

After Atheism: An Analysis of Religious Monopolies in the Post-Communist World

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Dramatic religious growth has occurred throughout the former Soviet Union in the past 30 years with approximately 100 million people joining religious groups for the first time. These religious revivals correspond to lessening restrictions on religious activity — a clear prediction of the “religious-economies” or “supply-side” approach to the study of religion. Nevertheless, a comparative analysis of post-communist countries reveals that levels of religious pluralism are not commensurate to levels of religious growth, a finding which seemingly contradicts a central proposition in the supply-side approach. This paper argues that a religious-economies explanation of post-communist religious growth remains untarnished when one considers the impact of Soviet atheism on religious markets and the role of religious regulation in the post-communist era. These two factors have created an instance where religious monopolies are able to grow at unprecedented rates.

Substantial religious revivals that are occurring throughout the former Soviet Union are beginning to be systematically documented (see Bourdeaux 2000; Ramet 1998; Borowik and Babinski 1997; Anderson 1994; Greeley 1994; and Swatos 1994). According to theorists advocating a religious-economies approach, religious competition drives religious growth (Iannaccone, Finke, and Stark 1997; Stark and Finke 2000; and Stark and Iannaccone 1994). Because competition is difficult to measure directly, indicators of religious pluralism and religious repression are often used as proxy measures for competition. Therefore, religious revivals that correspond to the lifting of communist religious regulations fully support the expectations of religious-economies theorists.

But the particulars of these revivals appear less supportive. In a comparative analysis of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, Steve Bruce (1999b:72) found that “of these three countries with in many senses similar recent histories, Lithuania is markedly more religious than the other two and it is the one with the most homogeneous religious culture.” Therefore, Bruce maintains that competition does not explain religiosity in Lithuania. Although the case of Lithuania is unique because it is the only former Soviet republic that is predominantly Roman

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Catholic, Bruce has uncovered a finding that loosely holds true for the rest of the former Soviet Union; namely, that religious pluralism does not predict levels of religiosity or religious change.

In this paper, I briefly document religious revivals occurring throughout the former Soviet Union and demonstrate that conventional measures of religious pluralism do not explain these instances of religious growth. Nevertheless, I contend that post-communist religious revivals follow predictable patterns when one accounts for two important factors in the religious economy. First, post-Soviet societies contained an inordinate number of atheists and agnostics. This was due to decades of religious repression and continuous attempts to convert the Soviet public to atheism. Therefore, religious competition in post-Soviet society should take into account competition with atheism. Second, post-Soviet countries are implementing their own religious regulations — ones that tend to favor certain religious groups. When one considers the impact of atheism in tandem with these new religious laws, religious growth follows the expectations of supply-side theory.

RELIGIOUS REVIVALS

On average, around 20 percent of the populations of each former Soviet State have taken up some form of religious affiliation since 1970 (see Table 1).¹ While the Soviet Union remained essentially in tact until the early 1990s, lessening of religious restrictions within the Soviet Union began in the early 1980s (see Bourdeaux 2000 and Ramet 1998). Therefore, one can most dramatically see the extent of these religious revivals by comparing levels of affiliation in 1970 to 1995. While each region differs in terms of its proportion of religious members in 1970, a substantial increase in memberships occurred in every region over the following 25 years. The most dramatic instance of religious growth occurred in Armenia due to a unique setback suffered by the Armenian Apostolic Church in the early 20th Century and its current restoration.²

Corresponding to indications of religious growth, there is a significant drop in the number of atheists in each former Soviet republic (see Table 1). The drop in the number of atheists does not perfectly match increases in religious

1. The World Christian Encyclopedia provides affiliation data for all the world's religions and for all the former states of the Soviet Union. "It does this by setting out summaries of the survey data produced every year by a vast decentralized investigation quietly undertaken by churches and religious workers across the world" (Barrett et al. 2000:viii).

2 Brutal Turkish attacks on Armenia between 1894 and 1915 created an Armenian diaspora of many wealthy patrons and leaders of the Armenian Apostolic Church (Marshall 2000:58). Although the Armenian Apostolic Church is profoundly tied to Armenian national identity and history, it was unable to recover from the genocidal attacks of the Turks under subsequent Soviet control. With the fall of communism, the Armenian Apostolic Church has re-established itself as the state church of Armenia. The unprecedented religious revival in Armenia reflects the return of a state church that was essentially exiled for the past century.

memberships due to the portion of non-religious people who in 1970 were not convinced atheists but have subsequently joined religious groups. Notwithstanding, a relatively consistent drop in atheism occurs in all former Soviet states.

