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NATIONS AND RELIGIONS OF EURASIA



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СОДЕРЖАНИЕ

Раздел I ЭТНОКУЛЬТУРНЫЕ ПРОЦЕССЫ В ДРЕВНОСТИ	
И СРЕДНЕВЕКОВЬЕ В ЕВРАЗИИ ——————————————————————————————————	
Дашковский П. К. Радиоуглеродное и археологическое датирование погребения	0
скифского времени из могильника Чинета-II (Алтай)	
Сакович Е. Г. Тибетские источники о Чингис-хане	23
Раздел II	
РЕЛИГИОЗНЫЙ ФАКТОР В ИСТОРИИ ДРЕВНИХ	
И СРЕДНЕВЕКОВЫХ НАРОДОВ ЕВРАЗИИ	
Серегин Н. Н. Погребальный обряд раннесредневековых тюрок	
Серегин 11.11. Погреоальный ооряд раннесредневековых тюрок Центральной Азии: формирование и эволюция	2.1
центральной Азии: формирование и эволюция	34
Раздел III	
ЭТНИЧЕСКИЕ ПРОЦЕССЫ И ТРАДИЦИОННАЯ КУЛЬТУРА	
НАРОДОВ ЕВРАЗИИ	
<i>Должиков В. А.</i> Н. М. Ядринцев об этнокультурном взаимодействии	
крестьян-старообрядцев Русского Алтая с аборигенным населением	52
крествин-староооридцев г усского илтая с аооритенным населением	
Раздел IV	
ПРОЗЕЛИТАРНЫЕ РЕЛИГИИ И ТРАДИЦИОННЫЕ ВЕРОВАНИЯ	
НАРОДОВ РОССИИ И ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЙ АЗИИ	
Гостюшева Е. М. Конфессиональный состав	
Кабинета Его Императорского Величества Алтайского округа	
в первое десятилетие XX в	65
Кащаева М. В. Пятидесятничество в XXI в.: парадигмы модернизации	
Mунх $б$ ат Д. Паломничество монголов: традиции и современность	
,	
Раздел V	
ГОСУДАРСТВЕННО-КОНФЕССИОНАЛЬНАЯ И НАЦИОНАЛЬНАЯ	
ПОЛИТИКА: ИСТОРИЯ И СОВРЕМЕННОСТЬ	
Эшматова Г.Б. Репрессии против служителей культа на Алтае	
в первые годы советской власти	85
Мусаев В. И. Поворот в советской национальной политике	
в середине — второй половине 1930-х гг	96
<i>Ильин В. Н.</i> Старообрядческие браки в контексте государственно-	
конфессиональной политики Российской империи на территории	
Томской губернии в XIX в	112

Раздел VI	
РЕЗУЛЬТАТЫ МОНИТОРИНГА МЕЖЭТНИЧЕСКИХ	
И МЕЖКОНФЕССИОНАЛЬНЫХ ОТНОШЕНИЙ	
В РЕГИОНАХ РОССИИ И ЗА РУБЕЖОМ	
Dashkovskiy P.K., Shershneva E.A., Cedav N. Perception of ethnic and religious	
processes by mongolia population (a sociological study)	119
Раздел VII ПЕРСОНАЛИИ	
<i>Щеглов С. Г.</i> В. А. Должиков: ученый и педагог	133
СВЕДЕНИЯ ОБ АВТОРАХ	140
ДЛЯ АВТОРОВ	142

