

Research article

Reducing Social Tension at the Regional Level in Modern Russian Society

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Abstract. This article concerns the manifestations of the social tension phenomenon at the regional level in the context of the global pandemic. The main purpose of the article was to study the social tension phenomenon in Russian society and determine the current directions for its reduction. The main theoretical and methodological approaches to studying social tension are presented herein. It was determined that social tension is a state of society formed under the influence of subjective and objective internal confrontations that are in an acute phase of their development. Sociological research made it possible to identify the assessments of various spheres of public life (social, economic, political and spiritual) experienced by the population. Assessments by population and sphere of public life at the regional and federal levels were compared. It was revealed that the population of the Orel region assessed all the factors of social tension in the region as significantly worse than in the country as a whole. In our opinion, this indicated that the population is inclined to perceive the situation in the region more negatively, due to a greater proximity to the real social, political and economic problems of the region. One of the possible ways to reduce social tension is by applying the social contract concept.

Keywords: social tension, social contract, threats

1. Introduction

In the modern scientific world, the study of social tension and the development of mechanisms for its regulation is quite in demand, since it affects a large number of social processes. During a global pandemic, the relevance of studies in the field of social tension increases, since they particularly reveal the statics and dynamics of interactions between individuals, social groups, and the peculiarities of their perception of the functioning of government bodies.

It is beyond argument that the concept of "social tension" is interdisciplinary in nature, since it has no unambiguous interpretation in the social sciences and humanities. In this regard, it is advisable to describe the semantic content of this term, in the interpretation of foreign and domestic authors in chronological order.

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The main problem in understanding and distinguishing the negative component of social tension from the part that positively affects the development of society is the correct understanding of its socio-psychological mechanism of transformation into mass protest actions, as well as the fact that social tension is a difficultly diagnosed multifactorial phenomenon.

In response to this problem, it is necessary to conduct regular monitoring studies of the level of social tension in order to obtain information that can be used to control and predict the subsequent development of the situation, as well as to develop a set of measures to reduce the level of social tension. These circumstances necessitate the development of a methodology for analyzing social tension, with the help of which it is possible to timely identify its state and trends in the development of society.

Moreover, social tension indicates the violations of integrity and functionality of the subsystems of the social system under consideration, as well as the transformation of values and behavioral attitudes of social groups.

The main substantive characteristics of social tension are the following: the dissatisfaction with the current situation in the most significant spheres of public life; lack of optimism in assessing the development of the current situation; low level of trust in the accepted and implemented management decisions; civic activity, expressed mainly through protest forms [1].

Thus, the key goal of this article is to study the social tension phenomenon in Russian society at the regional level and determine the current directions for its reduction in terms of a global pandemic.

2. Methodology and Methods

The problem of social tension has been in the focus of scientific research of Russian and foreign scientists for a long time.

Within the framework of the dysfunctional concept, T. Parsons and D. Turner consider social tension as a destructive process that arises from insoluble contradictions between conflicting parties [2]. E. Durkheim, R. Merton consider social tension as an inevitable consequence of social anomy [3, 4].

In this work, the authors adhere to the definition according to which social tension is a state of society formed under the influence of subjective and objective internal confrontations that are in an acute phase of their development [1].

At the same time, the theoretical approach was of great importance for this study, according to which social tension in society arises when dysfunction of public consciousness occurs due to the disruption of the normal functioning of basic social institutions. The main characteristics of social tension, in this case, will be the involvement of the majority of the population in this process, the individual being in a stressful state, the transformation of his worldview, the growth of deviant behavior, as well as the willingness to take certain actions to achieve the desired result [5].

Social tension is inextricably linked to the concept of social anxiety. For example, according to D.A. Kotov, social anxiety is the social mood of the majority, expressed through negative emotions arising from feelings of anxiety about their future and expectations of negative events in life. Social anxiety in this situation acts as a kind of indicator of the level of social tension, warning of possible social explosions. Social anxiety is latent, however, it can also turn into an open form if the majority of individuals become more confident that their needs in the economic, political, social and cultural spheres of society in the near future cannot be satisfied [6].

According to E.V. Tuchkov, social tension is an integral social indicator. Considering social tension in this aspect, the author notes that its formation occurs in a situation where the economic, political social needs of the individual cannot be satisfied, which in turn leads to a high degree of dissatisfaction with his position and capabilities. Furthermore, social tension is formed under the influence of certain events and processes occurring in society, which make it possible to see trends in the development of the social state of society [7]. The COVID-19 pandemic shows that the public sector is facing not only social anxiety, but also tumultuous challenges characterized by the sudden onset of inconsistent, unpredictable and uncertain events [8].

