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THE IDEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF ETHNO-CONFESSIONAL POLICY IN THE NORTHEAST CAUCASUS IN THE SYSTEM OF REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

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ABSTRACT
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Introduction

This study addresses topical issues of state policy regarding the ethno-religious sphere in the North-Eastern Caucasus. The work analyzes the evolution of state-confessional relations, the influence of Islam (specifically Sufism) on political processes, and the risks of radicalization. The author proposes an ideocratic management model aimed at optimizing the region's domestic policy.

Practical Relevance of the Research Topic

The complex ethno-confessional structure of the North-Eastern Caucasus in the face of global threats necessitates the region's integration into the all-Russian legal framework. A key state objective is the de-escalation of radicalism through the development of civil society and legal regulation. An ideocratic approach enables the forecasting of social risks and the mitigation of conflicts. A special role is assigned to traditional Sufi communities as a factor of stability. This paper justifies the transition from reactive management to proactive monitoring and proposes a clear demarcation between religion and politics to safeguard the spiritual sphere. The findings can be utilized by government authorities in implementing national policy strategies and preventing deviant behavior.

Scientific Relevance of the Research Topic

This work systematizes the principles of interaction between state authorities and religious institutions, examining Sufism as a resource for strengthening all-Russian identity. The study is interdisciplinary in nature, drawing on political science, religious studies, and conflict resolution. The author introduces a number of original definitions and formulates principles of state policy based on humanism, secularism, and social justice. A significant contribution of the research is the substantiation of the principle of «subvention» (separation) of religious organizations from the state as a tool for effective governance.

Object of the study – State national policy in the North-East Caucasus in historical and contemporary perspectives, viewed through the lens of regional and international security.

Subject of the study – Ideological foundations and principles of public administration within the methodological and theoretical context of the ethno-confessional policy of the Russian Federation.

Objective of the study – To develop the ideological foundations for implementing ethno-confessional policy and resolving social contradictions in the republics of the North-East Caucasus.

Research Tasks

The clarification and achievement of the research objective are addressed through the fulfillment of the following interrelated tasks:

1. To systematize the political principles and mechanisms aimed at the depoliticization of religious relations in the North-East Caucasus.
2. To determine the political and legal framework and conditions that ensure the stability of the public administration model in the North-East Caucasus and prevent the escalation of conflicts between civil society actors.
3. To demonstrate the impact of dramatic historical events on the formation of the national identity of the peoples of the North-East Caucasus and identify pathways for overcoming historical trauma.
4. To formulate the ideological foundations for a balanced ethno-confessional policy that fosters conditions for consensus and effective cooperation among political actors in the field of security.
5. To determine the significance of Islam in the socio-public development of the North Caucasian society.
6. To identify the social significance of the tariqa (Sufi order) within the ummah of the North-East Caucasus and its role in the region's political stability.
7. To systematize the political ideologies of radical Islamist movements that threaten Russia's regional and international security by identifying their specific characteristics, the nature of their extremist activities, and their historical origins.
8. To identify the challenges associated with the politicization of ethnicity in the prevention of destructive political processes.

9. To determine the role and significance of national and religious factors in preventing ethno-religious conflicts in the North-East Caucasus.

Theoretical and Methodological Framework of the Research

Ethno-confessional policy constitutes an interdisciplinary field with a complex methodology. The study employed methods of rationalism, comparative analysis, historiography, as well as structural-functional and civilizational approaches. *The institutional model* of theoretical research allowed for the examination of ethno-confessional policy through the prism of a complex of political, social, and legal principles. *The behavioral model* of political psychology enabled the identification and forecasting of the behavior of political actors and groups. The use of *a systemic model* facilitated the view of the political system as an interaction of elements defined by elites, leaders, and national minorities. *Methods of rational choice theory* allowed for the description of the free individual as a subject oriented toward the satisfaction of personal and public needs. *The discursive model* of political research contributed to the conceptualization of the political process through verbal and non-verbal communication. Approaches of *the micro-level research model* enabled the examination of the political process as a relationship between elites and social groups. The use of *dynamic modeling* theory in the field of social change provided a spatio-temporal context for viewing the political process. In parallel, *political-situational analysis* allowed for a detailed breakdown of significant political events, identifying their primary driving forces and interconnections, particularly during transitional periods. *The constructivist approach* facilitated the study of nation-building and the role of the ethno-elite in mobilization and resource management. Furthermore, *a macro-regional approach* was utilized to identify regional ethno-national contradictions in ethno-political conflicts, while systemic-synergetic analysis was applied to ethnic and religious disagreements. Finally, *the phenomenological method* helped to interpret the social significance of Islam and theological terms of Arabic origin.

