

An electoral activity of the population as an indicator of social tension in the region

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Abstract. The article examines the electoral activity of the region's population in the context of its further application as an indicator of social tension. Based on the analysis of the results of a sociological study of electoral activity, the authors substantiate the need to include such studies in the mechanism of regular monitoring of social tensions in the region.

Keywords: electoral activity, social tension, population, society, elections

1. Introduction

In the contemporary Russian society, the monitoring of social tensions is one of the important tasks of society and the state. Today, reforms in various public spheres are a stable phenomenon. This cannot affect the social relations that are regularly transformed, which contributes to the emergence of contradictions. A number of researchers defining social tensions note that with all the diversity of approaches to understanding this concept, a number of factors can be identified related to its manifestations [1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6]. As a rule, these are economic, political, and social spheres of society, within the framework of which there is a whole range of aspects contributing to increased tension.

As a result of a methodological analysis of various approaches to understanding this phenomenon, M. I. Vitkovskaya determines social tensions through the exacerbation of contradictions in society caused by social, political, and economic crises [7]. One of them is the crisis of the legitimacy of power. As a rule, it manifests itself through the strengthening of absenteeism attitudes in society and a decrease in the electoral activity of the population.

In conditions of stable social development, this trend does not cause serious concerns. But during periods of active reforming of various spheres of society, a change in electoral activity may be an indicator of social tension. The lack of interest in the formation of power in such conditions is explained by the loss of communication between society and the authorities, which can contribute to increased tension in society [8]. These circumstances determined the necessity of introducing a number of issues related to the study of the electoral activity of the population into the study of social tension.

2. Materials and Methods

In 2018, a sociological survey was conducted on the basis of the Altai State University. The empirical base of the research included the data obtained in the framework of the project "Developing and Promoting a Set of Social Measures to Reduce the Level of Social Tension and Conflict in the Altai Region in 2018." This project included a mass survey of the population on quota sampling by the method of standardized interviewing (N = 1,220).

A certain place in the study was taken up by issues related to the study of electoral activity of the population of the Altai region. Electoral activity was considered as the involvement of the population in the process of forming government bodies at all levels of social interaction in accordance with motivation and political attitudes.

3. Results

The women (54.2%) and men (45.8%) of voting age acted as respondents. By occupation, the majority of respondents are employed (26.2%), or they are the non-working pensioner or disabled persons (23.3%), and the employees of budget organizations (15.4%). The majority of respondents (78.4%) defined their material wealth as average, with enough money for food and clothing, and they have to save for large expenses.

When answering the question whether respondents participate in municipal elections, the majority of respondents (37.7%) answered that they always participate, 25.2% take part in most elections, 22.4% occasionally, 11.8% never, and 2.9% found it difficult to answer. Answers to the question about participation in regional elections were received in the following range: (1) 41.3% of respondents always participate; (2) 8.7% never participate; (5) 2.5% find it difficult to answer. When asked about participation in federal elections, the answers ranged from 48.8% (always participate) to 5.8% (never participate), and a share of 1.7% found it difficult to answer.

Table 1. Comparative analysis by election levels.

Respondent response	Election level		
	Municipal	Regional	Federal
Always	37.7 %	41.3 %	48.8 %
Most elections	25.2 %	26.5 %	25.3 %
Occasionally	22.4 %	21 %	18.4 %
Never	11.8 %	8.7 %	5.8 %
Difficult to answer	2.9 %	2.5 %	1.7 %

Comparative data analysis (Table 1) clearly demonstrates that the majority of the population of the Altai region prefers to take part in elections. At the same time, the priorities are the elections to the federal bodies of state power.

When answering the question about the reasons why the respondent rarely participates or does not participate at all in the elections, the following was noted: (1) do not trust all the candidates, parties, electoral programs (24,6 %); (2) have doubts about the fairness of the election results (20.5%); a feeling that nothing depends on them (19.6%); elections have no real consequences (14,6 %); not interested, lazy, indifferent to politics (8.1%); there is little information about candidates, so it's not clear who to vote for (4.7 %).