In the framework of this study, empirical methods of collecting information were used. Thus, a mass survey of the population of Orel and the Orel region "Social tension in the Orel region" was organized. The study was conducted in March 2020, the sample included 1304 people. The representativeness of the sample was ensured by age, sex, areas of employment, type of settlement. The sampling error does not exceed 2.3%.

3. Results and Discussion

Social tension is a negative emotional state, is characteristic to a certain group of people. This state is due to the existence of a sufficiently long time unsolvable situation of mismatch between social expectations, interests, needs of the entire population or its significant part and their actual satisfaction [7].

TABLE 1: Assessment of the state of the economic sphere of public life in Russia and the Orel region, %

Respondents' assessment	In the economic sphere of the Orel region	In the economic sphere of the Russian Federation
Very good	0.9	1.8
Good	6.4	11.3
Average	29.9	49.7
Bad	42.6	27.8
Very bad	18.5	6.9

TABLE 2: Dynamics of the degree of satisfaction with the socio-economic sphere in the region, %

Degree of satisfaction	Year			
	2011	2014	2017	2020
Satisfied	7.6	14.5	15.4	8.3
Rather satisfied	19.0	28.7	29.9	34.3
Rather dissatisfied	37.2	32.1	42.6	40.9
Dissatisfied	36.2	24.7	18.5	16.5

According to the results of the author’s sociological research, more than half of the region’s population negatively assesses the situation in the economic sphere of the region and less than a tenth of citizens assesses it positively (Table 1).

Primarily, this is due to the lack of a manufacturing sector, city-forming enterprises and industries, and, consequently, high-paying jobs. The region is a subsidized region, that is, it is a recipient of the Russian economy. Accordingly, people cannot find a job for themselves, on the one hand, but on the other, they worry about the future of their children, since the employment process remains quite problematic. The situation is aggravated by the lack of prospects for its improvement. All this is expressed in negative assessments of the socio-economic situation and the growth of social tension, since the problem situation has existed for a long time and there are no prospects for its improvement.

Despite the availability of a slight positive dynamics — the number of dissatisfied in 2011 is reduced from 73.4% (that is, two-thirds of the dissatisfied population) to 57.4% by 2020 — the fact that more than half of the population is not satisfied with their socio-economic the situation is quite alarming (Table 2).

The respondents’ assessment of the state of matters in the social sphere looks a little less pessimistic (Table 3).

There are still much more positive assessments of the state of the social sphere in Russia than in the region. Slightly less than a third of respondents assess negatively the

TABLE 3: Assessment of the state of the social sphere of public life in Russia and the Orel region, %

Respondents' assessment	In the social sphere in the Orel region	In the social sphere in the Russian Federation
Very good	0.4	1.0
Good	9.4	15.3
Average	43.6	50.3
Bad	32.5	25.9
Very bad	12.4	5.1

TABLE 4: Assessment of the state of the political sphere of public life in Russia and the Orel region, %

Respondents' assessment	In the political sphere in the Orel region	In the political sphere in the Russian Federation
Very good	2.2	3.1
Good	16.9	23.6
Average	48.4	43.5
Bad	23.1	21.5
Very bad	9.4	8.3

state of affairs in the social sphere of the country (31%), this indicator is not significantly lower than when assessing the economic sphere.

In regional assessments, less negativity by 12% is observed. The social sphere of the region is assessed negatively by 49%. At the same time, the number of extremely negative assessments of the Orel Region exceeds the all-Russian ones by two and a half times (12.4% and 5.1%, respectively). This is evidence that the Orel region experiences issues with medicine, with the attitude towards pensioners, people with disabilities, single mothers and large families. The lack of targeted assistance in the context of a pandemic, an effective system of benefits, and a low amount of social assistance negatively affect the level of social tension in the country as a whole and in the region in particular (Table 4).

In the assessment of the state of affairs in the political sphere by the population, the emergence of highly positive assessments is of great importance. For example, 3.1% of the population characterize the state of affairs in the political sphere of the country as “very good”. In the region, a little less positivity is observed — 2.2%. Thus, more than a quarter of the population positively assesses the situation in the political sphere (26.7%) in the country, and every fifth respondent (19.1%) in the region suggests that the political situation is not a factor of social tension.

This conclusion can be drawn with respect to those respondents who are neutral in their assessment of the state of affairs in the political sphere of the region — 48.4%. Neutral regional assessments of the political situation are slightly lower — 43.5%. At the

TABLE 5: Dynamics of the state of the political sphere of public life in Russia and the Orel region in 2020, %

Respondents' assessment	In the political sphere in the Orel region	In the political sphere in the Russian Federation
Is improving	21.1	14.8
Is virtually unchanged	40.8	40.3
Is getting worse	30.8	39.1
I am at a loss to answer	7.2	5.7

TABLE 6: Assessment of the state of the spiritual sphere of public life in Russia and the Orel region, %

Respondents' assessment	In the spiritual sphere in the Orel region	In the spiritual sphere in the Russian Federation
Very good	3.4	4.8
Good	27.0	33.3
Average	41.8	39.4
Bad	15.8	11.4
Very bad	5.0	3.9

same time, the fact that slightly less than a third of respondents assess the situation in the political sphere of the country (29.8%) and a third (32.5%) in the region suggests that this factor of social tension cannot be underestimated, and it is necessary to study in more detail when making certain decisions of public administration.

