

Conflictogeny: Assessing Social Tensions in Russia

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Abstract

During the transformation period known as perestroika, Russia underwent radical changes that led to conflicts in various spheres of life and increased social tensions. This chapter details some of the details of those tensions. The author created indices to reflect signs of tensions (provoking actions and reactions of the population to these actions and to a situation in the country). These indices allow us to assess the danger level by observing changes in them. This chapter presents the results of an assessment of social tensions in Russia from 1993 to 2011.

Keywords: conflictogeny, Russia, social tension indices

During the perestroika period Russia underwent radical changes. Privatization of property, economic crises, and structural economic adjustments led to growth of unemployment, decline in living standards, non-payment crises, and deferred salaries. These and other problems resulted in aggravation of antagonisms in society. New relations arise through a great number of disagreements formed at various levels of society. That all contributes to an increased level of social tension.

Definition of conflictogeny

Objective conditions of occurrence of tension in a society, a set of the economic, political, social and other processes which cause the disagreements correspond to a conflictogenic environment.

In conflictogenic environment certain persons, groups or strata of people make actions (provoking conflictogens) which cause negative reaction of significant (statistically significant) part of the population (responding conflictogens). Conflictgen or set of conflictgens can lead to occurrence of a conflict situation and its development into the destructive conflict. Conflictgens are revealed as a result of sociological polls.

Set of various kinds of conflictgens in different spheres of society's life forms society's conflictogeny. The conflictogeny of society is the set of provoking and responding conflictogens, i.e. set of tensions of social, economic, political character which under certain conditions leads to conflict development. The level of conflictogeny is the tension degree in a society, degree of public danger. I here consider only social conflictogeny including tensions of social, mental and socially-psychological character

The social conflictogeny is revealed through certain signs:

- Objective signs of conflictogeny - an actually taking place phenomena and the processes occurring in the country and causing negative reaction of the population;
- Objective-subjective signs of conflictogeny is an estimation of the population of objectively taking place actions or situations forming negative reaction in a society;
- Subjective signs of conflictogeny are the set of minor moods, experiences and negative emotions of the population, existence of tension, aggression and fear.

Allocation of these groups of signs is explained by the difference in kinds of indices, characterizing them, and the necessary measures for decrease in level of tension in a society. The indices of conflictogeny are a quantitative measure of tension level in a society. The indices reflect different signs of conflictogeny and are scaled in various ways. Therefore they are led to a comparable kind by standardization. As tension in a society can't have negative values nonlinear conversion is carried out and the indices are in the interval from 0 to 2. As a result they are calculated in dynamics the value of composite indices (of objective, objective-subjective and subjective signs of conflictogeny) and an overall index. Numerical value equal to 0

means absence of tension, 1 - the average level, 2 - the greatest level of tension in the analyzed period (1993-2011).

Objective signs of conflictogenity

Objective signs of conflictogenity include criminal acts, terrorism, presence of a considerable quantity of the weapon at the population, a drug addiction, corruption and so forth. They are being revealed in sociological polls, as those causing negative reaction of the majority of the population.

These signs are revealed by monitoring socioeconomic changes [4], held by the all-Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM), 1993–2011. The average sample included 2,400 respondents, aged 16 and above, from practically all the regions of the country.

High crime rates were observed in Russia over the entire transformation period. As the statistical data shows, the number of crimes increased, the percentage of crimes that were serious crimes and felonies rose, the proportion of criminals without stable income also increased. From 1987 to 1992, the number of all registered crimes grew 2.3 times (from 1.2 to 2.8 million crimes), rising by 18% per year on average. In the following period from 1993 to 2006, total crime rate increased 1.4 times more. In 2006, 3.9 million crimes were recorded. That was the highest number for the last 20 years. This was 27 crimes per 1000 residents of the country, which is considerably higher than the 2 to 5 crimes per thousand in European countries [2]. This figure had been decreasing and by the year 2011, declined by 37% in comparison to the year 2006 level.

The crime situation is also characterized by the number of persons who have committed crimes. The highest number of criminals was in 1999 and 2000 (1.7 million people, i.e. 1.2% from population). In general, this item has been decreasing since 2000 and in 2011 there were 1.0 million persons who have committed crimes. This value is very high; seven persons out of 1000 participated in crimes.

