

## **SOCIOLOGICAL STUDIES OF INSTITUTIONAL TRUST IN CHECHEN SOCIETY**

**Maret BETILMERZAEVA**

*D.Sc. (Philos.), Professor, Department of Philosophy,  
Political Science and Sociology, Chechen State Pedagogical University;  
Professor, Department of Philosophy, Chechen State University;  
Chief Research Associate, Sector of Ethnology, Institute of Humanitarian Studies,  
Academy of Sciences of the Chechen Republic  
(Grozny, Russian Federation)*

**Ali SALGIRIEV**

*Ph.D. (Political Science), Leading Research Associate,  
Sector of Philosophy and Sociology, Institute of Humanitarian Studies,  
Academy of Sciences of the Chechen Republic  
(Grozny, Russian Federation)*

**Magomed SOLTAMURADOV**

*Ph.D. (Philos.), Assistant Professor, Department of History of Russia and  
Political Science, Chechen State University; Leading Research Associate,  
Sector of Philosophy and Sociology, Institute of Humanitarian Studies,  
Academy of Sciences of the Chechen Republic  
(Grozny, Russian Federation)*

**Vakha GAZIEV**

*Ph.D. (Political Science), Assistant Professor,  
Department of History of Russia and Political Science, Chechen State University  
(Grozny, Russian Federation)*

## ABSTRACT

The authors have offered comparative sociological analysis of the transformations underway in Chechen society in the context of an analysis of institutional confidence and trust.

Social reality and political processes are treated as an object of studies, while the subject of studies and their objective are the comparative analysis of the evolution of public opinion about the structures of power and administration in the Chechen Republic, as well as the dynamics of the chosen development course.

The authors relied on the materials of sociological polls conducted by the North Ossetia Center for Social Studies of the Institute of Socio-Political Research of the Russian Academy of Sciences and the Department of Sociological Studies of SOIGSI VNTs, Russian Academy of Sciences, and the Government of the Republic of North

Ossetia-Alania in May-June 2003 within the project Chechnia in the Socio-Cultural Space of the Russian Federation: Ethnopsychological Analysis and joint studies carried out by the North Ossetia Center for Social Studies and the Department of Philosophy, Political Science and Sociology, Chechen State Pedagogical University, in May-June 2017.

The research objectives postulated the following tasks:

- (1) to find out how the respondents in the Chechen Republic assess the state of affairs in Russia;
- (2) to analyze the degree of popular confidence and trust in the structures of power and administration, in religious figures and the media.

In their studies the authors relied on the quantitative questionnaire method.

**KEYWORDS:** Chechen society, sociological studies, poll, questionnaire, transformation, level of institutional trust, development.

### Introduction

In the late twentieth century the Soviet Union and centralized power collapsed causing tragedies in the lives and fates of each and every member of the multi-million Soviet people. "Common Russian problems caused by social transformations" affected "all the entities of the Federation, the North Caucasian region being no exception. Historical and cultural specifics of its constituencies, one of them being the Chechen Republic, set it apart from the rest of the country."<sup>1</sup> Today philosophers, political scientists and other humanities experts should pay more attention to the situation in the world and in Russia: their profound analysis of the situation in the country should help us find the ways out of crises and create the best possible conditions in which Russian society can successfully develop.<sup>2</sup>

In its practical activities, sociology as one of the applied sciences relies on the results of studies of public trust and confidence in state and public institutions. Political stability, consistent public dialogue and development of democracy are impossible without a high level of institutional trust.

<sup>1</sup> Kh.V. Dzutsev, *Sovremennaiia Chechnia: protsessy sotsiokulturnoy transformatsii. Etnopsichologicheskoe issledovanie*, 2nd revised and enlarged edition, Monograph, ISPI RAS, Moscow, 2011, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> See: A. Salgiriev, M. Betilmerzaeva, V. Gaziev, M. Soltamuradov, "Institutional Trust as an Empirical Indicator of the Legitimacy of Political Elites," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 17, Issue 4, 2016, pp. 34-41.

Sociologists carry out public opinion polls to acquire the maximally objective and transparent results to be used in sociological and political forecasting. On the eve of the presidential elections in Russia it has become especially important to follow the dynamics of public trust and confidence and views and opinions of citizens of Russia.

