



# Patriarch Kirill's Praetorian Guard: Sorok Sorokov as Radical Outreach for “Holy Tradition”

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## Abstract

*The central focus of this article is an in-depth analysis of the interplay between Patriarch Kirill's ideology of “Holy Tradition” and the movement Sorok Sorokov, which we consider Kirill's praetorian guard, in charge of “maintaining the order for patriarchal services”—services which include humanitarian and military assistance in Russian offensives, the punishment of non-traditional priests, and the on-site guards of patriarchal projects within the wider scope of Russkiy mir. More importantly however, and due to this privileged position, Sorok Sorokov acts as a radicalizing outreach for Patriarch Kirill's “Holy Tradition” in the digital space. To demonstrate this relationship, we employ a mixed methods approach in line with digital humanities methodology. To achieve this, we have developed telegram API and web scraping tools as well as utilized exploratory data analysis, natural language processing, and critical discourse analysis. Our preliminary conclusions are that: (1) Sorok Sorokov does indeed function as a radical extension of Patriarch Kirill's Holy Tradition and (2) that Sorok Sorokov operates as an illiberal service provider for the Russian Orthodox Church in social contexts that Patriarch Kirill cannot directly address such as war and radical, national politics.*

Keywords: Sorok Sorokov, Russian Orthodox Church, Holy Tradition, illiberalism, Telegram

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On January 9, 2016, Metropolitan Hilarion sat down with film director Alexei Uchitel on the Russian Orthodox Church's (ROC) television channel Spas to discuss the role of cinema in society. The discussion was cordial, as they discussed Uchitel's upcoming film *Matilda*. The film is a historical fiction recounting Tsar Nicholas II's relationship with ballerina Matilda Kshesinskaya.<sup>1</sup> However, after the trailer for the film was released on April 8, 2016, the Russian Orthodox Church's messaging quickly turned to disdain. Bishop Tikhon (Shevkunov) noted the historical inaccuracy of the film and equated it to "slander" of a prominent saint.<sup>2</sup> Radical Orthodox groups were also quick to react to the trailer. On January 31, 2017, members of Christian State-Holy Rus,<sup>3</sup> led by Aleksandr Kalinin, sent threats via mail and telephone stating that "If the film *Matilda* is released, cinemas will burn, maybe even people will suffer."<sup>4</sup> In Moscow on September 10, near the office of Alexei Uchitel's lawyer, two cars caught fire with calling cards next to them with "burn for Matilda" written on them. On September 23, Kalinin and two others were detained after he gave an interview to Russian news agency *Interfax* reiterating the threats his group had made.<sup>5</sup> Less than a month later, another radical Orthodox group, Sorok Sorokov,<sup>6</sup> took up protests against *Matilda*. On October 24, Sorok Sorokov, led by Andrei Kormukhin, sent its members to movie theaters to protest their showing the film.<sup>7</sup>

Admittedly, while the group Sorok Sorokov cannot be traced to any particular violent events in relation to the release of *Matilda*, the group rallies its supporters for other violent acts and illegal demonstrations. It routinely deploys its members to construction sites of future Orthodox churches, acting as bodyguards against anti-ROC protestors, building fences, attacking the temporary shelters of anti-ROC protestors, and allegedly attacking the protestors directly.<sup>8</sup> Sorok Sorokov also regularly holds general Orthodox events consisting of field brawls (*Ackerkämpfe*),<sup>9</sup> weapons tear downs and assembly, mixed martial arts tournaments, live music, and

1 Oftsial'nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, "Mitropolit Volokolamskii Ilarion: Kino dolzhno otrazhat' deistvitel'nost' i dariť liudiam svetlye obrazy," January 9, 2016, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/4346161.html>.

2 Alena Makarenko, "Skandal vokrug 'Matil'dy,' Khronika," Buro (blog), September 15, 2017, <https://www.buro247.ru/culture/movies/15-sep-2017-matilda-scandal-chronicle.html>.

3 Khristianskoe gosudarstvo—Sviataia Rus'.

4 Lenta.ru, "Aktivisty poobeshchali zshech' kinoteatry za pokaz 'Matil'dy' Uchitelia," January 31, 2017, <https://lenta.ru/news/2017/01/31/threats/>.

5 Vladimir Rozanskij, "Aleksandr Kalinin, the War against 'Matilda' and Putin," PIME Asia News (blog), September 22, 2017, <https://www.asianews.it/news-en/Aleksandr-Kalinin,-the-war-against-%20%E2%80%99%20Matilda%20%E2%80%99%20-and-Putin-41852.html>.

6 The name can be translated as "forty times forty," which means that members of this group want to have 1,600 churches in Moscow "again."

7 Anastasiia Golubeva, "Protiv 'Matil'dy' sobrali pochti 100 tysiach podpisov," BBC Russkaia sluzhba, July 17, 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-40582707>; Ekaterina Venkina, "V Moskve pered pokazom 'Matil'dy' zaderzhali sem' aktivistov." Deutsche Welle, October 24, 2017, Politics, <https://www.dw.com/ru/%Do%B2-%Do%BC%Do%BE%D1%81%Do%BA%Do%B2%Do%B5-%Do%BF%Do%B5%D1%80%Do%B5%Do%B4-%Do%BF%D1%80%Do%B5%Do%BC%D1%8C%Do%B5%D1%80%Do%BE%Do%B0-%Do%BC%Do%B0%D1%82%Do%B8%Do%BB%D1%8C%Do%B4%D1%8B-%Do%B7%Do%B0%Do%B4%Do%B5%D1%80%Do%B6%Do%B0%Do%BB%Do%B8-%Do%BF%D1%80%Do%B0%Do%B2%Do%BE%D1%81%Do%BB%Do%B0%Do%B2%Do%BD%D1%8B%D1%85-%Do%B0%Do%BA%D1%82%Do%B8%Do%B2%Do%B8%D1%81%D1%82%Do%BE%Do%B2/a-41097583>.

8 Dmitriy Veselov, "'Torfyanka' zastoialas,'" Eclectic (blog), January 30, 2015, <https://eclectic-magazine.ru/park-torfyanka-stoyanie/>.

9 We use the German term *Ackerkämpfe*, or hooligan field brawls, as it is more suited for the performative aspect of Sorok Sorokov's events. Sorok Sorokov stages these *Ackerkämpfe* as a team-based demonstration of their ranks' fighting strength. Usually these teams line up across from each other in opposing rows and clash in the center in hand-to-hand combat. *Ackerkämpfe* complements the one-on-one mixed martial arts performances that take place at their events. See René Nissen, Kiril Avramov, and Jason Roberts, "White Rex, White Nationalism, and Combat Sport: The Production of a Far-Right Cultural Scene," *Journal of Illiberalism Studies* 1, no. 2 (2021): 19–37.

icon processions.<sup>10</sup> Members of Sorok Sorokov, as well as Kormukhin himself, have also been seen physically attacking those they deem as bringing Western values into Russia.<sup>11</sup>

This work is an analysis of the similarities and differences between the worldviews of Sorok Sorokov and the Russian Orthodox Church. Whereas other violent Orthodox groups, such as Christian State–Holy Rus, are admonished by the church<sup>12</sup> and punished by the state for their violent and illegal acts, the leader of Sorok Sorokov is given the medal of the Order of the Holy Equal-to-the-Apostles Prince Vladimir.<sup>13</sup> Why is Sorok Sorokov being given preferential treatment by the ROC and how related are their worldviews? In this article we show that Sorok Sorokov and the ROC are aligned in their traditional, markedly Russian, illiberal worldviews but, contrary to Sorok Sorokov's claims to having an "original brand,"<sup>14</sup> we provide evidence that they function as the "left hand of God" for Patriarch Kirill in affairs that the ROC is unable to address directly.

This article's first section denotes the background of these two groups' worldviews. We show how the ROC has only recently developed a monolithic, traditionalist worldview that is able to tolerate an ideological alignment with Sorok Sorokov, and what Sorok Sorokov's own views on Russia's socio-political standing are. The second section describes our mixed methodological approach. The final section consists of results, conclusions, and further discussions based on our findings. We conclude that Sorok Sorokov's ideology is not only directly parallel to the ROC's, but that they often focus these worldviews and narratives into a *specifically Russian worldview*. As the ROC is working within an interlocutor framework vis-à-vis both other traditional religious groups<sup>15</sup> in the international sphere and the Russian state, Sorok Sorokov is the interpreter and enforcer of this traditional ideology within Russia and the so-called near abroad, as Russians refer to those states that were formerly part of the Soviet Union.

This work is also a starting point for more granular analyses of the bidirectional influence between the ROC, and the cohort of the existing and identified radical Russian Orthodox milieu. This work is accompanied by our database, which entails: (a) all of the news articles from the patriarchia.ru domain from its inception in

10 "Russia: The Orthodox Connection | People & Power," Al Jazeera English, October 19, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQR36Z7Pwn4>.

11 Evgenii Shapovalov, "Unholy Alliance," Coda (blog), June 1, 2016, <https://www.codastory.com/lgbt-crisis/unholy-alliance/>.

12 Oftsial'nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, "V. R. Legoida: Est' veshchi, k kotorym khudozhnik dolzhen podkhodit's osobym taktom i vnimaniem," February 8, 2017, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/4800999.html>.

13 Sorok Sorokov, "Komykhin Andrei poluchaet medal' Vladimira Krestitelia," Sorok Sorokov YouTube channel, July 12, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gw9AdhV6OLE>.

14 Sorok Sorokov (forwarded from Russkii Demiurg), Telegram broadcast, August 23, 2021, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/21092>.

15 Standard scholarly English usage would generally understand the term "traditional religion" as denoting religious practices rooted in an indigenous ethnic community built around tradition rather than authoritative texts. However, the use of "traditional religion(s)" in this text follows Patriarch Kirill's use of the term, as it forms and informs the basis for our analysis of his socio-political worldview: that is, "traditional religion(s)" are conservative understandings of religious doctrines that ascribe authority to the ancient teachings of the saints (in the case of Orthodox Christianity) who are now held within and shaped by the Church or the Bride of Christ. According to this definition, Patriarch Kirill is willing to open dialog between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church or representatives of the Islamic world—religious groups in which there is salvation only within a conservative interpretation of these ancient teachings of the religious community in question, be they through scripture (including in the case of Islam), an institutional church (as within Russian Orthodoxy), or moral and ethical values (ultra-conservative Protestantism, which in turn derives these from its scriptures). Patriarch Kirill likely understands the general usage of the term and is attempting to co-opt the meaning for his purposes.

October 2004 up until August 2021, and (b) all of Sorok Sorokov's Telegram posts from October 2017 through July 2022.

### The ROC's Management of Its Internal Diversity

To understand Sorok Sorokov's involvement with the ROC, we first outline these factions and their ideological alignment within the framework of intra-Church politics. One of the earliest works focused on the different existing factions and intra-Church groups was published as early as 1997, by Ralph Della Cava, who introduces the notion of three distinct groups consisting of ultranationalists, ecumenists, and institutionalists. Further, Della Cava argues that factional arrangements within the Church are seemingly unrelated to its socio-political standing. At the time of Della Cava's writing, Sergey Chapnin, author of publications in ecclesiastical and secular media such as *Metaphrases*,<sup>16</sup> stated that the Church, through its factions, was unable to secure either a consensus of ideas about its present course.<sup>17</sup> While we agree with Della Cava's argument on the social validity of these factions, we differ on his assessment, as we recognize that the Church, under the direction of Patriarch Kirill since 2009, has created a consensus on its path to its socio-political future. Our research aligns rather well with more contemporary work by scholars of Orthodoxy such as Sergey Chapnin, who notes that the existing church factions are subdued by the Patriarch, by using the extraordinary circumstances presented by crises that allow for consolidation and direct management by the Moscow Patriarchate.

Another scholar who focuses her approach on the existing factions is Irina Papkova. She explicitly defines three major factions within the ROC as liberals, fundamentalists, and traditionalists. The general consensus is that the least populous faction within the ROC is that of the liberals. Their dwindling numbers likely coincide with the turn away from liberal politics in the turmoil of the "wild 1990s." Patriarch Alexy II recognized that his push to strengthen the ROC's socio-political involvement was aligning with the goals of far-right nationalist organizations such as Pamyat (memory).<sup>18</sup> Patriarch Alexy II, wary of a Russian neo-Nazi socio-political group forming around the ROC, declined to further grow the socio-political capital of the Church. He chose to not canonize the Romanovs and slowed down the reacquisition of religious buildings and the return of saints' relics.<sup>19</sup> These actions weakened the liberal ROC faction even further. Yet signs of the liberals' continuation are still present in socio-political compromises found in core ROC documents. This has been described by Kristina Stoeckl in regard to the ROC's view on human rights.<sup>20</sup> An illustrative example is the presentation of individual rights found within the "Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church (2000)":

The right to believe, to live, to have family is what protects the inherent foundations of human freedom from the arbitrary rule of outer forces. These internal rights are complemented with and ensured by other, external ones, such as the right to free

16 "Chapnin Sergei Valer'evich," n.d., <http://eurasian-defence.ru/?q=node/11404>.

17 Ralph Della Cava, "Reviving Orthodoxy in Russia: An Overview of the Factions in the Russian Orthodox Church, in the Spring of 1996," *Cahiers du Monde Russe* 38, no. 3 (September 1997): 387–413.

18 Most notably, Patriarch Alexy II was known for strengthening the ROC through his reacquisition of Orthodox relics and land from the state.

19 John Garrard and Carol Garrard, *Russian Orthodoxy Resurgent: Faith and Power in the New Russia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 116, <https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/9781400828999/html>.

20 Kristina Stoeckl, *The Russian Orthodox Church and Human Rights*, Routledge Religion, Society and Government in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet States, no. 1 (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 54.

movement, information, property, [and] to its possession and disposition.<sup>21</sup>

During this period, the future Patriarch Kirill, who was at that time the Metropolitan of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, was the chairman of the Department of External Church Relations (DECR), in charge of dialog with foreign political bodies and global churches. Kirill, due to his position as the chairman of the DECR, was also granted a permanent position on the Holy Synod. Thus, he was directly part of Patriarch Alexy II's initiative of strengthening the Church. At present we can state that Kirill has picked up where Alexy II left off: that is, he has continued to build up the Church's socio-political capital. This process is most visible within the ROC's initiative dubbed "Program 200,"<sup>22</sup> or the idea to reestablish 200 churches across Moscow. This ROC initiative was occasionally referenced as "Sorok Sorokov," or "forty forties" in English<sup>23</sup>—a noted change in the ROC's goals from 200 churches across Moscow to 1600. The use of the phrase "Sorok Sorokov" is anything but coincidental to the radical Orthodox group known by this name.

