism lacked plausibility due to the recruitment tactics employed by the Soviet government and inconsistencies in the doctrine itself.’ More prosaically, as a religious alternative scientific atheism lacked the ability to counteract personal faith. Appeals to modernism and technological innovation were unconvincing; space travel, for example, was viewed as a challenge to religion and ‘the conquest of space where God was supposed to live’ (Kolarz 1962: 20). Believers, including, famously, a young girl responding to Yuri Gagarin’s claim that he did not see God during his initial spaceflight, retorted that those without faith, of course, could not.

At its heart, then, the inability of the Soviet system to eliminate religious faith—what Froese (2004b: 47) refers to as ‘the nonempirical character of religious concepts and stories’—ultimately limited its success in undermining personal belief and practice.

Gorbachev’s liberalization of the societal and political spheres in the latter half of the 1980s was accompanied by the liberalization of the state’s approach to religion. A key event was the 1988 celebration of the Baptism of Prince Vladimir, leader of Kievan Rus’, in 988. The millennial celebration took place in an environment of relative freedom that ran counter to the expectations of many western commentators on religion in the USSR (Garrard and Garrard 2008). In its wake, Ellis (1989: 100) wrote that religion was becoming ‘accepted as a part of national life and is discussed, at least by some, in a completely different way from what was customary as recently as two or three years ago.’ Culminating this wave of liberalization, in 1990 the Soviet Union adopted the Law on Freedom of Religions, which guaranteed freedom of religious choice, legal equality for all religions, and the separation of church and state (Shterin and Richardson 1998). The Russian Federation, as the primary successor state to the Soviet Union, inherited many of the legal and political structures of the communist state, including the 1990 religious law. The 1993 Russian constitution reaffirmed the provisions of the Soviet law,
guaranteeing freedom of conscience and freedom of worship, proscribing the restriction of rights on religious grounds, and disavowing the endorsement of any one religion as the official religion of the state.2

Following the transition from communism, in this new environment of religious tolerance and freedom, members of new religious movements (NRMs) and other non-traditional religions came to Russia in search of converts. These groups included the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, the Church of Scientology, and the Aum Supreme Truth Sect (on the last, see Mikhailova 1996). These groups quickly gained adherents, while more traditional faiths struggled to establish their footing in Russia’s liberalized religious market.3 As Shterin (2000: 312; emphasis in the original) has observed: ‘the primacy of individual rights and equality of faiths was in conflict with the vision of a hierarchy of religions based on their historical links with the Russian nation and its various ethnic groups.’

Primus inter pares—at least in terms of the ‘historical hierarchy of religion’—is the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). Prior work on religion in the Russian Federation has focused on the ROC, with the Moscow Patriarchate viewed as the key political actor (Knox 2004; Daniel 2006; Papkova 2011a). This is unsurprising, not only given the historical importance of Orthodoxy in Russian history, but also the high levels of self-identification by ethnic Russians with the religion and the close relationship that the Patriarchate has attempted to cultivate with the post-communist Russian state; on the last point, as Papkova (2011a: 3) writes: ‘The church’s outwardly cozy relationship with the state and consequent presumed political influence have

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2 The text of the constitution (in English) is available at: http://www.departments.bucknell.edu/russian/const/constit.html

3 Though in absolute numbers, the number of converts was rather small. Shterin (2000) estimates that NRMs had, roughly, 40,000 members, while more traditional groups like the Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Mormons had 300,000 members at their height during the 1990s.
become stable assumptions in the discourse on Russian politics, particularly since the advent of
the Putin era.’

One of the important outcomes of this special relationship was the 1997 Law on Freedom
of Conscience and Religious Associations.⁴ The product of close collaboration between the
Church and the federal government (particularly with the Duma, the lower house of Russia’s
parliament), the 1997 law endorsed freedom of religion and establishment as guaranteed in the
constitution, while also avowing the favored position of Russia’s historical religions—
Orthodoxy, but also Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism—by differentiating religious organizations
from religious groups. The former were accorded the right to full legal status, with the stipulation
that they have confirmation from local authorities of their existence in a given territory for
fifteen years; the rights of religious groups were more circumscribed, as they functioned without
legal recognition for the state, itself impossible to obtain without the 15-year presence (Chapter
II of the 1997 Law). The 1997 law was the culmination of lobbying by the ROC and other
leaders of traditional religions against the perceived threat to Russian society from the NRMs
and other non-traditional faiths. A number of authors have suggested that the Russian Orthodox
Church was motivated by the perceived threat to its standing in Russian society that could result
from widespread conversion; ‘as early as 1993 the ROC was actively supporting a campaign for
radical restrictions on the activities of foreign missionaries, seen by the ROC as “soulhunters”
trespassing on its canonical territory’ (Verkhovsky 2002: 334).

Of secondary importance in the literature on religion in post-Soviet Russia are the
traditional, minority religious of Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism. When discussed, it is frequently
in reference to the 1997 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations; to reiterate,

⁴ An English translation of the 1997 Law is available at:
http://www2.stetson.edu/~psteeves/relnews/freedomofconscienceeng.html
for adherents to some minority religions in the Russian Federation, the 1997 legislation accorded *de facto* legal recognition and status as ‘traditional religions.’ In the preamble, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, and Christianity are recognized as ‘constituting an integral part of the historical heritage of the peoples of Russia.’ These religious traditions were not the targets of the 1997 law; rather, ‘the ROC’s support for the inclusion of these three religions in the 1997 preamble…indicate[s] the willingness of the Patriarchate to share with Judaism, Buddhism, and especially Islam the task of salvation of souls’ (Papkova 2011a: 35).

Buddhism, Islam, and Judaism are viewed as religious traditions with a long historical presence on the present-day territory of the Russian Federation. Russia is home to a diversity of national groups, and these minorities frequently practice the traditional religions with which they are historically associated. As discussed in greater detail later in this chapter, Buddhism is traditionally associated with three ethnonational minorities—the Buryats, the Kalmyks, and the Tuvans—though syncretism with shamanism is common, particularly among the latter group. Figure 1.1 provides a location map of where Buddhism has historically been practiced in Russia. In the North Caucasus, the peoples of Dagestan, in addition to the Chechens, Ingush, Karachays, Balkars and the Circassian populations have practiced Islam since at least the 18th century. Pockets of Islam-practicing nations are also found along the banks of the Volga River, while Russia’s capital of Moscow has increasingly attracted members of Islam-practicing national groups from the near abroad since the breakup of the USSR. During the Soviet period, Russia’s

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5 It should be noted that the preamble has no legal force backing it.

6 Islam has a long-standing historical presence in the North Caucasus. Muslim Arabs first reached the Dagestani city of Derbent—in the republic’s south and sited on the Caspian Sea—in the 640s, not long after Muhammad’s death (Reynolds 2005). The region’s mountainous geography hindered the spread of Islam into the region’s interior, however; it was not until late 18th and early 19th century that Islam gained a substantial and widespread following in the North Caucasus. Reynolds (2005: 36) suggests that the spread of Islam was associated with the establishment of legal norms: ‘concurrent with the spread of Islam was the diffusion of the notions of formalized law and the state.’
Jewish population was granted its own autonomous oblast in the Russian Far East (the Jewish Autonomous Oblast), though it never served, as intended, as the ‘homeland’ for the country’s Jews; rather, during the late Soviet period and into the 1990s most Jews emigrated to Israel and the United States following the liberalization of travel restrictions.

Figure 1.1: Regions of Historical Buddhist Practice in the Russian Federation

In post-Soviet Russia, religion has served as a touchstone for national identity in a period of transition and upheaval. This is true for both minority religions, like Buddhism and Islam, and Russian Orthodoxy. Religion has consolidated its position as a way of legitimating, and in
certain instances mobilizing, political-cultural identities; as Agadjanian (2001: 478) writes: ‘religious identity [provides] cohesive symbolic networks both of the level of an ‘imagined’ public religion… and on the level of private everyday religiosity.’ In an example of the former instance, Knox (2004) argues that Russian Orthodoxy has been co-opted by national chauvinists to legitimate an exclusivist national identity, one which connects to the discourses of xenophobia and racism present in the current political dialogue.

The role of religion as a foundation for national identity—its public function as a basis for the imagined community (see also Brubaker 2012)—will be discussed below in detail with reference to Russia’s Buddhist populations. My main interest in this dissertation is religion in the private sphere; specifically, I ask the question: what is the nature of religious belief and practice among Russia’s Buddhist groups? Because of the small size of many of these minority groups, it is difficult to accurately evaluate religiosity among supposed adherents—this is particularly true for Buddhists, Jews, and animists (in the Russian North). To answer this question, my dissertation takes a contextual approach—one that combines the interpretation of interviews, focus groups, and survey data—to evaluate a diverse set of questions associated with religious belief and practice in contemporary Russia.

Geographic Context

Context is a contested idea in the discipline of geography. The term is commonly invoked, though its use is frequently casual, as a synonym for the setting in which social, cultural, and political processes under consideration occur. I identify two primary ways in which context is used in the geographic literature: as a synonym for place or as the equivalent of the case study (see, respectively, Ethington and McDaniel 2007 and Castree 2005). I draw primarily
on the former definition of context in this dissertation; context-as-place implies that geographical location influences a range of processes, from electoral preferences to religious adherence. In *Place and Politics*, John Agnew (1987) identifies three distinct components of place: location, locale, and sense of place. Location refers to a specific site, which is sited at a set of geographic coordinates but also situated with respect to other locations. Locale refers to a space that is defined by its function and form. And sense of place is the subjective attachment, defined by emotion and sentiment, which individuals develop towards a place. Agnew’s (1987) work uses these three categories as a rubric for explaining political behavior in Scotland. The second use of context, as case study, is used to illustrate the particular effects of geography on social and political processes through a relevant example. In a recent intervention, Noel Castree (2005) has extensively critiqued the equation of context with the case study, particularly as has occurred in the literature on neoliberalism; he argues that much of this work notes the uniqueness of neoliberal policies as applied to particular cases, but cannot adequately articulate the commonalities that make these cases significant.

My second argument with respect to context, which, in part, is an attempt to address Castree’s concern over the ambiguity of much case study research, is that engagements with geographic place should be comprehensive in their methodological approach. I propose a multiple methods framework rooted in the integration of quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Chapter Four moves beyond work by Philip (1998: 272), who suggests that ‘accepting the utility of such an approach [combining quantitative and qualitative methods] must involve accepting that epistemology and methodology have a fluid relationship,’ but does not explicitly develop how such research should proceed. I further develop the relevance of this contextual, multiple-methods approach in reference to Buddhism in the republic of Kalmykia.
Russia’s Buddhist Republics: Introducing Kalmykia and Buryatia

The two study regions are best known as the home of a chess-loving leader with self-proclaimed abilities of extra-sensory communication (Kalmykia) and the purported resting place of Genghis Khan (Buryatia) (Economist 1997; Phillips 2001). Both republics are sited on the periphery of the state and only loosely integrated into Russia’s industrial system and resource economy. Other commonalities between the two republics, in addition to religion, include a shared Mongolian ancestry that traces back to Genghis Khan (Wixman 1984). The territories are, however, geographically distant; Kalmykia is located to the west of the Urals, to the northwest of the Caspian Sea and south of the Volga River, while Buryatia is closer to the historical center of the Buddhist faith in Asia, sited on the north-western portion of the border of Mongolia with Russia, near Lake Baikal. The project does not include the tiny Ust-Ordynsky Buryat Autonomous Okrug or the Aga-Buryatia Autonomous Okrug; both of which were Buryat populated exclaves in the Irkutsk and Chita regions, respectively, but were fully incorporated into these areas in January and March 2008 (see Figure 6.1).

Kalmykia is located to the northwest of the Caspian Sea. The Kalmyks are a historically nomadic population, who moved west from present-day Mongolia and settled on the north-western shore of the Caspian Sea during the late 16th and early 17th centuries. The Kalmyk Khanate was integrated into the Russian Empire in the late 1600s. In 1771, a large proportion of Kalmyk households (commonly referred to as kibitki) left the western steppe to return to Dzungaria, in present-day Xinjiang. This movement was primarily in response to Russian

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7 Kalmykia is notably poorer than Buryatia. According to data from the 2010 Russian Statistical Yearbook produced by Rosstat (http://www.gks.ru/bgd/regl/b10_13/IssWWW.exe/Stg/d1/06-26.htm), as of 2009 35.5% of Kalmykia’s residents and 18.9% of Buryatia’s residents have an income below the minimum subsistence level, which varies from republic to republic depending on the cost of living (http://www.gks.ru/gis/D_01.htm); these numbers are both above the national average of 13.2 percent.
encroachment on their pastoral lands and the attempt by Catherine the Great to conscript
Kalmyks into the imperial army (Khodarkovsky 1992). Relations between those Kalmyks who
stayed behind and the Russian government were civil, a period of calmness that facilitated a
growth in Buddhism in the region. In 1920, after the establishment of the Soviet state, the
Kalmyk Autonomous Oblast’ was created; it was upgraded to an autonomous republic in 1935.
However, relations between the Kalmyks and the Soviet state turned south during World War II;
the Kalmyks were one of the populations deported during the latter part of the war by Stalin, a
consequence of the German invasion and suspicions of collaboration (Conquest 1970). Nearly
100,000 Kalmyks were relocated, with the republic’s territory divided between the neighboring
regions (Grin 2001). The population was rehabilitated and returned to their traditional homeland
during the Khrushchev thaw of the late 1950s.

Today, the two main ethnic groups in Kalmykia are Russians and the titular Kalmyks.
The republic has a total population of approximately 290,000 according to the 2010 Russian
Census (conducted over a 12-day window in October of that year). Kalmyks compose 57.4
percent of the region’s population, while ethnic Russians make up 30.2 percent. Kalmyks as a
percentage of the region’s population increased by four percent during the most recent
intercensal period from 2002 to 2010. The Russian proportion of the population declined three
percent during the same timespan.8 Economically, Kalmykia is one of the poorest regions in the
Russian Federation. In 2010, income per person per month was 7,700 Russian rubles (RUR),
well below that of Ingushetia (~9,700 RUR/month), which is second-to-last on this list. The

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8 Between 1989—the year of the last Soviet census—and 2002, this demographic shift was more dramatic; in 1989,
Kalmyks were not a majority in their own republic, at 45 percent of the region’s population. The ethnic Russian
proportion of the population was 37 percent at that time.
republic’s head is now Alexei Orlov, an ethnic Kalmyk, who in 2010 replaced Kirsan Ilyumzhinov, the controversial former president who led for 17 years.

The republic of Buryatia is situated to the southeast of Lake Baikal in eastern Siberia. The Buryats first came under the influence of the Russian Empire in the seventeenth century, after a period of colonization by fur-traders moving east into Siberia. As occurred in Kalmykia, the late imperial period was one of growth for the religion in Buryatia; between 1741, when Buddhism was formally recognized by the state as a religious tradition, and 1893 the number of lamas increased from roughly 150 to over 15,000 (Hundley 2010). Following the October Revolution, the Buryat-Mongolian ASSR was created as part of the Russian republic, uniting Buryat-settled areas to the west of Lake Baikal and to the east, in Chita. These territorial exclaves were detached in 1937, and incorporated into their surrounding territories. Today, the republic of Buryatia is the primary home for ethnic Buryats in the Russian Federation. The republic’s total population is 972,000, as reported in the 2010 census. Buryats make up 30.0 percent of the region’s population, whereas Russians comprise 66.1 percent. As has occurred in Kalmykia, the titular Buryat proportion of the republic’s total population increased between 2002 and 2010. Nonetheless, Buryats remain a minority in their own republic, and this demography could explain the relative quiescence of the group. Buryats and Russians frequently worked together on achieving regionally-framed goals, such as the environmental movement centered on Lake Baikal, in the initial transition period (Humphrey 1995). Leisse and Leisse (2007) find that Russians, in their sample drawn from students at a regional university, are supportive of political balance among ethnic groups in the republic; Buryats also back such mixed representation, although support for Buryat-only control is higher than Russian support for Russian-only control. Economically, in comparison to Kalmykia, Buryatia is much better off; the average monthly
income per capita is just below 14,000 RUR. Nine Buryatia’s President is Vyacheslav Nagovitsyn, an ethnic Russian chosen for the position in 2007; prior to his appointment, Nagovitsyn had never been to Buryatia and did not speak Buryat, though he did acknowledge the importance of Buryat culture early in his term by promising to learn the language (Goble 2007).

Key comparative elements in considering the two republics include the demographic composition of each region, including majority-minority relations, as well as the connection between religious practice and national identity as articulated by political and religious elites. In Kalmykia, ethnic Kalmyks make up a majority of the region’s population at 57.4 percent; Russians are 30.2 percent of the population, with the remainder including Cossacks and some of the nationalities of Dagestan (i.e. Avars and Dargins). In Buryatia, the opposite situation obtains; Buryats are a titular minority, at 30.0 percent of the region’s population, compared to 66.1 percent for ethnic Russians. Though I do not suggest that these population structures increase the likelihood of national or ethnic politicization, I will argue that this demographic composition influences the policies endorsed by regional political and ethnic elites. Kirsan Ilyumzhinov, the president of Kalmykia from 1993 until 2010, was well known for providing both financial and political support to the construction of Elista’s first Buddhist temple; he also styled himself ‘an active thinker and ideologist’ on religious topics (Bourdeaux 2000: 16). In Buryatia, on the other hand, the region’s leading Buddhist, Khambo Lama Damba Ayusheev, has promoted a more insular notion of Buddhism, deemphasizing international connections (particularly with Tibet and the Dalai Lama) and promoting the idea of Russian Buddhism as distinct from the religion as practiced in other countries.

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9 These data are available at: http://www.gks.ru/bgd/regl/b11_12/IssWWW.exe/Stg/d01/01-05-1.htm
Other differences between the Kalmyks and Buryats, and their engagements with Buddhism as a belief system and structure, around which political interactions take place, remain. In discussing these two regions in detail, I argue against the superficial grouping of these two national communities into an all-encompassing category, such as Russian Buddhists. Rather, I employ a comparative approach that clearly establishes two distinct contrasts: a geographic one between Kalmykia and Buryatia (as discussed separately in Chapter Five and Six) and a processual one between different religious communities in contemporary Russia, specifically Orthodox, Muslims, and Buddhists (as discussed in Chapter 4). Other comparative elements of importance include population dynamics between the majorities and minorities and their effect on religious practice, as well as inter-group relations between the titular groups and the local Russian populations.

Comparative social science has traditionally been case-oriented and historical in its emphasis, and more closely affiliated with qualitative as opposed to quantitative work (Ragin 1987). Cross-national studies that privilege the latter methodology tend towards the abstract, while more focused case studies of social scientific events are often dissimilar and offer few general conclusions. Ragin (1987: ix), in making this distinction, differentiates between the variable-oriented approach, in which cases sometimes ‘have an unreal quality to them—countries become organisms with systemic distress,’ and case-oriented approaches, which ‘are sensitive to complexity and historical specificity.’ In geography the comparative has been de-emphasized. In Chapter Three I suggest that this relative lack of comparative work can be partially explained by a relative lack of multiple methods approaches for undertaking such research.

In concluding this introduction of Russia’s Buddhist regions, I note one other republic, Tuva, which is considered home to a Buddhist population, though religious practice in this
region is best described as syncretic, combining elements of Buddhism with shamanist practices (see Figure 1.1; Walters 2001; Purzycki 2010). Tuva is not considered in detail in this study, though I will discuss it briefly in the concluding chapter, when considering potential directions for future research.  

Outline of the Dissertation

Chapter Two delves further into the arguments associated with processes of secularization and modernity. To this end, I summarize three relevant literatures: writings on secularism and modernity in the social sciences; geography’s engagement with the topic of religion, and secularism in particular (see, for example, Wilford 2010); and the role of quantitative methods in evaluating religious practice and belief, as used by both sociologists and geographers. The two principal conclusions of this chapter are, first, that geography’s engagement with the topic of religion, in its diversity, has left the literature unfocused—as such, there is little consensus of what the geography of religion aims to achieve—and, second, that a multi-methods, contextual approach to the study of religion can serve as an empirical foundation for this geographic study of religion.

To further substantiate these positions, in Chapter Three I take up the idea of context. Conceptually, context has been associated with the idea of place, while instrumentally the term is often invoked as a synonym of ‘case study.’ This chapter first engages with these existing uses of context, and then proposes a definition that blends the ideas of context-as-place and context-as-

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10 As initially conceived, I intended to include Tuva in this study, due to the historical importance of Buddhism in this republic (Mongush 2001; Manchen-Helfen 1992). During my preliminary field trip to the republic in March-April 2010, I was detained by the Federal Security Service and fined for a visa violation. While I intend to include Tuva in future research, given this response to my presence in the republic, I decided not to pursue further the conduction of the survey in the republic at this time.
case study. I then present a multiple methods framework for the study of social, political, and cultural processes—of which religion is an example—in context. This approach blends methodologies traditionally associated with qualitative research, specifically interviews and focus groups, with survey work. Epistemologically, this approach is couched in recent calls for reflexivity and iteration in the research process, but departs from recent considerations of multiple methods in geography (see, for example, Philip 1998) by advocating for the incorporation of survey work into such approaches.11

Chapter Four reviews the role of religion in the Soviet state and the Russian Federation, developing in further detail some of the points made above, in particular the policies associated with state-imposed atheism, the linkages between religion and nationalism in the Soviet Union and Russian Federation, and the geographic distribution of Russia’s religious minorities. Following this review, the chapter critically evaluates the idea of a religious revival in Russia. To this end, it makes two related arguments. It first questions the extent of this revival by reviewing longitudinal data from the 2008 Levada Center statistical yearbook; these surveys point to a plateauing of religious belief over the past fifteen years. However, part of the problem with this picture is that national surveys generally undersample non-Orthodox respondents. I argue that religious belief among Muslims and Buddhists is higher in comparison to the averages provided by national samples. Second, this finding suggests that geographically focused survey work—which targets Muslims and Buddhists in the republics in which they traditionally reside—is needed to effectively gauge the importance of religion for those national groups traditionally associated with these belief systems. While sociologists and other scholars of religion have

11 Other methodologies usually classed as ‘quantitative,’ including GIS and cartography, have been incorporated into such work (Knigge and Cope 2006; Kwan and Ding 2008; Elwood 2010 for a review)
effectively identified the revival of religious belief in Russia, the nuances of this revival have been glossed over by a failure to attend to local variations across geography and religion.

Chapters Five and Six pursue the argument that a geographically contextual approach can inform our understanding of Buddhism as practiced in the Russian Federation. Chapter Five considers the importance of Buddhism in contemporary Kalmykia. Though the Kalmyks have long identified as Buddhists, the legacies of the Soviet period—specifically the targeting of religious institutions and persons and the resettlement of the Kalmyk nation to Central Asia and Siberia during World War II—weakened the position of Buddhism in Kalmyk society. The religion was forced into the private sphere, and while many Kalmyks continued to practice Buddhism in their homes, the public infrastructure of the religion (temples, monasteries and the associated training) was obliterated. Notably, in the two decades since the end of the Soviet Union, these outwards markers of Buddhism have been reconstructed and function with effectiveness. However, religious leaders in the republic commonly identify the lack of understanding of Buddhist practice and philosophy as problematic for the religion’s further development; this position was frequently expressed in interviews in the republic. In contrast, in other forums, specifically focus groups, study participants often noted the inclusive nature of Buddhism as a belief system; for example, one focus group participant stated that ‘the most important thing is to be Buddhist inside, in your soul’ (F.G. 3, P. 3). Survey results found relatively high levels of self-reported religious belief and frequent attendance at religious services, findings that point to a broad-based religious revival in Kalmykia. While the survey results suggest that a religious revival is occurring, the diverging interpretations of Buddhism’s

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12 This abbreviation refers to the focus group number (1 [academics], 2 [believers], or 3 [students]) and the participant as identified in the translation of the taped dialogue. See Chapter Five for more detail on the focus groups.
contemporary role in Kalmykia—with religious leaders emphasizing the lack of deep understanding of Buddhism as a system of practice and belief in Kalmykia in comparison to the surface-level understandings of Buddhism as expressed by some focus group participants—is a key finding of this chapter.

Chapter Six proceeds in a similar fashion, considering Buddhism as practiced by ethnic Buryats and comparing this to non-titular groups in the republic, primarily Russians. Though Buddhism has long been practiced in the republic, the religion experienced substantial growth during the late Tsarist period. Subsequently, in the Soviet Union the religion was forcefully targeted; monasteries were destroyed and religious leaders were frequently repressed and executed. In 1946 the Soviets opened Ivolginsky Datsan\textsuperscript{13} in the republic, one of two active monastery complexes for Russia’s Buddhists, and the seat of the Central Spiritual Board of Buddhists. The Soviet leadership remained suspicious of Buddhists, however, as illustrated by the trial of Bidya Dandaron in the early 1970s, and all religious training was preceded by education in Marxist-Leninist thought. As occurred in Kalmykia, with the liberalization of the late Gorbachev period, Buddhism experienced a resurgence, though this has primarily taken the form of an increase in the number of temples and other markers on the religious landscape. Given these outward changes, I use the results of a survey conducted in the republic in the summer of 2010 to compare opinions on religious practice and belief between the region’s main constitutive populations. These final two chapters also compare Buddhism in regional context through the lens of the Dalai Lama and the distinct positions that the religious leadership in Buryatia and Kalmykia take towards him. In making this comparison, I use the contextual framework developed in Chapter Three to consider these issues, while also tying the argument to

\textsuperscript{13} Datsan is the term used in Buryatia and Mongolia to refer to Buddhist monastery/temple complexes. In Kalmykia, the common term is khurul.
questions of contemporary relevance in the literature on political geography. The concluding chapter summarizes the key findings and presents directions for future research.
Chapter Two: Secularization and its Discontents, or a Geographic Approach to Evaluating Religious Practice and Belief

Introduction

Work on religion in the social sciences has long supported the argument that the modern world is increasingly secular—following Taylor (2007) this has traditionally meant that society is increasingly divided into public and private spheres, with religion’s accepted place in the latter (see Casanova 1994 for an alternative argument). Secularization is processual, with ‘sectors of society and culture…removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols’ (Berger 1967: 107). These changes occur at both the institutional level—with the separation of church and state—and among individuals—with a decline in traditional adherence to religion. The secular societies that result are places where ‘you can engage fully in politics without ever encountering God’ (Taylor 2007: 1); this contrasts pre-modern cultures, where religion permeated social and political life through manifestations (termed hierophanies) of the sacred (Eliade 1959).

Taylor’s argument is linked to classic social theories on the role of religion in modern society. Secularization was one of ‘the key historical revolutions transforming medieval agrarian societies into modern industrial nations’ (Norris and Inglehart 2011: 3). Social theorists working in the late 19th and early 20th centuries—most notably Max Weber and Emile Durkheim—laid the foundation for subsequent work on the sociology of religion. Weber (1993 [1922]), in The Sociology of Religion, suggests that a variety of interests are at play in structuring the cultural milieu in which religious practice emerges. Individuals have historically come to rely on proto-religious figures—magicians, shamans, and the like—to secure these interests; in more
developed religious systems, this role is taken on by priests and other religious leaders, who develop a more formal relationship with the lay community. In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Durkheim (1995 [1912]) suggested that religion is pervasive in pre-modern and modern societies. Contra Weber, whose view of religion was limited to its role as a system of beliefs and ideas, functionalists argue that religion also plays an important social role through the performance of rituals and ceremonies. In turn, these performances support social cohesion and the maintenance of societal order.

Though religion plays a defined role in the maintenance of social order, attendant to this ideological function is the process of functional differentiation—the distinction of religious institutions from political and economic ones. This functional differentiation, according to Durkheim—as well as Marx and Lenin—results in the weakening of religious institutions. This position prefigures the secularization thesis, which emerged as the dominant paradigm in the sociology of religion during the late 1960s (see Berger 1967 and below). To state briefly, the secularization thesis argues that the role of the church is distinct and separate from that of other social institutions: government, civil society, and economic actors.

Recent work has explicitly questioned the secularization thesis. In a reversal of his previous position, Berger (1999) argues that counter-secularization—the persistence of religious practice as a central component of peoples’ lives—is also a consequence of modernity. A second line of critique comes from rational choice theorists, most notably Stark and Finke (2000), who argue that religious pluralism leads to greater competition among faiths for adherents and, in turn, increased religiosity. Rational choice theory views religion as a commodity that is consumed by actors based on well-informed, considered decisions regarding the alternatives available in the religious marketplace (Stark and Finke 2000). In cases where one religion holds
a monopoly, the lack of competition between different faiths leads to stagnation and complacency in the attempt to win new converts. Norris and Inglehart (2011) reject the supply-side model endorsed by Stark and Finke. Rather, they argue that increased levels of human security lead to increased secularization, though cultural and demographic particularities complicate this picture on the global scale. Other scholars, most notably Bruce (2002: 44), have argued against the misconstrual of the secularization paradigm; what should be tested in any sociological analysis is the ‘long-term decline in the power, popularity and prestige in beliefs and rituals,’ as has occurred mainly in Western Europe.

Taking this debate as its point of departure, this chapter reviews three literatures that frame the dissertation: the processes of secularization and opposing arguments that suggest a trend of counter-secularization is underway; geographic work on religion, which distinguishes between the geography of religion and religious geographies; and the use of quantitative methodologies to evaluate religiosity, as associated with the scientific study of religion. From these last two topics, I suggest a reevaluation of context as a framing concept, an argument to be developed in more detail in Chapter Three. As I will argue there, a multiple methods approach—one that incorporates focus groups and interviews as well as geographically-focused surveys—offers a more complete picture of how religion is understood and employed in particular places.

Secularization and its Discontents

The literature on secularization and counter-secularization is vast; rather than offer a comprehensive review I will focus on the works of a subset of the leading authors on the topic:
Peter Berger, Steve Bruce, Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, and Jose Casanova. My point of emphasis is on the context-dependent nature of secularization, and I generally agree with Bruce (2002: 37): ‘the secularization story is an attempt to explain a historically and geographically specific cluster of changes,’ as primarily occurring in Western Europe and North America. At the end of this section, the geographical specificity of secularization is considered in a brief review of the diverse cases of post-Communist Eastern Europe. Wilford (2010), who argues for the relevance of secularization to geography, will also be discussed and returned to throughout the chapter. I point the reader to this article for a more complete review of the secularization debate and its particular relevance to geography, as well.

Before turning to these authors, however, I would like to briefly trace the theoretical linkages between modernity and secularism; as Stark and Finke (2000: 59) write: ‘there is universal agreement [in the literature on secularization] that modernization is the causal engine for dragging the gods into retirement.’¹⁵ More generally, using data from the World Values Survey, Inglehart and Baker (2000) identify two schools of thought with respect to the interaction of modernization and societal values: convergence and persistence. In the former case, modernization is leading to the emergence of a global set of norms and values—respect for human rights, tolerance, and democracy are examples—while in the latter case traditional, society-specific norms maintain an important role in a given society. With respect to religion, those who maintain a traditional worldview believe in heaven and hell, regularly attend church, express confidence in the church as an institution, and generally acknowledge religion as very important in their lives; those classed into the convergence category—referred to by Inglehart

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¹⁵ It should be noted that Stark and Finke see modernization as long-term processes with a gradual progression towards increased levels of economic development; the same pattern, of sustained progress towards an endpoint where religion is of little importance in a society, should apply to secularization. They argue that it does not.
and Baker as secular-rationalist—hold opposing views. Notably, Inglehart and Baker (2000: 46) observe the persistence of religious values; in the former communist states, this is attributable to the fact that ‘history has taken an ironic turn,’ what can be inferred as a reversal of the modernization trend. In Russia, the economic uncertainty of the post-communist years is correlated to a rise in the number of persons who describe themselves as religious—64 percent in 1995 in comparison to 56 percent in 1990. Contradictions do exist, however. While the numbers of respondents who indicate they hold religious beliefs is on the rise, attendance numbers continue to decline (though attendance rose between 1990 and 1995 in five of seven post-communist states, including Russia, where eight percent of respondents reported attending religious services at least once a month as opposed to six percent five years earlier). In sum, the authors conclude that ‘modernization theorists are partly right;’ Inglehart and Baker (2000: 49) specifically question the universality of modernization’s consequences and the linearity of the modernization path.

The relationship between modernization and secularization underpins many of the foundational arguments in the literature on the sociology of religion. In The Sacred Canopy, Peter Berger (1967) argues that religious pluralism results in increased secularization and is connected to the attenuation of the role of religious institutions and symbols in a given society. Berger’s work was one a suite of writings, mainly by sociologists, which appeared in the late 1960s and argued for the link between modernity and the universal weakening of religious practice (see also Luckmann 1967). Religious pluralism is a key driver in this process. The ramification of religious options undermines the position of the monopoly religion. In turn, the separation of church and state disconnects religion from the political sphere. At the same time, increased pluralism in the religious sphere—a process referred to by Berger as sacralization—
and institutional decoupling (i.e., the functionalist argument) work together to produce ‘the secularization of consciousness’ (Berger 1967: 127 cited in Goldstein 2009). In the late 1960s, this process had occurred primarily in the West.

Famously, Berger has since reversed course, pointedly arguing against the secularization thesis: ‘The assumption that we live in a secularized world is false. The world today...is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever’ (Berger 1999: 2). Modernization is, somewhat paradoxically, the main driver in this process of counter-secularization. Religion has either become a mechanism for rejecting modernity or a means of coping with the change and uncertainty that characterizes modern life. Berger pointedly rejects the thesis proposed by some academics that this most recent revival of religion is a last-ditch effort to counter the secularizing effects of modernization. Rather, religion will remain as important in the 21st century as it was in the 20th, despite an overlap between religious and non-religious forces in society and politics. Huntington’s (1993) ‘clash of civilizations’ model—which, to restate, suggested that the fault lines of international politics would be confessional rather than ideological—is most applicable to the Muslim world, with its ‘bloody borders,’ according to Berger (2010).16

Bruce (2002) offers a set of critiques of Berger’s revised position. Counter-secularization, like the original secularization thesis, must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis;17 secularization was always a place-specific process, ‘an account of what has happened to religion in western

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16 That said, I do not intend to imply that Berger accepts Huntington’s thesis writ large, either in the Muslim world or internationally; ‘While this sentence [that ‘Islam has bloody borders’] too does not describe Islam at all times and in all places, it does fit many situations in which Islam confronts other religious communities’ (Berger 2010).

17 Secularization is not evaluated on a religion-by-religion basis in Bruce’s book, however. In the United States, affiliation and attendance at mainstream churches (e.g. Episcopalian or Methodist) is declining, while evangelical Protestant churches are generally growing in the number of adherents.
Europe (and its North American and Australasian offshoots) since the Reformation’ (Bruce 2002: 37, cited in Proctor 2006). Neither narrative should be universally accepted, but instead must be considered in its specific historical and geographical context. Berger, in formalizing his rebuttal of the secularization thesis, recognizes the fact that the secularization thesis maintains in Western Europe (Berger 1999); however, in places like Latin America—where Protestant evangelicals have been particularly successful in challenging the dominance of the Catholic Church—the idea of secularization does not hold.

In evaluating secularization in the west—the case studies developed in detail include Great Britain and the United States—Bruce (2002) argues that indifference to religion is the primary explanation for the declining relevance of religious institutions to the state and society and the decrease in individual practice and belief. This apathy towards religion, in turn, is the result of ‘the lack of religious socialization and the lack of constant background affirmation of beliefs’ (Bruce 2002: 240); the latter claim evokes Billig’s (1995) notion of the banal, everyday reproduction of the nation. Socialization into religious systems is undermined by the interaction of the processes of modernity and post-modernity: rising equality as a product of development, the acknowledgement and valuation of cultural diversity, and the erosion of the importance of religion in key societal events (replaced, arguably, by the nation).

Positioned against Bruce’s work is that of Stark and Finke (2000), who apply rational choice theory to understanding the process of secularization and attendant religious decline. In this approach, secularization is defined in a straightforward fashion; modernization (and scientific advancement, in particular) is the principal driver, while the ‘primary concern [of the secularization thesis] is with individual piety, especially belief’ (Stark and Finke 2000: 59; emphasis in the original). In general, the thesis is less concerned with institutional differentiation
and the public-private binary. Among individuals religiosity remains high; with respect to the United States Stark and Finke note a doubling of church attendance over a 150-year window from 1835, while in Europe no longer-term decline in religious participation exists. Linked to the latter point, Stark and Finke also argue that the idea that religion previously experienced a ‘golden age’ during premodern times and has subsequently experienced a decline over the longue durée is false. The proliferation of alternative options in the marketplace—the strengthening of the supply side in the religious economy—has stimulated demand and led more people to adopt and practice a certain religious faith.

The application of rational choice theory to religious adherence has been extensively debated. In critiquing Stark and Finke’s position, other scholars have argued that this approach—with its emphasis on the individual rather than the institutional—oversimplifies the process of secularization by emphasizing a single dimension. Arguing against secularization as occurring in the west is straightforward: the United States is a modern society with high levels of individual piety while in Europe a lack of competition in the religious marketplace has artificially lowered levels of practice (see Gorski and Altınordu 2008 for this interpretation). This unidimensional approach has been empirically productive—it lends itself to quantitative evaluation through, for example, longitudinal correlations between religious adherence and government policy towards religion (for an example, see Froese 2001 on Hungary). Its theoretical rigor, however, has been questioned; rather, multidimensional engagements are viewed as more theoretically nuanced, though more difficult to evaluate empirically.

One such multidimensional approach is that of Casanova (1994), who suggests that the secularization thesis rests on three distinct hypotheses: differentiation, privatization, and decline. Leaving aside differentiation—the one pillar of the secularization thesis that is valid—Casanova
(1994: 5) argues that a ‘deprivatization’ of religion is currently underway; in turn, ‘religious traditions throughout the world are refusing to accept the marginal and privatized role which theories of modernity as well as theories of secularization have reserved for them.’ This argument engages, in part, with Luckmann’s (1967) work *The Invisible Religion*; his key theoretical argument is that religion has become privatized, determined by individual choice rather than imposed by outside, public pressure—a binary of institutional and non-institutional practice and belief.

Following Casanova, the deprivatization of religion currently underway is occurring at the intermediate scale; as religions no longer maintain their position as ‘grand legitimators’ due to the separation of church and state, they ‘can become movements and pressure groups that vie with rivals in the public sphere’ (Gorski and Altinordu 2008: 58). For individuals, the erosion of the central place of religious actors in the political, economic, and social spheres results in greater freedom in terms of religious choice; the outcome of differentiation ‘serve[s] as the social context within which religious organizations in civil society must adapt’ (Wilford 2010: 336).

To reiterate, Casanova’s argument is more nuanced than those of Berger (1967), Bruce (2002), or Stark and Finke (2000). Of the theories reviewed here, I find Casanova’s the most convincing because while he acknowledges the deprivatization of religion as is occurring in a variety of cases—including Russia, where religious actors are attempting to influence social and political policy with respect to issues like education (see Chapter Four)—Casanova does not reject secularization out of hand. While the imbrication of religion with political and social policy certainly occurs in some instances, this is not universal; in discussing this connection in the Russian case, there has been a clear attempt under the leadership of Vladimir Putin to limit the political influence of the Russian Orthodox Church (again, this point is developed in more
detail below). This allows Casanova (1994: 6) to distinguish between the various elements of the secularization idea; as such, ‘the core of the theory of secularization, the thesis of the differentiation and emancipation of the secular spheres from religious institutions and norms, remains valid.’

For those who are critical of Casanova’s approach, the debate turns on the consequences of differentiation as a result of modernization (Wilford 2010); Asad (2003), for example, suggest that the interpenetration of religion into the political and economic spheres are a consequence of religion’s continued social relevance. In such instances, there is substantial overlap between religion’s public face and its private meaning for individuals. The simultaneity of the public and private aspects of religion is commonly reflected in the employment of religion as a component of national identity and, more generally, in the communication of political values. Habermas (2006), along with a number of other high-profile scholars, has identified the increasing importance of religion in the public sphere since 1989-1991 and the end of the Cold War. Religion has reemerged as an important component in the political sphere in a variety of secular contexts, including France (with the recent debate over the place of headscarves in public buildings), Turkey (with similar concerns over the public role of religion and the emergence of the Islamic Justice and Development Party as the leading political force), and the United States (which has long had an observant religious population, and where the role of religion in influencing political positions has arguably increased in the past two decades).

In a recent piece, Rogers Brubaker (2012) considers the relevance of religion to the study of nationalism. He identifies four distinct approaches: religion as analogous to the nation; religion as explanation for nationalism; religion as component of nationalism; and religion as a form of nationalism. I view the third approach as particularly relevant to this dissertation.
Brubaker suggests that when religious and national boundaries are coterminous, religion serves either as the exclusive basis for national identity within a given state or as ‘the primary diacritical marker that enables one to identify ethnicity or nationality’ as distinct from other residents in that state, and recognizing the fact that members of the national community still reside beyond these borders (Brubaker 2012: 9). In the United States, religion plays a slightly different role, serving not as a marker of ethnic identity but as the basis for civic allegiance to the polity; the religiously-tinged myths and symbols employed in the definition of American national identity underscore the public role of religion as the basis for both nation building and the subsequent consolidation of this identity. To extend this rubric to the case of Russia’s minorities, Vovina notes the importance of spiritual revival for Chuvash national identity since the breakup of the Soviet Union;¹⁸ this suggests a context-specific need for understanding the blending of religion and national identity for Russia’s constituent minorities.

To consolidate this review, I identify two broader trends in the social scientific literature on religion that are of importance to geography’s engagement with secularization. First, secularization should be considered in its geographic context. While Asad’s (2003: 182; quoted in Wilford 2010) critique of Casanova—that the ‘entry of religion into these debates [on politics, the functioning of the economy, and public policy, among others] results in the creation of modern ‘hybrids’, [and in turn] the principle of structural differentiation no longer holds’—is appropriate for some contexts, it is not universally accepted. Some societies have maintained functional differentiation between religious and other political and economic actors. Following Brubaker (2012), in other cases religion serves as a central component of the political and cultural projects used to cultivate and strengthen national identity.

¹⁸ The Chuvash are Russia’s fifth-largest national group. They are a Turkic population residing in the Middle Volga basin.
To illustrate the binary, the geographical specificity of the secularization thesis is borne out in the varied examples of the post-Communist states of Eastern Europe. Investigating the validity of the secularization thesis in ten countries in the region, Need and Evans (2001) find that patterns of religious belief generally conform to this thesis with respect to age and education; there is no indication of a sustained religious revival among youths, contra Greeley’s (1994: 264) finding in the case of Russia that ‘a U curve relationship exists between age and belief in God, with the younger and the older more likely to believe in Her than those in the middle years of life.’

With respect to specific faiths, Need and Evans (2001: 242) point to differences in the relationship between church and state under communism; ‘the Orthodox Church was generally not seen as, and did not attempt to be, a bulwark against communism, whereas Catholicism—particularly in its most celebrated form in Poland—is generally thought to have represented a distinct element of civil society.’ Other work confirms the importance of religion in Catholic countries not only after the end of communism but during the post-World War II period. Froese (2004a: 71), for example, reports that religiosity in Poland during the communist period increased substantially, as the Church was seen as ‘the only means for spiritual, nationalistic, political, and intellectual expression outside the dictates of communist ideology.’ In another case, that of Hungary, Froese (2001: 267) applies Stark and Finke’s supply-side model to the religious revival that occurred in that country during the first years after communism—‘as predicted by supply-side theory, the fall of communism initially generated religious enthusiasm due to new levels of religious freedom.’ However, state patronage of traditional religions and the revision of the constitutional provision ensuring freedom of conscience had constrained the religious market in the country by the mid-1990s (a similar process occurred in the Russian
Federation, as will be discussed below). More generally, the varied roles that religion plays in the post-Communist states of Eastern Europe points to the problematic of the broad-based application of the secularization thesis. Rather, specific patterns of religious adherence and belief need to be investigated on a country-by-country or confession-by-confession basis. To preview an argument made below, I compare the role of religion in cultivating national identity in Kalmykia and Buryatia in Chapters Five and Six, as well as the divergence in religious belief and practice between Buddhists and Orthodox in the republic of Buryatia in Chapter Six.

The second relevant point, drawing particularly from Casanova, is the appropriateness of the geographic concept of scale to understanding secularization as currently occurring. Recent work, most notably that of Wilford (2010: 328), has attempted to carve out a niche for the secular perspective in geography; in the literature on the geography of religion, ‘the secular has largely been relegated to a residual category.’ Wilford’s (2010: 330) effort to insert scale as a relevant concept into the secularization debate acknowledges the complexity of functional differentiation—the argument, to restate, ‘which holds modern society to be comprised of separate specialized spheres of action (broadly divided into sacred and secular but more finely separated out into state politics, market economy, civil society, and religion)—across scales and geographic contexts. In his review piece, Wilford suggests that the geographic concept of scale can enhance our understanding of how secularization is playing out in various geographic contexts. In the United States, while broader trends of secularization maintain on the national scale, the actions of megachurches are emblematic of the ways in which actors ‘maintain religious vitality at smaller scales within a larger situation of secularization’ (Wilford 2010: 343). The success of these projects is dependent on the growth of their local congregations, which in turn legitimates national and global efforts. While secularization closes off some of the
traditional spaces of religious practices, it opens up spaces for other varieties of religious experience. As geographers consider the spatial outcomes associated with the secularization debate, it is necessary to more broadly summarize prior interventions on the topic of religion in the discipline.

\textit{Geographic Work on Religion: An Incomplete Oeuvre}

In introducing a set of themed articles in the \textit{Annals of the Association of American Geographers}, Proctor (2006) suggests that geographers have much to contribute to contemporary debates on religion. Citing work in the social sciences more broadly concerned with secularization and rebuttals of counter-secularization, he writes that ‘scholarly analysis of these contradictory trends in contemporary religion must necessarily attend to both empirical and conceptual complexities’ occurring across geographic space (Proctor 2006: 167). How, in other words, do processes like secularization, counter-secularization, and religious fundamentalism (as distinct from a broad-based religious revival) play out in various geographic contexts? This empirical knowledge must be complemented by theoretical clarity. Proctor’s point is that geographers—due to their interest in how the empirics of place and process inform and are informed by social theoretical debates—are uniquely positioned to contribute to work on religion. Put another way, Proctor is saying that context is relevant to the geographical study of religion. Building on the ideas of Proctor, Kong, and others, this section will attempt to instill coherence to the geographic study of religion.

Religion is one of a set of identity categories, also including nationality, race, and gender, which are spatially constituted and contextually dependent. Though religious identification is a
distinct form of social identity, it is commonly equated with nationality. This linkage is most common in the cases of the historical Diasporas—for example the Jews, but also applicable to other diasporic nations like the Armenians and Greeks—or in states where there is an historic link between the church and the state—as in the case of the Church of England. Alternatively, in other instances, there is a conscious effort to disassociate religious practice from citizenship and other types of political identification. In part, this is the result of states’ hesitancy to ask about religion when collecting census and other official population statistics; Great Britain’s inclusion of a question on religion in the 2001 census signaled a departure from the norm in the secular, Anglo-Saxon West, the outcome of requests from both scholars and the government for a clearer picture of the country’s increasingly multicultural society (Pacione 2005). Contributing to the broader literature on the scientific study of religion, geographers have used this census data to map the United Kingdom’s contemporary denominational geographies (a long-standing practice in the United States using sources other than the Census, which does not include questions on religion; see Zelinksy 1961; Shortridge 1974; Jordan 2007; and below).

This historic link between territory, nationality, and religious practice has been widely considered in works on the history and current spatial extent of religious practice. In Western Europe, for example, the principle of cuius regio, eius religio refers to the historic right of the sovereign to determine the religion of his (sic) realm (Knippenberg 2006). This concept was first invoked in the 1555 Peace of Augsberg and reaffirmed in the Treaty of Westphalia that followed the Thirty Years War (1648). It was most widely implemented in the German principalities, where rulers chose between Catholicism, Lutheranism, and Calvinism; inhabitants were allowed freedom of movement in order to settle in a territory where the religion of their choosing was

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19 In some cases, religion and nationality are mutually reinforcing, viz. the case of Poland discussed briefly above. See also Brubaker’s (2012) review of religion and nationalism.
practiced (Henkel 2005). This form of religious toleration through territorial division was also 
employed in other European states during the 16th century, including Switzerland. In a number 
of cases, religious homogeneity was established \textit{ex post facto}, a result of the principle of \textit{cuius regio, eius religio}; adherents to certain religions migrated to those territories where their religion 
of choice was practiced. The system was, however, not universally applied; in Great Britain, 
Henry VIII’s adoption of Anglicanism—though far from uncontested—established the Church of 
England as the \textit{de jure} national religion. Knippenberg (2006: 253) reiterates the contemporary 
importance of the principle of \textit{cuius regio, eius religio}: it ‘is still [a] vital factor for a proper 
explaining of the geographical distribution of religions and churches’ in modern Europe, 
underscoring the historical importance of church-state relations for these polities. Despite the 
trend towards secularization and increased multiculturalism, the term remains relevant to 
explaining the geographical patterns of religious practice found in contemporary Europe.

More generally, and beyond the clear overlap of religious practice and the political 
organization in space, work on religion in geography has been divided into two schools of 
research practice: the geography of religion and religious geographies (Isaac 1965). The former 
is associated with studies that map the spatial distribution of religious practice and an 
engagement with how religion has affected the physical form of landscapes; Kong (1990) links 
this literature to the Berkeley school of cultural geography (see also Sopher 1967). Historically, 
the latter classification was the main emphasis for much ‘geographical’ work (though social 
scientific disciplines did not exist in their current form when much of it was written); this 
includes ecclesiastical geography, which charted the spread of Christianity both within Europe 
and in colonized space, biblical geography, which entailed the mapping of toponyms found in the 
Bible, and physico-theological geography, which was primarily concerned with the idea that
God’s work in creating the geography of the earth was divine, in that the spatial order was too perfect to be the result of coincidence. At the beginning of the 20th century, geographers adopted environmental determinism as an explanation for the distinctiveness of religious practice across space; in such work, ‘the environment provides materials for religious actions and religious conceptions’ (Kong, 1990: 358). A succinct distinction between these two sets of literature is made by Levine (1986: 431): ‘the primary focus of the geography of religion lies not in the study of the individual religious experience [the purview of religious geographies; see Slater, 2004], but, rather, centres on religion in an instituted, social form’ (and one evident in the landscape).

Kong (1990; 2001; 2010) has written three decennial reviews of the geography of religion. Over the longer term, a summary of Kong’s reviews shows a clear pattern from underdevelopment—as first acknowledged by Sopher (1967; 1981)—to increased coherence in the literature. At its core, the initial intervention is an attempt to rehabilitate a marginalized subfield of human geography. Published in 1990, in this piece Kong specifically argues that geography, in spite of the potential for substantive, trans-disciplinary work, has not moved beyond classic understandings put forward in the Berkeley school of cultural geography—for example, religion’s role in landscape change—to consider questions of religious process associated with new, ‘low’ culture. Following Jackson (1988), Kong views the new cultural geography as considering topics—such as the political symbolism of religious places—that were previously of marginal importance to cultural geographers. She concludes this initial review by suggesting that geographers acknowledge the reciprocal relationship between landscape and religion.

The effect of religion on cultural landscapes is substantial, and Kong (1990) identifies this as one of three themes—along with writings in the new cultural geography vein (see below
Kong’s 2001 review offered a more substantial research agenda for the geography of religion. The research threads proposed included a consideration of informal sites of religious practice, the role of scale in religion, and differing dialectics and moralities associated with religion and manifested across spatial contexts. Kong (2001: 228) also suggests that geographers consider ‘different religions in different historical and place-specific contexts,’ a proposal taken up by some recent work in the discipline and also an important basis for this dissertation. Examples of the former include Hopkins’s (2004; 2007) project on young Muslim men in Scotland, which addresses how less-studied religions like Islam interact with categories like race and gender in specific contexts. The broader point is ‘that such studies properly recognize religion as neither spatially nor temporally confined to ‘reservations,’ practiced only in officially assigned spaces at allocated times’ (Kong 2010: 757).

Kong also suggests in this second review that geographers consider the poetics of place; for many, religion is the ‘search for the immanent and transcendent’ (Kong 2001: 218; see also Kong 2004). Following Carl Sauer, cultural geographers have long considered the effect of religion on the landscape. Isaac (1961-2: 12, quoted in Kong 2004), providing an early definition of the geography of religion, suggested that this is ‘the study of the part played by the religious motive in man’s [sic] transformation of the landscape.’ The new cultural geography turned away
from physical artifacts as markers of the landscape and indicators of cultural distinctiveness, and instead focused on the semantic and semiotic nature of landscape (Cosgrove and Jackson 1987). The production of landscape by religious actors and institutions underscored the contentious nature of space as conditioned by the politics of the sacred. In post-Soviet Russia, Sidorov’s (2000a) work on the Cathedral of Christ the Savior as a religious *qua* national monument underscores the mismatch between the constructed object, which has been used for the purpose of political legitimation, and the local and national scales at which such legitimation occurs.20 The Russian nation, according to Sidorov, is a political, social, and religious construct, one that has required a particular form of (re-) legitimation in the post-Soviet period. Sidorov argues that the reconstruction of the Cathedral has privileged the Russian Orthodox Church in comparison to other confessions, and that the rebuilding has been less relevant to regions beyond Moscow; ‘it is only a slight exaggeration to conclude that, in many respects, the scale of the national state has become local’ and sited in Moscow (Sidorov 2000a: 564).

In the most recent review, Kong (2010) reiterates the value of recent work on religion in geography, identifies an increased coherence, and lays out a research agenda that recognizes four ‘global shifts’ along which lines of further inquiry should be traced: increasing urbanization, and the attendant rise in faith-based organizations (FBOs), as studied by Beaumont (2008); the deterioration of the environment, and how the discourse of ‘what should be done’ interacts with religious belief and practice; the ageing of populations, particularly in the west, a line of research that offsets the focus on children’s and young people’s geographies that has recently emerged; and further work on how increasing mobilities interact with religion, beyond already existing work (Peach 2006).

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20 The Cathedral was also the site of the video shot in February 2012 by the feminist punk-rock collective Pussy Riot, three members of which were subsequently tried and sentenced to two years’ imprisonment.
Two broader critiques should first be made on the direction of geographic research on religion: 1) the theorization of the role of space and the spatial has not been adequately considered by work in geography, which instead privileges case studies; and 2) more traditional, ‘denominational geographies’ (Zelinsky 1973) that employ cartographic methods to visually represent patterns of religious identification have not critiqued the simplifications, including methodological nationalism and the devaluation of place, that occur in the sociology of religion literature. With respect to the first critique, as implicit in Kong’s (2010) most recent review, empirical questions remain at the forefront of such case-based work. Recent scholarship has considered a diversity of topics: the role of faith-based organizations and their function in urban social justice (Beaumont and Dias 2008; Beaumont 2008; Olson 2008); the role that religion plays for development actors (Olson 2006; Lunn 2009); the mapping of religious diversity, both in the United States and globally across countries (Jordan 2007; Warf and Winsberg 2008; Warf and Vincent 2009); and the emergence of the veiling-fashion industry in post-secular Turkey (Gökarıkseland Secor 2009) is a sampling of this literature. This emphasis on case studies accentuates a further divide—identified by Peach (1999) and reiterated by Henkel (2005)—in the literature on religion in geography between empirical research primarily concerned with quantitative and cartographic representations of religious practice and belief and work influenced by Tuan’s (1976) theorization of humanistic geography, which accents the cultural-spatial importance of religion (see, for example, Kong 1992).

Given this empirical focus, it has been scholars beyond geography, most notably Kim Knott, (2005; see also Knott 2008 for a review) who have considered theoretically the effects of the spatial turn in the social sciences on religious belief, as primarily inspired by Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space* (though for an exception in geography, see MacDonald 2002). Eliade
(1959) prefigures these arguments in his classic text *The Sacred and the Secular*, distinguishing between sacred and profane—or everyday—spaces and emphasizing the role of the *axis mundi* in the worldview of religious practice (see Knott 2008 for an interpretation). Knott’s (2005: 5-6) work articulates a concern for the everyday spaces in which religion is sited: ‘when we look at institutions and processes that are commonly defined in terms of traditions of belief and practice from an unusual perspective, in terms of their spatial character and location,’ what is the result? In essence, she and other scholars beyond geography (for example, Tweed 2006) are advocating for ‘reclaiming the importance of place’ (Yorgason and della Dora 2009: 630). In the geographic literature, recent work illustrates an emergent relationship between religion and the spatial turn associated with Lefebvre (1991); as Knott (2008: 1113) has succinctly written: ‘The contemporary study of religion requires an awareness of the operation of religion at a variety of scales, from body parts and things, streets and places of worship, cities and nations, to global flows and transnational connections.’ Knott effectively articulates some of the key research directions in geography, as evinced, for example, by the work of Gökariksel (2009) on the role of the veil in contemporary Turkish society. However, contextual work like that of Gökariksel (and others cited above) has yet to fully engage with the theoretical excursions into the imbrication of place and religion as found in the work of Knott.