TABLE 1
Percent of Religious Affiliations and Atheists in 1970 and 1995

Country	Percent of the population who are religiously affiliated		Percent of the population who are atheists	
	1970	1995	1970	1995
Armenia	39	81	23	7
Azerbaijan	66	88	15	0
Belarus	60	70	15	6
Estonia	47	62	23	11
Georgia	47	80	17	4
Kazakhstan	46	57	23	12
Kyrgyz Republic	47	70	24	7
Latvia	52	66	17	6
Lithuania	71	87	10	1
Moldova	48	73	22	6
Russian Federation	49	66	23	5
Tajikistan	66	85	14	2
Turkmenistan	65	88	15	2
Ukraine	62	84	16	5
Uzbekistan	58	78	17	4
Average Change from 1970 to 1995		+21		-12

Source: Barrett et al. (2001)

The case of the former-Soviet Union is ideal to test the hypothesis that religious competition impacts religious growth because there is variation in both proxy indicators of competition: religious regulation and religious pluralism. First, each Soviet successor state has vastly different levels of religious pluralism and, second, each state imposed its own laws concerning the regulation of religious groups (see Table 2).

In order to test the impact of competition on religious growth, I correlate the measures of pluralism and repression with changes in religious affiliations. The results do not support theoretical expectations. The correlation between religious pluralism and religious growth is -0.192. Not only is the finding non-significant, it is in the wrong direction. In regions with higher levels of religious pluralism, one would expect more religious growth. Figure 1 depicts this relationship visually in order to illustrate the point more clearly. No clear visual pattern emerges from the data and the best-fit line reveals no statistical association.

TABLE 2
Pluralism and Repression Statistics

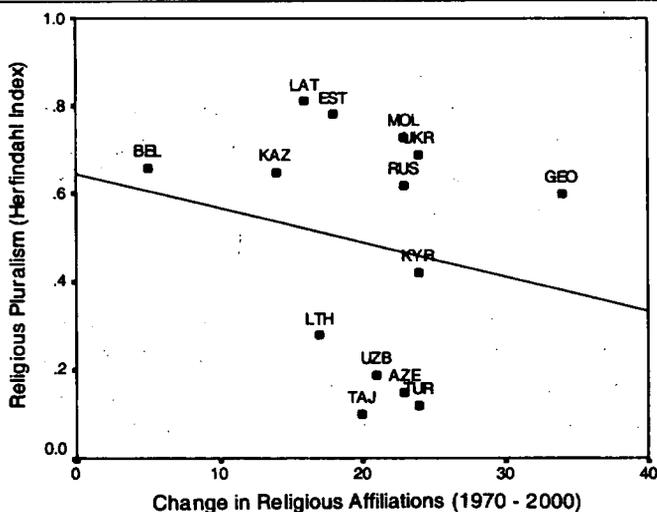
Country	Religious Pluralism (measured by Herfindahl Index) ^α	Religious Repression ^β
Armenia	0.39	4
Azerbaijan	0.15	5
Belarus	0.66	5
Estonia	0.78	1
Georgia	0.60	4
Kazakhstan	0.65	4
Kyrgyz Republic	0.42	4
Latvia	0.81	3
Lithuania	0.28	2
Moldova	0.73	4
Russian Federation	0.62	4
Tajikistan	0.10	7
Turkmenistan	0.12	7
Ukraine	0.69	3
Uzbekistan	0.19	6

^α The Herfindahl Index = $1 - \sum p_i^2$ where p_i is the proportion of religious adherents that belong to a religious group, i . A value of "1" means each individual belongs to a different religious group and a value of "0" means the entire population belongs to one religious group.

^β Repression scores taken from Marshall (2000). "1" = most religious freedom; "7" = least religious freedom.

FIGURE 1

Relationship between Religious Pluralism and Religious Growth

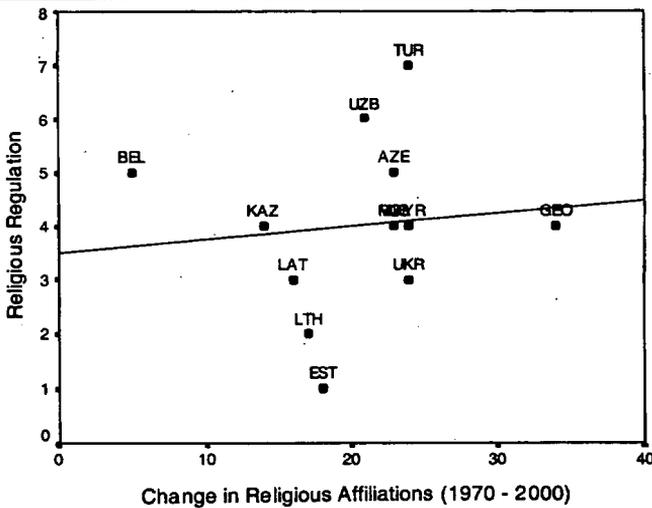


Note: Armenia was not included in the above figure because it is an extremely outlier in terms of religious growth (see endnotes).