Information Base of the Research

The scientific basis of this research rests on an analysis of current Russian legislation (the Constitution, federal laws, presidential decrees, and government

resolutions) as well as historical legal acts. The theoretical framework is grounded in the works of domestic and foreign scholars in the fields of political science, religious studies, philosophy, history, and conflict studies. To analyze current debates and methodological approaches, empirical data and conference proceedings were examined. Official websites of state, religious, and public organizations served as vital sources, enabling a comprehensive description of state policy and the activities of religious institutions. Historical data were retrieved from *the Complete Collection of Laws* and *the Digest of Laws of the Russian Empire*.

Scientific Novelty of the Research

The scientific novelty of this dissertation for political science lies in the following applied achievements:

1. The political and legal conditions designed to ensure the stability of the public administration model and prevent the escalation of conflicts between civil society actors in the North-East Caucasus have been formulated.

2. Approaches and a mechanism for developing a balanced policy to harmonize religious and ethnic relations in the North-East Caucasus have been proposed.

3. Priority areas for public administration in the ethno-religious sphere of the North-East Caucasus aimed at overcoming historical traumas and ethnocratic tendencies have been identified.

4. Ideological principles and values that ensure interethnic harmony and security in the context of cooperation between political actors and traditional religious organizations have been formulated.

5. The value-based and ideological foundations of Islam in the socio-public development of the North Caucasian society have been identified in the context of forming a common civic identity.

6. The role of the organizational and religious structure of the tariqa in the North-East Caucasus in preserving traditional spiritual and moral values and harmonizing ethnic and religious relations has been outlined.

7. The ideological foundations of radical Islamic movements, their specific features, and manifestations in the North Caucasus region have been identified in the context of regional and international security.

8. Ethno-confessional processes in the North-East Caucasus have been systematized, and conditions that mitigate the politicization of religious and ethnic relations in the region have been identified.

9. The influence of the religious factor on the emergence and resolution of destructive processes in the region has been determined; external threats to the Russian state have been identified; and an original interpretation of the principle of subvention, aimed at preventing ethno-religious conflicts in the North Caucasus, has been proposed.

Thus, the findings of this dissertation can be utilized to update the concepts of national policy implementation in the North-East Caucasus and to develop relevant regulatory legal acts at both federal and regional levels.

Provisions for Defense

The contribution to the study of ethno-confessional policy in the North-East Caucasus is reflected in the following main provisions submitted for defense:

1. Recommendations have been developed for updating regional concepts of national policy in the North Caucasus, specifically concerning the active involvement of secular civil society institutions in the implementation of state national policy, the indoctrination of a culture of compliance with federal legislation in law enforcement practice, and the tightening of control over non-profit (religious) organizations funded from abroad. This includes conducting unscheduled inspections of non-profit organizations designated as foreign agents by territorial bodies of the Ministry of Justice of Russia, as well as inspections of other NGOs, where violations identified will lead to restrictions analogous to those imposed on foreign agents.

These measures help to suppress the spread of destructive ideology imposed from abroad and to establish uniform legal standards for all participants in national and religious relations.

2. The concept and framework of an ideocratic mechanism in ethno-confessional policy have been developed. This mechanism involves the formation and maintenance of

a dominant ideology, its principles, and values within civil society on a voluntary basis, with the support of traditional religious organizations. The aim is to improve the qualitative characteristics of public life in accordance with current societal demands and legislatively approved state development strategies. However, ignoring societal demands under the pretext of achieving ideologically driven goals detached from reality is unacceptable.

The state's ability to exercise a monopoly on violence is not a determining factor ensuring the stability of state governance in the North Caucasus. The effectiveness of conflict prevention and mitigation in the region depends more significantly on the level of legal culture within civil society and the utilization of the ethno-confessional policy mechanism, characteristic of religious relations, to address the root ideological causes contributing to the spread of radicalism.

