

THE ANTI-ABORTION AGENDA IN THE CONSERVATIVE DISCOURSE IN RUSSIA: IDEOLOGICAL CAMPAIGNS, LEGAL INITIATIVES AND REGIONAL PRACTICES

ZHANNA CHERNOVA, LARISA SHPAKOVSKAYA

The article examines the processes of conservative mobilization in Russia in 2000-2010s as a deployment of ideological propaganda campaigns using the conservative rhetoric of the traditional family, traditional values, and traditional gender roles in order to solve “demographic problems”, above all the increase of fertility. The main focus of the article is the discourse on abortion. State anti-abortion propaganda is viewed as a “litmus test” of the ongoing processes of retraditionalization of state ideology and of instruments for regulating reproduction and sexuality. In analyzing the legislative and regional initiatives of the period under study, the authors describe the main public actors of the regional and federal levels, as well as the rhetoric they use. The article shows that since the 2000s one of the leading actors working for the adoption of anti-abortion legislation has been the Russian Orthodox Church. At the same time, there have been public actors at the federal level who have held back the adoption of anti-abortion legislation and have been consistently critical of anti-abortion rhetoric. Also at the same time, on the regional level, pro-conservative mobilization actors have effectively used state support, without encountering noticeable criticism. Substantively anti-abortion rhetoric is inscribed in the discourse on demographic problems and population decline as a threat to national security. It is aimed at regulating people’s intimate behavior, their bodies, and morality, thus representing a variant of biopolitics in the terms of Michel Foucault. In this sense, the ultimate goal of conservative mobilization is to create docile citizens indoctrinated with the ideology of a traditional family lifestyle and large families.

Key words: anti-abortion rhetoric, conservatism, fertility, traditional family values, discourse analysis

INTRODUCTION

Since the mid-2000s there has been a distinct strengthening of the conservative trend in Russian political discourse, especially noticeable in the politicization of issues of marriage and reproductive behavior (Zakharov 2012; Sakevich, Denisov, Rivkin-Fish 2016).

Expressed in terms of “reviving traditions” and “preserving traditional family values”, it is associated with criticism of liberal gender discourse and is clearly anti-Western in nature. Examples are the propaganda campaigns aimed at restricting women's reproductive rights, preventing the introduction of juvenile justice, and banning homosexual propaganda (Muravyova 2014).

ZHANNA CHERNOVA (chernova30@mail.ru), THE SOCIOLOGICAL INSTITUTE OF THE RAS – BRANCH OF THE FEDERAL CENTER OF THEORETICAL AND APPLIED SOCIOLOGY OF THE RUSSIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES, RUSSIA.

LARISA SHPAKOVSKAYA (slarisalarisa@gmail.com), THE SOCIOLOGICAL INSTITUTE OF THE RAS – BRANCH OF THE FEDERAL CENTER OF THEORETICAL AND APPLIED SOCIOLOGY OF THE RUSSIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES, RUSSIA.

The conservative turn in modern societies in recent years has both a global and a local dimension and is a complexly organized phenomenon. On the one hand, it is taking place in a broader context of individualization and pluralization of gender relations and biographies. These changes are conceptualized by theories such as the theory of reflexive modernization (Giddens 1991), the risk society (Bek 2000), and the second demographic transition (Van de Kaa 1987). They postulate the strengthening of individualization and of the role of choice and reflexivity in modern societies. In other words, they draw attention to the fact that all aspects of a human biography are becoming a matter of individual choice, not tradition. In the case of marriage and reproduction, this means transforming their meaning, acquiring the properties of personal, planned and conscious decisions and choices (Giddens 2004). Social theorists also draw attention to the growing importance of political discourse, expert knowledge and the media in shaping social reflexivity through the definition of normative patterns of behavior, including in the area of family and reproduction (Giddens 1991; Illouz 2008).

On the other hand, traditional gender ideology and the actors promoting this agenda are becoming more influential in the field of public policy. Conservative discourse in a variety of contexts is built around the need to tighten control over female reproduction and make women responsible for the reproduction of the nation (Yuval-Davis 1997; Roche 2016; Graff, Ratna, Walters 2019). Heterosexual marriage, which is considered a condition for high fertility, becomes the rallying point of the conservative gender order. The establishment of a conservative family and demographic agenda implies not only the normalization of heterosexual marriage as the normative model of the family, but also the accumulation of various types of resources by actors who are actively involved in conservative mobilization (regional executive authorities, the ROC (Russian Orthodox Church), GONGOs (Government-Organized Non-Governmental Organizations)). The question of how conservative mobilization is occurring in modern Russian society, how the local scenario fits into global trends, needs to be studied more carefully.

In this article, we analyze the processes of conservative mobilization as a set of propaganda ideological campaigns aimed at solving demographic problems and, above all, at increasing the birth rate, using the conservative rhetoric of the “traditional family”, “traditional family values” and traditional gender roles. We are also interested in how the anti-abortion rhetoric fits into the discourse of conservative mobilization.

To study conservative mobilization, we analyze publications in regional and federal media for 2000-2010. Publications were selected using the INTEGRUM electronic database, using the keywords “abortion”, “anti-abortion”, “against abortion”, “the right to have an abortion”. At the first stage, all publications were automatically selected according to these keywords, available in the electronic archive of the most authoritative Russian media INTEGRUM. Then, from the array of articles found by the database, the researchers removed publications that were not related to the discourse of power. That is, the sample included only publications describing the actions of representatives of regional and federal authorities and of the Russian Orthodox Church, as well as broadcast statements and speeches of representatives of authorities at all levels. In addition, the database of empirical materials included only articles for which the issue of abortion is central in meaning. The database of materials for discursive analysis was supplemented with legislative documents related to demography and health (document search was carried out using the

Consultant+ database). In addition, our database of materials includes publications representing expert discourse in the field of social sciences and demography on the problem of fertility. Discourse analysis was carried out using the thematic analysis method (Flick 2006).

