

## Conference Paper

# "A New Type of Believer": Transformations of Religiosity in the Regions of Post-Soviet Russia (On the Example of Khakassia)

**Yuri Mikhailovich Aksutin and Elena Alexandrovna Kochina**

The Khakas State University named after N. F. Katanov, Abakan, Russian Federation

### Abstract

The purpose of this article is to represent the research results and modeling of the features of the transformation of the Southern Siberia inhabitants' religiosity (Khakassia), as well as the specifics of their demographic characteristics. It presents an overview of the main approaches to the analysis of religiosity in the context of modern transformations. In particular, the author focuses on the conflict between the traditional stereotype, according to which older people, women and people with a low level of education predominate among believers, and religious identification is carried out exclusively by traditional mechanisms, and hypotheses about the formation of a new type of believer (new religiosity) in post-Soviet Russia. It is emphasized that the analysis and characterization of the phenomenological features of religiosity has its own difficulties (problems of determining the criteria of religiosity). This religiosity has a significant conflict potential. The article is based on the results of a mass surveys carried out by the method of formalized interviewing, by the authors in the South Siberian Republic of Khakassia. The author comes to a reasoned conclusion that the religious situation has undergone serious changes. On the one hand, the appeal to traditional identities was inevitable in the conditions of the disappearance of integration Soviet consciousness and the growth of religiosity solved the problem of gaining a sense of community, reinforced ethnic and national identities in the first post-Soviet years. The growth of religiosity was abrupt. However, the existence of a close relationship between religious (confessional) and ethnic identity was not identified in recent years. In addition, the results of the 2018–2019 surveys suggest that a certain 'limit of growth' of the society's religiosity has been reached. On the other hand, a new type of believer in Russia, judging by the current model, has already survived childhood illnesses. The results of the study show that there are more believers among older people. However, age and gender differences, as well as the level of education, are no longer fundamental. In Russia, a new type of believer has appeared — a young person with a fairly high level of education, who often makes a conscious choice of a denomination and performing religious rituals, having a functional self-identification with a particular religious tradition.

**Keywords:** religiosity, confessional identity, modernization, traditionalism.

Corresponding Author:  
 Yuri Mikhailovich Aksutin  
 aksutum@mail.ru

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## 1. Introduction

In modern conditions of social complexity, the importance of religiosity as a factor of social and cultural reality has significantly increased. This is especially true in post-Soviet Russia, which is still in the process of social and institutional transformation. The transformation is followed by changes not only in the social and political bases, but also in the consciousness of people. On the one hand, the disappearance of non-religious Soviet ideology and identity resulted in the destruction of the integration bases, which provoked an increase in interest in religion as a proven mechanism for gaining a sense of community. On the other hand, the religious situation in Russia, according to a number of researchers, is a new phenomenon that has not been studied yet. The processes of post-traditional modernization, the development of scientific rationalism and modernization have destroyed the stereotype that believers are mostly older people, women and people with a low level of education, and religious identification is carried out exclusively by traditional mechanisms (from parents to children). On this basis, the relevance of empirical studies of spiritual processes' specific aspects such as religious features of the spiritual life of the Russian population has increased. The epistemological problems of research related to the fundamental insufficiency of the speculative approach and the need to rely on factual and empirical data, are of such difficulties. Analysis and characteristics of the phenomenological features of religiosity, which has a significant conflict potential, is of particular importance in the multi-ethnic and multi-religious regions of the country, which include the Republic of Khakassia, where representatives of about 200 religious organizations and groups interact directly [6].

## 2. Methodology and Methods

The analysis of religiosity, due to the complexity of the studied phenomenon, has its own difficulties. First, the scientific literature does not stop arguing about the problems of determining the criteria and the degree of religiosity. As was noticed by I. V. Artemova, it is not very clear who is considered to be religious: is it a person who is experiencing a special subjective feeling called faith? Then we will certainly get data indicating that 60 – 70% of the population are religious. If you add additional criteria (the frequency of visits to temples, knowledge of prayers and rituals), the number of religious is immediately reduced to 3–5% [7]. It seems that a more correct position would be the one in which the main criterion is self-identification of the respondent. At the same time, the analysis of religiosity should be supplemented by the study of the behavioral characteristics of

different groups of the population in relation to the cult. Therefore, it is necessary to take the different types of believers and non-believers in the population into account. The study identified six main types: 'qualified believers' who know the basics of the Holy Scriptures, performing rites and rituals; 'qualified believers' who do not perform rituals, occasionally visiting religious buildings; the third category is hesitant. The second group, the unbelievers, which includes not believing in God, but positively related to religion in general (the passive unbelievers); not believing and negatively related to religion and those who are not indifferent to any religion. In other words, there are two groups of believers and three groups of non-believers. In addition, the respondents' affiliation to a particular religion (denomination) was also clarified.