Similarly, the correlation between religious regulation and religious growth is non-significant and in the wrong direction (0.108). Figure 2 depicts the relationship between post-Soviet religious regulation and religious growth. Interestingly, areas with high religious regulation appear to be experiencing religious revivals comparable to regions with little or no restrictions on religious activity. Consequently, this evidence suggests that competition may not be the causal variable that drives religious growth.

FIGURE 2

Relationship between Religious Regulation and Religious Growth



Note: Armenia was not included in the above figure because it is an extremely outlier in terms of religious growth (see endnotes).

The underlying cause of these findings is the fact that religious growth is occurring amongst religious monopolies. In other words, some religious groups have achieved a monopoly-like status in regions of the former Soviet Union and currently attract the majority of new religious converts in their respective regions. Subsequently, one finds dramatic religious growth in regions where religious competition is weakest.

RELIGIOUS MONOPOLIES

Religious monopolies are religious groups which dominate a religious market through a combination of state-support and state regulation of minority religious groups. In turn, religious-economies theorists show that religious monopolies tend to be weak and lazy because they rely on the state for their dominance (Iannaccone 1997; Iannaccone, Finke and Stark 1997; Stark and Iannaccone 1994). Prior to 1917, most of the regions of the future Soviet Union contained

distinct religious monopolies which successfully repressed their would-be religious competitors and relied heavily on government funding. At the beginning of the Twentieth Century, 95 percent of the populations of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan were Muslim; 90 percent of Lithuanians were Roman Catholic and the population of the remaining 8 states that would comprise the Soviet Union were 73 percent Orthodox (see Table 3).

TABLE 3

Affiliations with Dominant Religious Groups and New Religious Groups

Dominant Religion	Country	Percent affiliated with dominant religion (1900)	Percent lost by dominant religion (1970)	Percent regained by dominant religion (1995)
Orthodox	Armenia	89	-54	+40 ^α
	Belarus	61	-11	0
	Georgia	85	-57	+30
	Moldova	89	-46	0
	Russian Federation	76	-48	+23
	Ukraine	71	-19	+21 ^β
Islam	Azerbaijan	89	-28	+22
	Kazakhstan	94	-67	+10
	Kyrgyz Republic	96	-62	+24
	Tajikistan	98	-35	+19
	Turkmenistan	98	-39	+26
	Uzbekistan	98	-48	+25
Lutheran	Estonia	54	-30	0
	Latvia	45	-30	+7
Catholic	Lithuania	90	-25	+18

Source: Barrett et al. (2001)

^α Includes members of the Armenian Apostolic Church

^β Includes members of Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church

These powerful religions were lulled from their peaceful slumber by a dramatic historical event, the Russian Revolution. In the Civil War which followed the Revolution, religious groups were the victims of extreme violence. Bolsheviks targeted churches, monasteries, and clerics as potential sources of counter-revolutionary activity. Church property was seized and religious leaders, monks, and nuns were often killed in the process. The terror of the Civil War sometimes spun out of control as murderous gangs took advantage of the melee; "in many cases the tortures, murders and vandalism were the autonomous

initiative of local anarchistic bands of army and naval deserters calling themselves Bolsheviks" (Pospelovsky 1987:1).

This initial terror died down as the Soviet regime became more established. In turn, attempts to eliminate religion became more systematic. Soviets officially banned religious favoritism and sought to repress all religious activity. Specifically, the Communist Party closed thousands of religious buildings, imprisoned religious leaders, and waged a massive campaign to teach atheism. They hoped that these tactics would eventually secularize communist society.

After the first 50 years of communist rule, nearly half (47 percent) of all Soviets (many of whom were not alive at the time of the Russian Revolution) stated that they were either atheists or non-believers (Barrett, Kurian, and Johnson 2001). Through a combination of coercion and conversion, the Communist Party was able to cripple the religious institutions that had formerly enjoyed a monopolistic rule over their respective areas of influence. Dominant religious groups, in most Soviet states, lost over 30 percent of their members by 1970 (see Table 3). It is important to note that dramatic drops in the proportion of affiliated Muslims in Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyz Republic are in part due to the extensive relocation of Russians to these regions, thereby increasing the proportion of Orthodox (see Azrael and Payin 1996). Also of note is the success of the Roman Catholic Church in Lithuania which retained the highest proportion of religious members under communism.