CONTENT

Section I	
ETHNOCULTURAL PROCESSES IN ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL IN EURASIA	
Dashkovskiy P. K. Radiocarbon and archaeological dating of the burial of the scythian	
period from burial Chineta-II (Altay)	9
Sakovich E. G. The tibetan sources about Chingis-khan	
Section II	
RELIGIOUS FACTOR IN THE HISTORY OF ANCIENT AND MEDIUM PEOPLES OF EURASIA	
Seregin N. N. Funeral rite of early-medieval turks in Central Asia: formation and evolution	34
	0 1
Section III ETHNIC PROCESSES AND TRADITIONAL CULTURE	
OF PEOPLES OF EURASIA	
Dolzhikov V. A. N. M. Yadrintsev on the ethno-cultural interaction of peasants old	
believers of the russian altai with the aborigene population	52
Section IV	
PRECARIOUS RELIGIONS AND TRADITIONAL RELIGION OF PEOPLES OF RUSSIA AND CENTRAL ASIA	
Gostyusheva E. M. Religious composition of the cabinet of of His Imperial Majesty	
the aAltai region in the first decadeof the twentieth century	65
Kashchaeva M. V. Pentecostalism the XXI century: modernization paradigms	73
Munkhbat D. Pilgrimage for mongols: traditions and the present	79
Section V	
STATE-CONFESSIONAL AND NATIONAL POLICY: HISTORY AND PRESENT TIME	
Eshmatova G. B. Repressions against the clergy in the altai region	
in the first years of soviet power	85
Musaev V. I. The turn of the soviet national policy in the middle —	
second half of the 1930s.	96
<i>Ilyin V.N.</i> Old believer marriages in the context of the state and confessional policy	
of the Russian Empire in the territory of Tomsk province in the nineteenth century	112
Section VI	
RESULTS OF MONITORING OF INTER-ETHNIC AND INTER-	
CONFESSIONAL RELATIONS IN THE REGIONS OF RUSSIA AND ABROAD Dashkovskiy P. K., Shershneva E. A., Cedav N. Perception of ethnic and religious	
processes by mongolia population (a sociological study)	119

Section VII PERSONALITIES	
Shcheglov S. G. V. A. Dolzhikov: scientist and teacher	133
INFORMATION ABOUT CONFERENCES	140
INFORMATION ABOUT THE AUTHORS	142

Раздел VI

РЕЗУЛЬТАТЫ МОНИТОРИНГА МЕЖЭТНИЧЕСКИХ И МЕЖКОНФЕССИОНАЛЬНЫХ ОТНОШЕНИЙ В РЕГИОНАХ РОССИИ И ЗА РУБЕЖОМ

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ВОСПРИЯТИЕ ЭТНИЧЕСКИХ И РЕЛИГИОЗНЫХ ПРОЦЕССОВ НАСЕЛЕНИЕМ МОНГОЛИИ (ПО РЕЗУЛЬТАТАМ СОЦИОЛОГИЧЕСКИХ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЙ)

На основе результатов социологических опросов анализа собранных данных рассматриваются особенности восприятия этнических и религиозных процессов в Центральной и Западной Монголии, делается вывод, что в настоящее время достаточно большой процент респондентов позиционирует себя верующими людьми. При этом респонденты указывают не только на знакомство с традиционными для государства конфессиями, прежде всего буддизмом и исламом, но и на появление новых религиозных движений. Особенно популярными в последние годы становятся протестантские деноминации. Несмотря преобразования в области свободы совести и вероисповедания, на произошедшие с конца XX в. в государстве, достаточно большой процент респондентов испытывают потребность в более детальном знакомстве с различными религиозными традициями. О данном факте свидетельствуют как желание знакомиться с разными религиями в рамках школьной программы, так и через более широкое освещение данного вопроса в СМИ. Большинство респондентов обеспокоены тем, что усиливается влияние экстремистских взглядов во всем мире, хотя для самой Монголии данная проблема остро пока не стоит.

Ключевые слова: Монголия, этнические и религиозные процессы, прозелитарные религии, этносы, традиционные верования, социологическое исследование.

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PERCEPTION OF ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS PROCESSES BY MONGOLIA POPULATION (A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY)⁶

The article, based on the results of sociological surveys, considers the peculiarities of perception of ethnic and religious processes in Central and Western Mongolia. Based on the analysis of the collected data, it is concluded that currently a sufficiently large percentage of Mongolia's respondents position themselves as believers. At the same time, respondents indicate not only familiarity with the state's traditional confessions, primarily Buddhism and Islam, but also the emergence of new religious movements. Protestant denominations have become particularly popular in recent years. Despite the changes that have taken place since the end of the 20th century in the state in the field of freedom of conscience and religion, nevertheless, a sufficiently large percentage of respondents feel the need for more detailed acquaintance with various religious traditions. This fact is evidenced both by the desire to get acquainted with different religions in the framework of the school program, and through wider coverage of this issue in the media. The majority of respondents were concerned that extremist views were increasing worldwide, although Mongolia itself was not yet faced with the problem.

Keywords: Mongolia, ethnic and religious processes, proselytic religions, ethnic groups, traditional beliefs, sociological research.