Patriarch Kirill, unlike his predecessor, either does not recognize or does not shy away from far-right, nationalist, illiberal social movements that co-opt his traditional rhetoric in radical ways. Patriarch Kirill's adoption of the slogan "Program 200" and later "Sorok Sorokov" allows for ambiguity towards social movements such as Sorok Sorokov, and the lack of clear denunciation of their activities. By not denouncing Sorok Sorokov's co-opting of these phrases and traditionalist ideology accompanying them, Sorok Sorokov is able to act with impunity and tacit support as the left hand of God for Patriarch Kirill—the silent enforcers of his illiberal rhetoric with radical actions.

The second-most-numerous ROC faction is the fundamentalist one. Fundamentalists "invent a past they seek to relive in an attempt to counter perceived threats to religious and national identity. ... This past often denotes Pre-Revolutionary 'Holy Russia' as the yearned-for Golden Age."<sup>24</sup> The process of reinvention is crucial to this faction. While aspects of Holy Russia manifest themselves in current socio-political ideals such as monarchism, the fundamentalists do not seek a return to these ideals as they were defined within their respective historic periods. Rather, fundamentalists reinterpret these values and project them onto modern issues. Therefore, it is more appropriate to discuss fundamentalism as a form of "neo-traditionalism." One such example is the fundamentalists' position on inter-denominational church dialog. The fundamentalists contend that such dialog influences the Church by turning it towards un-Russian, pro-Western ideals, regardless of different church denominations' common Christian origins. This puts them at odds with Patriarch Kirill, who has continually worked to form inter-church dialog with other traditional religions. However, while the fundamentalists may disagree with some of the finer points of Kirill's traditionalist model, the apocalyptic nature of encroaching modernity entices fundamentalists to coalesce under his leadership.

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21 Russian Orthodox Church Department for External Church Relations, "The Basis of the Social Concept," 2000, p. 26, <https://mospatusa.com/files/THE-BASIS-OF-THE-SOCIAL-CONCEPT.pdf>.

22 Oftsial'nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, "Na telekanale 'Moskva-24' prodolzhaetsia tsikl peredach 'Sorok sorokov,' posviashchennyi 'Programme-200,'" September 28, 2013, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/3265670.html>.

23 Oftsial'nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, "Igumen Petr (Eremeev): Festival 'Sorok sorokov' vozvrashchaet Moskve traditsii tserkovnogo gorodskogo prazdnika," September 7, 2012, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/2453332.html>.

24 Irina Papkova, *The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 61.

The third group, the traditionalists, commonly labeled as supportive of a *pravoslavnaya derzhavnost*, or Orthodox statism, are those who feel that “the future of the Russian Federation lies in a spiritual renaissance of its people, a process that cannot occur without the active involvement of the Orthodox Church.”<sup>25</sup> The traditionalists are the most numerous faction within the ROC, headed by Patriarch Kirill.<sup>26</sup> They invoke Russian and Orthodox ideals that we define as “Patriarch Kirill’s Holy Tradition,” a more radical illiberal variation on the Orthodox Church’s definition of “Holy Tradition.”

Theologians, such as Fyodor Nikitich Romanov, Vladimir Lossky, and Georges Florovsky have interpreted Holy Tradition as “things of the past” that are inherently different from mere “traditions.” Holy Tradition originates from the hierarchy of the Church as an “authentic interpretation of Scripture ... [as] ‘Scripture rightly understood.’”<sup>27</sup> In contrast, “traditions” are merely derivatives of this truth, handed down, but ultimately opinions or mistakes not developed through the life of the Church, but outside its body or through secular definitions.<sup>28</sup> Vladimir Lossky, one of the preeminent theologians in Russian Orthodoxy, notes that “The true and holy Tradition, according to Filaret of Moscow, does not consist uniquely in visible and verbal transmission of teachings, rules, institutions and rites: it is at the same time an invisible and actual communication of grace and sanctification.”<sup>29</sup> Patriarch Kirill surely would have encountered Lossky’s works when he was in seminary, and he often invokes Lossky’s status as a great theologian in a number of his own works. Patriarch Kirill’s illiberal variation on Holy Tradition comes from its marked Russian, illiberal invocation in reaction to modernity and modernism.

### Analytical Approaches to the ROC’s Socio-Political Standing

Various scholars have attempted to decipher this particular illiberal invocation by implementing different analytical frameworks. Irina Papkova, in *The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics*, attempts to analyze this invocation through a political realist perspective. She splits her work into two major parts. The first half is an ethnographic and historical analysis of the inner workings of the ROC, where she outlines its three major factions. These factions are pivotal to understanding the nature of interaction between the ROC and outside socio-political actors. For this particular reason, we have followed Papkova’s factions model and offered a contemporary expansion on it in our introduction. In her second part, Papkova attempts to qualitatively address the degree and nature of the ROC’s involvement in post-Soviet politics by polling theological seminarians and secular university students. Her questions are accompanied by a range of preselected response options. For instance, a polled “question-answer” pair from this survey is: “Question:

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25 In this context, *derzhavnost*, derived from *derzhava* (meaning “state” or “power”) may be thought of as the striving for not only a powerful, traditionalist ROC, but one that lifts up the Russian Federation through a renewal of Orthodox values. Stoeckl, *The Russian Orthodox Church and Human Rights*, p. 47.

26 Papkova, *The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics*, p. 52.

27 Georges Florovsky, ed., “The Function of Tradition in the Ancient Church,” chap. V in *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky, Vol. I: Bible, Church, Tradition—An Eastern Orthodox View* (Büchervertriebsanstalt, Vaduz, Europa, 1987), p. 73–92. First published 1972.

28 An example that is often cited is the Raskol, or Schism within the Russian Orthodox Church dating to the mid-17th century, in which Old Believers held that truth, rather than mistakes, was to be found in the old liturgical books. See: A monk of St. Tikhon’s Monastery, *These Truths We Hold—The Holy Orthodox Church: Her Life and Teachings* (South Canaan, Pennsylvania: St. Tikhon’s Seminary Press, 1986); Vladimir Lossky, John H. Erickson, and Thomas E. Bird, *In the Image and Likeness of God* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985).

29 Lossky, Erickson, and Bird, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, chap. 8: 141–168.

Today the ideal form of government in Russia is? Answer: *Monarchy, Democracy, Theocracy, Dictatorship, Other, Don't Know, No Answer.*<sup>30</sup>

We find that the use of such questionnaires raises multiple issues. For one, the answer choices provide for a narrow understanding of governance and religion from a Russian (and specifically, a Russian Orthodox) perspective. For example, a monarchy, depending on the ROC faction, can have multiple meanings and respective interpretations. Even among the hierarchy of the ROC, a single choice may or may not be chosen based on an individual's understanding of society and interpretation of the specific term. The late priest Dimitry Smirnov (1951–2020) describes how the correct monarchy would be a constitutional monarchy—similar to the ROC's position in the Russian Empire but without the element of hereditary lineage. Smirnov also notes that Russia has always and will always need a monarchy: "It's in our blood."<sup>31</sup> In contrast, monarchy-skeptic Professor Andrei Zubov suggests that a monarchy is unnecessary "when a society begins to increase in its Christian self-consciousness," suggesting that each response would be influenced by the respondent's social circles.<sup>32</sup> Papkova's method of polling similarly does not account for the distinction between types of religious engagement in Russia, which is reflected in the responses provided. Papkova, while attempting to control for religious affiliation, only outlines a distinction between Orthodoxy and "other confessions."<sup>33</sup>

Papkova also analyzes the ROC-Russian Federation nexus through solely the framework of legislative and policy analysis. Thus, she focuses on ROC-sponsored legislation and ROC individuals' political connections and political capital. In this manner, she comes to the conclusion that while the state has clearly been integrating Orthodox symbolism and cultural capital into both the construction of its own legitimacy and the construction of a viable post-Soviet national identity, the Church is a passive actor, casually following the directives of the state.<sup>34</sup>

At face value, her conclusion appears to be convincing. Indeed, less than a month after Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Patriarch Kirill came out in support of Putin's narrative of the war, painting the West as aggressors against Russian ideals.<sup>35</sup> However, her conclusion assumes that the ROC holds no political clout outside of what is allotted to it by the state, a conclusion that ignores the ROC's long history of involvement in politics, military, and societal affairs. One of many examples that contradicts Papkova's conclusion can be found in Dimitry "Dima" Adamsky's *Nuclear Orthodoxy*.<sup>36</sup> Adamsky provides a detailed account of the ROC's

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30 Papkova, Irina, *The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics* (Washington, DC and New York: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Oxford University Press, 2011) p. 206.

31 Mark Boden, "Democracy Is Fraud!—We Need Monarchy!—Hugely Popular Russian Priest on Top TV Show (Dmitry Smirnov)," Russia Insider (blog), July 23, 2022. <https://russia-insider.com/en/christianity/democracy-fraud-we-need-monarchy-hugely-popular-russian-priest-top-tv-show-dmitry>. (Note the cited post is from a rerun of a television program, likely taken in 2019 before Smirnov's death. The website either reposted the article or reported the rerun.)

32 Mikhail Suslov and Jan Surer, "The Genealogy of the Idea of Monarchy in the Post-Soviet Political Discourse of the Russian Orthodox Church," *State, Religion, and Church* 3, no. 1 (2016): 27–62, <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/the-genealogy-of-the-idea-of-monarchy-in-the-post-soviet-political-discourse-of-the-russian-orthodox-church>.

33 Papkova, *Orthodox Church and Russian Politics*, p. 203.

34 Papkova, *Orthodox Church and Russian Politics*, p. 212.

35 Tenzin Zompa, "In Sunday Sermon, Orthodox Bishop Kirill Backs Russia's War against Ukraine," ThePrint, March 7, 2022, <https://theprint.in/world/in-sunday-sermon-orthodox-bishop-kirill-backs-russias-war-against-ukraine/862058/>.

36 Dmitry Adamsky, *Russian Nuclear Orthodoxy: Religion, Politics, and Strategy* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2019).

involvement in military affairs from the dissolution of the USSR to the present. Papkova's analysis, while useful for understanding the factions within the ROC, not only misses the ROC's ideological nuances and their contexts, but also the ROC's interaction with diffused entities, the public at large, and groups that operate outside of an institutional framework—Sorok Sorokov being one such example.

Another political science approach towards analyzing the ROC's socio-political ideology can be found in Stoeckl's *The Russian Orthodox Church and Human Rights*. In contrast to Papkova's political realist approach relying on the analysis of legislation and policy, Stoeckl employs a constructivist approach to analyze the ROC's interpretation and response to shifting global attitudes towards human rights. Her analysis relies on drafted Church documents, such as the Social Concept, alongside upper-echelon Church discourse and organizations such as the World Russian People's Council. Stoeckl's approach offers a more in-depth analysis of the ROC's human rights stance and concludes that the ROC employs a "double strategy" towards social engagement: towards foreign and secular societies, the ROC appears restrained and engaging; in domestic and religious societies, the ROC's actions are polemical. For example, as Kirill positions himself as being in dialog with the West in the Russian invasion of Ukraine,<sup>37</sup> he similarly supports Putin's narrative at home.<sup>38</sup> However, Stoeckl concludes her work by stating that the ROC's official stance on human rights will ultimately be resolved in an analysis of theology because "the future trajectory of the encounter of Orthodoxy and modernity is being mapped out."<sup>39</sup>

Denis Zhuravlev provides another example of a constructivist approach in analyzing the Orthodox tradition. His analysis has three steps: first, through discourse analysis of core ROC documents (the Social Concept, ROC elites' public addresses and social media activities, and popular Orthodox theologians' texts), he interprets the ideal Orthodox traditional identity. Orthodox traditionalist values are those which:

reject individual self-expression and propose the intrusion and reproduction of certain social practices within the contemplated "traditional world system" (intolerance to otherness, inclination toward authoritarianism, emphasis on following commonly accepted norms and not individual aspirations, gender discrimination, homophobia and other forms of intolerance, rejection of abortions and euthanasia, etc.)<sup>40</sup>

Zhuravlev then examines the mobilization of these values in a context in which ethical norms are politicized, namely, the mobilization of these values in the rights of sexual minorities. He concludes that because these traditionalist values have political consequences in context, they should be thought of as not merely confessional/religious affiliation but as political theology and traditionalist in the political sense of the word.

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37 Catholic News Agency staff, "Pope Francis Discusses Ukraine War with Russian Orthodox Leader," Catholic News Agency, March 16, 2022, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/250692/pope-francis-discusses-ukraine-war-with-russian-orthodox-leader>.

38 Zompa, "In Sunday Sermon."

39 Stoeckl, *The Russian Orthodox Church and Human Rights*, p. 131.

40 Denis Zhuravlev, "Orthodox Identity as Traditionalism: Construction of Political Meaning in the Current Public Discourse of the Russian Orthodox Church," *Russian Politics & Law* 55, no. 4–5 (September 3, 2017): 354–375, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10611940.2017.1533274>.



In similar fashion, Mikhail Suslov uses a close reading of “Holy Rus” as a homotopia to describe political mobilization of theological ideals. He argues that Holy Rus, an ideal embedded with geographical and geopolitical ideals but imagined, amorphous, and decentralized, holds power due to its “crucial potential, its ability to see alternatives to the global ‘society of the spectacle.’”<sup>41</sup>

Our contribution to the literature is to investigate the ROC’s struggle with modernity and expands on and supports the approaches and conclusions of Zhuravlev and Suslov. Our analysis of the interplay between the ROC and Sorok Sorokov, while not strictly theological, reveals insights into how theological arguments are being interpreted and acted upon by other social entities. Thus, our hypothesis expands on the greater understanding of how diffused social entities act as purveyors of traditional values.

