



## Individual Advanced Research

*Opportunities Program*

### Research Report

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#### **Title of research proposal**

*Regional Migration Policies in Post-Soviet Russia: From Pervasive Control to Insecure Freedom*

#### **Topic of research**

My research in Russia (November 2005-August 2006) was a continuation of my dissertation project, undertaken with the intention of expanding the dissertation into a manuscript suitable for book publication. The study is based on field research in six regions, Moscow, Belgorod, Stavropol, Krasnodar, Arkhangelsk, and Adygeia. The last two regions were not covered in my dissertation and were added during the period of my IARO grant.

The core of the study is a comparison of regional governments' policies on inward migration (both international migration and internal migration) in the Russian Federation since 1991. It is motivated by the observation that official policy toward migrants in Russia differs strikingly from one region to another, and in particular by the fact that some regions pursue overt or covert policies limiting in-migration. The broader issue is the development of freedom of movement in the post-Soviet period. On the one hand, some Russian citizens, notably the rich, have gained increased freedom of movement. On the other hand, some citizens are still subject to extensive harassment (including Caucasians, and

almost anyone who is not well-to-do). In addition, effective freedom of movement depends extensively on the policies of the regional government. These in turn seem to depend on several factors, including the economic base of the region, its relations with the federal government, and the nature of the migration streams its leadership considered the region likely to attract. Finally, migration controls in Russia are marked by extensive unpredictability, in the form of bureaucratic arbitrariness and corruption, which further undermines the uniformity of freedom of movement. On the whole then, Russia has become a more open society, but the actual effectiveness of this right is far from secure.

More specific questions addressed in my research include the following:

- Given Russia's problems of labor force shrinkage and population decline, why do relatively few regions (including Belgorod Oblast, which I studied) actively encourage inward migration?
- Why do adjacent regions (Krasnodar, Stavropol, and Adygeia) differ in the severity of their migration policies?
- Why has Moscow continued to attempt to limit residence in the city, even by Russian citizens?
- Why does the federal government in general so reluctant to respond to regional governments' violation of migration rights, despite the Constitution's express guarantees of free internal migration and President Putin's proclaimed wish to restore Russia's unified legal space?
- Why and under what circumstances do regional governments in Russia tolerate extensive corruption in the enforcement of migration controls?

## **Relevance and contribution to field**

### *Scholarly impact*

The research contributes to the scholarly literatures on (1) democratization in Russia, (2) Russian regional politics, and (3) migration theory.

1. Democratization in Russia has mainly been analyzed in terms of the development of democratic institutions, such as the presidency, parliament, and political parties. My study assesses the progress of democratization on a different parameter: that of a concrete civil right (freedom of movement and choice of place of residence), which was routinely denied to Soviet citizens and which Russian citizens and legal residents now ostensibly enjoy. In particular, I attempted to determine for whom (what categories of person) this right had become more real and actually enforceable, and for whom it has remained chimerical.
2. My IARO yielded further refinements to scholars' understanding of Russian center-regional relations. In particular, during my field research in Arkhangelsk, I investigated the extent to which the regional

- government of a province experiencing severe demographic problems can and does influence federal demographic or migration policy.
3. A major goal of my project is to understand why Russian regions differ so much in the freedom of migration they permit, and in general, what preconditions must be in place to make possible effective freedom of internal migration. Russia is an appropriate subject for such a study for at least two reasons. First, as noted, it features substantial inter-regional differences in migration policy. Second, the collapse of the Soviet police state creates a natural experiment, allowing the observer to note changes in migration policy since the fall of the Soviet Union.

### *Policy value*

For the Russian policy-maker, my study should yield a number of inferences. First, it is essential for the effectiveness of Russian central authority that President Putin and the representatives of the executive branch in the regions more fully assert their authority to guarantee a unified legal space for internal migration. Moreover, this control needs to be exerted in a consistent, uniform manner, rather than (as now) generally applied in the wake of a major crisis or scandal. Second, more harmonious federal-regional relations, and in particular more attention to regional concerns about the allocation of tax revenue and responsibility for social services, might help remove some of the motivation for regional governments to restrict free internal movement. Third, efforts should be made to engage with leading scholars (demographers and social scientists) at regional universities so that federal legislators and executive officials can benefit from their knowledge and receive access to a point of view different from those that circulate in Moscow policy-making circles.