CONSERVATIVE MOBILIZATION IN RUSSIAN POLITICAL DISCOURSE

Conservative mobilization in Russia in the field of family and reproduction is justified by the demographic situation that modern Russian society is experiencing (Vishnevsky 2012a, b; Vishnevsky, Zakharov 2019; Vishnevsky, Sakevich, Denisov 2018; Rivkin-Fish 2013). The institutional design and instruments of family policy in modern Russia focus mainly on monetary support for parenthood, paying less attention to the development of infrastructure for caring for children and leaving on the periphery of the state's attention the social and economic problems of parents, such as socialization in a new parental role, the social isolation of women during active motherhood, and the reduced competitiveness of young mothers in the labor market (Chernova 2012a; Chernova 2012b; Shpakovskaya 2012, 2013; Yarskaya-Smirnova 2010). The conservative ideology aimed at creating and maintaining the myth of a prosperous large family is at odds with the model of professional, family and reproductive behavior of women that developed over decades of Soviet power: a small number of children, a high level of participation of women in paid employment, high divorce rates and, as a result, a large number of maternal families, where the woman is the sole breadwinner (Zdravomyslova and Temkina 2003; Rotkirch and Temkina 2007; Pecherskaya 2012).

Conservative mobilization in its current form became possible thanks to those social, political and cultural transformations of late Soviet society in the 1980s, which in essence represented a "conservative revolution" (Magun 2010). The growing importance of conservative discourse in the domestic policy of the state was associated with the discussion of demographic problems (Sakevich, Denisov, Rivkin-Fish 2016). In 2006, President of the Russian Federation V.V. Putin, in his message to the Federal Assembly, stated that the demographic problems in society associated with a decrease in the birth rate are the result of the spread of non-family values among young people¹. This thesis justified the need to revive "traditional family values" and the "traditional family" as a necessary condition for increasing the birth rate. The concept of state policy in relation to the young family defines as the goal of family policy the popularization in society, especially among the youth, of "spiritual and moral values of the pre-revolutionary family".² A landmark event for the promotion of conservative mobilization was the establishment in 2008 of the Day of Family, Love and Fidelity (July 8) under the auspices of Peter and Fevronia, the canonized symbols of Christian marriage.

In addition to the symbolic strengthening of the traditional family, the state has made attempts to support this normative model through economic measures. For example, in 2012, additions were made to the Law on State Social Assistance, making available for "poor citizens,

¹ Message of the President of the Russian Federation to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation from 10.05.2006 (2006). ConsultantPlus. URL: <http://base.consultant.ru/cons/cgi/online.cgi?req=doc;base=LAW;n=60109>

² The concept of state policy in relation to the young family, approved on May 8, 2007 by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation. URL: http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_98438/

families with many children, families raising children with disabilities...”³ grants for the organization of a family business. According to this law, for a family to be eligible for such a grant the parents must be legally married and have at least two children. In the Concept of State Family Policy in the Russian Federation until 2025⁴, the emphasis is on the economic well-being of parents as the basis for a stable family and social stability in general. Such rhetoric clearly demonstrates that, from the state’s perspective, parents (primarily mothers) are not the subject of politics, but its tool, which, if used correctly, should help maintain the effective implementation of state tasks to ensure the economic and social stability of society. State instrumentalism in relation to the family is also manifested in public discussions of the possibility of introducing such disciplinary measures as raising the divorce tax, imposing a tax on childless couples who do not have children but are able to, and reducing indications for social abortions.

ANTI-ABORTION RHETORIC⁵ AS A SYMBOLIC INDICATOR OF RUSSIAN CONSERVATISM

The gradual growth of conservative tendencies in Russian society begins in the 2000s with the active participation of the Russian Orthodox Church, which sets the framework for the discussion of moral issues, acting as the main conveyer of traditional views on relations between the sexes. The modern reading of traditional family values is essentially synonymous with the anti-abortion position. The problem of abortion is a litmus test of ongoing processes of retraditionalization of the state ideology and tools for regulating sexuality.

With the active support of the leadership of the ROC, such a measure as the “week of silence” was introduced, which has been observed since 2011. At the same time, the Law “On the Fundamentals of Protecting the Health of Citizens of the Russian Federation”⁶ was adopted, which, in particular, regulates the procedure for abortions. Women who choose to have an abortion are asked to wait between two and seven days, depending on the length of their pregnancy. During this time, they must be examined by a gynecologist, shown the fetus on an ultrasound scan, made to listen to its heartbeat, and consulted by a psychologist. The introduction of this measure provoked a controversial reaction from society. Feminist organizations opposed the use of such pressure on women, considering it a way of forcing them to make a decision to have the child⁷. Despite these protests, the “week of silence” began to be actively used in state medical institutions.

³ Federal Law «On State Social Assistance» from 17.07.1999 178-FZ. *KonsultantPlus*. URL: http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_23735/

⁴ Order of the Government of the Russian Federation from 25.08.2014 1618-r «On approval of the Concept of the State Family Policy in the Russian Federation for the period up to 2025». URL: http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_167897/

⁵ By anti-abortion rhetoric, we mean a system of interpretations arguing a total prohibition or substantial restriction of a woman’s right to a medical procedure for the termination of pregnancy.

⁶ Federal Law «On Fundamentals of Health Protection of Citizens of the Russian Federation» from 20.11.2011 323-FZ. URL: http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_121895/

⁷ Radulova N. (2011). My body is my business. *Ogoniok*, 36, 52. URL: <https://ww.kommersant.ru/doc/1763592>

Since about the beginning of the 2010s, there has been an active political discussion about restricting access to abortions (Sakevich, Denisov, Ryvki-Fish 2016). The leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church has repeatedly spoken out in favor of withdrawing abortions from the mandatory health insurance system. It regularly appeals to representatives of the federal government with a demand to restrict the reproductive rights of women, leaving the possibility of abortion only on a paid basis. This position is supported by a number of conservative officials. The most striking example is the position of the Commissioner for Children's Rights, A. Kuznetsova: *"I dream of a time when not a single woman intends to or even thinks of having an abortion."*⁸ For this, in her opinion, it is necessary to provide more help to women in crisis and planning to have an abortion. In addition to a helpline and legal and psychological assistance to women, the children's ombudsman has ensured the inclusion of lessons on family happiness (the "Family Studies" course in general education schools) in the Plan for the Decade of Childhood, which is being implemented in Russia from 2018 to 2027.