When studying the transformation of religiosity and analyzing changes in social and demographic characteristics, data from secondary analysis and a wide range of original regional sociological studies conducted by the authors were used to support the theoretical analysis and generalizations. In particular, the analysis of materials held in the region of mass surveys in 2007 (400 people surveyed) [9], the results of surveys 2013–2018 implemented within the RGNF grant and of the Russian President 2013–2018 grants (520 people polled each year) [1–4] and survey 2019 (1000) were involved [5]. The questionnaire questions were formulated according to a single model. The representation of the sample was ensured by observing the proportions of the population living in different types of localities. A quota sample was applied based on gender, age, education, and territorial location of the studied population categories.

### 3. Results / Conclusions and Discussion

Before analyzing data on Khakassia, you should refer to the all-Russian trend. Most researchers distinguish the following characteristic features of Russian religiosity. In both the Soviet and post-Soviet periods, the majority of believers were women, people with low levels of education, and the elderly. The group of non-believers is dominated by men, people with a fairly high (secondary special and higher) level of education, and young people [8]. However, a number of authors (M. P. Mchedlov, E. G. Filimonov) note that the current religious situation has undergone significant changes [10]. A new type of believer appears — a young or middle-aged person with a full secondary or higher education. It is important to note that the characteristic of this type of believer is not limited only by age and education, but is supplemented by the following elements: conscious (reflexive) selection and execution of religious customs and rituals; functional

(as opposed to essential, that is. prescriptive) self-identification with a particular religious tradition.

First of all, let's take a look at the dynamics of the religious (confessional) identity of the Khakassia inhabitants. Note that the religious affiliation of the respondents was found out regardless of whether they declared himself a believer or not. According to a research of 2007–2019 conducted in the Republic of Khakassia [5], the majority of the population, about 70% of the respondents, identify themselves with Orthodoxy (Table 1). Other confessions are less represented. The second most popular answer is 'no,' and the third is 'I am an atheist'.

TABLE 1: What religion do you belong to? \*

Answer choice	% of the total number of respondents						
	2007	2013	2014	2015	2016	2018	2019
Orthodoxy	68.6%	76.0%	78.4%	69.6%	75.4%	68.7%	67.6%
Catholicism	0.1%	2.5%	1.3%	1.2%	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%
Protestantism	0.6%	1.5%	0.3%	0.6%	1.3%	0.4%	0.5%
Islam	1.8%	0.2%	0.0%	0.8%	1.2%	2.1%	1.2%
Buddhism (Lamaism)	0.2%	0.4%	0.0%	1.2%	2.1%	1.0%	2.5%
Paganism	0.6%	0.6%	1.8%	2.1%	1.5%	1.7%	1.1%
Shamanism	0.3%	0.6%	0.3%	3.1%	2.3%	2.5%	1.6%
I am an atheist	8.8%	6.1%	8.3%	9.4%	4.2%	9.2%	9.8%
Another	1%	0.0%	0.8%	1.9%	0.6%	1.7%	1.7%
No one	17.7%	16.7%	8.9%	7.3%	8.1%	11.5%	12.2%

\* The amount exceeds 100%, because one respondent could give more answers than one at the same time.

In general, the results of the survey show a very high overall degree of religious beliefs of the residents of Khakassia. The number of believers remained virtually unchanged during the period under review, and the observed progress was due to a reduction in the number of non-believers who are indifferent to religion (Table 2).

Virtually unchanged in the period under review, the number of doubtful (in 2007 — 13.5%, 2019 — 11%). The study revealed the fact of a sharp decrease in the number of 'believers' in the years of socio-economic destabilization (2014 and 2018). It is significant that some respondents in 2007 and 2013 did not identify themselves as believers at all, but at the same time they considered themselves to be the followers of certain confessions (68.6% of Orthodox Christians in 2007, and 60.8% of believers). A well-known phenomenon of mass surveys has manifested itself, when confessional affiliation is perceived as one of the characteristics of ethno-confessional and cultural identity, traditions, belonging to which is natural for respondents. For example, 11.3% of Orthodox and 6.3% of Muslims said that they doubtful between faith and disbelief, while 6.7% of

TABLE 2: Which of the statements applies to you more?

