

Conflict in a cross-border region: insights from a sociological study

V Nagaytsev^{1*}, V Artjukhina¹, and A Shrayber¹

¹ Altai State University, 61 Lenina pr., Barnaul 656049 Russia

E-mail: nvvv@yandex.ru

Abstract. The article is devoted to the study of the processes of conflict in one of the regions of Siberia (namely, Altai region), focusing on the estimates of its population. The article presents data from a representative sociological research on this issue, which was conducted in 2018 within 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 2018-2020”. As a result of this research, the authors determine the level of conflict in the region and outline a number of key ways to reduce it.

Keywords: conflict, population, respondent, region, society

1. Introduction

Conflict is a special state of the social system, when the interaction between different subjects is characterized by overt or hidden forms of confrontation and opposition, which is caused by the presence of sharp contradictions in the subject's interests. Conflict in society can be managed by directing its development in a constructive direction and supporting the conventional forms of its manifestation.

Conflicts are one of the inalienable forms of social interactions between various subjects. We define a social conflict as a process of confrontation, collision, and further negative opposition of two or more subjects due to the presence of contradictions in their interests. A number of contemporary researchers understand conflicts as a natural phenomenon in any social systems, even further considering them a source of social progressive development and normal functioning [1-6]. Conflicts make it possible to resolve the contradictions that have arisen between the subjects, to strengthen mutual understanding and cooperation between social groups of the population, and to reduce tensions in their relations. The main form of working with social conflicts is just their professional management. Currently, we clearly indicate that conflict management at the regional level is gaining in its importance.

2. Materials and Methods

The conflict level in a regional society was estimated by conducting a mass sociological survey, within 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 2018-2020.”

In the period from July 1 to August 31, 2018, a survey of the urban and rural population of the Altai Region was conducted using the method of standardized interviewing at the respondent's place

of residence (1,220 respondents in four cities and six districts of the Altai Region). The sample represents the region's population from the age of 18 years and older, differentiating by sex, age, occupation, and settlement types. The sample is characterized by the following: quota, multistage, stratified, a step-by-step selection of respondents.

3. Results

The study shows that social conflicts are an integral part of the daily life of the regional population. As can be seen from Table 1, the majority of respondents (almost 75% of respondents) state that sometimes they still encounter conflicts in their lives. Conflicts arise quite often in 15% of the region's population. Almost 2% of respondents constantly get into conflict situations. Another 6.4% of respondents say that there are never conflicts in their lives. It is worth mentioning that the residents of small villages and people over 65 years old say this more often than others. Almost 3% of the surveyed had difficulties in answering that question. Most often residents of the Altai region are in conflict with their family members (16.9%); with employees of service organizations (14.6%); with neighbors (9.0%); with friends (7.7%); with officials (7.0%); with work colleagues (6.9%); with the boss (6.9%); with strangers (4.2%), etc. Among other subjects with whom the population often conflicts, the respondents named the professional group of operators working in call-centers of commercial banks and microfinance organizations and collecting agencies.

Table 1. Distribution of answers to the question "How often do conflicts arise in your life?"

Response alternatives	Population, %
Constantly	1.7
Often	14.6
Sometimes	74.6
Never	6.4
Hard to answer	2.7

While being in a conflict, our respondents (a) prefer to find a compromise solution to the problem (35.3%); (b) try to prove their case to the opponent at any cost (21.7%); (c) don't contradict one opponent (19.5 %); (d) do not pay attention to the opponent's actions (12.6%); (e) resort to the help of other people (3%), (f) or act in some other way.

The results of the study indicate that the respondent's majority relate to emerging conflicts either negatively (42.0%), or rather negatively (40.6%). Only 2.4% of the respondents stated their positive attitude towards conflicts in their lives. Another 7.3% have a positive rather than negative attitude towards them. Other 7.7% found it difficult to answer the question.

Table 2. Distribution of answers to the question "In your opinion, what are the main causes of conflicts between people?"