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Political changes started in Mongolia in the 1990s have led to proclaiming ideas of freedom of conscience and religion. It has resulted in the growth of religiosity in the country. The first stages of democratic transformations were already marked by a number of the Government decrees aimed at regulation of state and church relations on the territory of Mongolia [Tsymzhit., Samdangiin, 2014: 68–69]. Starting in 2008, researchers of Altai State University have conducted systematical studies of ethnic and religious processes in Mongolia within the framework of Russian-Mongolian projects headed by P. K. Dashkovskiy. Particular results of the study are already published [Dashkovskiy, 2012; 2015; Dashkovskiy, Tsedev, Shershneva, 2010; Dashkovskiy, Kushnerik., Tsedev., Ganbold., 2009; Dashkovskii, Shershneva, Tsedev, 2013; 2017; Dashkovskii, Tsedev, 2017; Dashkovskii P. K., Kushnerik, 2009; Dashkovskii P. K., Kushnerik, Tsedev, 2017; Tsymzhit, 2017; etc.]. A number of sociological surveys were conducted in 2016 in Western and Central Mongolia within the continuing Russian-Mongolian project. The surveys were aimed at understanding

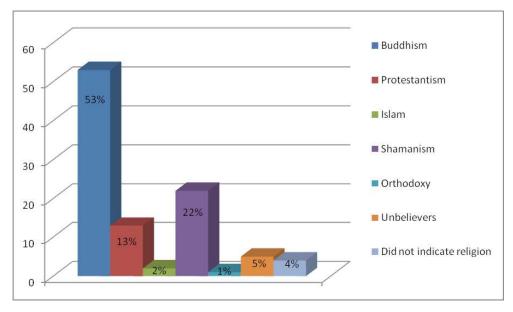
⁶ Статья подготовлена при финансовой поддержке проекта Минобрнауки РФ «Развитие этнорелигиозной ситуации в трансграничном пространстве Алтая, Казахстана и Монголии в контексте государственно-конфессиональной политики: исторический опыт и современные тенденции» (проект № 33.2177.2017/4.6).

of the Mongols attitude towards various ethnic and religious communities and towards the government policy of keeping national identity.

This work presents the results of the 2016 sociological survey in Mongolia. The authors chose an analytical type of sociological study which enabled to reveal the causes of processes connected with the religious situation in Mongolia. Applying interview as a method of research, we can identify the main trends which show the attitude of the population to the religious processes in Mongolia. Special attention is paid to evaluation of the government activity in building relationships with religious communities. We use statistical analysis in order to process and interpret the interviews results. It helps to determine particular patterns of development of religious processes and make conclusions about current ethnic and religious situation in the country. Statistical results are presented in a number of diagrams.

For the research, we interviewed 164 respondents (100%). To understand the degree of religiosity in the society, we asked the respondents a question, "Is it important for a person to be a believer from your point of view?" As a result, 48% (78 interviewees) answered positively, 21% (34 interviewees) said it was not necessary to be religious, and 32% (52 interviewees) found it difficult to answer the question. Wherein, 51% (84 interviewees) do not celebrate religious holidays. Distribution of the population in the surveyed Mongolia's areas by religious identity is shown in diagram 1.

Diagram 1
Opinion of Central and Western Mongolia population about their religious identity



It is clear from the diagram that the dominant religions are Buddhism and Shamanism what is connected with historical processes. Quite a big amount of respondents indicated Protestantism as their religion. Perhaps, the evaluation of the deep impact of Protestantism on the state policy is influenced by the fact that this religion is becoming more and more popular among the people of Central Asia and South Siberia [Badmaev, Adygbai., Burnakov, Mansheev, 2006; Dashkovskiy, 2012; etc.]. In many ways, the success of Protestant missionary activity in the region is connected with economic reasons. Difficult, sometimes tough economic situation leads to disappointment in the traditional system of religious values (as

Buddhism and Shamanism) and attracts people to a more economically successful religion — Protestantism. Interest in Christianity is also connected with the inclination of some part of Mongolian population, especially young people, towards liberal and democratic Western culture. Conversion to Christianity helps people to identify themselves not only as a part of Mongolian population but also as a part of the whole world community [Abaeva, Rinchinova, 2015: 123].

To be able to evaluate the familiarity of Mongolian population with other religions, we asked the respondents to indicate the religious organizations they know.