Soviets focused their atheist attack on the dominant religions of each region. While some Muslims initially backed the Bolsheviks during the Russian Civil War, Stalin vigorously attacked Islam as a potential source of nationalist opposition to Communism. And Islamic groups that did resist the Soviet forces "remained divided by clan loyalties and never developed a coherent ideology or leadership" (Rashid 2001:46). Some scholars feel that Soviets "did not inflict serious damage on the Islamic tradition" and argue that Islam remained "underground" throughout the Soviet era (Niyazi 1998:42; also see D'Encausse 1970). Admittedly, the Soviets did lessen harsh restrictions on Islam beginning in the 1940s and some mosques continued to operate clandestinely (see Keller 2001). Nevertheless, "in 1917, there were 20,000 mosques in Central Asia, but by 1929 fewer than 4,000 were functioning and by 1935 there were only 60 registered mosques in Uzbekistan [the largest of the Asian Soviet Republics with over half of the Muslim population of Central Asia]" (Rashid 2001:47). And "through the so-called language and alphabet reforms, Central Asian youths were denied access to the very rich Islamic religious literary traditions written in the Arabic alphabet" (Shahrani 1995:278). While it may be true that many Muslims went underground, the very act of hiding produced a generation of Central Asians who "often lacked any acquaintance with even the most basic tenets of Muslim belief and practice" (Shahrani 1995:279; also see Lewis 2000).

But a vague Islamic identity remained throughout Central Asia and with the Communist Party's loss of political power Muslim leaders began to reorganize efforts to educate the population about the ways of Islam.

The phenomenon of 'resurgent' Islam in Central Asia, which has attracted much attention in the West, has little to do, however, with Islamist political movements in other parts of the world. It is fundamentally a popular and, to a large measure, provincial or rural educational effort to reclaim Islamic knowledge and learning and to gain the right to practice Islam in public without fear of intimidation (Shahrani 1995:285).

These concerted efforts have been largely successful with dramatic increases in Muslims throughout historically Islamic regions of the former Soviet Union. Nevertheless, one sees that Islamic groups have not fully recouped their losses from the effects of intense repression and re-education (see Table 3).

The Orthodox Church also suffered greatly under Communist rule. But unlike many other religious groups who were closely regulated by the Soviets, the entire infrastructure of the Orthodox Church was controlled by the Soviet state. In some ways, the transition to Soviet control occurred unconditionally because the Orthodox Church had formerly been an arm of the Russian government. "The Russian Orthodox Church, which from 1721 to 1917 had been the handmaid of the tsars, had proven capable of adapting to the service of atheist, even atheizing, masters" (Ramet 1998:229). By 1970, Orthodox Church membership dwindled to an average of 40 percent of the population in the six predominantly Orthodox regions of the Soviet Union. In turn, the Orthodox Church has struggled to regain members in the past 25 years and there are complex divisions within the Church based on national differences (note I include the Armenian Apostolic Church and the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church as Orthodox). The Orthodox Church has not grown in Belarus and Moldova mainly due to the out-migration of ethnic Russians in recent decades (see Azrael and Payin 1996).

As mentioned above, the Roman Catholic Church of Lithuania appears to have suffered the least under Communism and has successfully converted a substantial portion of the population (18 percent) to Roman Catholicism in the last 30 years. In 1990, 90 percent of Lithuanians were members of the Roman Catholic Church and today around 85 percent are Roman Catholic. The Roman Catholic Church retained and regained members very impressively under communist rule throughout Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union with the Polish Catholic Church actually increasing its membership and power under communism (Froese and Pfaff 2001; Ramet 1998; Borowik and Babinski 1997). The Roman Catholic Church fared well under communism because it consistently acted as a vehicle of opposition to the Communist Party and the teachings of scientific atheism. "It has been observed that most Lithuanian dissidents are Roman Catholic; and even for nonbelievers, the Roman Catholic Church represents the aspirations of the nation" (Johnson 1994:21). Both the

Orthodox and Muslim communities were unable to generate the same level of commitment as the Roman Catholics for different reasons. The Orthodox Church, while being a symbol of Russian nationalism, had always been a state church and therefore was rendered largely ineffective by the control of a new atheistic state. And the Soviets definitely feared the nationalism of Islamic communities, but Muslim groups were too splintered to produce a unified opposition movement (Rashid 2001). Only the Roman Catholic Church, with its international hierarchy independent from local government rule, could partially withstand the repressive tactics of Communist Party in Lithuania and garner the resources to consistently battle the ubiquitous tenets of scientific atheism. For this reason, the vitality of the Lithuanian Catholic Church is partially the result of its strong political opposition to communism.

Finally, Estonia and Latvia, while often categorized as Protestant regions, contain no clear dominant religious group. Estonia is split evenly between Orthodox and Lutherans, while Latvia contains a mix of Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and Orthodox. This religious pluralism reflects the ethnic diversity of these regions. The proportion of Lutherans in these countries dwindled under communism in part due to the rapidly expanding number of ethnic Russians from 1930 on; by 1990 the populations of both Latvia and Estonia were over 30 percent Russian (Gerner and Hedlund 1993:74). Bruce (1999a:100) also notes that the religious-ethnic bonds in Latvia and Estonia are weak due to the ethnic shifts that occurred under communism. And recently, the Lutheran Church has been unsuccessful in recruiting large numbers of Latvians and Estonians.