Response alternatives	Population, %
An incompatibility of people due to the divergence of views on life	20.3
Low culture of communication in society	17.3
Fight for leadership	7.7
High level of social stratification	11.4
Personal features (temperament, character)	20.0
Distortion of information, rumors, gossip	15.6
National differences	3.2
Religious differences	2.4
Difficult to answer	1.6
Other	0.5

As can be seen from Table 2, the respondents consider the main causes of conflicts between people to be the following: (a) incompatibility of people due to diverging views on life (20.3%); (b) personal characteristics of people (20.0%); (c) a low culture of communication in society (17.3%); (d)

information distortion, rumors, gossip (15.6%); (e) a high level of social stratification (11.4%); (f) a struggle for leadership (7.7%); and (g) national and religious differences (5.6%). Among other causes of conflict, the respondents named a low standard of living in the certain categories of the population, intolerance to the opinions of others, various misunderstandings, etc. More than that, 1.6% of the surveyed respondents found it difficult to answer the question.

Table 3. Distribution of answers to the question “What method of conflict resolution do you consider most acceptable for yourself?”

Response alternatives	%
Power	4.5
Compromise	35.3
Finding a win-win solution	48.2
Separating the disputing parties	5.7
Delayed decision	1.9
Difficult to answer	4.0
Other	0.4

As can be seen from Table 3, in the opinion of the region’s population, the most acceptable ways of resolving conflicts are the parties finding a mutually beneficial solution (48.2%) or a compromise (35.3%). Among the surveyed, 5.7% consider separating the disputing parties as the most acceptable way of conflict resolution for themselves. A small number of respondents prefer to resolve their conflicts with the help of force (4.5%). Postponing conflict resolution for later has very few supporters (1.9%). Also, 4% found it difficult to answer this question. As other option, the respondents suggested the methods of conflict resolution listed above: “resolving conflicts in their favor”; “relying ion cooperation”; “Dividing the subject of the dispute in half”, etc.

The sociological study also clearly demonstrate that the population is not sufficiently aware of the option to constructively resolve conflicts with the participation of a third party. Thus, 15% go to court to protect their interests in situations of conflict; 17% rely on the police and other power structures; 24% turn to the friends and relatives; 8% rely on state authorities; 5% go to the media; 5% turn to strong and powerful people; 2% write complains to the Administration of the President of the Russian Federation, to political parties and deputies of legislative bodies of various levels, as well as public organizations, etc. Only 15% of the surveyed respondents prefer to manage on their own when resolving their conflicts. At the same time, none of the respondents interviewed by us addressed the existing centers of mediation and conflict management counseling in the Altai region.

The question “Please rate the level of conflict in our region (“5” – very high level, “1” – complete absence of conflict)” was aimed at directly determining the level of conflict in the Altai region. The majority of the survey participants rated the level of conflict as medium, answering “3” (46.5%) and “2” (23.4%). In short, they noted a small number of conflicts in the region. The number of respondents who believe that conflicts are completely absent in regional society (“1”) is 6%. The groups of 17.6% recorded a high level of conflict (“4”), and 6% noted a very high level of conflict (“5”).

4. Discussion

The dichotomies of consensus and conflict, peace and war are central to many theories and schools. In the field of sociological knowledge, two scientific directions can be distinguished in with respect to their representatives’ attitude to the functions of conflict in the social system. Representatives of the first direction, which can be described as “consensus theory,” emphasize in their positions such categories as “stability” and “evolutionary development”. And they treat conflict as a negative social phenomenon and pathology (A. Comte, E. Durkheim, T. Parsons, R. Merton, N. Smelser, P. Nolan, and others) [7-11]. Representatives of the second direction, which is designated as “conflict theory,” propose to consider conflict as a phenomenon that carries with it various positive functions for the social system, in addition to some negative consequences (K. Marx, G. Simmel, L. Coser, R.

Dahrendorf, K. Boulding, T. Schelling, etc.) [12-20]. For example, Lewis Coser considers social conflict as “a dynamic type of interaction between subjects that cannot be eliminated” [14].

The theory of conflict fundamentally changes our attitude to the phenomenon of social conflict. In real life, there is always a place not only for conflicts, wars, revolutions, but also for a consensus, which is well accepted by society on the basis of the mutual interests of people. Conflicts violate consensus, and their resolution is restored. Conflicts are temporary, only peace is permanent. The concept of “conflict” is not yet generally recognized as a scientific category of Sociology. From our point of view, it is important to research not only specific social conflicts, their participants, causes, forms of manifestation, types, but also their interaction and interdependence in society. Numerous conflicts form one common system of social phenomena and processes interdependent on each other. Of course, if we want to measure the overall conflict in a particular regional society, we will not be able to avoid analyzing the individual social conflicts arising in it. Discussion on the problem of conflict in local societies is a complex scientific task, solving which we can discover many useful social facts.