The foundation of this policy lies in strengthening the political system through ideological work, involving religious organizations in countering the infiltration of destructive ideas and concepts into the ethno-religious self-awareness of the population. This is achieved by fostering civic political participation and respect for the spiritual and moral principles of the peoples of the North-East Caucasus.

3. To transition from crisis management policy in the ideological sphere to balanced sustainable development, the expediency of involving diverse representatives of North Caucasian civil society in the implementation of national policy has been proven, with this process being moderated by relevant federal authorities.

Ambiguous reflection on the historical past is one of the key factors hindering the strengthening of pan-Russian identity in the North-East Caucasus and contributing to the activity of radical movements. Such factors include collective memory of military clashes with the state center and repressions, through the prism of which issues of identity, loyalty to the state, and its territorial integrity are reinterpreted in the public consciousness of the region. The current situation is complicated by the potential for the "secularization" of religion when it is involved in politics, and conversely, the "clericalization" of regional authorities due to the active participation of religious figures in political life.

4. The effectiveness of pursuing a value-oriented policy in the North-East Caucasus has been proven, aimed at ensuring the priority of pan-civil identity over particular interests, the inviolability of the federal legal order, and the preservation of ethno-religious traditions and historical-cultural heritage, alongside the organization of intercultural exchange.

Rational, pragmatic, and humanistic values form the basis of effective management of the ethno-confessional sphere. They are expressed in the practical principles of scientific objectivity, social justice, equality, freedom of conscience, respect for ideological and religious values, religious and national neutrality, cultural, religious, and ethnic diversity, friendship of peoples, inclusion, and respect for beliefs.

5. The political expediency of establishing regional platforms for intercultural dialogue has been demonstrated, in which the religious values of Islam are integrated with civic values, priority is given to human rights and freedoms, and religious institutions act not as instruments of political domination but as venues for educational discussion.

The promotion in regional politics of norms and values characteristic of Islam contributes to solving the tasks of ensuring civic harmony in the North-Eastern Caucasus. At the same time, sustainable development of the region is impossible without the active participation of civil society and the free exchange of opinions and beliefs regarding the priorities of the region's social development.

Platforms for such dialogue create conditions for the free expression of civic positions and the full participation of various social groups in the political life of the region. Such pluralism in a traditional religious society such as the North-Eastern Caucasus is possible only with the strengthening of federal authority in the region and the resolution of urgent socio-economic problems of the population. To increase the influence of the central government in the region, it is unacceptable to repeat the mistakes of the Soviet period and the 1990s in terms of the use of brute force.

6. A concept has been developed for countering external hostile elements in the North-Eastern Caucasus through the joint activities of the Naqshbandi, Shazili, and Qadiri tariqas, as well as spiritual and political leaders. The historical experience of the North

Caucasus convincingly demonstrates the fundamental role of spiritual leaders in the socio-ideological development of the region.

The vacuum created by the repression of religious leaders during the Soviet period was filled in the post-Soviet era by destructive ideas of Islamism and separatism. North Caucasian Sufism, unique in its own right, despite the fact that its followers do not constitute a majority, became the cornerstone of the restoration of constitutional order in the North-Eastern Caucasus, especially in the Chechen Republic.

Therefore, provided that a balanced state ethno-confessional policy is pursued, the tariqas possess significant potential for strengthening the region's resilience to destructive foreign influence. Their activities aimed at the ideological neutralization of Wahhabi groups pursuing separatist goals contribute to the harmonization of national and religious relations.

7. The expediency of a federal legislative ban on the propaganda of radical Wahhabist ideology, aimed at destroying social foundations, has been proven, by analogy with legislative bans on Wahhabism in Ingushetia, Dagestan, and Chechnya, as well as based on the religious prohibition of Wahhabism by the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Tatarstan. The fight against radical Wahhabism requires a comprehensive approach, combining силовое противодействие (forceful counteraction) to extremism with the prevention of terrorist ideology. A necessary condition for a federal ban on Wahhabism is the implementation of a set of administrative and criminal-legal sanctions that are applied to Nazi, extremist, and terrorist ideology.

The unimpeded spread of Wahhabism in the North-Eastern Caucasus was facilitated by two key factors: the destructive activities of foreign special services and organizations, directed against Russia's interests, as well as the weakness of civil society institutions, unable to effectively counter radical ideology.