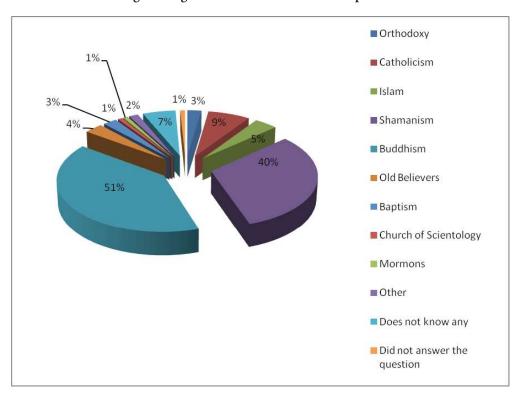


Diagram 2
Religious organizations familiar to the respondents

Diagram 2 shows that along with traditional religions people of Mongolia identify several new religious movements. It should be noted that such movements as Church of Evangelical Christians of Baptists (Baptism), Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), as well as Church of Scientology are better known to the recipients from Western Mongolia aged 16–35. In Central Mongolia, only 1 person out of 91 interviewees said he was familiar with Church of Scientology. In Western Mongolia, 5 respondents are familiar with Baptism, 1 — with Mormons, 1 — with Church of Scientology (out of 73 interviewees).

The appearance of new religious communities in Mongolia raises a question of familiarity of Mongolian citizens with new religious traditions. The respondents were asked a question, "Is it necessary to make schoolchildren get acquainted with the religions of the world?" The answers are shown in diagram 3.

45 40 35 41% ■ Yes, sure 30 ■ More likely yes than no 25 ■ Difficult to answer 20 23% More likely no than yes 15 17% 10 13% 5

Diagram 3 Is it necessary to make schoolchildren get acquainted with the religions of the world?

As diagram 3 shows, most parts of Mongolian population regardless of age think that schoolchildren need to be acquainted with the religious traditions of the world.

One of the most important ways of getting information about the religious situation in the country is with the help of mass media. In this regard, the respondents were asked a question, "Are the media sufficiently covering the problems of religion?"

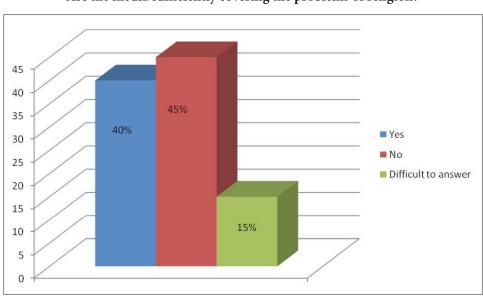


Diagram 4 Are the media sufficiently covering the problems of religion?

Wherein, in Western Mongolia, 58% of respondents (42 interviewees) out of 73 interviewees (100%) indicated that mass media coverage of religious problems is insufficient. Such a point of view prevails among people at the age of 22–45.

It is important to pay attention to the respondents' opinion about the reliability of the media information connected with the ethnic and religious situation in the country. As diagram 5 shows, interviewees' opinions differ.

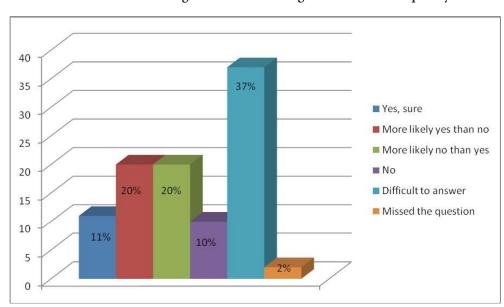


Diagram 5
Are the media covering the ethnic and religious situation adequately?

Attitude to mass media coverage of ethnic and religious issues is ambiguous, as respondents' answers show. The number of respondents who estimate the media activity positively is almost equal to the number of the respondents who demonstrate a negative position. It should be noted that quite a lot of interviewees — 37% (61 respondents out of 164) — found it difficult to estimate the media coverage of religious processes. Perhaps, it is connected with underdevelopment of mass media and the Internet communication in the region. Besides, researchers pay attention to the fact that most religious events are covered in Mongolia only with the help of specialized (religious) media [Tsybikdorzhiev, Batoeva, 2014: 41].

As a part of the study, we asked the interviewees to give an overall assessment of the religious situation in the Mongolian People's Republic. The answers are shown in diagram 6.

It is obvious that the religious situation in Mongolia is estimated differently. 62% of respondents consider it as rather stable whereas 37% think oppositely. Moreover, the results of the survey in Western Mongolia show the interviewees are even more inclined to estimate the religious situations as downscale rather than stable. The results of the survey in Western Mongolia are shown in diagram 7.

