

Church's Political Influence Growing, Poll Says

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Russians are increasingly aware of the Orthodox Church's influence on the political life of the country, but are attaching less importance to its teachings, according to a new poll released Tuesday.

Exactly half of those consulted by the state-run VTsIOM pollster said they felt the church's influence in domestic politics, a 6 percent rise over the 2010 figure. Forty-three percent said religious officials shape Russia's course in international affairs.

But while respondents said the church's political reach was growing, they said its role in the daily lives of citizens was falling, with 49 percent saying they essentially ignore the church, 6 percent more than two years ago.

The survey also found that 75 percent of Russians believe that the church should stay out of politics, while roughly one-third said the church should be limited to speaking on religious matters.

In general, young Russians (37 percent) and the highly educated (33 percent) backed limiting the church's sphere of influence. Villagers (22 percent), pensioners (20 percent) and those without higher education (18 to 19 percent) supported a greater role for the church.

The survey comes amid complaints that the church is behind authorities' efforts to prosecute three members of female punk band Pussy Riot for a performance criticizing President Vladimir Putin and Patriarch Kirill in Christ the Savior Cathedral.

The women face up to seven years in prison on charges of hooliganism motivated by religious hatred, with the verdict expected Friday.

VTsIOM pollsters consulted 1,600 people in 46 Russian regions for the survey, which was conducted in June. A margin of error of 3.4 percentage points was given for the poll.

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