A more moderate position, not supporting a complete ban on abortion, is taken by representatives of the Ministry of Health and the medical community, who fear that the ban will lead to an increase in the number of criminal abortions and negative consequences: a rise in maternal and infant mortality⁹. Moreover, the economic feasibility of a ban, which the conservatives insist on, is denied by the leadership of the Ministry of Health.

In September 2018, the Investigative Committee (IC) of the Russian Federation took the initiative to introduce the term "human fetus" into Article 124.1 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation in order to criminalize the death of a child before birth. In the current version of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, such a term does not exist and the human fetus is not a subject of criminal law. The position of the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation is based on the fact that *"recently we have received many complaints, and we are beginning criminal procedures and procedural checks on the fact of death of a fetus, including during childbirth. Often, forensic experts establish a direct causal relationship between the actions of doctors and the death of the fetus. But since the fetus is not yet separated from the mother, then, according to the law, death before the moment of birth does not fall under the articles of the Criminal Code, and we cannot hold doctors accountable for improper provision of assistance during obstetrics and are forced to stop criminal prosecution"*¹⁰. The professional medical community strongly criticized this proposal, citing the possibility of unreasonable criminal prosecution of doctors. Despite the fact that, officially, the proposal of the IC to make the human fetus a subject of criminal law is associated with attempts to introduce punishment for the negligence of doctors and is not connected with anti-abortion rhetoric, in practice, the introduction of this legal norm can be used by opponents of abortion as a mechanism for putting pressure on doctors and forcing them to renounce this medical procedure.

⁸ Anna Kuznetsova told about plans to solve the problem of abortion in Russia (2019). RIA Novosti, 10.01.2019. URL: https://ria.ru/20190110/1549193777.html?fbclid=IwAR3hCNCJix0FJas1jcHjc1_xaBugG8XiVHjAgZsB-Hvi_i21MIXQ

⁹ Veronica Skvortsova: in our country there is already a negative experience of a complete ban on abortion. TASS. Interview. 3.10.2016. <https://tass.ru/interviews/3672086> (Date of circulation 01.07.2021)

¹⁰ The Investigative Committee on the defense of rights. *Med Novosti*, September 13, 2018 <https://medportal.ru/mednovosti/sledstvennyy-komit-et-na-zaschite-prav-ploda/> (Address date 26.03.2021).

In August 2018, a deputy of the Legislative Assembly of St. Petersburg, A. Tsivilev, submitted a proposal to the Ministry of Health of the Russian Federation to prohibit unmarried women from using the IVF procedure. The deputy believes that this procedure should be available only to those women who are in an officially registered or civil marriage. At the moment, the Ministry of Health is considering this proposal. Despite the fact that this initiative is not directly related to a ban on abortion, it nevertheless also illustrates the conservative approach in modern Russian family policy, the purpose of which is not just to increase the birth rate, but to support the birth of children from the "correct" parents from the point of view of the state.

On January 25, 2019, State Duma deputy V. Milonov took the initiative to equate abortion with murder and introduce criminal punishment for it: *"We mustn't hide behind neutral terms like "termination of pregnancy" or "unwanted fetus." This is the murder of a person in the womb, period"*¹¹.

According to statistics, there has been a decrease in the number of abortions. In 2010, 1,186,100 thousand abortions were registered in Russia, and in 2019 the number was already down to 621,700 (including miscarriages)¹². Deputy Minister of Health T. Yakovleva stated that informing women had had an impact on the situation with abortions: centers for psychological and social support for pregnant women were organized in each antenatal clinic^{13, 14}. Demographers, however, cite the spread of modern contraception among Russians as the main reason for the decline in the number of abortions (Vishnevsky, Denisov, Sakevich 2017).

On February 13, 2019, a working group headed by P. Tolstoy was created in the State Duma of the Russian Federation to discuss legislative initiatives proposed by the Russian Orthodox Church. One of the key issues is the proposal to withdraw abortions from the mandatory health insurance system, which the leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church regularly submits to the authorities. The rhetoric of the head of the Russian Orthodox Church is built around legal (the right of an unborn child to life) and economic (the use of taxpayers' funds) arguments. During the opening of the Christmas parliamentary meetings in the State Duma of the Russian Federation, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church called paying for abortions for non-medical reasons (a figure of 5 billion rubles a year was named) a problem for taxpayers¹⁵. In this regard, he noted that the right to life of an unborn child should be recognized: "Let me remind you that the right to life, guaranteed by the Constitution of Russia, should imply its protection from the moment of

¹¹ Milonov proposes to equate abortion with murder (2019). RIA Novosti, 25.01.2019 URL: <https://ria.ru/ria.ru/20190125/1549887529.html?fbclid=IwAR1Ktf5pIc4-REqvoI-abn4CzMZCbgrbvVwMFGILVPK0vjCP8plA>

¹² Unified Interdepartmental Information and Statistical System (EMISS). URL: <https://fedstat.ru/indicator/31595>

¹³ In the Ministry of Health opposition to the prohibition of abortion (2019). Pravmir, 15.02.2019. URL: <https://www.pravmir.ru/v-minzdrave-vyistupili-protiv-zapreta-abortov/?fbclid=IwAR3mDslWBM-czxPx63WNf5bYb24OXcfTEtKECjGmLmWMMMMMMEb5c>

¹⁴ In the Ministry of Health opposition to the prohibition of abortion (2019). Pravmir, 15.02.2019. URL: <https://www.pravmir.ru/v-minzdrave-vyistupili-protiv-zapreta-abortov/?fbclid=IwAR3mDslWBM-czxPx63WNf5bYb24OXcfTEtKECjGmLmWMMMMMMEb5c>

¹⁵ The speech of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill at the opening of the VI Christmas parliamentary meetings in the Federation Council (2016). International Christmas Educational Readings, 29.01.2016. URL: <https://mroc.pravobraz.ru/slovo-svyatejshego-patriarxa-kirillana--otkrytiiv-rozhdestskix-parlamentskix-Slamentskix-Trech/Trechvversecofederacii/>

conception. Any form of encroachment on a person's life, including abortion, is a violation of this rule.” The head of the Russian Orthodox Church regularly makes proposals to remove from mandatory health insurance abortions not performed for medical reasons. So, for example, in his speech at the opening of the Christmas parliamentary meetings in the State Duma of the Russian Federation on January 30, 2019, he said: *“I have to say that there have been no legislative changes in this matter. The taxpayer still pays for something that is not and cannot be medical care: for getting rid of an unwanted child for free”*¹⁶.