Though the disconnect between theory and empirics should be further considered by geographers, my concern in this chapter—and the remainder of the dissertation—is with the second critique introduced above—that ‘denominational geography’ has failed to move beyond the numeric description and cartographic depiction of data on religious adherence and practice. Foundationally, the increased relevance of religion for geographers has not been accompanied by a serious reconsideration of the methodologies used to engage with such questions. Broadly,
there is an increasing recognition that geographers can contribute to academic debates by knowing the world well. This builds on recent calls made by Toal (2003: 655) for research that emphasizes ‘grounded geographical knowledge,’ which is inspired by work framed as part of the new regional geography (see, for example, Allen et al. 1998). The ‘micro-geographic’ approach to religion found in many of the case studies introduced above (i.e. Henkel and Šakaja 2009; Jones 2010; Kong 2002) often considers how religion plays a role in the prosaic experiences of its research subjects at a particular place—the basis for grounded theory as articulated in geography (see Knigge and Cope 2006 for a summary of this literature). Similarly, work on denominational geography is overly generalized in its technique; though distributions at the local and national scales are considered, such work provides little insight into the importance of religion for those who identify as believers and the various intellectual debates occurring within a specific religious community, among other questions. To summarize the above review of the literature on religion in geography, such work can be broadly classed into these two camps: localized, qualitative studies of religious groups and larger scale, descriptive studies that usually rely on mapping to present numeric data visually. I argue that there is not a distinctly geographic approach to the social scientific study of religion, and further that neither micro- or macro-geographic studies of religion reliably capture the role of religion as a social process in geographic context.

In turn, there is need for geographically informed research that considers religious denominations simultaneously at the sites of practice and in their regional and national contexts. Though I recognize the value of the empirical work that has emerged as the standard in the geography of religion, I am interested in religious practice and belief at the ‘meso-geographic’ scale, an approach that blends research into practices and beliefs of religious communities at the
local scale, yet at the same time considers the relevance of the religion at the national level. And as Murphy and O’Loughlin (2009: 241) have similarly observed, ‘against the backdrop [of contemporary global change], it is imperative that geographers, economists, and other social scientists deepen their understanding and appreciation of the forces at play in different world regions.’ Religion is one of the categories of social, cultural and political identity to which this broad call for a contextually engaged geography is relevant.

**Evaluating Trends in Secularization Quantitatively**

Before turning to the explication of this contextual approach, I first want to discuss the relevance of quantitative methods to the study of religion both in the social sciences and geography in particular. Survey analysis is one of a suite of techniques used by social scientists to answer questions about our world (Johnston 1980). In quantitative research, religion is either the process of interest—the dependent variable—or used as an explanation for other social processes—an independent variable in the investigation of another process. The diverse set of theories reviewed above in association with the secularization thesis consider religion with respect to other social factors, or as the dependent variable; such work tests the relationship between age, gender, nationality (among other factors) and religiosity. When considered as an independent variable, religion as a social characteristic provides insight into a range of demographic outcomes—morbidity and mortality, marriage, socioeconomic position, political attitudes, and education, among others. To be clear, I am interested in the former set of studies, where religion is the dependent variable, the subject of interest.

Given the sizable number of studies in the social scientific study of religion, I draw on two existing reviews of the literature to provide a general picture of the use of quantitative
methods in this field of inquiry. Wuthnow (1979) identifies some of the early contributions from this literature: a comprehensive profile of the demographic character of those who self-identify as religious, the cross-cultural comparison of religious practice, and attempts to substantiate the argument that the quantitative analysis of religion is an appropriate method for evaluating a potentially subjective idea like religious belief. At the time, the quantitative study of religion was a relatively recent development—Lenski’s (1961) *The Religious Factor*, ‘a pioneering work’ according to Wuthnow (1979: 1) had appeared only two decades before. Wuthnow’s volume extended this research in three directions: further testing of relationships between demographic characteristics and religiosity, evaluating religion in the context of social change (i.e. migration) in post-war America, and comparing religious practice historically across societies.

Nearly three decades later, Voas (2007b: 152), writing about the same literature, noted that it ‘is now very large, and it has been many years since it was possible even to attempt an overview.’ Much of this work still considers a standard set of topics: religiosity, the growth and decline of religious institutions, the role of demographic characteristics in religious belief, and inter-group comparisons. Importantly, there is increased recognition of the limitations of the quantitative approach; elsewhere, Voas (2007a) has noted the difficulty of accurately measuring affiliation, attendance, and belief through surveys. There are also issues of reliability, sensitivity to error, and the geographic limitations of data collection associated with such work (see further discussion below). Despite these potential caveats, the resources commonly used in the quantitative analysis of religion include regular national surveys, the data from which are made available to researchers one to two years after collection (Voas 2007b). The World Values Survey (WVS) is a particularly valuable resource; it has collected demographic information as well as opinions on political, economic, and societal topics in five waves and in more than 80
countries (for an example of the use of the WVS data to analyze questions on religion, see Bruce 2000 and Froese 2001; see also Chapter Four). The multi-national nature of the WVS data allows for comparison between countries on questions of analytical interest.

Despite the prevalence of national-scale survey analysis in the social scientific study of religion, such work is subject to critique. As Voas (2007a: 1168) notes, any general social survey is subject to fallibility in responses; ‘obtaining fully satisfactory data on religion—whether affiliation, attendance or belief—is difficult.’ With respect to affiliation, both the wording and context of the question often influence responses. This can be the product of, for example, questionnaire structure. During the 2001 census, in England and Wales the question on religion followed questions on country of birth and ethnicity. Voas (2007a: 1168) argues that the structure of the questionnaire and the wording of the question (‘What is your religion?’) in England and Wales ‘invite[d] the respondent to specify a cultural background rather than a current affiliation.’ In Scotland, on the other hand, the question on religion preceded these two questions. Hence, respondents were more likely to answer positively to the question of religious affiliation in the former cases, even if they are not currently practicing (see also Voas and Bruce 2004). This inconsistency potentially skews results when comparisons are attempted across the countries of the United Kingdom. Similarly, and as will be discussed in more detail below, in countries like the Russian Federation there is an historic link between certain ethnic groups and types of religious practice; as a result, individuals frequently provide the expected religion associated with their ethnic identity in response to such questions (see Voas 2007b).

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21 The sixth wave is currently underway. I will analyze data from the fifth wave of the World Values Survey, conducted in 2005-2006, below.

22 Though I draw primarily from censuses as my examples below, I reiterate that this fallibility is relevant to the ‘poll data’ used in many countries either in lieu of or between censuses (Warner 1993).
Other concerns revolve around the reliability of responses. Attendance at religious services is consistently overreported, while individuals often indicate high levels of belief not only with respect to religion, but also when asked about religious phenomena like reincarnation. Reliability questions also affect the accurate measurement of affiliation. To again take the 2001 British Census as an example; there was a coordinated campaign to gain recognition for Jediism, a religion purportedly based on the principles of the Jedi Knights from the ‘Star Wars’ movies. Nearly 400,000 respondents listed ‘Jedi Knight’ as their religion. A similar response occurred in Australia and New Zealand to censuses conducted there (Voas 2007b).23

Moving beyond Voas’s (2007b) review, I identify three further problems with the current application of survey and census data to analyzing questions on religion. First, not all censuses collect information on religion, or, in other cases, the conduction of the census itself has emerged as a political issue. The United States does not collect information on religion in its census, the product of the historic separation of church and state in the country; one resultant problem, as identified by Warner (1993: 1061), is that ‘firm data are hard to come by on the religious profile of the new immigrants and other expanding minorities’ in the country’s quickly changing society. In other countries, the censuses themselves have become politicized; Bosnia has not conducted a census since 1991, in the main because it would confirm that Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims) are now a majority in the country. Given that religion served as the central cleavage between the respective ethnic groups—Croats (Catholics), Serbs (Orthodox Christians), and Bosniaks (Muslims)—the conduction of a census is viewed as potentially explosive, as it would affirm the effectiveness of the Serbs ethnic cleansing campaigns during the 1990s. The hesitance

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23One respondent in Buryatia listed Jediism as their religion in my survey.
in conducting a census reflects the complex negotiation of counting that occurs in multiethnic societies.

Second, work in sociology on religion can be critiqued for its methodological nationalism. This term is variously employed in the social sciences (Chernilo 2006)—early interventions critiqued the self-reproducing nature of theoretical interventions with the nation-state, what Agnew (1994: 69) refers to as ‘a territorial definition of ‘society’,’ while more recently Wimmer and Schiller (2002) argue for the more thorough reconsideration of the nation-state as the a priori unit of analysis and theoretical engagement in light of globalization and associated processes like migration. Here I use methodological nationalism in the former sense—to critique the idea of the nation-state as the natural, territorialized component of the international system—though I recognize the validity of the more recent, social theoretical critiques. In essence, the equation of society to the territory of the nation-state continues to plague writings in the sociology of religion, particularly those that engage in quantitative analysis and use data collected at the scale of the nation-state. In a broad sense, this critique is not original. Sassen (2003: 5), for example, has noted how the social sciences—with the exception of geography—have not problematized the national scale; ‘the consequence has been a tendency to take it as a fixed scale, reifying it, and, more generally, to neutralize the question of scaling, or at best to reduce scaling to a hierarchy of size.’ Data collected at the national scale is convenient to analyze, but is often not sufficient for the diversity of processes occurring in a given society.

Third, and linked to the prior critique, sociological attempts to evaluate the societal function of religion often ignore the importance of place in evaluating practice and belief; Agnew (1989: 15), in considering the devaluation of geography in the social sciences, writes that
‘place’s association in the academic mind with parochialism and localism has become so deep-rooted that the idea of place as the structuring or mediating context for societal relations seems strange and out of temper with the national-society focus of most contemporary social science.’

With the transition from the community to the society as the object of analysis for much sociological inquiry, the rise of nationalism as the legitimating ideology of the state, and the increased formulation of society as a placeless as a result of modernization—including the process of secularization—place and context were further devalued. This occurred with respect to both the local and global, as ‘reference to local settings or to global processes was largely closed off by the nationalizing of social science and its subservience [particularly of sociology, political science, and economics] to the national state’ (Agnew 1989: 19). Though there has been an increased recognition of the importance of context in the two decades since, oftentimes the nation-state remains the primary unit of analysis; to reiterate the point made above—this is particularly true in the scientific study of religion, where cross-national datasets serve as the basis for longitudinal and contextual comparison. While religious processes at the global scale have been evaluated by authors questioning the secularization thesis, the local—or even the sub-national—is still deemphasized in the sociology of religion literature, particularly among those who use quantitative analysis and due to the individual level nature of such data. Though I will not explore the possibilities here, multilevel models have been widely used in both geography and related disciplines, as surveys typically collect data on residence and locale.

**Beyond Quantification: A More Complete Picture of the Geography of Religion**

This, in turn, raises a broader set of questions about the validity of responses to questions on religion in quantitative measures like surveys and censuses. Geographers, who have
effectively critiqued this tendency to reify the nation-state and national scale as is common in the social sciences, have not extended this analysis to questions on religion as evaluated sociologically (Wilford 2010, as noted below, is an exception). Overall, the response of geographers to this failure of sociology to adequately engage with the methodological nationalist and contextual critiques has been ambivalent. I first review how geographers have utilized quantitative data in considering questions on religion, before developing this critique in more detail.

In mapping processes like religion, it is necessary to distinguish between empiricism and empirical methodologies, while also recognizing that cartographic visualization can be used to make a range of arguments, including some that are not wholly empiricist. Examples include work that blends changes in the cartography of religious practice and resultant modifications in the landscape (Peach and Gale 2003). Empiricist arguments have, however, been closely linked to the mapping of religious belief as occurring in different geographic contexts (see Park 1994, Chapter Three, for a review of such work at the global and national scales). This literature builds on Zelinsky’s (1961) seminal article on the geographic distribution of religious practice in the United States, what he refers to elsewhere as ‘denominational geography’ (Zelinsky 1973). Zelinsky’s findings are not surprising. Catholics, for example, are concentrated in Massachusetts (the result of substantial immigration to this area by the Irish), southern Louisiana (the core of France’s colony in the present-day United States), and the southwest (most notably New Mexico and the Texas-Mexico borderlands, with their historical connections to Spain and, subsequently, Mexico). There are, of course, some spaces that are closely associated with specific faiths, such as Utah with Mormonism; this is despite the ‘diasporization’ of this group that has taken place in the past century and the in-migration to the state of non-Mormons (Meinig 1965). Though
certain pockets of faith exist across the American landscape, what is notable is the heterogeneity of America’s religious space. Writing subsequently on the country’s religious landscape, Zelinsky (2001) emphasizes the recency with which America was settled. During this process, the United States was conceptualized as a blank slate for a range of faiths to settle and demarcate their religious spaces through processes such as the construction of religious buildings; ‘virtually everywhere throughout the Neo-European realm, all or nearly all of whatever was sacred in the aboriginal scene was obliterated during and after the invasion by the newcomers’ (Zelinsky 2001: 569). Work mapping the spatial distribution of religions continues to rely on large-scale surveys, such as the World Christian Database (Warf and Vincent 2007). Updating the work of Zelinsky (1961) and Shortridge (1976), Jordan (2007) uses data from the Glenmary Research Center (collected in 2000 and disaggregated to the county level; see Jones et al. 2002) to evaluate religious adherence and diversity in the United States.

Census results, like those from Great Britain’s 2001 national census, provide further insight into spatial patterns of religious practice at both the scale of the nation-state and the locality. Pacione’s (2005; 2009) studies of religious affiliation in Scotland and the Scottish city of Glasgow, respectively, are recent examples in the geography literature; in the latter case, religion is an important factor in understanding how and why ethnic groups settle together (Pacione 2009). Though this research provides helpful empirical insights into patterns of religious practice in Glasgow, it is hindered by two problems commonplace in the fields of cartography and spatial analysis: the modifiable areal unit problem (MAUP; Fotheringham and Rogerson 1993) and the ecological fallacy (Openshaw 1984). The ecological fallacy—or the issues that arise when data collected at a predefined geographic scale are marshaled to explain or stand proxy for individual characteristics—is an inherent problem in much census data;
Openshaw (1984: 17) suggests, as a result, that ‘census statistics can be biased as much by the geographical boundaries that are used to report them as by questionnaire design and the code books used to categorise the responses.’ Similarly, the MAUP—defined as the potential for different patterns or results to emerge when data are aggregated to different scales or areas—is, according to Pacione (2009: 371), ‘an inherent and largely unavoidable element of spatial analysis.’ While this is generally true, such concerns must still be acknowledged when working with census results and other large-scale but geographically defined survey information. A third important set of critiques beyond the ecological fallacy and MAUP questions the reliability of census data more broadly, including criticisms that census districts do not correspond to locales—those spaces that take on wider importance in an individual’s life (as defined by Agnew [1987])—and that census data force individuals into categories that are neither appropriate nor accurate (see Christopher 1992 for an example).

Other studies have attempted to move beyond the basic mapping of religious communities by geography. In a wide-ranging consideration of the interaction of religion and geography, Park (1994) suggests that religion is one of a set of social identities that affects demographic processes like population growth and migration, and he notes the high birth rates in Muslim countries, which in turn contribute to high rates of population growth. Peach (2006), also using data from the 2001 British census, considers the correlation between religious practice and ethnicity in greater London; his key findings is that the Great Britain’s Muslim population is ethnically heterogeneous and exhibit low levels of residential segregation as a whole (though specific ethnic groups within the wider Muslim community are segregated).

As indicated above, my main critique of the work of Zelinsky, Pacione and others is that data are presented cartographically without deeper consideration of the varied interpretations of
the role of religion in a given context, the strength of belief and the frequency of practice, and the role of religion as a discursively negotiated social category. The key point is that while geographers have successfully mapped religious distributions, such work is hardly very difficult; this research has not engaged with the relationship between space and practice nor has it done enough to connect such distributions to wider social, cultural and political practices. Though I agree with MacDonald’s (2002: 63) characterization of such work on the geography of religion as ‘concerned with areal patterns within a passive space rather than treating space as an active part of social action,’ my approach is distinct from his emphasis on the production of space through worship. Rather, by foregrounding the contextual, I argue that geographers can uncover the variety of discourses that emerge around the topic of religion in a specific place.

**Consolidating the Position of Geography in the Social Scientific Study of Religion**

One component of the contextual argument to be developed in Chapter Three is the analysis of small-scale survey data. I suggest that geography, with its recognition of the importance of place and well-developed critique of methodological nationalism, should engage with global and local trends in religious practice and belief. My point is that we know relatively little about religion as practiced by minorities in countries like the Russian Federation; as such, a contextual approach that evaluates minority religions in their locations while also considering the picture at the national scale, is needed. To reiterate, this approach should be distinguished from prior work in geography on small-scale religious communities, which rely primarily on interviews or ethnographic techniques (cf. Henkel and Šakaja 2009; Kong 2002); oftentimes such work engages with the idea of context, but does not do so quantitatively.
Developing this point further, what constitutes a contextual approach to the study of religion? First, this methodology should be positioned against engagements with religion in cognate social scientific disciplines. Anthropology is most closely associated with situated, ethnographic research, a qualitative methodology that is ‘best understood as data [enhancer]’ through which ‘it is possible to see key aspects of cases more clearly’ (Ragin 1994: 92 quoted in Spickard 2007)—though the qualitative approach has gained increasing credibility among sociologists studying religion (Spickard 2007). This should be positioned against the traditional use of quantitative methods in sociology, which relies on three methodological foundations: a system of classification (i.e. answers should be linked to predetermined categories); random sampling in order to extrapolate the results from the survey to the general population; and an adequate sample, with a sufficient sample size (Voas 2007b). As a result, ‘most quantitative research…condense[s] data into simpler, more homogenous packages’ (Spickard 2007: 122). This leads, in turn, to the argument that categories are socially constructed (Jones 2009); though humans cognitively want to categorize and bound objects, events, and areas of study, oftentimes this process reifies categories, making them more substantial than they in fact are—though opened-ended questions can address this concern. In sum, there is a tension in approaches to religious topics between the micro-level studies traditionally reliant on qualitative methodologies survey and other large-scale quantitative approaches. As indicated above, this division is broadly apposite in geography as well.

I propose a contextual approach, one which blends the qualitative and the quantitative through the use of multiple methods, to address this continuing divide in the study of religion. Some scholars have previously proposed a multiple methods framework for considering questions on religion. Dittmer (2007), for example, proposes focus groups and ethnographic
research as entry points for investigating how religion is ‘popularly’ perceived—how an active audience engages with and articulates religious themes. The broader aim of this intervention is to reconcile religion and geopolitics; Dittmer (2007: 738) writes that ‘political geographers should view religion as systems of meaning derived from cultural resources by active agents [religious leaders, laypersons, and non-believers], who come to affectively embody those meanings and create geopolitical spaces.’

The empirical component of this dissertation builds on the ideas of secularization as summarized by Wilford (2010)—that the differentiation of societies has led to a variety of outcomes that are scalar-contingent—while further exploring an idea that Wilford only briefly touches on: the contribution of the geographic ideas of place and context to sociological research in religion. Specifically, this dissertation considers the relevance of place to understanding variations in outcomes of secularization. Writing from geography as disciplinary perspective, I am interested in how place—operationalized through the idea of context—works. Agnew (1989: 15), writing about the devaluation of place in the social sciences more generally, suggests that ‘place’s association in the academic mind with parochialism and localism has become so deep-rooted that the idea of place as the structuring or mediating context for societal relations seems strange and out of temper with the national-society focus of most contemporary social science.’ More recently, Gökarıksel (2012: 5) has suggested that defining and contesting the religious and the secular is ‘place-based, meaning that they are formed through the specific set of political and social relations, ideologies, and practices in particular sites.’ These related observations lead to a set of questions that I will address through the case study of Buddhism in the Russian Federation. Are the processes associated with secularization—the separation of church and state and decline in religious practice and belief among individuals—occurring in specific geographic contexts?
How do the public and private functions of religion interact, particularly through the concept of national identity? Furthermore, do differences exist between different religious communities in the areas under consideration?

In sum, despite critiques of the quantitative measuring of religion—that the complexity of religious practice and belief precludes the straightforward classification of individuals into predetermined categories—I view this research approach as an important component of understanding the role of religion in people’s lives. To quote Voas (2007b: 144) regarding the use of quantitative methods: ‘the act of selecting and defining variables imposes a rigor and openness to criticism that can more easily be escaped in discursive treatments of the same phenomena.’ As discussed below, in studying Kalmykia I complement my survey with interviews with religious leaders and focus groups among residents of the republic; I expand on this multiple methods approach in the following chapter.

**Conclusion: Religious Practice and Belief in the Post-Secular Age**

‘Post-secularism’ has emerged as a frequently employed neologism in the past decade. This position is variously defined; some scholars employ it in opposition to the condition of secularism, and view the post-secular as a period of return to the religion tenor as existed prior to the secular age. Others use post-secularism as a way to unsettle the binary of the religious/secular, to acknowledge that each of these elements can be simultaneously relevant (Geoghegan 2000). As summarized above, Casanova’s approach to secularism is in fact post-secularist—he acknowledges the complexity of secularism as differentiation, with religious actors losing their position of dominance in a given society but subsequently carving out other spheres of influence.
For geography, it is important to acknowledge that the post-secular is a contested concept. Kong (2010: 764) cautions against labeling contemporary events as a reemergence, rather than a continuance of religion’s historic function; still, ‘some of the “evidences” of secularization need to be interrogated’ through geographically informed research. This is particularly true in post-communist states, where religion was actively suppressed by the government (Kong 2010). Despite valuable recent work on religion in the discipline, geographers have not moved beyond the specificity of selected case studies, resulting in the resultant failure of the discipline to position itself in the wider consideration of religion in the social sciences.

Wilford’s (2010) recent intervention is the exception; in evaluating Casanova’s theory and the work of other writers in the secularization literature, he argues that secularization is contingent across geographic scales. In the West, counter-secularization is ‘confined to scales where their expression does not encroach on secular subsystems such as law, government, and the market’ (Wilford, 2010: 339); furthermore, ‘while it is at the macro-sociological level and larger geographic scales that secularizing forces are most clearly dominant and effective, there are still well-researched manifestations of secularization at smaller levels and scales.’

Diverging from Wilford (2010), I have argued in this chapter that a second research tradition in work on the geography of religion—referred to by Zelinsky as ‘denominational geographies’—should recognize the messiness and contingency of the post-secular age. The quantitative analysis of religion in both sociology and geography has reproduced the idea of methodological nationalism and deemphasized the importance of place. This is particularly

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24 Post-secularism and post-materialism—the set of values that deemphasizes notions of economic and physical security to privilege aspects like individualism and self-expression—are complementary. In discussing the latter, Inglehart (2000) suggests that a post-materialist orientation results from a ‘subjective sense of security’ and that ‘prolonged periods of prosperity tend to encourage the spread of postmaterialist values.’ This argument prefigures the one he makes with Pippa Norris (2011 and discussed above)—that more secular societies have higher levels of material security.
problematic in the latter discipline, where the critique of scale has been sustained (Sassen 2003). Quantitative methods as a type of analysis should not be abandoned; the case for evaluating religious practice and belief through quantitative research is made by Voas (2007b: 145):

‘without empirical evidence of this kind we have nothing but case studies, the representativeness of which would be impossible to judge.’ Because secularization occurs at scales other than the national or world-regional, and following from the important role that quantitative analysis can play in the analysis of religious questions, I have argued that geographers should engage with more nuanced, localized surveys of quantitative data, to gain insight into changes in practice and belief as occurring between the national and local.

It is, of course, difficult to generalize about surveys conducted in specific locales. As such, quantitative analysis should be only one component of a more complete approach. To digress, briefly: in his work on secularism, Charles Taylor (2007) posits a third way to conceptualize the secular in contemporary society, beyond the traditional public-private binary. Evoking the idea of ‘fullness,’ Taylor (2007: 3) writes that ‘belief in god is no longer axiomatic,’ and that people can experience life without a role being played by God; ‘secularity in this sense is a matter of the whole context of understanding in which our moral, spiritual or religious experience and search takes place.’ Without delving too deeply into the philosophical underpinnings of Taylor’s argument, I would like to suggest that the consideration of the role of religion in a given society is, in part, dependent on the geographical concept of place and the discursive mediations that occur in a given place. The following chapter suggests that Taylor’s concept of fullness in the study of religion can be achieved through a contextual approach, which recognizes the problematics of studying religion but works around these through a more robust theorization of context and the triangulation of multiple methodologies.
Chapter Three: Opening the ‘Black Box’ of Context: Redefining a Term, and its Methodological Consequences

Introduction

While geography draws on a suite of unifying ideas—place, space, scale, and territory are those most commonly invoked—there is less consensus on methodological approaches and in turn on how knowledge is generated and verified and the generalizability of findings across the specific case studies considered. Some might argue that this methodological variety is one of the discipline’s strengths in comparison to other social sciences; both anthropology and political science have been constrained by the dominance of particular techniques, ethnography and quantitative analysis respectively. To quote Baerwald’s (2010: 497) recent Association of American Geographers Presidential Address: ‘geographers are not bound by approaches,because we employ a broad range of perspectives and tools, and we appreciate the value of using multiple methods to consider different aspects of the same problem.’ I endorse the argument that one of geography’s strengths is its variety, though at the same time I want to make the case for further refinement of our methodological approach. This approach, in turn, suggests the possibility of greater epistemological consistency; rather than privilege positivism, postmodernism, or one of the other ways of ordering knowledge, I argue that by foregrounding ‘method’ geographers can articulate a clearer understanding of the discipline’s intellectual focus. Though certain types of research methods should be used for certain topics (for example, ethnographic work in the study of cultural change at the local scale), in this dissertation I advocate for the use of multiple methods by geographers who engage with social scientific questions in their geographic context. In turn, I suggest that a more robust theorization of how we engage methodologically with
this idea of context could bring clarity to the geographic project, both within the discipline and in positioning ourselves in the broader social scientific enterprise.

**Context as Concept**

Context is a protean concept, one that is often invoked but seldom engaged with; even working definitions are infrequent. As Barnett (1999: 280) observes: ‘the importance of context is…widely taken for granted in human geography. But there is very little explicit consideration of just what constitutes ‘context.’ In fact, context often serves as a sort of explanatory black box.’ This failure to identify how context is being operationalized is problematic. Castree’s (2005: 342-343) statement on the use of the term ‘context’ in recent ‘case studies’ of neoliberalism is broadly applicable: ‘it is currently unclear which of the meanings of context are in play in individual studies and is thus unclear in what specific sense the published case studies are ‘cases’.’

Drawing from Barnett (1999), Castree (2005), and Agnew (1987, 1996a), I identify two main uses of the term ‘context’ in human geography. The first is the association of context with geographic place, broadly categorized. Places have historical legacies, political attributes, and societal characteristics taken on by residents that define their particularity, and in turn give these geographical settings empirical relevance to explaining broader theoretical concepts. Moreover, places are linked to processes playing out beyond the locality (at, for example, the national and global scales), which ‘frame the range of possible political activities and actions for human agents’ (Agnew 1996a: 132). Barnett (1999: 279) provides a similar summation of the term’s use: ‘‘context’ is shorthand for a sensitivity towards the ways in which general processes are embedded, modified and reproduced in particular, local places.’ Recent writings in political
geography, most closely associated with electoral studies, suggest that contexts are more than ‘anonymous background settings for compositional analyses’ (O’Loughlin 1988: 122), and rather have a measurable effect on political behavior (Cox 1969; Agnew 1987; Johnston 1991; for a different view on the endurance of place as context, see Sack 1988; for a rejection of the importance of context, see King 1996). Following Agnew (1996a) and Ethington and McDaniel (2007), I refer to this use as context-as-place.

The second use is the connecting of context to the case study, a link made by Castree in the above-quoted intervention. This application of context is multi-scalar—the global, the national, and the local are all contexts (Castree 2005; Cox and Mair 1988; O’Loughlin 1988). These three applications of context-as-case study—to the local, national, and global scales—are related, but need to be distinguished nonetheless. While localities can be identified as the site of a case study, so too can the global and national; as such, the close association with place in the first category becomes generalized to the case study in the second category. As a result, context is not delimited to the locality as it is in the first definition (though, to restate, processes at other scales do influence the characteristics of the locality and the political choices of its residents), but rather assumes an empirical or theoretical commonality across the scale under consideration. Following Cox and Mair (1989), I view context as multi-scalar, in that the global can be positioned as a context as validly as the local. Questions are considered ‘in context,’ with the term serving as a stand-in for the geographic locale (Agnew 1987) where the research is sited. In the chapter, I denote this use as context-as-case study.

Clearly, these two definitions are related and overlapping. I suggest that when context-as-case study is invoked, it can be aligned with the idea of context-as-place. Most case studies attempt to situate their research in the specific process under consideration at a range of scales,
while generating an understanding of the historical and contemporary conditions that make the selected research site relevant to answering broader theoretical and empirical questions. Even research that takes the global scale as its context often appeals to more local scale processes to substantiate its argument; for example, Taylor and his collaborators critique the idea of the ‘global south’ through an empirical analysis of airline connections between cities (Taylor et al. 2009). To reconcile these two uses of context, I adopt Agnew’s notion of context-as-place while suggesting that this approach legitimates the selection of a particular case study; by explicating the hierarchical-geographical context of a particular case—and this can apply to cases that are local as well as global—geographers can simultaneously address Castree’s concerns about the frequent failure to clarify the relevance—in terms of broader applicability and theoretical and empirical generalizability—of a selected case. I extend the idea of context-as-place by arguing for the value of the comparative approach endorsed by Ragin (1987) and underutilized in human geography.  

Proceeding from this point, my aim in this chapter is to make a case for the value of the contextual approach, basing this claim on a framework for a revised methodological approach, one which foregrounds the use of multiple methods. This, in turn, provides a basis for suggesting that a comparative approach is of value in human geography, a point I return to both in the conclusion and in the empirical chapters that follow. In presenting this revised methodological framework, I necessarily revisit the debate in geography between qualitative and quantitative research practices. The competing positions associated with the aim of and methods underpinning knowledge production are at the heart of the key debates of current relevance to geography. At the same time, any issue of social scientific interest necessarily means different

25 Ragin is not being employed here for qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) or fuzzy sets—the methods most commonly associated with his approach—but rather for developing the value of comparison in a more general sense.
things to different people; the methods employed to study these phenomena are often similarly varied. In an attempt to resolve this debate—or at the least to move it forward—I adopt Elwood’s (2010: 96) idea of ‘productive complementarity,’ which underscores different ways of knowing and types of knowledge production and endorses a multiple methods approach to the generation of geographical knowledge. Epistemological and methodological diversity, where possible, should be incorporated into contextual study.

Frequently, distinctions between methodological approaches result from debates over the ontological perspective implicit in the given research. The essential ontological division associated with the debate between the use of quantitative and qualitative methods in geography derives from how the research positions the social and cultural world; is the world predictable and coherent—a perspective that lends itself to a realist or positivistic approach—or is it shaped by the agency of individuals involved in the production of knowledge? This ontological problematic should be acknowledged by those who employ a mixed or multiple methods approach; to quote Elwood (2010: 98-99): ‘a significant challenge of mixed methods research lies in articulating a philosophy of knowledge and accepted practices for developing knowledge that can not only accommodate but also integrates multiple ways of knowing.’ A second important distinction should be made between mixed methods and multiple methods.

Foundationally, this chapter argues for multiple methods as a research approach in human geography; mixed methods imply simultaneity in the research process that I did not rely on in my study.26

26 I did, however, employ mixed-methods—which ‘may be taken as referring to a situation whereby two or more methods are used to address a research question at the same stage in the research process’ (Philip 1998: 264)—during focus groups, asking respondents to write down responses to a series of questions on what it means to be Buddhist in addition to participating in the focus group conversation.
Rather, interviews informed focus group discussions, and both served as basis for testing and generating new questions that were subsequently incorporated in the survey measure. This follows Philip (1998: 271), who suggests that ‘qualitative research may be carried out to establish research questions which will subsequently be addressed by means of quantitative methods.’ In my case, a number of survey questions resulted from the interview and focus group conversations in the capital. Specific examples included questions on the importance of the Dalai Lama to the development of Russian Buddhism, the place of religious education in secular schools, and questions on both personal observance of religious holidays and the creation of a national religious holiday acknowledging Buddhism.

To summarize, in this chapter I am interested in the second of the two challenges identified by Elwood noted above: the consideration of practices associated with knowledge development. This leads to two initial arguments. First, I suggest that the blending of interviews, focus groups, and surveys is the most appropriate methodological approach for contextualizing the geographic process under consideration, a multiple methods approach that questions the division of geographical knowledge production into traditionally accepted epistemological categories (Elwood 2010). Second, and related, I suggest that the multiple methods approach used in this project is particularly apposite for generating knowledge about previously understudied subjects.

To make an argument for these positions, the chapter first returns to the two uses of context introduced above. I suggest that a thorough development of context as a conceptual idea rests on a more comprehensive methodological approach to answering geographic questions, one that incorporates interviews, focus groups, and surveys in the research process. To further substantiate this argument, I reflect that the benefits of this multiple methods approach are
closely associated with the generation of knowledge about understudied cases and processes. In concluding this chapter, I reiterate the value of this multiple methods approach by suggesting its facility for making comparisons across contexts by engaging with a variety of relationships and processes. Following Ragin (1987: 14), ‘the comparative method attends to configurations of conditions; it is used to determine the different combination of conditions associated with specific outcomes or processes.’ In the subsequent empirical chapters, I explicate the value of comparison across both religions and the geographic contexts of practice in contemporary Russia.

Context and its Uses in Contemporary Human Geography

The argument introduced above necessitates, first, a working definition of context. Before proposing such a definition, I want to further review how context has been employed in human geography in the past quarter-century and highlight the critiques of such usage. Context has frequently been counterpoised with composition—most commonly class, though other demographic characteristics are increasingly relevant—in the geographic framework, with the task of explaining individual behavior (Johnston 1986; O’Loughlin 1988; Agnew and Duncan 1989). Other social sciences, most notably political science, have privileged composition and only incorporated context in an uncritical sense, either through the facile acceptance of the nation-state as social and political container or a consideration of how memberships in social groups, organized in geographically limited areas, affect individual action (Agnew 1996a). This debate has played out most clearly in the electoral geography literature (see Cox 1969 for a foundational statement), where the push to distinguish context as a geographical idea led Agnew (1996a) to consider how political choice is influenced by a range of trans-scalar, contextual factors: the dynamism of labor markets in the current world system (global/regional), the
embedded nature of places in states and resultant center-periphery tensions (national), and the manner in which micro-geographies, at the local scale, condition individual action (local). In a sense, Agnew’s approach is reproducing Taylor’s (1982) materialist framework for political geography—in which the world-economy is the scale of reality, the nation-state the scale of ideology, and the local-urban the scale of experience (see also O’Loughlin 1988).

Part of the problem with invoking context is distinguishing how the term is being used in an epistemological sense. Context-as-place—Agnew’s (1996a; 133) hierarchical approach that suggests ‘that political behavior is inevitably structured by a changing configuration of social-geographical influences as global-local connections shift over time’—privileges geographical situatedness (Ethington and McDaniel 2007); the emphasis in political research since the behavioral turn on the individual, along with the significant theoretical issues of the modifiable area unit problem and the ecological fallacy, has limited the wider adoption of context-as-place. In electoral studies, the argument that context is relevant to explaining political behavior is frequently critiqued; one of the key debates in political geography in the past two decades centers on the equation of context with the neighborhood effect or force field bias, as opposed to Agnew’s (1996a) definition provided above, which moves ‘beyond the universal/particulars polarity into a historical-geographical framing’ of context (Agnew 1996b: 167). This does not address broader critiques of the contextual approach in political geography. According to McAllister (1987: 45), contextual effects are ‘either nonexistent or, at best, negligible’ and do not appropriately incorporate individual level data. In response to Agnew’s piece, Gary King (1996: 160) has argued that context is irrelevant to the explanation of social scientific phenomena; if political scientists, geographers, and others are working towards generalized understandings of such phenomena, it should be the aim of geographers to ‘try as hard as possible to make context
not count.’ The problem with this argument is that there is an expectation of independence that is inherently questionable in geographic approaches to statistics; in inferential statistical work, ‘there is no context save that of the specific problem itself to guide the investigator’ (Gould 1970: 445).

I do not intend to suggest that debates over context have been strictly limited to electoral studies in human geography. The increasing import of context is more widely apparent in the development of the case study as a key component of the human geographers’ toolkit. In such instances, the case study is intended to serve as the particular that illustrates the proposed general applicability of the theoretical proposition or empirical conditions being analyzed; the singular case study cannot prove this applicability or generality. The problem is, however, that without this generalizability, political, social, or economic processes are simply things that happen at random across geographic space. Moreover, without a clear articulation of what context means, the case study loses both its theoretical and empirical purchase. Castree (2005), in reviewing the recent literature on neoliberalism, argues that those who invoke the concept of the case study need to clearly state how the specific context of the case study is being operationalized, while also recognizing the possibility that the case could be more intellectually valuable for its distinctiveness rather than its universality. What is needed, in sum, is a clear articulation of how context is being used in the specific intervention. On this question of use it is worth quoting Castree’s intervention at length:

Context is one of those polysemic terms that means multiple things in geographic discourse. For some it is a synonym for all things empirical or ‘concrete’ (Marx’s famous ‘unity of the diverse’). For others context is a synonym for the scale of everyday life: that is, place or the local scale. However, as Cox and Mair (1989) insightfully argued many years ago, both conceptions of context are only partially valid. In the first place, one can theorize about context insofar as there may be processes specific to a context that can be isolated
conceptually. Secondly, Cox and Mair also pointed out that context is necessarily multi-scalar. The local is not the only scale at which multiple enduring and contingent phenomenon come together empirically. For instance, the global is as much a ‘context’ as the many ‘locals’ that comprise it; it is not some homogenous scale overlaying all that exists below it. (Castree 2005: 542)

Following Castree, any use of the term ‘context’ should acknowledge the syncretic quality of geographical process; hence, the concept integrates the scale of experience and the nexus where these local-urban practices interact with other trans-scalar processes.

The difficulty of generalizing specific contextual processes to the theoretical remains, however, and in turn the equation of context with case study as critiqued by Castree (2005) is similarly problematic. This approach frequently leaves unanswered an important set of questions: what is the justification for selecting this specific case study, on what basis is the specific case relevant to the general process it seeks to explain, and what are the broader commonalities of the case under consideration to other cases or general theoretical processes? Rather than addressing these questions, invocations of the term ‘context’ often leave unexplained the reasoning, relevance, and applicability of the case study considered. Recognizing this, Castree (2005: 544; emphasis in original) in turn calls for greater engagement with the epistemological structuring of contextual research: ‘In many parts of human geography, I suspect that doing case research…is valued more highly than the hard work of figuring out how best to do case research.’

I agree with Castree’s call for further attempts to interrogate how best to do case study work; such reflection is necessary, though the expectation that it will be universally accepted is naïve—and undesirable. Research projects necessarily adopt different approaches depending on the training, background, and epistemological perspective of the researcher. And, as previously mentioned, different disciplinary traditions privilege different research techniques.
Acknowledging these problematics, I nonetheless propose a working definition that attempts to synthesize the ideas of context-as-place and context-as-case study as apposite to human geography.

I previously suggested that context-as-place is apposite in formulating such a definition, since it is an inclusive concept to which the notion of context-as-case study can be aligned. Context-as-place, at its heart, suggests that geographical factors—including objective aspects like territorial boundaries and elections, which reinforce either the locality or the nation-state as a place, and subjective elements, like place attachment and affinity for one’s place of birth (see Relph 1976)—affect processes like political decision-making and social action. The case study serves as a mechanism for understanding these particularities, how they influence reception and response to problematics associated with that specific case, and, ideally, how that case reflects more general characteristics.

The approach employed specifically counters the path-dependency arguments popular in comparative political science, particularly as applied to the post-communist states. To summarize, path-dependency suggests that institutional legacies, preexisting characteristics, and cultural institutions all structure political and economic outcomes (see Johnson 2001, though she endorses a path-contingent approach). In this framework, decisions made at ‘critical junctures’ in turn condition and potentially constrain the options available when making future decisions (Johnson 2001: 254). A critique of this approach, by Thelen (1999), questions the overly historical and deterministic essence of this approach; path-dependency is found wanting when used to explain radical political change, or what Johnson refers to as ‘periods of extraordinary politics’ (Johnson 2001: 255). This failure to adequately engage with instances of dynamic change is a weakness of the path-dependent approach; instead, I will argue that a multi-method,
contextual approach to political and social change forwards our academic understanding of political and social change without an overbearing dependence on preexisting institutional or historical conditions.

In turn, as a working concept, I define context as a place—broadly classed—that is conditioned by the geographical factors of space, politics, and identity; contexts can be parochial, regional, or national—this scalar multiplicity in turn links the term to the idea of the case study. By defining context thus, I am firmly situating the concept within geography, in that context is linked to the locality and scale. This approach is distinct from other social sciences, most notably linguistics and anthropology, where one of the key arguments is that context is produced solely through discourse (see Duranti and Goodwin 1992). While discourse is relevant to my approach, by foregrounding the local and the interdependences that emerge across scales in defining context, the discussion moves towards the incorporation of the idea of place. I also distinguish my approach from studies in political science, which privilege the term ‘levels of analysis;’ as Singer (1961; 77) notes in his classic treatment of the idea, in the study of political questions ‘the observer may choose to focus upon the parts or upon the whole, upon the components or upon the system.’ While geographers usually explore connections between scale, political scientists generally do not (see also Ethington and McDaniel 2007). As Castree notes, the global (and, it follows, other scales like the nation-state or regional) can also be the context in which processes play out; hence, the local is no longer given as the scale of experience.

Castree’s question—how best to do case research?—is considered in the remainder of the chapter. Moving towards a ‘methodology of particulars’—to modify the title to Castree’s (2005)

27 Scale has long been a concept of importance in human geography, and refers to the levels of analysis at which geographers study human and physical processes. Marston (1999) has suggested that scale is socially constructed, and though this article has inspired widespread debate on the validity and usefulness of scale, the concept remains important to human geography’s organizing framework.
piece—I suggest that multiple methods can help geographers uncover the multiplicity of actors, discourses, and positionalities that affect the outcome of research. I reflect on the appropriateness of multiple methods to contextual research, arguing for an approach that blends context-as-place and context-as-case study through an emphasis on the comparative. The hierarchical-geographical explication of place in turn serves as the basis for justifying the selection of the case under consideration. Acknowledgement of discourse and the discursive construction of reality is a necessary component of this approach; by combing interviews, focus groups and surveys I am necessarily drawing on different forms of knowledge production and discursive engagements with research subjects.

This approach rests on three assumptions that should be articulated before proceeding. First, I believe that scale as an analytical category is still relevant to human geography. Rather than endorsing the recent proposal by Marston, Jones and Woodward (2005: 420) to excise scale from human geography—a proposal which would also call into question the value of context as a geographic concept—I will explore those ‘hybrid models that integrate vertical and horizontal understandings of socio-spatial processes,’ the middle path proposed by Marston et al.in their reevaluation of scale.28 The binaries of horizontal (level) and vertical (size) geographies rest on distinct vantage points ‘from which those territories are imagined,’ and the conflation of the two attenuates the strength of a separation made through the research process. In the proposed framework, within a specific research context the different actors engaged with offer distinct interpretations of the socio-spatial process under investigation. In the research discussed below, actors constantly frame themselves with respect to other points in the network of space that is the

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28Marston, Jones and Woodward (2005) suggest that scale as traditionally operationalized—that is, as a hierarchy—relies on an assumption of agency and outcome at predetermined levels. Instead, they propose a flat ontology that privileges diversity and variety.
Russian Federation or the international Buddhist community. Second, this chapter does not attempt to add to the theoretical discussion on the role of discourse in political geography (see Müller 2008), beyond recognizing that discourse is implicit in the process of research and knowledge generation. In point of fact, I prefer the term ‘conversation’ to ‘discourse,’ as it implies equality between researcher and subject that I tried to cultivate during my research. To reiterate, my primary interest is a methodological one. Third, geographers have long held that the value of our disciplinary approach lies in the engagement with geographic concepts and places—the world ‘thickly known’ (Toal 2003). Such research can occur at a variety of scales; the waning of world-systems theory as a theoretical approach can be attributed to an increased engagement with the local scale—the scale of experience—that moves beyond the urban as locality to consider other political sites: the neighborhood, the household, and the body (see, respectively, McDowell 1999; Secor 2005).

Using Context for Knowledge Generation

In foregrounding the methodological approach outlined below, I emphasize its relevance to the generation of knowledge. The three research approaches used—interviews, focus groups, and surveys—work together in complementary fashion; this builds on the concept of triangulation, which implies the cross-validation of research result through comparison across research methodologies. This is a recognized approach in human geography; to quote Valentine (2005: 112 cited in Longhurst 2010): ‘researchers can use multiple methods or different sources to try and maximize their understanding of a research question.’ Oftentimes, however, this process of knowledge generation is not clearly articulated. As Winchester (1999) notes, such data should not simply be aggregated. Rather, information and interpretation should both be
positioned with respect to the specific methodological approach used and posed as counterpoints to comparative cases (see further discussion below). I propose a revised framework for consolidating the explanation of multiple methods in the next section.

Before doing so, I want to establish the broader relevance of the contextual approach defined above; that is as the basis for knowledge generation regarding understudied topics. I take Buddhism in Russia as my example. Buddhism in Russia has been infrequently studied in the Anglophone literature (Snelling 1993); this is particularly true of Kalmykia (an exception is Sinclair 2008 and translations in Balzer 2009). Though I will further evaluate this literature in detail in Chapter Five, a preliminary review will establish the shortcomings of this limited literature as it currently stands. First, as occurred in other parts of the USSR, the religious demography of Kalmykia changed significantly during the Soviet short century. Religious practice at the organization level was forced underground; for individuals, religion became part of the domestic sphere, practiced in their homes. Within the Russian Federation, since 1991 Buddhism has experienced a sharp increase in its absolute number of religious institutions, such as places of worship, monasteries, and theological schools, with a more than tenfold increase in the number of such institutions from 1991 to 2003 (Krindatch, 2004). A similar pattern holds for Kalmykia.

Second, while much of the existing work on Kalmykia notes these infrastructural changes and the increased numbers of religious organizations, the literature offers little in terms of directly evaluating the nature of current religious practice. Moreover, when levels of religious adherence in the republic are compared to Russia as a whole, there appears to be a geographic effect, with levels of adherence substantially higher in comparison to survey results drawing on the general population (the same holds for religious practice among Muslims in Dagestan; see
Chapter Four). I used focus groups and interviews as the first steps in generating contextual knowledge. As I will discuss below, the results from these conversations did not clearly align; rather, a diverse set of interpretations regarding the relevance of Buddhism to ethnic Kalmyks emerged (where interviews, focus groups and surveys were all conducted). This complex narrative was then supplemented by a survey, conducted in the republic’s capital of Elista and four rural sample points (see Figure 5.4).

**Methods and Context: Proposing a Framework**

Kwan (2004) identifies two epistemological rifts that have occurred in the discipline of geography in the past century—between the physical and human branches of the subject and, in the latter case, between social-cultural and spatial-analytical geography. In turn, these two branches in human geography ‘are increasingly perceived or represented as irreconcilable spheres of geographical endeavors’ (Kwan 2004: 756). The second divide also occurs along methodological lines, with geographers in the social-cultural branch embracing qualitative methods during the past quarter century, in the wake of critiques of the quantitative revolution (though qualitative methods were used prior to the mid-1980s). Spatial-analytical geography, on the other hand, has continued to use quantitative methods, and more recently GIS, in its analytical toolkit.

This methodological division along quantitative-qualitative lines is superficial in some senses—mixed and multiple methods approaches to geographic research have a rich history (Philip 1998; Elwood 2010)—though it remains more broadly significant. In the recent literature in human geography, much of the work that effectively blends quantitative and qualitative approaches emphasizes hybrid practices in Geographic Information Systems (GIS) (Elwood
though the multiple methods framework has also been variously applied to population geography (McKendrick 1999; Graham 1999), land use/land cover change (Campbell et al. 2005), and, in a general sense, to the study of children’s geographies (Barker and Weller 2003; Langevang 2007; Hemming 2008). This last body of work suggests that multiple methods are effective at defusing the power relations between the adult researchers and the children being researched; as Langevang (2007: 270) reflects: ‘although the latent power inequalities cannot simply be lifted, they can be reduced in the research encounter by employing methods, which empower young people to retain some control over the knowledge that is being produced’ (see also Hopkins et al. 2011 on youth and religion in Scotland).

Part of the reason why the quantitative-qualitative divide remains relevant is that the effectiveness of mixed and multiple methods research as a research approach is still debated. As Elwood (2010: 94) has recently written, ‘the notion of mixed-methods research rests a bit uneasily alongside long-standing debates in geography that have sought to demarcate clear separations between quantitative and qualitative methods, or between positivist, humanist, post-structuralist, and other epistemological perspectives.’ This debate is, in essence, an epistemological one, with quantitative methods generally aligned with explanation—as Johnston (1982: 124) writes: ‘To many social scientists explanation implies a positivist epistemology; it suggests the uncovering of a causal mechanism that is general, and which allows prediction’—while qualitative methods allow the research to posit a world where interpretation is contingent, affected by the power relations between researcher and researched, and knowledge is non-essentialist. This interrogation of the nature, scope, and limitations of knowledge continues to define attempts to reconcile quantitative and qualitative methodologies.
In lieu of a predefined epistemological framework, I suggest that context serve as the organizing idea for the methodological approach proposed here. This precludes the implied endorsement of certain research objectives—for example, the empirical uniformity and universality associated with positivism. This approach does not valorize particular forms of knowledge production or privilege particular types of knowledge producers. Given the emphasis on the contextual—and if epistemological classification is taken as *de rigueur*—it approaches a critical realist epistemology (see Yeung 1997), as it is concerned with ‘the structures which generate outcomes via mechanisms…under specific contingent conditions’ (McKendrick 1999: 45). This approach attributes an important role to both quantitative and qualitative methodologies; as Yeung (1997: 57) writes: ‘qualitative methods…are necessary to abstract the causal mechanisms of which quantitative/statistical methods are oblivious…[while] quantitative methods, on the other hand, are particularly useful to establish the empirical regularities between objects.’

Despite an increasing recognition of their complementarity, multiple methods research in human geography has not incorporated quantitative analysis as one of its analytical approaches—rather multiple types of qualitatively oriented approaches (such as focus groups and semi-structured interviews) are employed in research described as multi-method (Darbyshire et al. 2005; Hemming 2008). In part, this is attributable to continued concern regarding the application of quantitative analysis in the discipline during the two decades following World War II, the quantitative revolution, and subsequent critiques of universality in a geographically diverse world. Multiple methods approaches have generally acknowledged the dynamics that exist between the researcher and the researched and the need for reflexivity due to the resultant
uneven positionalities (Langevang 2007). In the next sections, I trace the relevance of interviews, focus groups, and surveys to a multiple methods approach.

**Interviews, Focus Groups, and Surveys in Contextual Analysis**

In any research project, some individuals are necessarily more relevant to explaining the process under investigation; as discussed below, it is more appropriate to interview key informants—the head of Kalmykia’s Buddhists, Telo Tulku Rinpoche, is a relevant example—than to incorporate this individual’s knowledge through a large-scale survey (Cochrane 1998). Surveys do, however, serve the function of generating representative opinions of the general public on the political issues in question. Focus groups serve a mediating function, providing the opportunity for the investigator to explore topics of relevance in an iterative fashion, while also evaluating the effect of the questions of interest among groups that are specifically engaged with the topic of research. The following section seeks to triangulate interviews, focus groups and surveys as a multiple method research approach that helps to conceptualize geographic context-as-place and to generate new insights into previously understudied geographic regions and associated topics. I review the use of each of these techniques in contemporary human geography, before briefly discussing how each technique was implemented and briefly noting the associated research outcomes; the latter topic is discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.
Interviews

Interviews are a well-established component of the human geographer’s methodological toolkit (for recent examples, see Staeheli and Nagel 2006 and Nelson and Hiemstra 2008). This follows the wider recognition that interviews are a valid research technique, a validity which ‘rests on whether they can help elucidate the structures and causal mechanisms which underpin observable behaviour’ (Winchester 1996: 119) and is also indicative of the search for methodological alternatives to quantitative methods. Interviews are commonly placed along a continuum, from structured to semi-structured to unstructured (Longhurst 2010); this refers to the approach taken in the interview, whether formally designed and guided by the research, or semi-structured and dependent more on the interaction between research and subject, which varies across project. Interview subjects also vary across studies. Nelson and Hiemstra (2008) interview Latino immigrants in the Colorado mountain town of Leadville, while Staeheli and Nagel’s (2006) subjects are members of a similar demographic in Arab communities in Washington, DC, Los Angeles, CA, and Dearborn, MI; Kuus’s (2011) project, in comparison, involves interviews with high-level officials affiliated with the European Neighborhood Policy and resident in Brussels. Regardless of research subject and structured organization, I suggest that interviews are a formal type of conversation, effective at eliciting insights into the topic of interest by positioning the individual being interviewed as an ‘expert.’

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29 Crang (2002), in a review of qualitative methods as used in human geography, expresses some surprise at the extensive use of interview techniques instead of ‘immersive’ ethnography; in part, this is because it is easier and more time efficient to do interviews in comparison to ethnography. (Megoran [2006], for example, has advocated for the use of ethnography in considering political geographic research questions.) Whatever the reasons for interviews being more accepted as a research technique, I reiterate my position that interviews—or any single methodology—works most effectively in consonance with other, distinct approaches.

30 As discussed below, geographers have wrestled with notions of power and how they affect interview dynamics. Of central relevance to this point is that some interviews subjects might not see themselves as ‘experts.’
Some concern has been expressed in human geography regarding the methodological problems revolving around interviewing elites (Smith 2006). Smith’s critique is that political, economic, or societal leaders are commonly positioned through a misconceptualized notion of power, one that suggests that elites are more difficult to access, able to safeguard themselves against negative research outcomes, and more likely to manipulate research outputs in their favor. Rather, many of the concerns attributed to the power dynamics revolving around elite interactions are either inapplicable (for example, accessing elites is not necessarily more difficult in comparison to other social groups) or should be given broader consideration when evaluating the research process (including notions of positionality and the perception of the researcher as ‘expert’; see Elwood and Martin [2000]). I view engagement with elites as requiring a distinct methodological approach—that of interviews—based on their assumed expertise and close association with the topic under consideration; a similar point will be made below with respect to surveys.31 The element of power, when openly acknowledged, also factor in to the insights provided from interview research; ‘qualitative studies of élites can inform understandings in an unequal world’ (Crang 2002: 648).

Beyond Smith’s (2006) concerns regarding power, there are other drawbacks to interviews as a research technique. Interviews often run up against ethical concerns as outlined by institutional review boards, including concern as to whether the researcher is doing enough to protect the identity of the research subjects (see the recent forum in The Professional Geographer [Price 2012; Protecting Human Subjects Across the Geographic Research Process]).

31 As Kuus (2011: 1143) writes in discussing potential alternatives when conducting research among elites: ‘Common research methods like focus groups and participant observation are exceedingly difficult if not unviable.’ This is due, in part, to the insular nature of the foreign policy establishment, though Kuus can be critiqued for implicitly reproducing many of the assumptions about power that Smith questions.
for a general discussion of IRBs). Concerns regarding the positionality of the researcher—and regardless of subject—are widely noted, as well. Elwood and Martin (2000) are interested in the microgeographies that emerge in interview situations, specifically how the spatial location and conversational structure of the interview potentially influence power relations and positionality between interviewer and interviewee, while Rose (1997) reflects on the difficulty of reflexivity and the need to work through the doubts that arise during the research process.  

Although I recognize the importance of reflexivity and the consideration of how power dynamics necessarily affect the research process, from this point I reflect on interviews as a component on my research process through triangulation. This necessarily requires establishing the rigor of the interview work. Baxter and Eyles (1997) present a typology for rigor in such research; scholars should address the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of research results, rather than emphasize the epistemological and ontological perspectives to which interviews—as a form of qualitative research—appeal. (Or, at the least, rigor should be established in consonance with epistemological justifications.)

I will briefly reflect on the four bases of rigor as proposed. Credibility, which Baxter and Eyles (1997: 512) define as ‘authentic representations of experience’—or, are the interpretations offered valid?—is achieved through consistent selection practices, interview structure, and analytical strategies. With respect to selection practice, I employed a purposeful sampling, which targeted interlocutors of relevance to the topic. The interview structure was less rigorously framed, as they were either semi-structured or unstructured; often, I found that unstructured

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32 Though I do not emphasize it here, I agree with Rose (1997: 306) that reflexivity is a key component of the research process: ‘reflexivity in general is being advocated…as a strategy for situating knowledges: that is, as a means of avoiding the false neutrality and universality of so much academic knowledge.’ To distinguish, I view multiple methods and the triangulation of the research process as a form of reflexivity that strives for balance between partiality and objectivity.
interviews were more productive, as the interview subject spoke on topics of relevance without the limitations of my prepared script. There are other, more prosaic concerns; the unstructured interviews used in this research are nonetheless subject to ‘steering,’ as I tried to direct the conversation back towards the topics of interest. Given the low number of elite interviews in Kalmykia (n=9), the number was not large enough to analyze for common threads across conversation. Nor was this the intention of the interviews as initially conceived; rather, I viewed the interviews as a first step towards gaining familiarity with a novel topic, for the subsequent generation of the survey measure.