ATHEISM AND COMPETITION

The amazing decline and then re-growth of religious monopolies across the Soviet Union is mainly due to the arrival and then disappearance of a powerful religious competitor — the doctrine of scientific atheism. Soviets introduced “scientific atheism” as an alternative to religion; the doctrine of atheism held a monopoly status within the Soviet religious economy through state repression of its ideological competitors and continued government funding of its promotion (Froese *forthcoming*).

Following the Russian Revolution, the Communist Party fully believed that the intellectual enlightenment brought on by modernization and socialism would naturally quell all religious activity.

The advent of a new society was to make the eradication of religion all but automatic. . . . In this belief the party turned out to be greatly mistaken. The Bolsheviks had anticipated post-revolutionary battles involving political parties, classes, nationalities, and interest groups. What they did not foresee was the extent to which competing cultural perceptions and aspirations that emerged around the issue of atheism would bring an important cultural dimension into the equation as well (Husband 2000; 35).

In reaction to stubbornly held religious beliefs, the Soviets began a two pronged attack on religion. First, the activities of all religious groups throughout the Soviet Union were "brought under tight control by 60 years of militant demands and brute force, including two major official campaigns in the early 1930s and early 1960s to close down thousands of churches and change the religious landscape quickly" (Boiter 1980: 12; also see Ramet 1998; Luukkanen 1994; and Pospelovsky 1987).

Second, the Soviets established an intensive project to re-educate their citizenry in which scientific atheism was vigorously taught in schools, promoted in all public areas of life, and preached by state-supported atheist proselytes (Kaariainen 1989; Powell 1975). The Communist Party created an organization called the League of Militant Atheists to spread the message of atheism to the masses (see Peris 1998). This group referred to the whole Marxist-Leninist system of doctrines as "scientific-atheism." In general, scientific atheism combined a belief in socialist utopianism with an ethical mandate to proselytize the message of atheism. In sum, scientific atheism was not a science or even a social science but a Marxist-inspired faith in the moral superiority of belief in historical materialism.

Many Marxist-Leninists believed that fully educated individuals would eschew religious beliefs as uncivilized superstition. The initial policies of the Soviet regime set out to fully industrialize society and redistribute power amongst disenfranchised workers; in addition, Soviet citizens were to receive free and liberal educations. The joint impact of industrialization, collectivization, and atheist education was intended to create a new "Soviet human" who was free from the psychological bondage of pre-communist society, especially the phantasm of antiquated religious beliefs. Studies of the communist educational system show that "physics, biology, chemistry, astronomy, mathematics, history, geography and literature all serve as jumping-off points to instruct pupils on the evils or falsity of religion" (Bociurkiw and Strong 1975: 153).

In addition, they attempted to replace traditional religious rituals with atheist holidays and ceremonies; for instance, the Soviet state offered atheist alternatives to baptisms, confirmations, weddings, and funerals (Powell 1975: 71). Interestingly, communist ceremonies mimicked religious ones in eerie detail with communist officials wearing robes and conducting solemn rituals in church-like settings. Clearly, the obvious mimicry of religious practices had strayed far from the initial Marxist-Leninist vision of daily life under communism. Nevertheless, communists hoped that atheistic rituals would ease individuals out of long held traditional practices and provide a new source of symbolism, meaning and morality.

These tactics resulted in massive declines in church memberships and dramatic increases in atheists and non-believers. Now whether Soviets who classified themselves as "atheists" really believed in the teachings of scientific atheism

is difficult to determine. Kuran (1995) investigates the difficult task of determining public opinion in countries with high levels of preference falsification. Preference falsification refers to a situation in which publicly stated opinions fail to reflect privately held beliefs. This occurs mainly when a societal or political force coerces individuals to systematically hide certain personal beliefs. Kuran (1995:336) recognizes the problems in measuring levels of preference falsification and ironically notes that "the unavailability of good opinion data may itself be a sign of preference falsification." Clearly, this presents a dilemma in accurately estimating belief in scientific atheism among a population that is not permitted to voice anti-Communist thoughts.

Nevertheless, individuals stopped attending religious services and religious organizations lost a great deal of funding and resources under communist rule. In addition, scientific atheism introduced something new into the religious landscape of the Soviet Union — competition. Not only did atheism vie for the hearts and minds of the population, but the weakening of religious monopolies allowed for an increase in religious pluralism.

Before the Russian Revolution, minority religious groups represented a small percent of the population (less than 10 percent) of all territories that would become the Soviet Union. These groups included Bahais, Baptists, Buddhists, Evangelicals, Flagellants, Innokentians, Mennonites, Old Believers, Pentecostals, and Tolstoyans to name a few that were most visible at the beginning of the 20th Century (Corley 1996). By mid-century and toward the end of the Soviet era, Hare Krishnas, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventists and various "charismatic" sects entered the religious landscape. And the fall of the Soviet Union brought a multitude of foreign missionaries to each successor state (see Elliot and Corrada 1997). Ironically, it appears that Soviet Communism actually helped the growth of minority religious groups.