### **A concise summary of your approach and research methodology including a list of research sites**

My stay in Russia as an IARO fellow was divided between the following cities: Moscow (November 27, 2005-January 31, 2006; May 2-11, 2006, August 1-19, 2006), Belgorod (February 1, 2006-March 20, 2006), Arkhangelsk (March 21, 2006-May 1, 2006), and Maikop (May 11, 2006-August 1, 2006). At all sites (with the exception of Moscow) I was affiliated as a visiting scholar with a major local university (Belgorod State University, Lomonosov Pomor State University, and Adyg State University, respectively).

My research methodology combined the use of documentary sources and interviews. Wherever possible, I obtained official reports issued by regional governments or the regional office of the Federal Migration Service. I was particularly successful at locating such reports in Arkhangelsk, where I benefited from the cooperation of the local office of the State Statistical Committee (Gosstat). Arkhangelsk also has an unusually large and well-cataloged collection

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of regional publications and press, which I used extensively. I also used the Maikop regional library's local studies collection. In Belgorod I found the library less useful.

My interviews were conducted with a range of subjects, ranging from ordinary migrants, to NGO representatives, to government officials. While I did not conduct formal surveys, I took care to use a consistent set of questions during interviews with persons in each category. A major goal of my IARO was to increase the number of interviews with ordinary migrants, as I have found these to be the most reliable source of honest information. During my nine months in Russia, accordingly, I gave highest priority to conducting such interviews.

### **A summary of your research findings and preliminary conclusions addressing the questions and issues raised in your research proposal**

In this section, I briefly outline my answers to the questions I posed above. I then go into further depth by noting some specific findings based on my research as an IARO scholar.

In my project, I develop a model that deploys multiple levels of analysis to explain both why such extensive inter-regional variation in migration policy exists and is tolerated and to explain the actual observed variation:

1. The first, and most general level of explanation is the exogenously given fiscal, political, and social crisis of post-Soviet Russia. Regional governments' appetite for restrictive migration policies derives in part from the financial burden placed by new residents on inadequately funded social services, responsibility for which is disputed between the federal and regional governments. In addition, the pervasive insecurity created by a decade of civil strife in Chechnya and the resulting deterioration in inter-ethnic relations have fueled both mass and elite suspicion of migrants.
2. The second level is that of the state. The Russian federal government, unlike its Soviet predecessor, has lost interest in policing regional violations of migration rights because of the central government's reorientation away from the monopolization of labor (in the Soviet period) to the monopolization of rents from natural resources (today). In contrast to western countries where the central government monitors and regulates regional migration controls, in Russia, the state's disengagement from enforcement of migration policy makes it possible for extreme violations of migration rights to be perpetrated in many regions of the country.
3. The third level is that of regional politics. It is here that regional particularities come into play. To take one example, Moscow is glutted with migrants, and its government seeks to limit and harass them. In contrast, Belgorod, which has a relatively flourishing economy but suffers from a labor shortage, is dominated by a pro-growth regional

administration that facilitates inward migration. In addition, in the comparison of Krasnodar and Stavropol, I asked why two highly similar neighboring regions should diverge so sharply on the parameter of migration policy. I found that unlike Stavropol, Krasnodar has experienced the rise of a populist regional government that bases its claim to legitimacy on defending the region from outsiders. Thus, regional migration policies are not determined exclusively by objective restraints, such as public finance and security issues, but also depend on political actors' conscious decision to engage in the symbolic manipulation of migration concerns.

4. The final level is that of implementation. In a process I refer to as "contamination," regional governments (most notably those in Moscow and Krasnodar, the two most restrictive regions) enable police to prey on migrants by extracting bribes from them. Thus, corruption in the administration of migration controls is partially intended by the authorities, in that it promotes regional governments' efforts to keep migrants in a state of insecurity, and partially unintended, when police press their harassment of migrants beyond the government's goals.

I now turn to some specific discoveries made during my field research in Russia in 2005-06. These are organized by region.