The transferability of interviews refers to ‘the degree to which findings fit within contexts outside the study’ (Baxter and Eyles 1997: 515). While I view transferability as broadly significant to the social sciences, the contextual approach that I am proposing in this chapter deemphasizes the importance of such generalizability; rather, I am arguing for understanding a place well, and suggesting that this is a relevant niche for geographers to fill. The interviews, on the particularly topic of Buddhism’s development in Kalmykia, are intended to be one component of the contextual approach for which I am advocating.

I consider the last two factors, dependability and confirmability, together. The dependability of interviews is contingent upon reproducibility in its basic sense: can a researcher return to the initial conversations to verify the claims made? Similarly, can another scholar return to these conversations to check their validity? This is usually achieved through the documenting of field notes or audio-transcription of interviews; in this project, I transcribed field notes from each interview after they were over. Interviews were not recorded primarily due to their informal, unstructured nature. Moreover, I was concerned that recording the interviews would negatively affect the willingness of my interlocutors to speak openly on the topics of interest.
Confirmability is usually assured by addressing the other three bases sufficiently; this includes the practice of auditing prepared research materials (see Bradshaw 2001).

The interviews conducted in Kalmykia as part of this project were with social and political leaders: Telo Tulku Rinpoche, the head of Kalmykia’s leading Buddhist organization; the rector of Kalmyk State University, and a member of the republic’s khural, or parliament. Among the religious leadership, a key theme running through these conversations was the tension between the outward development of Buddhism—through the construction, for example, of temples—and the lack of private reflection regarding religion as a set of values and social mores. Non-religious elites, on the other hand, generally praised the religious revival as important to the continued development of Kalmyk national identity, something that should necessarily occur within the broader context of the Russian state.

The research outcomes from the interviews will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter Five. The shortcomings associated with the interview process are militated by the process of triangulation; by including focus groups and surveys in the research design, I intended to explore other types of conversations that individuals in Kalmykia were having about Buddhism and the religion’s revival.

**Focus Groups**

Broadly defined, focus groups are semi-structured discussions guided by a moderator and focusing on a research topic or topics. Originally used in market research, focus groups have been adapted as a research technique for investigating topics of interest in the social sciences. The use of focus groups in human geography as a research tool has increased in recent years, and has been utilized across a range of the discipline’s subfields (see, for example, Goss and
Leinbach 1996; Hopkins 2007; Skop 2006). The consensus among geographers is that focus
groups represent an appropriate forum for interpreting how individuals perceive ‘emic categories
of life’—ideas or processes with which individuals engage on a daily basis (Goss and Leinbach
1996: 117). Counterpoised to survey research, which is atomized to individuals, focus groups
facilitate the exploration of dialogues on the group scale, allowing the researcher to investigate
how opinions are formed and potentially altered through interaction (Goss and Leinbach 1996;
Megoran 2007). I also note that focus groups have been used by geographers working in the
former Soviet Union. Megoran uses this methodology (2007) in Central Asia to explore
questions of ethnicity and ethnic conflict. In his project, ethnic tensions were not directly
engaged; rather, through discussion and interaction, ethnicity emerged as a salient category for
participants involved in a boundary dispute in the region’s Ferghana Valley. The focus group is a
site where topics of relevance to all participants are discussed, opinions are shared, and
consensus is potentially reached through dialogue; at the least, the discussion format provides an
opportunity for participants to refine and potentially change their positions on certain topics.

As an opportunity for dialogue between group participants, with the intention of
stimulating conversation and debate on potentially contentious topics, the interaction of interest
in focus groups is between the various participants. Size should be limited so that no participants
feel left out; usually, focus groups contain between three and ten individuals. Familiarity or
comfort is an important aspect of the sessions; as Longhurst (2010: 105) writes: ‘the idea is to
attempt to simulate a group of friends or people who have things in common and feel relaxed
talking to each other.’ The moderator also plays an important role, though this part is
deemphasized in comparison to an interview, which is a more direct dialogue between
interviewer and interviewee (Longhurst 2010). A good moderator lets the conversation flow
between participants, and only intervenes when the discussion is exhausted or diverges from the topic of interest.

Hopkins (2007) suggests that focus groups, though now recognized as a valid research format in qualitative approaches to geographic questions, have fallen prey to a limited set of observations and approaches that have become entrenched due to a lack of writing on the groups as a research technique. He wants to shift the debate away from the discussions found in textbooks on qualitative methodologies, and instead draws on his personal experience conducting focus groups among Muslim men in Scotland. In agreement with Hopkins, I recognize that focus group research has limitations. For example, participants are less likely to report feelings of bias when they exist in comparison to one-on-one interviews, primarily due to the collective dynamic. In some cases, focus groups are dominated by one or two participants and limit the participation of other members of the group. In turn, I suggest that the ideal focus group does not exist. As with interviews, it is easy to steer focus group conversations in a direction towards the topic of interest, while among participants the possibility of the bandwagon effect potentially results in shifts in opinion or sentiment among the group’s participants. More prosaically, compositional factors such as size, setting, and whether or not participants knew each other prior to the group discussion result in varying research outcomes; it is difficult to state conclusively, however, that the outcomes from one group design are better than outcomes from an alternative.

I conducted three focus groups during fieldwork in Kalmykia. Participants were recruited through local contacts, including Professor Valery Badmaev at Kalmyk State University, and students who I met during my time in the region. Following Megoran (2007), although focus groups were composed, in part, of participants based of religious affiliation and ethnic identity, questions on these topics were not directly posed during the conversations. I provide further
details on participant selection and the conduction of the focus group in Chapter Five. In brief, focus group participants offered a variety of interpretations of the importance of Buddhism to contemporary Kalmyk identity; distinct from the interviews conducted, many focus group participants emphasized the personal importance of Buddhism. Few expressed broader concerns regarding the depth of religious consciousness in the republic—the primary critique made in many of the interviews. Rather, many participants noted the importance of the religion and its link to national identity; according to one, ‘Buddhism is a large part of what it means to be Kalmyk’ (F.G. 3, P. 3).

Surveys

Surveys are a long-standing research tool in geography, and though human geographers have turned away from quantitative methods as the discipline’s primary research approach, surveys are still frequently employed (Johnston et al. 2003). This ranges from large-N datasets—including the World Values Survey (O’Loughlin 2004; Schueth and O’Loughlin 2008), Eurobarometer (Dahlman 2004; Antonsich 2010), and national censuses (Pacione 2005)—to country- and region-specific surveys aimed at addressing specific questions of interest (Secor and O’Loughlin 2005; O’Loughlin and Ó Tuathail 2009). As discussed in Chapter Two, quantitative methodologies have been previously employed in the geographic study of religion. The value of surveys, both large and small, is manifest; the results of surveys—or closely related aggregations of population, like elections and censuses—are commonly the basis for public policy formulations and other sorts of political decisions made in aggregate. Similar to voting choices, responses to survey questions addressing political and social questions are context dependent; Secor and O’Loughlin (2005), for example, find that neighborhoods matter in
determining the strength of social and political trust in Istanbul and Moscow. Thrift (2002), in his forward-looking piece on the discipline of geography, notes that longitudinal large-N surveys are now evaluated through a variety of robust methods, including multi-level modeling and geographically-weighted regression.

My interest here, of course, is with small-N contextual surveys conducted in both Kalmykia and Buryatia. As a research method, surveys are not substantially different from structured interviews; respondents are asked to engage with a series of questions generated by the researcher. Often the structure itself is necessary for a productive interpretation of public and popular opinion; I doubt that many of the people surveyed thought about, as an example, the Dalai Lama’s importance to the development of Buddhism in Russia on a daily basis.

I suggest that surveys most clearly align with the evaluation of the effect of geopolitical discourse on the general public. The suggestion that surveys be linked to popular discourse is contentious. Surveys are not discursive, though they do provide a forum for respondents to share their opinions on a limited set of topics. Building on this, I view surveys as the most effective way to aggregate public opinion—a form of popular discourse—into a comprehensible picture.

Beyond the epistemological divisions between qualitative and quantitative approaches still present and previously discussed, I note other complications with survey analysis relevant to my project. A small-sample survey measure is particularly subject to these issues of design, sampling, and comprehensiveness. I take my experiences conducting the surveys in Russia as examples of each of these problems. First, the design and implementation of the surveys varied across the two republics. In Kalmykia a survey firm was hired to conduct 150 surveys in Elista, the republic’s capital, and 150 surveys at various points in the rural areas of the republic. This survey targeted ethnic Kalmyks; though a strong correlation was expected—and is present—
between ethnicity and religious affiliation, this is not direct sampling on the dependent variable of interest. As Russians living in Kalmykia predominantly reside in Elista, sampling ethnic Kalmyks randomly was more easily achieved at the rural survey sites. The stratification between urban and rural areas was maintained in the Buryatia sample, as well. In the Buryatia sample, however, observations are not independent but rather depended on local contacts and facilitators to find respondents willing to fill out the survey form. This frequently included individuals at their place of employment (in Russia, many individuals are underemployed; they usually responded with interest when asked to fill out a survey). In the rural areas, sampling was easier as individuals were frequently interested and willing to participate in the survey when solicited. In addition, and as I will discuss in more detail below, I sampled both ethnic Buryats and ethnic Russians, as well as members of other national groups in Buryatia, to further ensure independence on the question of religious affiliation.

Second, random-sampling at the local scale—the use of a random-route method or other stratified procedures—is very difficult to achieve. This is due, primarily, to the practicalities of accessing residences in urban and suburban environments in the Russian Federation. Most individuals live in apartment buildings and access to entryways is frequently limited. Moreover, when accessing entryways was possible, residents were frequently hesitant to answer the door and then devote 30-40 minutes to completing the survey form. As noted above, establishing such contact was easier in rural areas.

Third, such small-scale surveys remain subject to critiques of comprehensiveness. The sample sizes for each of the republics are small and geographically limited; the rural samples were collected in four sample points in Kalmykia and five in Buryatia. Also aligned with the question of comprehensiveness is the willingness of respondents to answer certain questions
included in the survey measure. Moreover, given the ‘individual’ nature of the research, respondents were frequently willing to leave questions on religion unanswered. For many, religion is a deeply personal question, and they are hesitant to share their true feelings on the subject with a stranger. More generally, it can be said that surveys are not comprehensive, and that this methodology is ‘necessary, but not sufficient’ to consider individuals in aggregate (Johnston et al. 2003: 159). 33 Given these limitations, I view survey work as most effective when complemented by other research techniques.

*For the Comparative in Human Geography: Towards a Conclusion*

The complementary research strategies advocated for in this chapter serves as the basis for the comparative analysis of both religions (Orthodoxy, Islam, and Buddhism) and geographic regions (Kalmykia and Buryatia) that follows. This approach follows Ragin (1987), who suggests combining qualitative methods—in his case through the use of Boolean algebra—and statistical analysis. In Ragin’s model, the qualitative is not supposed to supersede the quantitative; rather, these techniques are most effective in conjunction. However, a reliance only on quantitative analysis—what Ragin (1987: xiii) calls the ‘variable-oriented approach’—also falls short; ‘the simplifying assumptions that make this approach possible often violate commonsense notions of causation and sometimes pose serious obstacle to making interpretive statements about specific cases or even about categories of cases.’

Ragin, in developing his comparative approach, suggests that all social science is essentially comparative, even if the most common units of comparison are macro-scale societies,

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33 Though surveys were conducted in both Buryatia and Kalmykia, in the former the small sample size and lack of independence across observations precludes tests for statistical significance as employed in the latter. In Buryatia, rather, I relied on cross tabulations and intergroup comparison (between Buryats and ethnic Russians) to investigate trends on religious practice and belief.
i.e. nation-states. *Prima facie*, this presents a problem for geography. Geography as a discipline is about uniqueness—to quote David Lowenthal (1961: 242), ‘features of our shared universe seem unique, amorphous, or chaotic: the population of a country, the precise character of a region, the shape of a mountain.’ As such, it becomes difficult to make generalizations from particular cases; this is the critique that Castree makes of work that equates the case study and context, the failure to show the general relevance of the particular.

Gaddis (2002) simplifies the essence of the social scientific endeavor to the prediction of future events through general particularization, a process rooted in universal assumption. History, on the other hand, works through a process of particular generalization, a process of assumption that occurs within a determined temporal context, the past: ‘without such a procedure we’d have no hope of representing the past, because the alternative would be to replicate the past, an obvious impossibility’ (Gaddis 2002: 75). In this chapter, I have suggested that geographers undertake a similar intellectual project in spatially-limited contexts, an approach that should be embraced but also emphasize comparison, what I refer to as the ‘contextual comparative’ (Ragin 1987). I also have advocated for a multiple methods approach to such geographic engagement, which utilized interviews, focus groups, and surveys in tandem when investigating research questions of interest.

Drawbacks to this approach exist. First, researchers have limited time at their field site; the employment of multiple methods is time-consuming and costly. Second, the question of competence remains; some geographers feel more comfortable with certain methods, and choose instead to focus on these approaches rather than embracing diversity. More pointedly, Philip (1998: 265) writes that ‘negative attitudes towards quantification may reflect a situation in which some researchers have lost the skills, or never learnt the skills, of knowing how and when it
would be useful to use quantitative methods.’ Third, given the critiques of my particular project enumerated above, the argument that this project is spread too thin is easy to make. I do not deny the validity of this argument; however, I have generally viewed this research project as a pilot for further work exploring these themes of geography, religion, and their imbrication in the Russian Federation, a point I discuss further in the conclusion. I acknowledge the limits placed on comparison with respect to this project, given that I have not conducted focus groups or interviews in Buryatia. Though I do not explore this thread here, I view comparative research as relevant to moving beyond the context-as-place approach towards greater generalizability in research.

The proposed approach is not categorical, and does not preclude the use of other methodologies for developing geographic knowledge; ethnography and participant observation, for example, can both be used to answer important questions about everyday interactions with the political and its geographical manifestations (Hörschelmann and Stenning 2008; see specifically Megoran 2006 on the application of ethnography to border studies). Megoran (2006) has proposed the incorporation of ethnographic research into political geography. The main distinction in his piece is between emic and etic categories of knowledge, a division that interrogates how conceptualization and categorization of knowledge are produced. Rather than rigidly maintaining the emic and etic division, I have suggested a framework that moves towards the blending of approaches associated with these forms of knowledge.

In working towards a conclusion in this chapter, I suggest a (re)turn towards the comparative in human geography. The trending away from comparison is in large part due to the epistemological challenges associated with poststructuralism and postmodernism (Nijman 2007, cited in Ward 2010). That said, the comparative has not been completely disavowed in human
geography. Ward (2010) has recently made a similar suggestion in the study of cities, though what he terms a ‘relational comparative approach;’ in reference to cities, Ward (2010: 480) suggests that this approach ‘recognizes both the territorial and the relational histories and geographies that are behind their production and (re)production.’

In the chapters that follow, I advocate for a comparative approach that considers the historical and spatial imbrications of religion as a process and in its geographic context. Russia’s religious traditions—Orthodox, Islam, and Buddhism—have their own histories, geographic extents, and contemporary cultural relevance, depending on the group that practices them. Among Russia’s Buddhist communities, while similarities exist there are also points of divergence. In the subsequent two chapters (Five and Six) of this dissertation, I offer a comparison of the distinctions between Kalmykia and Buryatia.
Chapter Four: Minority Religions in Russia: Islam and Buddhism in History and Practice

Introduction

Religion is frequently positioned as an emerging category in social scientific research. One of the leading analysts of the sociology of religion, Steve Bruce (2003: 2), suggests that ‘religion is now back on the agenda of the political commentator,’ as religion serves as a motivating factor in a litany of political issues: terrorism and violence, civil war and domestic conflict, and identification with a particular ethnic or national group. Religion has gained wider credence in the social sciences because of its continued salience as a basis for social and political action; this is linked to the growing chorus in the academy that views the secularization thesis as wrong (see Chapter Two). The burgeoning of work in geography on religious topics led Kong to recently ask: ‘has the geographical study of religion finally arrived?’ (Kong 2010: 756). More to the point for political geographers, Agnew (2006: 183) has recently suggested that ‘religion is the emerging political language of the time.’ According to Agnew (2006, the upsurge in religiosity in a variety of geographic contexts—including the United States, the Middle East, and Latin America—is accompanied by the use of religion as a justification for political violence by non-state actors like al Qaeda.

These broad statements of importance aside, studies of religion in geography remain focused on specific issues in geographically delimited contexts. This point, which was noted in Chapter Two, is also reflected in recent publications on the geography of religion, including Wilford’s (forthcoming) case study of Rick Warren’s Saddleback Church, Beaumont’s (2008)
work on the role of faith-based organizations (FBOs) in addressing the needs of the urban poor, the geopolitical perspectives of American evangelicals (Sturm 2006, 2008; Dittmer 2007; Gerhardt 2008), as well as continued consideration of more traditional issues, such as religion’s impact on the landscape (e.g. Zelinsky 2001; Jones 2010), patterns of religious adherence and resultant diversity in the United States (Jordan 2007), and the spatial distribution of certain confessional populations, as measured through censuses (Pacione 2005). This last group of writings builds on the classic works on religion in geography, including Zelinsky (1961), Shortridge (1976), and Sopher (1967). In the following chapters, I work from a traditional geography of religion towards a more specific consideration of Buddhism in its geographic context, comparing religious belief and practice between Buddhists in Kalmykia and Buryatia.

To further explore the question of religious belief and practice, and to set the stage for this more focused discussion of Buddhism, this chapter evaluates survey data from the Russian Federation. This chapter directly engages with the first of the two research questions I introduced in Chapter One: what is the nature of religious practice in contemporary Russia, both at the country-wide scale and for three of the country’s traditional religions, Russian Orthodox, Islam, and Buddhism? I am particularly interested in the post-Soviet religious revival among the country’s religious minorities, specifically Buddhists and Muslims, as evaluated through three different surveys: the 2006 World Values Survey, a regional survey conducted in Dagestan in the fall of 2005, and a similar survey carried out in Kalmykia in the fall of 2010. Muslims and Buddhists are religious minorities in Russia, albeit ones that are legislatively recognized as

34 Building on this work, Beaumont and Dias (2008) have evaluated the role of FBOs in the provision of social welfare services in the Netherlands.

35 The Buryatia sample is not included in this analysis because of the non-random nature of the sampling procedure used in collecting the surveys. See further discussion in Chapter Six.
traditional faiths. I open with a history of the Soviet Union’s religious policy, consider in detail its effects on Muslims and Buddhists, and also discuss its overlap with nationalities policy among ethnic minorities. I then review the changes in religious policy begun under Mikhail Gorbachev and discuss their uneven implementation under the leadership of Boris Yeltsin, the Russian Federation’s first president. The next section discusses the findings of 2006 World Values Survey conducted on a countrywide scale. These results provide a general picture of attendance at religious services, both among the general public and those who specifically identify as Russian Orthodox. I then turn towards Russia’s minority religions, using the survey results from Dagestan and Kalmykia to provide a broad overview of religious practice among two of Russia’s minority religious communities, Islam and Buddhism.

**Gosateizm in the Soviet Union**

In his work on the Soviet secularization experiment, Froese (2008) comments on the novelty of the Soviet project. Never before had a state directly challenged the existence of God; the Soviets ‘hoped to expunge not only the existence of religious institutions but also daily expressions of spirituality and, most dauntingly, belief in a supernatural realm’ (Froese, 2008: 1). While the Bolsheviks had success in diminishing the social and cultural role of religious institutions and undermining individual belief among a large percentage of the population, their direct questioning of the existence of God failed to universally eradicate religious belief across Soviet society. In describing this agenda, Greeley (1994: 53) writes that ‘atheistic Communism thought of itself as pushing forward the inevitable process of secularization in which religion would disappear from the face of the earth.’ As both Froese and Greeley conclude, the Soviet
secularization experiment was a failure—in the post-Soviet period, God ‘seems to be alive and well and living in all Russia’ (Greeley, 1994: 255).

Broadly limned, the Communists’ approach to religion can be described as a coordinated campaign to undermine personal belief through an attack on religious institutions. Loyalty to the state was intended to take the place of belief in God. While the Soviet state successfully reduced the role of religious institutions in society, this campaign did not, in turn, result in the purging of personal belief. In the absence of religious institutions—or supply, according to rational choice theorists (see Stark and Finke 2000; Froese 2008)—religious demand did not dissolve. Faith, as experienced individually, must be distinguished from the role that religious organizations play in cultivating this faith, the private-public binary discussed by Casanova (1994). The division between the private and public is important to contemporary understandings of religion in the social sciences (in geography, see Kong 2001; Wilford 2009). This private vs. public binary is also relevant to understanding the current religious landscapes of Buryatia and Kalmykia (as will be discussed in Chapters Five and Six).

Early on, the Bolsheviks made clear their position on religion, based on the characterization of religion as the opium of the people as found in Marx’s critiques of Hegel (Marx 1977). In a series of decrees issued directly on the heels of the October Revolution in 1917, the Communists nationalized the property of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), required the separation of the Church from both the political and educational functions of the state, and denied the legality of Church-officiated weddings, divorces, and baptisms (Davis 2003). This early attack on religion was primarily aimed at the cultural dominance of the ROC, as consolidated during the imperial period (Froese 2008). For the Russian Orthodox Church, the 1920s was a period of direct persecution against religious leaders—Patriarch Tikhon was
arrested multiple times before his death in 1925—and the ROC experienced both internal and external division. The Renovationist movement, the most prominent of which was the Living Church, directly collaborated with the Soviets in the first decade after the October Revolution; the branches of this movement actively opposed the existing Orthodox leadership, seeking, for example, the right for priests to marry, though it never gained widespread support among the Russian laity (Knox 2004). In July 1927, Metropolitan Sergei, the acting leader of the ROC, issued a declaration of loyalty to the Soviet government, accepting ‘the Soviet Union as our civil motherland, whose joys and successes are our joys and successes, and whose misfortunes are our misfortunes’ (quoted in Davis 2003: 4). In response to the declaration, the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad—based at that time in Sremski Karlovci, Serbia—distanced itself from Metropolitan Sergei and his accommodationist stance and looked to the Church underground as the legitimate representative of Orthodoxy in the USSR.

Minority religions—including Islam, Buddhism, and evangelical Protestantism—did not experience the same level of persecution prior to 1929; in Central Asia, for example, the Soviets were initially hesitant to crack down on religious institutions due to the sheer size of the region’s Muslim population (Keller 2001). That year (1929), however, Stalin’s Decree on Religious Associations universalized the Bolshevik’s position on religion, making ‘most religious activity illegal, save for local, registered groups conducting services at state-approved sites’ (Johnson 2005: 5). Under this law, believers, in groups of no less than 20 (referred to as a dvadtsatka), were allowed to seek permission from local authorities to hold religious meetings in officially sanctioned buildings (Walters 1986). All other forms of religious practice, however, were proscribed. This included proselytization, the distribution of religious literature, and the conducting of services in places other than registered buildings (Sarkissian 2009). In sum,
beginning in 1929 the Soviet state embarked on a universal campaign of persecution against religious institutions, believers, and clergy. In the 1930s, the Stalinist purges targeted not only political figures but religious leaders and organizations, as well.

From a theoretical perspective, the Soviet Union’s secularization policy can be closely linked to the simultaneous campaign towards modernization carried out in the first two decades of the state’s existence. The key tenet of secularization theory—that modernization leads to a decline in religious adherence due to the partitioning out of social, political and economic functions into distinct spheres—would indicate that as the USSR’s modernization project proceeded apace, religious adherence would decline. However, the state’s direct intervention in the religious market, through the targeting of monopoly religions and the promotion of an institutionalized atheist alternative (through organizations like the League of Militant Atheists), complicates any attempt to correlate modernization and secularization. The project of scientific atheism was limited to the institutional realm, and while effective at targeting religious organizations it did not wholly undermine individual belief and private practice. This reflects the Soviet approach to political culture more generally: ‘unorganized sentiment was not acknowledged to exist…[and] social transformation was defined in organizational terms’ (Peris 1998: 8). In the case of religion, the first step in societal change was the elimination of ties to pre-existing institutions. This process proceeded unevenly in the first two decades of the Soviet Union, though by 1939 the Soviets had succeeded in severely limiting the role of religious institutions in the public sphere; by that year, there were only 200-300 churches still open throughout the USSR (Sidorov 2000b).

Though the Communist’s anti-religious efforts had succeeded on an institutional level, initial returns on the secularization project, when evaluated among individuals, were less
auspicious. In 1937, the Soviet census included questions on religion. The wider aim of this census, as characterized by Hirsch (1997: 269), was to ‘measure the revolution’s victories’ with respect to illiteracy, the consolidation of the working class, and rising living standards across the country, in addition to the anticipated reduction in religious belief. On religion, census takers first asked if respondents were believers; if yes, then respondents were asked to self-categorize their religious orientation (Zhiromskaya 1998). Given the Soviet campaign to suppress religion in the prior decade, respondents were naturally suspicious of and resistant to this question (Merridale 1996). Rumors of the secret taxation of religious adherents were prevalent, along with less conspiratorial theories that those who answered in the affirmative, along with their families, would face persecution at their place of work or education. Merridale (1996: 233) also observes that ‘more organized resistance [to the question of religious affiliation] was not uncommon, especially in areas where dissenting or unorthodox religious groups, such as Baptists, Seventh-Day Adventists and Tolstoyans, were powerful.’ Others provided falsified religions in the space for affiliation in the census (Merridale 1996). Despite this suspicion, the census found that only one-third of rural respondents and two-thirds of city dwellers responded that they were non-believers (Johnson 2005).

The spectacular failure of the Soviet campaign against religion led to the suppression of the 1937 census results until the opening of the Soviet archives after 1991. The League of Militant Atheists, an institutional alternative to organized religion designed to promote atheism through its publications (including the magazine, Bezbozhnik [The Godless]) and propaganda, was phased out as part of the Soviet anti-religion drive (see Peris 1998). Instead, the Soviet government undertook a brief but brutal campaign of further repression against religious

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36 The suppression of the 1937 census results were also linked to the substantial population decline experienced in 1932-1933 due to the widespread famine associated with the collectivization campaign (see Merridale 1996: 226).
institutions; in the context of the purges, the Soviets closed an increasing number of churches and imprisoned or shot members of the religious leadership. As Davis (2003: 11) reports, ‘by the late 1930s, 80,000 Orthodox clerics, monks, and nuns reportedly had lost their lives at the hands of the Bolsheviks.’ Those who were not killed were imprisoned in the gulag camps. As will be discussed in greater detail below, 1937 also marked a final crackdown against Buddhists in the USSR. This included the closing of those monasteries that had remained open, a shift in official doctrine, and further purges of intellectual and religious elites—Bidya Dandaron, an ethnic Buryat and expert on Buddhism and the Tibetan language, was first imprisoned that year (Bräker 1983).

The Soviet anti-religious campaign, which had succeeded on an institutional level but failed to undermine individual belief, was further attenuated by the events of World War II. Following Hitler’s abrogation of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact on 22 June 1941, Moscow’s Metropolitan Sergei issued an appeal to the Soviet people to defend the rodina (trans. homeland) from German aggression. During the Nazi’s initial push into the USSR, territory in the western part of the country came under German occupation. This included territory that had only recently been incorporated into the Soviet state and, as a result, religious institutions had not experienced the full brunt of the Soviet campaign against religion. In general, the Nazis adopted a conciliatory stance towards religion. Alexeev (1979: 32), for example, reports that roughly 700 churches opened in Ukraine after the Nazis occupied it in 1941—‘often the local population opened churches on the day the German army arrived.’ In present-day Belarus, Moldova, and the Baltic states, churches were reopened and often took up missionary and other ecumenical activities.
The resurgence was not, however, limited to occupied territories; in other parts of the
Soviet Union there was a notable increase in applications to open (or re-open) places of worship
(Peris 2000). This movement was furthered strengthened by Stalin’s tacit acceptance of religion;
on 4 September 1943, Stalin met with Metropolitan Sergei at the Kremlin. He agreed to Sergei’s
election as Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia (a position that had been vacant since 1922 when
Tikhon was first imprisoned), the resumption of official church publications, and a general
liberalization in policies towards religion. This reconciliation between the Church and the Soviet
regime was an integral part of a larger campaign to promote and consolidate the ‘Russian
nationalist’ opposition to the Nazis, which also included the revival of military orders from the
imperial period, for example. The Soviets used this liberalization of religious policy to further
support the successes of the winter of 1942-1943, when the German forces were repulsed at
Stalingrad. Nor was this shift in policy on the part of the Soviets limited to Orthodoxy; in
Buryatia soon after the war (1946) a monastery complex was opened near Ivolginsk to house the
leadership of the USSR’s Buddhist community, the Central Spiritual Board of Buddhists
(TsDUB).

In the post-World War II period, however, there was no unified message about the ability
of science to supplant religious belief—anti-religious propaganda organized around successes in
space travel, the physical sciences, and the academic enterprise more broadly did not convince
the faithful to abandon religion (Froese 2004b). Nonetheless, under Khrushchev, the
communists again launched an anti-religious drive against the country’s religious leadership and
institutions of worship; Bourdeaux (1981: 19) describes this new wave of crackdowns as ‘sudden
and ferocious’ and seemingly unanticipated by religious leaders. Between 1959 and 1964, nearly
half of the Russian Orthodox Church’s existing parishes were shuttered, while the number of
working priests, monks, and nuns declined, as well (Davis 1996). Early on in this period, closures were primarily concentrated in Ukraine and southern Russia, two areas that had long been part of the Soviet Union but came under lengthy Nazi occupation during World War II (Davis 2003). Similarly, Bourdeaux (1981) reports that the number of active monasteries declined from 66 to less than ten during this five-year period. The closing of religious institutions continued, albeit more gradually, during Brezhnev’s tenure as general secretary.

With the initiation of perestroika under Gorbachev, the religious revival that began during the 1960s among the intellectual elites of Moscow and Leningrad—which was visible to Bourdeaux (1983)—spread across Soviet society (see also Dunn 1977). Elsewhere, Bourdeaux (2000: 145) characterized the results of perestroika and glasnost thus: ‘What Gorbachev did was to take the lid off a seething cauldron, facilitating the rebirth of religious institutions nationwide and giving voice to the pent-up spiritual aspirations of the Russian people.’ The seminal event in consolidating the revival of religion during late Communism was the June 1988 celebration of the millennium of the conversion to Christianity of Prince Vladimir, leader of Kievan Rus’. In 1982, Brezhnev, acknowledging the international attention that would accompany the millennial celebration, returned the Danilov Monastery complex in Moscow to the ROC, the first indication of a thaw in relations between the Soviet leadership and the Orthodox Church. Six years later, the celebration itself received official sanction from Gorbachev and the Communist Party—though this came just five weeks prior to the event. The commemoration took on the international significance that Brezhnev had anticipated, and was granted widespread coverage in the Soviet media thanks to Gorbachev’s endorsement (Bourdeaux 1999).

Earlier that year, Gorbachev had held the first meeting in forty-five years between the Communists and the Church leadership. In addition to offering state support for the millennium
celebration, Gorbachev made a second promise to draft new legislation on religion in the Soviet Union to replace the 1929 law. Passed in October 1990 and enacted the next month, the purpose of the law (Article 1) was as follows:

This law guarantees the rights of citizens to decide and express their attitude towards religion, to convictions corresponding to this and to the unhindered confession of a religion and the exercise of religious rites, and also to equality and protection of the rights and interests of citizens regardless of their attitude towards religion, and regulates the relations pertaining to the activity of religious organisations (Codevilla 1991: 115).

The law also ensured freedom of conscience for Soviet citizens and the right of believers to proselytize and spread their faith (Article 3); a separation of church and state that was intended to ensure the equality of religious organization and limit state patronage of a particular faith (Article 5); and allowed for the formation of monasteries and other institutions designated for religious training (Articles 10 and 11). Clearly, the legislation, in guaranteeing freedom of religion, exceeded the expectations of both commentators on religion in the USSR and the leadership of the country’s leading faiths (Bourdeaux 2000).

After the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic (RSFSR) passed a law similar to the Soviet legislation, those religious organizations that had previously been underground worked to establish their legal status (Baran 2006). The early years of independence were also marked by an influx of missionaries from non-traditional religious movements—most notably Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons, and Hare Krishnas—who had previously engaged in active conversion projects in other parts of the world. Upon independence in late 1991, religion occupied an increasingly relevant place in Russian society. The 1993 Russian constitution guaranteed freedom of conscience and religious worship in Article 28.\(^{37}\) As important as these legal

\(^{37}\) An English language version of the 1993 Russian constitution is available at: http://www.departments.bucknell.edu/russian/const/constit.html
protections was the initial acceptance of the expansion of non-traditional religious communities. Dunlop (1999), for example, reports that a substantial religious market developed in the Russia in the mid-1990s; in addition to the faiths mentioned above, evangelical Christians, Baptists and Lutherans expanded their presence, as did Muslims and Buddhists. One of the more tangible outcomes of this expansion was a surge in the number of religious organizations in the country. In Dagestan, a predominantly Muslim republic in Russia’s North Caucasus that is discussed in detail below, this growth was phenomenal—Yemelianova (1999) reports that in 1996 there were 1,670 mosques and 25 Islamic schools in the republic, up from 27 mosques in 1985. Iconic places of worship, most notably the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow, which had been demolished in 1931 to make way for Stalin’s planned Palace of the Soviets but eventually became the site of the world’s largest open-air swimming pool, were also reconstructed (Sidorov 2000a; see Forest and Johnson 2002 on the imbrication of monumentalization and post-Soviet Russian national identity).

Though the Russian Orthodox Church reassumed a central place as a key cultural institution in Russian society, it soon became clear that the Church was not prepared for competition for adherents from those religions who sought converts after 70 years of state-sanctioned atheism (Baran 2006; Froese 2004b). Baran (2006: 649) documents the strategies used by the Russian Orthodox Church to counter the growing role of non-traditional faiths in the Russian religious market, including the association of non-traditional religions with totalitarianism—‘if the NRM[s] [new religious movements] played the part of the totalitarian bogeyman, the anticult movement cast the ROC as democracy’s vigilant protector.’ The Church’s Patriarch, Alexei II, also cultivated close relations with the Yeltsin administration and
acceded to more conservative and nationalistic elements in the ROC to prevent a schism (Knox 2004).

The most important outcome of the Church’s reaction against the opening of the religious marketplace in Russia was the 1997 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations, which altered the legal standing of recently arrived religious organizations. The ROC, in collaboration with members of the Russian parliament, began working on revising the 1990 legislation as early as 1993; Davis (1997: 647) quotes the Church’s patriarch, Alexei II, as saying a revised law ‘would open new possibilities for the role of the [Russian Orthodox] Church in the New Russian Society.’ Critics of the law said that it violated the human rights conventions—including the Helsinki Final Act and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—which Russia had endorsed.38 Despite such critiques, the legislation had strong domestic support, and should be viewed, in part, as a product of the strident criticism of the negative influence of non-traditional faiths by leading political and ecclesiastical figures in Russia. For example, the late Alexander Lebed’, after his June 1996 appointment by Yeltsin as head of Russia’s Security Council, reiterated Buddhism’s position as one of the state’s three ‘officially recognized religions,’ along with Orthodoxy and Islam (Goble 1996). At the same time, he advocated for the proscription of non-traditional religious groups, like the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and the Japanese cult Aum Shinrikyo before numerous audiences (on the latter case, see Mikhailova 1996).

38 The Helsinki Final Act, also referred to as the Helsinki Declaration, was concluded in 1975 and signed by 35 different countries; it can be broadly characterized as an attempt to improve relations between the West and the Communist bloc. The Final Act’s text is available here: http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/osce/basics/finact75.htm.
The July 1997 vote on the law in the Federation Council was nearly unanimous—112 votes in favor versus four against and one abstention. Valeriy Sudarenkov, then governor of Kaluga Oblast and chairman of the Federation Council’s leading cultural committee, suggested that the law served to protect Russian society ‘from the massive expansion of pseudo-religious cults and organizations that through their proselytizing endanger individual rights and freedoms and the health of citizens’ (RFE/RL 1997). The Law was initially vetoed by Yeltsin—primarily due to pressure not to enact the law from international non-governmental organizations, including Human Rights Watch, and foreign governments, notably the European Union and the United States. The law was revised and reconsidered later in the summer—it eventually passed after Yeltsin sent a modified version of the bill to the Russian parliament in early September. This version included only minor revisions to the initial legislation and, according to Duma deputy Galina Staravoitova (who abstained from the final vote), violated the constitutional guarantee that all religions have legal equality in the Russian state. Some religious groups claimed that the final version of the bill was more limiting than an interim version distributed after the initial veto of the legislation. The revised bill had the support of Patriarch Alexei and other religious leaders representing Russia’s traditional faiths, yet raised questions about the closeness of the relationship between the Yeltsin administration and the ROC, and the separation of church and state in the Russian polity more generally (Goble 1997).

39 The Federation Council is the upper chamber of the Russian Parliament; the Duma is the lower chamber. Prior to 2002, the leaders of Russia’s regions were also accorded a seat on the council. This was changed during Vladimir Putin’s first term, with members of the council now appointed by regional parliaments in collaboration with regional leaders (Ross 2003).

40 Staravoitova was murdered in St. Petersburg, Russia on 20 November 1998 by a pair of assassins. Those directly responsible for the attack have never been concretely identified.
In its final form, the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations included a number of provisions specifically targeting those religious organizations that established a presence in Russia after 1991. It distinguished religious groups from religious organizations. The former are small-scale communities that were accorded few rights under the new law; as Dunlop (1999: 34) describes it, ‘the only right that they in fact possess is to hold religious services in private apartments.’ It further divided religious organizations into two categories—those which had been established in Russia for at least 15 years (and hence had been granted some form of recognition by the Soviet state) and those which had not. Those who fell into the latter group were disallowed from holding religious services, publishing religious tracts, or, more prosaically, opening bank accounts. Another key concern was that some congregations of non-traditional faiths—Baptists and Catholics, for example—which practiced in secrecy prior to 1991 would be barred from establishing their legal position as a result of the legislation. Moreover, Article 27 included a geographic component, requiring that a religious organization be established for at least 15 years ‘in the respective territory’ where they intended to register. Those groups that were not already established in a specific geographic territory were required to re-register annually until reaching the 15-year threshold.

Bourdeaux (2000: 10) was a strident critic of the revised law, describing it as ‘a blueprint for the return of state control of religion,’ and Dunlop (1999: 33) wrote that the legislation is ‘a juridically illiterate hodgepodge.’ A few points deserve emphasis. First, though the law’s preamble reaffirms that Russia is a secular state, the Russian Orthodox Church is singled out as primus inter pares among religions in the country. The legislation recognizes ‘the special contribution of Orthodoxy to the history of Russia and to the establishment and development of Russia’s spirituality and culture.’ This has led to concerns that the Russian Orthodox Church is
politically privileged in what is officially a secular state. These fears have played out in a number of ways; for example, in 2002 the ROC secured the introduction of a “Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture” curriculum into Russian public schools (Daniel and Marsh, 2007). During the tenure of President Dmitri Medvedev (2008-2012), the Church has further secured the return of property confiscated during the Soviet period and a more established place for chaplains in the state military, among other concessions (see Papkova 2011b). In addition, while condemning violence and terrorism, the ROC has generally supported the Kremlin’s conduct of the second war in Chechnya, despite substantial human rights violations. In turn, in its relations with other confessions in Russia, the ROC has oscillated between hegemony—with the Roman Catholic Church, which has been forced to defer to decisions made by the Orthodox hierarchy—and ecumenism (in a broad sense of the term), with Islamic groups, for example (Warhola 2007).

Second, though the text of the law was restrictive and condoned discriminatory practices towards non-traditional religions, in application the legislation has not resulted in the maltreatment of religious minorities and their representative organizations in Russia. The law creates a situation comparable to that in the United Kingdom, where the Church of England is empowered and recognized as the state church. Moreover, it is important to note that some discriminatory practices existed prior to the 1997 law; between 1994 and 1997, roughly one-third of Russia’s regions (the equivalent of states in the United States in Russia’s federal system) passed laws limiting missionary activity by non-traditional practitioners. Though these laws frequently contained clauses that violated both the 1990 law and the Russian Constitution—for example, the city of Astrakhan required missionaries to register with local officials—the federal

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41 The curriculum did not gain an established foothold in the Russian educational system until early 2010, however, when a modified version was introduced on a trial basis in 19 Russian regions (Papkova 2011b; see also a further discussion of its implementation and public opinion on the measure in Buryatia in Chapter Six).
government failed to actively challenge this local legislation (Shterin and Richardson 1998). These laws were generally aimed at protecting the religion of the titular ethnicity, whether orthodoxy (in non-ethnic regions) or minority faiths such as Islam or Buddhism. In Kalmykia’s legislation, for example, foreign religions are described as ‘challenges to the national customs and traditions, morals of society’ (quoted in Shterin and Richardson 1998: 326). Daniel and Marsh (2007) report that most of the organizations that failed to meet the initial registration deadline (31 December 1999; later extended one year to 31 December 2000) were Orthodox. Moreover, though some religious organizations have been dissolved due to failure to properly register (many such groups were defunct and non-operational), the registration of new organizations has continued to grow, rising by roughly 30 percent between 1997 and 2006. The vague wording of the legislation leaves much open to interpretation; though, from a legal perspective, this reading has been favorable to religious pluralism thus far, there is the possibility of reversal.

Admittedly, this point should be qualified, as the law has been used as justification for politically motivated actions. For example, the Moscow branch of the Salvation Army, which was initially granted registration as a religious organization in 1992, was subsequently denied registration as a local organization in Moscow under the revised 1997 law (discussed above). The Salvation Army was viewed by Moscow authorities as a ‘paramilitary organization,’ though the group functioned in the Russian Empire and Soviet Union from 1913 to 1923 and had been permitted to register in other leading Russian cities, including St. Petersburg. This legal dispute limited the ability of the Salvation Army to distribute welfare aid.\(^42\)

\(^{42}\) The case was eventually settled at the European Court of Human Rights at Strasbourg, which ruled on the case in favor of the Salvation Army (see the ruling at: http://sutyajnik.ru/rus/echr/judgments/salvation_army_eng.htm). The group continues its work in Russia, and provided assistance during the 2010 forest fires outside of the capital.
Third, the law established Islam, Judaism and Buddhism as traditional faiths that constitute ‘an integral part of the historical heritage of the peoples of Russia.’ The language of the law in its initial iteration is imprecise, and it is unclear what benefits these three religions gain from being named as ‘traditional.’ Krindatch (2006) identifies attempts by the Federal government to amend the 1997 law, though neither was ultimately successful. One bill suggested a cap on the total number of traditional organizations, while a second sought to unify the four identified traditional religions in the establishment of shared platforms for topics like education. Non-traditional religions do face further pressures, despite the ambiguity of the traditional designation; as Fagan (2005a: 1) observes:

Carrying particular weight in Russia, symbolic appearances of solidarity between President Vladimir Putin and Patriarch Aleksi [sic] II—sometimes with representatives of Russia's other so-called traditional confessions (Islam, Judaism and Buddhism)—often translate into regional state officials taking decisions in the interests of only these faiths, including to the detriment of other religious confessions and non-believers.

The result of this haphazard approach to the legislation of religion is that such groups are unsure of their position in the wider political framework of the Russian state; this is particularly true for non-Orthodox Christians and members of other non-traditional faiths that have recently come to Russia in search of converts. For Buddhists and Muslims, despite the continuing ambiguity of the term ‘traditional,’ their position is strengthened by the traditional linking of religion and national identity as commonly accepted in contemporary Russia.

*The Civic State and the Ethnic Group: Religion and National Identity in the USSR and Russia*

As previously discussed, there is a general acceptance in the literature that the Soviet system, which established demarcated territories for the country’s constituent nationalities, strengthened national identity among these groups (see Roeder 1991; Suny 1993). This was not
the original intention; this territorial system was theorized to serve as an intermediate stage in the progression towards international socialism, though it also served the practical function of placating the diverse national groups living in the USSR during the country’s early, tenuous existence. The national revival that occurred during late perestroika was coterminous with the changing stance of the Communist party towards religion and wider social changes associated with glasnost’. Soviet policies that cultivated national identity—the Union’s federal political geography, patronage of titular elites in the educational and political spheres, and support for minority languages—led to the strengthening, rather than weakening, of nationalism as a political force once Gorbachev initiated social and political reforms.

In part, this relationship between religion and nationalism in the post-Soviet space is complicated by the modernization process and the distinct fashion in which it played out in the USSR. It is now widely recognized in the academic literature that nationalism is a product of modernity, closely associated with processes such as industrialization, the rise of vernacular languages (consolidated in standardized forms by the printing press), the universalization of education, and the extension of suffrage and political participation within a given society (Anderson 1991; Hobsbawm 1992). One end-product of nationalism has been the rise of secularism, as previously discussed in Chapter Two. Nationalism and secularism are complementary processes. As national identity replaced religion as the customary set of common values on which the legitimacy of the state is built, the functional role of religion changed. Smith (2000: 794) refers to this as the secular replacement model: ‘nationalism is a modern, secular, anthropocentric and subversive ideology, bornout of the Enlightenment and Romanticism,’ which ‘swiftly undermines and replaces religious traditions.’ Here again, the public-private binary is important for understanding the interaction between religion and
nationalism. The secularization of societies, particularly as occurred in ‘the West’—Europe and North America—resulted in the differentiation of religion’s role in the public sphere; this is the argument made by Casanova (1994), among others. Religion was no longer publically ubiquitous; instead, churches played particularistic public roles while also playing a role in defining individual identity for religious persons. In the Soviet Union, the differentiation of religion was more extreme and enforced by the state through the elimination of religious institutions and the active persecution of believers; as such, religious belief was relegated to the private sphere.

During the transitional period from communism, religion regained public acceptance. In turn, national entrepreneurs used religion as one of the collective values on which to construct their legitimacy; ‘what appeared immediately [after the breakup] was the need for a new kind of social cohesiveness that could create new cognitive frameworks and new social networks to cope with the dangerous process of entropy and anomie’ (Agadjanian 2001: 474). Religion, though rarely the focus, functioned as a source of legitimacy for the nascent political movements that developed during this time. Lithuania is one exception—there, religion played a central role in both organizing resistance to Communism and legitimating the new state.43 The key role was played by the Catholic Church; though the Lithuanian Communist Party attempted to employ the same anti-institutional measures that succeeded against the Russian Orthodox Church in other parts of the Union, Lithuania’s political history inspired an immediate distrust of the communist platform. Moreover, as Froese (2008: 155) writes, the link between nationality and religion is explicit in this case: ‘Lithuanians are Catholic…in their ethnic and national understandings of self.’ Elsewhere in the Soviet Union and its successor states, religion played a different role,

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43 Lithuania is particularly relevant to the post-Soviet case; Poland, as distinct from other countries in Eastern Europe, was mentioned in Chapter Two.
usually as an ancillary source of identity where national identity was undermined as a source of cohesion. For example, in the traditionally Muslim republics along the banks of the Volga, most notably Tatarstan, Islam ‘has not had a direct impact on the republican leadership and its policy’ (Yemelianova 1999: 611); rather Islam has been acknowledged as a component of Tatar national identity, and incorporated into national symbols, thereby reproducing the link between nation and religion in a banal, everyday sense (Billig 1995). Chechnya, over time, emerged as an exception as religion replaced nationalism as the basis for mobilization against the Russian state; this process was accelerated by the death of Dzhokar Dudayev late in the first war (April 1996) and the subsequent rise in influence of Shamil Basayev (see Hughes 2007).

Although it is difficult to generalize across cases, religion frequently served as a component of identity for those national groups that either declared independence or sovereignty—as commonly occurred within the RSFSR and the Soviet Union more broadly—during the transition period (the exception, perhaps, is Central Asia). The result, in the post-Soviet space, has been the de facto territorialization of religious identities along national lines. This linkage has a precedent; religion, through the principle of cuius region, eius religio, was territorialized historically in the marches of central and east Europe. The end goal of this system, when applied at the end of the Thirty Years War (1618-1648), was to create clearly delimited, religiously homogenous territories, through either emigration or conversion. In its contemporary iteration, religion no longer serves as the primary source of legitimation for political identity. Instead, religion serves to complement national identity, connecting contemporary Russia and its population to a set of traditions maintained prior to the Soviet period.
In contemporary Russia, individuals identify with a religion because it is historically associated with their national identity. This is partly a result of the ideological vacuum that developed in the wake of the Soviet Union’s collapse; as Johnson (2005: 20) writes: ‘traditional religious affiliations supported ethnic and national consolidation, providing coherent belief systems to replace Soviet ideology in a difficult time.’ Other authors have echoed this view, and in turn challenged the idea that religion was a mechanism for elite manipulation, the basis for conflict, or used to provoke reaction against past injustices. Agadjanian (2001: 473), for example, critiques the assumption that the ambiguous legacy of religion in the Soviet Union led to its manipulation by elites and the facile interpretation that religion provided ‘a temporary and inefficient substation for real needs.’

This debate provokes two questions about religious identities in contemporary Russia. First, do common characteristics associated with religious belief exist across Russia’s confessional groups? For more primordial thinkers on nationalism, most prominently Anthony Smith (2003), religion is one necessary component of an ethnically-defined nation—built, more broadly, on *jus sanguinis*, or the law of blood. It is not, however, sufficient. Religiosity remains variable across geographic contexts and religious groups. This is particularly true in Russia twenty years after the transition from communism. To address this first question, in the analysis that follows individual level surveys conducted in specific geographic contexts are compared to a pair of national-level surveys. This comparison is rooted in the fact that national surveys generally oversample both ethnic Russians and self-identified Orthodox; in February 2008, 70 percent of respondents indicated that they were Orthodox in a nationwide sample of 1600 individuals. In the World Values Survey (WVS), the most recent wave of which was conducted in Russia in 2006, 89.7 percent of respondents who indicated that they belong to a religion were
Orthodox (though only 61.6 percent of the sample responded that they practice any religion). There is, however, less reliable information on minority religions. The WVS sample is considered in more detail below, and compared to small-scale surveys conducted in a subset of Russia’s ethnic republics.

The second question is how important are measures of religiosity, in terms of the functional role of religion as a component of national identity? During the transition period, religion helped to reconstitute social networks, as a touchstone during the difficult transition period, and served as the renewed basis for important societal institutions like marriage and baptism. Given these functions, perhaps religiosity as traditionally measured through church attendance should be considered with respect to the importance of religion to specific national cultures; ‘what really matters here is not just the number of deep conversions but the whole spectrum of religious presence, in whatever form it might take’ (Agadjanian, 2001: 476). As such, measures like attendance at religious services should be acknowledged as varying across different religious traditions, but broadly important as an indicator of the role that religion plays as a component of national identity. The question regarding religion’s functional role and the context-specific practices that result underlies the discussion in the remainder of the chapter. Before turning to this discussion, however, I provide further background on two of Russia’s traditional religious minorities, Muslims and Buddhists.

**Religious Minorities in Russia**

Despite Russia’s religious pluralism, much of the existing work on religion in the country has focused on either the Russian Orthodox Church or the non-traditional religions that began proselytizing in the country following the breakup of the Soviet Union (Greeley 1994; Knox
Broadly, this work points to a revival of religious practice in Russia during perestroika and the transition from communism. Greeley’s (1994) survey, conducted in 1991, found that many Russians have had a ‘turning point experience,’ which led to a shift from non-belief to belief; a fifth of all Russians who previously identified as atheist acknowledged that they are believers. Other research has built on Greeley’s findings. Krindatch (2006), for example, reports that by 2004, 62 percent of respondents in national surveys indicated that they were believers, and 76 percent had been baptized. In comparison, in 1985 only a quarter of respondents indicated that they were believers (Greeley 1994). There remains, however, a disconnect between affirmed belief and religious practice—what Krindatch describes as a ‘popular religiosity.’ In turn, the number of believers who consistently attend church service and self-identify as practicing has remained consistent for much of the post-Soviet period. This disconnect is compounded by a set of issues associated with the collection of data on religion in Russia: the historical link between religious and national identity in the Soviet Union and Russia, the lack of questions on religion on Russian census forms, and the frequent under-sampling of minorities in nation-wide surveys.

Cognizant of these issues, the remainder of this chapter looks at Islam and Buddhism in both their historical and contemporary contexts. To restate, though a substantial amount of academic work has considered religious belief and practice using nationally representative surveys, we know much less about the importance of religion to Russia’s national and religious minorities. In turn, the chapter evaluates the results of two surveys conducted in the republics of Dagestan and Kalmykia, primarily among Muslims and Buddhists, respectively. Russia’s third traditional, minority religion, Judaism, is not considered due to the substantial outmigration of the country’s Jewish community to both Israel and the United States in the late Soviet period and
after 1991, resulting in the dramatic shrinking of this group to one tenth of one percent of the country’s population (approx. 150,000 persons).44 After providing a broad overview of these two religions, I return briefly to the question of measurement, summarizing the results of the most recent (2005-2006) wave of the World Values survey, which included a subset of questions on religion in Russia (and the other countries where it was conducted). I then turn to the results of two republic-specific surveys to investigate levels of religiosity among self-identified Muslims and Buddhists in the selected national republics of the Russian Federation.

Islam

Islam is often viewed as the key minority religion in contemporary Russia. This position is justified through two points: the demographic proportion of Muslims in terms of Russia’s overall population and the argument that Islam has recently reemerged as the basis for the anti-state insurgency ongoing in the North Caucasus (with Islam also serving as the foundation for opposition in the region during the 19th century; see Gammer 1994). The first argument revolves around the range of estimates for Russia’s Muslim population; some claim that there are 20 million Muslims now living in the Russia Federation (Hunter 2004). Commentators have predicted that the Russian state will be majority Muslim by 2050, the result of divergent fertility rates between Slavs and traditionally Muslim groups and the lower life expectancies among Slavic groups (Sudakov 2008). A similar prediction—that the high birthrates among traditionally Muslim ethnic groups would change the population picture (‘by the year 2000 every second child...
born in the country could be of Muslim origin)—was made prior to the breakup of the Soviet Union (Rywkin 1990). More measured estimates come from the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, which predicted that Muslims would compose just below 15 percent of Russian total population by 2030 (Pew Forum 2011). A precise calculation of the size of Russia’s minority religious groups remains impossible, however, because there is no question on religious affiliation included in the Russian census (Heleniak 2006). Estimates are usually based on population counts for ethnic groups who traditionally practice these religions. It should be noted that concerns over the demographic ‘threat’ that Muslims pose to the Russian state are not new; during the late Soviet period, Central Asia was theorized to be the key site for the emergence of any anti-state movement, associated with a politicized Islam, against the USSR (d’Encausse 1979). In fact, when it became clear during the latter half of 1991 that the Soviet Union was going to break up, these republics were hesitant to pursue independence.

The second reason why Islam has garnered more academic attention in comparison to other minority religions has to do with the security situation in Russia. The marginalization of Islam in the Russia state is often employed as explanation for the rise in religiously motivated political violence (see, for example, Toft, Philpott, and Shah 2011). This marginalization is uneven across various Muslim groups; the Central Spiritual Directorate of Muslims in Russia (TsDUMR) and Council of Muftis of Russia—the two main umbrella organizations for Muslims in Russia—maintain a monopoly over official Islamic practice in the country. In the Volga region—the republics of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan and Astrakhan oblast are home to the largest percentages of Muslims (see further discussion below)—these two organizations compete for believers and have experienced little competition from non-traditional Islamic communities. In the North Caucasus, however, the local spiritual boards are widely viewed as corrupt and
biased against the more austere forms of practice that have gained in popularity since 1991, specifically Wahhabism; in Dagestan, for example, there has also been substantial infighting for control of these institutions (see Matsuzato and Ibragimov 2005). This, in turn, leads to religiously motivated violence and terrorism by those groups who find themselves outside of the political-confessional alliance. During Vladimir Putin’s second term as Russia’s president, there was a noted increase in tensions between the Muslim and Orthodox religious communities at the official level (Warhola 2008). While the Islamist insurgency in the North Caucasus spread beyond Chechnya, among ethnic Russians there was a notable rise in xenophobia and racism against non-Slavs; according to Pain (2007: 896), ‘after the economic crisis of 1998, and especially after the series of terrorist bombings that rocked Russia throughout the late 1990s and spurred the second Chechen War, xenophobia rose sharply and for all intents and purposes became uncontrollable.’