Individual groups of Wahhabis, affiliated with the Islamic State (ISIS), a terrorist organization banned in Russia, continue to commit acts of religiously motivated violence in the region. Radical Wahhabism, which propagates separatism and armed resistance to authority, not only undermines state security but also denies the right to exist for Sufism, which is traditional for the region, and other traditional confessions of Russia.

8. The necessity of strict adherence to the principle of the inevitability of punishment for offenses has been demonstrated, along with the implementation of a policy aimed at consolidating North Caucasian society in the face of external threats. The key here is to strike a balance between the deepening of religious self-awareness and the strengthening of the secular foundations of statehood, as well as to ensure harmony between the preservation of religious traditions and a strategy of sustainable economic development. An important condition for the implementation of these measures is high-quality cross-disciplinary training of specialized professionals.

The political stability of the North-Eastern Caucasus is under threat due to the rise of religious and political radicalism, manifested in the archaization of social relations and ethnonationalism. Destabilizing factors include the ambitions of certain ethno-religious groups, ethnic segregation in the system of social mobility, corruption, and uncontrolled migration processes. Combined with socio-economic difficulties and the penetration of radical ideologies from abroad, this creates fertile ground for manifestations of religious extremism.

9. The author's concept and understanding of the principle of separation (subvention) in national and religious relations have been developed. This principle consists in: the removal of religious and ethnic organizations from the performance of state affairs; the delimitation of competences between the state and religious institutions; ensuring the equality of all ethnonational groups before Russian law, regardless of their proximity to those in power; compliance with the constitutional principles of freedom of conscience and religion of the individual and citizen, irrespective of nomenklatura tendencies in the socio-political sphere; non-interference by the state in the internal affairs of religion; the equal distance of religious associations from the state; the existence of a legal personality of equal character for religious and ethnic associations; and the distribution of spheres of competence between the state and religious associations.

Constructive interaction between state structures and religious associations is a preventive measure against ethnopolitical conflicts and an instrument for strengthening social integration. Nevertheless, in the North-Eastern Caucasus there is a tendency for religious organizations to use this partnership to gain political influence, and for state

authorities to use it to mobilize the electoral base of religious associations. Therefore, it is necessary to define the limits of rights and obligations between representatives of the authorities and religious organizations, which remain undefined in the North-Eastern Caucasus.

Theoretical and Practical Significance of the Research

This work contributes to the theory of ideology, soft power, and political conflict studies. The author argues that security in the North-Eastern Caucasus is achieved not through coercion, but through a consensus between state interests, historical memory, and Islamic tradition. This approach allows the region to be viewed as an active political subject that promotes the experience of interethnic harmony. Rethinking religious revival as a resource for civic identity helps to overcome the 'tradition vs. modernization' dichotomy.

The research findings are applicable to: the formulation of state ethno-confessional policy and regional strategies for social cohesion; the development of policy documents for managing political and ideological processes; and the design of curricula and specialized courses in political science, religious studies, and conflict resolution.

Approbation of the Research Topic

The main provisions of the dissertation have been approved by the Department of State-Confessional Relations and the Department of National and Federal Relations at the Institute of Governance and Social Studies (IGSU), RANEPA. In the course of the research, the author conducted multi-year field studies in Dagestan, Chechnya, and Ingushetia, and published a series of interviews with leading scholars, religious leaders, and experts regarding the current situation in the North-East Caucasus.

The scientific significance of the work is confirmed by publications in peer-reviewed journals (VAK-listed) with a total volume of 7.5 author's sheets, as well as in other scholarly publications:

1. Britvin, A.V., & Kozlov, M.V. (2022). Ideological foundations of ethno-confessional policy in the North Caucasus and the syncretization of Islam. *Izvestiya of Irkutsk State University. Series: Political Science. Religious Studies*, 42, 42–50. DOI: 10.26516/2073-3380.2022.42.42 (VAK list, K-2).

2. Britvin, A.V., & Semedov, S.A. (2024). The religious factor in the regional security system of the North-Eastern Caucasus (an axiological analysis). *Bulletin of Chelyabinsk State University*, 2(484), 25–34. DOI: 10.47475/1994-2796-2024-484-2-25-34 (VAK list, K-1).