### **Structure, Ideation, and Activities of the Youth Movement Sorok Sorokov**

Extensive research with a specific focus on Sorok Sorokov is rather limited, as most of the peer-reviewed literature scrutinizes the movement through variety of analytic frameworks that aim to capture wider phenomena where the movement is analyzed either as an actor among similar right-wing groups, or in the context of other complex processes and events. These range from civic resistance, missionary work, and digital vigilantism to right-wing militia activities in Russia and abroad. Such examples could be found in the work of Todd on political geographies and spatial politics of religious sites in Moscow,<sup>42</sup> where she describes Sorok Sorokov’s opposition to the “For Torfyanka Park!” movement as a supposedly foreign-funded provocation against Russian Orthodoxy. In similar manner, a detailed account and analysis of the protests of the construction of a church in a Moscow public park is provided in Olga Reznikova’s “Guardians of Torfjanka Park” chapter in a larger volume dedicated to the ethical dimensions of modern urban life. For the purposes of our research, the most interesting statement advanced by Reznikova is the following description of the genesis and connection of the movement to the ROC and the Moscow Patriarchate:

Sorok Sorokov is a Moscow right-wing orthodox group. Like other similar groups, it does not officially act on behalf of the ROC but is financed and informally supported by it. The name can be translated as “Forty times forty,” which means that members of this group want to have 1,600 churches in Moscow “again.” The group was formed in 2013 by Andrej Kormuhin in Novospassky Monastery. On behalf of the monastery, he recruited dozens of professional boxers for the physical enforcement of the construction of new churches. The group is also partially connected with a small militant right-wing group that acts violently against migrants and anti-fascists under the name of “Molot” (Hammer), and generally with the right-wing scene. Sorok Sorokov positions itself as “orthodox patriots,” using symbols from a mixture of German Nazism and the Russian right-wing movement with references to neo-pagan and orthodox symbols at the same time. For their own purposes,

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41 M. D. Suslov, “‘Holy Rus’: The Geopolitical Imagination in the Contemporary Russian Orthodox Church,” *Russian Politics & Law* 52, no. 3 (May 2014): 67–86, <https://doi.org/10.2753/RUP1061-1940520303>.

42 Meagan Todd, “The Political Geographies of Religious Sites in Moscow’s Neighborhoods,” *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 58, no. 6 (November 2, 2017): 642–669, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2018.1457448>.

they do not exclude physical confrontation with “enemies of the Orthodox Church.”<sup>43</sup>

Attention to the movement, as one actor alongside others that are engaged in a “missionary revival” work that illustrates the relational dynamics between the ROC, the Moscow Patriarchate, and the Russian state is exemplified in the analysis of the so-called “Enteo” phenomenon in contemporary political and social life in Russia.<sup>44</sup> The phenomenon could be described as one of Orthodox activists who, often in opposition to the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, wish “to establish the point of view of God which had been disclosed through Holy Tradition, to the most acute social issues, the all-round support of the Orthodox Church in the public space.”<sup>45</sup>

One notable exception, in terms of consistency of focus on different modes of Sorok Sorokov’s politico-social and religious functionality, are the works of Marlene Laruelle<sup>46</sup> that repeatedly include and discuss the movement and its relation to conservative and reactionary ideas, and the state and Church’s interest in the popularization of martial arts as an avenue for youth outreach as well as for their practical utility in training a Church-friendly militia. Both Reznikova and Laruelle explicitly point out that Sorok Sorokov is not officially sanctioned by the ROC or the Patriarchate; however, it acts as what we term its “praetorian guard”—that is, being tacitly supported, encouraged, and financed.

### Method and Materials

For the purpose of our analysis, we use Marlene Laruelle’s definition of illiberalism to frame Kirill’s application of Holy Tradition as illiberal.<sup>47</sup> Kirill’s rhetorical twisting of Holy Tradition is positioned as a backlash against liberalism in all its varied scripts, often in the name of democratic principles. It proposes solutions that are majoritarian, nation-centric, or sovereigntist, favoring traditional hierarchies and cultural homogeneity. It also calls for a shift from the domain of politics to that of culture in a post-postmodern manner, laying claim to a tradition of rootedness in the face of an age of globalization.

A major point of contention for Holy Tradition is the definition of freedom. Patriarch Kirill posits that liberalism has constructed an idea of negative freedom as a *freedom from*, a freedom of the individual that disconnects one from collective social norms in the name of self-determination:

By liberal we are referring to the secular, humanistic approach to the organization of society and the State, derived from Western philosophy and political thought, as perceived, learned

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43 Ege, Moritz, and Johannes Moser, *Urban Ethics: Conflicts over the Good and Proper Life in Cities*, Routledge Studies in Urbanism and the City (London: Routledge, 2021), p. 274.

44 Zoya V. Silaeva and Mikita I. Fomenko, “The Phenomenon of ‘Enteo’ in the Contemporary Socio-Political Life of Russia,” *Amazonia Investiga* 7, no. 1 (February, 2018): 305–312.

45 Silaeva and Fomenko, p. 308.

46 Marlene Laruelle, “Russia’s Militia Groups and Their Use at Home and Abroad,” IFRI, April 2019, [https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/laruelle\\_russia\\_militia\\_groups\\_2019.pdf](https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/laruelle_russia_militia_groups_2019.pdf); Marlene Laruelle, “Ideological Complementarity or Competition? The Kremlin, the Church, and the Monarchist Idea in Today’s Russia,” *Slavic Review* 79, no. 2 (summer 2020): 345–364, <https://doi.org/10.1017/slr.2020.87>; Marlene Laruelle, *Is Russia Fascist? Unraveling Propaganda East and West* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021), <https://www.cornellpress.cornell.edu/book/9781501754135/is-russia-fascist-/>.

47 Marlene Laruelle, “Illiberalism: A Conceptual Introduction,” *East European Politics* 38, no. 2 (April 3, 2022): 303–327, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21599165.2022.2037079>.

and developed in Western Europe and North America. ... It is this view which, in the twentieth century, formed the basis for the activities of international organizations. ...

This freedom is given to [an individual] in order for him always to choose good: "Our freedom of self-determination (*autexousion*) is a gift that cannot be forced or corrupted. We have received it in order to move in two directions: good and bad. Nothing of what God has given us for our use is evil ... the only thing that is wrong is our abuse of our capacity for self-determination."<sup>48</sup>

Combating liberalism, Patriarch Kirill argues that the affordance of self-determination is one of *freedom to*, or the positive freedom of a collective to integrate normative Orthodox values into all domains of socio-political life. In this vein, Kirill envisions the Orthodox Church as an integral institution of a "multipolar" world where secular societies and Holy Tradition may coexist "harmoniously." Kirill posits that this "harmony" will promote fair democratic representation in global affairs and solve violence worldwide.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, to him, "terrorism in the twentieth century is not an inter-religious conflict ... it is a conflict between the new world order based on secular liberal values, and those who, exploiting religious and traditional values, seek to impose their own new world order."<sup>50</sup>

This begs the question: how do Patriarch Kirill and the ROC confront socio-political actors promoting liberal values both domestically and abroad? We argue that this critical junction is where Sorok Sorokov aligns with the ROC's ideology and in turn acts as Kirill's praetorian guard and the "left hand of God." As stated on its own website, "Sorok Sorokov is a social movement, consisting of Orthodox Christians, but open to everyone who seeks to defend the Fatherland and traditional spiritual and moral values."<sup>51</sup> This movement declares three main areas of focus in relation to the Russian Orthodox Church: (1) helping the Church implement the Patriarch's "200 churches" program in Moscow,<sup>52</sup> (2) promoting a healthy lifestyle through "Orthodoxy and sport," and (3) deconstructing myths about Orthodoxy as a religion of the weak, which, allegedly, has ideologically exhausted itself and attracts nobody.<sup>53</sup>

Sorok Sorokov not only assaults liberal opposition; its members routinely intimidate, threaten, assault, and attack institutions and individuals promoting liberal values through legislative, legal, or illegal methods.<sup>54</sup> Andrei Kormukhin describes himself as a "warrior of Christ," and describes these actions as a means to a "second baptism

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48 Kirill and Russkaia Pravoslavnaiia Tserkov', "Svoboda i otvetstvennost': v poiskah harmonii," *Prava cheloveka i dostoinstvo lichnosti*, (Moscow: Publishing House of the Moscow Patriarch, 2011), p. 33.

49 Kirill and Russkaia Pravoslavnaiia Tserkov', "Svoboda i otvetstvennost'," (Moscow: Publishing House of the Moscow Patriarch, 2011), p. 38.

50 Ibid, p. 37.

51 Dvizhenie Sorok Sorokov, "Sorok Sorokov," n.d., <https://sorokosorokov.ru/sorok-sorokov/>.

52 While Sorok Sorokov's mission statement says "200," this number is likely just an achievable goal within the larger discourse of "1,600." With its growing popularity it claims to have implemented various additional projects and initiatives.

53 Anna Lutskova De Bacci, "This Russian Christian Youth Movement Is Growing by Leaps and Bounds," *Pravoslavia.Ru* (blog), October 6, 2016, <https://pravoslavia.ru/97526.html>.

54 News.ru, "Sorok sorokov' obvinilo detskogo parikmakhera v propagande satanizma i zla," September 20, 2022, <https://news.ru/regions/v-lnr-zayavili-chto-izrail-nikogda-ne-stanet-postavlyat-oruzhie-ukraine/>; Valentina Rodionova, "Lider dvizheniia 'Sorok sorokov' otvetil na obvineniia v ekstremizme," *Ridus* (blog), December 3, 2021, <https://www.ridus.ru/lider-dvizheniya-sorok-sorokov-otvetil-na-obvineniya-v-ekstremizme-367841.html>.

of Russia.<sup>55</sup> While allegedly not acting under the direct orders of the Patriarchate, Sorok Sorokov enjoys a rather privileged position secured by the state and the ROC. Sorok Sorokov's actions, contrary to those of other radical, illiberal movements such as the "Christian State," go unpunished.<sup>56</sup> Its leadership has been legitimized by meetings with Duma representatives and input on legislative actions. For example, Andrei Kormukhin met with deputies of the State Duma group "For Christian Values" to discuss the legality of showing *Matilda* in Russia.<sup>57</sup> The group's legitimization by the ROC revolves around the fact that the patriarch has publicly acknowledged the movement. In 2015, Patriarch Kirill personally congratulated Kormukhin on his 45th birthday and presented him with an icon of Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker in the same styling as Sorok Sorokov's logo.<sup>58</sup> Sorok Sorokov has also been conducting operations in the combat zones of Donbas precisely when ROC officials have been unable to travel to those specific locations.<sup>59</sup>

Demonstrating further overt and covert connections between the ROC and Sorok Sorokov is beyond the scope of this work. Due to the radical nature and modus operandi of Sorok Sorokov, it is highly unlikely that the ROC will want to openly publicize this relationship. Therefore, in order to analyze the overt nature of this marriage of convenience and willful omissions from both sides, we focus on the ideological connections between Sorok Sorokov and the ROC to illustrate the nature of this dynamic. As Kormukhin says, "Our activities as traditionalists irritate many."<sup>60</sup> We argue that this form of traditionalism aligns with Kirill's views on Holy Tradition and is anything but irritating to him. We conclude that: (1) Sorok Sorokov does indeed function as a radical extension of Patriarch Kirill's views on Holy Tradition, and (2) that Sorok Sorokov operates as an illiberal service provider for the ROC in social contexts that Patriarch Kirill cannot directly address, such as war, sports, or radical nationalist politics.

Drawing upon Stoeckl's constructivist method, our approach is focused on the ROC's role as a "norm entrepreneur."<sup>61</sup> As a norm entrepreneur, the ROC constructs a cognitive frame specifically in opposition to rival (in this case liberal) frames. The ROC, by calling to attention issues that hitherto have not been named, imported, and dramatized, attempts to shift public perception towards accepting other norms—namely, illiberal ones. We derive these issues from qualitative analysis of Patriarch Kirill's writings. Since 1971, Patriarch Kirill has reportedly written 66 books and countless articles on Russian Orthodoxy and society.<sup>62</sup> While his writing often engages period-specific issues, for example Soviet-ROC relations, there are universal issues that are found across the whole collection. The Patriarchate published a collection of Patriarch Kirill's writings that highlights these universal issues titled

55 Radio Svoboda, "Dvizhenie 'Sorok sorokov' potrebovali proverit' na dostovernost'," December 7, 2021, <https://www.svoboda.org/a/dvizhenie-sorok-sorokov-potrebovali-proveritj-na-dostovernosti/31597612.html>.

56 Shapovalov, "Unholy Alliance."

57 Dmitriy Volchek, "Gvardeitsy RPTs," Radio Svoboda (blog), September 29, 2017, <https://www.svoboda.org/a/28762569.html>.

58 Radio Svoboda, "Dvizhenie 'Sorok sorokov' potrebovali proverit' na dostovernost'."

59 LIFE, "Mashinu s Glavoi 'Soroka Sorokov' obstreliali v Donbasse," September 18, 2022, <https://life.ru/p/1524680>.

60 Valentina Rodionova, "Lider dvizheniya 'Sorok sorokov' otvetil na obvineniia v ekstremizme," Ridus (blog), December 3, 2021, <https://www.ridus.ru/lider-dvizheniya-sorok-sorokov-otvetil-na-obvineniya-v-ekstremizme-367841.html>.

61 Kristina Stoeckl, "The Russian Orthodox Church as Moral Norm Entrepreneur," *Religion, State and Society* 44, no. 2 (April 2016): 132–51, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09637494.2016.1194010>.

62 Biografiia Sviateishego Patriarkha Moskovskogo i vseia Rusi Kirilla, "Sviateishii Patriarkh Kirill—avtor sleduiushchikh knig," n.d., <https://patriarch.patriarchia.ru/knigi/>.