Soviets attacked dominant religious groups in order to upset their monopoly status. In the process, smaller religious groups attracted some individuals fleeing the repression of the Communist government. These smaller religious groups became more desirable mainly due to their lower profile. In addition, these groups were accustomed to dealing with religious repression prior to communist rule (Froese *forthcoming*).

Religious pluralism grew not only through the continued efforts of small proselytizing religious groups but also due to the systematic movement of peoples throughout the Soviet Union. Most significant to this discussion, the Soviets placed ethnic Russians and Ukrainians in Central Asia, many of whom are migrating back to their regions of origin in post-communist times (Azrael and Payin 1996). Even though all Soviets were atheistic comrades according to official ideology, the displacement of peoples fostered greater religious diversity or at least the integration of people with very different religious histories. "In this context occasional tensions arose between religious groups within

Christianity and also within Islam in terms of jostling for their 'share of the market'" (Lewis 2000).

But it was the fall of the Soviet Union which opened the door to a wide variety of foreign missionaries. Once again, this can be attributed to the role of the Communist Party as an atheist competitor; the immediate removal of the dominant atheist competitor created a hole in the religious market that outsiders would try to fill. By 1995, over 3000 missionaries from a count of 25 Western agencies alone spread throughout the Soviet Union in hopes of assembling new congregations (Elliot and Corrado 1997:336). Although these Western groups have met with some successes many have failed because they often do not understand the circumstances of their would-be converts. "The greatest flaw may be inadequate to nonexistent country-specific and culture-specific preparation; that is, woefully insufficient study of pertinent languages, literature and history" (Elliot and Corrado 1997:338). Also, missionaries need time to learn how to approach and appeal to individuals who have had years of education and indoctrination into the tenets of scientific atheism.

Overall religious membership has grown in the former Soviet Union regardless of religious diversity. This occurred because former monopoly churches actively pursued the population of disenfranchised atheists and non-believers even when they have had little competition from religious competitors. But when religious competition increased after the fall of the Soviet Union, a reassertion of new religious laws insured that religious monopolies would once again dominate.

RENEWED RELIGIOUS REPRESSION

A decade after the fall of the Soviet Union, Communist elites continue to rule Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan by applying "repressive campaigns to eliminate all forms of opposition, subverting democracy and elections almost as meticulously as the Soviets did and eliminating their political opponents through assassination, imprisonment or exile" (Rashid 2001:45). The states of Central Asia are all predominantly Muslim. Greater religious freedoms were assumed following the emergence of state independence, but each of these Central Asian countries returned to strict religious laws which in some form favor certain Islamic groups. In both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, the government "unofficially distinguishes between 'traditional' and 'nontraditional' religions, suggesting a de facto inequality" (Marshall 2000:185). Religious freedoms are more harshly denied in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. This is done through constitutional articles which require respect for "national traditions;" this results in the severe persecution of most religious groups (Gvosdev 2001:86). But "the major religious groups, Islam and Eastern Orthodoxy, suffer fewer problems as long as they do not criticize the government" (Marshall 2000: 304). Therefore, Muslims

continue to recruit and organize under these conditions as long as they remain deferential to the ruling elite. In turn, their religious competitors are severely regulated.

However, "the growing popularity of militant Islam . . . springs directly from the refusal of the Central Asian regimes to broaden the political base of their governments, allow democratization, and lift bans on political activity" (Rashid 2001:55). The Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) successfully fought political repression in the Tajikistan civil war and now enjoys membership in the coalition government of Tajikistan. It appears that to avoid more civil unrest other states of Central Asia will need to recognize Islamic political parties. This could lead to more reductions in religious pluralism and the official dominance of Islam in these regions. The low percentage of new religious groups in Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan is directly related to strong religious repression.

In some ways, the Orthodox Church may serve as a model for emerging Islamic coalitions. It has successfully influenced a dramatic shift in post-Soviet laws granting religious freedom. Russia enjoyed complete religious liberty for the first time in its history for a brief seven-year period. The influx of foreign missionaries and the vigorous activities of Protestant groups upset the Orthodox Church. "Indeed, [the Orthodox] complain that the Protestant fundamentalists behave in Russia as if it had never known Christianity and was a country of pagan savages" (Pospelovsky 1987:55). The Orthodox community assumed that religiously unaffiliated Russians should be theirs for the taking in post-communist times. But the success of non-Orthodox Christian groups proved too dramatic to bear. Soon after the advent of religious liberty,

an influential body of opinion began to proclaim that the freedoms had gone too far, that they threatened the true traditions of Russia, and that something must be done to curb them. Such attitudes are to a certain extent understandable and justifiable, though the methods attempted to bring some control to into the anarchy were unbelievably crude (Bourdeaux 1995:118).