## Trends Assessed

Comparative analysis of the results of sociological polls of 2003 and 2017 has revealed the dynamics of political situation<sup>3</sup> in Russia and the Chechen Republic and suggested several important conclusions about the prospects and potential of political cooperation between central and local powers.<sup>4</sup> In 2003, the respondents (urban population) offered the following answers to the question “Is Russia moving in the right or, rather, in the wrong direction?”: 6.1% of the polled believed that the direction was right; 22.5% believed that Russia was moving “in the wrong direction”; 58.4% described the direction as “right in some and wrong in other respects”; 13.0% were “undecided.” The same question asked in 2017 elicited the following responses: 24.0% answered “in the right direction”; 14.0%—“in the wrong direction”; 38.0%—“right in some and wrong in other respects”; 24.0% were “undecided” (see Table 1).

Positive dynamics of “in the right direction” responses to the first question, a smaller number of “in the wrong direction” responses and “right in some and wrong in other respects” are balanced out by a bigger number of “undecided,” which cannot but cause concern.

Table 1

Is Russia Moving in the Right Direction or the Direction is Primarily Wrong?

	Share of Responses, %	
	2003	2017
In the right direction	6.1	24.0
In the wrong direction	22.5	14.0
Right in some and wrong in other respects	58.4	38.0
Undecided	13.0	24.0

## The Degree of Confidence and Trust in the Structures of Power and Administration

In 2003, the question “To which extent do you trust the President of the Russian Federation” (see Table 2) elicited the following responses: Trust completely—17%; Trust to a certain ex-

<sup>3</sup> See: M.M. Betilmezaeva, “Mesto i rol gumanitarnogo znaniia i dukhovnoy bezopasnosti v kontekste multikulturalizma,” in: *Gumanitarnoe znanie i dukhovnaia bezopasnost. Sbornik materialov II Mezhdunarodnoy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii*, 2015, pp. 74-82.

<sup>4</sup> See: A. Salgiriev, “The Northern Caucasus: Tribal-Clan Structure of the Political Elites as a Factor of Political Tension,” *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 17, Issue 1, 2016, pp. 29-35.

tent—33.6%; Mistrust to a certain extent—20.9%; Do not trust at all—20.0%; Undecided—9.0%. In 2017, the responses were: Trust completely—24.0%; Trust to a certain extent—18.0%; Mistrust to a certain extent—16.0%; Do not trust at all—16.0%; Undecided—24.0%. An analysis of the dynamics of trust in the structures of power and administration among the population of Grozny showed that the share of those who trusted the President of the Russian Federation dropped from 50.6% in 2003 to 42% in 2017; the share of those who mistrusted the President, likewise, dropped from 40.9 in 2003 to 12% in 2017 at the expense of the share of “Undecided” that rose from 9% in 2003 to 24% in 2017.

Table 2

**To Which Extent Do You Trust the RF President?**

	Share of Responses, %	
	2003	2017
Trust completely	17	24.0
Trust to a certain extent	33.6	18.0
Mistrust to a certain extent	20.9	16.0
Do not trust at all	20.0	16.0
Undecided	9.0	24.0

In 2003, the question “To which extent do you trust the Government of the Russian Federation?” (see Table 3) elicited the following responses in 2003: Trust completely—6.4%; Trust to a certain extent—26.5%; Mistrust to a certain extent—34.5%; Do not trust at all—24.3%; Undecided—7.8%. The results in 2017 were as follows: Trust completely—18.0%; Trust to a certain extent—14.0%; Mistrust to a certain extent—22.0%; Do not trust at all—22.0%; Undecided—24.0%.

Table 3

**To Which Extent Do You Trust  
the Government of the Russian Federation?**

	Share of Responses, %	
	2003	2017
Trust completely	6.4	18.0
Trust to a certain extent	26.5	14.0
Mistrust to a certain extent	34.5	22.0
Do not trust at all	24.3	22.0
Undecided	7.8	24.0

In 2003, the question “To which extent do you trust the State Duma of the Russian Federation?” (see Table 4) invited the following answers: Trust completely—6.3%; Trust to a certain extent—26.0%; Mistrust to a certain extent—32.7%; Do not trust at all—25.1%; Undecided—9.9%. The results in 2017 were as follows: Trust completely—24.0%; Trust to a certain extent—12.0%; Mistrust to a certain extent—20.0%; Do not trust at all—26.0%; Undecided—18.0%.