This racism often targets individuals from the Caucasus; a series of riots in the southern region of Stavropol’ between Russians and Chechens were motivated by demographic concerns, contestations over language and discourse, and the historical specifics of place (Foxall 2010). Other traditionally Muslim groups in Russia, however, are not subject to such overt bias. Similarly, Islam’s relationship with communism in the Soviet Union was ambiguous. As previously discussed, Orthodox institutions and adherents were openly persecuted from the beginning of the communist state. Some of these same policies extended to Muslims. However, according to Froese (2005), Soviet Muslims were able to blend their religious identities into their national-political classifications as members of a particular ethnic group and as communists.

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45 The SOVA Center, a Moscow-based nonprofit organization focusing on human rights, nationalism and racism, charts the number of non-Russians injured in racially motivated acts of violence; notably, in 2011 this number declined substantially, to 185 from 443 in 2010. The data is available at: http://www.sova-center.ru/database/
Islamic doctrine makes certain concessions for adherents living in non-Muslim lands. Referred to as *darul harb*, this practice—which condones religious observation in secret—accommodates Muslims who must abandon open practice due to political persecution; in Central Asia, the closure of mosques and religiously affiliated educational establishments and the persecution of Islamic religious leaders made clear Soviet opposition to active religious practice. Lastly, there was less direct competition between communism and Islam, in comparison to Russian Orthodoxy. Communist party leaders, for example, could openly acknowledge their Muslim identity. More prosaically, the communist system also provided valuable material benefits to the underdeveloped regions of Soviet Central Asia. Educational opportunities expanded substantially, as did, in turn, literacy, access to medical care, and newspaper circulation (Froese 2005).

Malashenko (2010) has argued against aggregations like Russian or post-Soviet Islam. Rather, there is a diversity of religious traditions practiced by Russia’s Muslim populations; ‘a Russian Islam as a homogeneous phenomenon does not exist’ (Malashenko 2010: 13). While I recognize this diversity, I focus on the role of the religion in the North Caucasus because it is in this region that Islamic practice during the post-Soviet period has taken on a form distinct from the ‘official Islam’ first organized by the Soviet state (Yemelianova 2003). In the North Caucasus, and Dagestan in particular, the revival has led to commonplace signs of renewal—such as a sharp rise in the number of pilgrims to Mecca—as well as an emergent Islamist presence that forcefully opposes the Russian state.
Islam in the North Caucasus

Islamic practice in the North Caucasus is generally viewed as more conservative in comparison to the other Muslim regions of the Russian Federation, due to its historical longevity and the perception that Islam has been an organizing platform for resistance to the Russian state during the past three centuries. Islam came to the North Caucasus soon after Muhammad’s conversion (Reynolds 2005). In 642—only 10 years after Muhammad’s death—Arab armies entered the region via the lowlands on the western littoral of the Caspian Sea. The Arab invasion proved the strategic nature of the region as a gateway from the Middle East to the Eurasian steppe, while also underscoring the difficulty of fighting—and, more importantly, securing converts to Islam—in the mountainous terrain against an entrenched and willful opposition. Though Islam gained a foothold in the urban centers along the Caspian coast, including the ancient city of Derbent (site of the oldest mosque in Russia), it spread slowly into the interior of the North Caucasus; the Islamicization of the Chechens, for example, did not begin until the middle of the sixteenth century, and was not fully consolidated in the region’s mountainous south until the latter part of the 18th century (Zelkina 2000).

Russian forces made their first foray into the North Caucasus during the reign of Peter the Great, capturing Derbent on their way to Baku in 1722. Early on, Islam played only a marginal role in organizing resistance, as most of the mountaineers had little formal knowledge of Islam as a religious system. Such knowledge gradually developed towards the end of the eighteenth century, associated with the simultaneous processes of state-building and religious awakening that emerged in response to the Russian threat. At this time, the key political leaders were also religious figures—Sheikh Mansur’s call for ghazawat, or jihad, attracted a number of co-religionists. However, it was not until Imam Shamil’s emergence around 1830 that the notion of
political and religious unification for North Caucasus was first promoted. In the interim, the Naqshbandi tariqat, or religious order, integrated the concept of sharia (religious-based law) into the spiritual regime of believers in the North Caucasus. Unlike other orders, the Naqshbandis privileged sharia both in their religious practice and in daily life, with mysticism, an important component of the Sufi tradition, only practiced as a supplement. Sharia subsequently served as the juridical basis for the organization of the state-in-formation in the region, in part by supplanting adat, or customary law, although this political organization was done away with following Russia’s final victory in the Caucasus Wars in 1864.

As noted above, during the Soviet period the Communists successfully purged many of the institutions associated with Islam in the Muslim areas under its control. Privately, however, many Muslims retained a sense of religious identity; ‘Islamic society, despite persecution, preserved its worldview and moral values, even in the political context of the Soviet Union’ (Malashenko 1993: 63). In the North Caucasus, for example, Sufi practices continued privately during the Soviet period (Yemelianova 2003). Publicly, Soviet policy toward religion was inconsistent. In February 1944, coincident with the deportation of the Chechens and Ingush to Central Asia, the remaining mosques still operating in the republic were closed; after the groups’ rehabilitation in 1957, until 1978, mosques and associated Islamic institutions were proscribed (Broxup 1981). In 1943, however, the Soviets had permitted Islam to organize on a statewide institutional level, increasing the number of muftiates—or regionally-oriented religious administrations—in the country; for the North Caucasus, this administration was based in the

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46 Catherine the Great first established a muftiate for the Empire’s Muslims in the late 18th century, in the wake of the Pugachev Rebellion, with the aim of bringing Islamic practice under state control. Yemelianova (2003: 140) generally characterizes the muftiates as ‘effective tools of control and regulation of the Muslim minority by the state.’
Dagestani town of Buinaksk, now one of the centers of Islamic radicalism in the republic (Yemelianova 2003).

The ambiguous legacy of the Soviet’s anti-religious campaign with respect to Islam created a void into which Salafism rushed in the post-Soviet period; Muslims in the region were receptive to Islam as traditionally practiced, as well as non-traditional forms such as Salafism. Salafis, who practice an austere form of Islam that closely follows the strictures of the Koran, proposed an alternative social structure rooted in the requirements of Islam. Though rigid in its doctrine, Salafism was politicized in large part due to Russian policies towards conservative forms of Islam. Salafis have been particularly influential in Chechnya, in part because they are linked to a transnational network of like-minded Islamists, but also because Salafism served as a basis to overcome renascent clan identities among the Chechens and supplied a moral framework around which struggle against the Russians could be organized. Though Cornell (1998: 61) suggests that religion has not been a ‘decisive factor’ in spurring conflict in the wider Caucasus, and Reynolds (2005: 48) likewise suggests that when viewed longitudinally ‘the importance of Islam as a priority motive for conflict in the North Caucasus should not be overstated,’ recent developments caution against such conclusions. After 1999, for example, the Islamic insurgency in the North Caucasus has spread beyond Chechnya proper, with religion as an organizing ideology (Hahn 2008).

Buddhism

This section provides a brief contextualization of Buddhism in the Russian Federation, discussing the religion’s historical role in the country and further introducing the geographic

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47 Salafism can be generally equated with Wahhabism, the term more commonly used in Russia, frequently with derogatory connotations (Knysh 2005).
contexts where Buddhism is practiced. The section begins by providing an introduction to the religion in part to establish the comparison between Buddhism and Islam, as well as Russian Orthodoxy, in contemporary Russia. The subsequent two chapters will each include a more detailed history of the religion in Kalmykia and Buryatia, respectively, before interpreting the results of the surveys conducted there. The current discussion is more general in comparison to the review of Islam in the North Caucasus given above, as it provides important background information for the subsequent two chapters. In part, this broad approach is the consequence of previous scholarship. General commentaries on the religion in both the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation only mention Buddhism in passing. Clearly, this is the product of the country’s small Buddhist population—the three ethnic groups traditionally classified as Buddhist number less than one million persons in total.

I begin by discussing Buddhism’s emergence as a belief system, which prefigures the place-specific consideration of Buddhism in Russia. Buddhism is one of the world’s oldest religious and philosophical traditions. It first appeared in India roughly 2,500 years ago, and has since spread to Indonesia, Japan, Mongolia, and the parts of southern Russia considered in this dissertation. Gethin (1998) identifies three broad traditions in contemporary Buddhism: the Theravada school found in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia; the East Asian traditions as practiced in Japan and Korea, as well as China and Vietnam, and the Tibetan school, generally practiced in Tibet, Mongolia, and southern Russia. The Theravada tradition is viewed as historically closest to Buddhism as practiced in India in the centuries before Christ, while the East Asian tradition—affiliated with the Mahayana branch—broke away from the former tradition around the same time and instead emphasizes the notion of the ‘great vehicle,’ or the seeking of Buddhahood by a practitioner of the religion for the benefit of all beings (Gethin 1998).
The third tradition is closely affiliated with Tibet, though it shares some doctrinal affinities with the Mahayana branch introduced above. The religion spread north thanks to two periods of diffusion north to Tibet from India, the first in the 7th century A.D. and the second two hundred years later. Two main types of Buddhist teaching and practice appeared in Tibet as a result: the Mahayana tradition introduced above and the tantric path to enlightenment, considered by Gethin (1998: 268) as being more ‘esoteric.’ Tantras, as defined by Gethin (1998: 268), ‘are texts setting out certain esoteric meditation practices which present themselves as a secret teaching deriving directly from the Buddha himself;’ the aim of such meditation is the eventual transformation and eradication of feelings of desire. In Tibet, these two teachings were incorporated into four distinct schools: the Nyingma, the Kagyu, the Sakpa, and the Gelug. This last school gained a foothold in Mongolia in the sixteenth century, and has primarily been organized around the leadership of the Dalai Lama. From here, it spread to southern Russia early in the 17th century.

Buddhism was granted official recognition from the Russian Empire in 1741 by Tsarina Elizabeth. Her decree capped the number of datsans in Buryat territory at 11, and the number of lamas at 150. Despite these limitations, the religion continued to expand during the imperial period. In 1853, Tsar Nicholas I issued a second decree that limited the number of monasteries at 34, to be served by roughly 250 lamas (Fagan 2001); by the beginning of World War I, however, three more temples had been built and the number of lamas had grown exponentially, to 16,000 (Snelling, 1993). Monasteries traditionally served as centers for religious practice in Buryatia, and also played an important role in other social spheres, most notably education and medicine. The pervasiveness of Tibetan medicine as practiced in Buryatia in part delayed the Soviet crackdown against Buddhists, as the communist state was slow to provide alternative,
modern facilities for medical treatment (Kolarz 1962). In Kalmykia, Buddhism experienced substantial growth between 1905 and 1917—a period of liberalization in the Russian Empire; by 1917, there were 70 khuruls in the region and a plan to introduce Buddhism into the educational curriculum.

Kolarz (1962), in an early review of Buddhism in the USSR, characterized Communist policy as opportunistic. The religion, because of the informality found in much of its teaching, was initially viewed pragmatically (as opposed to the direct confrontation between the communists and the ROC); the communists, according to Bräker (1983: 39) were wary of ‘confrontation with non-Marxist intellectual or religious forces.’ Furthermore, Buddhist religious leaders did not openly oppose communism. Agvan Dorzhiev, who remained Khambo Lama through the October Revolution, stated ‘that there was no conflict between Soviet Power and Buddhism either on the ideological or on the practical political level’ (Kolarz, 1962: 455). Other Buddhists went further, proclaiming the apotheosis of Lenin and that the Buddha was the first communist.

Despite these relatively warm relations early in the Soviet period, the real communist project, of destroying the institutional framework of religion in the USSR, had substantial consequences for Buddhists when carried out beginning in the late 1920s. The usual Soviet techniques were used, some of which have been previously discussed: the League of Militant Atheists, a shift in official doctrine (as exhibited in the second edition of the Great Soviet Encyclopedia), and purges and the closing of monasteries. The closing and subsequent destruction of monasteries was frequently justified on ideological groups, as they had become centers for counter-state activity to be carried out by the resident lamas (Kolarz 1962). In Kalmykia, for example, the shuttering of temples had to be approved by members of the
religious community—this was frequently done through orchestrated votes taken under the supervision of party leaders and policy. Buddhism was further undermined by the deportation of the Kalmyks during World War II (see Chapter Five). As Kolarz (1962: 449) writes: ‘The combined national and religious persecution inflicted on the Buddhist peoples of the Soviet Union may be considered as something unsurpassed.’

In the post-Soviet period, as Balzer (2011) notes, Buddhism has grown steadily, though some issues between foreign-trained monks and the older generation, which still practices a syncretic form of the religion, remain. More broadly, Buddhist practice in Russia can be classed into two groups. In the republics of Buryatia, Kalmykia, and Tuva, Buddhism is the traditional religion, one which was adhered to extensively prior to the Soviet period. In each case, the Gelug (Yellow Hat) school predominates. This is also referred to, frequently, as Tibetan Buddhism or Lamaism. This is the historical legacy of the Mongols’ adoption of Buddhism as their state religion in 1576 (see Zhukovskaya 1992). Soon after this decision, the nomadic Kalmyks migrated west from present-day Xinjiang to the northwestern shores of the Caspian Sea. In Buryatia, missionaries from the south traveled to this northern outpost of the Mongol state during the early 17th century. In 1712, 150 lamas from Tibet entered Buryatia, joined the resident tribes, and began wider-scale conversions.

The Tuvans, though they speak a Turkic language, are included with the two Mongol groups due to the historic presence of Buddhism on their territory. This republic should, however, be treated as distinct from Buryatia and Kalmykia for two reasons. First, Tuva was a late addition to the USSR; it was officially annexed during World War II, after being a dependency of the Soviet state for the previous quarter century. Prior to this, and since 1757, Tuva was officially part of the Chinese state. Walters (2001: 24) writes that ‘the acceptance
of Buddhism on the eve of the Manchurian-Chinese invasion of Tuva in 1757…played a key role in preserving the ethnic identity of the Tuvinians and in helping them to resist assimilation.’

Second, religious life in Tuva is defined by a syncretism between Buddhism and shamanism, and Buddhism never fully supplanted shamanist traditions. Given Tuva’s historical distinctiveness in comparison to Russia’s other Buddhist republics and the challenge that conducting survey work there presented (as discussed earlier), the republic is not considered in detail in the remainder of the dissertation.

The second group of Buddhists in Russia is composed of ethnic Russians who have adopted the religion. This includes, as an example, followers of the artist and spiritualist Nicholas Roerich (McCannon 2000; Lunkin and Filatov 2000). A second branch of ethnic Russian practitioners of Buddhism are members of communities in Moscow and St. Petersburg. The opening of a Buddhist temple in St. Petersburg during the late Tsarist period signaled Tsar Nicholas II’s tacit endorsement of Buddhism as a form of religious practice, which was further solidified by the empire and the Khambo Lama at the time, Agvan Dorzhiev. The analysis of Buddhism in present-day Russia does not consider ethnic Russians who practice Buddhism in St. Petersburg, Moscow, and other larger cities in western Russia (i.e. Saratov).

Overview of Religious Adherence and Practice in Contemporary Russia

I first frame the individual level data available from the latest wave of the World Values Survey (conducted in Russia in 2006) and the two regional surveys conducted in Dagestan and

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48 Khambo Lama is the title of the religious leader of Buryatia’s Buddhist community. The position was revived following World War II.

49 Dorzhiev is the subject of Snelling’s (1993) biography. Additionally, Fagan (2003) extensively documents the internal rivalry in St. Petersburg’s Buddhist community.
Kalmykia with summary findings from the 2008 Levada Yearbook (the most recent year publically available), in order to provide a general picture of religious life in Russia. The Levada Center is one of the leading survey firms in Russia. The results reported in the Yearbook offer longitudinal comparisons to other responses from surveys conducted in Russia by the Center, with some question being asked as far back as 1991.

The responses to some of the questions from the Levada survey deserve particular emphasis. The first question in the subsection on religion asks respondents to evaluate the credibility of religious organizations. This broad measure of trust has been frequently asked of key institutions in Russian society. In the March 2008 iteration of the survey, 40 percent of respondents indicated that religious organizations were fully credible, while one-quarter indicated that such organizations were not completely credible and 10 percent responded that they lacked any credibility (a further 25 percent indicated that it was difficult to say). In comparison, the corresponding numbers for the army were 37-33-12, with 18 percent failing to provide a specific response. Longitudinally, trust has remained relatively consistent in the Church and religious organizations, oscillating between a reported low of 35 percent in March 1998 to a high of 44 percent in September 2005. Scholarly work, for example that of Krindatch (2004), also reports a high level of trust in religious organizations; in 2002, 62 percent of respondents indicated that they either trust or rather trust the Russian Orthodox Church according to a survey conducted by VTsIOM (another leading survey firm, trans. All-Russian Center for the Study of Public Opinion). Only Vladimir Putin, in his third year as Russia’s president, had more credibility (Krindatch 2004).

Another relevant question asks respondents to report which religion they profess (ispovedovat’). In the nationwide sample from the Levada Center, only five percent of
respondents indicated that they are atheist; 16 percent responded that they do not subscribe to a specific faith.\textsuperscript{50} In terms of attendance at religious services, only eight percent of respondents indicated that they attend once a month or more; at the other extreme, 57 percent answered that they attend less than once a year (with 38 percent indicating that they never attend). Lastly, when asked to self-evaluate their religiosity, 42 percent of those surveyed indicated that they are ‘very’ or ‘somewhat religious,’ while a fifth of respondents indicated that they are not at all religious.

While the Levada Center’s survey provides an adequate overview of religious life in contemporary Russia, it is subject to critique. First, surveys conducted on the national scale in Russia frequently under-sample non-Russian (\textit{russkiy})\textsuperscript{51} respondents. The Levada Center’s 2008 survey is no exception. In response to the question ‘Which religion do you practice?,’ 70 percent answered Orthodoxy. A further 16 percent indicated that they do not follow a specific faith, while five percent responded that they are atheists. Seven percent of the sample replied that they were Muslims, with only 0.1\% indicating that they were Buddhist. Based on alternative estimates of the total number of adherents, minority religions—specifically Islam and Buddhism—were not properly represented in the overall sample. This is unsurprising, as Levada does not survey in unsafe areas, including Chechnya and Ingushetia, where Islam uniformly practiced. Heleniak (2006), in calculating the total number of Muslims in Russia as of the 2002 census, follows the classic convention of counting members of those groups traditionally identified as Muslim—including Russia’s second-largest ethnic group, the Tatars—to generate an overall number. He

\begin{footnote}{50}See also comparisons between this nationwide sample and the republic-specific data in the subsequent section. I note that in the Levada data there is no question asking respondents to evaluate how religious they feel in terms of change in religious belief over time.
\end{footnote}

\begin{footnote}{51}The adjective ‘Russian’ is the translation of two different words in the Russian language: \textit{russkiy}, which refers to Russian as an ethnic identity, and \textit{rossiyskiy}, which refers to Russian as a civic identity (i.e. a Russian citizen).
\end{footnote}
estimates that there are approximately 15 million Muslims in Russia; this is slightly over ten percent of the country’s total population of 145 million as measured by the 2002 census. A number of issues complicate this estimate, and could either increase or decrease the total number; census work in the Muslim republics of Chechnya and Ingushetia was hampered due to the violence that was ongoing in North Caucasus during 2002 and the large flows of displaced persons between the two republics. Other estimates of Russia’s Muslim population reflect this uncertainty, and range from three million to 30 million; Vladimir Putin’s estimation at the November 2003 meeting of the Organization of the Islamic Conference that there were 20 million Muslims in Russia was widely adopted as an accurate figure (Walker 2005). The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life recently offered a more tempered estimate, projecting Russia’s Muslim population at slightly over 16 million in 2010 (currently 11.7 percent of the country’s total population), with an expected rise of two million by 2030 (Pew Center 2011).

Aggregating Russia’s ethnic groups commonly identified as Buddhist is a bit easier—there are three such groups (the Buryats, Kalmyks, and Tuvans [though some ethnic Altai also practice Buddhism; see Chapter Seven]), in comparison to the 56 ethnicities classified as Muslim. This classification is not without its problems, however. In Tuva, as noted above, religious practice is characterized by syncretism; shamanic rituals and rites remain important despite the penetration of Buddhism into the region during the 17th century and its acknowledgement as the de facto state religion during Tuva’s brief experience with independence (Mongush 2001). Both shamanism and Buddhism have experienced a revival since 1991, and are recognized—along with Russian Orthodoxy—as traditional religions (Walters 2001). In terms of enumeration, Lehmann (1998), for example, equally divides Tuva’s

52 The country’s population has declined since, with a total population of roughly 142 million according to the 2010 census. I use the 2002 figure because this is the data on which Heleniak relies.
population between these two traditional religions. Moreover, any count using national groups as the basis does not include ethnic Russians who practice Buddhism.

Acknowledging these caveats, and following Filatov and Lunkin (2006), this dissertation estimates Russia’s total Buddhist population to be 550,000. Though the total population of the traditionally Buddhist groups is larger—at roughly 850,000 (according to the 2002 census)—this number is scaled down in recognition of adherence to shamanism among Tuvans and, to a lesser extent, Buryats. Moreover, this estimate is of the number of individuals who self-identify as Buddhists; it is not an estimate of active practitioners.

In the rest of the chapter I report reliable survey data on religious practice in Dagestan and Kalmykia, to compare trends in self-identification and active practice to broader trends among the general population in the Russian Federation. For this latter group, I use the data from the World Values Survey as the point of comparison. This analysis is inspired, in part, by Filatov and Lunkin’s (2006: 33) argument that there is a ‘figures fetish’ in enumerating religious groups in Russia; despite counts of total membership in different religious communities, ‘people do not have a clear idea of what the figures mean or what they really represent.’ Using counts of the total number of religious organizations for specific faiths registered with the Russian government, Filatov and Lunkin generate refined estimates of active practitioners for Russia’s leading faiths (as mentioned above with respect to Buddhists). Among traditional faiths, the number of registered organizations grew substantially in the first years after the transition from communism. Between 1990 and 1996, the number of Islamic associations increased from 870 to 2,494 and the number of Buddhist associations from 16 to 124 (Knox 2004). Filatov and Lunkin’s approach generates some notable results; as an example, their estimate of actively practicing Muslims—at slightly less than 3 million—is much lower in comparison to the
numbers put forward by other scholars (Heleniak 2006). This divergence in part stems from regional variation in practice, as correlated to the total number of organizations. In North Caucasus, for example, Filatov and Lunkin (2006) estimate that three-quarters of the members of traditionally Muslim ethnic groups are practicing Muslims; in the Volga basin, the estimate of active practitioners is much lower, between 10 and 15 percent.

While more reliable than estimating the size of a religious community by counting the total populations of the ethnic groups traditionally associated with these religions, which results in gross overestimates of the size of Russia’s Orthodox and Muslim communities, Filatov and Lunkin’s methodology is itself subject to critique. The approximations of practice among Muslims could be more clearly linked to estimates generated through survey work; this is the case for Muslims in Tatarstan, the estimates for which are correlated to the findings of previous surveys. The calculations of practice among Buddhists are also imprecise, as the authors themselves acknowledge. Buddhism does not require active observance at determined times; ‘people may have a Buddhist religious consciousness without any connection with a Buddhist community’ (Filatov and Lunkin 2006: 45). Moreover, some of the Buddhist centers established over the past two decades have not registered as religious organizations due to their small size. Finally, at the time of writing there was no existing survey work on religious practice in the Buddhist republics that the authors could consult to justify their estimates. In turn, the method runs into the issue of the ecological fallacy, by using community-scale information on the number of religious organizations to estimate the attributes of individuals. These shortcomings result in an imprecise measure of the number of Buddhists, and other counts of individuals adhering to particular faiths, in Russia.
In sum, the primary obstacle to a more precise enumeration of religious adherents is the lack of individual-level data. This is, in part, because there is no specific question about religion on the Russian census.\textsuperscript{53} Such questions were excluded during the Soviet period on ideological grounds (with the exception of the aborted 1937 census discussed above); an initial draft of the 2002 census included a question on religion, but it was dropped from the final version (Heleniak 2006). Therefore, because there is no national survey of religious practice among Russia’s ethnic minorities, individual-scale estimates of religiosity have to rely on small-scale, republic-specific surveys.

In the North Caucasus, such surveys are rare, and frequently limited to a single republic. Working in Dagestan, Ware et al. (2003) find religion to be of only marginal importance as a source of identity; instead, the geographic territories of ‘Dagestan’ and ‘Russia’ are the most cited referents. One exception to this trend is Lehmann (1998), who reports high levels of belief among titulars in Muslim republics in the North Caucasus: Chechnya (99% responded that they either believe and practice or believe), Kabardino-Balkaria (85%), and Dagestan (83%). In each republic, belief among ethnic Russian residents is substantially lower: 57 percent in Chechnya, 55 percent in Kabardino-Balkaria, and 48 percent in Dagestan.

As indicated above, surveys of religious belief in Russia’s Buddhist republics are virtually non-existent. Filatov and Lunkin (2006) cite one study, conducted in Kalmykia, which indicated that only 60 percent of ethnic Kalmyks report some form of religious belief; moreover, the religions practiced by Kalmyks include not just Buddhism, but also Russian Orthodoxy and various protestant denominations. Lehmann’s (1998) work in Kalmykia and Buryatia again finds

\textsuperscript{53} The inclusion of questions on religion on census forms is not common. See the discussion in Chapter Two.
higher levels of religious belief among titiulars in comparison to Russians in these republics—58 to 41 percent in Buryatia and 54 to 50 percent in Kalmykia.

Religious Adherence and Practice among Russia’s Muslims and Buddhists

The intent of this section is to provide a general overview of religious belief and practice among the Russian population as a whole, as reported in the World Values Survey, and Muslims and Buddhists in two, specific, geographic contexts. The latter results should not be understood as nationally representative of all Muslims or Buddhists in the Russian Federation, given the geographic and contextual variation noted above. In discussing the results in the ethnic republics, I limit interpretation to those who self-identified as either Muslim (Sunni, Shia, Sufi, or unspecified) in Dagestan (n=550) or Buddhist in Kalmykia (n=281).

My discussion is motivated by two main questions: 1) what is the nature and depth of religious practice in Russia as compared to the two ethnic republics analyzed? and 2) what determining factors explain the variation in religious attendance across the respective samples? In addressing the latter question, I consider how demographic and political determinants influence self-reported attendance at a place of worship. While attendance is one of a suite of measures that can be used to evaluate the importance of religion in an individual’s life, I rely on it here as it is the only consistent measure of religious engagement across the three surveys considered. Based on the literature reviewed above, both in this chapter and in Chapter Two, I have generated a set of four hypotheses to be tested via the survey results. Broadly classed, these hypotheses test the central tenets of modernization theory—that there is a link between the

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54 I drew from O’Loughlin and Ó Tuathail (2009) to organize this survey interpretation.
processes of modernity and secularization (and, in turn, attendance at religious services) in a given society (see discussion in Chapter Two).

These hypotheses build on previous sociological work on religious practice in the Russian Federation. I am specifically interested in the results reported by Greeley (1994), Kääriäinen (1999), and Kääriäinen and Furman (2000). Each of these pieces takes modernization theory as its theoretical basis, testing a number of hypotheses associated with this approach. To briefly restate, modernization theory suggests that modern societies should be differentiated from those societies that maintain traditional elements and can be viewed as still developing economically. With respect to religion, modernization theory proposes that societal changes will lead to a decline in religious adherence. Societies that are more economically and politically advanced—as reflected in the level of urbanization, higher education level, and a well-functioning state structure—experience an attendant decline in religious belief and active practice. This argument is at the core of secularization theory, with religion playing a decreasingly important—or altered (Casanova 1994)—function in mediating the public-private binary. Modernization theory has been widely critiqued in the social sciences, primarily for its presumed linearity and universality (in human geography, see Taylor 1989). Wuthnow (1991: 2) writes that despite this criticism, ‘its [modernization theory’s] assumptions continue to undergird much of our conventional wisdom about religion and politics.’ Given its use in the existing reviews of religiosity in the Russian Federation, I employ modernization theory as a baseline to build the case for contextual differentiation in the analysis of geographies of religion.

**H1:** The strength of religious belief is linearly related to age; youth are more likely to indicate lower levels of attendance at religious services in comparison to older respondents.
This hypothesis follows assumptions regarding religiosity in cases of modernization—older individuals are more likely to adhere to traditional beliefs and value systems. Greeley (1994), however, argues an alternate position; in some societies, including post-Soviet Russia and East Germany, the young and old report higher levels of religiosity in comparison to those of middle age. In both contexts, religious belief is complicated by the influence of communism; in Russia, this took the form of 70 years of state-mandated atheism (1917-1991). In this case, there was little institutionalization of religious practice within either families or the society as a whole. Oftentimes, youth are compelled to attend religious services through social pressure. The result, in the literature, is inconsistent evaluations of the importance of religion to youth in Russia. In her work on the religious revival in Russia’s republics, Lehmann (1998: 474) reports that ‘the rise in the level of belief has been especially pronounced among the young’ since the breakup of the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{55} Other authors have suggested the opposite—that belief in God is strongest among the elderly (Kääriäinen, 1999).\textsuperscript{56} Whatever the case, the Soviet intervention in religion has complicated the role that religion plays in Russia’s post-Soviet society. As such, and following Kääriäinen’s (1999) findings from the World Values Survey in the early and mid-1990s, I anticipate that older respondents will have adopted religious practice to the same extent that occurs in other cases. In a cross-national comparison, Inglehart and Baker (2000) report that in societies that have experienced substantial economic growth and attendant modernization since the 1950s older respondents are more commonly classified as ‘traditional’ along a rational-

\textsuperscript{55} Interestingly, Lehmann (1998: 492) also found that ‘Muslim and Buddhist youth are experiencing a stronger religious revival than Russian youth’ in the ethnic republics where she conducted extensive survey work in the mid-1990s. Using the sample from Buryatia, I will directly compare religiosity among Buddhists and non-Buddhists in that republic in Chapter Six.

\textsuperscript{56} Though more recently, Kääriäinen (2009) has revised this position somewhat, noting an uptick in religious service attendance among youth in the 2005-2006 data.
traditional spectrum—this indicates, among other values, that God is important in the respondent’s life. With respect to church attendance—the measure operationalized in this chapter—Inglehart and Baker’s findings are less uniform (and not reported by age); while attendance has declined in many advanced industrial societies, in five of the seven post-communist states (Belarus, Bulgaria, Hungary, Latvia, and Russia) evaluated attendance has risen since 1991.

The second clause in this hypothesis is also connected to the private nature of religious observance during the Soviet period. I suggest that older individuals who report adherence to either Islam or Buddhism maintained their beliefs, though this did not mean active, public observation. Muslims in the Soviet Union adopted the concept of *darul ul harb*, as previously introduced in the chapter (Froese 2005). Similarly, during the Soviet period Buddhists often maintained altars and other markers of religious belief in the privacy of their own homes. Because many individuals kept their beliefs private during the communist period, older individuals can more easily transition to public practice than youths, who have traditionally been socialized in religious institutions through the intervention of their elders. Moreover, as Kääriäinen notes, only 18 percent of respondents in the World Values Surveys conducted in Russia report that they were raised with a religious upbringing; this finding is consistent across the three waves considered: 1991, 1993 and 1996.

*H2: Religious belief is related to gender, and women are more likely to report high levels of attendance at religious services.*

Work in the sociology of religion has found that women are more devout than their male counterparts (see Miller and Hoffmann 1995 for an example). Miller and Stark (2002) test the
traditional theory that women’s higher levels of devoutness are the product of socialization and traditional attitudes towards gender; they find, however, little support for the socialization model, and argue instead that religious adherence is the product of risk-aversion among females. These wider debates about religiosity and gender aside, writing in the case of Russian Federation, Kääriäinen (1999) reported that three-fifth of women responded that they believe in God, as opposed to only one-third of men. In a more thorough longitudinal survey, Kääriäinen (2009) reiterates the point that women are more frequent attendees at religious services. As discussed above, Kääriäinen’s data and other national surveys primarily include Orthodox believers; below, I compare the importance of gender to religiosity and service attendance for Muslims and Buddhists in the Russian Federation to the most recent data from the World Values Survey, the same survey used by Kääriäinen (1999), albeit earlier waves.

**H3: Strength of religious belief and practice is related to place of residence; attendance at religious services will be higher among rural residents, in comparison to city dwellers.**

It is widely accepted that individuals living in rural areas are more religious than their urban counterparts (Chalfant and Heller 1991). This was also true in the Soviet Union; Borowik (2002: 498) reports that ‘religion remained at high levels in rural areas,’ as well as parts of the country where religion was a component in national and ethnic differentiation. On the other hand, residence in urban areas was likely to indicate acceptance of the Soviets’ atheist program (though during the 1970s, there was a revival in religious observance among the urban intelligentsia). All three surveys—the WVS, and the Dagestan and Kalmykia samples—interviewed individuals in urban and rural areas. Following the consensus in the literature, I
expect that rural respondents will report higher levels of self-evaluated religiosity in comparison to urban residents.

**H4: Ethno-national pride is related to the strength of religious belief; respondents with higher reported levels of pride in their ethnic group are expected to indicate higher levels of service attendance.**

Ethno-national pride is frequently posited as a component of a coherent national identity, to which religion is also linked in the literature. For Hastings (1997: 175), religion served as ‘both the mythic core in the particularisation [sic] of…local ethnicity, and a universalising [sic] bridge in its [the national group’s] network with wider ethnic circles.’ Religion as a link across groups is more commonplace in recent times; the Orthodox Church is closely linked to Russian national identity (as discussed above), while an affinity exists in the wider Orthodox community between countries like Russia and Serbia. In their interpretation of the World Values Survey, Inglehart and Baker (2000: 29) view national pride as one indicator of adherence to traditional values, and make a direct connection between pride and religious adherence: ‘highly religious nations rank high on national pride.’ O’Loughlin and Ó Tuathail (2009: 606) write that pride in one’s ethnic group is ‘socially constructed and repetitively reproduced,’ an emotional construct that reinforces the individual’s attachment to the associated group. More generally, both national pride and religion serve as bases for nation building. Given this function—one that is similar to religion in its function of socializing an individual into the group dynamic—I posit that individuals with higher levels of ethnic pride will report that they are more religious.
Evaluating the Hypotheses using the World Values Survey

The World Values Survey collects information through surveys in more than 50 countries worldwide on a variety of political, economic, and social questions. The WVS has been used extensively both in geography (see O’Loughlin 2004; Schueth and O’Loughlin 2008) and sociology, in the latter case to evaluate the nature of religious practice in post-communist countries (Froese 2001; Bruce 2000). While it does have some drawbacks, including variable sample patterns across countries and a large timeframe in which the data for each wave is collected, when evaluated at the country scale the WVS provides a consistent set of questions for longitudinal comparison (the sixth wave, to be conducted in 2010-2012, will provide 30 years of coverage for some countries). Regarding personal religious practice, the survey gathers information on which religion respondents practice, their frequency of attendance at religious services, self-perception regarding personal belief (“Regardless of attendance at religious services, do you consider yourself…?”), and the importance of God in a respondent’s life, among other questions. For Russia, the latest publically available data comes from the fifth wave, conducted in the country in 2006.

Below, I evaluate questions of religious adherence and practice among those individuals who identified themselves as Orthodox in the World Values Survey and compare these results to those from two survey projects conducted in two of the Russian Federation’s 21 ethnic republics. The first was conducted by O’Loughlin et al.in five regions of the North Caucasus, three of which—Karachay-Cherkessia, Kabardino-Balkaria, and Dagestan—are areas where Islam has historically predominated (see O’Loughlin et al. 2007). I consider the results for Dagestan in detail here. It should be noted that religion is not the primary focus of O’Loughlin et al.’s project; rather, the project considered political, economic, and social conditions in the North
Caucasus as a post-conflict zone. The survey included three questions on religion: 1) do you consider yourself a believer, and what religion do you ascribe to?; 2) how frequently do you usually attend your place of worship?; and 3) would you say you have become more religious in comparison to 1990? The questions on religion in the North Caucasus survey were reproduced for the surveys conducted in Kalmykia and Buryatia, in the summer and fall of 2010, respectively, with slight modification. I focus on the Kalmykia sample, given its larger, independent sample. The subsequent section considers the interaction of these same demographic characteristics—including urban versus rural residence, measures of interethnic trust, and general economic welfare, among other factors—with religious attendance.

Using data from the most recent wave of the World Values Survey (conducted in 2005-2006), I performed a preliminary evaluation of the above hypotheses using multivariate regression. In the most recent, publically available wave for Russia, 2,033 individuals were sampled country-wide. There is frequently missing data in the survey; for example, only 61.6 percent of respondents provided a religious affiliation; while some of this missing data corresponds to individuals without an affiliation, it is also likely that some of those interviewed were unwilling to provide such information.

A limited subset of questions from the WVS for Russia engaged with the topic of religion. This included questions on religious affiliation, frequency of attendance at services, and self-evaluated religiosity (Are you a religious person? and How important is God in your life?). Overall, most of the sample is composed of individuals who self-identify as Orthodox; 89.7 percent of those who gave an affiliation said they were Orthodox. I note that 6.5 percent of the

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57 Question 27 in the North Caucasus survey, on attendance, is reproduced exactly in the two later surveys. In Kalmykia (q. 42), the adverb ‘usually’ was dropped and the specific religious buildings were replaced by the generic phrase ‘religious services.’
sample identified as Muslim and 1.4 percent as Buddhist. For the latter population, this corresponds closely to the percentage of Buddhists, as identified by historically associated national groups, in the Russian Federation as a whole—slightly less than one million out of a national population of 140-145 million. However, the absolute number of Buddhists in the sample is too small for statistical comparison, at 17 persons. With respect to self-identified Muslims, the sample is most likely undercounted given the difficulty of surveying in the historically Islamic, but currently unstable, North Caucasus region.

Associated with the above stated hypotheses, I identified demographic variables linked to modernization for inclusion in the regression model. This included an age variable, which was continuously coded with respondents falling between the ages of 16 and 80. The mean age for the sample was 41.2 years, with a standard deviation of 16.5. Gender was recoded as a dummy variable, with men as the baseline category (overall, the sample is 53.5 percent female). The same transformation was performed for settlement type, distinguishing between the country-specific identifiers of towns (ranging in population from more than one million to less than 50,000) and rural settlements. The latter were the baseline category. The final variable hypothesized to be of importance in determining religiosity, pride in one’s ethnic group, was continuously coded from ‘very proud’ to ‘not at all proud;’ I maintained this order in the analysis (see also Table 4.2 for an explanation of the variable transformations across the three surveys and Table 4.3 for summary statistics).

The model also included a series of control variables that are commonly linked to the modernization thesis: marital status, respondents’ level of education, employment status, self-evaluated material well-being, and interethnic trust. Marital status was recoded as a binary

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58 These percentages refer to those who gave a religious affiliation. If the sample as a whole is taken, only 0.8 percent identified as Buddhist and 4.0 percent as Muslim.
variable, with those who reported as married or in a civil union coded as one and all others coded as zero. With respect to education, Albrecht and Heaton (1984: 46), in reviewing work in sociology, suggest that higher levels of education are linked to declining religiosity: ‘educational achievement impacts negatively on religious commitment.’ Respondents were classified into four categories with respect to education: without education or incomplete/complete primary; secondary in preparation for university; secondary in preparation for a technical profession; and university-level education (the last three categories group together individuals who either have some education or have completed their education at the designated level). The third and fourth controls, employment and material status, can be viewed as broader indicators of wealth; however, higher levels of material well-being do not directly translate to increased life satisfaction (Helliwell and Putnam 2004). While modernization can be viewed as resulting in increased material wealth, there is little consensus on the correlation between wealth and religiosity in the existing literature. Employment was coded as a binary variable, either employed or not employed (including the unemployed, pensioners, and students), while material well-being was a continuous variable evaluated on a 10-point scale in the World Values Survey and a four-point scale in the regional surveys. Interethnic trust, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Six, is included as a control of attachment to a specific community and cultural tradition, a value that is anticipated to be weakened according to the modernization thesis. This variable was recoded as a binary variable, according to whether respondents indicated some measure of trust of other national groups.

To ensure consistency with the samples collected in Dagestan and Kalmykia, I evaluated the selected factors against the dependent variable of church attendance. Again, this is the only

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59 The overall trend is somewhat problematic when disaggregated to specific religions; Albrecht and Heaton find a positive relationship between education and religiosity among Mormons.
question related to religiosity and religious practice that is asked across all three samples. According to Kääriäinen (1999), attendance at religious services at least once a month is the widely held international standard for frequent attendance. The variable was binomially recoded; attendance of ‘once a month’ or more frequently was coded as one and all other answers were coded zero (‘only on holy days,’ ‘once a year,’ ‘less often,’ and ‘never’).

Based on this recoding, I conducted a logistic regression of the attendance variable; the first model included only the independent variables of interest as associated with the hypotheses introduced above, and then subsequently added the five controls. Given the predominance of Orthodox in the WVS sample, I selected out those who identified with this religion to facilitate comparison with the republic-scale samples of Muslims and Buddhists. The results presented in Table 4.1 evaluate the population as a whole and make a comparison to the Orthodox sample.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>National Sample</th>
<th>National Sample w/controls</th>
<th>Orthodox Sub-Sample</th>
<th>Orthodox Sub-Sample w/controls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>1.01***</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>1.01***</td>
<td>1.01</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender (male as baseline)</td>
<td>1.86***</td>
<td>1.75***</td>
<td>1.60***</td>
<td>1.72**</td>
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<td>Urban residence</td>
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<td>1.18</td>
<td>1.39*</td>
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<td>Ethnic pride</td>
<td>1.59**</td>
<td>1.57*</td>
<td>1.38</td>
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<tr>
<td>Controls</td>
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<td>Marital status (married)</td>
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<td>Education - Technical</td>
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<td>Material well-being</td>
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<td>Employment status</td>
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<td>0.94</td>
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<td>Interethnic trust</td>
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<td>0.99</td>
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<td>Number of Observations</td>
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<td>1,085</td>
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<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td>0.029</td>
<td>0.034</td>
<td>0.021</td>
<td>0.024</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significance levels are indicated by asterisks: * p ≤ .10; ** p ≤ .05; *** p ≤ .01
A few important trends are noted. Only gender comes across as consistently significant in both models. The odds of frequent attendance are 75 percent higher for females in comparison to males in the complete sample and 72 percent higher in the Orthodox subsample. In the complete sample, the variables measuring pride in one’s ethnic group and those with a technical education (in comparison to the baseline category of no education) are both significant, albeit at the 0.1 level. To interpret these variables, the odds of frequent attendance among those who express ethnic pride are 57 percent higher than the baseline category; among those with a technical education, in comparison to the baseline category, the odds of frequent attendance are approximately 50 percent less. These variables are not, however, significant for the Orthodox subsample; rather, the only conclusion about self-identified Orthodox from the World Values Survey is that the odds of females attending religious services frequent are significantly higher in comparison to males. This confirms one finding of Kääriäinen (1999; 2009), who reported that women are more likely to believe in God—the finding is, however, hardly surprising.

Survey Design and Implementation in the Local Surveys

Using these results as a baseline, I compare them to two republic-scale surveys conducted in Dagestan and Kalmykia. In both republics, the samples included individuals who identified with a religious tradition other than Islam or Buddhism; these were Russians, members of other ethnic groups, and the titular group, as well, who indicated that they are atheists or do not practice that group’s traditional religion. The Dagestan survey was collected at a total of 26 sample points across the republic. A map of the survey locations for the entire North Caucasus sample is provided in O’Loughlin and Ó Tuathail (2009). The overall sample size was 625, of whom 550 self-identified as Muslim. At the actual survey points, the interviewers used a
random-route method to ensure the independence of the sample. The second survey considered was conducted in Kalmykia during the fall of 2010. In this republic, three hundred surveys were conducted, evenly split between the republic’s capital of Elista and four other population points in the rural areas of the republic. The locations of these rural sampling points, by rayon, are indicated in Figure 5.4. A local research institute, the Regional Institute of Innovative Research, was hired to conduct the survey. Out of the entire sample, 281 respondents self-identified as Buddhist. For the latter survey, a number of questions were drawn from the Levada Center’s 2008 Yearbook discussed above, to facilitate comparisons with the general Russian population. Many of the baseline questions from O’Loughlin et al.’s (2007) survey were also included, though questions on the topic of religion go beyond their limited concern with this subject. Responses to these questions will be explored in more detail in the subsequent chapters.

**An Overview of the Survey Results**

This section provides a general picture of the survey results in the selected republics, comparing them to the results presented above from the World Values Survey. An initial way to evaluate religious affiliation is to consider what percentage of individuals identifies as atheist. In the WVS sample atheism is not an option; however, and to repeat, only 61.6 percent of respondents chose to report a specific religion (as noted above, the percentage is not directly comparable). In the two selected republics the number of respondents who indicated that they are atheists is low: roughly two percent in Kalmykia and seven percent in Dagestan. Clearly, a high percentage of respondents in the republics maintain some form of religious belief. It should be noted that the percentages of those who indicate they are atheist closely correspond to the national sample as provided in the 2008 Levada Center Yearbook (five percent), being slightly
lower in Kalmykia and slightly higher in Dagestan. Turning to the strength of religious sentiment, the republic-scale surveys included two common questions on religiosity: a longitudinal measure that asked respondents to compare how religious they felt at the time of the survey to 1990 (which is unreliable for the youngest respondents in the 2010 sample, who were born after 1990) and a measure of frequency of attendance at religious services. I focus on the latter question due to concerns regarding reliability and to maintain the comparison to the World Values Survey data.60

For Russian Orthodox, according to the WVS data previously analyzed, 16.4 percent report that they attend religious services once a month or more often, and can thus be classified as frequent attendees (analyzed in the models presented in Table 4.1). To provide a general picture of attendance in the ethnic republics, in Dagestan a comparable percentage of Muslims indicated that they rarely or never attend religious services; only 21.5 percent of the sample attends mosque at least once a month. Nearly half of the sample (49.5 percent) responded that they never or very rarely attend mosque. This is somewhat surprising, as the republic is widely viewed as the core of Islam’s post-Soviet revival; for example, Ware and Kisriev (2000) report that 80 percent of those who undertook the pilgrimage to Mecca (the hajj) in the first decade after the breakup of the USSR were from Dagestan. Many of the new mosques in the republic are affiliated with Salafism, which, somewhat contradictorily and despite the fervor of its practitioners, does not emphasize mosque attendance. Recent work by Kurbanov (2011) points to the adoption of practices associated with Wahhabism among the urban youth in Dagestan and other parts of the North Caucasus and the resultant adoption of alternate religious practices:

60 The longitudinal question asked respondents to evaluate how religious they feel today in comparison to 10-20 years ago (see Appendix One, q. 44); this was a problematic wording for the sample’s youngest respondents, at age 18.
The irreversible Salafisation [a term synonymous to the more derogatory Wahhabism; see Knysh 2005] of the region is leading to increasingly more young people excluding themselves from the nationwide information and communication networks and moving into an alternative space—one that exists in mosques, in domestic educational circles for learning the Quran and the foundations of Islam, and on web pages, innumerable chat rooms and forums. (Kurbanov 2011: 363)

Hence, it is possible that youths and those who have recently rediscovered religion seek out alternatives sites for religious engagement, beyond attendance at services. Those, however, who maintain a more traditional form of practice—i.e. the older population—are perhaps more likely to attend religious services in the mosques of the republic as organized by the traditional religious organizations, such as the regional spiritual board or muftiate (see Matsuzato and Ibragimov 2005). To summarize, survey respondents in Dagestan indicated high levels of self-identification with Islam, but do not uniformly attend mosque or participate in religious services.

Interestingly, Buddhists are more frequent attendees at religious services in comparison both to their Muslim and Russian Orthodox counterparts; 25.3 percent of the sample attends religious services at least once a month. For Buddhists in Kalmykia, 19 of 281 respondents (6.8 percent) indicated that they ‘never’ or ‘less than once a year’ attend religious services. The majority (56.9 percent) of respondents indicated that they attend religious services a few times a year.

Using these data on frequent attendance, I evaluated which variables predict higher levels of attendance from the demographic factors introduced above: age, gender, urban-rural residence, and ethnic pride. As performed on the World Values Survey data, I use logistic regression models to evaluate which social characteristics predict frequent attendance at religious services in Dagestan and Kalmykia, respectively, while also including a set of five control variables.
Testing Modernization Theory Among Russia’s Religious Groups

Table 4.2: Variable Transformations Performed across the Three Samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>Transformation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequent Attendance</td>
<td>Respondents assigned a value of 1 if they reported attending religious services once a month or more often. All others assigned a value of 0.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Continuous coding maintained.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>For all three samples, males were designated the baseline category.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban-rural residence</td>
<td>Respondents assigned a value of 1 if they live in urban areas; those living in rural areas were assigned a value of 0.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic pride</td>
<td>Respondents who reported being ‘very proud’ or ‘somewhat proud’ of their ethnicity were assigned a value of 1. All others assigned a value of 0, including those who responded ‘don’t know’ or did not answer.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Controls</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marital status</td>
<td>Respondents who indicated they are married, living as married, or in a civil union were coded as 1. All others (single divorced, or widowed) coded as 0.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Education level             | For the WVS: transformed into four categories, with no/beginning education serving as the baseline. Separate variables were created for those with some/complete secondary, technical or university education.  
                              | For the regional surveys: transformed into three categories, with no/beginning education combined with some/complete secondary serving as the baseline (this was due to the small numbers reporting no/beginning education in both republics). Separate variables were created for those with some/complete technical or university education. |
| Employment status           | Respondents assigned a value of 1 if they reported being employed in some sector; all others (pensioners, housewives, the unemployed and students) coded as 0. |
| Material well-being         | Continuous coding maintained. In the WVS, this was on a 10-point scale; in the regional surveys, this was on a four-point scale.             |
| Interethnic trust           | Respondents assigned a value of 1 if they reported that either they trust or generally trust members of other ethnic groups (WVS) or somewhat or completely disagree with the statement that members of other ethnic groups cannot be trusted (Dagestan and Kalmykia). All others assigned a value of 0. |

To ensure consistency in the comparison across the three samples, I reproduced the coding for both the dependent variable of frequent attendance and the independent variables and
controls. Table 4.2 provides a more detailed outline of these variables for reference; in Table 4.3 I provide summary statistics for these variables across each of the three surveys. In interpreting the regression models, I present the results from Dagestan and Kalmykia, and then offer a comparative evaluation of the stated hypotheses across the three models. As I did previously, for the Dagestan sample I first ran the model with the independent variables of interest: age, gender, urban-rural residence, and ethnic pride. Subsequently, the model added the five control variables. Table 4.4 reports the results from these models. The same procedure was followed for the Kalmykia sample, the results of which are given in Table 4.5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>WVS – National</th>
<th>WVS – Orthodox</th>
<th>Dagestan – Muslim</th>
<th>Kalmykia - Buddhist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequent Attendance</td>
<td>Yes = 11.7</td>
<td>Yes = 16.4</td>
<td>Yes = 21.5</td>
<td>Yes = 25.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Variables</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Residence</td>
<td>Ethnic pride</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean = 41.25 yrs.</td>
<td>Female = 53.5</td>
<td>Urban = 68.4</td>
<td>Yes = 83.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean = 43.06 yrs.</td>
<td>Female = 61.3</td>
<td>Urban = 67.0</td>
<td>Yes = 87.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean = 38.74 yrs.</td>
<td>Female = 51.6</td>
<td>Urban = 37.5</td>
<td>Yes = 78.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean = 41.99 yrs.</td>
<td>Female = 52.3</td>
<td>Urban = 48.0</td>
<td>Yes = 70.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controls</td>
<td>Marital status</td>
<td>Education level</td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>Material well-being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes = 60.4</td>
<td>Secondary = 21.5</td>
<td>Second. = 20.8</td>
<td>Yes = 59.0</td>
<td>Lowest step = 1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes = 61.3</td>
<td>Technical = 46.0</td>
<td>Tech. = 47.2</td>
<td>Yes = 58.1</td>
<td>Second step = 5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes = 69.1</td>
<td>University = 29.3</td>
<td>Uni. = 28.6</td>
<td>Yes = 54.7</td>
<td>Third step = 11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes = 64.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes = 58.0</td>
<td>Fourth step = 9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education level</td>
<td></td>
<td>Residence</td>
<td>Material well-being</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>Yes = 59.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lowest step = 1.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes = 58.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Second step = 5.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes = 54.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Third step = 11.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes = 58.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fourth step = 9.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fifth step = 15.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sixth step = 13.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Seventh step = 13.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Eighth step = 14.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ninth step = 9.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Upper step = 6.4</td>
<td>Upper = 5.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interethnic trust</td>
<td>Yes = 39.8</td>
<td>Yes = 41.3</td>
<td>Yes = 31.1</td>
<td>Yes = 82.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of observations</td>
<td>2,033&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1,123&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>550</td>
<td>281</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> This is the total number of observations for the WVS data set. Individual variables have missing values, which results in a reduction the total number of observations for specific variables. See models reported in Table 4.1 for an indication of this reduction.

<sup>b</sup> This is the total number of respondents who selected ‘Orthodox’ when asked to identify their religious denomination. The same caveat regarding the reduction in observations applies to this sample as to the complete national sample.

The first hypothesis to be tested evaluates the relationship between age and religious attendance. In prior work on the relationship between age and religiosity in Russia, Greeley (1994) hypothesized of a u-shaped curve in religious belief, with higher levels of belief among the youngest and oldest cohorts in the country. In my analysis, among Orthodox the trend is towards more frequent attendance as age increases, while the reverse is the case for Buddhists; however, neither of these trends is statistically significant. In Dagestan, interestingly, the odds of frequent attendance are greater as age increases; the variable is significant at the 0.05 level. This supports the argument introduced above—that younger residents of the republic are increasingly drawn to Salafist doctrine, which deemphasizes the importance of mosque attendance in favor of the ‘alternative spaces’ identified by Kurbanov. Further, and again following Kurbanov (2011), a distinction should be made between ‘old Islam’ and ‘new Islam.’ The former has experienced a limited revival, through the rediscovery of traditional practice; it ‘has regained its previous position, and reaffirmed the prerevolutionary, feudal community view of the world,’ though it has also ‘become clear that this Islam is incapable of satisfying the spiritual needs of Caucasians in the twenty-first century’ (Kurbanov 2011: 348). This inadequacy is addressed by the alternative forms of religious engagement—occurring primarily in urban areas—mentioned
previously. Older individuals are more likely to maintain affiliation with the traditional religious organizations in the republic, and thus meet their religious needs through attendance at mosque.

**Table 4.4: Logistic Regression Results for Frequent Attendance among Muslims in Dagestan (odds ratios reported)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Dagestan Sample</th>
<th>Dagestan Sample w/controls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>1.02**</td>
<td>1.02**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (male as baseline)</td>
<td>0.08***</td>
<td>0.07***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban-rural residence</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic pride</td>
<td>2.00**</td>
<td>2.12**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Controls**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marital status (married)</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education - Technical</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education – University</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material well-being</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interethnic trust</td>
<td>1.28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of Observations 550

R-squared 0.200 0.209

Significance levels are indicated by asterisks: * p ≤ .10; ** p ≤ .05; *** p ≤ .01

**Table 4.5: Logistic Regression Results for Frequent Attendance among Buddhists in Kalmykia (odds ratios reported)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Kalmykia Sample</th>
<th>Kalmykia Sample w/controls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (male as baseline)</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>1.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban-rural residence</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>1.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic pride</td>
<td>3.30***</td>
<td>2.82***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Controls**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marital status (married)</td>
<td>1.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education - Technical</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education – University</td>
<td>0.32***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material well-being</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interethnic trust</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

61 A revised version of the full model for the Kalmykia sample also included an interaction term between education and age, to explore change in the odds ratio in the age term between the limited and full model; this change indicates, preliminarily, that older people are less educated. In this model, older, educated respondents (with both technical and university-level training) were significantly more likely (at the 0.05 level) to attend temple frequently in comparison to the rest of the sample.
The second hypothesis posits a clear relationship between gender and attendance at religious services, with women being more frequent attendees. To reiterate the preliminary conclusion made above, for the Russian Orthodox sample, the theorized relation holds: the odds of women reporting frequent attendance are significantly greater in comparison to men. Kääriäinen (1999) reports a similar finding from the 1996 wave of the WVS with respect to gender and belief in God; 60 percent of women express such a belief, versus one-third of the males in the sample. Greeley (1994), in reporting earlier data (from 1993) and evaluating the interaction between age and gender, found that the gender gap maintained for older Russians but that there was no significant difference for younger age categories.

In Dagestan, the difference in odds for frequent attendance at religious services is reversed—though this is generally unsurprising given the gender norms associated with the religion. The odds of men frequently attending mosque are 13 times as large of women reporting the same rate of attendance, when calculated via the model’s reported odds ratio with men as the baseline. To generalize about this finding to other contexts, in data collected in the spring of 2007 among students in Kuwait, Gonzalez (2011) reports that 14.1 percent of females in her sample attend mosque once a month or more frequently; in contrast, 69.6 percent of male respondents fall into the same category. The comparable numbers for Dagestan are 4.9 percent and 39.1 percent, respectively. To quote Gonzalez (2011: 346): ‘in Kuwait, men are encouraged to attend mosque for their prayers and women are encouraged to pray at home.’ The same condition holds in Dagestan. This also underscores the relevance of the geographic, contextual
approach taken in this chapter; the national sample clearly masks the divergence in attendance practice among Muslims in the Russian Federation. Lastly, the gender gap is nonexistent in Kalmykia. Given the noted paucity of studies on Buddhist practice in Russia, it is difficult to make a broader conclusion regarding this outcome; I speculate that this reflects the wider trend towards increased levels of religiosity (see Chapter Five) and frequent attendance at religious services. A quarter of the Kalmykia sample reported it attends khurul (temple) at least once a month.