In 1997, the Russian Duma revised the Bill on Religious Freedom to create a new policy of religious restriction that in some ways resembled the laws under Stalin. "The reaction was out of all proportion, but the old atheist guard believed that they day had come again" (Bourdeaux 2000:10).

Sociologist Sergei Filatov regards [the new religious law] as so repressive as to be inoperable. He predicts that authorities will exploit it to keep minority churches intimidated, and at the mercy for the extortion of bribes in exchange for the privilege of building a church or renting a hall. It will also place many churches at the mercy of the good will of the local Orthodox bishop or priest. (Broun 1998: 258-9)

Many of the Orthodox regions of the former Soviet Union followed the example of Russia and also passed very restrictive religious laws. Belarus, Moldova,

Georgia, and the Ukraine all have official policies that favor the Orthodox Church (see Marshall 2000).

The Orthodox Church has convincingly argued that new religious groups pose a danger to the cultural independence of its society. In response, post-communist laws continue to limit the promotion of certain religious doctrines as a way to eliminate what they view as brainwashing sects and cults.

The Roman Catholic Church of Lithuania also receives some assistance from the new Lithuanian government. "It enjoys the full range of [advantages] found in the traditional Roman Catholic societies of Western Europe: theological seminaries, monastic orders, army chaplains, the right to teach religious in schools, radio and TV studios, and the regular airing of programs and a full range of publications" (Marshall 2000:205). As mentioned earlier, Bruce (1999a) argues that religious growth in Lithuania undermines the competition hypothesis because Lithuania is religiously homogeneous. In addition, while the Lithuanian Roman Catholic Church certainly enjoys some advantages over its religious competitors, official religious laws are more tolerant than in most other former Soviet republics.

Finally, the least religiously restrictive regions of the former Soviet Union are also the ones which are the most pluralistic. Estonia and Latvia do little to regulate their religious markets. And the correlation between levels of regulation and levels of pluralism for all the countries in my sample is $-.671$ and significant at the $.01$ level. This indicates that higher levels of religious regulation are more common in regions with a clearly dominant religion regardless of what that religion may be.

What one can very clearly see across the former Soviet Union is a return to government regulation of religion in areas where one religious group makes up the majority of the population. In turn, regulation helps these dominant groups recruit non-believers and atheists. Majority religions grow most substantially in regions where minority religious groups are more highly regulated. The Lithuanian Roman Catholic is a clear exception to this trend; it was able to recruit a high percent of the population (19 percent) without any substantial restrictions on religious competitors.

Roman Catholic exceptionalism is not confined to the former Soviet Union. The Polish Catholic Church provides the fascinating example of how Roman Catholicism can thrive in hostile environments. Due to the symbiosis of national and religious interests in Poland, the Roman Catholic Church became an important vehicle to safely house political opposition to the communist regime. And the Polish political environment bifurcated into essentially two distinct camps — the communists vs. the Catholics.

Thus in Poland, after the Stalinist period and following the Gomulka government's recognition of the national function of the Polish Catholic Church, two relatively equal partial systems were created. This statement may seem paradoxical considering the objective inferiority to which the church was subjected by the dominant political powers. But from the

social point of view, it managed to mark out a part of the social environment within definite boundaries and establish itself as a macrosystem capable of contesting the state system on equal terms, both at the symbolic level and that of social mobilization. (Borowik 1994:136).

Religiosity soared in Poland under communism because it embodied the only means for spiritual, nationalistic, political, and intellectual expression outside the dictates of communist ideology. In fact, Osa (1997:339) argues that the Polish Catholic Church not only housed nationalist activists but actually helped to create the ideological position of Solidarity and "paved the way for a movement that transcends social boundaries." Polish Catholicism became the "symbol of a solid nation against an atheistic communist regime" (Osa 1997:339). In turn, it became the most successful majority religious group to exist under communist rule.

The Lithuanian Catholic Church may have benefited from the example provided by Roman Catholics in Poland. For instance, "the visit of the Pope to Poland in the spring of 1979 had as much impact on Lithuanian Catholics as it had in Poland itself" (Boiter 1980:70). The fact that the Polish Catholic Church remained powerful throughout the communist era inspired Lithuanians to oppose communism through their religion. And following the fall of the Soviet Union, the Lithuanian Catholic Church naturally developed into the nationalist center of a free Lithuania. In turn, Roman Catholicism flourished in Lithuania.

In general, the Roman Catholic Church in Poland and Lithuania was stronger than other monopoly churches because it relied less on state support prior to communism and retained enough autonomy and resources to support nationalist opposition to communist rule. Perhaps, the Roman Catholic Church has learned to retain its autonomy from the state or is temporarily enjoying its apparent lack of competition. If and when smaller religious groups begin to gain popularity in Roman Catholic countries, it will be interesting to watch the Roman Catholic Church's response to see if legal regulations of religious competition will develop.