Answering a question about attitudes towards people who deliberately refuse to participate in elections, the majority of respondents (59.8%) indicated that they were indifferent to them, 25.3% of respondents condemned such a position, 4.4% supported it, and 10.5% found it difficult to answer. These results suggest that the majority of the population of the Altai region does not give any negative assessment of those who refused to participate in the elections, and the support for this position is very small.

Also, questions were included in the study related to the identification of political preferences. When answering the question "Which political forces do you support?", the following results were obtained: "United Russia" (25.6%), the Communist Party (11.5%), LDPR (10.7%), "Fair Russia" (4.6%), "Yabloko" (1.8%), and other political parties and movements (5.6%). The respondents also indicated A. Navalny, the Sobriety Party. Some respondents' answers were: "there must be a coalition," "there is no decent party," "we will vote against all". However, the majority of respondents showed clear electoral interest and activity in choosing political power in the country.

During the study, a change of governor took place in the Altai region. This allowed the study to include issues related to the identification of electoral activity at the regional level and the identification of preferences for candidates for the post of governor of the Altai region.

Answers to the question “If the elections of the governor of the Altai region take place next weekend, will you take part in them?”, were distributed as follows: 38.9% of respondents would definitely participate; 30.3% answered that they would rather take part than not; 17% of respondents said they would rather not participate; 5.2% answered “definitely not”; 8.7% found it difficult to answer.

At the same time, when answering the question “If the elections for the governor of the Altai Territory take place next weekend, who will you vote for?”, 41.1% of the respondents did not decide, and 31.3% chose the candidate from the “United Russia” party V. P. Tomenko. It can be assumed that the understanding of the need to vote does not always cause the formation of a political position.

Respondents also expressed attitudes towards V. P. Tomenko, who was appointed as the Acting Governor of the Altai region, at the time of the survey. 38.3% of respondents indicated that they were neutral to him and states that it would unlikely to see significant changes with his arrival. In turn, 24.3% of the surveyed were positive and had high hopes for him, while 22.8% found it difficult to answer. More than that, 12.5% among the interviewed had a negative attitude, because the Acting Governor was not familiar with the specifics of the region and would be unlikely effective. A share of 2.3% chose the option “other” and noted a few widespread remarks: “time will tell,” “there will be no changes,” “they don’t relate in any way”.

Analysis of the research results suggests that in the Altai region, electoral activity is at a sufficient and average level. It should also be noted that there are no obvious sociopolitical crisis phenomena and there is no need to talk about an increase in social tension.

4. Discussion

However, in the modern methodology, the question of factors and indicators of social tension continues to be debatable. A large number of modern studies is aimed at justifying their choice to ensure the optimal identification of the dynamics of social tensions in society. There is a significant range of positions on choosing approaches to understanding the content of a concept, identifying and substantiating its main characteristics [9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15].

At the same time, social and political factors in justifying social tensions and the reasons for its growth occupy a significant place among most researchers. However, meaningfully, they turn to various aspects of socio-political interaction [16, 17, 18]. S. S. Kutafieva determines social tension through an imbalance of social relations. Considering one of the important aspects, she notes the need to ensure a positive assessment of power by the population as one of the provisions stabilizing society [19].

In conducting a sociological study, V. A. Baranochnikov pays considerable attention to identifying the degree of political (including electoral) activity of various groups of the population. The author notes that high political activity is a sign of a responsible attitude of society towards what is happening in the country and the region [2].

The authors of the article “Social Tensions and Protest Activity in Russia,” O. V. Rodimushkina and others note the important role of public confidence in government and political institutions in stabilizing social relations. They emphasize that the decrease in the level of such trust, the emergence of discontent with the regional authorities are the factors that can influence the growth of social tensions in the region [20].

5. Conclusion

Despite the appeal of researchers to various forms of interaction between society and government as factors affecting social tension in society, in the context of these forms, as a rule, there is a need to study the electoral behavior of the population. Research in this area expands the possibilities of studying the state of society through the definition of political attitudes of the population, their involvement in the system of forming government.

Thus, it can be argued that the monitoring of social tensions in the region should include an analysis of the population electoral activity. The interest demonstrated by the society in the formation of power structures shows the presence of a definite connection between society and the state, a responsible attitude of the population towards their future, which is a sign of the maturity of social institutions and the absence of crisis phenomena.

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