Table 4

**To Which Extent Do You Trust  
the State Duma of the Russian Federation?**

	Share of Responses, %	
	2003	2017
Trust completely	6.3	24.0
Trust to a certain extent	26.0	12.0
Mistrust to a certain extent	32.7	20.0
Do not trust at all	25.1	26.0
Undecided	9.9	18.0

In 2003, the question “To which extent do you trust the Federation Council of the Russian Federation?” (see Table 5) elicited the following responses: Trust completely—6.4%; Trust to a certain extent—26.5%; Mistrust to a certain extent—34.5%; Do not trust at all—24.3%; Undecided—7.8%. The results in 2017 were as follows: Trust completely—20.0%; Trust to a certain extent—14.0%; Mistrust to a certain extent—20.0%; Do not trust at all—22.0%; Undecided—24.0%.

Table 5

**To Which Extent Do You Trust  
the Federation Council of the Russian Federation?**

	Share of Responses, %	
	2003	2017
Trust completely	6.4	20.0
Trust to a certain extent	26.5	14.0
Mistrust to a certain extent	34.5	20.0
Do not trust at all	24.3	22.0
Undecided	7.8	24.0

In 2003, the question “To which extent do you trust the law enforcement structures of the Russian Federation?” (see Table 6) elicited the following responses: Trust completely—4.1%; Trust to a certain extent—11.2%; Mistrust to a certain extent—28.9%; Do not trust at all—46.9%; Undecided—8.9%. The results in 2017 were as follows: Trust completely—14.0%; Trust to a certain extent—8.0%; Mistrust to a certain extent—20.0%; Do not trust at all—26.0%; Undecided—32.0%.

In 2003, the question “To which extent do you trust the Federal Security Service (FSB) of the Russian Federation?” (see Table 7) elicited the following responses: Trust completely—3.2%; Trust to a certain extent—10.9%; Mistrust to a certain extent—23.4%; Do not trust at all—51.2%; Undecided—11.2%. The results in 2017 were as follows: Trust completely—18.0%; Trust to a certain extent—18.0%; Mistrust to a certain extent—22.0%; Do not trust at all—12.0%; Undecided—30.0%.

Table 6

**To Which Extent Do You Trust  
the Law Enforcement Structures of the Russian Federation?**

	Share of Responses, %	
	2003	2017
Trust completely	4.1	14.0
Trust to a certain extent	11.2	8.0
Mistrust to a certain extent	28.9	20.0
Do not trust at all	46.9	26.0
Undecided	8.9	32.0

Table 7

**To Which Extent Do You Trust  
the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation?**

	Share of Responses, %	
	2003	2017
Trust completely	3.2	18.0
Trust to a certain extent	10.9	18.0
Mistrust to a certain extent	23.4	22.0
Do not trust at all	51.2	12.0
Undecided	11.2	30.0

In 2003, the question “To which extent do you trust the Plenipotentiary Representative of the President of the Russian Federation in the Southern Federal District/North-Caucasian Federal District (V. Kazantsev in 2003; O. Belaventsev in 2017)?” (see Table 8) elicited the following responses: Trust completely—4.9%; Trust to a certain extent—19.2%; Mistrust to a certain extent—25.7%; Do not trust at all—33.7%; Undecided—16.5%. The results in 2017 were as follows: Trust completely—12.0%; Trust to a certain extent—12.0%; Mistrust to a certain extent—6.0%; Do not trust at all—0.0%; Undecided—70.0%.

We have relied on the obtained results not only to chronologically compare the degrees of approval of the job conducted by the institutes of power, but also to analyze the degree and the dynamics of trust in any structure of power and administration vertically (see Table 9). In 2003, sociological monitoring of the degree of trust revealed that the President of the Russian Federation enjoyed the highest degree of job approval (17%); in 2017, the share rose to 24%. The State Duma of the Russian Federation scored at the same level. On the whole, in the last ten years people in the Chechen Republic demonstrated a rising level of institutional trust and confidence.

The share of those who do not trust power and administration structures is gradually decreasing, an apparently positive dynamics. In 2003, for example, 51.2% did not trust the FSB; 46.9% felt the same about the law enforcement structures. In 2017, the share of those who mistrusted the

FSB dropped to the historically low of 12%, while the share of those who trusted this structure increased 6-fold.