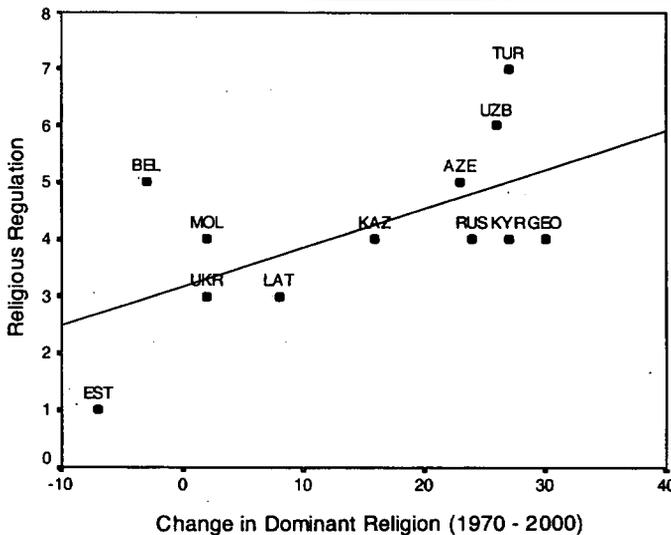
If I take Lithuania out of my analysis as a special case which requires additional explanation, the relationship between regulation and the growth of majority religions becomes clear (see Figure 3). A Pearson's correlation between regulation and religious growth is strong (.588) and significant at the 0.05 level. This finding is substantial considering the small size of the sample ($n = 12$).

By seeking restrictions of their competitors, dominant religious groups act in accordance to religious-economies predictions. Regulation clearly works to their advantage. Through the regulation of smaller religious groups, dominant religions can better exploit the opportunities left by the collapse of their powerful atheist competitor. In the end, this analysis shows that the re-emergence of monopoly churches occurs not through innovation and vitality but through political favoritism. While monopoly religions across the former Soviet Union are currently reaping the benefit of state support, their strength will be

compromised in the long run. As Elliot and Corrado (1997:347) correctly warn, "Orthodox, for their part, need to recognize that religious pluralism is unavoidable in a free society, and that a renewal of state-enforced Orthodox privilege would only sap its spiritual vitality."

FIGURE 3

Relationship between Religious Pluralism and Growth of Majority Religions (Lithuania Removed)



Note: Armenia was not included in the above figure because it is an extremely outlier in terms of religious growth (see endnotes); Lithuania is also removed (see text).

CONCLUSION

Studies of religious revivals throughout the former Soviet Union must account for the impact of decades of forced secularization. This impact is complex. First, the Communist Party actively promoted atheism and successfully reduced religious membership. This was accomplished through a combined effort of coercion and conversion. Stalin, Khrushchev and other Soviet rulers severely punished religious leaders and successfully scared a lot of people out of their pews. And many Soviet teachers, professors, reporters, officials and atheist activists preached the dogma of scientific atheism to a literally captive audience. As a result, much of the Soviet population was rendered ignorant of the true teachings of religious groups and many publicly claimed to be atheists or non-believers.

Second, the Communist Party unwittingly brought about a more diverse religious market. In addition to introducing an atheistic alternative into mainly monopolistic religious markets, the Communist Party broke the hold major religious groups had over more innovative sects and also integrated people with

different religious backgrounds. Small religious groups of Evangelicals and Pentecostals grew while the dominant churches dramatically shrank in the first half of the 20th Century. This is not to say that these small religious groups avoided persecution by the Communist regime. But they were able to find new niches under the radar of repression while the Soviet government focused its efforts on destroying monopoly religions.

In the end, the Communist Party lost political power and "scientific atheism" lost its sponsor. Within this vacuum, religious groups compete to establish ties to an unusually large religiously unaffiliated population. Vigorous promotion of new religions and increases in religious pluralism have generated intense competition between religious doctrines. This competition explains a renewed appetite for religion and also explains the renewed presence of religious regulations. Traditionally dominant religious groups tend to be displeased with the activities of smaller religious groups and foreign missionaries. Subsequently, they have sought assistance from their governments to reduce the competition by limiting the promotion of "nontraditional" religious doctrines. As a result, there is a renewal of state-supported religions which enjoy a definite advantage in recruiting from the vast religiously-unaffiliated population.

These unique circumstances have produced an unusual phenomenon — dramatic religious growth in the absence of religious pluralism. But the religious-economies model predicts that religiosity will grow weaker if these monopoly religions retain their political favoritism. As scientific atheism becomes a thing of the past, monopoly religions are expected to again rely on state support for their dominance and religious fervor will fade. Conversely, countries currently enjoying religious liberties are expected to show increases in religiosity with time.

The story of religion in the Soviet Union is essentially about the dramatic rise and fall of an atheist competitor and the religious market that was left in its wake. Interestingly, years of religious repression have given rise *not* to new levels of religious freedom but a return to pre-communist relations between church and state.

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