Svoboda i odgovornost': v poiskah harmonii," *Prava cheloveka i dostoinstvo lichnosti*, ("Freedom and Responsibility: A Search for Harmony"—*Human Rights and Personal Dignity*). Following this collection, we propose the following analytical categories that mirror these universal issues:

TABLE 1. Socio-Political Issues Described across Patriarch Kirill's Works

Category	General description
Traditional religion in opposition to modern religion	The influence of modern social issues on theology
Russian ideology vs. Western liberal ideology	The individual in relation to societal hierarchies, through the framework of positive (freedom to) and negative (freedom from) freedoms
Secularization and tradition	The interaction between religious and secular institutions
Protestant and Orthodox religious beliefs	The features of religion that delineate Protestant, Western-backed religious beliefs from Eastern Orthodox Christian ones
Material and/or spiritual welfare	The relationship between one's own worldly objects and religious values
Civilizational models	The origins and embodiment of the foundational values of a whole society
Political identity	The intersection and magnitude of the relationship of one's identity to larger socio-political groups, institutions, or civilizations
Hierarchy of values	The hierarchical ordering of moral and social values within a social group
Economic inequality	The nature of inequality in material welfare

The ROC under Kirill has also made a move to publish its works and comments on these universal issues through the internet. In 1997, Patriarch Alexy II blessed the World Wide Web and information technology as a new possibility for Orthodox missionary work, but it was not until 2005 that the Press Service of the Moscow Patriarchate launched its official website, [patriarchia.ru](http://patriarchia.ru). On March 21, 2009, only two months after Kirill was elevated to patriarch, Kirill and the Holy Synod formed the Synodal Information Department (SID) under Vladimir Legoyda. Legoyda was also entrusted with the [patriarchia.ru](http://patriarchia.ru) domain as a means to SID's pursuit of its larger plan to "form a unified information policy of the ROC, coordinate the work of diocese and synodal information units, and interact with Orthodox and secular media."<sup>63</sup> With dioceses, deaneries, and parishes already moving to deliver

63 "ZhURNALY zasedaniia Sviashennogo Sinoda Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi ot 31 marta 2009 goda," Moscow: Russian Orthodox Church, March 31, 2009, <https://patriarch.patriarchia.ru/informatsionnaya-rabota/>.

information digitally through their own, independent websites, Kirill sought to use this department to align these groups under the ROC's hierarchical structure and ideology. Prikhod, the website builder designed by Legoyda for the SID in 2009, states that only "official" Orthodox entities could create websites, and only after they were approved by an editorial board would they be published and added to the ROC's "global map of Orthodox Churches" project: "It's easier together. It is easier to move forward, help each other, develop, learn and do it well, with an understanding of the matter. The Orthodox Internet should be presented at a decent and a serious level."<sup>64</sup>

Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin further explains this position, stating that anonymous actors use the internet and their anonymity to influence families away from original, Church-oriented norms without repercussion. The internet can have "a huge impact on the family, sometimes posing as a threat to [the family's] safety."<sup>65</sup> Thus, the ROC seeks to present itself and its digital platforms as a unified Orthodox Internet sphere in order to combat encroaching Western values that target Orthodox norms and structures—Western values denoted as homosexuality, freedom of the individual from any form of collective, euthanasia, abortion, etc.

In order to acquire texts and content to be used as primary-source material for analysis, we therefore scraped two sections from patriarchia.ru, namely the sections titled "Church and Society" and "Church and State," from October 2004 through July 2021. The content of these two sections is similar to Patriarch Kirill's writings, in that they highlight contemporary (2009–2021) local and global socio-political issues. Their contents are also reactionary in that they describe how socio-political issues should be interpreted from an *illiberal Orthodox* perspective.

For example, a month after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, patriarchia.ru put out a transcribed lecture delivered by the first deputy chairman of the Synodal Department for Church Relations with Society and the Media, Aleksandr Shchipkov, which was presented at the all-Russian scientific and theological conference titled "The Bishop in the Life of the Church: Theology, History, Law." In his words, "Patriarch Kirill often speaks out on the most contested and acute problems, whether it is international conflicts, a pandemic or digitalization." In this piece, Shchipkov labels the war as a "metaphysical conflict" and exculpates Russia as the aggressor, noting that the West's "declaration" of war was meant to combat the growing idea of "Russian" as a critical component of Patriarch Kirill's view of Holy Tradition.<sup>66</sup>

This piece is an illustrative sample of rhetorical deployment of the ROC's ideology under Patriarch Kirill. We captured this example alongside 37,444 other posts appearing on the patriarchia.ru website that showcase the unfiltered, anti-Western and anti-liberal ideology of the ROC.

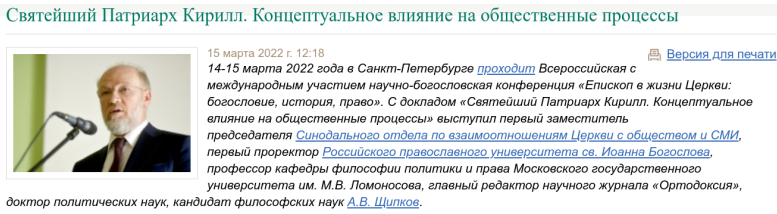
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64 Prikhod, "O PROEKTE," n.d., <http://prihod.ru/o-proekte/>.

65 Ofitsial'nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, "Predsedatel' Izdatel'skogo Soveta Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi prinial uchastie v rabote kruglogo stola, posviashchennogo vlianiiu internet-prostranstva na zdorov'e sem'i," blog, July 2018, <http://eparhia.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5235509.html>.

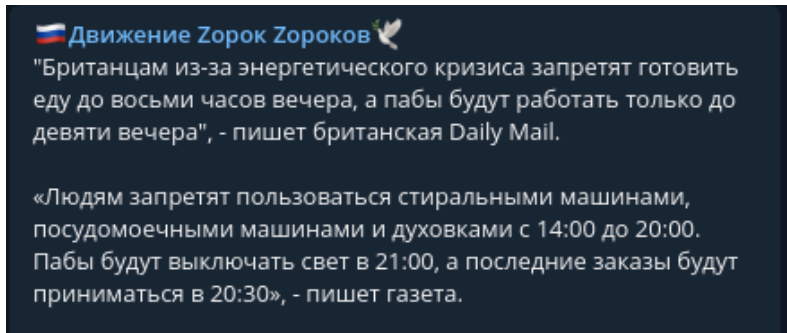
66 Ofitsial'nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, "Patriarkh Kirill neredko vyskazyvaetsia po samym diskussionnym i ostrym problemam. Bud' to mezhdunarodnye konflikty pandemiia ili tsifrovizatsia," and "Sviateishii Patriarkh Kirill. Kontseptual'noe vliianie na obshchestvennye protsessy," March 15, 2022, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5908596.html>. Note that the original source is ambiguous as to what it is referring to as "Russian." Note also that no NATO member state has actually declared war on Russia.

FIGURE 1. Illustrative sample of news from the patriarchia.ru website



Sorok Sorokov’s digital discourse is similar to the ROC’s; however, its messaging is primarily done over the Telegram platform. Telegram functions similarly to Twitter: Sorok Sorokov sends its messages as “broadcasts,” or public-facing messages presented in a timeline similar to an RSS feed. The Sorok Sorokov Telegram channel (@sorok4orussia) was created on October 13, 2017 and has been steadily growing since. At the time of writing, it has reached 63,500 subscribers with a monthly growth of 3%–5%. Compared to the rest of Russian Telegram, Sorok Sorokov does not come close to being on the top 100 most subscribed list (#100 cuts off at 652,273); however, the channel is still quite active. It posts as many as 30 broadcasts a day, and each post averages 32,000 views after one week. The Sorok Sorokov channel also has a sizable outreach within Telegram as it has been cited 43,388 times by other Telegram channels, from smaller subscriber bases to the top channels in Russia. Sorok Sorokov’s broadcasts depict third-party news pieces with added commentary through which they often depict anti-Western, anti-liberal socio-political worldviews accompanied by calls to action and thereby work as “digital vigilantes.”<sup>67</sup> A recent illustrative example is contained in a broadcast sent on September 3, 2022:

FIGURE 2. An illustrative example of a Sorok Sorokov Telegram broadcast



In this post, Sorok Sorokov reacts to a *Daily Mail* article<sup>68</sup> predicting upcoming power regulations in the UK following the Russian cut-off of oil and gas to Europe.

67 Galina V. Lukyanova, Denis S. Martyanov, and Anna V. Volkova, “Value Determinants of Digital Vigilante’s [sic] Communication Strategies,” in 2022 *Communication Strategies in Digital Society Seminar* (ComSDS), 224–227 (Saint Petersburg, Russia: Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1109/ComSDS55328.2022.9769100>.

68 Elizabeth Haigh, Mark Duell, and Arthur Parashar, “The Worst Is Yet to Come: Britons Are Told to Expect Double Digit Inflation until NEXT Winter after Ofgem’s Energy Price Cap Hike as UK Faces the Biggest Cost of Living Squeeze since the 1950s,” *Daily Mail*, August 26, 2022, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11150389/The-worst-come-Britons-told-expect-double-digit-inflation-winter.html>.

Sorok Sorokov comments that these potential regulations are not the UK reacting to the war in Ukraine, but rather one step towards winning the battle between World Orders. For Sorok Sorokov, the West is attempting to win this metaphysical war by instilling “digital fascism” and creating “electronic concentration camps” against those with Russian ideologies.<sup>69</sup> Other posts by Sorok Sorokov give greater detail on this metaphysical war. Russians with traditional values as their World Order<sup>70</sup> are facing the “New World Order” of the West—the LGBT 4th Reich,<sup>71</sup> globalists,<sup>72</sup> transhumanists,<sup>73</sup> feminists,<sup>74</sup> Marxists,<sup>75</sup> Leninists,<sup>76</sup> etc.—“who, since the 19th century, destroyed the institution of a traditional, large family,<sup>77</sup> as the foundations of national states.” Sorok Sorokov’s Telegram posts often follow with final lines promoting a call to action. In one such instance, Sorok Sorokov promotes expansion beyond the Donbas region of Ukraine and ends the post as follows: “It’s time to call things by their proper names. Our investigators have collected a lot of evidence of this terrorist activity of [the Nazi Ukrainian State, NUS] and the structural units of this NUS, such as ‘Azov’ and ‘Right Sector’ in different states, including in the United States, are recognized as criminal or terrorist. Only under such circumstances will we begin to conduct an ideologically correct Special Operation.”<sup>78</sup> We collected a wide range of messaging from Sorok Sorokov, with a total of 11,719 such broadcasts.

With the two corpora (37,444 from patriarchia.ru and 11,719 from Sorok Sorokov’s Telegram channel, respectively), we then devised a means to select the most salient documents. We collected 200 corresponding religious and social terms from Runet (the Russian-language community on the internet) word embeddings to query the corpora. Word embeddings are the representations of words that are learned from surrounding contexts. For each word in a corpus, the resulting embeddings are represented as mathematical vectors in relation to the rest of the words in the corpus. We chose GeoWAC<sup>79</sup> word embeddings for this case due to multiple reasons. These include the size of the corpus, containing 2.1 billion words built on Runet discourse, as well as its ability “to correct implicit geographic and demographic biases. ... The resulting corpora explicitly match the ground-truth geographic distribution of each language, thus equally representing language users from around the world.”<sup>80</sup>

Word embeddings are crucial to avoid overfitting between the two corpora. If we only choose the most popular words from within the patriarchia.ru posts, we potentially miss broader contexts that arise from the use of context-defined synonyms. An important example would be the use of “tradition.” While the Patriarchate and Sorok Sorokov both use “tradition” to mean a specifically Russian Orthodox foundation

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69 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, September 3, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/32957>.

70 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, September 26, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/33533>.

71 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, September 26, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/33533>.

72 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, September 26, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/33533>.

73 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, September 26, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/33533>.

74 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, March 6, 2021, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/16841>. Feminists are sometimes also referred to derogatorily as “me-too-ists.”

75 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, March 6, 2021, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/16841>.

76 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, March 6, 2021, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/16841>.

77 This is sometimes referred to as the “great reset” by Sorok Sorokov.

78 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, September 3, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/32958>.

79 Jonathan Dunn and Benjamin Adams, “Geographically-Balanced Gigaword Corpora for 50 Language Varieties,” *Proceedings of the 12th Conference on Language Resources and Evaluation (LREC 2020)* (Christchurch, New Zealand: University of Canterbury, 2020), 2528–36, <https://aclanthology.org/2020.lrec-1.308.pdf>.

80 Dunn and Adams, “Geographically-Balanced Gigaword Corpora,” 2528.



for societal norms, the use of “original” shows different stances towards origins and demographic demarcations in tradition. The ROC’s usage of “original” is used to denote a reinstating of ethnic and cultural origins in the style of Gumilevian ethnogenesis.<sup>81</sup> One such example discusses Cossack “originality.”<sup>82</sup> However, Sorok Sorokov’s usage of “original”<sup>83</sup> discusses the origins of a strong, national, Russian ideal, original in regard to previous iterations of a strong Russia. Our use of word embeddings to query our corpora not only links categorical terms between the corpora, but it also links the contexts of said terms, giving way to a more salient comparison.

We also query our corpora with the top 100 most frequent words from each corpus, which allows us to avoid overfitting on the categories. While we denoted that only using words from the corpora would lead to overfitting, there is also a possibility of overfitting by grouping documents only on our category-defined word embeddings. Due to the fact that we defined the initial words from our analytical categories, we may be missing the degree to which these documents actually talk across said categories. Thus, by using word frequencies we address (and nullify) this two-tailed hypothesis. By using word frequencies, we elevate the number of matches because we have more possible query matches. If we have a large number of matches between the corpora from word frequencies, but the ideology is more tangential to our categories, that could imply that Sorok Sorokov is either co-opting other illiberal groups or it is defining its own version of illiberalism. If the increase in matches corresponds to an increase in correlation across categories, that implies that Sorok Sorokov is a forefront force, or the *praetorian guard*, of the ROC. Likewise, should the comparison across categories drastically differ with a large number of matches, it would imply that the future of the ROC’s illiberal ideology could fracture along these differences, or worse, harden to match that of Sorok Sorokov.