The increase in the importance of such a social tension factor as the state of the political sphere is evidenced by the distribution of respondents' answers to the question about its dynamics for the current year. One-third of the respondents say that the situation is getting worse. It should be noted that negative assessments prevail here with the dynamics of the state of affairs in the country (39.1%), and not in the region (30.8%). On the contrary, every fifth respondent (20.1%) claims an improvement in the state of affairs in the socio-political sphere, while only (14.8%) note an improvement in Russia. This circumstance is associated with the arrival of a new governor in the region, whose activities have received approval among the residents of the region (especially among young people), due to the widespread involvement of social networks (Table 5).

The spiritual sphere of public life is most positively assessed by the respondents (Table 6).

The table clearly shows the presence of the respondents highly positively assessing the matter under study. For example, the situation in the spiritual sphere in the region was evaluated as "very good" by 3.4% of respondents, and in Russia — by 4.8%. Attention is drawn to the fact that all-Russian and regional assessments of the state of the spiritual sphere do not have clear differences. More than a third of respondents

assess positively the state of the spiritual sphere in Russia (38.1%) and almost a third – in the Orel region (30.4%). This circumstance indicates that the state of affairs in the spiritual sphere is not a factor of social tension. At the same time, the fact that every fourth resident of the region expresses negative assessment (20.8%) suggests that the state of the spiritual sphere cannot be completely excluded when assessing social tension.

According to the analysis of the above, the state of affairs in the socio-economic sphere in the country as a whole and in the region in particular is one of the most important factors affecting the level of social tension. Assessments of the social and political situation evidence that the state of affairs in these areas requires special attention to itself and a more detailed study in order to identify problematic issues with the subsequent development of recommendations for overcoming them. The high assessments of the state of spiritual sphere by the population of the Orel region indicate a favorable social climate in the region and in the country as a whole, a satisfactory level of social well-being, a high level of spiritual culture, morality and patriotism of the population. However, the fact that a quarter of the region's population gave negative assessments suggests that the state of affairs in this area also requires detailed research and cannot be excluded from the number of factors negatively affecting the level of social tension.

Such factors as rising prices, low wages, pensions, unemployment and corruption remain unchanged and are among the top five problems that have the greatest impact on the increase in the level of social tension in a pandemic.

The lack of the right to openly express one's opinion should be noted among the newly emerging factors. Thus, it can be concluded, that material problems are of concern to a smaller number of citizens, that is, the material situation has improved, as mentioned above, and there is a need for freedom and independence. In continuation to this statement, the attention should be drawn to the emergence of such an issue as the availability of infrastructure. It is understood by the residents as the availability of parks, squares, sports grounds, etc. where they could spend their leisure time. A factor such as an increase in the retirement age was also mentioned, but not so often. Apparently, the population has come to terms with the need to raise it.

The results of the study make it possible to conclude that the population of the Orel region estimates all factors of social tension in the region significantly worse than in the country as a whole. In our opinion, this indicates, first of all, that the population is inclined to perceive the situation in the region more negatively, due to the greater proximity to the real social, political and economic problems of the region.

4. Conclusions

As it was revealed in the course of the study, the social tension is largely influenced by regional problems and contradictions, including those associated with the global pandemic. Definitely, one of the main tasks of public authorities in the region is to resolve the existing shortcomings in the socio-economic sphere, improve the quality of life of the population and, thereby, reduce the level of social tension. However, such a significant difference in assessments of the state of various public spheres at the regional and federal levels, emphasizes the need to discuss various social approaches to social tension reduction at the regional level.

One of the possibilities for social tension reduction is the application of the social contract concept. This concept has been developed for a long time in the scientific works of domestic and foreign scientists, and modern approaches to its application are considered in the works of D. Rawls and J. Habermas [9, 10]. According to modern views, the social contract defines the basic boundaries and characteristics of social action, and the fundamental principles of reconciliation of contradicting, conflicting interests [11]. In the course of the transformation of public administration, new management innovations and traditional social values should be harmonized [12].

In our opinion, one of the topical directions for social tension reduction is the application of the above approach at the regional and even municipal level. Initiation of the process of concluding a social contract between regional authorities and the regional society can clearly define and consolidate the rules and principles of public administration in the region, increase confidence in the authorities and, in the long term, contribute to social tension reduction.

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