5. Conclusion

This article explored the conflict nature of the population of the Altai region. Its following components were analyzed: (a) the population’s attitude to conflicts; (b) frequency of their occurrence in citizens’ lives; (c) causes and participants of conflicts; (d) forms of human behavior in conflicts; (e) the most common methods of conflict resolution, etc.

In the life of the majority of the region’s population, a variety of conflict situations arise periodically. Moreover, residents of the Altai region are extremely negative about conflicts, which indicates the prevalence of the phenomenon of conflict-phobia in society and low conflict-literacy of the population. Most often, conflicts occur with family members, employees of service organizations, neighbors, friends and buddies, as well as with colleagues and strangers, etc. The population of the region considers the following main causes of conflicts between people: incompatibility of people because of different views on life; personal characteristics; a low culture of communication; distortion of information; a high level of social stratification; struggle for leadership; national and religious differences, etc. According to the population, the most acceptable way to resolve conflicts is finding a mutually beneficial solution or compromise by the parties.

The level of conflict in the region is estimated as “medium,” i.e. being between “the absence of serious conflicts” and “the high level of conflict in society.” In our opinion, if there is an increase in the level of conflict, the regulatory mechanisms of a society may not cope with the task of maintaining agreement in relations between key social actors in the region, which will inevitably lead to the transformation of the entire social system.

6. Acknowledgments

The article was prepared with the financial support of the Russian Foundation for Basic Research in the framework of the project p_a № 18-411-220001 “Developing and Promoting a set of Social Measures to Reduce the Level of Social Tension and Conflict in the Altai Region in 2018-2020.”

References

- [1] Scott V 2015 *Workplace – conflict resolution* (Saarbrücken: Lambert Academic Publishing)
- [2] Aumann R, and Maschler M 1995 *Repeated games with incomplete information* (Cambridge: MIT Press)
- [3] Carakoz A 2006 *Together* (Koblenz: Fellbach)
- [4] Ayalew M 2012 *The role of regional organizations in conflict transformation* (Saarbrücken: Lambert Academic Publishing)
- [5] Popov E A 2013 Language of sociality – A construct of epoch or of science? *Sotsiologicheskie Issledovaniya* 5 pp 13-19
- [6] Sergienko A M, Rodionova L V, Kolesnikova O N, and Ivanova O A 2019 Practices and drivers of the rural youth’s migration behavior in the Siberian agricultural region *Vestnik Tomskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta. Filosofiya. Sotsiologiya. Politologiya – Tomsk State University*

- Journal of Philosophy, Sociology and Political Science* **47** pp 168-178
- [7] Parsons T 1968 *The structure of social action* (NY, NY: Free Press)
 - [8] Merton R 1968 *Social theory and social structure* (NY, NY: Free Press)
 - [9] Smelser N 1962 *Theory of collective behavior* (NY, NY: Free Press)
 - [10] Nolan P, and Lenski G 2004 *Human societies: An introduction to Macrosociology* (Boulder: Paradigm)
 - [11] Sanderson S 1999 *Social transformations: A general theory of historical development* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield)
 - [12] Marx K 1971 *Preface to A contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (London: Lawrence & Whishart)
 - [13] Simmel G 1968 *The conflict in modern culture, and other essays* (N.Y.: Teachers College Press)
 - [14] Coser L 1956 *The function of social conflict* (Glencoe: Free Press)
 - [15] Dahrendorf R 1959 *Class and class conflict in industrial society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press)
 - [16] Boulding K 1988 *Conflict and defense: a general theory* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America)
 - [17] Schelling T 1963 *The strategy of conflict* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press)
 - [18] Deutsch M 1973 *The resolution of conflict* (New Haven: Yale University Press)
 - [19] Newstone M, and Brown R 1986 *Contact and conflict in intergroup encounters* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell)
 - [20] Thomas K, and Kilmann R 2010 TKI profile & interpretive *Report pat sample 2* pp 3-6