Responding to a request from the conservative lobby, the Ministry of Health has revised the list of indications for late abortion under mandatory health insurance. In December 2020, a draft order “On approval of the list of medical indications for artificial termination of pregnancy” was posted on the Federal Bills Portal, which reduced the list of such indications in terms of both the woman’s health and fetal disorders. This draft was submitted for public discussion and drew criticism from feminist-oriented public figures and organizations¹⁷, while medical experts argued that significant changes had not been made to the pre-existing list of indications (adopted in 2007)¹⁸.

The success and effectiveness of the ROC as a “developer” of conservative ideology is due to the status of this actor in the modern context of state policy, which gives it access to institutional tools for the (re)production of a new tradition, primarily through the ability to influence the position of federal and regional authorities. At the same time, the marginalization of the feminist agenda in the official ideology and the weak position of feminist organizations opposing the restriction of women's reproductive rights significantly reduce the ability of these organizations to win in the public policy struggle to define tradition. In this situation, representatives of the medical professional community, as well as the Ministry of Health, who take a more moderate position and do not support a complete ban on abortion, act as a deterrent. Their argumentation is not related to moral categories and does not pretend to redefine the semantic meanings of this reproductive choice. The expert position is related to the fear that a complete ban will lead to an increase in the number of criminal abortions and their negative consequences for women's health.

GOVERNMENT-SPONSORED NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS (GONGOS) AS PROMOTERS OF THE ANTI-ABORTION AGENDA

The position of the state as the most significant political actor with a large amount of various resources is the key to setting the agenda, forming and regulating the activities of NGOs in the field of birth control. In the 1990s and early 2000s, state support at the ideological, institutional

¹⁶ Patriarch Kirill responds to opponents of the withdrawal of abortion from MHC (2019). *Regnum.ru*, 30.01.2019. URL: <https://regnum.ru/news/society/2562701.html>

¹⁷ «Biopolitics»: Oksana Pushkina criticizes draft order of the Ministry of Health on restriction of women’s rights to abortion by a list of pathologies (2020). *Novaya Gazeta*, 14.12.2020.

URL: <https://novayagazeta.ru/news/2020/12/14/166411-biopolitika-oksana-pushkina-raskritikovala-proekt-prikazaminzdrava-ob-ogranichenii-prav-zhensna-abortychm>

¹⁸ MOH: Draft Order on List of Medical Indications for Abortion does not abolish termination of pregnancy at the woman’s request (2020). *Novaya Gazeta*, 14.12.2020.

URL: <https://novayagazeta.ru/news/2020/12/14/166431-minzdravproekt--prikazaýo----perechne-meditinskihpokazaniyydlya-aborta-Rotmenyaetyvani-beremennyzhostshiny chinu>

and financial levels made it possible to create a network of family planning centers and to develop programs for sexual education of adolescents and youth. During this period, NGOs supported by foreign foundations were also involved in addressing the high abortion rate.

Since the mid-2000s, the legal framework for regulating and financing the activities of NGOs (for example, the organization of the Presidential Grants Fund), primarily in the social sphere, has changed (Owen, Bindman 2017: 100). Along with this, sanctions were imposed for receiving funding from a number of foreign sources, which led to a situation where affiliation with the state and the Russian Orthodox Church and financing from state and oligarchic funds became the only possible strategy for maintaining the activities of NGOs. As shown above, anti-abortion rhetoric as one of the key tools for promoting traditional values and the “traditional family model” gives impetus to the development of a number of conservatively oriented organizations and initiatives. In the scientific literature, the abbreviation GONGO is used to refer to such public organizations created on the initiative and at the expense of the state (Hasmath, Hildebrandt, Hsu 2019).

One of the largest and most influential GONGOs that openly declare their anti-abortion position is the Saint Andrew the First-Called Foundation, which has been implementing the Sanctity of Motherhood¹⁹ program since 2006. Under its auspices, regular forums are held (“The Sanctity of Motherhood”, “Large Family and the Future of Humanity”) in which representatives of the federal and regional authorities, leading religious denominations and NGOs that support traditional family values take part. Close cooperation with the authorities allows the program staff to participate in the development of political documents in the field of family policy, for example, to introduce initiatives into the concept of family policy in the Russian Federation, to lobby for the introduction of the Family Studies program into the educational standards of secondary schools.

One of the priority projects implemented by the foundation is the You Are Not Alone program, which is focused on supporting women who, “due to life difficulties, find themselves in a situation of reproductive choice.” This project is focused not only on working with women; its task is to ensure the inclusion of psychologists in obstetric institutions. Since 2016, together with the Ministry of Health of the Russian Federation, the foundation has also been holding the All-Russian competition “The Sanctity of Motherhood”, which is aimed at professionals - health workers, psychologists and social workers who oppose abortion. At the end of each year, the results of the work are summed up and the winners of the competition are awarded: specialists who were able to dissuade the largest number of women from having abortions. Thus, 300 people from 60 regions took part in the 2018 competition. One of the nominations was won by a social worker from the perinatal center in the city of Tobolsk, who was awarded the “Sanctity of motherhood” medal for being able to persuade 40 women who applied to the center to decide to keep their pregnancy²⁰.