Terrorism is recognized as a global problem. Events called Terrorism have become a reality in Russian life since 1994. By the year 2003, the annual number of victims reached 561, with increasing number of civilian fatalities and injuries. An unprecedented terrorist attack took place in 2004 when terrorists captured a school in the town of Beslan, North Ossetia, and took over 1000 people hostage (including hundreds of children). This resulted in a total of 335 victims. From 2004 to 2008, the number of events called Terrorism throughout the country was decreasing (10 incidents in 2008). However, the year 2009-2011 was marked by a slight increase in the number of events called Terrorism. In total there were 2121 acts of terrorism from 1994 to 2011.

Crimes connected with illegal circulation of weapons contributed to growth of organized crime. Statistical data (Official website of the Federal State Statistics Service) showed that the maximum number of illegal circulation of weapons was in 1999–2000. According to expert estimates, from 1.5 million to 5 million firearms were illicitly trafficked during those years. From 1999 to 2004 the number of trafficking crimes decreased – from 73.3thou to 28.4thou crimes. The armed crime rate depended directly on the economic and political situation. During years of financial crisis, the number of such crimes rose, according to data for 1999 and 2009 (11% and 7% respectively).

The increase in crimes committed with weapons and in military conflicts, was fuelled by the growing availability of large quantities of weapons. In Russia, during the analyzed period, the following military conflicts have occurred:

- 1990–1992 Georgian-Ossetian War
- 1990–1993 Georgian Civil War
- 1991–1994 Karabakh War
- 1992 Ossetian-Ingush Conflict
- 1992–1993 Abkhazian War
- 1994–1996 First Chechen War
- 1999 Invasion of Dagestan
- 1999–2006 Second Chechen War
- 2006–2007 Kodori Valley
- 2008 Armed Conflict in South Ossetia

According to data from the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs [3], the number of crimes committed with weapons has been steadily decreasing since 2003. In 2011, the number of crimes was 27% of the number of crimes in 2003. There were 26,600 crimes in 2003 compared to 6,800 crimes in 2011.

At present Russian society is affected by the problem of drug trafficking. The proliferation of drugs across Russia has become a growing threat. Between 1993 and 2000, the number of crimes connected with drug trafficking rose from 53,200 to 243,600 crimes, increasing 36% per year on average. A four-year decrease was followed by the next wave of such crimes until 2009, when their number was close to the 2000-year level (239,000 crimes).

Corruption in Russia was revealed in administrative records. Corruption is practiced by bureaucratic organizations, certain law-enforcement officials, deputies, middle managers, examiners, physicians and so on. The widespread nature of corruption is recognized by the adoption of the federal law "On countering corruption" in 2008.

A typical manifestation of corruption is bribery, which has been steadily increasing throughout the country over the whole period of study. Between 1990 and 2009, the number of registered bribery cases grew 2.9 times (from 2,700 to 13,100 cases). Then reduction of cases of bribery (10,900 cases in 2011) is observed (Official website of the Federal State Statistics Service). The most favorable circumstances for bribery are state procurement and public purchases. Bribery accounted for up to 20% of the sum of executed transactions.

Russians pay huge sums of money in bribes. For example, the corruption market volume in Russia in 2002 was estimated by experts [1] at 520.9 billion rubles per year (26 billion dollars). This finding was a result of a survey of 5,666 citizens and 1,838 representatives of small and medium-sized businesses in 40 regions of the country. Officials obtain 170.4 billion rubles in bribes per year from citizens and 350.5 billion rubles from small and medium-size enterprises. The bribes from 521 billion rubles are equivalent to one fourth of the Federal budget expenses for the given year. Bribes are used to pay for accident settlement with traffic police, a place at a free hospital, university entrance, place of residence registration, police assistance, receipt of social payments, and much more.

Thus, problems of criminality, terrorism, drug addiction, corruption are in the Russian society. These phenomena, by population estimations, represent the problems causing negative reaction, aggression, fear. They are objective signs of presence of social tension.

Numerical value of a composite index of objective signs of social conflictogenity increased till 2003 when it accepts the greatest value (from 0.57 1993 to 2.0 2003). Then this index decreased and since 2008 it accepts values below the average level for the analyzed period. In 2011 it equaled 0.76.

Objective-subjective signs of conflictogenity

Objective-subjective signs of conflictogenity are the negative reactions of the population to actions of power and security structures; the political, social, extremist, nationalist organizations, and to a situation in the country.

Among objective-subjective signs were revealed such, as the disapproval and negative view of president's and government's activities of the country; negative view of political conditions as a whole, of interethnic relations; view of potential for public protest, poor regional and family economic situation. These signs are revealed by monitoring socioeconomic changes [4].