Answer choice	% of the total number of respondents						
	2007	2013	2014	2015	2016	2018	2019
I believe in God, and perform basic rites and rituals	11.8%	12.7%	7.8%	17.9%	17.7%	11.3%	12.4%
I believe in God, but I do not perform religious rites and rituals	49.0%	53.1%	31.8%	45.2%	54.0%	46.9%	47.5%
I hesitate between faith and disbelief	13.5%	15.6%	18.2%	12.9%	10.2%	12.5%	11.0%
I don't believe in God, but I have a positive attitude to religion	14.5%	8.1%	15.6%	9.2%	5.6%	7.3%	8.2%
I do not believe in God, and I have a negative attitude to religion	5.9%	0.8%	11.2%	2.1%	0.4%	1.0%	1.6%
I do not believe in God, and I am indifferent to religion	1.6%	6.3%	8.9%	6.3%	3.7%	10.0%	9.4%
I find it difficult to answer	3.7%	3.5%	6.5%	6.3%	8.5%	11.0%	9.9%
Total responses:	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

‘Orthodox’ and 6.3% of ‘Muslims’ do not believe in God. In fairness, we note that such data were only for two religious groups.

To test the hypothesis about the formation of a new type of believer, or even about a ‘new religiosity’ in Russia, the results of the analysis of gender and demographic characteristics of believers are of considerable interest. The study revealed a situation of predominance among women believers in the period of the 2000s. For example, a 2007 survey showed that the number of believers in the group of women is 70.4%, of which 15.6% perform the main rituals. Among the men surveyed, there were slightly fewer believers, about 49.6% (qualified — 7.3%). In the pre-crisis 2013, among the surveyed women, 74.2% were believers, and 55.6% were men. Among believers, 16.8% of men and 25.5% of women adhere to ritual prescriptions. It is noteworthy that in 2014, marked by a large-scale economic and political crisis, the number of believers among the women surveyed decreased to 58.3% (21.1% perform rituals) and almost equaled the number of men who believe (57.5% believe; 20.2% perform rituals). The 2015–2016 survey confirmed that the number of believers is equalizing between men (2015 — 60.2%; 2016 -64.9%) and women (2015 — 67.7%; 2016 — 72.7%), as well as an overall increase in the proportion of those (1/3) who know and perform the basic precepts and rituals. In the 2018 survey, 62.9% of women surveyed classified themselves as believers (22.1% qualified), 56.8% of men surveyed were believers, of whom 14.2% were, so called,

qualified. The results of the survey are comparable to the data of the 2019 survey, in which 65.1% of women and 53.6% of men described themselves as believers.

Age characteristics of believers were also in line with the hypothesis of the formation of a new religiosity. Thus, 23.1% of non-believers in the 18–24 age group according to the 2007 survey. 51.7% of young respondents identified themselves as believers, of which only 8.1% noted the fact of performing rites and rituals. In 2013, only 9.9% of this age group were non-believers, while 18.2% were hesitant. 67% of respondents described themselves as believers, 18.2% of them perform rites and rituals. In the crisis of 2014 and the next 2015 the share of believers has decreased slightly (by 10%), since only about 57% of respondents have already noted the presence of faith in God. However, if in 2014 12.2% performed rituals, in 2015 about 20% of young respondents performed them. A change in the dynamics and a new growth in the number of believers was registered in 2016 (64.1%), while the share of qualified believers remained virtually unchanged (18.2%). We believe that a new stage in the dynamics of young respondents' religiosity began in the period 2018–2019 and it is marked by a decrease in the number of young believers to 50% (no more than 14% perform rituals), which in general, repeats the picture of the late 2000s.

In the second age group (25–34 years), according to surveys from 2007 to 2013, there were about 65–67% of believers, and 16.5% of non-believers. At the same time, as in the first group, there was a tendency to increase the number of qualified (in the views of the respondents themselves) believers performing rites. There were no more than 9% of them in 2007–2013, 16.5% in 2014, and 22.4% in 2015. At the end of the period, the religious situation looked different. Thus, according to the results of the 2018 survey of believers — 62.5% (qualified — 18.2%) and in 2019, their share did not exceed 58% of the number of respondents in this age group. The number of qualified believers also decreased (10.4%). In general, in the first and second age groups, there is a similarity in the dynamics of religiosity. The level of religiosity of young residents of the Republic, which peaked in the mid-2010s, has declined.