3. Britvin, A.V. (2024). The religious factor in destructive social processes (the case of Islamism). *State and Municipal Management. Scholar Notes*, 3, 133–141. DOI: 10.22394/2079-1690-2024-1-3-133-141 (VAK list, K-2).

4. Britvin, A.V. (2024). The ideocratic dimension of ethno-confessional policy. *Bulletin of the Volga Region Institute of Administration*, 24(5), 74–82. DOI: 10.22394/1682-2358-2024-5-74-82 (VAK list, K-2).

5. Britvin, A.V. (2024). Conflictological approaches to preventing external influence on the ethno-religious factor (the case of the North Caucasus). *Vlast (Power)*, 5, 128–135. DOI: 10.24412/2071-5358-2024-5-128-135 (VAK list, K-1).

6. Britvin, A.V. (2024). The Sufi factor in the politicization of Islam in the North-Eastern Caucasus. *Humanities. Bulletin of the Financial University*, 14(5), 30–40. DOI: 10.26794/2226-7867-2024-14-5-30-40 (VAK list, K-2).

7. Britvin, A.V. (2024). The political-ideological factor in the development of state-religious relations in the North-Eastern Caucasus. In *State Governance and Development of Russia: Civilizational Challenges and National Interests: Collection of Articles of the Conference Session of IPACS RANEPA (May 15–20, 2023)* (Vol. I, pp. 371–379). Moscow: Nauchny Konsultant.

8. Britvin, A.V. (Comp.). (2025, July 28). *IPACS Expert Dialogue: Islam as a factor of unity – opinions of philosophers, theologians, and public figures of the Caucasus. Interviews on the social significance of Islam with scholars, public and religious figures of the North-Eastern Caucasus: Chechen philosopher Vakhit Akaev, Head of the Department of Ethnography of the Caucasus at the MAE RAS Makka Albogachieva, Assistant to the Mufti of Dagestan Muhammad Magomedov, Head of the UNESCO Chair Department at DSU Gyulchohra Seidova, Russian philosopher Semed Semedov, and Ingush theologian Magomed Kharsiev*. Official website of the Institute of Public Administration and Civil Service (IPACS) of RANEPA. Retrieved from

https://igsu.ranepa.ru/news/ekspertnyy-dialog-igsu-islam-kak-faktor-edinstva-mneniya-filosofov-bogoslovov-i-obshchestvennykh-deya/ (Accessed: July 28, 2025).

The research findings were presented at the following conferences:

1. VII International Scientific and Practical Conference «Russia and the World: Dialogues – 2023. Goals and Values,» session: «International Conflict Resolution and Post-Conflict Reconstruction.» Russian Academy of Education (RAE), Moscow, 2023.

2. International Conference Session «Public Administration and Development of Russia: Civilizational Challenges and National Interests,» session: «The Role of Regions in Ensuring Russia's National Security,» paper: «The Political and Ideological Factor in the System of State-Religious Relations in the North-East Caucasus,» RANEPA, Moscow, 2023.

3. International Student Conference «Civic Identity of Modern Youth: Religious and Educational Policy in the Context of Sociocultural Realities,» panel discussion: «Civic Identity and Forms of Subjectivity,» paper: «The Role of Islam in the Development of State-Confessional Relations in the North Caucasus,» Bolgar Islamic Academy, Bolgar, Republic of Tatarstan, 2023.

4. Annual All-Russian Conference of Students, Master's and PhD Students «Academic Dialogues 2024,» session: «Modern Man in Conditions of Crisis and Social Uncertainty,» paper: «Problems and Prospects of Preventing Ethno-Religious Conflicts in the North-East Caucasus,» RANEPA, Moscow, 2024.

5. Scientific Conference Session «Public Administration and Development of Russia: New Horizons and the Image of the Future,» session: «Religion as a Confessional and Social Phenomenon,» paper: «Tariqa in the North Caucasian Ummah: Its Place and Role,» RANEPA, Moscow, 2024.

6. Scientific Conference Session «Public Administration and Development of Russia: New Horizons and the Image of the Future,» session: «Ensuring National Security as a Condition for Russia's Development,» paper: «Russia's National Security in the Context of Ethno-Confessional Policy in the North-East Caucasus,» RANEPA, Moscow, 2024.

Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is structured in accordance with its stated objective and the logic of the research. The work consists of an introduction, three chapters, nine sections with subsections, a conclusion, a bibliography, and an appendix.