The stability of the sociopolitical situation is reflected by indices that characterize confidence in power structures. Issues of no confidence in the government and in the President were observed in sociological surveys of 1993–2002. The population expressed the utmost distrust in the Government during 1995–1999. During these years, 68–78% of the population considered the Government unreliable. President Yeltsin was especially regarded with the utmost mistrust in 1998–1999, with 91% of the population distrusting him. The situation changed drastically after President Putin had been elected. In 2000, 37% of the population had no confidence in the President.

Since 2003, activities of the Government and the President of Russia are measured in terms of approval/disapproval. The year 2005 was marked by utter disapproval, with 51% of the population disapproving of the Government activities and 23% disapproving of the President's policies.

The political situation as a whole was perceived by the population as dangerous in 1993–2000 and since 2001 as quiet.

Income differentiation and social contrasts formed mass protest sentiment among the population, mainly among those whose living standards had declined. According to the monitoring data, the probability of mass protests against decreasing living standards and in defense of human rights was highest in 1993 and 1999 (endorsed by 37% of the respondents), and then in 1997 and 1998 (32% of the respondents). An increasing perceived probability of mass demonstrations has been observed over the last decade, particularly during the crisis period (2009–2010). At the same time, according to VCIOM surveys, an overwhelming majority of Russians (92%) have never participated in strikes.

One of conflictogenity signs is the population's perception of poor regional economic situation. Level of economic unfavourableness is defined on the basis of answers of respondents to a question "How would you estimate present economic situation in your city, rural area?".

In 1998 76.7% of the population perceived an economic situation in a city, rural area, as bad or very bad (52.9% - bad and 23.8% - very bad). In comparison in 1993 such estimation was given by 50.6% of respondents. Then this index decreased till 2008 (36.9%). The economic crisis has led to deterioration of an economic situation in the country that was reflected in population's estimations. In 2009 and 2010 43.0 and 41.1% of the population perceived an economic situation as bad or very bad, in 2011 it equaled 34.7%. Despite a tendency to the best, more than a thirds of population by the end of the analyzed period still perceived economic situations in residing settlement as bad or very bad.

Economic condition of a family is established as perceive Family poverty of respondents which answered a question "How would you estimate financial condition of your family now?".

In 1996–1999 half of population and even more perceived Family poverty as bad or very bad. 1998 was the hardest year in the material relation. That year 65.4% of respondents perceived Family poverty as bad or very bad (44.2% - bad and 21.2% - very bad). The next years the lesser share of the population perceived Family poverty as bad. For example, in 2011 21.6% of respondents perceived Family poverty as bad one, and 2.5% - as very bad. Nevertheless, almost a quarter of population was dissatisfied with economic condition of the family.

Soviet society predetermined the appearance of an informal economy. Informal economy underlay the development of a market system. Employed without official is population employment in formal and informal sectors of economy without the contract conclusion. In personal part-time farming is more common among the rural population. Unregistered employment, on the contrary, is more typical for the urban population. As the data shows (Monitoring of Socio-Economic Changes), this part of population employed without official covers both formal and informal sectors of economy, and is mainly concentrated in the service sector.

The proportion of people employed informally by households has been almost constantly decreasing (from 6.9% in 1995 to 1.8% in 2009), except for a slight increase during the years of financial crises. The highest proportion of informally employed individuals without official registration was in 1999–2001(9–10%), with subsequent decline to 6.5% in 2009.

Interethnic frictions have their own special features. The main factors are linguistic issues, cultural issues, and historical memory. They are closely connected with politics, economics, and religious life.

Russia is a multiethnic country, comprising more than 120 ethnic groups. Ethnic Russians exceed 80% of the population. Historically, there was intolerance in Russia towards dissidents, and totalitarian ideologies were deeply rooted. The ethnic psychology of the Russian population and excited ethnic self-awareness increased social tensions and interethnic frictions. An aggravation of ethnic relations was noted in 1995–1996. This aggravation was mentioned by 20–25% of the survey population. Subsequently this

measure had been decreasing, and by the year 2008 aggravation of ethnic relations was only mentioned by 5% of the population.

Weakness of the government in 1997–1998 was mentioned by 37–40% of the population. Since 2000, this weakness was mentioned by not more than 15% of the population, which is indicative of the perceived strengthening of the Government.

The last two signs of conflictogenity (the aggravation of interethnic relations and weakness of the government) during the last years become not significant and are not monitored any more in the process of monitoring of social and economic changes.