Our matching algorithm is a method of calculating keyword frequencies. Given our list of frequencies and word embeddings, we iterate over the corpora and determine if any of these terms are found within the document. We then return the document alongside how many and which specific terms were found. After iteration, we bin the top 20 documents from each corpus with the most hits and qualitatively analyze their contents. The resulting distilled corpus totals 120 documents. One drawback of this methodology is that the longer the original document is, the more likely it is to discuss the keyword and thus get a “hit.” However, we avoid this drawback because shorter documents, even if they are ideologically dense and thus would not result in as many hits, are callbacks to longer documents within the corpora that contain detailed descriptions of the ideology being espoused. Likewise, we presume that not normalizing document length will also allow us to analyze the broader contexts as in the example of the use of “tradition.” Aside from the content discourse analysis stage, we find that this method allows a more accurate analysis and comparison between the ROC’s and Sorok Sorokov’s ideological manifestations within the texts. Our methodology can be visualized in Figure 3 (below):

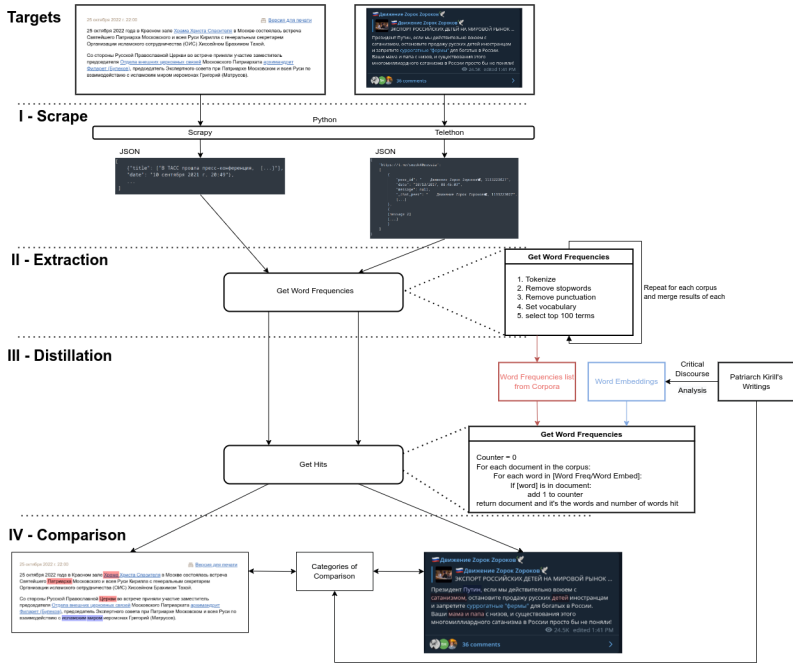
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81 By “Gumilevian,” we mean to relate the Patriarch’s ideas of “origin” in spirituality of a people to be sui generis and a biological feature of the human organism. See Mark Bassin, *The Gumilev Mystique: Biopolitics, Eurasianism, and the Construction of Community in Modern Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.7591/9781501703393>.

82 Ofitsial’nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, “V Sevastopole zavershilsia II Evraziiskii forum ‘Kazach’e edinstvo,’” June 28, 2017, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/4943104.html>.

83 Sorok Sorokov [forwarded from ✕ ○ Posledniy Russkii], Telegram broadcast, October 31, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/34743>.

FIGURE 3. Methodology summary and research stages visualization



## Results and Discussion

In order to demonstrate this dynamic, we first analyze the structural similarities and differences between the two outlets, as we acknowledge the fact that each outlet has inherently different messaging functionalities and each outlet caters to different segments of the Russian-speaking audience. These differences include the fact that patriarchia.ru is functioning as a universal information portal for all ROC dioceses across multiple languages, whereas Sorok Sorokov's Telegram channel is a direct line of communication to its followers. Patriarchia.ru's diverse broadcasting contains multiple heterogeneous sections, ranging from the repository of doctrinal documents to its "Church and state" or "Church and society" news provisions. In contrast, Sorok Sorokov's Telegram is a singular channel for interaction that combines news, commentary, and content forwarded from other Russian media platforms, be they Telegram, Vkontakte, etc. In terms of functionality, both domains perform their own agenda-setting, issue selection, and framing and saliency; however, their approaches towards the application specifics differ.

These differences affect the length and form of messaging in these domains, as the posts on Telegram tend to be much shorter than a typical news piece on patriarchia.ru. Our method takes into account these structural differences and we find that these differences of form do not impact the functionality or the aims of either outlet. Both information outlets aim to distill socio-political news and events into packets of digestible information as filtered through their respective ideological lenses. For

example, in Figures 2 and 3 above, each of the pieces describes only the most salient informational features from a broader event.

Yet these outlets' messaging style and tone differ substantially. Patriarchia.ru's style is "accepting" and "open" in a sense that it broadcasts an Orthodox ideal laden with universal norms. At face value, this universal ideal appears passive. In the Church's outreach to minority groups, for example, the ROC will often appeal to a minority group's own set of values rather than force Traditional Orthodox ones. The ROC's style avoids antagonizing groups that it believes it can bring under its aegis of socio-political concerns, or those it aligns with (such as *Russkii mir*<sup>84</sup>). In contrast, Sorok Sorokov's Telegram channel appears to be more active and aggressive. Possibly due to the nature of Telegram broadcast channels being "joinable," Sorok Sorokov's style presupposes that its readership in its majority represents individuals who espouse pronounced, traditionalist, Russian Orthodox worldviews. The commenters also address their viewers directly, often with calls to action.

While both view the degeneration of Orthodox values as corresponding to a present state of apocalypse, the Patriarchate is proactive about preventing further breakdown.<sup>85</sup> At the same time, Sorok Sorokov believes that more extreme preventive measures must be adopted.<sup>86</sup> However, in spite of these differences, Sorok Sorokov's alignment with the ROC's worldview is quite salient. The broadcasts by Sorok Sorokov sometimes involve direct quotations from Patriarch Kirill's addresses and often direct quotes from published news articles found on patriarchia.ru. While the assumed readerships contain differences, and while the content is stylistically different, Sorok Sorokov often rehashes the ideology of the ROC and shapes the presentation of the ROC's worldview for its more direct audience.

When comparing the content captured and collected from both domains, we find that the majority of the data, across our analytical categories, exhibits significant overlaps in terms of manifested political ideation. The categories we introduced, and our qualitative analysis of the socio-political worldviews as exhibited by the two domains across said categories, are described in the following section.

## **Traditional Religions and Modern Religions**

Both patriarchia.ru and Sorok Sorokov denote traditional theology as inherent to the foundation of the moral norms of healthy "traditional" societies. However, contact with or appeasement towards loaded policy issues, such as gender, individual rights and freedoms, or globalization, inevitably leads to a denigration of traditional religion and a direct subversion of key social pillars. The denigration and erosion of these pillars also leads to extreme social polarization, division, and rupture. The ROC's definition of Holy Tradition as stated in the introduction initially contradicts

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84 "According to the statements of its numerous supporters, the 'Russkii Mir' is a concept defining the alleged premises concerning the cultural and, consequently, political unity of the post-Soviet space. What is important to bear in mind is that this community sees itself as separate and different from the West." See Michał Wawrzonek, "The Concept of 'Russkii Mir,'" *Dynamics and Policies of Prejudice from the Eighteenth to the Twenty-First Century* (2018), 289, ISBN: 978-1-5275-0862-0 .

85 Ofitsial'nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, "Mitropolit Volokolamskii Ilarion: My budem prodolzhat' napominat' vsemu miru o khristianskom nasledii, kotoroe seichas podvergaetsia poruganiuu," September 17, 2020, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5692387.html>.

86 Sorok Sorokov, forwarded from [ru NPKRossii - Dokumentalist Chupakhin], Telegram broadcast, November 15, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/35208>; Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, October 17, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/34291>.

this no-contact policy;<sup>87</sup> however, the ROC envisions the Church as the ultimate keeper of tradition and thus are decoding contemporary issues in a proper manner.

A good illustration of this dynamic within the two corpora is their understanding of radical Islamic terrorism. This is visible in the patriarchia.ru's depiction of radical Islam as being both a product of, and a tool of, Western political leaders. "Journalists in the West turn a blind eye to: in all countries of the Middle East where political regimes change Radical Islamists come to power with the help of Western powers who aim at the complete eradication of Christianity in the region."<sup>88</sup> In the ROC's view, modern religions,<sup>89</sup> denoted as radicalizations away from traditional religions, such as radical Islam, are thus a major threat to national security. Sorok Sorokov also interprets modern religions as a radicalization away from traditional religions. They align with the ROC in terms of radical Islam being a product and tool of Western powers to remove Christianity. While the argument may seem contradictory on its face, the comparison being made is only one part of a larger conspiratorial narrative. Both the ROC and Sorok Sorokov use rhetorical victimization in an attempt to turn identification into radicalization. The issues of the world must: (1) be connected to a larger cabal of anti-traditional elites, and (2) these must be in furtherance of the goal, either out of fear or malice, to remove traditional religions from the world. This cabal must be creating a deteriorated version of a traditional religion to destroy Christianity on multiple levels. On one level, it undermines the traditional religion of Islam. On another, it is being used to directly eliminate Christianity.

In another example, Sorok Sorokov uses the refugee crisis in Europe as an example of Western elites using radical Islam to put Christians "under lock and key."<sup>90</sup> Sorok Sorokov also invokes the logic of degeneration when discussing the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. "[The] Patriarchate of Constantinople, which has departed from the Orthodox faith, for anti-Christian globalists," represents the transformation of a once traditional religion into a tool for the West against the Russian Orthodox Church and Russia more broadly.<sup>91</sup> Ukraine's shift towards the West is a threat to national security because, as Sorok Sorokov notes, this type of shift undermines traditional Orthodox dogma,<sup>92</sup> which will result in the radicalization of its people.<sup>93</sup>

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87 Russian Orthodox Church Department for External Church Relations, "Basis of the Social Concept," p. 13.

88 Ofitsial'nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, "Predsedatel' OVTsS prinial delegatsiiu nemetskikh zhurnalistov," July 23, 2013, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/3117207.html>.

89 "Modern religions," as used in this article, refer to Patriarch Kirill's articulation of this term. For Kirill, these are any religions that have turned away from or deviated from their authentic archetypes, regardless of agency. The term "modern" was specifically chosen because of Patriarch Kirill's articulation of these deviations often resulting from modernity and its moral corruption. For example, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine is a "modern religion" in Kirill's terms, because it has broken from the Russian Orthodox Church due to its political alignment with the West. As another example, radical Islam is considered a "modern religion" because it has deviated from the fundamental tenets of traditional Islam as a reaction to the moral decay of the West. It should be noted that the Russian Orthodox Church is not a "modern religion" because, while it is reactionary towards the West in our understanding, it sees itself as a keeper and defender of the true tradition and is therefore not reactionary, but continuous.

90 Sorok Sorokov [forwarded from GOLOVANOV], Telegram broadcast, November 1, 2020, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/13902>.

91 Sorok Sorokov [forwarded from Pravoslavnoe Soprotivlenie Velikoy, Maloy i Beloy Rusi], Telegram broadcast, July 6, 2020, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/10830>.

92 In this case, Sorok Sorokov references specific heresies against Orthodox dogma in relation to marriage. However, it should be noted that the "illegal" granting of the *tomos* (decree of autocephalacy, or national church denominational autonomy within Eastern Orthodox Christianity) to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine in 2019 and the subsequent messaging by Patriarch Kirill denotes the OCU as heretical regardless of direct examples.

93 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, April 25, 2019, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/3278>.

## **Russian and Western Liberal Ideology**

Both domains are preoccupied with the issues of the inherent tension between the position of an individual in relation to a societal milieu. Both corpora focus mainly on issues related to positive and negative freedoms, or “freedom to” and “freedom from,” respectively. This preoccupation is manifested through Sorok Sorokov’s frequent calls to action that are radical outgrowths of the more passive messaging tone of patriarchia.ru.

Illustrative examples of this dynamic could be found in Sorok Sorokov’s appeal to individual ethics in decisions to get vaccinated against covid-19. The ethical appeals concern not the ethics of the singular individual, but rather the individual’s position within the framework of a larger social collective—in this sense, the Russian Orthodox collective.<sup>94</sup> Patriarchia.ru similarly depicts the issue of individual freedoms in its description of illicit drug use and HIV: “the use of drugs is contrary to the ‘calling to life,’ from a moral point of view, it is ‘a refusal to think, desire, and act as a free person.’”<sup>95</sup> A “free person” in this context has two meanings: (1) the first is that illicit drug use traps the user in a cycle of addiction in which he or she becomes unable to act at all; (2) the second is that individuals who use illicit drugs are already individualistic in the negative sense of freedom (freedom from ...) and must then be cared for in a collective sense—specifically in the care of the church and the family. Western means of combatting their addiction—replacement drug therapy and individual care and counseling—merely lead an individual back to illicit drug use. Both patriarchia.ru and Sorok Sorokov regard this Russian Orthodox collective (similar in thought to *Russkii mir*) as being afforded the freedom to draft and affirm a multipolar world order in direct opposition to globalization and the “freedom from.” In this formulation, patriarchia.ru again holds to a more passive messaging strategy, while Sorok Sorokov invokes a call to action to defend the homeland against encroaching globalist values.<sup>96</sup>

## **Secularization and Tradition**

As above, both information outlets intensively focus on the impact of modern ideals; however, they also focus on how the networks through which these ideals move. In the case of institutions (namely schools, but also including political institutions) both patriarchia.ru and Sorok Sorokov note that these institutions themselves do not per se corrupt an Orthodox ideal, but rather that they are dangerous due to their possibility of being bundled together with secular ideals. Likewise, these institutions can be considered as soft targets for secular actors to indoctrinate children, the core of the family unit.<sup>97</sup> It is particularly pronounced in the Patriarchate’s concerns about the secular education young people receive in the course of their schooling that leaves them “ignorant” of the great Russian traditions in art, literature, and culture and pushes them towards an “empty” consumer culture, and a popular culture of “the lowest quality” that has highly destructive potential.<sup>98</sup> Secularized institutions are corrupted in the eyes of the ROC, and both the ROC and Sorok Sorokov call

94 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, June 17, 2021, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/18936>; Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, June 17th, 2021, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/18918>.

95 Ofitsial'nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, “V Otdel vnesnikh tserkovnykh sviazei proshla vstrecha, posviashchennaia uchastiiu Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi v profilaktike i bor'be s VICH/SPIDom,” February 11, 2019, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5371475.html>.

96 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, February 7, 2021, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/16325>.

97 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, May 20, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/30084>.