Diagram 6
All respondents' assessment of the religious situation in the Mongolian People's Republic

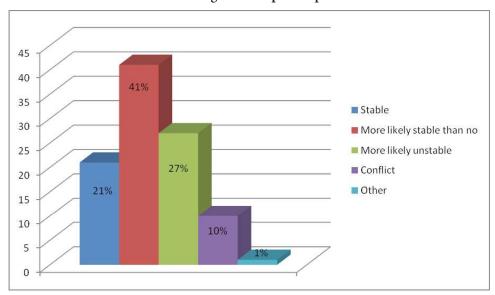
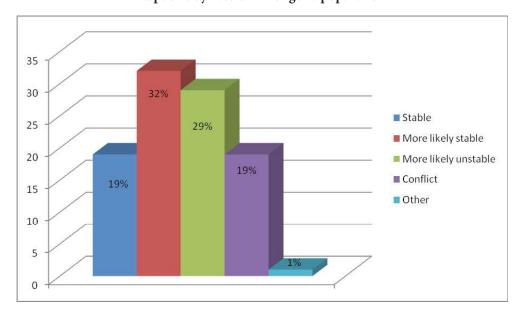


Diagram 7
The assessment of the religious situation in the Mongolian People's Republic by Western Mongolia population



As it is clear from diagram 7, 51% of respondents from Western Mongolia estimate religious processes in Mongolia positively and 48% — rather negatively. In Central Mongolia, the situation is a bit different. Thus, 22% of respondents view religious development as stable, 49% think it is more likely stable than unstable. It may be caused by the fact that in Western Mongolia, in contrast to Central Mongolia, the population have two major religions —

Buddhism and Bayan-Ulgiyim Aimak Islam; the latter is practiced by ethnic Kazakhs. This situation may lead to certain ethnic and religious conflicts. It is noteworthy that 63% of respondents agree with rather stable religious situation particularly in Central Mongolia what is shown in diagram 8.

40 38% 35 ■ Stable 30 ■ More likely stable 25 ■ More likely unstable ■ Conflict 20 Other 15 ■ Did not answer the question 10 10% 5

Diagram 8
The assessment of the religious situation by Central Mongolia Population

The respondents were also asked to estimate whether the religion may influence the development of extremist activities. The answers to this question are given in diagram 9.

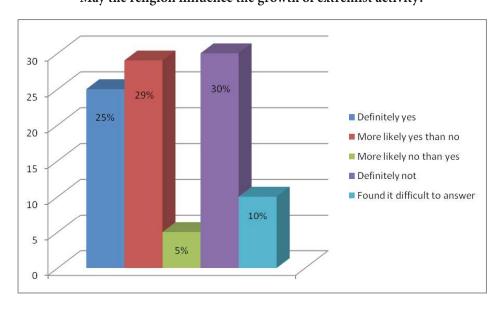


Diagram 9
May the religion influence the growth of extremist activity?

According to the results, we may conclude that most interviewees consider religion one of the main factors in the development of extremist activities. 21% (41 interviewees out of 164) definitely answer it is the religion that influences the formation of extremist views, and 29% (47 interviewees out of 164) consider religion as one of the most important factors which influence such extremist views. In the process of research, we tried to understand which exactly religious movements have essential impact on formation of extremist views.

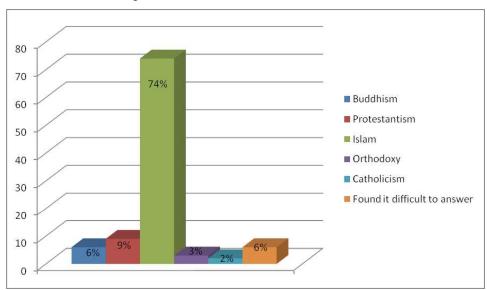


Diagram 10 Which religion influences the formation of extremist views?

The answers to this question are in fact predictable. Most interviewees — 65 respondents (74%) out of 164 (100%) — believe that extremist threat goes particularly from Islam what corresponds to general whole world opinion about this religion. In support of this fact, Mongolia citizens named several countries associated with extremist activities. The interviewees' associations are shown in diagram 11.