In the third group of respondents (35–54 years), according to the survey of 2007 and 2013, 65.7% of believers (qualified — 10.7%), and 18.4% of non-believers. In 2014, the number of believers in the group decreased (57.4%), but the number of qualified believers increased (20%). In 2015, the share of believers in this age group returned to pre-crisis values (63%), and those performing rites and rituals increased by 7%. The trend was confirmed in the surveys of 2018 (believers — 62.7%, qualified — 21.4%) and 2019 (believers — 61.7%, qualified — 14.4%). In general, the percentage of religious people

in this group was not only higher than in the first and second groups, but also showed significant stability throughout the study period.

The group over 55 also showed a general trend. According to 2007 survey, 64.1% of believers in this group (14.5% of them qualified), and 26% of non — believers. In 2013, the number of believers did not exceed 55% of the respondents, but 23.6% knew and performed religious rituals. The percentage of non-believers remained at the same level. In 2014, the picture remained almost unchanged with a slight trend of a decrease in the number of believers within 5%. In 2015–2016, there were 67.4% of believers and 26% of them performed religious rituals. In 2018 the share of believers was 60.4%, 18% of them qualified, and in 2019 — 65.8% (qualified no more than 15%), which fits into the general idea of a higher level of religiosity of people in the older age groups.

Additionally, the level of education of the respondents was found out. As for the level of education of believers, the surveys also confirmed the marked trend of transformation of the traditional type of religiosity. In 2007, among 'qualified believers', 25% of the respondents had higher education, and 'unskilled believers' — 44.2% (total — 70), while among non-believers, 12.3% had higher education. 70.6% of believers have secondary vocational education; 14% of non-believers. The majority of respondents with only secondary education are also in the group of believers — 60.1%. The situation has undergone some adjustments only according to the results of the 2015 survey, when believers with higher education were 63.5%, with an average professional — 67.1%, primary professional — 62.8%, average — 58.3%, below average — 74.1%. In the group of unbelievers higher and secondary vocational education had 14%, initial professional — 38.1%, an average of 18.6%, below the average of 7.4%. The 2019 survey recorded the following situation. In the group of believers who know and perform rituals, 13% of respondents have higher education, in the group of unskilled — 51.6% (total — 64.6%), while among non-believers, 18% had higher education. In the group of people who are indifferent to religion, 6.6% had higher education, and among non-believers who have a negative perception of religion — 1.3%. 60% of believers have secondary vocational education and 16.9% of non-believers. 49.4% of believers have primary vocational education and 26.6% of non-believers. The majority of respondents with only secondary education are in the group of unskilled believers — 43.8%. Among qualified believers, 13.3% had secondary education. Among non-believers, 22.2% had secondary education. It is also noteworthy that there are no non-believers who have a negative or indifferent attitude to religion among the respondents with 'below average' education. This suggests that believers often have a higher level of education than

non-believers. However, it should also be borne in mind that there is a tendency of decreasing the share of those with higher education among believers.

## 4. Conclusions

Post-Soviet socio-cultural transformations have had a serious impact on the lives and minds of Russian citizens. Over the past years, the number of believers in the country's regions has increased significantly. Even taking into account the methodological conventions of determining religiosity, believers to some extent in the Khakass regional society, according to the criterion of self-identification, are about more than 60%. However, the results of the 2019 survey suggest that a certain limit has been reached for the growth of the society's religiosity. In general, the main results of the study can be reduced to the following thesis statements. Firstly, the definition of 'religiosity' as a state of consciousness allowed us to justify the typology of respondents by the nature of their attitude to religion. The religious type included: 1) qualified; 2) non-qualified believers; 3) ranging between faith and disbelief; 4) passive non-believers who are positively related to religion; 5) non-believers and negatively related to religion; 6) indifferent type of believers.

Secondly, the results of the study suggest that the socio-demographic characteristics of believers in Khakassia reproduce the all-Russian situation. As before, there are more believers among older people. However, age and gender differences, as well as the level of education, are no longer fundamental. Among young people, there are slightly fewer believers than in the 'age' group of respondents, and the level of education of believers was higher than that of non-believers. In Russia, a new type of believer has emerged — a young person with a fairly high level of education, often carrying out a conscious selection of a denomination and performing religious rituals, having a functional self-identification with a particular religious tradition. At the same time, the existence of a close relationship between religious (confessional) and ethnic identity could not be identified. The main indicator of this phenomenon — the incident when respondents did not identify themselves as believers, but at the same time considered themselves adherents of certain faiths, was shown only in the surveys of 2007 and 2013.



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