*Moscow.* While I had noted the phenomenon of mass corruption of migration controls in Moscow during earlier visits, as an IARO fellow I studied this issue in more depth. One key finding is the extent to which corruption is fully institutionalized, and in some contexts, sometimes even compulsory. An example is the use of police coercion against companies that attempt to employ foreign workers legally. During interviews, I learned that such companies are often subject to special police harassment (such as repeated intrusive inspections) in order to force them to enter into corrupt relations with police officers. A similar finding was the extent to which *uchastkovye* (neighborhood police officers with specified beats) circumvent formal procedures and identify unregistered tenants in apartments, who can then be subjected to demands for bribes. It also seems significant that when organized attempts are made to defend migrants against such persecution, they often take place through informal relationships (i.e., with trusted contacts in the police) or through other forms of informal pressure, rather than through formal legal procedures. An example of this practice is one NGO's use of what is, in effect, blackmail against employers who fail to pay their migrant workers' salaries. This NGO threatens to report the employers to its police contacts unless the salaries are paid, thus in essence practicing extortion.

An additional finding was the extent to which Russian citizens with ethnic origins in the Caucasus are subject to quasi-official harassment by the police. During my tenure as an IARO scholar I conducted several interviews that revealed the following practice: Russian citizens from the Caucasus who attempt to register

their residence in Moscow are compelled to submit to an interview with an *uchaskovyi*, which often results in their being required to pay a bribe. This practice is, of course, illegal, but seems ubiquitous, and no official intervention by the federal procuracy or courts seems to have been undertaken to prevent it.

In summary, my research revealed that even as Moscow has reduced its overt attempts to restrict migration into the city (both by Russian citizens and foreign nationals), its covert or quasi-official attempts to do so have not been attenuated, and have often taken the form of officially tolerated corrupt practices that victimize migrants.

*Belgorod.* In some ways, my most surprising discovery in Belgorod was the surprising probity of its migration practices. I conducted a number of interviews that all tended to the same conclusion: migration policy is enforced in a remarkably honest manner in this region, especially by contrast to Moscow and southern Russia. One employer of migrant workers from Central Asia told me that she has worked in several regions of Russia, and was struck by the firmness with which Belgorod enforces legal requirements for employment of foreign nationals. On the other hand, she also noted that harassment and extortion were much less prevalent than in other regions. Similarly, a municipal official in a rural region of the province also noted that the Belgorod branch of the federal migration service conducts frequent and effective inspections of field workers to enforce labor force restrictions. These data indicate that at least some regions both can and want to prevent the corruption of their migration enforcement.

At the same time, I also gained further information about Belgorod's policy toward ethnic and religious minorities. Both in the case of the Armenian community and the Muslim community, I found that they operate under certain restrictions. Perhaps because of the strong ties between the regional government and the Orthodox Church, the regional Muslim congregation has met with extreme official reluctance to approve its proposal for the construction of a mosque. In this respect, Belgorod, while less abusive toward migrants than other regions, is hardly embracing a multi-cultural polity.

*Arkhangelsk.* As noted above, the reason for including Arkhangelsk in the study is that it faces a rapidly declining and ageing population. How has the regional government reacted to these trends? Have they attempted to modify federal policy, which treats the depopulation of northern Russia as inevitable and desirable? My finding was that the provincial government was surprisingly passive in the face of its existing and projected population loss, and has not presented an alternative to the federal government's program of phased out-migration from northern Russia. This seems surprising in light of Arkhangelsk region's labor force needs. My conclusion is that the degree of effective centralization in the Russian federal system prevents regional governments from being effective advocates for policy change. In this respect, the Russian federal system currently vitiates one of the main functions of regional (e.g. state)

governments in other federations, namely, that of advocates for the regional population and laboratories for policy change.

On other questions of interest in my project, Arkhangelsk presented a mixed picture. As in Belgorod and Adygeia (see below), public document checks and sweeps are far less frequent than in Moscow and some southern regions. Immigration policy in Arkhangelsk has not been as substantially influenced by ethnic tensions as it has in many other regions of Russia, and representatives of a number of ethnic minorities reported that their position in Arkhangelsk is quite secure. On the other hand, the unfolding de facto expulsion of a large community of Roma (gypsies), which was underway during my visit, suggests that migration rights are not fully secure in Arkhangelsk.

*Adygeia.* My IARO helped me investigate these questions in the North Caucasus region of Russia, where I compared two regions I visited in 2004 (Krasnodar and Stavropol) with a third region I added as an IARO fellow in 2006 (Adygeia). My findings were that as compared with the other two regions, Adygeia is notably more lenient in its enforcement of at least some aspects of migration controls. For example, police foot and road patrols do not comb the province looking for people without registration, as they do in the other two regions. In addition, interviews with undocumented migrants from Armenian or of Armenian origin yielded the result that Adygeia has become known as a region in which it is relatively easy to obtain both citizenship and residential registration documents. In particular, the bribes required to receive such documents are approximately 50 percent those demanded by officials in neighboring Krasnodar. They also noted that official hostility to Armenian migrants is far less in Adygeia than in Krasnodar.