¹⁹ Holiness of Motherhood. Foundation of Apostle Andrew the First Named <http://fap.ru/programs/svyatost-materinstva/> (date of address 16.06.2021).

²⁰ Inga Yagunova, from Tobolsk, over 1.5 years dissuaded 40 women from abortion (2018). Ural meridian. URL: https://ural-meridian.ru/news/89338/?fbclid=IwAR04epZ9VCXwtn5mm-4LDV9W0gZM_9Nwc_uWdWT5A7m7GYW_U6LkHSAj70

The Fund for Social and Cultural Initiatives (President of the Fund - Svetlana Medvedeva), which has significant financial and administrative resources, has for some years been holding the "Give Me Life!"²¹ event, which not only holds educational events that talk about the dangers of abortion, but supports regional initiatives to introduce a moratorium on abortions. The moratorium, as a rule, is timed to coincide with the Day of Family, Love and Fidelity, which has been celebrated in Russia since 2008. This action is supported by the Ministry of Health of the Russian Federation.

Another example of a GONGO is the all-Russian public movement "For Life!", which was created around the festival of the same name and has been held since the early 2010s²². Geographically, the movement covers 103 regions and includes representatives of the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Belarus and Serbia. The main goal of the movement is the protection of "life" and "family values", which is understood as the fight against abortion by means of propaganda. The movement is actively involved in the development and promotion of bills to protect the "life of children from the moment of conception." An important direction of the movement's work is anti-abortion counseling: persuading women to refuse abortion, training specialists who support the anti-abortion position, and disseminating visual materials about the dangers of abortion.

A major propaganda campaign of this movement was the collection of signatures in support of a petition to ban abortion (February 9, 2016, Initiative No. 87F21245). The organizers claim that they were able to collect 1 million signatures, including the approval of the head of the Russian Orthodox Church²³, which allows them to use the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of March 4, 2013 No. 183 "On the consideration of public initiatives sent by citizens of the Russian Federation using the Internet resource "Russian Public Initiative"²⁴. According to the Decree, such petitions (provided that they were posted on the website of the Russian Public Initiative) should be considered by special expert groups, who then recommend them for consideration by the relevant authority, including the State Duma. However, on the website of the Russian Public Initiative, where this petition is published, it is indicated that 100,192 votes "for" and 2,972 votes "against" were collected²⁵, as a result of which government experts deemed it inadvisable, even though they approved the idea of reducing the number of abortions.

Another example of advancing the anti-abortion agenda with the participation of a GONGO is the establishment by the Women for Life Charitable Foundation in December 2018 of the Ambassador for Life Before Birth Award²⁶. This is an award in the form of a badge presented to those who oppose abortion. One of the activities of the foundation is the project "Saved": *"A single word can save a life. Every day we conduct Internet monitoring and find women who are thinking about having an abortion. Under the guidance of perinatal psychologists, volunteers talk to such*

²¹ Give Me Life. Foundation of socio-cultural initiatives. URL: <http://www.fondsci.ru/projects/social/367/>

²² Russian Public Movement «For Life». URL: <https://rusprolife.ru>

²³ Petition for the protection of children before birth. All-Russian public movement «For life». URL: <https://rusprolife.ru/petitsiya-za-zapret-abortov/>

²⁴ Decree of the President of the Russian Federation dated March 4, 2013. 183 «On consideration of public initiatives directed by citizens of the Russian Federation using the Internet resource "Russian Public Initiative». URL: <http://base.garant.ru/70326884/#ixzz6xwgVCXUj>

²⁵ Payment by the state of abortion only on medical grounds. *Russian social initiative*. URL: <https://www.roi.ru/21245/>

²⁶ Foundation award. *Charity fund «Women for life»*. URL: <https://womenprolife.ru/projects/17>

women, trying to persuade them to keep the child. If targeted assistance is needed, the Fund tries to provide it. The victories of our volunteers are decisions in favor of life. We publish screenshots with good news in our social networks”²⁷. There is no information on the foundation's website about how the women are found and monitored, or what kind of work is done with them; however, reports on the work are regularly published, where you can find out that: “46 babies were saved in May. A total of 2186 saved (June 2021)”, and users can also share “their story” about how women kept their child thanks to the fund.

The promotional video “We defeated the fascists! Let's beat the abortionists!”²⁸, released in the fall of 2018 by the “Family and Demography Foundation in the Name of Saints Peter and Fevronia” (its first head was the now deceased Archpriest Dmitry Smirnov), is a good example of an anti-abortion propaganda initiative. This video is interesting for two characteristic features. First, in social advertising promoting fertility (for example, posters in the Moscow metro reading “The country needs your records”), the only parent is the mother. The figure of the father is not presented either on the poster or in the video. In essence, it is a modern version of the Soviet gender contract, when motherhood was a woman's social duty. Secondly, there is the ad's slogan, as well as a symbolic reference to the Immortal Regiment campaign, which takes place annually on May 9 in all cities of the country. The use of the symbols of the most important official holiday of modern Russia - Victory Day - as well as the comparison of abortion supporters with the Nazis, reflects the position of the authorities (state and church) on demographic problems as a national security problem, the threat of which is equated with the threat of losing the country during World War II.

Thus, anti-abortion rhetoric begins to flourish with the help of NGOs whose activities are legitimized and supported by the state and the Russian Orthodox Church. GONGOs act as conductors of a conservative ideology, which allows them to accumulate ideological and material support, involving women in their initiatives and creating the appearance of support for traditional family values by the population. In their propaganda campaigns, they use war mobilization rhetoric, urging women to refuse abortion in order to “save the nation” and “advance the national interest.”