The third hypothesis sought to test the relationship between urban and rural residence and attendance at religious services. This variable is not significant in any of the three models evaluating Orthodoxy, Islam, and Buddhism in their geographic context. While the general trend of more frequent attendance for urban dwellers is present across all three models, no robust conclusion can be made about this pattern due to this lack of significance. Though this measure is not significant, the question of access remains an important one for each of the three religions considered. In the case of Kalmykia, as will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter, in 1991 there were no temples in the republic; they had all been destroyed during the religious crackdown of the late 1920s and 1930s. While construction has proceeded apace since the breakup of the Soviet Union, the rural parts of the republics are still underserved. In Dagestan, the explosion in mosque construction has been noted by other authors, in particular Ware and Kisriev (2000); whereas in the late Soviet period there were 27 mosques in the republic, a decade later there were approximately 2,000. Given that the republic’s population is nearly three million according to the 2010 census, the argument could be made that Muslims there are still underserved with respect to religious infrastructure.
The final hypothesis to be tested posits that there is a positive relationship between ethnic pride and religious attendance: those who indicate they are proud of their ethnic group are more likely to frequently attend religious services. To restate, this position builds on the traditional link between ethnic identity and religious practice, particularly of a religion historically associated with a national group. For Russian Orthodox, those who indicate some measure of pride in their ethnic group are not significantly more likely to indicate that they frequently attend religious services.62

The results for the two minority religions are much more interesting. In both cases, the odds of frequent attendance are significantly larger for those who indicate they are proud of their ethnic group and those who do not with respect to attendance at religious services. In Dagestan, the odds of frequent attendance are two times as large for those who indicate they are proud of their ethnic group; in Kalmykia the odds are nearly three times a large (and significant at the 0.01 level). This finding substantiates the claim that religion is likely viewed by respondents as an important component of ethnic identity, particularly among Russia’s ethnic minorities and practitioners of minority religions. This follows the work of Agadjanian (2001: 477), who argues that religious identity plays an important role not only in terms of socialization and protection, but also as a cultural touchstone; ‘religious identity conveyed at least an illusion of consistency and a great deal of emotional power for those who introduced into the debate new (or reified old) ideas instead of the rapidly disappearing Marxist discourse.’ In other words, religion served as an important basis for the reclamation of the cultural identities suppressed (but in other ways cultivated) during the Soviet short century. In some instances, religion became the

62 It should be noted, however, that this variable is significant at the 0.1 level in the national sample, indicating that the relationship between ethnic pride and frequent religious attendance is present among those who do not practice Orthodoxy exclusively (though again, I have not directly tested this).
basis for political mobilization; in the most well-known instance, that of Chechnya, this path was rather circuitous and occurred only after the Russian military killed off all of the more moderate nationalists. In Dagestan and Kalmykia, rather, the apparent relationship points to a link between ethnic attachment and religious practice in a more prosaic sense; to quote Agadjanian (2001: 477): religion served as ‘an auxiliary source of ethnic and national consolidation.’ I explore this idea in greater detail with respect to the Kalmyk sample in Chapter Five.

Clearly, limitations exist in the data presented in this chapter. When disaggregated into three categories, as in the analysis of the relationship between age and attendance at religious services, the small samples collected in the ethnic republics become even smaller. One line of investigation that mediates the problems associated with small sample size is the pooling of the two republic-level samples, to facilitate comparison within and between the two groups. Following the procedure used in Kolossov and O’Loughlin (2011), I ran a pooled model testing the dependent variable of frequent attendance against the terms that were reported as significant in Tables 4.4 and 4.5. While the pooling of the samples is potentially problematic because of the non-random nature of the Kalmykia data, I assume that the effects measured across the two samples are consistent for this analysis. The results for this model are reported in Table 4.6. In general, the significant variables in the pooled sample corresponded to the significant variables in the full models reported above, i.e. ethnic pride and university-level education for the Kalmykia sample. When the effects of the predictors for Dagestan are compared to the Kalmyk sample, there is no significant difference for ethnic pride, education, or age; as expected, only gender (with males as the baseline) differs substantially—and significantly—from the survey results in Kalmykia.

63 The code for the pooling of the samples is based on the information found here: http://www.stata.com/support/faqs/statistics/pooling-data-and-chow-tests/
### Table 4.6: Pooled Logistic Regression Results for Frequent Attendance among Muslims in Dagestan and Buddhists in Kalmykia (odds ratios reported)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pooled Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age (Kalmykia)</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender – Male as baseline (Kalmykia)</td>
<td>1.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education – University (Kalmykia)</td>
<td>0.42***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic pride (Kalmykia)</td>
<td>3.16***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dagestan</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (Dagestan)</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender – Male as baseline (Dagestan)</td>
<td>0.05***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education – University (Dagestan)</td>
<td>1.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic pride (Dagestan)</td>
<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Observations</td>
<td>831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td>0.157</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significance levels are indicated by asterisks: * $p \leq .10$; ** $p \leq .05$; *** $p \leq .01$

### Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been twofold. First, I have presented a background on church-state relations in both the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation: the policy of state atheism, its failures, and the legislative attempts to control the religious market in newly-independent Russian state. The legacy of the 1997 law on religion is ambiguous; while it has weakened the position of new faiths, specifically in their attempts at evangelicalism, it also provided Islam and Buddhism with secured legal recognition as traditional religions. Building on this, I have situated Islam and Buddhism, two of Russia’s leading minority religions, in their geographic contexts.

Second, in testing a series of hypotheses linked to modernization and the secularization thesis, I found that similar demographic and attitudinal relationships exists that correspond to the results prior work on religiosity in Russia (see Kääriäinen 1999). According to data from the
World Values Survey, individuals who report frequent attendance at religious services—once a month or more often—are more likely to be female. For the general population in Russia, there is also a significant relationship—albeit at the 0.10 level—between ethnic pride and frequent attendance. These results do not, however, hold when a limited subset of those who identify as Russian Orthodox is considered.

In sum, the general patterns provided by the data are notable. They prove that many of the findings from country-wide samples of Russia also hold for the country’s minority religions and the associated ethnic groups. Researchers should, however, be attendant to religion-specific factors, for example the low percentage of frequent attendance by women in the republic of Dagestan and the higher levels of attendance among both Kalmyks and Dagestanis who report pride in their ethnic group—when the samples were pooled there was no significant difference between the Dagestan sample and the Kalmykia baseline. Such work drawing on surveys conducted in specific regions are essential because Muslims and Buddhists are frequently sampled only in low numbers in such national surveys. Most importantly among these findings, the link in the literature between ethnic identification—as measured through pride—and elevated levels of religious practice is validated.

The subsequent two chapters explore the case studies of Kalmykia and Buryatia in detail, in an attempt to uncover the importance of Buddhism in each of these republics. In Chapter Five, I follow the contextual methodological approach outlined in Chapter Three to explore the case of Kalmykia, drawing on interviews, focus groups, and surveys, while for Buryatia I am primarily interested in comparing religiosity among ethnic Buryats and the non-titulars nationalities resident in the republic through the interpretation of survey results.
Chapter Five: Competing Discourses on Buddhism’s Revival in Kalmykia

Introduction

In Turkish, the word ‘kalmyk’ means remnant. This name can be traced to the nomadic history of the Kalmyk nation. In 1771, a majority of the group left their pastureland to the northwest of the Caspian Sea and headed east, with the aim of returning to their historic homeland of Dzungaria. This return migration—motivated by the demands made by Catherine the Great for Kalmyk conscripts to join the Russian army—decimated the Kalmyk population, as the migrants ran short of food and feed for their animals, succumbed to disease, and were harassed by the nomadic Kazakhs as they moved east (Khodarkovsky 1992). Less than one-tenth of the nomadic Kalmyks remained in European Russia, cut off from the larger group by the Volga River.

The Kalmyks are often constructed as a remnant, a formerly nomadic population that practices an eastern religion at the edge of Europe. Vladimir Putin, who recently reassumed the presidency of Russia after a four-year stint as Prime Minister, has referred to Kalmykia as Russia’s only Buddhist region; other writers have used the description ‘the island of Kalmykia’ to emphasize the region’s political and cultural distinctiveness (Brushtein 2007). The republic is situated to the northwest of the Caspian Sea, between the Muslim regions of the northeast Caucasus and the Volga River basin. It is one of 21 ethnic republics in Russia’s federal system, though one of the few where the titular nationality is a majority. More generally, the republic’s location in European Russia complicates parsimonious divisions of cultural and political space such as those found in Huntington’s (1993) civilizational model, divisions which have been
increasingly challenged by geographers and other social scientists (see, for example, Matsuzato 2010).

In this chapter, I use interviews, focus group, and survey data to trace the role of Buddhism in contemporary Kalmyk society. I argue that Buddhism’s revival is broad but not deep; while the survey results introduced in Chapter Four and further discussed here indicate that Kalmyks frequently visit the republic’s khuruls (Buddhist temple complexes in Kalmykia) to take part in religious services and commonly view themselves as quite religious, the interviews and focus groups that I conducted point towards a more complicated story regarding religious revival in the republic. In interviews religious leaders identified a lack of deeper spiritual knowledge, while in focus groups a number of participants emphasized the cultural and societal relevance of Buddhism while downplaying the importance of such knowledge. While greater accord exists on the specific issue of the Dalai Lama’s visits, I also find that elites are less likely to directly point to Russia’s relations with China as explanation for the failure of his Holiness to secure a visa. To further develop these arguments, the chapter opens by outlining the history of Buddhism in Kalmykia, with particular focus on the late Tsarist and Soviet periods. I then turn to the role of Buddhism in Kalmykia today. The conversations, discussions, and surveys are used to triangulate an improved understanding of Buddhism as a social and cultural institution in the republic.

**Complicating the Geographical Imaginary: The Case of Kalmykia**

The expanding Russian Empire first came into contact with Buddhists in present-day Kalmykia at the beginning of the 17th century. Bands of nomadic Oirats, whose historic homeland is situated in inner Asia between the Tien Shan and Altai mountain ranges, moved
west during the late 16th century. These groups eventually settled along the lower Volga River. Importantly, this occurred after the introduction of Tibetan Buddhism to the Mongol and Oirat tribes in the late 16th century. Both groups adopted the Gelug—or ‘Yellow Hat’—school of Buddhism.\footnote{The Gelug School, which, along with Nyingma, Kagyu, and Sakya, is one of the four main traditions in Tibetan Buddhism, is colloquially referred to as the ‘Yellow Hat’ tradition after the color of the headwear worn by the School’s monks. Thanks in part to the patronage of the Mongol Empire, by the beginning of the 16th century the Gelug School emerged as dominant in Tibet.} After settling northwest of the Caspian Sea, the Kalmyk khanate maintained notably close ties with Tibet and its resident Buddhist leadership through the middle of the 18th century (Khodarkovsky 1992). The khans dispatched missions that transported valuable offerings to the Dalai Lama, which were reciprocated through gifts of religious artifacts and holy texts, as well as the delegation of a chief lama to the Kalmyks. Bakaeva (1994: 18) has characterized this period as an era of strengthening ties between the Kalmyk khanate and its ‘ideological partner,’ Tibet. Elsewhere, Bakaeva (2008: 161) argues that ‘the spread of Buddhism among the wider population of Kalmyks dates to the period of ethnic formation \textit{(stanovleniye etnosa)} and sovereignty’ during the 17th century.

As introduced earlier in the dissertation, 1771 was a seminal year in Kalmyk history. A large percentage of Kalmyk households \textit{(kibitki)} under the leadership of Khan Ubashi banded together to return to Dzhungaria, in what is present-day Xinjiang. The remainder stayed; this remnant was formally integrated into the Russia’s imperial structure and the Khanate was dissolved. In time, the remaining Kalmyks divided along tribal-military lines into three \textit{ulus}, or clans: the Derbet (currently residing in northern and western Kalmykia); the Torgout (in southern and eastern Kalmykia); and Khosheut (to the east of the Volga River) (Wixman 1984).

After 1771, the Kalmyks who remained further strengthened the institutional presence of Buddhism in the region; three more monastery complexes were opened in quick succession,
bringing the total number to 14 by the end of the century (Bakaeva 2008). Further expansion continued apace during the 19th century. Moreover, in 1803 the Russian government recognized a spiritual leader for all Kalmyk Buddhists, bringing to an end a period of fractured leadership that resulted from the breakup of the Khanate (Filatov 2003). During the early 20th century, the Kalmyks strengthened connections with other regions where Buddhism was practiced, most notably Buryatia, and through Buryatia with Mongolia and Tibet; this included sending monks for training at religious centers in these regions and the exchange of cult objects. As a further result of these connections, two spiritual-religious institutions were established in Kalmykia. There was also substantial growth in the number of monasteries in the republic and a noted rise in the number of believers; at the beginning of the 20th century there were more than one hundred Buddhist temples (khuruls) and prayer tents (*molitvennyye kibitki*) (Bakaeva 1994). As was the case in Buryatia, the close relationship between the 13th Dalai Lama and Agvan Dorzhiev—discussed in more detail in Chapter Six—facilitated the expansion of religious practice; Dorzhiev ‘continually boosted (*podnimal*) the question of the construction of Buddhist temples and centers of learning’ in both Kalmykia and other parts of the Russian empire (Bakaeva 2008: 173). He was instrumental in the establishment of the two Buddhist spiritual institutions mentioned above, one in 1907 in the Maloderbet *ulus* and the second a year later among the Ikitsokhi *ulus* (Filatov 2003).

**Buddhism in the Soviet Period**

As discussed in Chapter Four, the initial approach of the Soviets to Buddhism in Kalmykia was uneven; though the Soviet government was clearly antireligious, they did not initially target Muslims or Buddhists in fear of alienating the national groups that traditionally
practiced these religions. As of July 1917—the interim period between the February and October Revolutions—there were 92 khuruls and 2,090 monks and religious persons in Kalmykia. Religious leaders in Kalmykia and Buryatia continued to debate the course of Buddhism in the Soviet Union; during a meeting of the All-Union Spiritual Buddhist Council in 1927, delegates from Buryatia and Kalmykia decided to unite with the Leningrad temple to form a common organization. However, by the mid-1920s, the tide was turning against those religions that had escaped the initial Soviet crackdown. Despite continued internal debates between Buddhist conservatives and reformers, the Soviet policy on the ground was becoming clearer; 12 of the 19 Buddhist temples in the region were closed in 1924, while 143 lamas were divested (Schorkowitz 2001). The following year, during the Fifth All-Kalmyk Conference of Lamaist Clergy, the further consolidation of the region’s khuruls was endorsed, an indication of the increased penetration of communist apparatchiks into Kalmykia’s key Buddhist organizations; Schorkowitz (2001:225) reports that ‘later conferences show an even stronger party influence, increasing ideological control of the participants, and a further widening of the gap between “modernist” and “traditionalist” forces.’

This antireligious position was further consolidated in the following decade; in February 1930, the Central Executive Committee of the USSR issued a decree ‘On the fight with counterrevolutionary elements in the administration of religious associations’ (Bakaeva 2008). Subsequently, the Soviet government launched an extensive anti-religion campaign in Kalmykia, which resulted in the closure or destruction all of the region’s khuruls with the exception of Khosheutovsky—dedicated to the Kalmyk soldiers who died in the first ‘Great Patriotic War’ against Napoleon (1812). The Central Spiritual Board—at the center of many of the debates about the future course of Buddhism in the republic—was disbanded. By 1936, only fourteen
Buddhist temples remained, and these were soon closed as a result of further religious persecution; at the beginning of World War II, no temples remained open. To quote Filatov (2003: 289): ‘by the beginning of the 1940s, the organized religious life of Kalmyk Buddhists had been completely destroyed (razrushena).’

As a result of direct persecution, Buddhism was forced underground, with the laity continuing their traditional practices and establishing ‘Sunday schools’ for the religious education of Kalmyk youth (Richardson 2002). Despite the active campaign against religion, religiosity remained high among the Kalmyks (Bakaeva 2008); during the early years of World War II, prayer houses were opened in some occupied villages.

Then, in the winter of 1943-1944, the Soviet government resettled the entire Kalmyk nation, moving them to various points east in Central Asia and Siberia (see Grin 2001). In Soviet thinking, the Kalmyks were viewed as one of the ‘traitor’ nations, groups that were perceived as collaborating with the German military against the Soviet state (Conquest 1970; Tishkov 1997). On December 28, 1943 the Soviet Union initiated Operation Ulus, which entailed the transfer of the entire Kalmyk population from the nation’s Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR), located northwest of the Caspian Sea, to Siberia and Central Asia. Guchinova (2006: 246) relates a first-person account of the deportation process:

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65 Bakaeva (2008) notes that a group of Kalmyk émigrés had opened a temple in the Yugoslav city of Belgrade in 1929, though Kalmyks residing in the autonomous oblast had no knowledge of the temple’s opening.

66 In writing about the legacy of the deportation, Tishkov (1997) identifies three important and ongoing factors of relevance: 1) the deportations were ethnically motivated and targeted entire groups both within the traditional area of settlement and beyond; 2) the deportations are still relevant to members of these groups, as older persons either lived through the deportation or were born during these periods; and 3) until 1991, the USSR had done little to redress the social and cultural consequences of deportation through legislation.

67 Kalmykia was initially incorporated into the Soviet Union as an autonomous oblast. It was upgraded to an autonomous republic in 1935 (see Grin 2001).
On 28 December 1943, a column of Studebakers drove up to the edge of Bashanta. What was this, we wondered, what could they be here for? Maybe a unit was moving through Bashanta? No-one had the first idea that all the Kalmyks would be shipped off to exile in those vehicles. But then a rumour started going round they were going to exile the Kalmyks, as traitors to the Motherland.

Over the next four days approximately 90,000 Kalmyks were resettled; in the course of the following months, a further 20,000, including the 15,000 men serving in the Red Army were moved east. The autonomous republic was dissolved and its territory incorporated into the neighboring regions. According to Guchinova (1997), some Kalmyks viewed resettlement as an appropriate punishment for the group’s abandonment of Buddhist traditions during the early Soviet period.

The transfer of the Kalmyks was not unique. The group was one of eight populations moved en masse by the Soviet state during the course of the war. The window during which ethnically-based but politically-motivated deportations occurred was actually larger than 1941-1945, beginning in the mid-1930s and extending to 1951. Previous transfers performed during the 1930s primarily targeted Diaspora nations (Germans, Poles, and Koreans, among others) living in close proximity to their home states who were resettled to the Soviet interior (Martin 1998).

This successive targeting of Kalmykia’s religious institutions and then the Kalmyk nation itself adversely affected religious practice in the region. Even following the rehabilitation and repatriation of the Kalmyks by Khrushchev in 1957, no religious institutions were permitted to

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68 The other groups deported during the war were: the Karachai, the Chechens, the Ingush, and the Balkars from the North Caucasus; the Germans settled along the Volga River; the Crimean Tatars; and the Meskhetians Turks, who lived in Georgia near the border with Turkey. Koreans residing in the Russian Far East had previously been resettled to Central Asia during the 1930s (see Martin 1998; Diener 2006). The Chechens, not surprisingly, have received the most recent attention from scholars; see Williams (2000) as an example.
register with the government up until Gorbachev’s reforms (see Bourdeaux 2000). Instead, informal religious centers were established, where some Buddhist practices were continued (Bakaeva 2008). Russification—including the use of Russian as the primary language of everyday communication among ethnic Kalmyks—was furthered culturally by the adoption of traditionally Orthodox practices, including baptism (Filatov 2009).

Despite a lack of formal religious institutions and the influence of Russian cultural norms, during the Soviet period many Kalmyks continued to self-identify as Buddhists; Bourdeaux (2000), for example, cites a 1985 survey that found that roughly a quarter of Kalmyks described themselves as Buddhist and speculates that these numbers were artificially low due to the state policy of atheism. According to the survey, 30 percent of rural residents and 23 percent of those living in the city self-identified as Buddhists, and nearly the entire sample (98 percent) acknowledged that they observed Buddhist holidays (Bourdeaux 2000; Filatov 2009). Private observance of Buddhist holidays remained common, and many homes contained objects of religious significance. Filatov (2003) argues that Buddhism was preserved as an important component of daily life and Bakaeva (2008: 176) writes that the level of religiosity among Kalmyks ‘was close to the average in the Soviet Union.’

Since rehabilitation in 1957, given the general proscription on public religious practice the Kalmyks attempted to reestablish their national identity in other ways. The erosion of knowledge of Kalmyk was partially addressed by the region’s Language Act, passed in the fall of

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69 Under Khrushchev, all of the groups which were deported between 1935 and 1951 were rehabilitated, though territorial disputes that arose as a consequence of population transfers are still issues of concern in, for example, Dagestan (Martin 1998; Ware and Kisriev 1997).

70 The accuracy of any such survey conducted in the Soviet Union is, however, questionable.

71 In making this point, Bakaeva cites the same 1985 survey mentioned just above.
The loss of native Kalmyk speakers has been particularly acute; Tishkov (1997) reports that many Kalmyks—even those with knowledge of their native tongue—prefer to use Russian both in the workplace and at home and just over a quarter (27.3 percent) of Kalmyks in urban areas could read, write, and speak their native language. The 1999 legislation established Kalmyk and Russian as state languages but also includes provisions for protecting the languages of other minority groups residing in the republic (see Grin 2001). The Kalmyks have promoted their culture in other ways as well, with the celebration of their literary epic, the Dzhangar, and the continued cultivation of Kalmyk dance through Tulpan, the republic’s dance troupe (Richardson 2002).

Buddhism’s Revival in Kalmykia: From the Late Soviet Period to the Present Day

The first Buddhist organization was registered in Kalmykia in 1988, during the late Soviet period of glasnost. The next year, the first prayer house opened in the republic, headed by the Buryat lama Tuvan Dordzh. Two years later (1991), the Buddhist Union of Kalmykia (OBK) was set up, uniting the religious organizations that had been established in the larger towns and villages throughout the republic. In 1992, Telo Tulku Rinpoche, an American citizen of Kalmyk descent, was appointed to head the association. The OBK was the primary force behind the opening, in 1996, of the Buddhist temple ‘Syakuisn Suime’ in the republic’s capital of Elista (Sinclair 2008; Badmaev and Ulanov 2010). Frequently described as the ‘largest Buddhist temple in Europe,’ it was constructed with substantial monetary support—approximately $500,000 US—from the republic’s government (Fagan 2003a). State assistance also extended to construction, as of 2003, of 20 more Buddhist temples beyond the capital. It should be noted that religious pluralism is still respected and Buddhism is not legally recognized as the ‘state’ religion.
(on the last point, see also Fagan 2003a). Filatov (2003: 290) points to the election of Kirsan Ilyumzhinov as President of the republic in 1993 as the starting point for the ‘genuine resurrection of Buddhism in Kalmykia,’ thanks to the resultant government support (though, as Humphrey [2002] notes, Ilyumzhinov’s tenure has led to other points of political tension).

Beyond the construction of new religious facilities and the close collaboration between religious and political authorities, Buddhism’s prominence in contemporary Kalmykia is primarily as a marker of national identity. Numerous authors have noted this importance. To paraphrase Bakaeva (1994: 20), religion is now one of the key components in defining Kalmyk national consciousness. Buddhism is one of a set of elements—also including the national epic, the Dzangar, and the legacies of shamanism as a pre-Buddhist belief system—that define the spirituality of the Kalmyk nation and religious life in the republic today (Filatov 2009). Similarly, other commentators have suggested that Buddhism is more important as a component of cultural, as opposed to religious, identity (Badmaev and Ulanov 2010).

Moreover, serious challenges remain for Buddhism and Buddhist practice in the republic. Badmaev and Ulanov (2010) identify a number of issues complicating the religion’s revival: a lack of understanding among self-identified Buddhists of the foundations of the religion, problems surrounding the Dalai Lama’s visit to the region, continued debates between traditionalists and modernizers (see also Ulanov 2009), and the need to bring in religious leaders from other traditionally Buddhist regions, including Buryatia and Tibet, due to the closure of khuruls and institutions for religious training during the Soviet period (Bakaeva 2008).

Sinclair (2008) discusses the nature of Kalmykia’s Buddhist revival, contrasting this localized reawakening with discourses of reform advocated for by Tibetan Buddhists now serving in the republic, thereby focusing on the latter two issues identified above. Prior to 1917
Buddhism in Kalmykia was closely tied to Tibet, as monks frequently traveled east to study Buddhist practice before returning to Kalmykia to serve as local religious teachers. In discussing the situation currently in Kalmykia, Sinclair (2008: 242) distinguishes between revival and reform, ‘two types of social movement that may be conceptually distinct but are entwined in practice, with each enabling the emergence of the other.’ These competing discourses play out within the Buddhist community, rather than as a rivalry between Buddhists and non-Buddhists.

Following Sinclair (2008), in the analysis below I consider how different actors interpret the nature of Buddhism in Kalmykia, distinguishing between those who emphasize the religion’s revival and those who stress a need for further development in spiritual consciousness. The latter group suggests that the development of Buddhism in the republic is held back by a lack of deep knowledge of religious tradition and a shortage of adequate teachers. While khurulsand stupas are being built (see Figure 5.1), and young Kalmyks have traveled to India to train as monks, there is neither a widespread acceptance of monastic traditions nor a developed understanding of Buddhist traditions and strictures in the broader society.\(^2\)

Sinclair (2008), in her research, delves into these issues through a series of interviews, conducted with Buddhist monks and a doctor now living in Kalmykia. She discusses the perspective of the monks and emphasizes the lack of knowledge about Buddhism found among the Kalmyks. While there is no doubt of the authenticity of Kalmyks as Buddhists, Buddhism is used as a social structure to achieve certain successes in day-to-day life; the actual practice of Buddhism is deemphasized, and in turn ‘many Kalmyks have forgotten \textit{how} to be Buddhist’ (Sinclair 2008: 249). One Tibetan living in Elista observed that people are more interested in ritual—as a way to secure good luck or avoid

\(^{2}\) Traditionally, stupas have served as reliquaries for holy objects and as sites of worship for Buddhists. In Kalmykia, stupas are generally symbolic in nature, serving as markers in the religious landscape and frequently found in towns lacking a \textit{khurul}, or temple.
danger—than in Buddhist teachings. Meditation is also not sufficiently practiced. Other people in the republic abuse the system as it has developed; traditional healers advise the sick to go to the khurulto have their ailments treated, in order to deflect blame if such treatments are ineffectual. Sinclair notes the tension between Tibetan practice as a pure form of Buddhism and the development, in Kalmykia, of a distinct type of Buddhism; ‘the sense of being a historically Buddhist people is juxtaposed with a sense of having lost Buddhism and the necessity for its authentic rediscovery’ (Sinclair 2008: 256).

This debate coalesces around the issue of how Buddhism, as a religion, is practiced and understood in Kalmykia. Though self-identification as Buddhist is common among the Kalmyks, at the beginning of the 1990s russification had also affected the religious sphere; many Kalmyks ‘baptized their children, observed the main Orthodox holidays (Easter, Christmas, and Troitsa [Holy Trinity Day]), and frequently had Orthodox icons in their homes’ (Filatov 2003: 290). Badmaev and Ulanov (2010: 75) argue that ‘the majority of believers in Kalmykia have only a weak notion of Buddhism;’ though they participate in religious services, self-described Buddhists are frequently unable to identify the more common gods in the Buddhist pantheon and often attend religious services at the temple in the hope that ‘good karma’ will rub off on them. Genuine spiritual practice—at least from the perspective of Buddhist religious leaders and scholars—is rare among those who identify as Buddhists, a finding that is generally supported in the interviews conducted with regional religious leaders presented below.
An issue of increased importance for Buddhists in the Russian Federation—and particularly in Kalmykia—is the continuing politics that revolve around the pastoral visits of the Dalai Lama; though not as incendiary as the ongoing conflict between the Russian state and Islamist militants, the discussion of this issue is intended to communicate that points of disagreement exist between Russia’s Buddhist communities and the federal state. A recent book by the journalist Tim Johnson (2011) highlights the tenuous nature of the Dalai Lama’s position. Though he has successfully marshaled support for the Tibetan cause internationally, the Dalai Lama has failed to bring about a resolution of the Tibetan question with China. The result is a waiting game; as the Dalai Lama enters the twilight of his life, the Chinese government can
maintain the status quo until his death. At that point, a renewed debate about the reincarnation of
the Dalai Lama is likely to develop, much like occurred over the Panchen Lama.\textsuperscript{73} Since early in
the transition period and with the exception of a November 2004 visit to Elista (the capital of
Kalmykia), which will be discussed in more detail below, the Russian government has
substantially modified its stance towards the Dalai Lama. Various justifications for the denials
of a visa have been invoked. In August 2002, a scheduled visit by the Dalai Lama was canceled
because of the perceived political nature of the Dalai Lama’s entourage, which included
members of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile (TGiE; International Campaign for Tibet 2002).
According to a foreign ministry official, ‘as the matter was studied, the religious aspects of the
visit became increasingly overshadowed by its political focus’ (quoted in Lomanov and Slobodin
2002). In 2010, the denial of a visa request by the Buddhist Union of Kalmykia (OBK) was
justified on the grounds that a visit by the Dalai Lama would be particularly harmful to Russian-
Chinese relations in an anniversary year of the countries’ joint victory in the Second World War
(Lenta.ru 2010). While general accord exists among interview subjects, focus group participants,
and survey respondents regarding the importance of the Dalai Lama’s visits to Kalmykia and
Russia more broadly, religious leaders were at times hesitant to directly blame Chinese-Russian
relations for the failure to secure the necessary visas to make such trips possible.

Beyond the competing discourses on revival and reform and continued contestation over
the pastoral visits of the Dalai Lama, I identify a third issue that links Buddhism in Kalmykia to
broader issues affecting religion and religious actors in post-Soviet Russia (though the analytical
sections focus on the first two issues introduced above). Similar to the challenge to Orthodoxy

\textsuperscript{73} The Panchen Lama traditionally plays a role in finding the next incarnation of the Dalai Lama. After the death of
the 10\textsuperscript{th} Panchen Lama in 1989, the Dalai Lama selected a successor, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima. He, however, went
missing at the age of six, and was replaced by the preferred Chinese candidate.
coming from non-traditional Christian groups, Kalmykia’s Buddhists have experienced competition from rival schools of Buddhist practice. In a 2003 interview, Telo Tulku Rinpoche acknowledged that, with the end of state-imposed atheism, he was initially interested in cultivating an increased understandings of each of the four schools of Tibetan Buddhism (Gelug, Nyingma, Kagyu, and Sakya); with religious liberalization, however, ‘when we opened the doors the wrong group took a step forward and introduced themselves to Kalmykia’ (Fagan 2003b). This is in reference to the Karma Kagyu center, headed by Sanal Batyrev in Elista and lamas Shamar Rinpoche and Ole Nydahl internationally; this school of Buddhism, and Ole Nydahl in particular, has been accused of importing a sort of pop-Buddhism—personalistic and western in form—at odds with the religion as traditionally practiced in the republic (Baumann 1995). In part, the success of the Karma Kagyu center depended on the unfamiliarity of Russian authorities with Buddhism, as the group was allowed to register as a religious organization (rather than as a group; see the previous discussion of the 1997 law in Chapter Four for more detail), despite its recent introduction to Kalmykia. Also of note, a second umbrella organization, the Buddhist Union of Kalmykia (BSK), was established in 2000 by a group claiming to be dissatisfied with the ineffective leadership of Telo Tulku Rinpoche; the aim of this organization was to establish a parallel administrative structure to represent the interests of all of Kalmykia’s Buddhists (Filatov 2003). Though I do not discuss this issue in greater detail below, its existence further connects Kalmyk Buddhism to the broader religious processes present in contemporary Russia.

74 Though both the OBK and BSK are positioned as centralizing organization, neither plays a coordinating role in the day-to-day affairs of the republic’s Buddhist associations (Filatov 2003).
Research Methods and Approach

The remainder of this chapter engages with the dual issues of religious practice and belief and the politicization of the Dalai Lama’s visits, drawing on focus groups, interviews and surveys conducted in the region during 2010. As discussed in Chapter Three, in this project I employ a multiple method approach to investigating the topic of Buddhism in the Russian Federation. Theoretically, I am interested in developing a more robust methodological toolkit for studying geographic processes, one which looks towards the concept of geographic context as organizing idea. I recapitulate the relevance of each method—interviews, focus groups, and surveys—and discuss the findings associated with each below. A concluding section synthesizes these findings.

Interviews

Interviews were not part of the research project as initially conceived. During my time in Kalmykia, however, I had the opportunity to meet with and discuss Buddhism with a wide range of actors; interview subjects during my time in Kalmykia included two lamas training at the capital’s main temple, the rector of Kalmyk State University, and Mergen Ulanov, a leading scholar of Buddhism and member of the faculty at Kalmyk State University. I also spoke to Telo Tulku Rinpoche, the head of the OBK, at the main khurul in Elista; we held a follow-up interview in Boulder, Colorado on 3 April 2012.75 I characterize most of these interviews as informal; initial conversations in Kalmykia were not recorded, though I did write down relevant quotes and observations. The second interview with the Rinpoche was recorded. I intend to

75 The Rinpoche lives part-time with his wife and son in Erie, Colorado. A recent profile of the Rinpoche appeared in Time and is available here: http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2111552,00.html.
conducted more interviews during subsequent trips to Kalmykia, to further investigate some of the findings of this dissertation (I discuss this point in greater detail in the concluding chapter).

Interviewees reiterated many of the points made in the prior literature on Buddhism in Kalmykia, particularly the work of Sinclair (2008). Among informants in Kalmykia, there was some cynicism regarding the strength of the revival of Buddhist practice. One monk noted that knowledge of the religion and religious belief and practice ‘has increased from nothing’ in the late Soviet period. The outer forms of the revival are present—khuruls have been built (as of 2010 there were 27 in the republic) as have other Buddhist structures, such as stupas and pagodas (including a prominent one in Elista’s main square, opposite the statue of Lenin [Humphrey 2002]; see Figure 5.2). It is, of course, more difficult to evaluate whether this outward revival has actually affected, positively, the thoughts and actions of those who identify as Buddhist.

Other interlocutors deemphasized the importance of a comprehensive knowledge of Buddhist philosophy; instead, a recognition of the basic elements of the religion, including virtuousness, karma, and the three ‘jewels’ (the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha) is sufficient. However, one monk observed that many people who come to the main temple in Elista lack even this basic understanding. He characterized their interest as ‘surface-level,’ and noted that whereas Buddhism was still interesting during the Soviet period, the novelty has worn off over the past two decades. Oftentimes, those attending temple ask the lama to say a prayer for success in their everyday affairs or seek guidance about a course of action. Another monk

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76 Author’s interview with monk, Elista, Kalmykia, 16 February 2010.

77 The Dharma refers to the teachings of Buddha as concerned with the nature of human suffering and the underlying laws of reality. The Sangha is the Buddhist spiritual community, including the monastic orders and the laity (Gethin 1998).

78 All informants remain anonymous when prior permission for identification was not obtained, in accordance with the human subjects’ protocol drafted for this project. Author’s interview with monk, Elista, Kalmykia, 16 February 2010.
noted that understandings of Buddhism are frequently informed by perspectives incorporated from other religions; for example, Buddha is frequently positioned as a God like Allah.

Figure 5.2: The Newly-Built Pagoda in the Main Square, Elista (21 February 2010; photo by author)

The khurul, on the other hand, does provide an important structure, and interest among attendees at religious services gradually increases as visits become more frequent. The wider aim of religious leaders in Kalmykia is to construct a community of knowledge. For example, some students from Kalmyk State University are also undergoing religious training, with the aim of
eventually serving as monks. Another suggestion to strengthen religious practice was to print religious texts and books in Kalmyk, to facilitate understanding of the religion among the republic’s residents. And a religious renaissance for a group is arguably more difficult than the conversion or ‘awakening’ of an individual. Though again, individuals often revert to old behaviors and, in the case of Kalmykia, must wrestle with the anti-religious legacies of the communist period.

Telo Tulku Rinpoche, leader of the Buddhist Union of Kalmykia, also questioned the depth of Buddhism’s revival in the republic, contrasting the recent growth in Buddhist infrastructure in Kalmykia with the lack of a more theological understanding of Buddhism’s foundations. The outward growth of Buddhism—echoing a point made by other interlocutors—has been remarkable. The Rinpoche strongly agrees that Buddhism, for Kalmyks, is one of the foundational elements of national identity: ‘Buddhism is the spice of being Kalmykian…Buddhism has become a symbol of the Kalmyk nation.’ One of the important events in the past decade in Kalmykia was the opening of the Golden Temple complex in Kalmykia’s capital city of Elista in December 2005, which in turn serves as a source of pride for the nation. When the Rinpoche first came to Kalmykia after the transition from communism, Buddhist services were held in a home—with a maximum capacity of 30 to 40 people—close to Elista’s downtown. Attendance at this makeshift Buddhist temple was sparse, at less than ten persons per day—though this increased to 50 or so on religious holidays—and was composed of

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79 In our April 2012 conversation, Rinpoche Telo Tulku noted that the lack of clergymen who are trained to serve as the head lamas of temples has hindered the development of Buddhism, particular in rural areas in Kalmykia. This program is one way to address this shortage.

80 Author’s interview with Telo Tulku Rinpoche, Boulder, Colorado, 3 April 2012.

81 The temple’s official name is the Golden Abode of the Buddha Shakyamuni. I will refer to it here as the Golden Temple. It was built in roughly one year, following the consecration of the temple site by the Dalai Lama during his November 2004 visit (see below).
In speaking about Buddhism’s revival in Kalmykia, Telo Tulku Rinpoche underscored the importance of the initial visits by the Dalai Lama, in 1992 and 1993: they ‘really sparked the movement, interest, the energy…those really opened the doors to many people.’ 82

In 1996, the OBK moved to another temple on the outskirts of Elista, at the site where the Dalai Lama gave his lecture during his 1993 visit. The construction of the Golden Temple about a decade later was spontaneous; during the November 2004 visit by the Dalai Lama, Kalmykia’s enigmatic President, Kirsan Ilyumzhinov, announced his intention to construct a grand temple near downtown Elista over lunch, with the aim of housing the growing number of Kalmyks who attended religious services on holidays. 83 With a reported cost of $25 million USD, the Golden Temple is certainly grand; it houses the largest statue of Buddha in Europe (Parfitt 2006; see also Figure 5.3). The Rinpoche emphasized the importance of the temple to Kalmyk society—it established the republic as a center for Buddhism in Europe and united the Kalmyk people behind a common cause. Continued harmony is essential, as financially the temple is supported by private donations—primarily from local residents and visitors to the temple—and receives no monies from either federal or regional authorities.

In discussing the adoption of Buddhist practices among the republic’s residents, the Rinpoche was less sanguine. He specifically questioned whether a Buddhist understanding transfers to the daily, personal lives of those who identify as Buddhist, and noted that ‘forming consciousness is the hardest part’ of adopting any religious practice. 84 The Rinpoche accorded culture a deterministic role in conditioning belief systems in Kalmyk society; though Kalmyks

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82 Author’s interview with Telo Tulku Rinpoche, Boulder, Colorado, 3 April 2012.
83 Author’s interview with Telo Tulku Rinpoche, Boulder, Colorado, 3 April 2012.
84 Author’s interview with Telo Tulku Rinpoche, Elista, Kalmykia, 3 March 2010.
are by birth Buddhist, different cultures interpret the teachings of Buddha in different ways. Culture, according to the Rinpoche, is a way of thinking that is specific to different groups in different places. This does not, however, mean that there is such a thing as Kalmyk Buddhism: ‘Buddha did not write separate teaching for separate peoples.’\textsuperscript{85} Buddhism is a cultural system that requires genuine personal commitment; while the revival of Buddhist institutions has been substantial, according to my interlocutors, individual understanding of and deeper engagement with Buddhism is still a work in progress. During a conference held for local academics at the Golden Temple (26 February 2010) at which Telo Tulku Rinpoche spoke and outlined some of these thoughts, other presenters echoed the point that ethnicity is not a requirement to be Buddhist and that there is not Tibetan or Kalmyk Buddhism as distinct forms, only Buddhism as a broader, inclusive system of knowledge and cultural traditions.\textsuperscript{86}

In addition to the various interpretations of Buddhism’s role in Kalmyk society, an issue that frequently arose in conversations was the ability to secure permission from Moscow for a pastoral visit by the Dalai Lama. The consistent denial of visas to the Dalai Lama is the main objection voiced by Russia’s Buddhists with respect to state policy towards the religion (Fagan 2005a). During my initial interview with Telo Tulku Rinpoche, the Dalai Lama’s role in the development of Kalmyk Buddhism was only tacitly discussed. The Rinpoche noted the importance of the Dalai Lama’s 2004 visit for uniting the Kalmyk nation behind the effort to build the Golden Temple; this came during a period of frustration for Kalmykia’s Buddhists and ‘a loss of faith in many areas.’ Filatov (2009) reached a similar conclusion; despite promises by

\textsuperscript{85}Author’s interview with Telo Tulku Rinpoche, Elista, Kalmykia, 3 March 2010.

\textsuperscript{86} This position—held by the Rinpoche and other religious actors with whom I spoke—is countered by some of the academic experts on Buddhism in Kalmykia. Badmaev and Ulanov (2010 76-77) write: ‘Buddhist identity has become an ethnic marker and has taken on a dual-layered cultural-religious character’ of specific importance to ethnic Kalmyks.
Kalmykia’s then-president, Kirsan Ilyumzhinov, to construct ‘a grand building’ to serve as the center of the republic’s Buddhist community, it was the Dalai Lama who provided the spiritual basis for its construction by consecrating the temple site. Religiously, according to the Rinpoche, this blessing ensured that the temple would be a genuine abode (obitel’) of God. In an interview at the time, he was quoted as saying: ‘Sanctification signifies the invocation of Buddhist deities of wisdom and transference [of this wisdom] into the statues that stand in the khurul. After the ceremony, it is as if the statues have become living Buddhas’ (Caucasian Knot 2004).

Figure 5.3: Elista’s Golden Temple foregrounded by Beliy Starets (17 February 2010; photo by author)

Beliy Starets (trans. The White Elder) is a part of the Buddhist pantheon of particular importance to practitioners of the religion of Mongolian descent. He is commonly viewed as the defender of life and longevity and is one of the symbols of fertility and well-being in the pantheon.
In our follow-up conversation, I directly asked the Rinpoche about the politics behind the Dalai Lama and the difficulties in securing a visa invitation. Telo Tulku Rinpoche emphasized that the link between Tibet and Kalmykia is long-standing; these ‘historical ties between the Dalai Lama and the people of Kalmykia is not something that was developed in the last 20, 30 years. It is for centuries that we had this cultural and religious ties [sic] with the Tibetan [people], as well as the Dalai Lama.’88 Moreover, the relationship between Tibet and Kalmykia could be mutually beneficial, given the experience of the Kalmyks in deportation; the forced removal of the Kalmyks during World War II further eroded the place of religion in Kalmyk society and reduced the number of speakers of the Kalmyk language (Grin 2001). The Rinpoche suggested, obliquely, that the Tibetans were currently experiencing a similar sort of cultural and religious persecution.

Portentously, the Rinpoche speculated on the future of Tibet—what he referred to, in an understated fashion, ‘as a big question.’ He stated: ‘Let’s say, for example, Tibet does not exist. And, who has the responsibility of preserving that rich tradition of Buddhism, freely, without any restriction, without any…repression.’89 The Rinpoche pointed to Kalmykia, along with Mongolia and Bhutan, as important sites for this preservation of Buddhism in its Tibetan form. The Kalmyks need knowledge and wisdom from the Tibetan people, something which His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, is able to provide. Pragmatically, with respect to the visits, ‘to bring him to Russia, it’s a lot easier to bring one person than to take thousands of people to India,’ a reference to the trips that the Rinpoche has organized for Kalmyk Buddhists to attend the Dalai Lama’s

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88 Author’s interview with Telo Tulku Rinpoche, Boulder, Colorado, 3 April 2012.
89 Author’s interview with Telo Tulku Rinpoche, Boulder, Colorado, 3 April 2012.
teaching in Dharamsala (the seat in India of the Tibetan-Government-in-Exile). Thus, while not
directly speculating on the reasons why the Dalai Lama is not granted a visa—though earlier in
the interview, the Rinpoche indirectly referred to a failed negotiations regarding an economic
treaty between Russia and China in 2004 as the reason for the issuance of a visa to His Holiness
in November of that year—Telo Tulku Rinpoche clearly views such visits as necessary and
important to the development of Buddhism in Kalmykia.

Focus Groups

Similar discourses were apparent in the focus groups, specifically the tensions between
Buddhism’s outward revival and the understanding of Buddhism by those who self-identity as
practitioners of the religion. With respect to the Dalai Lama, focus group participants offered
more explicit explanations as to why His Holiness is commonly denied a visa.

In general, the aim of the focus groups was to create an environment for a more open-
ended and free–flowing debate on the role of Buddhism in contemporary Kalmykia. The
discussion component of the focus groups had two main purposes, distinct from either the
informal interviews or surveys. First, in a discursive setting, I asked more open-ended questions,
responses to which would be difficult to capture in a survey measure. In introducing this
methodology to participants, I described the focus group as a ‘round table’ (krugliy-stol)
designed to elicit discussions about a set of topics related to Kalmyk national identity and
Buddhism. In opening up the discussion, two framing questions were introduced at the beginning
of the focus group: 1) How would you characterize the development of Buddhism after the
events of 1991 and, in turn, what have been the effects of the social and political changes

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90Author’s interview with Telo Tulku Rinpoche, Boulder, Colorado, 3 April 2012.
associated with the fall of the Soviet Union on Buddhism and Buddhist practice?; and 2) what role does Buddhism play in the formation of Kalmyk national consciousness? Participants were then asked to engage with questions related to four themes central to the project: the role of Buddhism in their everyday life, the distinction between Buddhism as a national or world tradition, Buddhism as a marker of national identity, and the relationship between Buddhism and globalization. Second, and related, the focus groups were intended as a forum to gauge the relevance of certain questions for subsequent incorporation in the survey. The focus groups had a set list of questions that were asked across all three groups, which included other questions in addition to those mentioned above. I conducted the focus groups myself in Russian; while my positionality as a foreign researcher could have affected the content of the conversation, I generally found participants willing to share their opinions on the topics of discussion—two of which I discuss in detail below. The focus groups were held in February and March 2010.

Each focus group opened with a brief presentation on the aim of the project and the use of focus groups as a research tool in social scientific research. Participants were asked to sign a waiver in Russian that outlined the nature of the research, documented sources of financial support for the project, and provided the contact information of the Institution Review Board at the University of Colorado in the event of any negative consequences resulting from participation in the research. Each participant was provided with a copy of this waiver to keep. Participants were offered compensation of 500 Russian rubles (approximately $16 US at the time) for taking part in the focus group. Appended to the waiver was a brief questionnaire that included a subset of demographic questions and an open-ended question asking respondents to reflect on what it means to be Buddhist (Chto vas znachit buit’ Buddhistom?).
A pilot group was conducted among students at Kalmyk State University roughly halfway through my time in Kalmykia, on 24 February 2010. In lieu of a class period, and with the help of Valeriy Badmaev, a professor at the University in the Department of Philosophy and my main collaborator on this project in the republic, we jointly conducted a structured conversation with eight students on the topics of Buddhism and national identity among the Kalmyks. The students were uniformly ethnic Kalmyk and ranged in age from 19 to 42, though most were towards the younger end of this spectrum. The interest of the respondents in these topics varied; two students in the class were studying at the Buddhist institute associated with the main khural in Elista in addition to their university studies. In responding to the written question on the personal meaning of Buddhism, one of these students wrote, ‘I am a Buddhist—this means being beneficent (dobriy), compassionate to all living things. Buddhism helps to teach me to work towards perfecting my consciousness.’ Other students, however, seemed to have little interest in Buddhism as a topic. For example, in responding to the written prompt on what it means to be Buddhist, one respondent wrote ‘It is difficult to answer,’ while another left the question blank.

Some modifications were made to the focus group procedure following this pilot session; though I originally thought that Professor Badmaev could moderate the focus groups, I decided to perform these duties myself, in an attempt to stimulate more interactive conversations among participants. This, of course, was complicated by my lack of native fluency in Russian, though I viewed the tradeoff as necessary to stimulate greater debate. Also, the number of participants was reduced, as two participants particularly dominated the conversation during the pilot, while others did not speak at all; I thought that smaller groups would be more likely to provoke inclusive conversations and elicit a greater diversity of opinion. This choice was also influenced, in part, by reviewing the experiences of previous researchers. For example, in his project on
young Muslim males in Scotland, Hopkins (2007) conducted focus groups with three to 12 participants. Different researchers place differing lower and upper thresholds on the size of focus groups; some say four to six is a minimum, while 10 is frequently cited as a maximum (Hopkins 2007). Hopkins found that ‘the focus groups with fewer young men ran smoothly with everyone having a chance to voice their opinions on matters of importance to them,’ while in the larger groups participants often competed to make their points heard (Hopkins 2007: 531).

Following this pilot, I conducted three additional focus groups organized by distinct socio-demographic categories: academics, believers in and active practitioners of Buddhism, and university students. I recruited participants for the focus groups through local contacts, primarily Professor Badmaev and students at Kalmyk State University, whom I met during a separate visit to an English class at the school. Other characteristics of the group—including age and composition—were also considered, though given the short timeframe of this visit, it was difficult to speak to a diversity of ages and genders. As Hopkins (2007: 531) notes, ‘there is a need then to consider the many possible influences on group dynamics rather than concentrating on the numbers that should be included in each group.’ By structuring the groups according to these socio-demographic categories, I intended to create a group dynamic more conducive to open discussion, as participants frequently knew one another prior to the focus group session.\(^9\)

Hopkins is also undecided on whether or not participants should be strangers prior to participating in the focus group. Familiarity among participants can result in different research outcomes. In his research, Hopkins noted that participants generally knew one another, leading to increased interaction and likelihood of disagreement or refutation; the same was true in my three

\(^9\) Though previously knowing other focus group participants is potentially problematic, in that it makes participants less hesitant to openly share controversial opinions or stake confrontational positions, I believe that the quality of the focus groups was not diminished; because participants knew each other the conversations were generally familiar and comfortable.
focus groups. In Table 5.1 I provide a description of the participants in each of the three focus
groups by key socio-demographic variables.

The setting for the focus groups is another important component of the research process,
as previously noted in Chapter Three. Each focus group was conducted in a quiet space—one in
a conference room at a local research institute, a second in the library of the Golden Temple, and
the third at a local café proximate to the university. To restate, I served as moderator for the
groups, a position that potentially complicates research results, given my obvious foreignness,
accented Russian, and positionality as an international, American researcher. Elwood and Martin
(2000: 654) note a similar complication with respect to interviews, and suggest that the ‘division
of activity space’—or differences with respect to the spaces where the interlocutors feel
comfortable interacting with the researcher—might be contingent on age and other social
factors.92 I tried to acknowledge this problem by conducting focus groups in settings convenient
and comfortable for the respective participants.

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92 In the last case, that of the café, the focus group was with students enrolled at the local university; the meeting
location was a popular spot for students to socialize. I viewed this as an optimal place to conduct such a
conversation, despite the background noise and potential distractions. Moreover, since all of the participants in this
group were female, a public setting most likely increased their level of comfort.
Table 5.1: Composition of the Four Kalmykia Focus Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category and date held</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age range</th>
<th>What religion do you practice?</th>
<th>How religious do you consider yourself?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students (pilot group); 24 February 2010</td>
<td>5 females; 3 males</td>
<td>19 to 42</td>
<td>Buddhism: 8</td>
<td>Very religious: 1 Somewhat religious: 5 Depends on the circumstances: 1 It is difficult to say: 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academics; 25 February 2010</td>
<td>3 females; 2 males</td>
<td>34 to 62</td>
<td>Buddhism: 4 Depends on the circumstances: 1</td>
<td>Very religious: 1 Somewhat religious: 1 Not very religious: 2 Depends on the circumstances: 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believers; 6 March 2010</td>
<td>4 females</td>
<td>25 to 47</td>
<td>Buddhism: 4</td>
<td>Very religious: 2 Somewhat religious: 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students; 7 March 2010</td>
<td>3 females</td>
<td>18 to 23</td>
<td>Buddhism: 3</td>
<td>Somewhat religious: 2 Not very religious: 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In engaging with the first theme of the focus group, I asked participants to begin our conversation by reflecting on the relevance of Buddhism to them personally (as discussed above with respect to the pilot survey). Interestingly, their written answers blended appeals to Buddhism as a component of national identity and tradition with references to ideas of tolerance and respect, what I would refer to as Buddhism as a values system. One respondent wrote: ‘To be Buddhist does not only mean going to the khurul, attending prayers, and so on. You don’t have to do this and can still practice Buddhism, be Buddhist. The most important thing is to be Buddhist inside, in your soul.’93 Another invoked the cultural and national importance of Buddhism to Kalmyk identity; being Buddhist ‘means, first of all, following the traditions of my ancestors, my grandmother and grandfather...[it] also means being sincere and good-natured to other persons.’ (These two participants described themselves as ‘somewhat religious’ and ‘not very religious,’ respectively). Another participant observed that even among non-Buddhists and

93 All focus group translations from the Russian are my own.
Christian Kalmyks, there are rites and traditions associated with Buddhism that are universally practiced, such as the celebration of holidays. While other focus group participants who described themselves as very religious in the survey component invoked the importance of the three jewels of Buddhist teaching—Buddha, the Dharma (the teachings), and the Sangha (the spiritual community)—and the Dalai Lama as spiritual teacher, reference to Buddhism as a system of values was also present. Through Buddhism, this same participant strives ‘to help those who are in need of my help (to the extent of my abilities).’

In dialogue, the multiple perspectives regarding Buddhism’s role in contemporary Kalmyk society clearly came through. I first discuss this topic before turning to the role of the Dalai Lama and his importance to Kalmyk Buddhism. Both were themes that each of the focus groups commonly discussed in detail. In the first group, conducted among academics, there were a number of participants who were very confident in their knowledge of Buddhism. One participant had conducted surveys in Kalmykia, which included questions on Buddhist belief and practice (F.G. 1, P. 1). A second participant displayed a deep knowledge of both the scholarly work on Buddhism in Kalmykia and the rites and practices associated with the religion (F.G. 1, P. 4). At one point, he cited the work of E.P. Bakaeva on the historical particularity of Buddhism in Kalmykia in comparison to other national groups in the Russian Federation. The second two focus groups, on the other hand, were less donnish in their discussions. Many of the comments in response to my questions were superficial; this was particularly true (though not necessarily surprising) among the students, who did not report high levels of self-evaluated religiosity in the written questionnaire (see Table 4.1). Overall, there was little dissention in any of the three focus groups, a condition that could result from my positionality as both moderator and outsider.
Despite these caveats, some themes of interests did emerge, and I further identify three themes of importance associated with the role of Buddhism in Kalmyk society. The first revolves around Buddhism as a system of knowledge and its relevance to both the national community and the individual. With the academics, consideration of this topic was sophisticated. Participants acknowledged the difficulty of comprehending Buddhism as a knowledge system and how this complicates the positioning of the religion as a component of national identity:

The Buddhism that we [have] on a daily basis [is different], we do not understand all of the complexities of Buddhism, Buddhism is too complex a religion to understand. In order to understand it there are lamas, they understand...for Kalmyks, Buddhism, they go and perform defined rites, worship, but they do not understand the consequences of this worship. They don’t understand what this worship is for (F.G. 1, P. 3).

The participant continues later: ‘religion for them [most Kalmyks] is just an ethnic accessory [prinadlezhnost] of the nation’ (F.G. 1, P. 3). The religion, however, does take on an individual importance that should be distinguished from its broader national context. For a second participant, Buddhism ‘has taken on a large role in my life because Buddhism is a way of life…it is a system for me which helps me resolve many problems and [achieve] spiritual authenticity’ (F.G. 1, P. 4). This participant practices a ‘genuine Buddhist spirituality,’ including the chanting of prayers and meditation.

Among others in the intellectuals focus group, a participant (F.G. 1, P. 2) related a more personal experience with the religion; ‘I was raised in what can be considered a family of believers because I had a grandfather, he was a lama,’ whom she referred to as a ger. A second member of this group stated that his parents were not at all religious (though they had become more so recently) and that he became interested in Buddhism through studies in psychology; in Buddhism ‘everyone can find for something for themselves.’ He observed, in
turn: ‘Why is Buddhism so popular in the west? Because Buddhism is a very deep system of psychological training’ (FG. 1, P. 4).