Adygeia thus appears to be something of an oasis both for unregistered Russian citizens and for undocumented foreign nationals and stateless persons. I attribute this contrast with the neighboring regions in part to Adygeia's status as an ethnic republic, in which there is no official support for ethnic Russian nationalism, and in part to the region's extreme dependence on the federal government for funding of its governmental activities. In addition, the lower "prices" of immigration documents in the region also suggest that, perversely enough, official repressiveness towards migrants in Russia actually leads primarily to higher levels of corruption, or at least higher charges for corruption—with more repressive Krasnodar more "expensive" than less repressive Adygeia.

At the same time, perhaps surprisingly, other forms of immigration policy dysfunction appear to be almost as rampant in Adygeia as in neighboring (and better known) Krasnodar. A leading example is the stateless status of a large community of Kurds who reside in the province, paralleling the position of the Meskhetian Turks in Krasnodar (which I wrote about in my dissertation). Thus, Adygeia's policies toward ethnically different migrants are only relatively milder than those of its neighbors'.

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## **Suggestions for future research**

Here I note several subjects that would repay further interest.

1. *The role of migration policy in Russian regional electoral politics.* My stay in Moscow coincided with the election campaign for the municipal Duma (city council). This campaign included campaign advertising by the nationalist Rodina party that visually compared Caucasian migrants with garbage and suggested that they should be removed from the city. As a result of these advertisements, the Moscow branch of Rodina was barred from the municipal elections. More study is needed to determine the extent to which migration issues are becoming important in regional elections in Moscow and elsewhere.
2. *A comparison of Russia and Ukraine.* In future I hope to undertake a study comparing migration policy in Russia and Ukraine. While both are former Soviet republics with a heritage of repressive migration policies, Ukraine appears to have effectively abolished restrictive internal migration controls, whereas Russia, as noted, has not. At the moment I have no preliminary hypothesis to propose to explain this contrast, except that Ukraine is in general a more open polity than Russia. Further study is needed.
3. *Islam in migrant communities.* Most studies of Islamic institutions and Muslim religious communities in Russia have focused on areas of traditional Muslim settlement, such as the Caucasus and the Volga basin. More research is needed into the way in which migration is leading to the expansion of these communities and institutions in new regions of Russia, and also to learn how that expansion is being managed by regional governments. To take only one example, Moscow is believed to be home to around a million Muslim residents. More study is needed to learn how these Muslim Muscovites and their religious leaders are being integrated into municipal politics.

## **Recommendations for US policy-makers**

My investigation concerns primarily Russian domestic policy. As such, internal migration policy is not subject to extensive influence by the US. Nonetheless, I have several recommendations for the US policy community.

1. *Consider and evaluate the security risks for the United States.* The extensive corruption of migration controls in Russia represents a security risk for the United States. The ease with which individuals and goods can pass through Russian border controls and evade registration requirements in exchange for corrupt payments to officials means that the US government should consider Russian border controls to be extensively compromised in their ability to restrain either

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terrorist activity or international organized crime. One possible implication might be the development of joint structures, or at a minimum, training and exchange programs, for US and Russian border and immigration officials. Such exchanges could help increase awareness of this issue within the federal executive branch of the Russian government.

2. *Increase cooperation with migrant NGO's.* The violation of migrants' rights is a major failure of democratic transition in post-Soviet Russia. The organizations that are working to publicize and counteract the abuse of migrants deserve the support of the US government. Such organizations also serve another important function: they help keep Russian civic leaders in contact with their American counterparts, potentially increasing both knowledge and friendship between civically-oriented circles within the two countries.
3. *Consider expanding refugee resettlement programs from Russia.* The resettlement of the Meskhetian Turks from Krasnodar Krai has been a major success and should be replicated. I have personally interviewed Meskhetian Turkish refugees in the USA, and they have expressed satisfaction with their resettlement. In addition, there are many other people in Russia with similar problems of statelessness and official harassment. Examples include many Armenian and Kurdish residents of Russia. Resettling such communities to the USA would alleviate their suffering, provide the US with a hardworking and highly disciplined pool of new residents, and help draw attention to the problems of statelessness and abuse of migrants in contemporary Russia.

Respectfully submitted,  
Matthew A. Light