98 Ofitsial'nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, “Sviatishii Patriarkh Kirill vozglavil zasedanie Patriarshego soвета po kul'ture,” February 20, 2020, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5594607.html>.

attention to the dangers of engrained ideals within them. In line with the ROC, Sorok Sorokov admonishes those in power rather than the institutions themselves. Schools with Orthodox teachings are the “traditional” form of education, and these are being “voluntarily and forcibly ... destroyed” through digitization.<sup>99</sup> These corrupted, secular institutions then baptize children into the rites and “faith” of the West, destroying countries from within.<sup>100</sup>

### **Protestantism vs. Eastern Orthodox Christianity**

Between Sorok Sorokov and the Patriarchate, only the Patriarchate explicitly brings to the forefront any differences between Protestantism and Eastern Orthodox Christianity (such as the power or function of the head of a church). This is primarily due to the difference in the function of the messaging and the perceived audiences. Furthermore, while the ROC recognizes such differences, it does not speak to them in overly critical terms, most likely in order to garner an air of authority and to maintain an alliance against secular modernity. Thus, when the ROC does discuss Western Christianity or Islam, it does so in familial terms—all forms of traditional religion, both East and West, are brothers in arms. For Western Christendom, the ROC states that both Eastern and Western versions of Christianity “have the potential for such cooperation which can bring Christian power to bear on many issues of the concerns of mankind today.”<sup>101</sup> For Hanafi Islam,<sup>102</sup> or other Eastern and Orthodox religious groups,<sup>103</sup> the ROC’s sentiment is the same. Eastern and Orthodox religious communities share a common traditional base that the ROC feels it must form an alliance with in order to defend against encroaching modernism and/or individual liberalism. The ROC’s logic structure for inter-religious alliance-building is as follows: (1) all forms of Christianity share an ancient truth developed by ancient church fathers; (2) modernity, in the present and in history, causes reactions and evolutions in religious thinking; (3) these reactions are distortions that lead to the fracturing of Christianity and traditional religions more broadly.<sup>104</sup>

Sorok Sorokov, due to the self-selected nature of its audience, rarely speaks to this distinction. In our distilled dataset, there is only one single mention of Islam. This singular mention is made in a commentary by Sorok Sorokov on the possible reconciliation of the Russian and Ukrainian Orthodox Churches. In this instance,

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99 Sorok Sorokov [forwarded from RIA KATYuShA], Telegram broadcast, November 3, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/34842>.

100 Sorok Sorokov [forwarded from Yuriy Baranchik], Telegram broadcast, October 30, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/34704>.

101 Ofitsial’nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, “Sviateishii Patriarkh Kirill vstretitsia s glavami diplomaticheskikh missii latinoamerikanskikh stran v Rossiiskoi Federatsii,” June 8, 2017, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/4929055.html>.

102 Hanafi Islam differs in the ROC worldview from other forms because “radical” Islam, according to the ROC, is born from struggles with modernity and not developed from “tradition.” Thus the ROC speaks to Hanafi Islam: “we should distinguish between traditional Islam and so-called radical Islamism or, more precisely, terrorism under Islamic slogans, which the leaders of traditional Islam disavow.” Ofitsial’nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, “Predsedatel’ OVTsS prinal delegatsiiu nemetskikh zhurnalistov,” July 23, 2013, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/3117207.html>.

103 Explicitly stated as (Hanafi) Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism in this source. Ofitsial’nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, “Predsedatel’ Otdela vneshnikh tserkovnykh sviazei prinal uchastie v otkrytii VI Vsemirnogo kongressa rossiiskikh sootchestvennikov, prozhivaiushchikh za rubezhom,” October 31, 2018, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5294085.html>.

104 Ofitsial’nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, “Mitropolit Kirill: Torzhestvo po sluchaiu 1020-letia Kievskoi Rusi yavili torzhestvo Pravoslaviia,” June 30, 2008, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/443064.html>. It should also be noted that religious groups in general will always present themselves as the holders of the correct church or other ecclesial tradition. What is most important here is how the ROC is positioning itself as a holder of truth that can shape geopolitics from an anti-Western perspective.

Sorok Sorokov points to the fallibility of Islamic scripture in regard to the institution of marriage.

Even though Sorok Sorokov makes the same distinctions that the ROC does, Sorok Sorokov does not make these a hallmark of its messaging. However, its position on the Ukrainian Orthodox Church implies a close following of the ROC's calls for co-belligerency. Sorok Sorokov's comments that traditional religions, such as the ancient Ukrainian Orthodox Church (under the Moscow Patriarchate), can be corrupted away from traditional values, imply that traditional religions should form a defensive alliance. Based on this position, they can disregard their doctrinal differences with Islam—so long as Islam's underlying values are interpreted in a traditional sense, they can be tolerated.

### **Material Welfare and Spiritual Welfare**

The Patriarchate divides any individual's well-being into two categories: material and spiritual. Similarly to the distinction between heaven and its theological arrangement on Earth in the form of the church, the church delineates material welfare as a means of supporting and achieving such an arrangement in the welfare of an individual. Material welfare is anything that can be directly measured monetarily or implicitly understood, such as social status. However, it must be used to orient oneself towards the *ecclesia* (that is, the church or community of believers). When one only holds onto one's material possessions, rather than using or spending them to further the *ecclesia* one acts as a societal black hole, giving nothing in return. Such individuals threaten the *ecclesia* and are a potential source of conflict.<sup>105</sup> In Patriarch Kirill's view, this distinction falls on how an individual understands free will.<sup>106</sup> Free will allows man to act with disposition (Greek: *proairesis*) and self-determination (*autexousion*); disposition determines the rewards and punishment an individual incurs from how they use self-determination.<sup>107</sup> In other words, material wealth and consumerism are indicative of one's abuse of self-determination and they are thus detrimental to society. However, self-determination is neither "heroic" nor "moral" and must be accompanied with the correct disposition towards materiality.

Sorok Sorokov, similar to the ROC, considers materialist culture as corrosive to traditional religious values and secondary to spiritual welfare. However, unlike the ROC, Sorok Sorokov does not discuss material and spiritual welfare as malleable or navigable. Sorok Sorokov, rather, considers material welfare as the lesser of the two, but recognizes that material welfare and spiritual welfare are both means to protect "human life," "human rights," and the "moral and ethical norms" of Russians globally.<sup>108</sup> Sorok Sorokov, by not delineating the two, implies that objects of Russian culture are in and of themselves inherently spiritually Russian. This marks Sorok Sorokov as more overtly political than the ROC, as the former indicates a tolerance towards Russian-origin material culture and a disdain for "external cultural and information expansion."<sup>109</sup>

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105 Ofitsial'nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, "Predstoiatel' Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi prinial uchastie v zasedanii Prezidiuma Mezhreligioznogo soveta SNG," November 28, 2011, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/1787386.html>.

106 Kirill and Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov', "Svoboda i otvetstvennost'," p. 71.

107 Kirill and Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov', "Svoboda i otvetstvennost'," pg. 42.

108 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, March 13, 2021, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/16972>.

109 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, March 13, 2021, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/16972>.

This difference highlights how Sorok Sorokov acts beyond the purview of the Church and is able to overstep theological constraints, unlike the ROC. Sorok Sorokov is able to position itself as protector of *Russkii mir* against external material and spiritual threats because it is not bound by *The Basis of the Social Concept* like the ROC is. The ROC is specifically bound by the principle of *symphonia*, which “is essentially co-operation, mutual support and mutual responsibility without [the church or state] side intruding into the exclusive domain of the other.”<sup>110</sup> Because Sorok Sorokov is not officially an arm of the ROC, it can defend against the importation of Western materialist culture. In contrast, while the ROC does dictate its positions on the import of culture, cultural material, and technology, it generally avoids direct confrontation in legal or political disputes concerning these matters.<sup>111</sup> Thus, we witness a partial overlap between the ROC and Sorok Sorokov’s stance towards material and spiritual welfare, but Sorok Sorokov provides an actionable nuance.

### Civilizational Models

The ROC loosely defines a civilization as a common group of people who share a common meaning of being. For the ROC, the meaning of being can be found in the “inexhaustible source of Orthodox faith” inherent to Russia since it is the world’s largest defender of Orthodox Christian faith.<sup>112</sup> Modern civilization stands in opposition to the Russian, Orthodox civilizational model. Modern civilization, as a godless one, attempts to find meaning in the physical world—advancing technologically, economically, and politically by cannibalizing the collective under the premise of Western individualism. Modern civilization thus also disrupts the borders between and within social groups—borders that define moral norms.

One example is the ROC’s description of Ukraine. In 2008, Patriarch Kirill described the relationship as follows: “Russia, Ukraine, Belarus – is Holy Russia. Consciousness of belonging to a single spiritual civilizational system of values is in the blood of all of us. ... We understand the importance of preserving a common civilizational space which is called Holy Russia.”<sup>113</sup> Then, in 2019, Metropolitan Hilarion stated that Europe (and by this point, Ukraine as it was shifting towards the West) had rejected the moral foundations of European civilization—namely, Christianity—leading to an unstable development: “it is identity that sets the system of value coordinates of a particular social community. However, the main problem of modern European civilization is that it has ceased to be European. This happened as a result of the voluntary rejection by the political leadership of the European Union from the foundations of European identity, the main of which is Christianity.”<sup>114</sup>

Sorok Sorokov discusses civilization as it is defined in a specifically Russian context, building on the distinctions made by the ROC and showing the radicalization of the ROC’s general ideation. To Sorok Sorokov, Russia is a thousand-year-old civilization born from the Byzantine and Russian Empires. It is a civilization “permeated with

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110 The Russian Orthodox Church Department for External Church Relations, “Basis of the Social Concept,” p. 13.

111 Oftsial’nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, “Spor vinodelov i chuvstva veruiushchikh,” February 15, 2022, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5901120.html>.

112 Oftsial’nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, “Sviatishii Patriarkh Aleksii otvetil na voprosy ‘Rossiiskoi gazety,’” June 15, 2005, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/24886.html>.

113 Oftsial’nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, “Mitropolit Kirill: ‘Torzhestvo po sluchaiu 1020-letiiia Kievskoi Rusi yavili torzhestvo Pravoslaviia,’” June 30, 2008, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/443064.html>.

114 Oftsial’nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, “Mitropolit Volokolamskii Ilarion vystupil s dokladom na mezhdunarodnom forume khristianskikh zhurnalistov ‘Khristianstvo v sovremennom mire,’” September 6, 2019, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5496447.html>.



traditional spiritual and moral values, where faith, prayer, and traditions formed a single fabric of the people.<sup>115</sup> Based upon Russian Orthodox Church teaching as the foundation for culture, education, economy, and law, Sorok Sorokov believes this would likewise rid Russia of its enemies, such as the Jews or black Russians,<sup>116</sup> if it were to be reinstated as the basis of Russia's current national identity.<sup>117</sup> In contrast, Western civilization is an attempt to build on the ruins of traditional civilizations, such as the ruins of Christian Europe: "[Western civilization's] characteristic features will be humanism, unity with nature, convergence of science and [Eastern] mysticism."<sup>118</sup> The resulting "new civilization" will be a Frankenstein's monster of Western enlightenment thinking, and not be based on Christianity at all.<sup>119</sup> Western civilizational models must be fought against because they lead "black Russians"<sup>120</sup> (and other minorities) into false ideologies and false spiritualities. Sorok Sorokov claims that this anti-Western framework was the basis for Russia's involvement in the Great Patriotic War (as the Second World War is known in Russia) and this is a continuation of this doctrine today.<sup>121</sup>

The ROC and Sorok Sorokov are well aligned at this ideological juncture—both feel as though they are defending the *Russkii mir* civilizational model. However, Sorok Sorokov advocates for physical "self-defense"<sup>122</sup> in this ideological battle—a battle emphasized by the invasion of Ukraine,<sup>123</sup> but which had started 10 years ago, when Sorok Sorokov was chasing LGBT groups in Moscow.<sup>124</sup>

## Political Identity

Sorok Sorokov suggests that Orthodox values are not only a part of Russian identity,<sup>125</sup> but that they function as a "soft power" instrument swaying those in the secular West

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115 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, March 8, 2021, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/16866>.

116 While Sorok Sorokov rarely mentions "Jews," they often allude to them in anti-Semitic, conspiratorial terms. Sorok Sorokov will include anti-Semitic dog whistles such as "George Soros" and "cabal" in their descriptions of the enemies of Russia and Russian Orthodoxy. It should be noted, however, that Russian Orthodox dogma does not align with this anti-Semitic narrative. The use of "black Russians" as enemies is implied in Sorok Sorokov's Telegram channel as any non-white, non-Orthodox Russian citizen. Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, January 1, 2021, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/15615>; Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, January 6, 2021, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/15744>; Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, May 31, 2020, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/9002>; Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, December 31, 2020 <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/15490>; Sorok Sorokov [forwarded from Poslednij Okop Z], January 26, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/24963>. Sorok Sorokov, [forwarded from Julija Vitjazeva], Telegram broadcast, January 11, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/24637>.

117 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, January 1, 2021, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/15615>; Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, January 6, 2021, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/15744>; Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, May 31, 2020, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/9002>; Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, December 31, 2020 <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/15490>; Sorok Sorokov [forwarded from Poslednij Okop Z], January 26, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/24963>.

118 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, March 26, 2020, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/6005>. In this context, they mean Eastern mysticism specifically, but the takeaway is that any resulting synthesis between West and East results in catastrophic mutation.

119 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, March 26, 2020, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/6005>.

120 Sorok Sorokov [forwarded from Julija Vitjazeva], Telegram broadcast, January 11, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/24637>.

121 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, May 8, 2021, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/18074>.

122 Sorok Sorokov [forwarded from Svyashchennik Aleksandr Lemesenko], Telegram broadcast, November 9, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/35032>.

123 Sorok Sorokov [forwarded from Neofitsial'nyy Bezsonov "Z"], Telegram broadcast, October 2, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/33755>.

124 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, October 17, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/34287>.

125 Sorok Sorokov, being unrestricted by formal definitions, often employs "Russian" in multiple ways. For the most concise definition of "Russian" and its usage in socio-politics, see: Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, February 9, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/25245>. This is one example of many such invocations. The term has Orthodox roots; however, it is often employed opportunistically in a manner similar to the use of *Russkii mir*.

who would be sympathetic to traditionalist values. “For example, Lauren Witzke ... former senate candidate from Delaware. ... ‘I identify myself more with Russia—and Putin’s Christian values—than with Joe Biden.’”<sup>126</sup> Sorok Sorokov also immediately relates Western political identity features, such as gender and sexual orientation, as inorganic features. They are inorganic because they are instilled through Western liberalism which Sorok Sorokov would claim is functioning as a religious movement. In another similar instance, Ukrainian nationalists are immediately labeled as neopagans partaking in the Western conspiracy to tear Ukraine away from Russia and Orthodoxy.<sup>127</sup> In contrast, Russian political identities, based on Orthodox principles, are real and actionable identities:

... the time has come not for sofa wars and warriors sitting at the keyboard and sending virtual projectiles at their ideological opponents, but the time has come for the soldiers of Christ, who must prove their commitment to Christ, His New Testament and patristic teachings, that there is a lot about the right cheek.<sup>128</sup>

Political identity is the most prevalent category within our distilled Sorok Sorokov dataset. This corroborates our understanding of Sorok Sorokov as the “left hand” or praetorian guard of the ROC. While the ROC attempts to garner support in the Duma, Sorok Sorokov mobilizes its actionable political identity that is in agreement with the Patriarchate.<sup>129</sup>

In contrast, the ROC seldom addresses political identity directly. Of course, the ROC would also consider all forms of identity to contain religion, be it Western or traditional religion. Yet the ROC has also alluded to the ability of Orthodox principles to act as an instrument of soft power. Kirill, in his position as Metropolitan at the time, “expressed the following opinion that familiarity with these documents will demonstrate the level of contemporary theological thought in the Moscow Patriarchate and cannot fail to be attractive to thinking people.”<sup>130</sup> When the ROC otherwise speaks to political topics, it does not speak in its own words so much as it repeats the statements by heads of state whom it is aligned with. If the ROC does speak to politics, it does so in lofty terms that are often dated: Orthodoxy, in its “primordial spiritual values” and as “the guardian ... of our people, ... does not depend on political or other preferences and attitudes.”<sup>131</sup> Similarly, despite the fact that the Patriarchate’s comments on the 2022 invasion of Ukraine appear political, they are still firmly grounded in theological terms that are simply not as inflammatory or direct as Sorok Sorokov’s broadcasts and forwarded broadcasts.<sup>132</sup> It is possible that the ROC has become more overtly political in its messaging since around the time of

<sup>126</sup> Sorok Sorokov [forward from Mediasol], Telegram broadcast, May 13, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/29808>.