INSTITUTIONAL NETWORKS TO SUPPORT ANTI-ABORTION POLICY AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL

In this section, we will show how institutional networks for supporting anti-abortion policy are being formed at the regional level as an indicator of the conservative mobilization actively deployed in recent years at the national level. For regional authorities, improvement of priority demographic indicators is one measure of the effectiveness of their activities. The cooperation of executive authorities with conservatively oriented actors, primarily the ROC, allows the regions not only to pursue a family policy that does not contradict the priorities set at the national level,

²⁷ Save the person inside you. *Charity fund "Women for life"*. URL: <https://womenprolife.ru>

²⁸ We defeated the fascists! We'll defeat the abortionists! *Youtube*. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aqnSOL1rrzY>

but also to accumulate additional resources for the implementation of such projects. To understand how conservative mobilization is developing in modern Russian society, how anti-abortion rhetoric is built, and which actors are involved in shaping and promoting the anti-abortion agenda, we analyze a number of regional initiatives that seem to be the most significant in terms of creating forms of cooperation between state and religious bodies.

Local authorities have taken a creative approach to the development of measures for the practical implementation of the decisions of the Ministry of Health on the prevention of abortion. For example, in the Volgograd region, a mobile abortion prevention service was created under the Volgograd diocese, which included a priest and representatives of the regional committees for social protection of the population and health care. The purpose of the service was to assist in the promotion of family values, the prevention of abortion and the organization of pre-abortion counseling. It was assumed that the employees of the service would meet with the heads of medical institutions, including antenatal clinics and maternity hospitals, as well as families who had decided to have an abortion, in order to dissuade (primarily women) from performing this medical procedure. The question of where the employees of the mobile service receive information about specific families that decide to terminate a pregnancy is not discussed²⁹.

In the Far East, increasing the birth rate and preventing abortions are priority areas for regional demographic policy. In the region of Khabarovsk, the number of women who refused abortions increased by 22% over the year of operation, an experience assessed as successful, hence which should be extended to other regions. Work on the prevention of abortion, according to O. Ponomareva, an expert of the Committee on Family, Women and Children of the State Duma of the Russian Federation, involves, firstly, counseling of women, including online (webinars), by family psychologists and other specialists, and secondly, *“monitoring among the health workers of the region, who make decisions on population policy to one degree or another. I am sure that among them there are many who maintain a high level of tolerance for abortion. If they believe that this is acceptable, then this opinion is extrapolated to other specialists. We need to actively work here to prevent this from happening. We are ready to help, and I am sure that in a year we will already see positive results”*³⁰.

In 2018, a four-day moratorium (temporary ban) on abortions was introduced in three regions of Russia³¹: in Primorsky Krai from July 31 to August 3, and in Yakutia and the Ryazan region from July 9 to 15. A similar initiative was held as part of the Give Me Life! campaign, organized by the Svetlana Medvedeva Foundation for Social and Cultural Initiatives together with the Ministry of Health of the Russian Federation.

In Krasnoyarsk, antenatal clinics are implementing the Doctors for Life project, which is also aimed at preventing abortions. In March 2018, Krasnoyarsk Maternity Hospital No. 4 received

²⁹ Lopatin V. (2019). In the Volgograd diocese, a mobile service for the prevention of abortion is created. *NovostiVolgograd.ru*, 04.02.2019. URL: <https://novostivolgograda.ru/news/society/04-02-2019/v-volgogradskoy-eparhii--sozdali-mobilyu-sluzhbu-pootvrovabortionov>

³⁰ The number of abortions on Kolyma will be reduced through webinars and medical supervision (2018). *MagadanMedia*, 10.12.2018. URL: <https://magadanmedia.ru/news/768149/?fbclid=IwAR3-uuVFlyW-910SGoBbmQW8-kL4y0i2HKwoA8ZmzP1fWmXk22NSY8>

³¹ Mishina V. (2018). Moratorium on abortion is announced for educational purposes. *Kommersant*, 138. URL: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3706048>

a grant to conduct seminars aimed at saving lives as part of the Orthodox Initiative 2017-2018 competition, held under the auspices of the Russian Orthodox Church. At the end of December, the regional Ministry of Health awarded the winners of the competition - doctors from 15 antenatal clinics who had dissuaded the women who turned to them from having an abortion - with an angel of beads made by schoolchildren. The number of awards corresponded to the number of "lives saved"³².

Starting December 1, 2018, in the Penza region, women applying for a referral for an abortion under mandatory health insurance must go before a "commission" consisting of the head of the district, the deputy for social issues, the head physician, a psychologist, and representatives of women's organizations. The result of the work of the commission should be the decision of the woman to keep her child. The regional authorities consider this as work aimed at preventing abortions and refer to the "successful" experience of the Nizhnelomovsky district of the Penza region, where, in 2018, of 50 women who had decided to terminate their pregnancy, 20 refused to have an abortion after the work of the commission.

At the end of January 2019, the governor of the Penza region, Ivan Belozertsev, threatened to dismiss the heads of municipalities if they refused to hold personal meetings with women wanting to have an abortion. According to him, officials are obliged to find out the reason for such a decision: *"Every woman who has announced her decision to terminate a pregnancy should meet and talk with the head physician of the antenatal clinic, a psychologist, representatives of the active women's community and, without fail, the head of the municipality in order to find out the reasons for such a decision. If it is a question of a difficult financial situation or poor living conditions, help to find a way out"*³³.

In 2019, a campaign was begun in Izhevsk to open anti-abortion offices based on state medical institutions. This form of work with women who have decided to have an abortion was developed with the support of the Ministry of Health of Udmurtia and the Udmurt diocese. After contacting a doctor, a woman should undergo a consultation in an anti-abortion office, where consulting doctors will select, depending on the woman's particular life situation, the appropriate forms and method of assistance to keep the child: humanitarian, legal, psychological, temporary shelter or employment³⁴.

Similar anti-abortion campaigns can be found in almost all Russian regions. Their analysis shows that, at the regional level, representatives of state authorities closely cooperate with the Russian Orthodox Church, implementing joint anti-abortion initiatives. At the same time, the ROC acts here as a partner of local authorities and the ideological curator of medical institutions. In contrast to the federal level, where the ideological landscape is more diverse, at the regional

³² Organizers of the project «Doctors for Life» award the best doctors who motivate women to remain pregnant (2018). *Ministry of Health of the Krasnoyarsk Krai*, 21.12.2018.