In the other two focus groups, considerations of the topic were less pedantic, and though interesting these conversations reflect a different type of engagement with the religion. As in the first group, participants articulated the personal nature of religious experience. Among the believers, one participant connected her family’s history to her faith: ‘I was always interested in Buddhism. I found out that I had a grandfather who prayed everyday...[I later found out that he] previously was a monk...After this I read some books, but was particularly drawn to lectures’ (F.G. 2, P 2). Among the students, the personal element of religious experience was deemphasized, in lieu of considerations of how the participants view the religion; one said: ‘I know that theory in Buddhism is very complex... one life is too little and [it is impossible] to say that I know everything’ (FG. 3, P. 3). To (partially) remedy this problem, one participant in the same group suggested later on that courses be held which cover the ‘elementary elements’ of Buddhism; another said that this could be done in school, through the ‘Fundamentals of Religion’ program.

A second component of the discussion cohered around the characterization of the religious revival in Kalmykia. One participant in the first focus group (academics) noted, in particular, the growth in religious belief among the republic’s youth. In a recent survey (2006) conducted by one of the academics, 82 percent of young Kalmyks indicated that they are believers, up from roughly 30 percent during the late perestroika period; ‘of course Buddhism plays an increasingly large role in the development of our people [narod]’ (F.G. 1, P.1). This participant also noted the numerous young people at the khorul visits there. More generally, the turn towards Buddhism is because of ‘people [need] some sort of support,
hope…as is characteristic of all religions, they are a source [of such things]’ (F.G. 1, P.1). A second participant generally agreed with this conclusion: that more and more young people are turning towards religion. In the third group, the students, a participant noted that many Kalmyks are participating in religious delegations to India; ‘more and more and more Kalmyks [are participating]…before there were no such [opportunities] in general’ (FG. 3, P. 1). This exchange is particularly popular among students and young Kalmyks, in spite of the obvious financial burden associated with such a trip. Moreover, it helps redress the lack of religious knowledge among the younger generation. In the third focus group, a participant stated: ‘We aren’t particularly guilty because we don’t know a lot about Buddhism…of course we should know more than we know, but we can’t know everything’ (FG. 3, P. 2).

The third topic of interest revolves around the role of Buddhism in Kalmyk national identity. Interlocutors were asked to consider the role that the religion plays in Kalmyk national identity. Across all groups, participants noted the importance of national religious holidays—the celebrations of Tsagaan Sar (trans. white month; Mongolian new year) and Zul (Kalmyk new year). These holidays serve a national-religious and civic function—they were commonly referred to as ‘narodniy prazdniki’ (trans. national holidays)—with commemorations occurring both at the republic’s khuruls and in secular spaces, for example Elista’s outdoor pavilion. In describing the relevance of the holiday to Kalmyks, a number of participants in the focus group with academics noted the importance of attending prayers at the khurul around the holidays; ‘on these holidays…very many children, and also the old, go to temple, listen to prayers, ask for the blessing of their family in the coming years’ (F.G. 1, P. 2). In Kalmykia, moreover, shamanism and its syncretic influence on Buddhism is minimal; to quote a second participant among the academics, ‘Kalmyks should be distinguished from other Buddhist peoples, from Buryats, from
Tuvans…we have no shamans’ (F.G. 1, P.3). This participant then suggested that Kalmyks practice a purer form of Buddhism in comparison to these other groups.

In a related thread, participants were asked to consider the link between Buddhism and membership in the Kalmyk nation; in order to be considered a Kalmyk, does one have to be a Buddhist?94 In the second focus group, among believers, one participant quickly responded no (F.G. 2, P. 2), while two others responded yes (F.G. 2, Ps. 1 and 4), emphasizing the personal nature of this opinion. When asked to substantiate this position, one participant responded: ‘because [Buddhism] is the religion of our ancestors [predki]…there is a link…it’s] karmic’ (F.G. 2, P. 1). Another responded: ‘we are Buddhists from birth; from birth we understand that we are Buddhist and this defines our life’ (F.G. 2, P. 2). As the conversation went on, the first participant (P. 1) seemed to temper her position; the fourth member of this group noted that there are Kalmyks who practice Christianity (Orthodoxy) and Catholicism though also stated that ‘Buddhism for Kalmyks is the closest, in my opinion, the best religion for Kalmyks because of our way of life (obraz zhizni)…[and] traditions’ (F.G. 2, P. 3). The university-age students had, for the most part, a different take on the topic, one that was more inclusive and associated with civic understandings of the nation. ‘Everyone can be a Buddhist; according to their wishes…it’s not required that all Kalmyks be Buddhist’ (FG. 3, P. 3). In the course of the conversation, another participant said that ‘when we say ‘Kalmyk,’ when I think ‘Kalmyk,’ it automatically comes to mind that that person is Buddhist, because it is our national religion’ (FG. 3, P. 2).

Participants were also asked about the importance of the Dalai Lama to Buddhism in Kalmykia during the focus group sessions. As I noted before, those participating in the focus groups were less hesitant to directly identify Russia’s relations with China as the reason behind

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94 The same question was asked in the survey; the results are discussed later in the chapter.
the denial of visas. One focus group respondent (F.G. 1, P. 3) explicitly identified Chinese influence as consequential for the inability of the Dalai Lama to secure a Russian visa:

Russia doesn’t want to spoil relations with China. [Russia] has a border with China. The arrival of the Dalai Lama, [to visit] the Kalmyks, Buryats, and Tuvans, people who practice Buddhism, they are ‘little’ (*note: in English). Because of this, the wishes of the Kalmyks that the Dalai Lama visits cannot outweigh the wishes of Russia [to maintain] relations with China. China is powerful, capable, and because of this Russia does not want to spoil relations.  

Another was more succinct: ‘Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, we have lost our status as one of the premier states (*note: in reference to Russia)...[we now have] to acknowledge the opinions especially of our neighbors’ (F.G. 1, P. 5) In the same session, another identified the failure to consider the wishes of religious believers thusly: ‘We infrequently consider the opinions of believers… we do not consider human rights, individual rights. We don’t recognize the rights of small peoples [*malyx narodov]*’ (F.G. 1, P. 1). During the second conversation, participants expressed their discontent over the failure to issue visas to the Dalai Lama. One respondents said that ‘this is the influence, the very negative influence of China, of course’ (F.G. 2, P.1), while a second interjected that ‘this is the influence of the largest country in the world, and the people and population that is the largest in the world, who with their opposition can dictate this’ (F.G. 2, P. 3). For believers, politics was perceived as trumping religion; ‘it is insulting that geopolitics bears on the pastoral visit of his Holiness’ (F.G. 2, P. 1). Among the students, participants were not sure what lay behind the Russian government refusal of visas, probably due to a lack of familiarity with the debates as opposed to an unwillingness to take a potentially politicized position; ‘I can’t definitively say why,’ whether the rejection is due to geopolitics or another factor, such as lack of political support domestically (F.G. 3, P. 3).

95 Another source on the topic made the comparison quantitatively: 1.3 million Buddhists in Russia versus 1.3 billion Chinese (Brooke 2011).
Another central theme that emerged during focus group conversations was centered on the importance of the Dalai Lama to Kalmyk national identity; this link further strengthens the desire for a pastoral visit. One participant (F.G. 1, P.4) said that the Dalai Lama:

is a figure who genuinely unites all [Kalmyks], regardless of political leanings and so on, because he is an important element in the consolidation of our ethnus, tremendous...he provided tremendous enthusiasm, lifting (pod’yem) and this is very important, so that the people don’t break (ne slomalsya).

In the session with self-identified believers, participants linked the personal meaning of such visits to the republic scale, while also suggesting that its importance to individual believers is ineffable:

For us personally this is our spiritual leader, each visit by his Holiness gives—it seems to me—the republic such a jolt (tolchok). I don’t even know how to say it. I again think about the purpose of life...I don’t even know how to say it (F.G. 2, P. 1).

In reiterating this point, the participant said: ‘it seems to me that people change imperceptibly…though a very large change occurred after the first visit of his holiness to us here in Kalmykia,’ specifically in the religious landscape and the subsequent construction of the Golden Temple. In another session, a participant recalled the Dalai Lama’s 2004 visit to Elista: ‘I remember that when the Dalai Lama came, there was tremendous fervor…everyone went to get the blessing of the Dalai Lama’ (FG. 3, P. 3), despite the ‘dismal weather on the steppe’ (F.G. 2, P. 2) during his late November visit. Similarly, another participant stressed that ‘to many it was important that specifically the Dalai Lama blessed them’ (FG. 3, P. 1).

Lastly, there is clearly a genuine desire that the Dalai Lama visits again. This came through unambiguously in conversations with believers; ‘when people go to hear the Dalai Lama, they receive such happiness simply in seeing and hearing him, to have the opportunity... is a great happiness’ (F.G. 2, P. 1). Even those focus group participants who expressed a measure
of ambivalence about the role of religion in Kalmyk society indicated that they were hopeful that the Dalai Lama would again visit the republic; ‘these visits have, of course, great importance. The Dalai Lama is a great cultural, historical, political figure, yes?’ (F.G. 1, P. 1; this was the only focus group participant who did not identify Buddhism as their religion of practice). Another stated: ‘I, of course, would be happy if the Dalai Lama came and visited Kalmykia and the other Buddhist regions of Russia’ (F.G. 1, P. 5). Both of these participants distinguished their personal opinions from the broader situation—both geopolitical and societal—that are perceived to limit the Dalai Lama’s visits to the country.96

To summarize, focus group participants discussed a range of ideas from different perspectives; I have presented in detail their discussions of two topics here. In some of these ‘practical’ conversations participants moved towards consonance in responding to questions, for example in the consideration of the link between religion and national identity in the second group related above. While the topics identified are partial their selection is intended to highlight the main dialogues running each of the focus groups, and specifically how understandings and interpretations of Buddhism’s development in Kalmykia are genuinely articulated in conversation.

Surveys

The focus groups and interviews served as the basis for the survey drafted for the republic. Though I have already discussed some of the results and caveats of the survey in the

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96 The public opinion survey included a question on the importance of the Dalai Lama’s visits to Kalmykia for the development of Buddhism. An overwhelming percentage of Kalmyks—85 percent in total—agreed that the Dalai Lama’s visits are either ‘very’ or ‘somewhat important’ for the religion’s development. Only one percent of the sample indicated that they believed such a visit to be ‘not very important.’ Given this lack of differentiation, it is not necessary to perform a separate regression model to tease out potential relationships of interest; rather, there is near uniform recognition of the importance of the Dalai Lama’s visits among those surveyed.
preceding chapter, here I will explore the survey outcomes in more detail. Three hundred ethnic Kalmyks were interviewed in a survey conducted in the republic in August and September 2010. It was administered by a local research institute, the Regional Institute of Innovative Research, under the guidance of Valeriy Badmaev, a professor in the Department of Philosophy at Kalmyk State University. The sample was evenly divided between Elista, the capital of the republic of Kalmykia, and four rural rayons: Yashkul’skiy, Oktyabr’skiy, Yustinskiy, and Laganskiy (see figure 5.4 for survey locations and rayons). These rayons were selected based on their geographic distribution in the republic.

According to preliminary results from the 2010 Russian census, the population of Kalmykia is just under 290,000; 57.4 percent are Kalmyks, while 30.2 percent are ethnic Russians. In the 2002 census, the republic’s population was slightly above 290,000, of whom 53.3 percent were Kalmyk and 33.6 percent Russian; as is occurring more drastically in the neighboring ethnic republics in the North Caucasus, there is evidence of outmigration by Russians to other areas.
Overall, the population primarily resides in rural settlements, with only 44.1 percent of residents living in one of the three population points classified as cities in the republic: Elista, Gorodovikovsk, and Lagan’. These percentages vary substantially from the same measures for the Russian Federation, where 73.7 percent of people live in urban areas. The mean age in the republic is 35.6 years (in comparison to a countrywide mean age of 39.0 years); there are roughly 11,000 more females residing in the republic in comparison to males (females compose 51.9
percent of the population). In Russia as a whole, females make up 53.8 percent of the total population, and there are roughly 10 million more women than men in the country.97

The survey conducted in Kalmykia was composed of 59 questions, making it slightly longer than the Buryatia questionnaire that will be discussed in the following chapter. The first section of the survey collected standard demographic information from respondents, including gender, age, marital status, education, and occupation. The sample closely reflects the gender composition of the republic, as 51.0 percent of respondents were female; the average age for the sample is 41.4 years, a divergence from the republic mean that is expected since no one under the age of 18 was interviewed. Summary statistics for the other demographic questions asked are provided in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2: Summary Statistics for the Kalmykia Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selected demographic categories</th>
<th>Percent of total</th>
<th>Kalmykia Average – 2010 Census</th>
<th>Russian Average – 2010 Census</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married or civil union</td>
<td>63.0%</td>
<td>58.0% (males) 51.8% (females)</td>
<td>63.3% (males) 52.4% (females)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmarried or divorced</td>
<td>32.3%</td>
<td>38.6% (males) 32.8% (females)</td>
<td>33.0% (males) 29.0% (females)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some higher education</td>
<td>67.3%</td>
<td>27.0%</td>
<td>28.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>57.3%</td>
<td>49.4%</td>
<td>58.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pensioners</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>Not reported</td>
<td>Not reported</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The survey then asked respondents to evaluate their material status: their family’s standard of living, the general economic conditions in the republic, and their economic outlook over the coming two years. Surprisingly—Kalmykia is commonly viewed as one of the poorer republics in the Russian Federation, and according to 2010 data from Rosstat per capita income

97 The results reported here are available at: http://www.perepis-2010.ru/results_of_the_census/results-inform.php

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was 7,700 Russian rubles per month, placing it last on the list of Russia’s 83 federal subjects—respondents were generally sanguine about their economic condition; 20 percent reported that they could purchase everything they need, while 72 percent reported that they could afford food and clothing without issue. In the national sample, drawn from the Levada Center’s 2008 Yearbook, 18 percent of respondents indicated that they could purchase everything they need—a comparable percentage to the regional survey—though only 42 percent of respondents indicated that they only had money for food and clothing (see Table 5.3 in the Yearbook). In Kalmykia a clear majority—55.7 percent—agreed that ‘Things are not so bad, and it is possible to live’ when asked about the general economic conditions in the republic, while 45.3 percent believed that their economic position would improve in the next two years. In comparison, with respect to the latter question the Levada Center’s 2008 Yearbook asked respondents whether they viewed their life circumstances as improving over the coming year; it reports that in December 2008 23 percent of the sample see improvement, a substantial difference from the regional survey (these results are reported in Table 1.13 of the Yearbook).98

Two other important framing questions asked respondents to indicate their current outlook on the economic and political situation in the country, and to state their preferred system of governance—communism, western democracy, or the current form of government in Russia. With respect to the first question, a majority—52 percent—replied that they believed the most trying times were behind them, while less than 20 percent thought they were still

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98 Notably, the findings in the Kalmykia survey mirror those in the December 2005 survey conducted by O’Loughlin et al. in the North Caucasus—both areas are poor by national income standards but respondents indicate that they get by reasonably well.
Relatedly, a majority of respondents indicated that they have no desire to move or migrate to other parts of the Russian Federation, a notable result considering Kalmykia’s poverty, at least according to official statistics. That is not to say that concerns about the economic situation in the republic are not present; an overwhelming 91 percent of respondents indicated that the lack of economic development was one of the most pressing problems facing the republic in the next five years. With respect to political system, there is a strong preference for the current system—commonly referred to as managed democracy and characterized by an emphasis on political stability, elections with predictable outcomes, and a hesitance to challenge the political status quo (Wegren and Konitzer 2007). Forty percent of respondent prefer the current system, while 35 percent prefer communism; western democracy has little support at just over 20 percent of the sample. This closely trends to the national sample, where 36 percent prefer the current system, 24 percent communism, and 15 percent democracy (see Graphic 3.2 and Chapter Six for further discussion). As with economic concerns, many respondents (52.7 percent) pointed to corruption as a pressing problem to be dealt with in the coming years.

Reflecting both the economic and political concerns among residents in the republic, a group of over 300 parents recently sent a letter to the US embassy in Moscow asking for support in refurbishing a hospital in Elista (Lally 2010).

The survey sample can be summarized thus: though the republic is poor, survey respondents are generally optimistic about their economic position and content with their lives in the republic; individuals are also optimistic about the state of Russia, indicating that they believe

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99 In the national sample, the results vary substantially depending on when the survey was conducted. In the April 2008 sample, 27 percent of respondents agreed that ‘the hardest times are still ahead,’ while in December of that year 52 percent of the sample selected this answer. In turn, optimism about the future was higher in April 2008, with 43 percent of the sample agreeing that ‘the hardest times are already behind;’ in December 2008, only 16 percent of respondents agreed with this statement. See Table 2.1 in the 2008 Levada Center Yearbook.
the worst years of transition have passed and that the current political system is preferable for the further management of the Russian state. Overall, the sample seems to be optimistic and politically conservative, preferring the status quo over any potential changes in the political sphere. The following subsections discuss three topics in further detail, using survey results and logistic regression models as a basis the conclusions reached: the high incidence of religious identity but comparatively low levels of practice and self-evaluated strength of belief (though both are higher than other groups when compared at the national scale); the role of religion in the formation of the Kalmyk ethnos, specifically ways in which Kalmyk Buddhism should be distinguished from Tibetan practice; and religion as a component of civic as opposed to ethnic national identity.

Religious belief and practice in the republic of Kalmykia

With respect to religion, as noted in Chapter Four a high percentage of the survey sample—281 out of 300 respondents (93.7 percent)—indicated Buddhism when asked what religion they practice. As previously noted in Chapter Four, this percentage of religious identification is higher than comparative samples for Muslims and Russian Orthodox. Interpretations vary as to why Kalmyks so commonly identify as Buddhist; Sinclair (2008: 242) writes that ‘since perestroika Kalmyks have been earnestly reviving their pre-Soviet traditions in an ambitious project of nation building.’ Similarly, based on the interviews and focus groups, I have suggested above that this high level of identification is the product of the search for
common values and a national basis for identity, as well as the direct patronage of Buddhism by Kalmykia’s leaders in the years after the transition from communism.  

Beyond the analysis of why individuals frequently attend religious services, as presented in Chapter Four, a number of similar questions asked respondents to evaluate the role of religion in their lives. Survey respondents were queried regarding what religion means to them personally. In Kalmykia, only 7.3 percent of respondents indicated that ‘religion has no meaning in my life;’ in comparison, this number is 22 percent in the national sample from the 2008 Levada Yearbook. For a plurality of respondents (48.7 percent), religion helps them in thinking about the meaning of life, the concept of the soul, and eternity. Prayer is also an important component of the religious lives of ethnic Kalmyks; only five percent of respondents replied that they never pray, while 19.3 percent indicated that they pray at least once a week. Again, a comparison to the national sample illustrates the generally important role that religion plays in the lives of Kalmyks; among all Russians, 34 percent indicated that they never pray (though this number is down from 69 percent in June 1991), while 26 percent indicated that they pray once per week at a minimum. This division between those who never pray and those who pray frequently is notable. In Russia as a whole, there appears to be a clear divide between those who never pray and those who pray frequently. In Kalmykia, such a division is not readily apparent, with few people never praying but also fewer praying frequently; in part, I suggest that this is

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100 I discussed this question and the survey results with Telo Tulku Rinpoche during our follow-up interview on 3 April 2012. He observed: ‘When you say Kalmyk, when you say Kalmyk culture, what does it consist of? And Buddhism is one of the ingredients of their national identity or ethnic identity that makes them a Kalmyk...we see Buddhism as a culture, as well [as a religion].’

101 For the Kalmyk sample, it should be noted that the most popular response regarding prayer was ’a few times a year;’ it seems that prayer and attendance at religious service are broadly equated in the minds of Kalmykia’s Buddhists.
explainable due to the equation of prayer with attendance at temple among Buddhists in the republic.

To further explain the strength of religious sentiment in Kalmykia, I evaluated responses to the question, ‘How religious do you consider yourself?’, using ordered logistic regression. Ordered logistic regression is used when the dependent variable is classed into multiple categories. The model assumes a logistic distribution of the error terms, as distinct from ordered probit models, which assume a normal distribution for these terms (Hoffmann 2003). The response to the question on self-evaluated religiosity proceeds in a stepwise fashion: ‘not at all religious,’ ‘not very religious,’ ‘somewhat religious,’ and ‘very religious.’ I dropped a small number of respondents (n=21), who stated that their religiosity ‘depends on the circumstance’ or that the question was ‘difficult to answer,’ along with two missing cases. For consistency, I used the same predictors and controls as outlined in Chapter Four; to restate, the primary independent variables of interest are age, gender, urban-rural residence and ethnic pride, while the control variables are marital status, material well-being, educational level, employment status, and interethnic trust (see Table 4.3). This provides an opportunity to extend the interpretation of the role of religion in the everyday lives of Kalmyks beyond the limited use of the question on frequent attendance. The results of this regression analysis are reported in Table 5.3.
Table 5.3: Ordered Logistic Regression Model for Predicting Self-Reported Religiosity (odds ratios reported)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Kalmykia Sample</th>
<th>Kalmykia Sample w/controls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>1.02**</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (male as baseline)</td>
<td>1.42**</td>
<td>1.74**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban-rural residence</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic pride</td>
<td>2.45***</td>
<td>2.07***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controls</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status (married)</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.92**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education - Technical</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.37**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education – University</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.41**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material well-being</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interethnic trust</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Observations</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td>0.036</td>
<td>0.068</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significance levels are indicated by asterisks: * p ≤ .10; ** p ≤ .05; *** p ≤ .01

Notably, some consistencies are apparent across the two models. In the full model, two of the dependent variables of interest are significant. First, the odds of women reporting higher levels of religiosity in comparison to men are 0.74 times greater in the full model; a similar pattern holds for those who reported being either ‘somewhat’ or ‘very proud’ to be a member of the Kalmyk ethnicity—the odds of higher levels of self-reported religiosity are twice as large for this group in comparison to the baseline category.102 Three control variables—both educational measures and marital status—were also significant in the ordered logit model. With respect to education, those with either technical training or university-level education are less likely to report higher levels of religiosity in comparison to the baseline category, which is composed of those with a secondary level education or no education at all; the baseline has 2.7 times higher odds of reporting high levels of self-religiosity in comparison to those with a technical education.

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102 While interpreting odds ratios for ordered logit is more difficult in comparison to the binary logistic model—where the reference category is clear—Hoffmann (2003) suggests that general statements of likelihood are supported by a positive, significant odds ratio.
and a 2.4 times higher odds in comparison to those with a university education.\textsuperscript{103} Married persons have approximately twice as large odds of reporting higher levels of religiosity in comparison to those who are not married.

Beyond these questions of individual religious practice (as modeled in Chapter Four) and belief (as reported above), I also asked respondents to report on how they perceive the religious beliefs and practices of their neighbors (see Appendix One, q. 52). Half of all respondents indicated that people previously hid their religious practices and beliefs and one quarter indicated that more and more individuals are turning towards religion, while only 2.4 percent suggested that the revival in religious practice was trendy and did not reflect a more substantive change in individual consciousness. Respectively, in the Levada Center’s national sample 28 percent chose the first option (that people previously hid their religious practices), 22 percent that second (that more and more people are becoming believers), and 23 percent viewed the country’s religious revival as currently fashionable but not sustainable in the long term.

I was specifically interested in exploring what variables predict the interpretation that more and more individuals are now turning towards religion. In the focus group among the academics, a theme that emerged was the perception that many young people now attend khurul and consider themselves to be believers; among students, the importance of Buddhism as a marker of cultural identity was reiterated. In turn, I constructed a dummy variable for these responses to question 52, as introduced above, and conducted a logistic regression. The predictors again remained consistent, though I reclassified the continuous age variable into three categories: 19-29; 30-49 and 50 and above. This follows the classification used in the World

\textsuperscript{103}These odds ratios were determined by dividing one by the coefficients for technical and university-level education, respectively.
Values Survey, while also facilitating the interpretation of varying ‘generational’ effects. The preliminary analysis also suggested that age is more of a cohort effect, one which disappears with the introduction of the education variable. The final model includes an interaction term between age and education, in order to explore what is the main effect as modified by this interaction. This model is reported in Table 5.4, again following the same procedure of testing the independent variables of interest before evaluating a second model including controls and the third model with the interaction terms introduced above (terms were included for young and middle aged respondents with either a university or technical education).

**Table 5.4: Logistic Regression Model for Predicting the Increasing Adoption of Religious Practices (odds ratios reported).**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Kalmykia Sample</th>
<th>Kalmykia Sample w/controls</th>
<th>Kalmykia Sample w/interaction terms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age category: young (18-29 years old)</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age category: middle (30-49 years old)</td>
<td>1.98**</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (male as baseline)</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>0.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban-rural residence</td>
<td>0.51**</td>
<td>0.49**</td>
<td>0.47**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic pride</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>1.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controls</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status (married)</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education - Technical</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.99</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education – University</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.00**</td>
<td>1.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material well-being</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.55**</td>
<td>0.53**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interethnic trust</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.21*</td>
<td>2.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age*education terms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young*university</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle*university</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young*technical</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle*technical</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Observations</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td>0.031</td>
<td>0.084</td>
<td>0.088</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significance levels are indicated by asterisks: * p ≤ .10; ** p ≤ .05; *** p ≤ .01
In directly testing which covariates explain a perception of religious revival, a few notable trends are apparent. First, the odds of individuals living beyond Elista choosing this response—that ‘more and more new people are following God’—to describe the contemporary religious climate are twice as large in comparison to those residing in the republic’s capital. While it is difficult to speculate as to why, perhaps the relative success of the OBK in constructing temples in Kalmykia’s rural areas lends credence to the idea that a genuine religious revival is occurring. Second and supporting the focus group discussion among academics, the odds of those with a university level education selecting this response are three times as large in comparison to those with either a secondary or beginner’s education. Lastly, the categorical age categories are not significant; as such, no robust conclusions about a ‘generational gap’ can be made. The introduction of the interaction terms in the third model point to support for the sentiment that religious practice is increasing among younger individuals with higher levels of education—the comparison category is composed of older individuals at all levels of education, as well less-educated youth and middle-age respondents—though none of these coefficients are significant. Rather, only rural residence and material status maintain their significance from the second model.

Overall, the survey responses to questions on religious practice and belief do lead to some important conclusions. First, among respondents in the Kalmykia sample women generally tend to describe themselves as more religious, as do individuals with lower levels of education and high scores on the measure of ethnic pride. Notably, the latter result lends further credence to the findings of Chapter Four, specifically that a significant relationship exists between high levels of ethnic pride and frequent attendance at religious services. In terms of interpreting the
current religious milieu in the republic as one of revival, this response is more common among those living beyond the capital of Elista in the sample.

Religion and the Kalmyk ethnos

Mark Bassin (2009) has recently explored the concept of *ethnos* as theorized in the Soviet-era works of Lev Gumilev. Gumilev posits *ethnos* as a scalar hierarchy, with both sub- and super-*ethnosy*; his theory therefore resembles the work of Oswald Spengler (Weltkulturen), Arnold Toynbee, Samuel Huntington and, in geography, both Friedrich Ratzel and Rudolph Kjellen. Gumilev’s theory is biologically inspired; the notions of birth, maturity, and decline of civilizations are present, with each period experiencing different levels of *passionarnost’*, or levels of political engagement. Bassin subsequently links Gumilev’s ideas to the concept of *etnogeopolitika*, an increasingly popular school of thought in Russia, which ‘argues that ethnicity—in all of its various manifestations—represents the most fundamental force driving the political life of the 21st century’ (Bassin 2009: 133). In Russia, *etnogeopolitika* is frequently considered to be an entirely new understanding of the world, one which is novel due to its privileging of the ethnic and the ascribing of specific, political characteristics to the ethnic groups considered.

Despite continued critique from western scholars, Lev Gumilev’s theory of ethnos maintains wide popularity in Russian academic circles. Of particular importance is the concept of *ethnos*; beyond the implications of the term for interstate rivalry and civilizational clashes, scholars often employ the term in deference to Gumilev’s writings and in acknowledging periods of ‘ethnic outburst,’ when the political and cultural position of a specific ethnic group took center stage (on the example of the Buryats during the late 1980s and early 1990s, see Skrynnikova and
Amogolonova 2006). It is also, importantly, a term that is of familiarity to Russian citizens, given its prevalence in the national discourse. To investigate the perceived role of Buddhism’s revival in the Kalmyk ethnos, respondents were a question that directly engaged with Gumilev’s concept (see Appendix One, q. 51). This question engages with Gumilev’s notion of ethnos by querying respondents as to the role of religion during a period of passionarnost’. Two responses were particularly popular in the sample, as each was selected by more than half of respondents (up to three answers could be selected). Nearly two-thirds of the sample replied that Buddhism is of importance to the Kalmyk ethnos because it ‘helps to overcome difficult life situations, [and] to gain confidence in life,’ while 57.7 percent responded that the religion ‘aids in the preservation of cultural traditions.’ Only 4.7 percent said either that Buddhism has no measurable impact or that the religion draws people away from real life and the fight for societal progress; among these 14 respondents, eight either identified as atheist or declined to respond to the question of religious affiliation.

A similar question asked respondents to answer whether and in what ways Kalmyk Buddhism should be distinguished from its Tibetan alternative. It did not directly invoke Gumilev’s concept of ethnos, though there is substantial debate within Kalmykia’s Buddhist community regarding the role of Tibetans and the influence of the Tibetan school (Sinclair 2008). Interestingly, these results corroborated some of the findings from the focus groups; when asked about more theologically nuanced questions, most self-identified Buddhists are unsure how to respond. One-third of respondents responded that ‘it is difficult to say’ when directly asked about this question of distinguishing Kalmyk Buddhism from Tibetan practice. Of the 46 percent who responded that such distinction should be made, 51.8 percent agreed that religious practice should reflect the particularities of Kalmyk culture—for example, the
observance of nationally important, quasi-religious holidays—while 42.5 percent agreed that services should be conducted in the Kalmyk language. In general, however, the low percentage of the sample who viewed such changes as necessary potentially reflects uncertainty regarding the specifics of Buddhist practice and ceremony.

*Civic versus ethnic national identity: the factor of religion*

In the literature on nationalism, two approaches predominate: ethnic and civic. Civic nationalism is commonly viewed as inclusive, based on a set of common laws and institutions associated with a particular state and allowing assimilation in the nation-state through legally established norms. Membership in a civic nation usually corresponds to the borders of that state. As such, civic nations are territorially defined and delimited; such ‘nations must possess compact, well-defined territories’ (Smith 1991: 9). Also of importance is a set of shared norms and traditions, the product of a common legal and political heritage that is reproduced in popular media, the education system, and other national institutions. Examples of civic nation-states include the United States and the Russian Federation, where the term rossiyskiy is employed in the inclusive sense.

Ethnic nationalism, on the other hand, is viewed as exclusive. A shared language and customs (including religion), rather than a common legal tradition and political norms, unite ethnic communities. Common descent, rather than residence in a shared territory, is required for membership in ethnically defined nations (Smith 1991). Those groups commonly classed as such, including Armenians, Greeks, and Germans, are groups that have frequently lived in diaspora or in states where citizenship was circumscribed through strict legal norms; in the
former case, populations maintain their distinct national identity while living in another state, while in the latter case assimilation of those not born into the ethnic group is impossible.  

Given the legacy of Soviet Union, with its emphasis on a common civic identity (the result being the eventual erosion of national identity and other types of premodern ties), and the inclusive nature of the Russian Federation, I expected a strongly civic conceptualization of national identity in Kalmykia. To test this, the survey included a set of questions that tested elements of Smith’s distinction between ethnic and civic nations.

Respondents were asked what place they consider to be their homeland (in Russian: rodina; see Appendix One, q. 20). ‘Russia’ and ‘the USSR’ were included as civic responses, while other answers were intended to demonstrate a more ethnic conceptualization of identity: ‘the native land of my people’ and ‘the land where my ancestors are buried.’ Interestingly, respondents predominantly chose another response—‘the village and town where I was born/raised’—when asked to identify their motherland; this option was selected by just over two-thirds of respondents.  

The conceptualization of the rodina as a place of birth and maturation, rather than a civic nation-state—either existent or past—or an ethnically defined and shared site/space should be situated against other research into the significance of the term. Conducting ethnographic work in Chukotka, Thompson (2003: 138) finds a local attachment that is complicated by resettlement to Russia’s far northeast: “‘Homeland’ or rodina was rarely a long-lost birthplace in central Russia; like natives, many settlers professed their attachment to Chukotka using exactly this term.” Thompson’s finding is interesting given the etymology of the word ‘rodina’; it means ‘family’ or ‘kin’ and is the root for a number of cognate words in

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104 The latter was the case in Germany, though this has changed in the past decade.

105 Twenty percent of respondents answered ‘the native land of my people;’ the remaining choices were all selected by less than 10 percent of respondents.
Russian (Müller 2007). As Müller (2007: 209) writes in reference to the word, ‘upon returning to his family in his home village, a man would say he is returning to his *rodina*.’ In Kalmykia, in comparison to the Russian North, a continual proximity to birthplace or childhood home results in the maintenance of local attachments.

Associated with this question on homeland was a set of three questions on national self-identification; respondents were asked to indicate how they identify in the first and second order. A diverse set of options were provided, including: ‘citizen of Russia’; ‘in equal parts a citizen of Russia and resident of my republic’; ‘resident of my republic’; and ‘member of my nation.’ Those who identified as citizens of Russia were viewed as civic in their self-identification, while those who selected ‘member of my nation’ privilege an ethnic, national form of identity. The results for these questions—provided in Table 5.5—are ambiguous in terms of the overall pattern, though some specific results are of interest. First, though nearly equal numbers of respondents selected ‘member of my nation’ and ‘citizen of Russia’ when asked to provide their primary identity, these two categories diverged sharply when asked about their second order identities. This suggests that identity as directly associated with the nation, while important for a minority of respondents, is of lesser importance to many ethnic Kalmyks in comparison to identification with either the Russian state or the republic; Kalmyks most commonly maintain a civic vision of themselves as balanced between the nation-state and the republic, a layering of identity commonly compared to the traditional Russian folk art of Matrioshka dolls (Taras 1993). This balance between regional and nation-state scale identification is particularly common in ethnically defined federations; some authors suggest that this inherent multinationality makes such federations less stable than their mono-ethnic counterparts (Watts 2007). When asked about citizenship, the results are unambiguous; the majority of Kalmyks—nearly 85 percent—
consider themselves to be citizens of the Russian state, while just over 10 percent view themselves as citizens of the republic.

This high level of identification with the Russian state also indicates that there is little sentiment towards national politicization among the Kalmyks in general. To attempt to evaluate these related ideas, I asked respondents to give their opinion on the state of interethnic relations in the republic. This question tests the level of interethnic accord; it can be safely assumed that those who view interethnic relations as strained could potentially support a confrontational political platform. The survey results, however, point to widespread interethnic harmony; 93.3 percent of the sample (290 out of 300 respondents) characterized interethnic relations as peaceful, mostly friendly, or very friendly. There is little distinction between those who consider themselves to be religious and those who view religion as less important in their everyday lives.

### Table 5.5: Self-Identification with State or Nation, Kalmykia Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geographic attachment</th>
<th>First Order</th>
<th>Second Order</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Member of my nation</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizen of Russia</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
<td>32.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In equal parts a citizen of Russia and resident of my republic</td>
<td>31.7%</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resident of my republic</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>27.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resident of my city (locality)</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soviet citizen</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is difficult to say</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A final question evaluated the link between Buddhism and ethnic identity, asking respondents if being Buddhist was a required component of Kalmyk ethnic identity (see Appendix One, q.59). This question is the most direct test of the ethnic-civic dichotomy; a common religious heritage is commonly viewed as a required component of an ethnically

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106 A more direct test of the level of support for nationalist political parties in Kalmykia was viewed by the conductors of the survey as too sensitive to be asked, in part due to the republic’s proximity to the North Caucasus.
conceived nation. A more civic understanding of the Kalmyk nation would correspond to the decoupling of religion and inclusion in the national group. The latter sentiment predominates in the sample; 61.9 percent of respondents indicated that they ‘completely’ or ‘mostly disagree’ with the idea that one has to be Buddhist to be Kalmyk. Less than twenty percent of the sample adopted the alternate stance, explicitly linking Buddhism to Kalmyk national identity. This contradicts the findings of the focus groups (a point I discuss just below), in that survey respondents seem to deemphasize the notion of Buddhism as a required component of Kalmyk national identity, something that clearly came through in interview and focus group conversations.

To summarize the survey results on the conceptualization of civic versus ethnic national identity indicate that Kalmyks generally maintain a civic vision of their nation. Kalmyks do not privilege either civic or ethnically associated territories in defining their homeland, or rodina. When asked about political identity, they most commonly identify the Russian Federation and the republic of Kalmykia together, as would be expected in a federal polity. Lastly, the civic vision of the Kalmyk nation is confirmed by the rejection in the sample of the link between the Buddhist religion and ethnicity. Moreover, the survey indicates that there is little evidence of national politicization among those who consider themselves religious, among the Kalmyks sampled.

**Conclusion: Triangulating Interviews, Focus Groups, and Surveys**

The multiple methods approach used in this chapter (and outlined previously in Chapter Three) illustrates the various conversations that circulate around issues of social and political interest in geographic context. Formal conversations with religious elites result in one reading of
the role of Buddhism in Kalmykia, while practical conversations and measures of public opinion support an alternate interpretation. The analysis of these conversations should be value-free. While interview subjects put forward a particular interpretation of a topic, other persons in a particular place will view the topic differently; both interpretations should be evaluated and considered when approaching topics of social scientific interest contextually.

In synthesizing the results reported above, I position the survey results as a framing mechanism for understanding the broader processes occurring in Kalmykia with respect to religion. The uptick in attendance, the percentages of respondents who view themselves as either ‘somewhat’ or ‘very religious’ (37.7 percent and nine percent, respectively), and the general opinion of religious revival, either in terms of reawakening or a new discovery all underscore the contemporary relevance of Buddhism in Kalmykia. While the religion is of greater interest to some groups—such as those who feel pride in their ethnicity—the conclusion that Buddhism’s revival is both broad-based and substantial is warranted.

In comparing these society-wide findings—the popular interpretation that comes out in an independent survey sample—to the more formal and practical discussions that revolve around Buddhism, some distinctions should be made. Without question, religious leaders in the republic praise some elements of the revival: the construction of khuruls, the increase in Buddhist practice after the atheistic policies of the Soviet Union, and the role of Buddhism in Kalmykia as a cultural foundation for both the group and, perhaps, as an example for other threatened peoples. That said, the critique of a lack of deep engagement with Buddhist thought also clearly comes through, as evinced by concerns over the self-centered nature of some practitioners (i.e. those who come to temple for advice or the blessings of monks). The focus group dialogues present a mixed picture, one which straddles the popular and formal interpretations adumbrated above.
While the conversations among academics were insightful and displayed a substantial depth of knowledge, among the students and even the believers, the engagement with the topic was more cursory. Participants in this last group expressed interest in the topic, but often did so through vague statements of religious belief (i.e., that Buddhism is ‘the best religion for Kalmyks because of our way of life (obraz zhizni)…[and] traditions’ (F.G. 2, P. 3). Clearly, the suggestion that academics, some of whom formally studied Buddhism either as a religious doctrine or from a sociologically perspective, would exhibit a deeper knowledge of Buddhism is unsurprising.

When considered distinctly, individuals tended to emphasize what was important to them personally throughout the focus groups: the theological and sociological importance of Buddhism for academics; the religious and spiritual relevance for believers; and the role of the religion as a form of cultural identity among students.

Existing scholarship on Buddhism in post-Soviet Kalmykia commonly argues that Buddhists in the republic have little understanding of theological bases of the religion (Sinclair 2008; Badmaev and Ulanov 2010). In turn, the ‘revival’ of Buddhism can be viewed as broad but not deep; the construction of religious infrastructure belies a weak conceptualization of religious practice and associated values. My project reaches similar conclusions, but does so with the qualification that different actors privilege different interpretations. Empirical engagement with this discourse of revival, in turn, presents a more complex picture. To restate, while religious leaders echoed the conclusions found in prior research, focus group conversations complicate a straightforward critique of the ‘revival’ discourse. In dialogue, both students and believers offered evidence that Buddhism has substantial meaning in the everyday lives of ethnic Kalmyks, particularly as a system of values; while they acknowledge their ignorance of some elements of Buddhism, participants in these groups emphasized the importance of the religion to
Kalmyk national identity. The key finding from the survey is that many respondents view Buddhism as a central component of their personal lives, but also an important part of the cultural and political organization of the republic. In generalizing about public opinion on religion, a high percentage of Kalmyks self-identify as Buddhist and there is above-average (compared to means for Russia as a whole) levels of attendance at religious services. Also, it is important to note that though Buddhism is an important component of Kalmyk national identity, members of the ethnic group do not explicitly make religion a requirement for ethnic Kalmyks.
Chapter Six: Buddhism in Buryatia: Regional Identities and Cultural Distinctions

Introduction

In the Soviet Union, the position of the country’s religious organizations was clear; they were required to be subservient to the communist regime in exchange for a circumscribed recognition and limits on religious practice. For Buddhists, one of the more telling events reflecting this pact was the condoning by their leaders of the 1959 invasion of Tibet by Chinese forces (Kolarz 1962; Fagan 2001). The situation changed, however, during the last years of the Soviet state, and the floodgates opened in earnest in 1990, with the October passage of the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations (as discussed in Chapter Four; see also Anderson 1994). To quote Davis (1997: 645) and reiterate the points made previously, this ‘revolutionary law… declared Russia to be a secular state, prohibited the establishment of a state religion, and denied to the state any right of intervention in religious affairs.’

In the Russian Federation after 1991, the relationship between the state and religion has been more complex. The opening of the religious marketplace resulted in an influx of non-traditional faiths—usually Christian groups from the West that sent missionaries to Russia in order to fill the purported spiritual vacuum (Pelkmans 2009). As indicated in Chapter Four, the politics of religious competition have been one of the primary focuses of scholarship on religion in post-Soviet Russia. While general claims of religious revival both among Russian Orthodox and adherents to minority religions are common, they are rarely empirically substantiated; this is particularly true for smaller religious communities, which are not appropriately considered in national-scale samples.
The broader aim of this chapter, like Chapters Four and Five, is to investigate religious belief and practice in its regional geographic context. I have previously argued that the analysis of national samples obscures the picture of religious practice and belief among a country’s constituent religious minorities, taking the Russian Federation as my case study. The comparison of Orthodoxy, Islam, and Buddhism presented in Chapter Four identifies distinctions within the respective religious communities in terms of frequent attendance at religious services.

In Kalmykia, this picture is further complicated by the competing discourses regarding religious revival. While interview subjects decried the lack of detailed knowledge of religious traditions among Buddhist practitioners, focus group participants and survey respondents overwhelmingly identified as Buddhists. Their self-described religiosity was, however, complex as well. In the case of Buryatia, my empirical focus is on differences between self-identified Buddhists and Orthodox Christians, and I limit the analysis to the survey sample collected in the republic in the summer of 2010. The chapter opens by introducing the Buryats and situating the group geographically in eastern Siberia, with particular emphasis on the interaction of national identity and political action since the breakup of the Soviet Union. I then review the history of Buddhism in Buryatia, with particular emphasis on the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. The third section of the chapter is descriptive, summarizing the basic demographic characteristics of the the summer 2010 survey sample, including age, education and socioeconomic outlook.

In the fourth section, I turn to this survey data in greater detail, to evaluate the coherence of religious identity among the residents of the republic. Following the arguments outlined in Chapters Four and Five, I investigate the strength of religious identification among Buryatia’s Buddhists and emphasize the comparison between this group and the Russian Orthodox who live in the republic. The key argument in this chapter revolves around the distinction in religious
practice and belief between titulars—that is, ethnic Buryats—and non-titulars—primarily Russians, but including other groups, as well—in Buryatia. Buryats have actively guarded their cultural distinctiveness, particularly during the post-Soviet era, with religion as one of the key markers of this. My findings—that Buryats are significantly more likely to indicate high levels of religious belief and are more frequent attendees at religious services—lends empirical credence to claims of religion as a source of identity for minorities in contemporary Russia. At the same time, religion is not viewed as a marker of ethnic exclusivity—in other words, one does not have to be Buddhist to be considered a Buryat—nor is there a strong correlation between national identity and a self-identification with a particular polity or territory.

**Buryatia: Division and Opportunism**

Buryats are the largest ethnic minority in Siberia, and primarily reside in the Republic of Buryatia, Irkutsk Oblast, and Zabaikalsky Krai (see Figure 6.1). In total, there are roughly 460,000 Buryats living in the Russian Federation according to the 2010 census. The total number of Buryats has trended upwards since the breakup of the Soviet Union; whereas the population’s total size was approximately 415,000 in 1989 (the last Soviet census), it rose to 445,000 in 2002. In Buryatia proper, the Buryat portion of the total population increased over the last intercensal period (2002 to 2010) from 272,000 (at which time Buryats composed 27.8 of the republic’s total population) to 286,000, what is now 30.0 percent of the total population for that region. For the neighboring regions, in the most recent census count there are 77,000 Buryats in Irkutsk oblast (3.3. percent of the total population of that region), and 74,000 in Zabaikalsky Krai (6.8 percent of the total population).
In Irkutsk Oblast and Zabaikalsky Krai, Buryats were previously concentrated in two autonomous okrugs (AOs): Ust-Orda Buryat and Aga-Buryat. These two regions were combined with surrounding, predominantly Russian territories in 2008; this is part of the Kremlin’s project to merge regions (ukrupnennie regionov) to streamline the territorial structure of the federation (see Goode 2004; Derrick 2009). Such mergers are a component of a more

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107 Russia’s federal structure, like that of the Soviet Union, is complex. There are currently eight federal districts and 83 lower-level territories; this latter category includes 55 non-ethnically defined regions (including both krais and oblasts), 21 ethnic republics (of which Buryatia and Kalmykia are examples), five autonomous okrugs and oblasts (the Jewish Autonomous Oblast is the only example of the latter), and two city-regions (Moscow and St. Petersburg).
comprehensive policy of centralization undertaken since Vladimir Putin was elected president in 2000, which has also included the creation of eight meso-level federal districts, the requirement of conformance between regional and federal laws, and the direct appointment of regional executives by Moscow (Ross 2003; Alexander 2004; Bahry 2005; Chebankova 2010).108

While some authors have suggested that the merging of the two Buryat regions with their surrounding Russian territories could serve as a potential catalyst for national mobilization, primarily due to continued discontent over the division of Buryat territory into three distinct units by Stalin in 1937, this has not been the case (Skrynnikova and Amogolonova 2006). Rather, such protest has generally been limited to peripheral groups and intellectuals, as more mainstream elements in the national community supported the mergers (Graber and Long 2009). Khambo Lama Damba Ayusheev, head of the leading Buddhist organization in Buryatia, Traditional Buddhist Sangha of Russia (TBSR; discussed in greater detail below), criticized a group that was protesting against the incorporation of Aga-Buryat into Chita oblast in the summer of 2008 (Bernstein 2009). Other leaders within the Russian federal structure—including the district’s executive and the head of the Siberian federal district—actively campaigned for Ust’-Orda Buryat’s merger with the surrounding Irkutsk oblast, portraying the process as inevitable (Goode 2004). While support for incorporation was generally viewed as weaker in Aga-Buryat, in part due to an existing agreement between the region and the surrounding Chita oblast that delimited areas of collaboration and autonomy, the referendum was endorsed by the region’s leader and passed with 93.5 percent in the okrug proper during the March 2007 vote (Terentyeva et al. 2007; Graber and Long 2009). This level of support was comparable to

108 Acceding to the demands of demonstrators in the wake of the falsified December 2011 parliamentary elections, President Dmitry Medvedev promised a return to a decentralized model of direct elections of regional heads; legislation to this effect was introduced by Medvedev in January 2012: http://www.cdi.org/russia/johnson/russia-duma-dismantle-managed-democracy-491.cfm.
that in Ust’-Orda Buryat Autonomous Oblast, held roughly a year prior in April 2006. In both cases, guarantees for the maintenance of cultural autonomy tempered concerns over the loss of the political rights associated with separate territorial units.

These recent events reinforce the idea that the Buryats are one of the ‘quiet’ minorities of the Russian Federation (Humphrey 1995). This has been the accepted view since the late Soviet period through the merger debates. During the late perestroika period, like other titular minorities in Russia’s ethnic republics, the Buryats issued a sovereignty declaration. This was not a declaration of independence, but rather was aimed at establishing the region’s political position in the contest between Yeltsin—who directed the republics to take ‘all the sovereignty you can swallow’—and Gorbachev—who sought to undermine Yeltsin’s position by allowing autonomous republics to participate as equals in negotiations over the future of the Soviet state (Tishkov 1997). In total, between August 1990 and May 1991 16 of Russia’s autonomous republics issued sovereignty declarations (Tishkov 1997; Giuliano 2006); these actions by second-level republics—Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics (ASSRs) like Buryatia located within the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR)—reproduced the actions of first order, union republics like Estonia and Georgia. To quote Gorenburg (2003: 13): ‘nationalist demands for sovereignty and self-determination were based on the perceived unfairness of the hierarchy of regions within the federal administrative system.’ Tatarstan’s 1990 declaration is the most widely discussed in the academic literature; it retitled the republic ‘the Tatar Soviet Socialist Republic,’ thus implying that the region was on equal footing with the union republics and the RSFSR specifically (Walker 1996; Rorlich 1999; Bahry 2005). In the medium term, the declaration strengthened Tatarstan’s bargaining position against the federal center; the republic was able to extract substantial economic concessions from the Yeltsin administration when it
signed the first bilateral agreement in February 1994 (Graney 2010; on the bilateral treaties more generally, see Stoner-Weiss 1999 and Filippov and Shvetsova 1999).

In Buryatia, on the other hand, the sovereignty declaration was attenuated by the region’s ethnic composition; according to Tishkov (1997: 57-58), ‘it seemed too risky to inscribe into official text that which was elsewhere seen as a ‘normal’ formulation’—the declaration referred to the ‘multi-national people of Buryatia’ as opposed to the formulation ‘the people of the republic’ used elsewhere. Generally, the sovereignty declaration was the high point of nationalist mobilization in Buryatia. Though the republic’s parliament passed a language law in 1992, which established both Buryat and Russian as state languages of the republic and required dual usage of Buryat and Russian on street and road signs, in official announcements and government texts, and on goods produced in the republic, compliance with the law has generally been lax. ‘The law exists mostly on paper and has not changed the language situation in the republic in a significant way’ (Khilkanova and Khilkanov 2004: 95); most Buryats, particularly those living in cities and the highly educated, continue to use Russian in everyday communication with each other and in interethnic communication. (Buryat, like Kalmyk, is related linguistically to Mongolian). Nor was the language law a unique step among the country’s ethnic republics; Tatarstan, Tuva, and the Sakha Republic all adopted similar provisions (Giuliano 2006). Further indicating the ebbing on nationalist sentiment, in June 1994 Leonid Potapov, an ethnic Russian and former Communist apparatchik, was elected president of the republic with 77 percent of the vote.

Humphrey (1995: 113), writing about the post-Soviet period, distinguishes between the political and cultural identity of the Buryats: ‘in the federal political context, Buryats are joining with the local Russian population to express regional interests, while in cultural contexts they
maintain a distinctive ethnic identity.’ Similarly, in explaining the strong support for the mergers, Graber and Long (2009: 152) observe that ‘there is no small amount of pride in Ulan-Ude that the Buryats are not embroiled in the kind of ethno-national strife that they see daily on Russian news from the Caucasus.’ In turn, the members of the group have adopted a pragmatic approach to the changes in Russia’s political geography.

Though Buryats are generally content with their political position, cultural identity remains an important issue, as intimated by Humphrey (1995) and other writers on the region. In particular, religion and language are viewed as central components of Buryatia’s national-cultural revival. I consolidate the discussion of the latter by noting that the longer term effect of language politics in the republic is towards increased Russianization, with Khilkanova and Khilkanov (2004: 97) going so far as to argue that ‘the Buryat case shows that ethnic identity can survive the loss of the indigenous group language if other original cultural components [religion, habits, mentality, traditions, and so on] remain.’ Similarly, Skrynnikova and Amogolonova (2006: 52) write: ‘despite the highest interest in the language issue at the beginning of this national revival period, the problem of language has remained no more than an element of ideological rhetoric.’ A number of important cleavages remain as obstacles to any coherent ethno-national movement: linguistic divides between eastern and western Buryats (the latter group, which resides in the area formerly demarcated by the Ust-Orda Buryat AO, is generally unfamiliar with the literary form of Buryat); the lack of knowledge of Buryat among members of the ethnic group living in the republic’s cities, particularly Ulan-Ude; and the broader

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109 In a 1991-92 survey, Khilkanova and Khilkanov (2004) report that Buryats rated their facility in Russian well above their facility in Buryat; 90.4 percent rated their Russian speaking skills as either good or very good, while only 58.4 percent rated their Buryat speaking skills at this same level.
cultural divide between eastern and western Buryats, which is also reflected in terms of adherence to Buddhism, a cultural component discussed in more detail below.

With the failure to form a coherent, Buryat-specific national movement in the early 1990s, Skrynnikova and Amogolonova suggest that ethnic entrepreneurs turned to a regionalist, pan-Mongolian discourse to position the group as distinct in the Russian polity during a second phase of national revival. The project was not overtly political—the ‘sociocultural practices [associated with pan-Mongolianism] do not involve irredentist ends’—though the further consolidation of ethnically Buryat areas into the surrounding Russian regions, introduced above, has led to wider calls for the maintenance of a Buryat territory in Russia, a debate that can be connected to both the merging of the Autonomous Okrugs with their surrounding territories and the longer-term potential for combining the Republic of Buryatia with the newly enlarged regions to its east and west (Skrynnikova and Amogolonova 2006: 53). Another commonly voiced demand is the reconstitution of the Buryat-Mongol ASSR, which existed in name prior to 1958, to its boundaries before 1937; this includes the Aga-Buryat and Ust-Orda Buryat regions (see Tishkov 1997 and Graber and Long 2009).

Given the tendency towards the adoption of Russian as the language of everyday communication, Buddhism is commonly positioned as the key markers of Buryat cultural identity, particularly since the late 1980s; ‘religion is considered to be the most stable and universal element of Buryat culture, and therefore in the public understanding Buddhism and Shamanism have taken their roles as religions, which are ethnic space markers as well as national symbols,’ with Buddhism, specifically, positioned as ‘the national religion’ (Skrynnikova and Amogolonova 2011: 800; emphasis in original). The emergent role of a national religion—for those residing in the Republic of Buryatia, this is primarily Buddhism, though it is tempered by
shamanistic elements—has its origins in the late Soviet period. Humphrey (1995: 118) writes: ‘In the perestroikaperiod of the late 1980s there was a burst of interest in exploring the Buryat past. This involved first of all Buddhism, and the issue of closer links with Mongolia.’ This process has progressed in the two decades since; Leisse and Leisse (2007: 775) suggest that ‘although in general, ethnic groups in the former Soviet Union do not define themselves through religion in the first place, a kind of renaissance of religious belief can nevertheless be found.’

In general, most ethnic minorities in the Russian Federation have shown little desire to pursue campaigns for independence from the central state, though the more active groups, most notably the Chechens, have garnered substantial academic attention. Early in the transition period, nationalist movements in Russia’s ethnic republics were led by intellectuals and students, while, according to Gorenburg (2003), local political leaders positioned themselves in opposition to such movements. There is, moreover, a strong economic disincentive to mobilize and push for secession. In time, the leadership in the regions effectively coopted nationalist mobilizations, while at the federal level the government attempted to create a national community that was both inclusive—Russian as a civic identity—and satisfied demands for cultural recognition (see, for example, Codagnone and Filippov 2000). Most groups have been satisfied with maintaining their cultural autonomy, through the preservation of language, the revival of religious institutions, and the expression of culturally distinct traditions, including dancing and singing. The remainder of this chapter investigates the nature of this cultural and religious revival, first by providing an overview of the history of Buddhism in the Republic of Buryatia and then turning to the results of my summer 2010 survey to evaluate the import of religious belief and practice among the region’s various communities.
A History of Buddhism in Buryatia

Early Russian exploration into the Transbaikal was carried out by a motley crew of freebooters, Cossacks, and promeshelniki (fur traders) who entered Siberia in search of wealth, primarily from the trade in sable and other furs (Forsyth 1994; Reid 2003). Extensive Russian contact with the Buryats occurred after Buddhism had been widely adopted in the Transbaikal region, though Cossacks established a bridgehead fort—at Bratsk, to the west of Lake Baikal on the Angara River—in Buryat territory in the early 1630s (Reid 2003). Buddhism appeared in Buryatia after first contact with the Russians in the trans-Baikal region, brought along by a wave of Khalkha Mongol refugees who moved north into the region during the 1660s. This geography in part explains the stronger attachment to Buddhism among the eastern Buryats; it was more proximate to Mongolia, where Buddhism of the Gelugpa school had been adopted as the state religion in 1576 (Zhukovskaya 1992). Buddhist missionaries from Mongolia and Tibet entered Buryatia in sustained numbers in the early 18th century; this was after the border between the Russian and Manchurian empires was agreed upon in the 1689 Treaty of Nerchinsk. Over time, Buryatia became a religious borderland, situated between the Buddhist theocracy of Outer Mongolia—and Tibet further to the south—and orthodox Russia (Roof 1998; Filatov 2007). Until 1727, Buryats looked south, to the high lama in residence at the city of Urga (present-day Ulan-Bator), for spiritual leadership (Filatov 2007).