The composite index of objective-subjective signs of social conflictogenity which reflects estimation by the population of objectively taking place actions or situations, had the highest value during 1995 (2.0). High values of this index were also in 1998 (1.87) and 1999 (1.82). After 1998 numerical value of composite index was constantly decreasing and since 2003 accepts values below the average level. In 2011 it is equal 0.52.

Subjective signs of conflictogenity

Subjective signs of conflictogenity represent minor moods, feelings and negative emotions of the population, sensations of tension, aggression, fear, awareness of one's own distress and one's family's distress, personal protest potential.

During the analyzed period, the population's emotional state could be called unstable. According to the survey [5], two thirds of the population were afraid of lawlessness and incidence of crime. Most of the population wanted (often 61%, sometimes 29%) to buy weapons for later use.

Analysis of the data for social and economic changes [4] also shows that population moods are not stable. Tensions, irritations, and fears rise during periods of economic crises, and decrease during periods of economic stabilization, namely, of increased income, and lower unemployment. The year 1993 was notable. During the introduction of market prices for food and consumer goods, half of the population (52%) felt irritated and frightened. As the economic situation was stabilizing, moods of the population generally improved. In 1997 48% of the population experienced irritation and fear.

The 1998-year default dismayed the majority of the population (68%). It was the hardest year for the population of all the years in the analyzed period. Even the economic crisis of 2008–2010 did not cause as much despondency and outbursts of fear. During that year 66% of the population was not satisfied with the life.

The choice of the answer variant «Enduring our distress is already impossible» indicates distress of the population. In 1999, this statement was chosen by 45% of the population. Since 2000, the part of the population who defines their distress has been decreasing. In 2009 it was about 13%. In 2010 the economic crisis brought certain changes, and the part of the population living in poverty grew by 3 percentage points.

The estimation of probability of mass actions characterises subjective assessment of possibility of protest performances but readiness to participate in them is an internal mood of the persons. Readiness (most likely) to take part in mass actions against falling living standards and for protection of own rights was expressed by a third of population (32.6%) in 1998, 28.9% in 1999. By the year 2011 readiness to take part in mass actions was expressed by 11.0% of respondents.

The composite index of subjective signs of conflictogenity exceeded its average value during the 1993–1999 periods. The highest level of aggression, fear there was in 1998. Since 2001 it is observed a decrease in this index to 0.54 in 2011.

The overall index

There were four main stages of socio-economic development in Russia during the analyzed period and the overall index of conflictogenity levels correspond to them.

The years 1993–1997 were the time of economic instability, rise in unemployment, underemployment, secondary employment and dismissal of workers and specialists. As a result of industrial decline, commercial enterprises were forced to reduce working hours. This led to a massive increase in

hidden unemployment. The overall index was rising (i.e., level of social tension raised), remaining within the range 1.07–1.35.

In 1998–1999 socio-economic situation worsened as a result of a crisis (the default). The decline in industrial output deepened, the budget crisis intensified, the financial market was destabilized, and the amount of overdue payments increased. Reduction in labor demand, hyperinflation together with increasing amount of nonpayment of wages and pensions resulted in substantial reduction in consumption. Impoverishment of the middle stratum of the population worsened the social structure of society. Those years were the hardest for the population. This fact is reflected in an increase in the overall index, it was the highest (2.0–1.87).

The 2001–2007 periods was marked by positive trends in development. During those years, the moving away from a raw material model of economy and development of other economic sectors became apparent, and the volume of investments in production increased. The labor market improved, the number of formal sector jobs rose, and unemployment decreased. The number of small-scale industries increased and small businesses began to develop efficiently. Under these circumstances the overall index decreased to 0.66.

As the world financial crisis began in 2008, industrial output fell in 2008 by 10.3% and in 2009 by 10.8%. Those were the most dramatic declines in output over the last decade. Negative effects were observed in the building sector as well. The development of the financial crisis worsened the economic situation in the country, the relation to the President and the country government has worsened, the probability of mass actions and readiness to take in their part has increased, the proportion of the people marking the distress has increased. It contributed to the little growth of conflictogenity of a society (on 4 %).

Conclusions

Thus, in article the indices characterising provoking and reciprocal conflictogens are offered. They form social tension in a society, social conflictogenity of a society. The overall index of conflictogenity reflects dynamics of social tension in Russia from 1993 to 2011. The highest level of social tension was observed in 1998. It was a year of heavy financial crisis in Russia. After that social conflictogenity of a society decreased as a whole.

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