Table 8

**To Which Extent Do You Trust  
the Plenipotentiary Representative of the President of the Russian Federation  
in the Southern Federal District/North-Caucasian Federal District  
(V. Kazantsev in 2003; O. Belaventsev in 2017)?**

	Share of Responses, %	
	2003	2017
Trust completely	4.9	12.0
Trust to a certain extent	19.2	12.0
Mistrust to a certain extent	25.7	6.0
Do not trust at all	33.7	0.0
Undecided	16.5	70.0

Table 9

**The Degree of Trust in the Structures of Power and Administration:  
Comparative Analysis**

Power Structures	Share of Responses, %									
	2003	2017	2003	2017	2003	2017	2003	2017	2003	2017
	Trust Completely		Trust to a Certain Extent		Mistrust to a Certain Extent		Do Not Trust at All		Undecided	
President of RF	17.0	24.0	33.6	18.0	20.9	16.0	20.0	16.0	9.0	24.0
Government of RF	6.4	18.0	26.5	14.0	34.5	22.0	24.3	22.0	7.8	24.0
State Duma of RF	6.3	24.0	26.0	12.0	32.7	20.0	25.1	26.0	9.9	18.0
Federation Council of RF	4.7	20.0	22.0	14.0	30.0	20.0	27.0	22.0	16.4	24.0
Law enforcement structures of RF	4.1	14.0	11.2	8.0	28.9	20.0	46.9	26.0	8.9	32.0
FSB of RF	3.2	18.0	10.9	18.0	23.4	22.0	51.2	12.0	11.2	30.0
Representative of the President in SFD/NCFD	4.9	12.0	19.2	12.0	25.7	6.0	33.7	0.0	16.5	70.0

The share of those who had no trust in the President dropped to 16% in 2017 against 20% in 2003.

The dynamics change in the share of those who expressed “trust to a certain extent” or “mistrust to a certain extent” in the structures of power and state administration are especially interesting. In the last 14 years, the President of the Russian Federation lost more votes than any other structure in the “trust to a certain extent” category: 33.6% in 2003 against 18% in 2017.

Despite the 2017 positive dynamics, mistrust in some structures of power did not drop. The State Duma of the Russian Federation is one of the leaders in this respect: 26% in 2017 against 25.1% in 2003. It shares its leadership with the law enforcement structures: the same 26% in 2017 even if there is a drop from the much higher 46.9% in 2003. This means that while the law enforcement structures demonstrated positive dynamics, the attitude to the State Duma cannot but cause concern: the share of those who “do not trust it at all” remains practically the same.

The degree of trust in the Plenipotentiary Representative of the President of the Russian Federation in the SFD/NCFD Victor Kazantsev in 2003 and Oleg Belaventsev in 2017 can be explained as follows: in 2003, Kazantsev was negatively perceived by the respondents, hence the low degree of trust. In 2017, most of the respondents still knew next to nothing about Belaventsev, appointed to the post in the summer of 2016, hence a great share of “undecided” (70%).

The “Undecided” group deserves special attention: while the first four lines demonstrate positive dynamics, the share of “undecided” looks like a black spot on the otherwise positive picture of the social and political state of Chechen society. It seems that this is caused by the following:

- (1) the social, political and economic situation in the country responsible for political apathy and the fairly big distance between common people and the structures of power and administration;
- (2) the fairly unambiguous structures of power and administration that not infrequently exceed the limits of their authority which makes it hard to adequately assess them.

It seems that a deeper analysis of the “undecided” phenomenon might suggest other explanations.

## The Degree of Trust in Religious Figures and the Media

It is highly interesting to compare the dynamics of trust/mistrust in the structures of power and administration and in religious figures and the media.<sup>5</sup> In 2003, the question “To which extent do you trust the religious figures of the Russian Federation?” (see Table 10) elicited the following responses: Trust completely—11.4%; Trust to a certain extent—33.9%; Mistrust to a certain extent—22.5%; Do not trust at all—19.2%; Undecided—12.9%. The results of 2017: Trust completely—16.0%; Trust to a certain extent—42.0%; Mistrust to a certain extent—8.0%; Do not trust at all—10.0%; Undecided—24.0%. This means that in the Chechen Republic the share of those who trust religious figures “completely” or “to a certain extent” rose considerably to reach 58.0% against 18.0% of those who “mistrust to a certain extent” or “do not trust at all.” The trend towards a bigger share of “undecided” persisted.

In 2003, the question “To which extent do you trust the federal TV channels?” (see Table 11) elicited the following responses: Trust completely—2.2%; Trust to a certain extent—16.8%; Mistrust to a certain extent—36.1%; Do not trust at all—40.1%; Undecided—4.7%. The results of 2017: Trust completely—18.0%; Trust to a certain extent—10.0%; Mistrust to a certain extent—24.0%; Do not trust at all—34.0%; Undecided—14.0%. Dynamics of trust/mistrust are obviously positive.