URL: <https://kraszdrav.ru/news/7016>

³³ Governor of Penza orders officials to dissuade women from abortion (2019). Interfax, 21.01.2019. URL: <https://www.interfax.ru/russia/647023> (Date of circulation 26.03.2021).

³⁴ Izhevsk opens first anti-abortion counseling office (2019). *Udm-info.fu*, 06.03.2019. URL: <https://udm-info.ru/news/society/06-03-2019/v-izhevsketokrylysa-pervyy-kabinet-protivoabortnogo-konsultirovaniya>

level criticism of the conservative position of the ROC in relation to reproduction and the family by NGOs and activists is little noticed.

ATTEMPTS AT SCIENTIFIC LEGITIMIZATION OF ANTI-ABORTION POLICY

In general, in the Russian academic discourse it is basically possible to distinguish two main points of view on reproduction issues, which are inscribed in a broader context for assessing the current state and prospects for the development of the family. These can be called the “alarmist” and the modernization points of view, and are presented mainly in the works of such authors as the sociologist of the family A. Antonov and the demographer A. Vishnevsky, respectively. The “alarmist” position is based on the idea that the family is in a state of deep crisis. According to Antonov, the transformation of the family that has taken place in the country is a particular expression of the global crisis of the social institution of the family, which is seen as *“the vices of the social organization of the market-industrial type”* (Antonov 2005: 579). The crisis of the family, one of the most striking indicators of which is a decrease in the birth rate, among other reasons as a result of abortions, is associated with a weakening of the social and normative regulation of the family, a transformation of cultural symbols and patterns, and a decrease in the value of marriage, of a family with children and intra-family unity. The “modernization” position, on the contrary, asserts that the transformation of marital and reproductive behavior is carried out within the framework of a broader process of family modernization and reproduction, of *“a crisis in its traditional form”, a transition to a new type of family* (Vishnevsky 2006: 239). A. Vishnevsky believes that there are no special grounds for dramatizing the current “family” situation in Russia. There are no extraordinary changes in the mass demographic behavior of people; the frequency of marriages and divorces and the birth rate remain within the range of fluctuations that have been observed for more than a decade, while the number of abortions, on the contrary, tends to decrease.

The most striking example of the academic legitimization of anti-abortion policy, presented as a tool for achieving national security, is the article “Abortion Legislation: World Trends and National Interests”, published in 2018 in the scientific journal *Sociological Research* (Zhukov 2018) by Academician of the Russian Academy of Sciences V. Zhukov. The publication of this article caused quite a stir in the professional community, which called into question the legitimacy of a scientific journal publishing such an odious text on its pages. Critical remarks about the author of the article and the editors of the journal concerned the low scientific quality of the text and its frank ideological bias, as well as the very fact of publishing such a statement on the pages of a scientific publication. However, the text of the article itself (its title and content) is an extremely revealing example of how the “pro-life” position is articulated in academic discourse, of the kind of rhetoric in which the problem of banning abortions in modern Russia is framed: as a protection of national interests.

The main pathos of this article is that abortion is infanticide, the great evil of the 21st century. The author criticizes the liberal legislation in the field of women's reproductive rights in force in the Russian Federation and tries to prove that a ban on abortions will lead to unambiguously positive effects in all areas of the socio-political and economic life of society. Moreover, V. Zhukov argues that “further liberalization of legislation can bring significant damage

to the socio-political, financial, economic, demographic, and intellectual development of the country and affect the *electoral behavior of the population* (italics - Zh.Ch., L.Sh.)” (Zhukov 2018: 113). In this regard, not only does the argumentation rely on the demographic indicators traditional for supporters of the ban on abortion, but it also emphasizes the applied nature of the problem: to gain control over the behavior of citizens, the loss of which is viewed as negatively impacting the ability of the authorities to manipulate public opinion and preserve the ruling regime’s social support base.

In an attempt to provide an analysis of international and Russian legislation, the author of this article unequivocally defends his anti-abortion position, making unsubstantiated allegations and providing baseless statistical data (Timoshenko 2019: 173). In particular, Zhukov claims: “*More than 50 million abortions are performed in the world every year. In other words, the same number of people are killed in the wombs of potential mothers every year as in the 6 years of World War II*” (Zhukov 2018: 113). Thus, the author introduces a new interpretation of the beginning of a human life, of the status of the embryo, and tries to justify the lack of a woman's right to make a reproductive choice.

The very comparison of data on the number of abortions with the number of victims of the Second World War is extremely revealing for understanding how the problem of abortion is framed in modern Russian discourse. Since the 2000s, demographic problems have been viewed by supporters of the alarmist position in terms of a national catastrophe, the extinction of the Russian nation, which is typical of the official discourse of the state³⁵. However, relatively recently, the decline in the birth rate, which is seen by the supporters of this position solely as a consequence of abortion, began to be viewed through an appeal to the Great Patriotic War, the construction of the memory of which is the foundation of the ideological myth of Putin's ideology. Stalin's abortion ban policy is assessed by the author of the article as unambiguously positive, to have led to victory over fascist Germany: “*Goebbels once concluded that Germany would never defeat a people in which 90% of the women retain their virginity before marriage. In Soviet times, a significant part of family traditions were preserved, the pregnancy of schoolgirls was extremely rare and was perceived as an emergency by the family, the school, and the public*” (Zhukov 2018: 115). It should be noted that the comparison of supporters of the right to abortion with fascists is a fairly common rhetorical device used in official discourse, in speeches by traditionalists and the promotion of traditional family values (the social ad video “We defeated the fascists, we will defeat the abortionists”). In January 2019, at a meeting with employees and students of medical universities, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church compared women who had an abortion for medical reasons with the Nazis: “*By killing a fetus that is somehow defective, we are killing a disabled person. Only Hitler did this – for him only the healthy were meant to live.*”

³⁵ Thus, in the Address of the President of the Russian Federation to the Federal Assembly in 2000, it was stated: We, the citizens of Russia, are becoming fewer each year. The country’s population has been declining by 750,000 on average every year for several years. And according to the projections, and the projections are based on real work, real work of people who are proficient in this, who have devoted their whole life to it, in 15 years Russians there may be 22 million fewer Russians. I ask that you think about this figure: one seventh of the population. If the current trend continues, *the survival of the nation will be threatened* (cursive - Zh.C., L.S.). We are really in danger of becoming a decrepit nation. Today’s demographic situation is alarming» (Message from the President of the Russian Federation to the Federal Assembly from 15.01.2020 (2020). *ConsultantPlus*. URL: http://ww.tant.ru/document/_consc_LAW_342959/#dst0).