<sup>127</sup> Sorok Sorokov [forward from politika i analitika], Telegram broadcast, February 4, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/25127>.

<sup>128</sup> Sorok Sorokov [forwarded from KORMUKhIN [Z]], Telegram broadcast, January 18, 2018, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/1530>.

<sup>129</sup> Sorok Sorokov [forwarded from Dremuchiy okhranitel' Z], Telegram broadcast, October 8, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/33933>.

<sup>130</sup> “Mitropolit Kirill: ‘Torzhestvo po sluchayu 1020-letiya Kievskoy Rusi yavili torzhestvo Pravoslaviya.’” *Ofitsial'nyy sayt Russkoy Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi*, June 30, 2008, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/443064.html>.

<sup>131</sup> *Ofitsial'nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi*, “Sviateishii Patriarkh Aleksii otvetil na voprosy ‘Rossiiskoy gazety,’” June 14, 2005, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/24756.html>.

<sup>132</sup> *Ofitsial'nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi*, “Patriarshaia propoved' v nedeliu 15-yu po piatidesiatnitse posle liturgii v Aleksandro-Nevskom skitu,” September 25, 2022, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5962628.html>.

the 2022 invasion of Ukraine; however, it is unlikely that the principles outlined in *The Social Concept* can be subverted without consequences.

## Hierarchy of Values

The “spiritual” and “moral” values as prescribed in Sorok Sorokov’s broadcasts and the ROC’s domain are understandably abstract—neither the ROC nor Sorok Sorokov will delineate exactly what these values are, as they are inherent to their views of Orthodox faith and belief.<sup>133</sup> However, it should be noted that the ROC and Sorok Sorokov assign different levels of importance to certain societal strata. To the ROC, the most crucial social strata are youth and children. This group is most vulnerable to social engineering via Western propaganda, either through the internet or other forms of media. “It is necessary to remember that these are the people who will, in the near future, make the most important decisions in the economy, politics, and the social sphere.”<sup>134</sup> The ROC then puts traditional family values as the second most important category. Traditional family values should be propagated by family members outwards into the community. The ROC sees the family as a potential target for Western ideation and thus the family unit itself as being under pressure from Western ideation as the main cause of Russian demographic decline: “The demographic crisis which has taken over most of Europe is directly related to the destruction of traditional family values which a number of Western powers are engaged in today in the form of their leadership.”<sup>135</sup>

Sorok Sorokov agrees with the ROC that secularized forms of media are detrimental to the family structure.<sup>136</sup> As a youth “social movement,” it is no surprise that Sorok Sorokov emphasizes the position of the family relative to society.<sup>137</sup> They describe the family as a function of the Russian *passionarnost*.<sup>138</sup> This *passionarnost* drives Russians to produce large families with equally passionate family members to continue this trend.<sup>139</sup> The family is the core of society for Sorok Sorokov. An important point of difference between Sorok Sorokov and the ROC is that Sorok Sorokov’s traditional family unit should be directly involved with structures the Church abstains from participating in, such as politics as outlined in the *Social Concept*. While the ROC implies that societal change will come from the family unit,<sup>140</sup> Sorok Sorokov explicitly defines it as the fulcrum for *other* societal changes:

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133 Spiritual and moral values follow a similar use to that of Patriarch Kiril’s use of “Holy Tradition.” While there is canon law governing these values (such as *The Basis of the Social Concept*, 2000), the majority are left vague such that they can be flexibly interpreted. For the ROC, this interpretation leaves open the “left hand of God” space for Sorok Sorokov to inhabit without directly violating a more rigid set of rules. For Sorok Sorokov, they can claim to merely be following the ambiguous teachings of the Church.

134 Oftsial’nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, “Proekti riada eparkhii Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi poluchat podderzhku grantovogo konkursa Prezidenta RF (dopolneno),” June 22, 2020, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5652250.html>.

135 Oftsial’nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, “Predsedatel’ OVTsS prinial delegatsiiu nemetskiikh zhurnalistov,” July 23, 2013, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/3117207.html>.

136 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, March 16, 2018, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/1907>.

137 Sorok Sorokov claims to be a youth group for multiple reasons. First, children are the foundation of the family and are thus the main inroad to indoctrination. Secondly, its events and teachings and social groups mainly involve children ages six and up. Young children can be seen tearing down guns and young adults can be seen participating in mixed martial arts and field brawls. However, it should be noted that their social movement, like any other (such as the YMCA), does include adult participation and mentorship.

138 “Passionality,” or *passionarnost*, is considered by Gumilev to be a biological feature of the human organism, which exhibits a fundamental influence on a human’s behavior and attitude. As Gumilev states, “Every ethnos comes into being as a result of a particular eruption of passionarnost.” Bassin, *The Gumilev Mystique*, p. 44–56.

139 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, February 9, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/25251>.

140 Oftsial’nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, “Mezhdunarodnaia diskussia o semeinykh tsnostiakh: chto dal’she?,” September 24, 2014, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/3736823.html>.

“we, the parents, must become a catalyst for both legislative and socio-legal processes in society.”<sup>141</sup>

### Economic Inequality

The way the ROC likens economics to being both a tool and an indicator of a civilization’s moral and spiritual health. On the one hand, a declining economy can be the result of modernism and the breakdown of the family unit.<sup>142</sup> On the other hand, it is a means of leveraging the protection of Christians globally,<sup>143</sup> to level “external” differences in order to push “internal” moral and spiritual matters to the forefront,<sup>144</sup> or to highlight how economic successes are built upon these moral and spiritual foundations.<sup>145</sup> While the ROC’s message is consistent, its application is very externally focused. The ROC is not introspective with regard to its influence on the Russian economy, or rather, when it is, it shifts the blame. Since the economy is external to spirit, any faults in the Russian economy are likewise attributed to external enemies (or internal “fifth columns”). However, when the ROC interacts with the economic sphere, it is doing so with the *correct* Orthodox values.<sup>146</sup> Hence, the delineation is that the economy can be used as a tool in both foreign policy<sup>147</sup> and domestically, building institutions to counter Western projects.<sup>148</sup>

Sorok Sorokov, by contrast, mentions economics more often and mainly in domestic and near-abroad contexts. While it follows a similar path to the ROC in terms of an economy’s representation of foundational values, it rarely refers to it as a specific instrument. Likewise, the group differs from the ROC in describing the causes of economic failures. Its members would agree that liberalism and consumer culture denigrates Russian traditional society, but they extend this argument further. The economic woes of Russia are not only the result of external, liberal forces,<sup>149</sup> but the fact that Russia itself still has Marxist economic legacies to grapple with.<sup>150</sup> The mention of Marx by Sorok Sorokov hearkens back to the group’s conspiratorial definition of world orders. To Sorok Sorokov, “Marx-Lenin-Trotsky” is the spiritual

141 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, March 14, 2018, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/1881>.

142 Ofitsial’nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, “V agentstve ‘Interfaks’ proshla press-konferentsiia po itogam poshcheniia Sviateishim Patriarkhom Kirillom Ukrainskoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi,” July 30, 2010, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/1234840.html/>.

143 Ofitsial’nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, “V Moskve proshel kruglyi stol, posviashchennyi polozheniiu khristian na Blizhnem Vostoke i v Severnoi Afrike,” November 5, 2013, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/3348339.html>.

144 Ofitsial’nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, “Predstoiatel’ Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi prinial uchastie v zasedanii Prezidiuma Mezhreligioznogo soveta SNG,” November 28, 2011, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/1789047.html>.

145 Ofitsial’nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, “V Sevastopole zavershilsia II Evraziiskii forum ‘Kazach’e edinstvo,’” June 28, 2017, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/4943104.html>.

146 We italicize correct to emphasize that Russian Orthodoxy has fractured over its long history and that there are factions such as the liberals that, while Russian Orthodox in name, are not in line with Kirill or the traditionalists and are thus prone to failure economically and/or spiritually. In the example of digital marketplaces and media, while more liberal sectors of society may produce economic success, they are instilling sin and degradation in society. If these sectors are unsuccessful, they are so due to said degradation.

147 Ofitsial’nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, “Sviateishii Patriarkh Kirill vstretilsia s glavami diplomateskikh missiy latinoamerikanskikh stran v Rossiiskoi Federatsii,” June 8, 2017, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/4929263.html>.

148 Ofitsial’nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, “Sviateishii Patriarkh Kirill vozglavil ocherednoe zasedanie nabliudatel’nogo, obshchestvennogo i popechitel’skogo sovetov po izdaniiu ‘Pravoslavnoi entsiklopedii’ i prezentatsiiu alfavitnykh tomov, izdannykh v 2011 godu,” November 12, 2011, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/1672085.html>.

149 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, March 8, 2021, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/16866>.

150 Sorok Sorokov [forwarded from Традиционалист из Третьего Рима], Telegram broadcast, March 6, 2021, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/16838>.

inspiration for the “neocons,” “USSR 2.0.,” and “new world order” that uses freedom of the individual as a mask for collective control.<sup>151</sup> The neocons are the “most powerful group of satanists who control the world processes,”<sup>152</sup> including economic ones. Noted individuals at the top include the Rockefellers, George W. Bush, the Clintons, Barack Obama, Bill Gates, and, of course, the Soros Foundation.<sup>153</sup> Their main goals are focused on the protection and promotion of LGBT people, the dehumanizing of humanity, and the reduction of the world’s population from 7.5 billion to 1–1.5 billion.<sup>154</sup> In economic narratives, Sorok Sorokov is regurgitating thinly-veiled invocations of multiple popular conspiracy theories in circulation. These conspiratorial narratives culminate in the argument that the neocons seek to destroy traditional spiritual and moral values by leveraging economic means and thus they are then able to infiltrate the Orthodox Church and near-church structures. In Sorok Sorokov’s view, this “4th LGBT Reich”<sup>155</sup> is in the process of sacrificing Ukraine for this goal.<sup>156</sup>

### **Concluding Remarks**

Across our comparative categories, it is evident that Sorok Sorokov’s ideology significantly overlaps with the ROC’s. The group also interprets and repackages the ROC’s worldview and narratives into a specifically radical, illiberal perspective. We find that this intentional focus is not only a function of Sorok Sorokov’s Telegram channel but a complement to the ROC’s more nonconfrontational messaging. As the ROC is working within an interlocutor framework to other traditional religions and the state, Sorok Sorokov is the interpreter and enforcer of this traditional ideology within Russia and the near abroad.

This specific repackaging by Sorok Sorokov is a *win-win situation* for both parties. For the ROC, Sorok Sorokov deflects any backlash aimed at the Church and the group also gives the appearance of grassroots support. Similarly, topics that the Patriarch cannot directly address, such as domestic politics, internal distinctions, and calls to action, are Sorok Sorokov’s domain of expertise. For Sorok Sorokov, it is an opportunity to achieve an elevated status and legitimacy in wider political and social circles compared to other social movements. The group openly flaunts this mentality in its Telegram broadcasts and the media interviews and appearances of their leader, Andrey “Hammer” Khormukhin.<sup>157</sup>

As stated previously, this work does not represent an analysis of the direct overt and covert connections between Sorok Sorokov and the ROC. These connections are often omitted in the Patriarch’s public addresses. Rather than naming these groups, Kirill often refers to the general category of “youth groups.” We could hypothesize that these addresses include Sorok Sorokov due to the similarities we have shown above, but we do not draw these direct connections outright. However, we hypothesize that

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151 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, April 13, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/28576>; Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, July 22, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/31799>.

152 Ibid. Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, December 30, 2021, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/24340>.

153 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, December 30, 2021, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/24335>. Regarding whom Sorok Sorokov identifies as a “neocon,” one must bear in mind that the majority of the group’s posting seems to be located within a largely conspiratorial discourse that allows for multiple contradictions to exist in parallel.

154 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, July 2, 2020, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/10662>.

155 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, May 29, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/30402>.

156 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, July 12, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/31532>; Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, June 15, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/30897>.

157 Russian: “Molot.”

scholars of Russian Orthodoxy and radical, far-right groups in Russia could prove such connections with the use of our database. This work primarily argues that there is a connection between the ROC and Sorok Sorokov, and proves that such connections can be validated either through the methods we employed in this work or with others. We propose that further research using named entity recognition over these datasets followed by network analyses could provide insights in this way. If one were to find an additional degree of distance from the @Sorok4orussia Telegram account and map the named entities within these channels, one could create a network map of the key individuals Sorok Sorokov is referencing.

We also point out that, while we have proven the similarities between the worldviews of Sorok Sorokov and the ROC, we have not made a determination as to what degree of influence Sorok Sorokov exerts on the broader social fabric of Russia. This type of analysis could provide answers to questions similar to: “How local is Sorok Sorokov?” The group has gone to Ukraine to “defend” Russian Orthodox churches, and it claims to have thousands of supporters across Ukraine and Russia. We propose that one can mark the actual social pull of Sorok Sorokov by combining the above network analysis with an analysis of its viewership and rebroadcasts in other channels. It is also possible to differentiate the enemies of the movement from its allies—through the application of sentiment mining, for instance. Sorok Sorokov broadcasts often list both enemies and allies; thus, when mapping these entities, it would be pertinent to analyze the sentiment of the trailing commentary.