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110 The term ‘Transbaikal’ refers to the southern and eastern shores of Lake Baikal, corresponding generally to present-day Buryatia (see Figure 6.1). The term ‘Cisbaikal’ usually refers to the Lake’s western shores, in present-day Irkutsk oblast.

111 The Khalkha Mongols are the largest of a number of Mongol sub-groups; today, they primarily reside within the borders of Mongolia proper (Atwood 2004).

112 Filatov (2007) also notes that this lama was ‘completely controlled by the Chinese state.’
Orthodox missionary activity among the non-Slavic peoples incorporated into the Russian Empire as a result of eastward expansion was extensive, with varying levels of success (Khodorkovsky 2001). Kolarz (1962) reports that one-fifth of all Buryats were successfully converted to Christianity via such missionary activity. Buddhism’s wider adoption was also tempered by the legacies of shamanism. The linkage between the natural and humanistic world was not completely severed, as ‘the spirits of nature were renamed and classified as Buddhist protector deities’ (Humphrey 1995: 114). Contemporarily, Bernstein (2002) notes the continued import of oboos—mountain cairns that are sites of worship for shamanists—to Buddhist practice in Buryat-settled areas. Today, the western Buryats—those living to the west of Lake Baikal, in the Ust’-Orda region and its environs—are still viewed as practicing a religion that combines both Buddhist and Shamanist elements (Filatov 2007).

In 1741, Empress Elizabeth issued an imperial order (ukaz) legitimating the presence of Buddhism in Russia, while also freeing the lamas from the tributary yasak system that defined relations between imperial Russian and the native populations of Siberia.113 For the Empire, Buddhism posed a double threat, in that it challenged the ability of Orthodoxy to expand among the previously shamanist population, while simultaneously posing a risk to Russia’s geographic expansion into the Lake Baikal region (Hundley 2010). As opposed to shamanism, with its local-scale religious connections, its lack of a central doctrine, and absence of either a central religious hierarchy or written canon, Buddhism was a formal theological system, with an established and written scripture, the monastery/temple system, and connections to coreligionists beyond the borders of the Russian state. Though the ukaz was intended to limit the expansion of Buddhism

113 Some scholars have expressed doubts about the authenticity of this declaration; Elizabeth had only been empress for one month prior to its issuance in late 1741 (Bernstein 2009). Nonetheless, the date remains significant in Buryatia’s Buddhist community. In 1991, the Buryats marked the 250th anniversary of this decree with extensive celebrations.
in the Transbaikal (it capped the number of monasteries at 11, their number in 1741), the religion continued to grow apace; between 1741 and 1917, the number of monasteries—known locally as datsans—in the region increased to 37 (Fagan 2001). Attendant to this institutional growth, Buddhism played a central role across a range of social institutions in pre-Soviet Buryatia. Tibetan medicine was widely practiced in the republic. Buddhist monasteries served as educational centers and printed both secular and religious materials (Zhukovskaya 2008).

Similarly, Tolz (2009: 276) suggests that Buddhism served as an important base for the emerging idea of a ‘Buryat nation,’ which developed during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with the ‘Buriat literary language to be based on the Halha [Khalkha] dialect of Mongolian in which a literary tradition existed and with which literate Buddhist Buriats of Transbaikal’e were familiar.’

The development of policies designed to counter Buddhism’s growing influence first began in the late 18th century, as the increasing multiethnic and poly-confessional character of the Russian state came to be viewed as a potential site of challenge for central control, while the penetration of enlightenment ideas of structured and organized states influenced policy makers in St. Petersburg. One of the results was the creation of the position of Khambo Lama in 1764 by Catherine the Great. The post ‘was designed to create a Buddhist leader and center of control that would be independent of Tibetan control, if not of Tibetan influence, one that was chosen, and could be removed, by Russian authorities’ (Hundley 2010: 240; see also Forsyth 1994). The Russian state subsequently initiated a policy of conversion that moved beyond the short-term policy of containing the religion’s growth that had previously been in place. The containment policy did have some lasting effects on Buddhist practice in the region, including the limiting of datsan construction, so that in the latter two thirds of the 19th century no new complexes were
built. The attempt at rolling back Buddhism in the Transbaikal was generally ineffective, however, with the ratio of Buryats practicing Buddhism increasing through the 1800s. Missionary work was marginally more successful, in particular in the Cisbaikal, the region to the Lake’s west surrounding Irkutsk (where the Ust’-Orda Buryat Autonomous Okrug was located prior to its incorporation into Irkustk Oblast).

Buddhism was flourishing in Buryatia just prior to the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. Humphrey (1995) reports that at the end of the nineteenth century, there were 36 monasteries in the region and that one-fifth of the adult male population were lamas (according to Zhukovskaya [1992], the former number would increase by 11 by 1917). The most well-known of these lamas was Agvan Dorzhiev, who was representative of the broader impact that ethnic Buryats had in the intellectual circles of late imperial Russia (Snelling 1993). Dorzhiev was a key participant on the Russian side of the Great Game for influence in Central Asia, serving as agent for the Tsar’s interests in Tibet; prior to this, he had previously served as a tutor for the thirteenth Dalai Lama. He was also the driving force behind the opening of a Buddhist temple in the Empire’s capital of St. Petersburg.

The two-decade period following the revolutions of 1917 was a difficult one for the Buryats, as one of the more ‘culturally developed’ ethnic groups at the periphery of the state (Hirsch 2005; Zhukovskaya 1997). Regarding the years from 1917 to 1923, in his landmark treatment of the period, Pipes (1997: 50) writes: ‘The outbreak of the Russian Revolution had, as its initial consequence, the abolition of the Tsarist regime and, as its ultimate result, the complete breakdown of all forms of organized life throughout Russia.’ In Buryatia, specifically, the end of the Russian empire was a catalyst for renewed suggestions about the creation of a pan-Mongolian state, free from either Russian or Chinese dominance. During the transitional period,
the Buryat National Committee (Burnatskom)—composed of members of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party rather than Bolsheviks—broadly supported the establishment of a socialist state with ideological and organizational links to the preexisting Buddhist structures (Humphrey 1995). In 1923, the Committee established the Buryat-Mongol ASSR. This was the first time that Buryat identity had been territorially demarcated in a centralized political unit; Buddhism was viewed as the *de facto* national religion, with the lama and monastery system intended to serve as an important base for further developing the nation’s intellectual leadership (Tolz 2009).

Buddhism was, however, also viewed as in need of reform; ‘in the early 20th century Buryat lama reformers alleged that the great economic power of the monasteries and their close ties with the tribal aristocracy had led to degeneration of the ideals of Buddhism’ (Humphrey 1995: 114). After the Soviets gained power in the region, Agvan Dorzhiev came to play a key role in this reform process, along with other leading Buryat intellectuals. This program included a substantial list of changes, such as increased regulation in the granting of Buddhist degrees and limiting the economic resources of specific monasteries (Bernstein 2009). Politically, the Bolsheviks consolidated their position in the republic through the course of the decade, implementing collectivist policies with respect to agriculture and livestock and consolidating the national-territorial basis of the Buryat region.

In the Soviet system, Buddhism’s conceptualization as a religion of political passivity resulted in the emergence of the idea of Lamaist modernism, which emphasized the compatibility of the religion and communism. Buddhism was initially viewed pragmatically. Kolarz (1962: 453) described the campaign as based on ‘persuasion,’ as opposed to the direct confrontation between the communists and the ROC (or the ‘administrative terror’ that would follow). The communists were wary of ‘confrontation with non-Marxist intellectual or religious forces’
(Bräker 1983: 39). Because of this policy, Buddhism experienced something of a boom in the early Soviet years; Bräker (1983) provides numbers indicating an increase in the number of lamas in each of the three republics where Buddhism is the primary religion. Gellner (1987: 383), more critically, describes this period as a ‘lukewarm honeymoon.’

Though the Bolsheviks initially perceived some commonalities between communism and Buddhism, this position was reversed at the end of the 1920s. During that decade, the Soviets had gradually eroded the power of Burnatskom’s leadership; the result, according to Humphrey (1995: 116) was the application of Soviet policies in place in other parts of the Union: the ‘expropriation of monastic lands, annihilation of aristocratic and clan leadership, confiscation of livestock for state purposes, [and] a new territorial basis for administration.’ With respect to Buddhism, the 1929 passage the ‘Law on Religious Associations,’ aimed at the regulation and control of religious groups, marked a substantial departure from prior Soviet policy, and had significant consequences for Buryatia’s Buddhists (see discussion in Chapter Four).

In turn, the Soviets targeted Buddhist religious institutions, the clergy, and the laity with particular violence between 1929 and 1937. The communist approach to religion, aimed at destroying the institutional framework of religion in the USSR, had further consequences for Buddhists when fully realized in the late 1930s. These policies were carried out through the usual Soviet techniques—the League of Militant Atheists, a shift in official doctrine (as exhibited in the second edition of the Great Soviet Encyclopedia), and purges and the closing of monasteries. While some ritual materials found their way into museums, metal religious objects were often melted down during the Second World War to meet the demand for weapons, while others were secreted abroad; as Zhukovskaya (1997: 5) writes: ‘from the late 1930s, the Buddhist culture of Buryatia ceased to exist.’
Following World War II, the Soviets reestablished the institutional presence of Buddhism in Buryatia by opening Ivolginsky Datsan, situated approximately 30 kilometers outside of the region’s capital, Ulan-Ude—though this did not result in the reinvigoration of the region’s Buddhist culture. The opening of Ivolginsky Datsan and Aginsky Datsan in neighboring Aga Buryat AO led to a limited spiritual revival.\textsuperscript{114} The temple compound was home to ‘Buddhists for Peace,’ an anti-imperialist propaganda movement sponsored by the Soviet state. After World War II, the state embarked on a series of initiatives to promote Soviet foreign policy in Asian states. The state cultivated relationships with international Buddhists but generally persecuted practitioners within the country. At the same time, the Buddhist Cultural Council of the USSR was established as the overseeing organization for Soviet Buddhists; Bräker (1983) argues that it has served more as a foreign policy tool than as an advocacy group representative of Buddhists in the country. In Soviet times, the Directorate served a political function of strengthening ties with Asian states. This, rather than the traditional functions of prayer and education, was Ivolginsky’s primary purpose; lamas were required to study the foundations of Marxist-Leninist doctrine before turning to Buddhist texts (Humphrey 1995).

Religion, despite the outwardly attractive trappings and cooptation by the Soviet state to the benefit of its foreign policy, continued to be viewed as a subversive idea. As occurred among most other faiths, ‘Buddhists carefully guard[ed] their inner world from outside observation’ (Sapiets, 1974: 6; see also Religion in Communist Lands 1973). Buddhist practice was limited to the domestic sphere, where individuals often maintained altars or other markers of religious identity in the privacy of their homes (Russian Orthodox believers followed a similar practice by keeping icons in one corner of their living space). Vanchikova and Chimitdorzhin

\textsuperscript{114} Ivolginskiy Datsan was a new construction, while Aginsky Datsan was housed in one of the small temples that had survived the closure of a larger monastic complex (Zhukovskaya 1997).
make a more abstract argument: ‘even during the period of mass atheism it was impossible to separate the Buddhist and national worldviews of the [Buryat] people.’ During the post-war period, though government policies towards religious organizations underwent some liberalization, the position of Buddhism within the Soviet system was subject to the whims of the regime (Vanchikova and Chimitdorzhin 2006).

One relevant example was the Bidya Dandaron trial. Dandaron’s arrest was preceded by an article in *Uchitel’naya gazeta* (The Teacher’s Newspaper)—one of the multiple venues through which the Communist Party expressed its opinions—in 1972. Though it voices confidence in the eventual success of the Soviet state in eliminating the practice of Buddhism (through ‘the selection of [appropriate] methods for carrying on the fight…[which] must be subtle, more intricate, more effective than the methods used by religion’), the article also warns that ‘Buddhism is not as harmless as it looks’ (*Religion in Communist Lands* 1973: 42). The trial revealed the continued suspicion by the Soviet government of Buddhism as a form of religious practice (see Bourdeaux 2000). Dandaron was convicted under article 247 of the criminal codex of the RSFSR, ‘On the Organization of Buddhist Sects’ and imprisoned in Ulan-Ude (Zhukovskaya 1997). He died in jail in 1974. In part, as Bourdeaux (2000: 16) suggests, the Soviets had reasons for concern; ‘it is clear from the evidence that Buddhism maintained an existence, part overt, part secret, during these long years of suppression…there were strong influences ready to lead to an open revival as soon as this became possible in the Gorbachev period.’

There was a notable groundswell of religious feeling that resulted from the Dalai Lama’s unofficial 1979 visit to Siberia; this, in turn, set the stage for his official visit during the 1991 jubilee marking the 250th anniversary of the official recognition of Buddhism by Empress
Elizabeth in 1741 (Zhukovskaya 1997). This latter visit and the associated celebration, according to Zhukovskaya (1997: 12-13), ‘was a landmark in the history of the revival of Buddhism in Buryatia…[which since] has quickly gathered momentum.’ The following section adumbrates the processes behind this revival, before I turn to the evaluation of the 2010 survey results.

A Post-Soviet Religious Revival?

According to Sergei Filatov, one of the leading scholars of religion in contemporary Russia, Buddhism’s revival in Buryatia began in earnest in 1990 with the establishment of new Buddhist religious organizations and the return of religious buildings and valuables to believers (Filatov 2010). In 1992, the Central Spiritual Board of Buddhists (Tsentral’noye dukhovnoye upravleniye buddistov; TsDUB) was granted the status of an all-Russian religious organization; Ivolginskiy Datsan was given to the organization to serve as its headquarters (Filatov 2010).

In 1995, TsDUB was renamed Traditional Buddhist Sangha of Russia (TBSR), following the accession of Damba Ayusheev to the post of Khambo Lama. As leader, Ayusheev has positioned the organization as an ally of Moscow, securing recognition of TBSR as the only traditional Buddhist organization in the country. Ayusheev, in turn, became the official representative of Buddhism in the federal government, and was granted a seat on the Interreligious Council of Russia after its establishment in 1998 (Filatov 2010). The practice of centralizing religious administration was widely used by the Soviets, and has been adopted by its primary successor state; for Muslims in the RFSFR, the Central Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of the European Part of Russia and Siberia (TsDUM) is the leading national organization. In its post-Soviet iteration, the TsDUM has generally recognized the preeminent position of the

115 The Interreligious Council of Russia promotes interfaith dialogue between the four traditional religions of the Russian Federation: Orthodoxy, Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism.
Russian Orthodox Church in the Russia’s contemporary religious hierarchy. Warhola (2008: 345) writes that the organization—TsDUM—‘tends to view Islam in Russia as a minority faith in a predominantly Orthodox country, tends to accept the symbolic or even legal primacy of the Patriarchate, and even on occasion adopts the rhetoric of the most traditional forms of Russian nationalism.’ Today, though the Khambo Lama is nominally the leader of all of Russia’s Buddhists, in the other regions where Buddhism is predominant, specifically Tuva and Kalmykia, believers look to their local equivalents for leadership (Fagan 2001).

There are also internal divisions within Buryatia’s Buddhist community. Over the past fifteen years, some twenty communities have chosen to leave TBSR. Some of these communities have registered their own organization, Maidar, in protest of Khambo Lama Ayusheev’s leadership. Tensions exist between official Buddhism, as represented by TBSR, and the more organic Buddhist communities that have appeared in the republics; this is similar to the unofficial rivals to Islam that have emerged in the Muslim republics of the North Caucasus (on Dagestan, see Matsuzato and Ibragimov 2005). Members of these groups disagree with the Khambo Lama’s attempt to create a unified Buddhist tradition, arguing that there are many paths to enlightenment and that, moreover, Buddhism should not take on such a unified, national hue. Fagan (2001) explores similar discourses—specifically the division between the Gelug School and more organic, ‘European’ forms of Buddhism—in the Buddhist community of St. Petersburg. She reiterates that such a religious division between schools of thought cannot be clearly demarcated. In St. Petersburg, there has been a pointed struggle for control of the institutions of religious practice, with the Buddhist community there divided over who should have the right to practice in the local datsan. Foundationally, much of this debate is centered on
who is a ‘proper’ or ‘authentic’ Buddhist, in many ways returning to the cleavages present in Buryatia.  

Spiritual alternatives to Traditional Buddhist Sangha of Russia include Lama Nimazhap Ilyukhinov’s Spiritual Administration of Russia’s Buddhists (SARB), the aforementioned Maidar, and the Association of Buryatia’s Buddhists (ABB), headed by Choi-Dorzhe Budaev (Filatov 2010). SARB, under the leadership of Nimazhap Ilyukhinov, was established as a distinct Buddhist organization in January 1998. Ilyukhinov, who previously had served as a lama at Ivolginskiy Datsan during the late Soviet period, promoted the link between Buddhism and democratic development; ‘Ilyukhinov feels that Buddhism can and should serve as the spiritual basis for the development of democracy in Buryatia’ (Filatov 2007). Ilyukhinov generally supports closer ties with Tibet and Tibetan teachers, as well as the Dalai Lama, to support the continued development of Buddhist education in the republic; he was also supportive of other Buddhist schools, not only the Gelug tradition (Filatov 2007). In an interview with Geraldine Fagan (2001: 11), Ilyukhinov emphasized the inclusive nature of Buddhism and reproved Ayusheev for his perceived nationalism and the geographic limitations of his organization: ‘The khambo lama is trying to make Buddhism the particularity of two or three peoples in Russia and give it a national hue, such as ‘Buryat Buddhism.’ This does not exist – nor does Tuvinian, nor Crimean Buddhism.’ In 2008, SARB completed a datsan complex in Ulan-Ude that included educational space and accommodation for monks, with the aim of enhancing ties both with the Dalai Lama and other Tibetans (Filatov 2010).

A second group, Maidar, broke from Ayusheev’s TBSR in 1999, under the leadership of Lama Danzan-Khaibzun Samaev. This schism began in western Buryatia, in Tunkinskiy and

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116 In my April 2012 interview with Telo Tulku Rimpoche, the leader of Kalmykia’s main Buddhist organization, he invoked the need for authenticity in Buddhist practice.
Okinskiy rayons, where three datsans registered as local religious organizations in order to protect themselves ‘from interference in their internal affairs by the Sangha,’ according to Maidar’s leader, Danzan-Khaibzun Samaev (Fagan 2001: 10). Maidar was intended to serve as an alternative umbrella organization to Ayushseev’s TBSR. According to Filatov (2010), Samaev questioned the claims of a religious revival in Buryatia: ‘a rebirth—this isn’t the construction of datsans—a real rebirth requires spiritual development.’ This echoes previous comments by Samaev, who, according to Fagan (2001: 10), ‘is sharply critical of Ayusheev’s personal qualities and believes that he was elected khambo lama in 1995 solely thanks to an impressive practical ability to construct datsans.’ Maidar adopted ecological issues in Buryatia as one of its cornerstone issues—a focus that was reflected in more syncretic religious practice that combined Buddhism and shamanism (Filatov 2010). Though Samaev was killed in 2005 in a car accident, a group devoted to the religious and political-ecological platform of Maidar is still active in Ulan-Ude and European Russia (Filatov 2010).

The third challenger to Ayusheev’s TBSR, as identified by Filatov (2007; 2010), is the Association of Buryatia’s Buddhists. Among the opposition groups, the ABB and its leadership are the most pointed critics of Ayusheev; Filatov (2010) quotes Rizgen Lama, an associate of Choi-Dorzhe Budaev, the group’s leader, as saying that ‘we don’t need some sort of “Buryat” Buddhism. The Dalai Lama is our teacher and leader.’ In an effort to integrate Russia’s Buddhists into the international spiritual community, one of the ABB’s more recent aims was the creation of an association to unite Buddhist organizations in Buryatia, Kalmykia, and Tuva; according to Filatov (2010), this was ‘a plan which Ayusheev tried his best to undermine.’ The organization also claims that Ayusheev has possibly been behind preventing the Dalai Lama’s visit to Buryatia, to which he has not been since 1992 (Filatov 2010).
Though cleavages within Buryatia’s Buddhist community revolve around a diversity of issues, some of which I have introduced above, I would further highlight two more widely publicized debates. Other issues remain, including debate over the role that the Dalai Lama should play in the religious lives of Buryatia’s Buddhists; this issue will be discussed in greater detail below. Of relevance to Buryatia specifically, and relations between Ayusheev, the republic’s government, and alternative organizations, are the protests that emerged around the proposed tour of one of two extant copies of the Atlas of Tibetan Medicine to North America in late 1998 and early 1999, which occurred just weeks before the republic’s presidential elections (Corwin 1999). Leonid Potapov, at the time Buryatia’s president, reached an agreement with Pro
Cultura, a U.S.-based cultural agency, to have the Atlas visit a select number of cities in the United States. Word of this agreement provoked a heated response from Khambo Lama Ayusheev and members of the TBSR, who were not party to the negotiations (see Bernstein 2002). Initially, in response to these objections, Potapov reneged on the contract in early April 1998; however, because the republic would have owed three million dollars for breach of contract, the government in turn reversed this position and allowed the tour to go forward.

Figure 6.3: A Recently-Constructed Datsan near the Village of Arshan, Buryatia (31 July 2010, photo by author)

Though the Russian government, Lama Ilyukhinov of SARB, and even the Dalai Lama approved of the tour, strong opposition by the TBSR and Khambo Lama Ayusheev resulted in
more organized protests the following month. Approximately 500 Buddhists demonstrated outside the republic’s parliament building and the museum in Ulan-Ude where the Atlas was kept, in an attempt to prevent the book’s removal. The protestors claimed that the book belonged to the Buddhist community—Ayusheev referred to it as a ‘sacred treasure’—and that sufficient safeguards to guarantee its proper handling and ensure the book’s eventual return were not in place (Corwin 1999). The republic’s government, on the other hand, argued that the Atlas was state property. Three protestors were arrested and some 30 monks purportedly sustained injuries from police trying to break up the demonstration; Potapov later exonerated the policemen and claimed that the protests were politically motivated. In time, the Atlas was returned to Ulan-Ude, though only after detouring through Moscow. After 2007, when Potapov was replaced as Buryatia’s president by Vyacheslav Nagovitsyn, relations between TBSR and the regional government improved, though as Filatov (2010) writes ‘at the same time, the new republican leadership [also] adopted a tolerant policy towards the alternative Buddhist groups.’

A second galvanizing event in Buryatia’s Buddhist community was the exhuming of the incorruptible body of the 12th Khambo Lama, Itegilov, in 2002. A popular cult quickly emerged around Itegilov, which accorded supernatural powers to the body, such as the ability to cure diseases and grant wishes (see Figure 6.2; Bernstein 2011; Quijada 2012). Pilgrims travel great distances to view the body, which is displayed a number of times throughout the year (Antonov 2010). 117 Politically, Bernstein (2011: 632) argues that the exhumation of Itegilov’s body came at an opportune time for TBSR—after Ilyukhinov and Samaev had broken away from the umbrella organization—and the body ‘became a new foundation of its [TBSR’s] legitimacy, which

117 During fieldwork in Buryatia, I attended one of the displays of the ‘incorruptible body’ (see Chapter Seven). Though a number of western tourists were present, the majority of the attendees were ethnic Buryats (see Figure 6.1).
especially strengthened the institution of the Khambo Lamas.’ Ayusheev has used the body as a political tool, denying a request in 2009 from Kalmykia’s then-president, Kirsan Iliumzhinov, for the body to travel to Elista for the celebrations associated with the 400-year anniversary of the Kalmyks’ incorporation into the Russian state.

In a recent interview, Ayusheev touted the successes of the Buddhist revival in Buryatia, with its aim being the restoration of Buddhism to its pre-1917 status: ‘today we have already achieved 80 percent of that task. We have reconstructed 95 percent of the datsans that existed prior to the revolution—in Zabaikalisky Krai, Irkutsk oblast and Buryatia, as well as in many of Russia’s larger cities, including St. Petersburg’ (Sokolov 2009; see Figure 6.3). Buddhism’s revival can be contested—and has been by leaders of alternative religious organizations, including Maidar and ABB—due to the fact that there is little development of spirituality, despite the construction of institutions in which the faith can be practiced. However, given the relevance of Buddhism to Buryatia’s post-soviet cultural revival, the internal divisions recounted above are only part of the picture of the contemporary relevance of the religion in Buryat society. In the remainder of this chapter, I will comparatively evaluate Buddhism as religious practice and cultural marker of identity, comparing survey responses from titulars (Buryats) and non-titulars (predominantly Russians) in the republic on a series of political, cultural, and religious questions. Before turning to this analysis, I briefly outline the nature of the survey that I conducted in the republic in July and August 2010.

**Describing the Buryatia Survey Sample, Summer 2010**

In this section, I focus first on demographic characteristics and then turn to a subset of opinion questions stratified by national group. I situate this discussion with respect to the
recently released results for the 2010 Russian census (referred to as *Perepis 2010*), the most recent publically available data for the republic. The median age in Buryatia according to *Perepis 2010* is 32.7 years, with a total population just under one million (~972,000). As is the case in Russia as a whole, women have a longer life expectancy than men; the median age for females is 35.0 years, in comparison to 30.3 years for males. The republic is predominantly urban, with 58.6 percent of residents living in cities. In 2010, average per capita income in Buryatia was roughly 14,000 rubles (RUR) per month, slightly below the average for the Siberian Federal Districts (~14,900 RUR/month) and well below the national average (18,500 RUR/month).\(^{118}\)

With the aid of local research assistants, primarily students at a local university, I collected 143 surveys at five locations throughout the Buryat Republic during July and August 2010 (see Appendix Two for a description of the survey, with differences noted in comparison to the Kalmykia questionnaire). This is not a random, republic wide sample; as such, I do not perform more advanced statistical modeling such as regression analysis used in the preceding chapters. Because the observations are not independent, I cannot make inferences about the general population on the basis of this data. Despite these limitations, cross-tabulations and intergroup comparisons (between Buryats and Russians) provide a more general picture of religious practice and belief in present-day Buryatia.

\(^{118}\) Kalmykia, in comparison, is Russia’s poorest region, with a per capita monthly income of 7,700 rubles. This data is available at: [http://www.gks.ru/bgd/regl/b11_12/IssWWW.exe/Stg/d01/01-05-1.htm](http://www.gks.ru/bgd/regl/b11_12/IssWWW.exe/Stg/d01/01-05-1.htm).
In terms of the geography of the sample, slightly more than one-third of the surveys (n=55) were conducted in Ulan-Ude, the republic’s capital and largest city, with the remainder sampled in four rural rayons. Individuals were frequently solicited for the survey in public spaces or at their place of work; this was particularly true in the city and the suburbs, where restricted access to apartment buildings precluded the implementation of a random route method. Outside Ulan-Ude, individuals were frequently contacted and surveyed at their residences with doorstep interviews. The sampling locations beyond the capital were determined by locational criteria.
(geographic location within the republic), ethnic composition (two areas that are predominantly Russian and predominantly Buryat were sampled, respectively), and the relevance of these places in the academic literature on Buddhism in Buryatia. Ivolginsk (where the sampling in Ivolgiksy Rayon took place) is a medium-sized town 30 kilometers from Ulan-Ude and close to the Ivolginsky Datsan complex, while the two towns sampled in Barguzinskiy Rayon (Barguzin and Ulyun) are proximate to the shrine to the self-arisen Ianzhima (Bernstein 2011). Figure 6.4 details the locations where the survey was conducted.

In terms of gender, the sample was weighted towards women; female respondents comprised 60.8 percent of the sample. Ages for the respondents ranged from 18 to 77 years; the median age was 41 years, the mean was 40.95 years and the standard deviation 15.9 years. A majority of the respondents—60.1 percent—indicated that they were married or part of a civil union, while 7.0 percent were divorced, 5.6 percent were widows or widowers, and the remainder (27.3 percent) were single. The sample is highly educated, reflecting the emphasis on university-level training in the Soviet Union and Russian Federation. As a group, the Buryats were among the highest educated in the Soviet Union; Humphrey (1995) cites sources in Buryatia that indicate that the group was second only to Armenians in level of education in the

119 The self-arisen Ianzhima refers to a stone in the Barguzin Valley that is purported to depict the Goddess Ianzhima. It was discovered by Khambo Lama Ayusheev during a search for relics in the Valley in the mid-1990s, in an attempt to identify a location conducive to the construction of a monastery (see Bernstein 2011).

120 It is hard to get a sense of the representativeness of these rayons. My original intention was to conduct the survey in the south and east of the republic as well. The latter rayons are sparsely populated, while the regions bordering Mongolia required special permission to visit (which, recently, has been consistently denied by the local branch of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

121 It was difficult to find male respondents willing to fill out the survey. Most men either initially refused when solicited or began the survey only to leave it incomplete. This was particularly true for Russian men, who frequently refused to participate, in part due to the survey’s length.

122 Though Buryats are highly educated, I maintain the assumption that the well-educated were oversampled given that contacts in urban areas frequently occurred in places of employment (offices and shops).
USSR. In the 2010 sample, slightly more than 60 percent of respondents indicated that they had completed university or were currently enrolled. Education levels are notable, as the literature is ambivalent on the link between education, political activism, and potential separatism. In the late Soviet period, Roeder (1991: 197) found that ‘nationalities with the highest levels of educational, occupational, and often political attainment, rather than the disadvantaged or marginal ones, that have advanced the most ambitious agendas for change and engaged in the most extensive protest;’ this included Armenians, Georgians, and Estonians. On the other hand, Treisman (1997), in his study of political mobilization in Russia’s ethnic republics, finds that there is no measurable relationship between separatism and education, underscoring more generally a weak relationship between mobilization and modernization.

Table 6.1: Self-Reported Socio-Economic Status across Samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-reported socio-economic status</th>
<th>Buryatia</th>
<th>Kalmykia</th>
<th>Russia(^a)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We can purchase everything that we need</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have enough money to purchase food and clothing, but cannot afford luxuries</td>
<td>67.1%</td>
<td>72.0%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have enough money only for food</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We do not even have enough money for food</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) – Data from Table 5.3 of the 2008 Levada Yearbook. The yearbook includes one additional category (distinguishing between luxury goods and items of everyday use) and is worded slightly differently; for comparison, these two categories were combined into the first category in my surveys, ‘We can purchase everything that we need’.

With respect to economic status, instead of directly asking respondents about their household income, I asked respondents to qualitatively evaluate their material circumstances (Table 6.1; this also includes a comparison with the Kalmykia sample and the 2008 Levada Yearbook for a national sample). Most respondents reported that they could purchase all necessities, with less than 10 percent of the sample indicating that they struggled to pay for either clothing or food. Another measure of socio-economic status asked respondent to evaluate their...
perceptions of how those around them live. By and large, respondents indicated that they were satisfied with economic conditions, with roughly two-thirds of the sample replying that ‘things are not so bad, and it is possible to live.’ Further establishing this positive economic outlook was a question on future expectations; more than 50 percent of respondents indicated that they expected their family’s material position to improve in the next two years.

**Political Opinion and National Identity**

Overall, the surveys were proportionally split between titulars (Buryats; 49.0 percent of the sample) and non-titulars (Russians and other minorities; 51.0 percent), which allows for a comparison of the levels of religiosity among Buryats and non-Buryats while not sampling directly on the variable of interest. In response to the question ‘what is your nationality?’, 70 of 143 respondents indicated Buryat, 69 responded Russian, and the remaining four were Georgian, Jewish, Lithuanian, and Tatar, respectively. These four respondents are classed in the non-titular category for ease of interpretation. I stratify the survey results into titular and non-titular categories, in order to tease out any potential divergences between the two groups in terms of political opinion or ethnic identification. While the Buryats—and Buddhist groups more generally (Treisman 1997; Giuliano 2006)—have been classed as one of the more quiescent

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123 After a preliminary evaluation of the survey results in Buryatia, I requested that the survey firm in Kalmykia focus their data collection efforts on ethnic Kalmyks, who are expected to adhere to Buddhism. There were a number of questions that I was interested in that were irrelevant to non-Buddhists; for example, both surveys included a question on the link between Buddhism and ethnicity (question 56 in the Buryatia survey, 58 in Kalmykia). Moreover, some of the more interesting questions that arose in preliminary work in Kalmykia, specifically pertaining to the group’s deportation during World War II, would be inappropriate to ask non-Kalmyks.

124 To reiterate, because of the non-random nature of the sample, chi-square tests or other types of statistical analysis are not used; to do so would impose an assumption of validity and generalizability that cannot be ascribed to non-random data.
national groups in the Russian Federation in terms of political mobilization, there has been little survey work to directly test this claim (see Leisse and Leisse 2007 for an exception).

There are, in general, many similarities between the Buryat and non-titular sample. For example, there is no significant difference in terms of self-reported migration likelihood; 63.0 percent of non-titulars reported that they would move if given the opportunity, while the comparable number for Buryats was 55.7 percent. Similar percentages for each group are optimistic about the future; close to 40 percent of each sample believes that the period of greatest economic difficulty has passed. And there is agreement on the issues that the republic has to address in the near future, with both groups viewing the lack of economic development as the most pressing problem for the people of Buryatia in the coming five years; 68.6 percent of Buryats and 65.2 percent of Russians identified this issue, respectively. While other similarities in opinion exist between titulars and non-titulars, this section primarily engages with differences between the two groups. I report cross-tabulations for those questions associated with political opinion and ethnic and religious identity, stratified by titular and non-titular categories. I focus on these particular questions given the importance of ethnic identity in the Soviet and post-Soviet eras and the resulting association between national group and religious affiliation, as reviewed above and in Chapters Two, Four, and Five.

Political Opinion

As in Kalmykia, my survey included a question about preference for political system, with respondents able to choose between the following: the Soviet system, the current system, a democratic system, or something else. This question was included to establish a baseline for respondents’ satisfaction with the political context in contemporary Russia, which is considered
by many to be an illiberal democracy (McFaul and Stoner-Weiss 2008). Table 6.2 reports the responses by titular and non-titular respondents, as well as responses to this question from the 2008 Levada Yearbook. Interestingly, in Buryatia support for the current political system or some alternative choice not provided is consistent across the two sub-categories. The main difference is in preference for democracy and communism; respectively, Buryats were more likely to indicate that they view the former as the best political system, while non-titulars generally hold this view of communism. In the national sample, on the other hand, the current political system is the preferred one; Rose and his coauthors (2004: 204) find that Russia more broadly is experiencing a form of political equilibrium, a condition which ‘can result if citizens adapt their behavior to whatever political elites supply, which appears to be the case in Russia today.’ In the 1990s, surveys conducted in Russia frequently found inconsistent support for democracy and democratic institutions like open elections, though little work directly targeted ethnic republics (Wyman 1994). Leisse and Leisse (2007), discussing the results of a small-sample survey conducted at Buryat State University in Ulan-Ude, find that all national groups feel alienated from the political system. Additionally, the responses to this question could also be linked to the retrenchment of democracy in Russia in the past decade and the appointment of an ethnic Russia (Vyacheslav Nagovitsyn) to the post of President in the republic, though such a conclusion is tentative.
### Table 6.2: Which Political System do you Consider Best? (Buryatia survey, July-Aug. 2010; 2008 Levada Yearbook, February 2008)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political System</th>
<th>Percent of total—Buryats</th>
<th>Percent of total—non-titulars (Russians and others)</th>
<th>National Sample(^a)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Soviet system, which was in place before the 1990s</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
<td>38.4%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A democratic system on the order of western states</td>
<td>36.2%</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The current system</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Something else/No response</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) Data from Graphic 3.2 of the 2008 Levada Yearbook. Only the first three categories are included in the Levada sample; the 25% for ‘Something else/No response’ is calculated by subtracting the sum for these three categories from 100.

A second set of relevant questions related to political opinion asked respondents about two forms of trust: generalized social trust and interethnic trust (one example of particularized trust; Bahry et al. 2005). Trust is widely viewed as an important basis for the establishment of democratic institutions; as Cook, Hardin and Levi (2005: 1) summarize the existing literature: ‘some social theorists claim that trust is required to produce cooperation on a large scale in order to make societies function productively.’ High levels of generalized trust also support the generation of social capital, functioning as a sort of intermediary between close association—often at the local level, or between individuals who share a common, preexisting social identity—and the more diffused nature of democracy (Secor and O’Loughlin 2005; Putnam 1993). As Secor and O’Loughlin (2005: 69) have argued, though trust can be generally theorized to facilitate democratic consolidation, context matters in evaluating the extent of such trust; ‘the constitution and operation of social capital is likely to vary across political and economic contexts, sub-populations and localities.’ Their approach uses multilevel models to compare levels of trust across neighborhoods in the cities of Istanbul and Moscow; here, rather, I am interested in how different ethnic groups in a single locale view trust differently.
Tables 6.3 and 6.4 report cross-tabulations in response to the two separate questions on trust that were posed in the survey. Building on the response presented above, on the question of generalized social trust, nearly a third of titular respondents answered that ‘people should be trusted,’ while just over a quarter of non-titulars agreed with this choice. Secor and O’Loughlin (2005) found that in Russia’s capital of Moscow slightly more than 40 percent (42.3%) of respondents indicated trust in their fellow citizens; social trust is lower in Buryatia, particularly among non-titulars. Other work on trust in Russia has found that trust is generally low; Ward et al. (2006) compare the North Caucasus survey to similar data in Bosnia and find that trust is lower in the former case, at roughly 15 percent of their sample. Though trust among Buryats is higher compared to non-titulars, this difference is not substantial, which is somewhat surprising given this group’s preference for democracy—with its need for general social trust—reported above.

Table 6.3: Generalized Social Trust (Buryatia survey, July-Aug. 2010)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percent of total—Buryats</th>
<th>Percent of total—non-titulars</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People should be trusted</td>
<td>32.9%</td>
<td>26.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You need to be careful with</td>
<td>54.3%</td>
<td>61.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>those you don’t know</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is difficult to say/no</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>response</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With respect to interethnic trust, in comparison to non-titulars, Buryats were less likely to indicate that members of other nationalities could be trusted—though, in general, respondents were much more likely to disagree with the idea that trust should be nation-specific than agree. Bahry et al. (2005), in reviewing the literature on trust, find that trust is greater in ethnically homogenous contexts, in comparison to heterogeneous states like Russia. Instead, diversity

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125 In the most recent wave of the World Values Survey (2005-2006), 26.7 percent of respondents Russia-wide agreed with the statement that ‘most people can be trusted.’ As such, while Buryats in the sample are above the national average, other national groups in the republic are slightly below this average.
leads to particular forms of trust—in co-ethnics at its broadest, but more commonly friends and family. The survey results reported here indicate that titular respondents are hesitant to generalize about trust beyond their national group, with nearly a quarter choosing the ambivalent response ‘Cannot say one way or another.’ Overall, in comparison to Bahry and her coauthors (2005: 530), who report ‘low generalized and high particularized confidence in others’ in comparing two samples in Tatarstan and the Sakha Republic, my survey indicates that generalized trust is low but not necessarily limited by more particularistic, in-group types of trust. These findings, moreover, challenge the findings of the 2005-2006 WVS for Russia, which reported that nearly 60 percent of respondents generally do not trust people of other nationalities. While the differences in wording between the two questions potentially undermines the comparison—my question asked respondents to agree or disagree with the statement of exclusive trust of one’s national group, the World Values Survey asked respondents to evaluate their level of trust for other national groups—this is a substantial divergence in result. In multiethnic Buryatia, and again following the work of Leisse and Leisse (2007: 783), ‘relations between the two major ethnic groups…are fairly good;’ students surveyed in 2002 reported little change with respect to interethnic relations during the preceding years. This further confirms the picture of ethnic accord generally ascribed to the republic (Humphrey 1995). Perhaps higher levels of generalized and interethnic trust are one outcome of these relatively harmonious relations.

Table 6.4: Interethnic Trust: Can one Trust only Members of your Nationality (Buryatia survey, July-Aug. 2010)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percent of total—Buryats</th>
<th>Percent of total—non-titulars</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannot say one way or the other</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>68.6%</td>
<td>89.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is difficult to say</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
National Identity

As discussed in the chapter on Kalmykia, the survey included a series of questions pertaining to national identity. These included, for example, questions that asked respondents to identify the geographic space they consider to be their homeland (in Russian: rodina), pride in their national group, longitudinal attachment to their nationality, and a desire for a more nationally diverse set of friends. The nature of the sample, with a rough division between titulars and non-titulars, allows for a comparison on these questions of national identity between the two groups.

Pride in one’s ethnic group is an important component of national identity. It is commonly used as an independent variable of interest when analyzing questions on national identity (see Holland and O’Loughlin 2010). Tolz (1998) posits a relationship between a strong state and ethnic pride—many people identified with and were proud of belonging to a strong state during the Soviet Union. Since 1991 we can expect a reversal of sorts, with the weakening of the Russian Federation positioned against the continued relevance of national identity in the country’s 21 ethnic republics. This proposition is generally confirmed. In the Buryatia sample, 47.1 percent of Buryats responded that they are very proud to belong to the Buryat nation; the corresponding number for non-titulars is 35.6 percent. A similar question was asked by Leisse and Leisse (2007), though geographic units (Buryatia and Russia) not the respondent’s national/ethnic group was the referent; as would be anticipated, Buryats are comparatively prouder of Buryatia while the same holds for Russians regarding Russia. More generally, this follows the expectation that titulars have more pride in their ethnic group in comparison to other groups (O’Loughlin and Ó Tuathail 2009). Associated with both political opinion and questions on national identity, the survey asked respondents to identify the polity of which they consider
themselves a citizen. The aim of this question was to investigate if any differences exist between titulars and non-titulars regarding their allegiance to particular territories. As reported in Table 6.5, there is a slight divergence between titulars and non-titulars with respect to territorial identification. Ethnic Burayts are more likely to indicate an attachment to Buryatia—whether as a distinct entity or in combination with Russia; again, this supports the findings of Leisse and Leisse (2007) on the similar metric of pride in a geographic territory.

Table 6.5: Of which State/Territory do you Consider yourself a Citizen? (One answer only; Buryatia survey, July-Aug. 2010)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percent of total—Buryats</th>
<th>Percent of total—non-titulars</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>45.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buryatia</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Soviet Union</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The world</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the first place Russia, then Buryatia</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
<td>34.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the first place Buryatia, then Russia</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is difficult to say</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Though pride is commonly viewed as highly correlated to questions of attachment to the national territory or state (depending on the geographical referent; in my survey, I asked respondents to evaluate their level of pride in belonging to the nation/ethnic group), the survey included a second question asking respondents to evaluate longitudinal attachment to the national group. The literature on attachment in geography has increased substantially in the past few years. Much of this work evaluates place attachment—or how place mediates abstracts notions like dependence and more functional elements such as life satisfaction (see, for example,
National attachment is a similar metric, though not explicitly linked to a place or territory. In Buryatia, both titulars and non-titulars indicated that levels of attachment to their national group had remained consistent over the past two decades since the collapse of the Soviet Union; 48.6 percent of titulars and 39.7 percent of non-titulars responded that they are ‘neither more nor less attached,’ the most common answer for both groups.

A final question with respect to national identity asked respondents to evaluate whether they would like more friends from different national groups. Again, this question is designed to test ethnic exclusivity. Considering the case of Bosnia, O’Loughlin (2010) uses a similar question to evaluate the extent to which ethnic animosity has dissipated in the decade since the end of the conflict there. He finds that there is some basis for hope, since almost half of all respondents would like more friends from other national groups. Though Buryatia is not a post-conflict society, questions on interethnic friendship help gauge the overall situation with regard to ethnic tension; a low percentage of respondents desirous of such friendships would auger poorly for the long-term situation in the republic. This is not, however, the case. Most residents of Buryatia, both titular and non-titular want more friends from other national groups. Among non-titulars 61.7 percent said that they would like more friends from other national groups, while 72.9 percent of Buryats responded affirmatively. Only 5 out of 143 respondents (slightly more than three percent of the sample) responded in the negative.

Overall, it is difficult to reach any universal conclusions on distinctions in political opinion and national identification when comparing the titular and non-titular samples in Buryatia, again due to the limitations of the survey. Though non-titulars are more likely to eschew particularistic forms of trust, and chose the Soviet system as their optimal form of

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126 Amin (2004: 37) suggest that place attachment is now mediated by multiple attachments that form as a result of globalization, leading to a ‘heterotopic sense of place.’
political organization, both titulars and non-titulars generally identify with the Russian polity and view it as the political territory to which they belong. With respect to national identity, though Buryats are more likely to respond that they are very proud to be a member of their national group, they are not substantially more likely to do so in comparison to non-titulars. In sum, there is little evidence that those who are more religious are more politicized with respect to the nation; the inter-nation situation in the republic is quiescent—following the observation of Humphrey (1995) that the Buryats are one of the Russian Federation’s ‘quiet’ nations—with a substantial majority of respondents indicating that they would like more friends from other national groups and little increase in levels of national attachment.\footnote{To further consolidate this point, a question in the Buryatia survey asked respondents to evaluate whether the interests of national groups can only be effectively represented by national parties (see Appendix 2, q. 16). Three-fifths of the respondents either indicated it was difficult to say or did not respond. Among the remaining respondents, no clear relationship between religious practice and support for this idea is apparent.}

*Religious Belief, Observance and Purpose: Buddhists and Russian Orthodox Compared*

Given the close relationship between ethnicity and religion in the Russian Federation, this section maintains the breakdown between titulars (Buryats) and non-titulars (almost all ethnic Russians), though where necessary it evaluates those who indicate adherence to a particular faith (either Buddhism or Orthodoxy) in more detail. I am interested here in further exploring differences between the two groups in terms of religious practice and belief religious views on the purpose of religion, and opinions on the role of religions in Russian political life. In the following sections, I evaluate in turn responses to questions on religious belief and practice, considering the comparison between Buddhists and Orthodox before discussing the former in greater detail, and then turn to the ancillary topics of the societal function of religious
organizations, the approach of Buryats and Russians towards religious education and holidays, and differing opinions on the Dalai Lama.

**Religious Belief and Practice in the Republic of Buryatia**

Religious belief was variously evaluated in the Buryatia survey. Respondents were initially asked to indicate which religion they practice. This was an open-ended response that resulted in a more diverse set of answers than if the religions were listed beforehand on the survey form. There is, not surprisingly, a close correlation between ethnic identity and religions self-identification; roughly 83 percent of respondents who indicated that Buryat is their nationality in turn responded that they are Buddhists. Russians, the second-largest nationality in the sample, most commonly reported Orthodoxy as the religion they practice (42.0 percent), though Christianity—generally viewed as equivalent to Orthodoxy by many Russians, who do not distinguish Orthodoxy from other Christian denominations—was also a popular response (24.6 percent). A number of Russians indicated that they did not practice a specific religion or chose not to respond to the question (answering either ‘no religious affiliation’ or not providing a response; 27.5 percent).

The survey asked respondents to evaluate how religious they consider themselves to be. Answers to this question were reported on a Likert-type scale—very religious, somewhat religious, not very religious, and not at all religious—though the more ambiguous ‘it depends on the circumstances’ was also an option. In considering this response and in making comparisons across the sample, I am interested in all respondents who reported some measure of personal religiosity, rather than stratifying between those who are ‘very religious’ and those who are

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128 The remaining ethnic Buryats practice a diverse set of religions—including Christianity and shamanism—or identify themselves as atheists.
Among respondents who indicated that they practice Buddhism, 57.9 percent replied that they view themselves as either very or somewhat religious (though only 8.6 percent of this group responded that they are ‘very religious’); the remainder replied that they consider themselves ‘not very religious’ or that ‘it depends on the circumstances.’ In comparison, among those who indicated that they practice either Orthodoxy or Christianity (including Catholicism), 42.9 percent consider themselves to be either very or somewhat religious (though again, the percentage of this subsample who view themselves as very religious is low, at 6.1 percent). To restate the results from Kalmykia for the question, again, conducted only among ethnic Kamlyks, 49.5 percent reported that they are either ‘very religious’ or ‘somewhat religious.’ In the 2008 Levada Yearbook, the comparative national number was 42 percent (collected in January 2008). Notably, this is down from 48 percent one decade previously (December 1998).

With respect to religious practice, the survey subsequently asked respondents to report how frequently they attend religious services. This frequency was again reported on a continuous scale, ranging from ‘never’ to ‘a few times of week’ (see Appendix One, q. 42; q. 44 in the Buryatia survey). The most common response among ethnic Buryats and non-titulars on the question of attendance was ‘a few times a year;’ 54.3 percent of the former category and 37.7 of the latter chose this response. Notably, among ethnic Russians (and other non-titulars) more than a quarter reported never attending religious services: 26.0 percent. This is a notable divergence from the Buryat respondents, among whom only 4.3 percent (three out of 70 respondents) indicated that they never attend religious services. In terms of frequent attendance—that is once

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129 The small numbers of respondents who indicate that they are ‘very religious’—n = 11 (7.7 percent) for the entire sample—precludes valid comparisons across groups.

130 The Levada data is reported in Table 18.4 of the 2008 Yearbook.
a month or more frequently—22.9 percent of Buryats fall into this category, while the same is true for only 13.7 percent of the non-titular portion of the sample.

The republic-scale trends follow notable patterns when compared to the Kalmykia survey and the national sample from Levada. In Kalmykia, as in the Buryatia sample, the most frequently given answer regarding attendance was ‘a few times a year,’ at 53.7 percent of self-identified Buddhists. Notably, only 3.3 percent of the sample indicated that they never attend religious services, while roughly a quarter can be classified as frequent attendees (once a month or more frequently; 23.7 percent). The national sample, on the other hand, is more in line with the Russian portion of the Buryatia sample; 38 percent reported that they never attend religious services (the most common response) while only 7.2 reported that they are frequent attendees at religious services. This comparison further underscores distinctions across religious communities with respect to attendance as identified in Chapter Four.

Another way to evaluate the strength of religious belief for an individual is to ask them how frequently they pray. I acknowledge that the results to this question are complicated by the personal nature of prayer; in conducting the survey, some respondents declined to share this information (25.9 percent either declined to give an answer or reported ‘it is difficult to say’). For those that did respond to the question of how often they pray, options ranged from ‘never’ to ‘a few times a day,’ an ordering similar to that on the question of attendance. The structure for this variable was directly borrowed from the Levada Center’s 2008 Yearbook, the results of which serve as a valuable point of comparison. In the Levada sample, 34 percent reported that they never pray; the comparable numbers among Buryats was 2.9 percent and 22.1 percent among Russians (though, again, these numbers do not adjust for those respondents who refused the question or provided an ambiguous response). In Kalmykia, it should be noted, the rate of
refusal was much lower (only 7.0 percent responded ‘it is difficult to say’), and only 5.0 percent reported that they never pray—a number in line with the Buryat portion of the Buryatia sample. This comparison suggests that, on average, Buryats pray more frequently than Russians (with similar numbers found in Kalmykia as reported in Buryatia), though this is potentially influenced by the distinct practices associated with each religion.

A third question asked respondents to give their impressions on the nature of religious belief among the population in general. This question, like the question on prayer, is designed as another point of triangulation for understanding the nature of religious belief in the republic; respondents to the survey were given four choices: ‘there have been no changes in the religious feelings of the people;’ ‘people were previously secretive about their religious feelings, but now they have stopped hiding them;’ ‘more and more new people are following God;’ and ‘this is only the current trend, and does not have as its basis deep religious feelings.’ The responses to this question are subjective, and do not lend themselves easily to quantitative analysis. However, in comparing Buryats and non-titulars, the latter group was much more likely to respond ‘it is difficult to say’—28.8 percent versus 14.3 percent for titulars. The other notable result is that many more Buryats—48.6 percent in comparison to 30.1 percent for Russians—responded that they viewed religion as something that people were previously secretive about, but now no longer have to hide. For the Kalmykia sample, half of the sample agreed with this interpretation of religious sentiment in Russia. The Levada Yearbook, on the other hand, paints a different picture; 28 percent of respondents agreed that this statement most accurately described the religious feelings of those around them; this was the most common response. Roughly equal percentages (23 and 22 percent, respectively) either ascribed religious sentiment to an ‘external craze’ (vneshnaya moda) without basis in deep religious feeling or agreed that more and more
people are finding fellowship with God. This result supports the commonplace narrative in the literature on Buddhism in Buryatia during the Soviet period. According to Abaeva (2008), the 1950s was period of increased activity among Buddhists in the republic, as monks conducted unauthorized services and ceremonial rites despite the threat of stiff fines and imprisonment. People also publically disavowed the Central Spiritual Board of Buddhists that was established at Ivolginsky Datsan, due to the direct support it received from the Soviet authorities. And, more prosaically, many Buddhists maintained shrines and other religious objects in their homes during the Soviet period; the same was true for Russian Orthodox, who kept icons.

*Religion and Identity among Buryatia’s Buddhists*

This comparative picture indicates that ethnic Buryats are generally more religious, more often attend religious services, and view the current religious ‘revival’ as a return to past practices through increasingly public worship and religious expression. I further investigated the relationship between religious practice, demographic characteristics, and markers of ethnic identity through a series of cross tabulations focused on the Buddhist sample.

The primary aim was to generate a basis for comparison to the results presented in Chapters Four and Five. Based on modernization theory as employed above, I first evaluated high levels of self-reported religiosity against the independent variables of interest: age, gender, urban-rural residence, and ethnic pride. These cross-tabulations are reported in Table 6.6. Some interesting—though not statistically confirmable—results emerge, though again, their

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131 For ease of interpretation, I recoded religiosity into a binary category as well; those who reported that they are either ‘somewhat’ or ‘very religious’ were assigned a value of one, while all other responses were categorized as zero. This followed the same procedure as in Chapter Five.

132 To ease the process of reporting, I categorized the continuous age variable into categories: 18-29, 30-49, and over 50 years of age. This classification follows that used in the World Values Survey.
meaning with respect to the modernization thesis is inconclusive. Younger respondents generally reported high levels of religiosity, though the further stratification of an already small sample into the age categories complicates this result; there were only 14 respondents between the ages of 18 and 29 in the subsample. In general, however, older respondents indicate lower levels of self-reported religiosity in comparison to the younger classifications. There is no difference across gender, as the percentages for high levels of self-reported religiousness are virtually identical for men and women. This is distinct from the Kalmyk sample, where such difference was apparent. Those living outside of Ulan-Ude indicate higher levels of religiosity.

**Table 6.6: Cross Tabulations for Selected Independent Variables for the Buddhist subsample, Buryatia July-August 2010**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Categories</th>
<th>Not religious or low levels of religiosity</th>
<th>High levels of religiosity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-29 years old</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-49 years old</td>
<td>45.2%</td>
<td>54.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50+ years old</td>
<td>65.2%</td>
<td>34.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>46.8%</td>
<td>53.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>47.8%</td>
<td>52.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of residence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>56.7%</td>
<td>43.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>60.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic pride</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes (either ‘somewhat’ or ‘very proud’)</td>
<td>41.3%</td>
<td>58.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>58.3%</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similarly, I further evaluated self-reported religiosity as a measure of ethnic pride, the variable which was significant in predicting higher levels of frequent attendance when evaluated for the Dagestan and Kalmykia samples. In this instance, I compared those who indicated pride in their ethnic group, again maintaining the binary coding employed previously, to self-reported religiosity. Among those who reported higher levels of religiosity—overall 52.9 percent of the sample—73.0 percent reported high levels of pride as well (these numbers differ slightly from
those reported above in Table 6.6 since I am considering the change in religiosity with respect to pride, not vice versa). In comparison, those who did not view themselves as somewhat or very religious were less likely to report pride in their ethnic membership, with only 57.6 percent of this sample indicating that they are either somewhat or very proud to be part of the Buryat nation. Though the results are not evaluated with respect to significance, they confirm the general pattern that a relationship exists between ethnic pride and levels of religious feeling for ethnic minorities in the Russian Federation.

The Purpose of Religious Organizations

Buddhism has long been positioned as a ‘moral framework’ for the Buryats, distinct from Shamanism or Russian Orthodoxy; the noted ethnographers Shcherbatskoï and Ol’denburg (who worked during the late imperial and early Soviet periods) viewed Buddhism as more sophisticated and progressive in comparison to potential religious alternatives (see Tolz 2009). In today’s Russia, religious organizations are understood to play an important role in the communication of religious principles and ideals; this occurs locally, through religious organizations centered in towns and villages, and also at the republic level. Many of the groups discussed previously—TSBR, Maidar, and the Association of Buryatia’s Buddhists—serve this function. The number of registered organizations is also a commonplace measure of a religion’s revival in a particular geographic region (Filatov and Lunkin 2006).