*Tweaking the human race just because the embryo doesn't make a good acrobat is a crime against humanity.*³⁶

When arguing his anti-abortion position and the need for legislative tightening of reproductive rights, Zhukov is trying to rhetorically "play on the legal field" by referring to the articles of the Constitution of the Russian Federation. Thus, Art. 28 guarantees citizens freedom of conscience, including the right to freely have religious and other beliefs and act in accordance with them. But according to the author, this constitutional right is systematically violated in the case of gynecologists: *"However, recommending and performing abortions is a job requirement of gynecologists (...) training and working in "obstetrics and gynecology" becomes impossible for people whose beliefs do not allow abortion for moral, religious, scientific and other convictions, because such persons are not able to fully exercise their constitutional right to freely dispose of their abilities to work, freely choose their occupation and profession, as guaranteed by Art. 37 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation"* (Zhukov 2018: 120).

V. Zhukov believes that it is the state that should take measures to tighten access to the abortion procedure. At the same time, the rhetoric used by the author remains within the framework of paternalistic family policy and the etocratic gender order of the Soviet period. His position regarding women is highly instrumental: they are a demographic resource of the country, whose mobilization will once again make it possible to overcome the negative demographic situation in Russia: *"If the Government of Russia, the media and society take the measures necessary to strengthen and consolidate the authority of the woman-mother at the legislative level, show state care for her offspring, assume responsibility for raising a child born to a woman and educate him in the spirit of respect for the mother, take a number of measures to reduce maternal and infant mortality, then the number of abortions can be reduced by 2-3 times. Further, the arithmetic is simple: if you save the lives of at least 1.5–2 million people by persuading women to refuse abortion, and add to this 1.5–1.9 million babies born annually, then Russia will get out of the demographic hole, population growth will acquire a sustainable character, and by 2025 165 million people will live in the country"* (Zhukov 2018: 122). This concluding paragraph of the article is indicative of the articulation of the conservative position as presented by an expert and reflected in the official rhetoric of the state regarding demographic problems in general. The author sees the state as the main actor capable of determining the reproductive choice of women. Achieving quantitative indicators (the population required for the state) is possible only through state care for the woman-mother.

In general, there is a polarization of views on marital and reproductive behavior in academic discourse. The conservative-alarmist approach is not dominant. At the same time, its conceptual and ideological coinciding with the conservative official discourse conveyed by the state and the Russian Orthodox Church is noticeable. The ideological campaign to revive traditional family values and fight against abortion, homosexuality and feminism has recently not only gained momentum, but is also supported by relevant expert statements by scientists that demonize these phenomena and consider them dangerous for Russian society.

³⁶ «Only Hitler killed the disabled!»: The Patriarch condemns abortion due to physical defects (2019). *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 29.01.2019. URL: <https://www.kp.ru/daily/26933/3983819/>

CONCLUSION

Thus, conservative mobilization begins with federal legislation and statements by representatives of the central government. In essence, these initiatives are linked to the declaration that demographic problems and population decline are a threat to national security. They are aimed at regulating citizens' intimate behavior, their physicality and "moral character". According to M. Foucault, the interest of political power in health, reproduction and demographic characteristics of the population is associated with the transformation of forms of power and control in modern societies. The conductors of this power are experts, the media and various forms of local self-government. Foucault calls these forms of control biopower. Biopower refers to techniques to normalize and monitor human bodies to make them more docile and productive (Foucault 2003). Governance through the media, social policy, education and health care has an implicit interest in the formation of individuals of a special type (Lawler 2000: 2). Such individuals do not act on the basis of external directive control, but can control their behavior independently, focusing on given patterns of normality. In this sense, the ultimate goal of conservative mobilization is controlled Russian citizens, indoctrinated by the ideology of a family lifestyle and having many children. At the same time, the main pathos of the discourse of conservative mobilization associated with the issue of abortion is directed at women. This discourse presents women as responsible for fertility rates, the reproduction of the nation and national security (Rivkin-Fish 2010). It aims to control women's physicality and sexuality by turning them into "moral subjects" who subordinate their behavior to the national interest (Paxon 2004). Since these interests are formulated in terms of safety and protection of the interests of the nation, i.e., use militaristic terminology, the discourse on the right to abortion becomes essentially a form of ideological production of the patriarchal gender order (Connell 1987).

The change in the position of the state regarding abortion is most clearly seen starting from the mid-2000s, when conservative rhetoric becomes dominant, and is also reinforced by changes in legislation regulating various areas: family policy, child protection, health care, and the conditions for the activities of NGOs. At the same time, the main ideological debate at the federal level is around the preservation/exclusion of medical abortion procedures from the mandatory health insurance plan. Numerous legislative initiatives of the State Duma, with which representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church and Orthodox-oriented experts agree in their public statements (for example, statements by urologist and reproductive health specialist, Corresponding Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Professor O. Apolikhin), do not find support from the Ministry of Health and are rejected. Nevertheless, the entire set of statements, initiatives, and regional campaigns can be viewed as a conservative mobilization aimed at overcoming the "problem of low fertility" by promoting traditional family values and reducing tolerance for abortion. Various actors (representatives of the federal and regional authorities, specialized NGOs, representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church) are actively involved in promoting the anti-abortion agenda, which allows them to be included in institutionalized support networks and gain access to funding under relevant programs (for example, a program aimed at reducing the number of abortions within the framework of the Decade of Childhood). Thus, conservative mobilization presupposes not only the formation of an ideological framework, but also the development of institutional mechanisms for its implementation.

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