We also propose further research from a religious studies perspective to illuminate the implications of differences between Sorok Sorokov and the ROC. If the connections to ROC individuals can be proven through the suggested methods above, and given the fact that Sorok Sorokov acts as an enforcer of traditional Orthodoxy even within the Church, it would then be possible that the ROC’s use of Sorok Sorokov will prompt a fracture within the Church. However, the reverse is also possible. If the Patriarch and the ROC lean into the Sorok Sorokov movement, it is possible that the ROC will harden or push for justification of violence in defense of its ideals akin to a justification for “just war.”

Finally, we propose a further quantitative analysis of the interaction between the Sorok Sorokov channel and the patriarchia.ru domain. For one, an analysis of these categories over time series could show the flow of information between these two information providers. While scraping data and performing content discourse analysis, we have noticed that Sorok Sorokov, at the inception of the group’s Telegram channel, was quoting older material from patriarchia.ru. As the group has gained popularity following its defense of the building of a church in Torfyanka Park, we would hypothesize that its hyperlinking to patriarchia.ru content: (1) increases over time, and (2) references newer news pieces from the ROC that are currently being discussed, rather than citing older works from the patriarchate and interpreting them. This could indicate a more overt messaging correlation between the two platforms—that is, the patriarchia.ru website, alongside Sorok Sorokov’s Telegram channel. We also propose further qualitative analysis using word embeddings created from patriarchia.ru in order to map the domain’s worldview onto other Orthodox digital spaces.

Our included database also lends itself to *natural language processing* (NLP) of religious texts. Natural language processing, including the word embeddings we used in this work, is often built on generalized speech categories—in this case, Runet. While this proves to be mostly functional in most cases, there has yet to be an

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NLP model constructed and trained *specifically on religious speech*. Such a model, built from our dataset, could prove useful in discerning the degree to which Russian political speech is marked, influenced by, and contains religious undertones.

## Appendix

- (1) Scraping patriarchia.ru data:
  - (a) Scraping URLs. This code, when pointed at the patriarchia.ru's news domains, grabs all of the URLs that link to news pieces. ("Church and State" is at this URL: <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/news/233/>)

```
import scrapy
class QuotesSpider(scrapy.Spider):
    #spider name
    name = "rocnews"

    #yield URLs for each news page
    def start_requests(self):
        number_of_pages = 19
        for i in range(1, number_of_pages):
            url = 'http://www.patriarchia.ru/en/db/news/234/page{}.html'.format(i)
            yield scrapy.Request(url=url, callback=self.parse)
            i+=1

    def parse(self, response):
        page = response.url.split("/")[-3]
        news = response.xpath("//*[contains(@class, 'main')]/*[contains(@class, 'title')]").getall()
        news_links = response.xpath("//*[contains(@class, 'main')]/*[(contains(@class, 'news')) and not(contains(@class, 'top'))]/*[contains(@class, 'title')]/a/@href").getall()
        yield{
            'news_list': news_links
        }
```

Example Output of (1a) from a single news webpage:

```
[
  {
    "news_list": [
      "/en/db/text/5830952.html",
      "/en/db/text/5830920.html",
      "/en/db/text/5830190.html",
      "/en/db/text/5830172.html",
      "/en/db/text/5827779.html",
      "/en/db/text/5827775.html",
      "/en/db/text/5826537.html",
      "/en/db/text/5826087.html",
      "/en/db/text/5826094.html",
      "/en/db/text/5824962.html",
      "/en/db/text/5824195.html",
      "/en/db/text/5822892.html",
      "/en/db/text/5822888.html",
      "/en/db/text/5822877.html",
      "/en/db/text/5821064.html"
    ]
  }
]
```



- (b) Scraping data from URLs. Given a JSON file yielded from (1a), this code yields the news title, news text, and data from the contents of the page via relative xpath. The patriarchia.ru site does not have authors for these pieces.

```
import scrapy
import json

class QuotesSpider(scrapy.Spider):
    name = "rocnews_urls"

    def start_requests(self):
        urls_list = []
        # Opening JSON file of URLs and flatten into single list
        with open("test.json") as json_file:
            data = json.load(json_file)
            for i in data:
                urls_list.append(list(i.values()))
        flat_list = []
        # Iterate through the outer list
        for element in urls_list:
            if type(element) is list:
                # If the element is of type list, iterate through the sublist
                for item in element:
                    flat_list.append(item)
            else:
                flat_list.append(element)
        flat_list_2 = []
        for element in flat_list:
            if type(element) is list:
                # If the element is of type list, iterate through the sublist
                for item in element:
                    flat_list_2.append(item)
        print(flat_list_2)

        #for each URL in the flat list, parse contents
        for i in range(0, len(flat_list_2)):
            url = "http://www.patriarchia.ru" + flat_list_2[i]
            yield scrapy.Request(url=url, callback=self.parse)

        #yield (via relative xpath) title, text, and date
        def parse(self, response):
            page = response.url.split("/")[-1]
            title = response.xpath("//*[contains(@class, 'main')]/*[contains(@class, 'section')]/h1/text()").getall()
            news_text = response.xpath("//*[contains(@class, 'main')]/*[contains(@class, 'text')]/text()").getall()
            date = response.xpath("//*[contains(@class, 'date')]/text()").extract_first()
            yield {
                'title': title,
                'news_text': news_text,
                'date': date
            }
        }
```

Example output of (1b):

```
[
  {«title»:
    [«Святейший Патриарх Кирилл: Событие, свидетелями которого мы
    являемся, имеет большое духовное значение»],
    «news_text»:
    [«11 сентября 2021 года в деревне Самолва в Псковской области «, « це-
    ремония открытия мемориального комплекса «Князь Александр Невский с
    дружиной».», «На торжественном мероприятии присутствовали Президент
    Российской Федерации В.В. Путин, Святейший Патриарх Московский и
    всея Руси Кирилл, председатель «, « «, «, помощник Президента, пред-
    седатель Российского военно-исторического общества В.Р. Мединский и
    губернатор Псковской области М.Ю. Ведерников.», ««Событие, свидете-
    лями которого мы являемся, имеет большое духовное значение, потому
    что в центре деяний князя Александра Невского была идея защиты веры»,
    — заявил в ходе церемонии Предстоятель Русской Православной Церкви,
    слова которого приводит «, «.», ««Сегодня мы говорим о стране, народе,
    нашей вере. В этих словах — преемственность от той традиции, которую
    закладывали такие герои, как Александр Невский. Дай Бог, чтобы этот
    дух, внутренняя сила не покидали наш народ, чтобы никакие соблазны не
    поколебали уверенности в патриотических позициях. Александр Невский
    из глубины веков ищет любви к родной земле, к родине и способности
    ограждать православную веру от всяких воздействий, которые в современ-
    ных условиях реализуются не посредством крестовых походов, но другими
    способами. В этом месте хотелось бы сказать: Господи, храни Землю рус-
    скую!» — сказал, в частности, Святейший Патриарх Кирилл.»],
    «date»: “11 сентября 2021 г. 20:57”}
]
```

(2) Scraping Sorok Sorokov Telegram

- (a) This function is only a part of a large suite developed at GDIL, however there is no mystery that we used the Telethon API to target Sorok Sorokov. This snippet is our main workhorse, and thus included for scrutiny; for those aiming to replicate our in-house tool, functions will need to be defined to handle the serialization of Python objects returned by lazy methods of Telethon. Researchers will also need to provide their own api keys and hashes.

(3) Lemmatizing news articles:

- (a) Lemmatizing articles allows us to match documents without worrying about missing words with different morphemes. This function presupposes that the JSON file from (1b) has been split into individual documents.

```
import spacy
import os
from spacy.lang.ru.examples import sentences
#load large spacy model
nlp = spacy.load("ru_core_news_lg", disable=["ner"])
#define target file paths
source_directory = r"../sorok_ind_files/"
target_directory = r"../lemma_ru/ru_sorok_ind_lemma/"
#for each file in directory, lemmatize the document, then save it
for original_filename in os.listdir(source_directory):
    filename = source_directory + original_filename
    with open(filename) as f:
        text = f.read()
        doc = nlp(text)
        sentences_lemmata_list = [sentence.lemma_for sentence in doc.sents]
    with open((target_directory + original_filename), 'w+') as f_2:
        for sent in sentences_lemmata_list:
            f_2.write(sent)
        f_2.close()
    f.close()
```

(4) Grabbing top “hits”:

- (a) We use both pre-selected word embeddings (from GeoWAC) and word frequencies found within the corpus. Given picked dataframes of lemmatized articles, this code finds word frequencies, removes stopwords, then counts hits within the corpus and returns the top 20 documents of each. The function for hits is  $O_n^2$  time.

(5) Word Embeddings

традиция обычай многовековой многовековой традиционный самобытность самобытный верование предок предание канон Богословие богословский теология богослов теологический вероучение теолог философия филологический православие правование Монархия монархический монарх диктатура самодержавие феодализм феодальный анархия буржуазный авторитарный владычество идентичность самоидентификация самобытность ментальность общность самосознание аутентичность государственность ценностный мировоззрение множественность Национальный национально нац региональный интернациональный узбекский международный нация общенациональный общеевропейский наднациональный Личность личностный личностно идентичность мировоззрение самосознание самоидентификация ценностный ментальность нравственность нравственный Отдельный отдельно отдельность обособленный конкретный определенный особый данный смежный специальный отдельностоящий Иерархия иерархический иерарх главенство олигархический низший монархический клановый ранг сословный божественность порядок порядке очередность регламентироваться законодательством регламентировать соответствие регламентировать законодательство порядка регламент Общество сообщество акционерный община общественник институция общественно государственно государство объединение социум Цивилизация

цивилизационный человечество доисторический древность древний предок высокоразвитый религия нация тысячелетний Идеология идеологически идеологический идеолог национализм атеистический мировоззренческий религия гуманистический марксизм доктрина ценности ценность ценностный духовность общечеловеческий образованность Неравенство равенство бедность гендерный расслоение диспропорция несправедливость дискриминация безработица дифференциация классовый Семья многодетный родственник родитель родня малоимущий чета жена близкие домочадец семейный Дети детишки ребенок детка ребятишки дитя ребеночка сынишка деточка ребенка детей Муж жена отец супруга сын свекровь супруг дочь невестка мама папа Жена муж отец дочь супруга сын невестка мама племянник племянница супруг брак супружество однополый замужество супруг сожителство брачный супруга супруги развод внебрачный гомосексуализм гомосексуальность гомосексуалист гомосексуал гомосексуальный педофилие однополый феминизм расизм ксенофобия антисемитизм Феминизм феминистка национализм шовинизм гомосексуализм эмансипация расизм радикализм атеизм либерализм гуманизм Либерализм национализм авторитаризм капитализм либерал тоталитаризм империализм радикализм либеральный демократия идеология Содомия религия жертвоприношение жертвенность невежественный распад распадаться распасться развал разложение крах разрушение перерождение вырождение отмирание деградация Развал развалить разваливать крах распад развалиться разваливаться разруха разорение перестройка схождение Деградация вырождение деградировать истощение разрушение необратимый разложение вымирание обнищание прогрессирующий стагнация Православие христианство православный католицизм ислам христианский католичество мусульманство религия монашество христианин Протестантство протестантский протестант католичество католицизм католический мусульманство атеистический православие лютеранский христианство Патриарх митрополит святейший филарет патриархкирил руськирил архиепископ патриархия архиерей патриархат патриарший Церковь православный храм церковно римско-католический церковный собор лютеранский церковь патриархат монастырь вера благочестие неверие добродетель истина божественность праведность верить смирение исповедание человеколюбие Зло сатанаСатанаinWikipedia тьма злой добро несправедливость злодейЗ диавол демон всемогущество невежество отечество отчизна родина отеческий беззаветный служение самоотверженность доблесть самоотверженный честь государственность запад восток западный север юг -восток юго-восток северо-восток северо-запад северо-восточный иран воля покорность решимость устремление повиновение решительность сознательность провидение убеждение всемогущество разумение ересь еретик догмат язычник христианство мракобесие вероучение православие инквизиция неверие невежество душа душ души сердце ванна помysel душевный дух печаль ванная статус статусный привилегия гражданство значимость авторитет признание престижность состоятельность легитимность авторитетность атеизм марксизм атеистический материализм тоталитаризм атеист национализм коммунизм сталинизм идеология большевизм демократия демократический демократизация парламентаризм верховенство плюрализм авторитаризм либерализм социализм демократичность диктатура государство страна государственно гос-во гектосударствар правительство государственность держава содружество правитель республикамолдова демография демографический социология народонаселение макроэкономика политология экономика рождаемость -экономический антропология макроэкономический грех греховный грешник грешный прегрешение гордыня

согрешить покаяние скверна благоденствие христос твердыня крепость цитадель неприступный крестоносец оплот святилище непоколебимый несокрушимый святыня бастион смерть гибель кончина умирать самоубийство умирание погибель умерший убийство несчастный смертельный воспроизведение гибель кончина умирать самоубийство умирание погибель умерший убийство несчастный смертельный колонизация колонизатор колонизировать колонист экспансия порабощение колониальный милитаризация покорение коллективизация освоение трансгуманизм гуманизм гуманистический материализм гуманизация материалистический общечеловеческий метафизический идеология либерализм диалектический секуляризм материализм православие радикализм национализм мультикультурализм идеология популяризация либерализм пропаганда коррупция коррупционный преступность взяточничество коррумпированность коррупционер антикоррупционный антикоррупциоть терроризм коррумпировать бюрократия Спорт велоспорт велоспорвать спортивный теннис атлетика физкультура баскетбол туризм футбол конькобежный благотворительность благотворитель благотворительный пожертвование волонтерство филантроп служение волонтерский спонсорство меценат спонсорский Многолетняя многолетний малоимущий малообеспеченный сирота семья инвалид пенсионер единовременный -сирота льгота конфликт многолетний малоимущий малообеспеченный сирота семья инвалид пенсионер единовременный -сирота льгота воспитание перевоспитание воспитывать -нравственный социализация нравственный воспитать воспитанный воспитываться воспитательный духовность насилие жестокость издевательство пытка расизм жестокий домогательство насильственный дискриминация запугивание террор материнство отцовство деторождение репродуктивный донорство беременность усыновление женщина младенчество фертильность новорождать разврат развратный развращать оргия развратница извращение похоть безнравственный ебл порнография жестокость развод развестись разводиться бракоразводный брак расставание алименты замужество супруга супружество супруг