<sup>5</sup> See: V.Iu. Gadaev, “Problema dukhovno-nravstvennogo razvitiia sovremennoy chechenskoy molodezhi,” *Istoria nauki i tekhniki*, No. 3, 2008, pp. 70-73; V. Akaev, “Religious and Political Elites in the Northern Caucasus: Formation, Ideological Contradictions, and Practical Opposition,” *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 15, Issue 1, 2014, pp. 77-89.



Table 10

**To Which Extent Do You Trust  
the Religious Figures of the Russian Federation?**

	Share of Responses, %	
	2003	2017
Trust completely	11.4	16.0
Trust to a certain extent	33.9	42.0
Mistrust to a certain extent	22.5	8.0
Do not trust at all	19.2	10.0
Undecided	12.9	24.0

Table 11

**To Which Extent Do You Trust Federal TV of  
the Russian Federation?**

	Share of Responses, %	
	2003	2017
Trust completely	2.2	18.0
Trust to a certain extent	16.8	10.0
Mistrust to a certain extent	36.1	24.0
Do not trust at all	40.1	34.0
Undecided	4.7	14.0

In 2003, the question “To which extent do you trust the federal press?” (see Table 12) elicited the following responses: Trust completely—2.6%; Trust to a certain extent—21.3%; Mistrust to a certain extent—29.4%; Do not trust at all—38.2%; Undecided—8.5%. The results of 2017: Trust completely—14.0%; Trust to a certain extent—10.0%; Mistrust to a certain extent—30.0%; Do not trust at all—28.0%; Undecided—18.0%.

Table 13 offers comparative analysis of the shares of those in the Chechen Republic who trust and mistrust religious figures, federal TV channels and the media.

An average share of trust in the religious figures in Chechnia remains high: 55% in 2003 and 58% in 2017; the share of those who “mistrust to a certain extent” or “do not trust at all” dropped from 41.4% in 2003 to 18.0% in 2017. Positive attitude to religious figures stems from high level of religiosity.

ity of Chechen society<sup>6</sup> and confirms that cooperation between religious institutes and people is highly productive.<sup>7</sup> The federal TV channels and the media were supported by 18% and 14% of respondents in 2017, respectively, against 2.2% and 2.8% in 2003, which can be assessed as a positive trend. On the other hand, an average share of “completely trust” and “trust to a certain extent” almost remained the same: 19.0% in 2003 and 18.0% in 2017; 24.1% and 24.0% in 2017, the slightly lower shares.

Table 12

## To Which Extent Do You Trust the Federal Press?

	Share of Responses, %	
	2003	2017
Trust completely	2.8	1.0
Trust to a certain extent	21.3	10.0
Mistrust to a certain extent	29.4	30.0
Do not trust at all	38.2	28.0
Undecided	8.5	18.0

Table 13

Trust in Religious Figures, Federal TV Channels and the Media:  
Comparative Analysis

	Share of Responses, %					
	2003	2017	2003	2017	2003	2017
	Trust in Religious Figures		Trust in Federal TV Channels		Trust in the Media	
Trust completely	11.4	16.0	2.2	18.0	2.8	14.0
Trust to a certain extent	33.9	42.0	16.8	10.0	21.3	10.0
Mistrust to a certain extent	22.5	8.0	36.1	24.0	29.4	30.0
Do not trust at all	19.2	10.0	40.1	34.0	38.2	28.0
Undecided	12.9	24.0	4.7	14.0	8.5	18.0

<sup>6</sup> See: M. Betilmerzaeva, A. Akhtaev, B. Sadulaev, A. Salgiriev, “Religion and State: Interaction and Sociocultural Transformations (the Chechen Republic Case Study),” *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 18, Issue 1, 2017, pp. 124-132.

<sup>7</sup> See: M.M. Betilmerzaeva, “Dukhovnaia bezopasnost kak garant zdorovogo obschestva,” in: *Gumanitarnoe znanie i dukhovnaia bezopasnost*, 2014, pp. 60-67.

### *Conclusion*

When compared, the combined shares of “Undecided”—118.8% in 2003 and 302.0% in 2017—showed that the number of politically and socially passive respondents increased by nearly 2.5 times, which means that:

- (1) to preserve the current level of trust in the structures of power and administration, or even increase it, they should become closer to common people;
  - (2) secular, religious and educational resources should be tapped to the fullest extent to shape personalities able and willing to make decisions not only in everyday life but also in the sphere of national or even international significance.
-