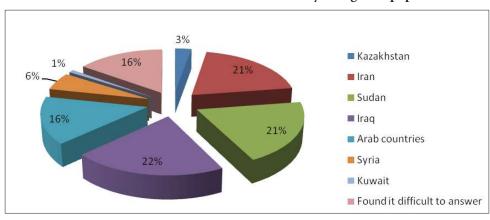
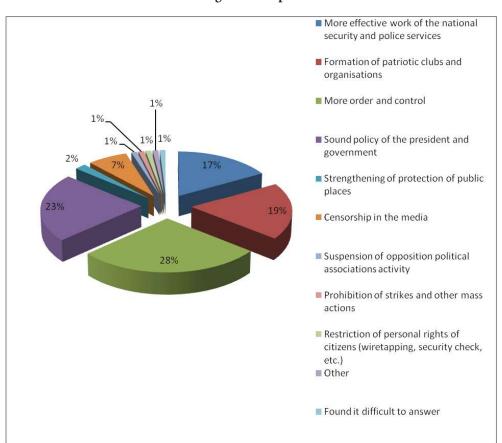


Diagram 11
Countries associated with extremist activities by Mongolian population

It should be noted that being concerned about the development of religious extremism in the world, Mongolia gained the status of permanent observer of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. The problems of extremism, terrorism, and separatism are major factors which united countries of Central Asia into a unified organization. It is the necessity to find a solution to the security problem shared by the countries that led to formation of the SCO. At the same time, we must say that Mongolia regardless its concern about the world security problems stands aside of negative tendencies connected with extremist movements. That is why, on the one hand, extremism and terrorism is not the principal problem of the country at the moment [Rodionov, 2012: 106]. On the other hand, we should take into consideration that there is Kazakh population who practice Islam in Bayan-Ulgiyim Aimak, Western Mongolia. According to official sources, there are no extremist trends in this region at the moment. However, noting that Mongolia is a neighbour of Russia and Kazakhstan where such trends have been observed recently, it is not inconceivable that such views may appear in Mongolia.

Targeted state policy may prevent from dissemination of extremist ideas over the country. To be able to estimate the interviewees' opinion on the point, we asked the respondents to indicate the most effective measures in this respect. The answers are shown in diagram 12.

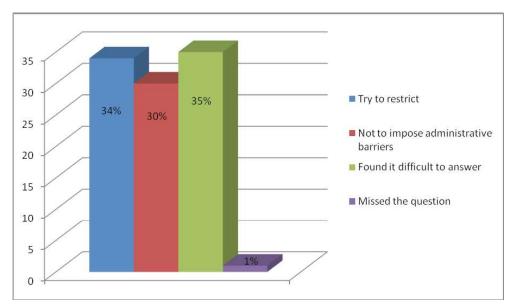
Diagram 12
Which measures may prevent from dissemination of extremist ideas according to the respondents?



We should pay special attention to the fact that along with traditional measures of struggle with extremism (security service activity, control and order, and similar) 19% of respondents stand for organizing patriotic clubs who can help to solve the problem of extremism in Mongolia.

Moreover, we can conclude that Mongolia population see the government as the main power to control religious relations between people. The interviewees were asked a question about the policy of the government towards religious communities and their activities.

Diagram 13
According to the respondents, which policy should the government have towards religious organizations and their activity?



It should be mentioned that respondents from Western Mongolia believe that religious organizations' activity must be more restricted. Such point of view is shared by 40% of interviewees. 14% of respondents think that the government should not restrict religious organizations' activity. Central Mongolia population have a bit different opinion. Thus, 43% of respondents stand against the active influence of the state on religious organizations, and 29% believe the government should restrict religious activity.

As a result of our survey research conducted in Mongolia in 2016 we may come to the following conclusions. At the present time, quite a big number of respondents see themselves as religious people. The interviewees are familiar not only with traditional for Mongolia religions but with some new religious movements as well. At the same time, despite the changes encouraging freedom of conscience and religion quite a lot of respondents believe that they need more detailed knowledge about religions and religious traditions. They believe they need both — introducing classes on various religions into school curricula and wider coverage of religious questions in the media. Most respondents are concerned about the growth of extremist religious activity in the world. They believe that sound policy of the government may shield Mongolia from extremist movements on the territory of the state. We may describe the ethnic and religious situation in Western Mongolia as relatively unstable, as it is proved

by the answers of the interviewees. Moreover, population of Western Mongolia believes that the government should influence the activity of religious organizations on the territory of the country. In this connection, we must note a little ambiguous position of the government towards the democratic ideas of the freedom of conscience. The government declares the freedom of conscience but, at the same time, interferes with religious organizations' activity, according to the respondents. However, most population do not see any violation of their rights in this fact because they believe it may contribute to the stability of ethnic and religious situation in the country.

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