Two survey questions were designed to evaluate the role of religious organizations in the social and political life of Buryatia. The first asked respondents to assess this societal role. Nearly half the sample—46.9 percent—responded that religious organizations’ function was ‘to support societal values and morality.’ (I return to the question of religion as a moral framework
Slightly more than one-third viewed the organizations as important to the development of societal, national, and political accord, while roughly the same percentage agreed that their role is the preservation of cultural traditions. Seven percent of the sample agreed that such organizations should not have a social role. As a point of comparison, in the Levada Center survey from which this question was taken, 46 percent of the national sample also agreed that the support of values and morality are central to the mission of religious organizations. Interestingly, in Buryatia few view the role of religious organizations to meet the demands of believers (~25 percent), which would appear to be the function of such groups; this perhaps is reflective of the politicization of religious organizations discussed above.

In the political sphere, many of the responses regarding the role religious organizations should play were ambivalent or confused about the exact nature of the question. In the overall sample, this was particularly true for titulars; 41.1 percent answered ‘it is difficult to say.’ Most Buryats were satisfied with the status quo; half of the sample reported that the level of influence is currently appropriate. Neither group, however, took a clear-cut position on the political influence of such groups.

The Waxing Influence of Religion in Russian Politics

Since the election of Dmitri Medvedev as Russia’s president and the subsequent leadership transition in the Moscow Patriarchate following Alexei II’s death in December 2008, Papkova suggests that the Russian Orthodox Church has made substantive strives towards achieving long-standing goals associated with its political platform (Papkova 2011b; see also Garrard and Garrard 2008). These include the introduction of courses on religion and ethics in
the Russian school system, Medvedev’s June 2010 authorization of the ‘Day of the Baptism of Rus’ (an Orthodoxy holiday/celebration that falls on July 28) as a federal holiday, the provision of salaries to priests ministering in the Russian armed forces, and the returning of property held by the Church before the Communist period, which means ‘prospectively turning the ROC into the largest landowner within the Russian Federation’ (Papkova 2011b: 676).

The survey in Buryatia asked directly about these two changes, and I compare these responses to the 2008 Levada Center Yearbook here. Regarding the first change, in April 2010, courses on ‘Fundamentals of Religious Culture and Secular Ethics’ were introduced in 19 Russian regions, targeting students in grades four and five.\(^{133}\) This decision brought some resolution to long-running debates in the Russian Federation over the place of religious education in public schools and moved away from the focus on religious history that had been supported by Putin during his tenure as president (Basil 2007). The curriculum acknowledges the multi-confessional composition of the Russian polity by allowing students to choose between units in Orthodoxy, Buddhist, Islamic, and Jewish religion and culture. Students and their guardians are permitted to choose between six different modules, which cover each of the four traditional religions, a history of world religion, or teaching in secular ethics (Rozhaeva 2010).

Respondents in Buryatia were queried about the place of religious education in Russian schools; the question was taken from the Levada Center’s 2008 yearbook and asked respondents for their opinion on the place of religious studies in public schools. In the Levada Center’s sample, in January 2008 20 percent of respondents indicated that they did not believe religion had a place in public schools, while 60 percent indicated that this decision should be left up to

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\(^{133}\) The 19 regions where the trial program was launched are the republics of Kalmykia, Karachay-Cherkessia, Udmurtia, Chechnya, and Chuvashia; Kamchatka, Krasnoyarsk, and Stavropol territories; Vologda, Kaliningrad, Kostroma, Kurgan, Novosibirsk, Penza, Sverdlovsk, Tambov, Tver, and Tomsk provinces; and in the Jewish Autonomous region (Rozhaeva 2010).
students and their parents, and 12 percent thought that a religious curriculum should be implemented by the state.\textsuperscript{134} In Buryatia—which, it should be noted, was not one of the 19 republics where the curriculum was tested—there was general agreement with the national sample and little difference between titular and non-titular respondents (Table 6.7). Two-thirds of respondents believed that the decision regarding religious education should be left to students and parents. Given that the federal legislation on religious education is recent, and the fact that Buryatia is not one of the regions where the pilot program is being tested, the finding that Buryatia closely aligns to the national sample is unsurprising.

The results for the question regarding the institution of federal holidays, similar to the ‘Day of the Baptism of Rus’ (\textit{Den’ Kreshshenie Rus’}), for other faiths besides Orthodoxy, further reflects a general sentiment of tolerance and acceptance of multi-confessionalism among Buryatia’s residents. Recognition of the ‘Day of the Baptism of Rus’ as a federal holiday marks a departure from Putin’s tenure as president, when ‘the regime carefully maintained at least the façade of viewing Russian identity as based on its multicultural heritage’ (Papkova 2011b: 677).

The creation of a national holiday to mark the religious conversion of the Russian nation to Orthodoxy was first proposed by the ROC in 2008. Medvedev has abandoned this façade and openly acknowledges the Russian Orthodox Church as a key social institution, particularly since the election of Kirill I as Patriarch after Alexei’s death; ‘Medvedev’s governance of church–state relations since Kirill’s enthronement has further weakened Russia’s Constitution and widened the chasm between constitutional promise and practice’ (Blitt 2010: 1344). Following the approval of the Orthodox holiday in the Federation Council in May 2010, Amir Gallyamov, a

\textsuperscript{134} In response to the same question in June 1991, only 10 percent of respondents replied that religion had no place in school, while 20 percent thought that such a curriculum should be in place. Interestingly, Russians’ approach towards religious education has become decidedly more secular over the past two decades.
senator from the Amur region (located in the Russian Far East, further to the east of Buryatia) proposed the creation of similar holidays for Islam and Buddhism (Goble 2010). In support of a measure, Goble quotes representatives from each religion who voice their support for the measure; a representative from a Moscow-based Buddhist Center is quoted as saying that ‘justice requires’ such a recognition now that the Orthodox Church has its own holiday.

### Table 6.7: Should there be a Defined Place for Religious Studies in the Curriculum of Public Schools? (Buryatia survey, July-Aug. 2010)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percent of total—Buryats</th>
<th>Percent of total—non-titulars</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There is no place for religion in school</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>According to the wishes of the students or their parents, student may study the history of religion or the foundation of religious morals</td>
<td>70.0%</td>
<td>61.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to institute a course in the Law of God in secondary schools for all who wish to take it</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is difficult to say</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Support for this proposal is generally strong among all residents of Buryatia; these results are reported in full in Table 6.8. In the Buryatia sample, three-quarters of titular respondents agreed that other religions should have officially recognized holidays; for non-titulars, the corresponding percentage was just above 50 percent. The higher levels of support for the official acknowledgement of non-Orthodox religions among Buryats are unsurprising; strong support for such holidays among non-titulars indicates that respondents feel that other traditional religions should be recognized in addition to Orthodoxy. It should also be noted that there is either some ambivalence to the question or a lack of understanding of what is being asked, as 20 percent of titulars and nearly 30 percent of non-titulars chose not to give an opinion on the question. Moreover, since the Day of the Baptism of Rus’ is a non-working holiday—on par with military-
oriented holidays like Victory Day, celebrated on May 9th—the widespread support is not surprising, as such recognition could mean another paid holiday.

Table 6.8: July 28 is recognized as a Federal Holiday, the Day of the Baptism of Rus’. Should Other Religions also have Official Holidays? (Buryatia survey, July-Aug. 2010)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percent of total—Buryats</th>
<th>Percent of total—non-titulars</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>75.7%</td>
<td>53.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannot say one way or the other</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is difficult to say</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Role of the Dalai Lama in Buryat Buddhism

A fourth topic of interest with respect to religion revolves around the role of the Dalai Lama in Buryatia and Russian Buddhism more broadly. In considering this question, I evaluated survey results while also drawing on interviews given by the Khambo Lama and other religious leaders in the republic and reported in secondary sources. In describing the situation in Buryatia, Filatov (2010) writes that ‘the relationship to the Dalai Lama is a particularly important question among the Buryat religious community, considering that the Dalai Lama is the main spiritual leader for Buddhists of the Gelug School worldwide.’ Khambo Lama Ayusheev’s position towards the Dalai Lama has, however, been inconsistent. In August 2002, in the wake of the Foreign Ministry’s denial of a visa for the Dalai Lama, Ayusheev responded pointedly: ‘The ban on the Dalai Lama’s entry to Russia signifies [a] violation of the constitutional rights of all Buddhists in our country’ (quoted in Canada Tibet Committee 2002). More recently, however, it seems that Ayusheev has amended his stance on potential visits (see Bernstein 2011 and Chapter Five). He acknowledges the Dalai Lama’s position as the spiritual leader of all Buddhists, but does not recognize specific proposals made by the Dalai Lama as obligatory for the development
of Buddhism in the republic. In contrast, Ayusheev has argued that Buddhism in Buryatia is nationally distinct from the wider community of Tibetan Buddhism as practiced in other traditionally Buddhist regions and the west.

The criticisms of Ayusheev discussed previously in the chapter—his hierarchical approach and skepticism of outside influence in Buryatia’s Buddhist community—apply to the Khambo Lama’s revised approach to the Dalai Lama. Others in Buryatia ascribe a more conspiratorial role to the Khambo Lama; members of the Association of Buryatia’s Buddhists—a splinter organization from TSBR introduced above—believe ‘that it was indeed Ayusheev who had undermined the possibility of a visit to Russia by the Dalai Lama,’ according to Filatov (2010). Bernstein (2011: 625) makes a similar argument: ‘Over the last decade, [Ayusheev] has repeatedly expressed his dislike for the proliferation of Tibetan and other Buddhist “missionaries” in the republic, arguing that Buryat Buddhism is fully “autocephalous”.’ In a recent interview, Ayusheev was again ambivalent on the role of outside influences in the republic’s Buddhist community; with respect to a forthcoming visit from Gyalwa Karmapa, head of the Karma Kagyu school (one of the four schools of Tibetan Buddhism), Ayusheev stated: ‘there are no politics here, we receive Buddhist as Buddhists, as human beings’ (Sokolov 2009).

The same question as was posed in Kalmykia, on the importance of the Dalai Lama’s visits for the development of Buddhism in Russia, was asked of residents of Buryatia. Again, because this sample is evenly divided between titular and non-titular groups, the interpretation of responses varies somewhat from Kalmykia. Among Buryats in the sample, who are usually self-identified Buddhists, 85.7 percent agreed that a visit by the Dalai Lama was either ‘very’ or ‘somewhat’ important to the religions development in the republic; this percentage is comparable to the response in Kalmykia. Among non-titulars—primarily Russians—the responses were more
circumscribed; though 45.2 percent of respondents viewed such a visit as important, another 46.6 percent responded that they could not say one way or the other or had difficulty answering the question. Only 5.4 percent of non-titulars viewed such a visit as unimportant; only one titular chose this response. As would be expected, most Russians do not view the Dalai Lama’s visit as particularly important, one way or another.

In sum, continued Chinese opposition to the Dalai Lama’s international travels has had a tangible impact on the development of Buddhism in Russia. That said, Russia’s Buddhist leaders have attempted to work around the visa ban in a variety of ways. In early 2009, Telo Tulku Rinpoche requested that the Dalai Lama provide teachings to Russian Buddhists in India; over 200 pilgrims from across the country attended. A similar teaching was given in Dharamsala, India in December 2011 and was attended by 1,300 Russian citizens (Tibet Post 2011). Khambo Lama Ayusheev has thus far refrained from making similar calls. Rather, for Buddhists in Buryatia, another alternative has been to travel south to Mongolia to coincide with the Dalai Lama’s visits that country.

**Conclusion: What Role Religion in the Buryat Republic?**

The aim of this chapter has been twofold. First, I reviewed the extant literature on the national identity of the Buryats; this overview confirms the thesis that the Buryats are generally quiescent and do not demand political autonomy or independence on the basis of nationality. Some issues of concern remain—including the territorial division of the Buryats between three federal units and the recent amalgamation of two of these units into the surrounding, predominantly Russian territories. Though Buryats express high levels of pride in belonging to their ethnic group, this expression is not significantly different in comparison to the non-titular
portion of the sample; moreover, all groups in Russia, and ethnic minorities in particular, generally report such high levels of ethnic pride. (In general in the country levels of ethnic pride for minorities are higher in comparison to Russians.) Moreover, Buryats most commonly select Russia as the state with which they identify territorially.

The second aim of the chapter was to review the contemporary position of Buddhism in the republic and evaluate public opinion on religious practice, belief, and the politics associated with religion as an institution. In evaluating the survey results, the primary finding of interest is that ethnic Buryats are more likely to self-identify as Buddhist in comparison to the non-titular sample with respect to Orthodoxy/Christianity. Moreover, when the two samples were directly compared, the attendance measure for Buryats is notably higher than the non-titular sample. Additionally, religion serves as an important component of Buryat national identity. In comparisons across the Buryat subsample, some confirmatory patterns emerge; for example, those Buryats who report higher levels of ethnic pride are generally more likely to indicate that they are religious, lending further support to the findings reported in Chapter Four. As in the case of Kalmykia, moreover, there is little difference across genders with respect to the percentages self-reporting that they are either ‘somewhat’ or ‘very religious.’

Relatedly, on questions regarding the place of religion in the public sphere, there is general concordance when comparing the opinions of titulars and non-titulars in Buryatia. Though titulars more widely support the creation of federal holidays recognizing religions other than Orthodoxy, non-titulars are generally supportive of this measure as well. Anecdotally, when conducting the survey respondents often interjected with ‘well, why not?’ after this question was read.
To summarize, the key distinction between ethnic Buryats and their non-titular counterparts in the republic of Buryatia rests on divergences in self-identification with a particular religion and frequency of attendance at religious services. Though the survey results cannot be generalized due to the non-random nature of the sample, I argue that this work is a significant first step towards a more nuanced understanding of the role of religion in contemporary Russia by suggesting that substantial differences exist between distinct religious communities and national groups in the country with respect to practice and belief.
Chapter Seven: Conclusion

On a cold March morning in 2010, I traveled the 30 kilometers outside Buryatia’s capital of Ulan-Ude to Ivolginsky Datsan, the Soviet-era headquarters of Russia’s Buddhist community and the present-day seat of Khambo Lama Ayusheev’s TSBR. That day, the incorruptible body of the 12th Khambo Lama, Dashi-Dorzho Itigelov, was being displayed for pilgrims and believers, one of eight times throughout the year that this is done. The importance of the datsan as a spiritual center was greatly enhanced in 2002, when, following a decree by the current Khambo Lama (the religious head of Buddhism in Buryatia), the body of Khambo Lama Itigelov (1852-1927) was exhumed from its sarcophagus. Prior to his death in 1927, Itigelov instructed his disciples to exhume his body both 30 years and 75 years after his death, with the latter exhumation being permanent. The Lama had been disinterred twice before, in 1955—the lamas did not quite make it to the 30-year mark—and 1973, in order to check the condition of the body. Both times, it was unchanged, with the Lama still sitting in the lotus position; some claim that his hair, for example, continues to grow at an astonishingly slow rate (Quijada 2012).

Khambo Lama still sits in the lotus position, in a glass container. The front of the container is open. Visitors are ushered quickly up to the Lama, where they bow their heads and touch his scarf, before being led away. It is important to both approach and move away from the Lama while facing forward; there was a monk in place to make sure visitors did not turn their backs. He was part of a retinue of lamas, who helped make sure that the pilgrims do not dawdle, both in front of the lama and while praying to the statues and photos (for example, of the Dalai Lama) to the Lama’s side.
The incorruptible body of Khambo Lama Itigelov is a symbol of Buddhism in Russia.\textsuperscript{135} Forced underground during the Soviet period, Buddhism has experienced a resurrection in the twenty years since the end of the Soviet Union. There is, however, some uncertainty about how Buddhism proceeds from here; like the pilgrims who come to Ivolginsky Datsan to receive a blessing from Itigelov, their interaction with the body structured by lamas, the steps towards a more complete understanding of Buddhist thought and practice are still tentative. The construction of khurulsand datsans, the more active role played by religious leaders in Kalmyk and Buryat society, and the growing import of Buddhism as an element of national identity all support the argument that Buddhism is experiencing a revival.\textsuperscript{136} Beyond these discourses of authenticity and legitimacy at the organizational level, relatively little is known about the routine practices and beliefs of Buryats and Kalmyks, two of Russia’s traditionally Buddhist populations; this dissertation has sought to address this gap in the academic literature. The survey results I report here point to a more ambiguous interpretation of Buddhism’s role in contemporary Russia; many respondents in both republics view themselves as religious, but not fanatically so. Religion, rather, is an important, though not essential element, of daily life in the Russian republics of Kalmykia and Buryatia.

In this concluding chapter, I summarize the main findings of the dissertation through a recapitulation of the chapters, reflecting on the work’s two main contributions to the broader discipline of geography and the social sciences more generally: a more geographically oriented

\textsuperscript{135} I am not the first author to make this claim (see Bernstein 2011). Quijada (2012) suggests that the post-Soviet religious revival—and the importance of Itigelov’s body—should be positioned with respect to the 70 years of scientific progress associated with Soviet times; ‘religious practice is no longer relegated to the discursive past and consigned to “backwardness” but, rather, recuperated in the post-Soviet present.’

\textsuperscript{136} This increased administrative role can be directly linked to the politics that surrounds Itigelov’s imperishable body. As Bernstein (2011: 624) has argued, Itigelov’s body is part of a necropolitics, orchestrated by Khambo Lama Ayusheev, that ‘effectively shifts the locus of “authentic” Buddhism from India and Tibet to contemporary Buryatia, strengthening assertions of cultural sovereignty’ (see also Veredery 1999).
understanding of religious practice and belief in the Russian Federation and the further
development of the idea of context through an emphasis on the comparative and the use of
multiple methods. In this section, I gauge my success in answering the two research questions
posed in the opening chapter: 1) what is the nature of religious practice in contemporary Russia,
both at the country-wide scale and for three of the country’s traditional religions, Russian
Orthodox, Islam, and Buddhism? and 2) to what extent is the nature of religious practice in these
two Buddhist republics comparable, and are they affected by questions associated with regional
politics, national identity, and demographic difference? Stepping back from these specific
conclusions, I then reflect on two broader contributions that the dissertation makes, albeit
implicitly, to important conversations in the social sciences: the topic of nationalism and
geography’s role in its study and the relationship between religion and national identity. I close
by offering three potential research trajectories for future work based on this preliminary study,
as well as a set of thoughts on the relationship between political geography and the geography of
religion.

**Summarizing the Main Findings**

With respect to religious practice and belief among Russia’s Buddhists, this dissertation
reports three main findings. Empirically, in Chapter Four I interrogate the idea that Russia is
experiencing (or has experienced) a religious revival as evaluated through survey work in
Kalmykia, comparing the results of the survey I conducted in this republic in 2010 to prior
research by O’Loughlin et al. (2007) in the North Caucasus and the results of the latest wave of
the World Values Survey (2005-2006). In comparison to self-identified Muslims in the
neighboring republic of Dagestan or Russian Orthodox in the World Values Survey, Kalmyks
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report higher levels of frequent attendance versus—that is, attending religious services at least once a month if not more frequently. In particular, those who report high levels of pride in their ethnic affiliation are also significantly more likely to attend religious services; the same holds for religious attendance in among Dagestan’s Muslims. Additionally, gender plays an important role in predicting high levels of attendance at religious services; unsurprisingly, among Muslims in Dagestan men are more frequent attendees at religious services. Therefore, in responding to the first research question posed above, I find a substantive link between national identity and religious practice as measured through attendance, in addition to the noted results with respect to gender.

In Chapter Five, I subsequently considered in detail the conversations in Kalmykia that revolve around religion and Buddhism. This multiple methods approach, using interviews, focus groups, and surveys, identified a divide between formal conversations about Buddhism and more popular interpretations. Religious leaders commonly view the revival as wide but not deep, criticizing this lack of deep engagement with the religion on the part of self-identified believers. This is not to say, however, that religious elites are wholly negative towards the Buddhist revival; to reiterate the thoughts of one, Buddhism ‘has increased from nothing.’ Interlocutors in focus groups, on the other hand, pointed to the importance of the religion for Kalmyk national identity and their satisfaction with their level of understanding and engagement with the religion—though they frequently acknowledged their ignorance regarding many specifics. There was greater consonance between the elites and focus group participants on the question of the Dalai Lama and securing visas for his Holiness’s pastoral visits to the Kalmykia; each party identified relations between Russia and China as the main sticking point, though Telo Tulku Rinpoche did so more obliquely. Engaging with the nature of religious practice and belief more
directly, the survey results, in turn, show that levels of self-reported religiosity among the
Kalmykia sample are higher among women and those who expressed pride in their ethnicity,
while the more educated generally report lower levels of religiousness (though this results is
complicated by an interaction with age). Also, respondents living in rural areas are more likely to
view the current religious renaissance as a new phenomenon. This statistical analysis is
complemented by the further evaluation of the survey results, which points towards a layered
sense of national identity as Kalmyks frequently identify with both the Russian state and their
republic. The interaction of identity and religion is further complicated by the question of
whether one must be Buddhist to be Kalmyk; most respondents disagreed, further adopting a
more civic view of their nation.

In Buryatia, the analysis relies solely on survey data collected in the summer of 2010, as
discussed in Chapter Six. While the sample is neither representative nor independent, it does
allow for comparisons within the data, specifically between the titular Buryats and non-titular
groups resident in the republic (primarily ethnic Russians), as well as across responses to the
variety of questions on religion asked. The results generally confirm the thesis that Buddhism is
an important element in Buryat national identity: the titular group is more likely—as measured in
percentage terms—to self-identify with their traditional religion and more frequently attend
religious services. Cross tabulations indicate a relationship between ethnic pride and religiosity,
as was the case in the other ethnic republics evaluated (in Chapter Four). In other comparisons,
titulars and non-titulars generally held consonant views on issues such as the role of religion in
political life and educational system. For example, both Buryats and non-titulars are supportive
of the creation of federal holiday that recognizes the importance of the religion in the Russian
civic state, and each group generally supports teaching about religious cultures in state schools as
determined by the wishes of pupils’ parents.

Chapter Five and Six consolidate a set of important points of similarity when comparing Kalmykia and Buryatia, as posed in the second research question; in both republics, religion has emerged as an important component of cultural identity, though there is little evidence of national politicization among either the religious or the populations more generally. Respondents also commonly view the Buddhist religious community as inclusive and not dependent on an exclusive, ethnic vision of the nation. Overall, in these three empirical chapters, the aim is to identify the factors that affect religious practice and belief across multiple geographic contexts. This approach is distinct from much work on religiosity and religious practice as currently evaluated in the academic literature on religion in Russia (Filatov and Lunkin 2006).

The dissertation also makes a set of important contributions beyond answering the two specific research questions. Methodologically, and particularly complementing the work in the chapter on Kalmykia, I suggest a multiple methods approach for engaging with the idea of geographic context. As noted, context is a mutable concept in the discipline, variously employed theoretically but rarely explicitly defined. I offer a working definition of context that privileges the notion of context-as-place—as articulated by Agnew (1987) with his notions of location, locale, and sense of place—before explicating a methodological approach that strives for greater understanding of how places are affected by the geographical factors of territory, political organization, and subjective attachment. Contexts can be parochial, regional, or national—this scalar multiplicity in turn links the term to the idea of the case study. An additional aim of this approach is the reconciliation of quantitative and qualitative methods as a research approach, a
project frequently attempted (see, for example, Philip 1998); my main critique of these prior attempts is their failure to construct a framework on which this reconciliation would be based.

To synthesize this argument with this contextual comparative methodology, I reflect a bit more on the case of Kalmykia. In considering this republic, the application of the methodological approach to context articulated in Chapter Three indicates that the conversations and interpretations of the religious ‘revival’ in the republic are complex. Interviews, focus groups, and surveys combine a suite of methodologies that, when taken individually lend credence to specific arguments; when taken together, however, they reflect the problematic of a single interpretation and methodology. Furthermore, this approach diverges from both micro-level analyses of religion that have recently become commonplace in human geography and macro-level studies that map the spatial distributions of religious groups through census or other national-scale data in its more comprehensive attempt to understand the process of religious revival in the Russian Federation.

Theoretical contributions were not the main point of emphasis in the dissertation. Instead, I am interested in how the geographic perspective approaches the study of religion, particularly as mediated by the processes of modernization and secularization, two literatures introduced and reviewed in Chapter Two. With respect to the literature on the geography of religion, however, I am pushing for greater consideration of the contextual—in the case of the Russian Federation, religious practices in its diverse constituent units. While geographers have increasingly addressed religion in light of the cultural turn—though a number of foundational writings were produced before this (Sopher 1967; Zelinsky 1961)—the numeric evaluation of religious practice in geography has not evolved much beyond the approach of Zelinsky half a century ago. The reliance on census data to cartographically represent distributions of religious
practice does not engage with the geographic complexity found in places like Russia; at the same

time, sociologists working in the scientific study of religion continue to reproduce the problems
associated with methodological nationalism by taking the nation-state as their primary scale of
analysis. In sum, this dissertation argues for the further evaluation of religious belief and practice
in religiously diverse countries such as Russia. Moving beyond a single methodology, moreover,
helps to develop a more concrete understanding of the contexts in which these religions are
practiced.

Beyond these chapter-specific conclusions, I suggest that this dissertation makes
important contributions to two literatures of relevance to both human geography and the social
sciences more broadly: the political geography of the nation and the interaction of identity and
religion. In the leading theories of nationalism, geography is acknowledged to be of central
importance; Ernest Gellner (1983), for example, suggests that nationalism as a political principle
demands territorial congruence between nation and state. For the geographer James Anderson
(1988), territory provides an overall structuration for nationalism, forming the basis for the
political, economic, and social processes that are marshaled in support of the nationalist project.
Territory is simultaneously imbued with a latent emotive significance—through, for example, the
marking of the landscape with monuments and memorials—and overt material importance—
through the recognition of the nation’s political unit in the interstate community (Penrose 2002;
as discussed below, such recognition is not universal). Despite this implicit connection, work on
nationalism in geography remains relatively underdeveloped. One of the implicit goals of this
dissertation has been to consider how religion, as one aspect of national identity, interacts with
other sentiments—pride in one’s ethnic group and civically oriented notions of trust—to
determine the strength of practice and belief. I suggest, primarily, that these interactions are contextually dependent and variable across space.

Extending Brubaker’s argument, the second broader aim of this dissertation has been to argue that religion as a component of nationalism—Brubaker’s third argument as discussed in Chapter Two—is contextually dependent. Different actors, at least in the case of Buddhism in Kalmykia, consider religion’s role in Kalmyk national identity to be distinct; while survey respondents generally report that they are religious believers and indicate frequent attendance at religious services, other interlocutors (primarily religious and academic elites) broadly questioned the depth of this revival. As such, I would advocate for the extension of Brubaker’s argument to recognize the contextual nature of any such interaction between religion and national identity. (This difference is also made apparent in various modifications to the religious landscape across space, as studied by geographers.)

**Directions for Future Research**

I view this dissertation as a starting point for future research on a range of topics. In this section I will review three: the contemporary influence of the deportation of the Kalmyks during World War II; Buddhist practice in the republics of Tuva and Altai, the two other areas where traditionally Buddhist populations are found in Russia; and further survey work on Russia’s religious minorities, not only Buddhists but also Muslims, Jews, and non-Orthodox Christians (including Baptists and Catholics).
Legacies of Deportation in the Republic of Kalmykia

Geography’s increased engagement with population movements, deportation, and large-scale killing has increased since the mid-1990s and the genocide in Rwanda and ethnic killings and cleansings in Bosnia (see Wood 1998). Tyner (2008: 20) argues that certain ‘geographical imaginations…undergirded the mass killings of the Khmer Rouge,’ dependent on the creation and inscription of meaning across geographic spaces and places. Considerations of how place is remade through genocide and ethnic cleansing underscores how geography’s key concepts of territoriality, identity and power are intimately bound up in any genocidal project (O’Lear and Egbert 2009). These theoretical elements as studied by geographers are ‘complemented by thick, context-specific knowledge of places’ (O’Lear and Egbert 2009: 2). To this end, and beyond Tyner’s work in Cambodia, geographers are now engaging with the spatial practices of genocide and ethnic cleansing in Bosnia, Guatemala, and Darfur (Ó Tuathail and Dahlman 2011; Oglesby and Ross 2009; Levinger 2009; for a critical geopolitical analysis of the last case, see Gerhardt 2009).

This process as it played out in the Soviet Union has not been considered by geographers, and is generally understudied in the social sciences, though exceptions do exist (see, for example, Pohl 1999; Richardson 2002). An important thread is the consideration of the legacies of genocide, ethnic cleansing, and other actions by states to target specific populations; valuable work in post-ethnic cleansing in Bosnia has explored the consequences of such actions in this context (O’Loughlin 2010; Ó Tuathail and Dahlman 2011). Though not as traumatic as the wars in the former Yugoslavia, the 1943 deportation of the Kalmyks has importance for questions associated with related to national identity. Data from the Fall 2010 survey provide a preliminary picture of the deportation’s effects. Four questions specifically engaged with the legacies of
deportation (see Appendix One, qs. 36-39). Survey participants were asked which element of Kalmyk life was most affected by the deportation: language, religion, culture (in a general sense), or the republic’s economy. Eighty-five percent of the sample indicated that the Kalmyk language was most negatively affected by the deportation (on language legislation in post-Soviet Kalmykia, see Grin 2001); religion was second, with 38.3 percent of sample selecting this response. In responding to a related question (Appendix One, q. 37), three-quarters of the sample indicated that they view religion as playing either an ‘important’ or ‘very important’ role during the deportation (though research into the precise nature of this role is undeveloped).

Another question asked respondents to evaluate the strength of Kalmyk national identity as a consequence of the deportation: is it stronger, as this was a defining event in the group’s history, or weaker, due to the loss of population and the erosion of language and religious practice? Nearly 70 percent of the sample chose the former option, that the deportation had adversely affected group identity. Though it clearly remains a defining event—the academic consensus is that the deportation was a demographic disaster and resulted in substantial social and cultural disruption—Kalmyks do not view its legacy as something that galvanized greater cultural awareness. In part, this is likely due to the fact that the subject was infrequently discussed in the Soviet Union until perestroika and glasnost, which in turn led to the 1989 declaration by the Supreme Soviet that acknowledged the illegality of the resettlement plans and the April 1991 law ‘On the Rehabilitation of Repressed People’ passed in the Russian republic.\(^\text{137}\)

\(^{137}\) A question on the survey asked about the importance of the latter law for the Kalmyk people. Most respondents—88.3 percent of the sample—view it as a fundamentally important acknowledgement by the Russian government of past injustices.
Tuva and the Altai Republic

Tuva, the third republic in the Russian Federation traditionally considered Buddhist, is conspicuously absent from the empirical portion of the dissertation. This exclusion is, in part, a result of lack of funding; to conduct a survey in Tuva was beyond the budget of the project. The republic has experienced significant outmigration of its non-Tuvan population since the breakup of the Soviet Union, primarily due to a series of small-scale interethnic conflicts that occurred in 1990 (Alatalu 1992). There is also a substantial illicit drug trade that passes through the region, on the way from Central Asia—primarily Afghanistan—to markets in European Russia (Orlova 2009). These conditions have set the authorities on edge and made certain types of research more difficult; during my first research trip to Russia I was stopped by local police and interrogated at a station regarding my presence in the republic. This ended the prospects of work in the republic at that time.

The Buddhist community in Tuva faces many of the same concerns as do Buddhists in Kalmykia and Buryatia. As occurred in the other two republics, between 1929 and 1937—a period of nominal independence for Tuva—a purge of religious leadership took place, accompanied by the destruction of the region’s temples and monasteries. In the post-Soviet period, Tuva has flirted with national politicization, with the Khostag Tuva (Free Tuva) party gaining influence (see Giuliano 2006). In 1995, Tuva was one of the first regions in Russia to recognize the juridical legitimacy of Buddhism, Shamanism, and Russian Orthodoxy. More recently, the region’s central Buddhist organization has had to deal with the emergence of rival organizations headed by two Tibetans who came to the republic in the mid-1990s and now hold Russian citizenship (see Fagan 2005b).
To the west, the Altai Republic is a fourth territory where Buddhism is practiced in Russia, though as in Tuva this is blended with shamanism (see Figure 1.1 for republic locations). Halemba (2007), drawing on fieldwork conducted there, argues that Buddhism is the religious identity privileged by the republic’s elite and intellectual class, while shamanism maintains a broader popularity among residents. This divide suggests the need to conduct research in the Altai and Tuva, to explore the nature of religious adherence and strength of practice in these two republics.

This project does, however, face barriers, specifically the two mentioned above: continued ethnic unease and the presence of illegal drug smuggling. Despite these concerns, in the future I plan to engage in further research in both Tuva and the Altai. These barriers could be worked around through collaboration with local scholars in the republic. Empirical work in English on Buddhism in Tuva is virtually nonexistent, though scholarship on shamanist practices in the republic is increasing (see, for example, Purzycki 2010) and Russian-language sources have detailed the history of Buddhism in Tuva (Mongush 2001).

**Russia’s Other Religious Minorities: Muslims, Jews, and Christians**

As discussed in this dissertation, Russia is a religious patchwork; Muslims live in the North Caucasus, along the banks of the Volga River, and in the country’s capital of Moscow, while Buddhists are similarly dispersed geographically. A variety of other religions—ranging from non-traditional faiths like Catholicism and Baptism to animism to new religious movements—are practiced in Russia. Recognizing this religious variety, at the turn of the millennium, the Keston Institute launched a compendium project on contemporary religious life in the Russian Federation. The resulting four-volume collection, edited by Michael Bourdeaux
and Sergei Filatov (2003-2006), details Russia’s religious variety across the different communities of practice and geographies; the chapter on Buddhism, for example, provides a background on the religion then discusses the Tibetan school in Russia, including the Gelug tradition and the Karma-Kagyu school. Subsequent sections review the position of the religion in Buryatia, Tuva, and Kalmykia. The main critique of this work is its focus on religious organizations—their membership numbers, the associated monasteries, and contact information—as opposed to the strength of religious practice and belief among Russian citizens and the role that religion plays in the lives of ordinary people.

In part, I view the current research as a pilot study for a more ambitious project on religious practice in Russia, which draws on the example of Bourdeaux and Filatov. This includes further work in Russia’s Buddhist regions, in particular conducting interviews with Buddhist stakeholders in Buryatia, Tuva, and the Altai Republic to supplement the similar conversations discussed in this dissertation with respect to Kalmykia. Moreover, given the historical association between certain ethnic groups, which as a consequence of the Soviet policy on nationalities are spatially concentrated in the Russian Federation’s ethnic republics, an inclusive survey of religious minorities can be effectively conducted. Additionally, I would like to implement a cross-regional survey project that evaluates the role of religion for different religions across Russia’s diverse geography, with specific focus on the country’s ethnic republics as mentioned above. Such work into the nature of religious practice and belief, as evaluated quantitatively through regionally representative surveys among Russian Orthodox, Muslim, shamanist (the Russian North) and paganist practitioners (such as Mari-El; see Luehrmann 2005), could lead to valuable insights given Russia’s diverse ethnic and religious geography. To
restate, national samples as currently conducted do not provide sufficient detail to understanding the variety of religious practice and belief in contemporary Russia.

**Final Thoughts**

The aim of this dissertation has been to develop new paths of research in the discipline of geography along two lines: a quantitative geography of religion that does more than map spatial patterns in practice but rather is attendant to the variation in religious practice within countries and considers this diversity through survey work; and a formalized methodological approach to the geographical idea of context, one which draws on and advocates for the use of multiple methods, including surveys, interviews, and focus groups. Throughout, the dissertation is informed by the conversations that human geographers are having about topics of longstanding concern—the use of multiple methods and the epistemologies that justify their use—and topics that have recently returned to the fore, such as the contribution of geography to the study of religion, both in a sociological sense and as a political-cultural element that is spatially enacted through changes in the landscape or processes such the use of religion in the cultivation of national identities.

The revitalization of political geography in the past three decades led to suggestions of incoherence—discussed most notably in a 2003 forum in *Political Geography*—due to the wide range of topics found under the discipline’s umbrella. Yet Murphy and O’Loughlin’s (2009) recent call for a revivified regional geography clarifies the need for in-depth studies across a diverse set of geographies and topics, a project to which political geographers are well positioned to contribute. Moreover, this heterogeneity—the purported incoherence—should be embraced as one of the discipline’s strengths; it prevents a single theoretical perspective or methodological
approach from being dominant. Geography’s particular strength in comparison to other academic disciplines lies in attempting to understand how different processes play out at different scales and how processes occurring at one scale interact with those occurring at others; the approach advocated for in this dissertation serves as a basis to strengthen this practice through multiple methods. Though I make the case for the importance of this multiple methods approach in engagements with geographic context, I reiterate here that this approach is not categorical. Instead, I agree with Baerwald’s (2010: 496): ‘one of the most distinctive characteristics of geography is that it is not a discipline that can be defined in the same ways as many other disciplines.’ This dissertation has considered religious practice and belief among Russia’s religious minorities through a distinctly geographic approach.
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Appendix One: English version of the Kalmykia survey

REPUBLIC ____________ RAYON ____________
POPULATION POINT ____________

1. GENDER  Male  Female

2. AGE ______________________________

3. MARITAL/FAMILY STATUS?
   _____ Single, not married  _____ Married  _____ Civil Union
   _____ Divorced  _____ Widower, widow

4. EDUCATION?
   _____ Without education or beginner  _____ Middle special (Technical School)
   _____ Middle  _____ Unfinished higher, higher (University)

5. EMPLOYMENT
   _____ Work on a farm or in forestry  _____ Work in the service industry, trade
   _____ Work in industry, industrial production  _____ Military or security services
   _____ Work in the construction or transportation sectors  _____ Pensioner
   _____ Work in the government, public sector  _____ Housewife
   _____ Work in the fields of culture, science or education  _____ Currently not working, unemployed
   _____ Work in the financial, insurance, or legal services sectors  _____ Student
   _____ Other

6. PLEASE SAY, HOW YOU WOULD CHARACTERIZE YOUR FAMILY’S STANDARD OF LIVING?
   _____ We can buy everything that we need
   _____ We have enough money to purchase food and clothing, but cannot afford luxuries
   _____ We have enough money only for food
   _____ We do not even have enough money for food

7. WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS, IN YOUR OPINION, BEST DESCRIBES HOW THE PEOPLE AROUND YOU LIVE?
   _____ Things are not so bad, and it is possible to live
   _____ To live is difficult, but tolerable
   _____ To survive in our impoverished condition is already not possible
   _____ It is difficult to say

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8. WHAT DO YOU THINK, IN TWO YEARS WILL YOUR AND YOUR FAMILY’S MATERIAL POSITION BE...
   _____ Definitely better, richer  _____ Somewhat worse, poorer
   _____ Somewhat better, richer  _____ Definitely worse, poorer
   _____ Neither better nor worse  _____ It is difficult to say

9. ARE WE NOW LIVING THROUGH THE MOST DIFFICULT TIMES, ARE THEY ALREADY PAST, OR STILL AHEAD?
   _____ We are living through them now  _____ They are already past
   _____ They are still ahead

10. WHAT CAN YOU SAY ABOUT YOUR MOOD RECENTLY?
    _____ Excellent mood  _____ Normal, even mood
    _____ Tense, irritable  _____ Fearful, depressed
    _____ It is difficult to say

11. WHICH POLITICAL SYSTEM DO YOU CONSIDER BEST: THE SOVIET (WHICH WE HAD UP UNTIL THE 1990S), THE CURRENT SYSTEM OR THAT LIKE THEY HAVE IN WESTERN STATES?
    _____ The Soviet system, which was in place before the 1990s
    _____ The current system
    _____ A democratic system on the order of western states
    _____ Something else

12. IF YOU HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO MOVE SOMEWHERE IN THE NEXT TWO YEARS, WOULD YOU TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THIS OPPORTUNITY?
    _____ Very likely  _____ Definitely will not move (skip questions 18 and 19)
    _____ Likely  _____ It is difficult to say
    _____ Not likely

13. WHERE WOULD YOU LIKE TO MOVE?
    _____ Within the borders of our city (rayon)  _____ Within the borders of our republic
    _____ To another region in the SFO  _____ To Moscow or St. Petersburg
    _____ To another region of Russia  _____ To another former Soviet republic
    _____ To the far abroad  _____ It is difficult to say

14. WHY WOULD YOU LIKE TO MOVE?
    _____ To live in my homeland
    _____ To improve my material position, to find more interesting work
    _____ To study
    _____ I fear for my personal safety and the safety of my family
    _____ Here I have encountered many problems due to my nationality
    _____ To be closer to relatives
    _____ Something else
15. WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING WILL BE THE MOST SERIOUS PROBLEM FOR PEOPLE IN KALMYKIA IN THE COMING FIVE YEARS? (you can choose up to three answers)

- The lack of economic development and unemployment
- Nation-based tensions between local ethnic groups
- Crime
- The deterioration of the environment
- Corruption, the corruptibility of power
- The inability of those in power to adequately perform their tasks
- It is difficult to say

16. WHAT IS YOUR NATIONALITY?

____________________________________________

17. WHAT IS YOUR MOTHER’S NATIONALITY?

________________________________________

18. WHAT IS YOUR FATHER’S NATIONALITY?

________________________________________

19. IN WHAT LANGUAGE DO YOU USUALLY COMMUNICATE AT HOME?

_______________

20. WHICH PLACE DO YOU CONSIDER, FIRST AND FOREMOST, TO BE YOUR HOMELAND?

- Village or town where I was born
- The place where my children live
- The native land of my people
- Where life is best
- The land, where the graves of my ancestors are to be found
- Russia
- USSR
- Other
- It is difficult to say

21. HOW DO YOU IDENTIFY YOURSELF IN THE FIRST ORDER?

- Member of my nation
- Citizen of Russia
- In equal parts a citizen of Russia and member of my nation
- Resident of my republic
- Resident of my city, locality
- Soviet person
- Other
- It is difficult to say
22. HOW DO YOU IDENTIFY YOURSELF IN THE SECOND ORDER?

_____ Member of my nation
_____ Citizen of Russia
_____ In equal parts a citizen of Russia and member of my nation
_____ Resident of my republic
_____ Resident of my city, locality
_____ Soviet person
_____ Other
_____ It is difficult to say

23. PLEASE SAY, OF WHICH STATE/POLITY DO YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF A CITIZEN?

_____ I consider myself: citizen of Russia
_____ I consider myself: in the first place a citizen of Russia, but also a citizen of my republic
_____ I consider myself: in the first place a citizen of my republic, but also a citizen of Russia
_____ I consider myself: citizen of my republic
_____ I consider myself: citizen of the Soviet Union
_____ I consider myself: citizen of the world
_____ It is difficult to say

24. PLEASE NAME THE THREE LEADING POLITICAL FIGURES, EITHER IN HISTORY OR CURRENTLY ALIVE:

1. ________________________________ 2. ________________________________ 3. ________________________________

25. ARE YOU PROUD TO BELONG TO YOUR NATION/ETHNIC GROUP?

_____ I am very proud
_____ I am somewhat proud
_____ I am neutral
_____ I am not very proud
_____ I am not at all proud of this
_____ It is difficult to say

26. IN COMPARISON TO 1990, DO YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF A MEMBER OF YOUR NATIONALITY...

_____ Definitely more, stronger
_____ Somewhat more, stronger
_____ Neither more nor less, weaker nor stronger
_____ Somewhat weaker, less
_____ Definitely weaker, less
_____ It is difficult to say

27. HOW DO YOU DESCRIBE RELATIONS BETWEEN DIFFERENT NATIONALITIES IN YOUR LOCALITY?

_____ Very tense
_____ Somewhat tense
_____ Peaceful (neither tense nor friendly)
_____ Somewhat friendly
_____ Very friendly
_____ It is difficult to say
28. DO YOU WANT TO HAVE MORE FRIENDS AMONG MEMBERS OF OTHER NATIONALITIES LIVING IN YOU LOCALITY?

_____ Definitely yes  _____ Mostly no
_____ Mostly yes  _____ Definitely no
_____ Cannot say yes or no  _____ It is difficult to say

29. DO YOU DISCUSS WITH YOUR NEIGHBORS THE STATE OF RELATIONS BETWEEN PEOPLE OF DIFFERENC NATIONALITIES WHO RESIDE IN YOUR RAYON?

_____ Very often  _____ I never discuss these problems with neighbors
_____ Fairly often  _____ It is difficult to say
_____ Quite rarely

30. HOW OFTEN DO YOU INTERACT IN YOUR EVEYDAY LIFE (AT WORK, AT THE STORE, IN THE COURSE OF THE DAY) WITH PEOPLE BELONGING TO A DIFFERENT NATION/ETHNIC GROUP?

_____ Every day  _____ Less than once a month
_____ At least once a week  _____ Never
_____ At least once a month

31. ONE PERSON SAYS THAT PEOPLE SHOULD BE TRUSTED, WHILE ANOTHER THAT YOU NEED TO BE CAREFUL WITH THOSE YOU DON’T KNOW. WITH WHICH OF THESE EXPRESSIONS DO YOU AGREE?

_____ People should be trusted  _____ One needs to be careful
_____ It is difficult to say

32. THERE IS AN OPINION THAT ONE CAN ONLY TRUST MEMBERS OF THEIR NATIONALITY. DO YOU AGREE WITH THIS OPINION?

_____ Completely agree  _____ Mostly disagree
_____ Mostly agree  _____ Completely disagree
_____ Cannot say one way or the other  _____ It is difficult to say

33. HAVE YOU EVER EXPERIENCED ANY PREJUDICE ON NATIONAL OR RELIGIOUS GROUNDS WHERE YOU LIVE?

_____ Yes, often  _____ Yes, sometimes  _____ Very rarely  _____ Never
_____ It is difficult to say

34. HAVE YOU EVER EXPERIENCED ANY PREJUDICE ON NATIONAL OR RELIGIOUS GROUNDS BEYOND THE BORDERS OF KALMYKIA?

_____ Yes, often  _____ Yes, sometimes  _____ Very rarely  _____ Never
_____ It is difficult to say
35. IS THERE THE POSSIBILITY IN THE NEXT ONE TO TWO YEARS OF A WIDESCALE CONFLICTUAL EVENT ALONG NATIONAL OR RELIGIOUS LINES OCCURRING IN YOUR REPUBLIC?

_____ Definitely yes  _____ Definitely no
_____ Mostly yes  _____ It is difficult to say
_____ Mostly no  

36. WHICH SPHERES OF KALMYK LIFE DID THE DEPORTATION MOST NEGATIVELY EFFECT?

_____ The economy  _____ Language
_____ Religion  _____
_____ Culture  Another sphere: _______________

37. WHAT WAS THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN THE LIVES OF KALMYKS DURING THE PERIOD OF DEPORTATION?

_____ It played a leading role  _____ It had no role whatsoever
_____ It played an important role  _____ It is difficult to say
_____ It played an unimportant role  

38. IN 1991 THE RUSSIAN SOVIET FEDERATED SOCIALIST REPUBLIC (RSFSR) PASSED A LAW ‘ON THE REHABILITATION OF REPRESSED PEOPLES.’ WHAT MEANING DOES THE PASSAGE OF THAT LAW HAVE FOR KALMYKS?

_____ Fundamentally important, as it restored historical equality in the government’s position towards the Kalmyks.
_____ The law does not have particular significance for Kalmyks.
_____ The law has no significance for all of the deported peoples.
_____ It is difficult to say

39. IN GENERAL, WHAT CAN WE SAY: DUE TO THE DEPORTATION THE NATIONAL IDENTITY OF THE KALMYKS TODAY IS...

_____ Stronger, because this is the defining event in our peoples history.
_____ Weaker, due to the deaths of the population and the loss of language and religion.
_____ Not stronger and not weaker, this is ancient history and is now not important.
_____ It is difficult to say

40. WHAT LANGUAGE WOULD YOU LIKE YOUR CHILDREN TO BE EDUCATED IN?

_____ In the Russian language  _____ In their native language
_____ In Russian and their native language  _____ It is difficult to say

41. WHICH RELIGION DO YOU PRACTICE?
42. HOW OFTEN DO YOU ATTEND RELIGIOUS SERVICES?

_____ A few times a week  _____ A few times a year
_____ Once a week            _____ Once a year
_____ Two to three times a month _____ Less than once a year
_____ Once a month           _____ Never

43. HOW RELIGIOUS OF A PERSON DO YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF?

_____ Very religious          _____ Not at all religious
_____ Somewhat religious      _____ It depends on the circumstances
_____ Not very religious      _____ It is difficult to say

44. WHAT CAN YOU SAY ABOUT YOURSELF, IN COMPARISON TO 10-20 YEARS AGO ARE YOU...

_____ Significantly more religious     _____ Less religious
_____ More religious                   _____ Significantly less religious
_____ Neither more nor less religious  _____ It is difficult to say

45. WHAT MEANING DOES RELIGION HAVE FOR YOU PERSONALLY? (you can choose up to three responses)

_____ Religion is simply necessary to me as a believer
_____ Religion makes me think about the purpose of life, about my soul, about eternity
_____ Religion helps me be tolerant towards people and their shortcomings
_____ Religion helps me to be aware of invalids and the poor
_____ Reading religious literature gives me happiness and contentment
_____ My presence at a religious service helps my moral cleanliness
_____ The observance of religious rites helps me chase away unhappiness, and leads to success in my affairs.
_____ The performance of religious rites makes me a more spiritual and moral person
_____ The existence of churches and the faith of believers is proof of an active and ongoing battle against the spread of atheism
_____ Religion has no meaning in my life

46. DO YOU PRAY? IF SO, HOW OFTEN?

_____ Never            _____ Two or three times a month
_____ A few times a day  _____ About once a month
_____ Once a day         _____ A few times a year
_____ A few times a week  _____ Once or twice a year
_____ Definitely once a week  _____ Less than once a year
_____ Practically every week  _____ It is difficult to say

47. DO YOU OBSERVE RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS?

_____ Yes            _____ No            _____ It depends on the holiday

48. DO YOU OBSERVE RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS ASSOCIATED WITH THE FOLLOWING RELIGIONS?

_____ Buddhism        _____ Muslim        _____ Orthodox        _____ Other
49. **DO YOU BELIEVE THAT CONTEMPORARY KALMYK BUDDHISM SHOULD DISTINGUISH ITSELF FROM THE TIBETAN VERSION?**

| Yes | No (skip q. 50) | It is difficult to say (skip q. 50) |

50. **IF YES, THEN HOW?**

- ____ Services should be held in the Kalmyk language
- ____ Ceremonially
- ____ It should reflect elements of Kalmyk cultural and mentality
- ____ Something else
- ____ It is difficult to say

51. **WHAT ROLE, IN YOUR OPINION, DOES THE REVIVAL OF BUDDHISM PLAY IN THE KALMYK ETHNOS? (you can choose up to three responses)**

- ____ No significant impact
- ____ Helps to overcome difficult life situations, to gain confidence in life
- ____ Supports societal morality, tolerance
- ____ Contributes to a sense of belonging to the ethnic group, national unity
- ____ Aids in the preservation of cultural traditions
- ____ Increases attachment to world culture
- ____ Alleviates social tension, promotes national reconciliation
- ____ It draws people away from real life and the fight for societal progress
- ____ Counteracts the formation of rational outlook on the world
- ____ It is difficult to say

52. **WHAT CAN YOU SAY ABOUT THE RELIGIOUS FEELINGS OF THOSE AROUND YOU?**

- ____ There have been no changes in the religious feelings of the people
- ____ People were previously secretive their religious feelings, but now they have stopped hiding them
- ____ More and more new people are following God
- ____ This is only the current trend, and does not have as its basis deep religious feelings
- ____ It is difficult to say

53. **WHAT ROLE, IN YOUR OPINION, SHOULD RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS PLAY IN KALMYK SOCIETY? (you can choose up to three responses)**

- ____ In general, they should not interfere in society
- ____ To support societal values and morality
- ____ To assist societal, national, and political accord
- ____ To satisfy the spiritual needs of believers
- ____ Helps the preservation of cultural traditions
- ____ To support charity and the idea of kindheartedness
- ____ To help the poor and disadvantaged elements of the population
- ____ To help the development of spiritual literature and art
- ____ It is difficult to say
54. WHAT DO YOU THINK, SHOULD THERE BE A DEFINED PLACE FOR RELIGIOUS STUDIES IN THE CURRICULUM OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS?

_____ There is no place for religion in school
_____ According to the wishes of the students or their parents, students may study the history of religion or the foundation of religious morals
_____ Need to institute a course in the Law of God in secondary schools for all who wish to take it
_____ It is difficult to say

55. IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT LEVEL OF INFLUENCE DO RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS EXERT ON STATE POLITICS IN KALMYKIA?

_____ Too much
_____ Somewhat more than there should be
_____ As much as there should be
_____ Somewhat less than there should be
_____ Too little
_____ It is difficult to say

56. HIS HOLINESS THE DALI LAMA HAS VISITED KALMYKIA IN AN OFFICIAL CAPACITY THREE TIMES. WHAT DOES THIS VISIT MEAN FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF BUDDHISM IN RUSSIA?

_____ Very important
_____ Somewhat important
_____ Cannot say one way or the other
_____ Not very important
_____ Not at all important
_____ It is difficult to say

57. SHOULD POLITICAL LEADERS (FOR EXAMPLE, THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC) BE RELIGIOUS?

_____ Definitely yes
_____ Mostly yes
_____ Mostly no
_____ Definitely no
_____ It is difficult to say

58. JULY 28 IS RECOGNIZED AS A GOVERNMENT HOLIDAY – THE DAY OF THE BAPTISM OF RUS’. THERE IS AN OPINION THAT OTHER RELIGIONS SHOULD ALSO HAVE OFFICIAL HOLIDAYS. DO YOU AGREE WITH THIS OPINION?

_____ Completely agree
_____ Mostly agree
_____ Cannot say one way or the other
_____ Mostly disagree
_____ Completely disagree
_____ It is difficult to say

59. THERE IS AN OPINION THAT IN ORDER TO BE KALMYK, YOU MUST BE, ABOVE ALL, A BUDDHIST. DO YOU AGREE WITH THIS OPINION?

_____ Completely agree
_____ Mostly agree
_____ Cannot say one way or the other
_____ Mostly disagree
_____ Completely disagree
_____ It is difficult to say
Appendix Two: Modifications to the Buryatia survey

NOTE: Where appropriate, Buryatia was substituted for Kalmykia. Some questions asked in Buryatia were dropped in Kalmykia due to their sensitive nature. Other questions regarding the subject of the Kalmyk deportation during World War II were added to the survey in that republic.

QUESTIONS 1-11: No changes

12. WHAT, IN YOUR OPINION, SHOULD BE THE IDEAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE STATE AND ITS PEOPLE?
   _____ The government should control the actions of the people with the necessary use of force
   _____ The government should be based on the people, and the government and the people should be united in their goals and aspirations
   _____ The government and the people should support one another and interact according to the principles established under law
   _____ The government should fulfill the will of the people and be subject to their strict control
   _____ It is difficult to say

13. WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE PEOPLE WHO ARE CURRENTLY IN POWER?
   _____ They are people concerned only with the material well-being and career
   _____ They are honest, but weak, unable to handle power and maintain order and an appropriate political course
   _____ They are honest, but not competent at how to lead the country out of economic crisis
   _____ They are people concerned only with the material well-being and career
   _____ It is difficult to say

14. DO YOU AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING DESCRIPTION OF THOSE WHO HOLD POWER IN YOUR REPUBLIC: “THEY ARE PEOPLE WHO ARE LIKED BY MOSCOW”?
   _____ Completely agree
   _____ Mostly agree
   _____ Cannot say one way or the other
   _____ Mostly disagree
   _____ Completely disagree
   _____ It is difficult to say
15. DO YOU AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING DESCRIPTION OF THOSE WHO HOLD POWER IN YOUR REPUBLIC: “THEY ARE PEOPLE WHO HAVE MONEY”?

_____ Completely agree
_____ Mostly agree
_____ Cannot say one way or the other
_____ Mostly disagree
_____ Completely disagree
_____ It is difficult to say

16. THERE IS AN OPINION THAT THE EVERYDAY INTERESTS OF A PEOPLE CAN BE MET ONLY BY NATIONAL PARTIES. DO YOU AGREE WITH THIS POINT OF VIEW?

_____ Completely agree
_____ Mostly agree
_____ Cannot say one way or the other
_____ Mostly disagree
_____ Completely disagree
_____ It is difficult to say

QUESTIONS 17-39 correspond to QUESTIONS 12-34 in the Kalmykia survey.

40. IS THERE THE POSSIBILITY IN THE NEXT ONE TO TWO YEARS OF A WIDESPREAD CONFLICTUAL EVENT ALONG NATIONAL OR RELIGIOUS LINES OCCURRING IN RUSSIA?

_____ Definitely yes
_____ Mostly yes
_____ Mostly no
_____ Definitely no
_____ It is difficult to say

QUESTION 41 corresponds to QUESTION 35 in the Kalmykia survey.

QUESTIONS 42-48 correspond to QUESTIONS 40-46 in the Kalmykia survey.

QUESTIONS 49-56 correspond to QUESTIONS 52-59 in the Kalmykia survey.