

**COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF
ATTITUDES TOWARDS
THE SOCIOPOLITICAL SITUATION
IN THE CHECHEN REPUBLIC
(BASED ON SOCIOLOGICAL DATA)**

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ABSTRACT

The subject of analysis is the transformation of attitudes towards the socio-political situation in the Chechen society. The analysis is based on the data obtained through sociological surveys conducted by the North Ossetia Center for Social Research of the Institute of Socio-Political Research of the Russian Academy of Sciences and the Department of Sociological Studies of the North Ossetia Institute of

Humanities and Social Research of the Vladikavkaz Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences and the Government of the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania in May-June 2003, as well as through joint research conducted by the North Ossetia Center for Social Research and the Department of Philosophy, Political Science and Sociology of the Chechen State Pedagogical University in May-June 2017.

KEYWORDS: Chechen society, transformation, evaluation of the sociopolitical situation, development, terrorism, criminogenic environment, political cultural space, unemployment, employment, educational system, security.

Introduction

Problems throughout Russia, which are engendered by social transformations, are projected onto all the constituencies of the Russian Federation in accordance with the historical and cultural features of various regions, including the Chechen Republic.¹ This region, which for a long time used to be one of the most dangerous and long-standing areas of ethno-political instability and social flux, is now one of the most successful constituencies of the Russian Federation, where very promising projects of both federal and republican level are being implemented.² The recent presidential elections of 18 March, 2018 and the global situation that has developed around Russia and its political trends are making the task of studying the social attitudes and the evolution of public opinion especially poignant.³

As the scientists note, the geopolitical and geo-economic importance of the Caucasian region determines the fact that the interests of many active entities of contemporary global politics intersect in this region. The ethno-political situation in the region becomes occasionally strained under the influence of both endogenic and exogenic factors, provoked by the unresolved problems of the recent centuries. The main reason behind the high level of conflict-readiness seems to lie in the bureaucratic ideological charge of regional policy, which does not resolve these problems, but merely camouflages them with the assistance of the concerned representatives of the local elites.⁴ Meanwhile,

¹ See: A. Salgiriev, "Mekhanizmy formirovaniya politicheskikh elit v Chechenskoj Respublike," *Globalny nauchny potentsial*, No. 17, 2012, pp. 82-85.

² See: A. Salgiriev, "Political Elites in the Context of the Ethno-political Processes in the Northern Caucasus," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 16, Issue 3-4, 2015, pp. 25-31.

³ See: A. Salgiriev, M. Betilmerzaeva, V. Gaziev, M. Soltamuradov, "Political Stratification within the Elites (A North Caucasian Case Study)," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 17, Issue 3, 2016, pp. 30-37.

⁴ See: A. Salgiriev, M. Betilmerzaeva, M. Soltamuradov, M.-E. Shamsuev, "Specific Interests of the North Caucasian Elites as a Conflict Potential," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 19, Issue 1, 2018, pp. 51-58.

without a clear understanding by the individual of his social, ethnic and civil identity,⁵ which are determined by the historical conscience and historical memory,⁶ a quality sociocultural continuum may not be formed.

The current political and economic situation in the country demands a deeper analysis of all of its aspects with the engagement of not only federal, but also regional research groups.⁷ In particular, sociological research allows to obtain the most objective and transparent results, which may be used in predicting sociopolitical processes within the country via direct questioning of the respondents.

As part of the Chechnia in the Sociocultural Space of the Russian Federation: Ethnosociological Analysis project⁸ in May-June 2017, joint research was conducted by the North Ossetia Center for Social Research and the Department of Philosophy, Political Science and Sociology of the Chechen State Pedagogical University. It entailed large-scale public opinion surveys that engaged all social strata of the Chechen society. Comparison of the two studies' results allows to obtain a dynamic image of the sociopolitical situation in the Republic and the social approval/disapproval of the political agenda of the federal and regional authorities.

The subject of this comparative study is the dynamics of social attitudes towards the socio-political situation in the Chechen Republic based on the data obtained in the two sociological surveys.

The goal of the study is to determine the scale and the nature of the transformation of attitudes towards the sociopolitical situation in the Chechen society.

The goal had stipulated the formulation of the following tasks:

- (1) Track the evolution of attitudes towards terrorism in the Chechen Republic in 2003 and in 2017.
- (2) Analyze the attitude to the Russian government's agenda in the Chechen Republic, which is aimed at its reintegration into the political and cultural space of the Russian Federation.
- (3) Clarify the shifting emphasis in the respondents' attitudes towards the most crucial issues that the Chechen Republic faced in 2003 and 2017.

The research utilized the quantitative data of questionnaire surveys.

The previous work attempted to give "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."⁹ One of the primary research goals is, in particular, the analysis of the dynamics of the population's attitude to terrorism.

There is not an integrated definition of the concept of terrorism in the modern scientific and research discourse, with different researchers emphasizing various aspects of this phenomenon. For instance, in his definition of terrorism, M.Ya. Yakh'iaev emphasizes the fact that it is a "specific method of political activity that comprises employing methods of terror by certain social groups in their struggle against political opponents for the attainment of their social and political goals."¹⁰ The

⁵ See: L.Ya. Arapkhanova, "Migratsionnye problemy v Respublike Ingushetia," in: *Migratsionnye protsessy na Yuge Rossii: realii, problemy, perspektivy. Materialy mezhdunarodnoi nauchno-prakticheskoi konferentsii, 26-27 maia 2008 g.*, Issue 2, ed. by A.V. Ponedelkov, SKAGS, Rostov-on-Don, 2008, pp. 92-94.

⁶ See: M. Betilmerzaeva, V. Gadaev, Kh.-A.S. Khaladov, "Istoricheskoe soznanie v kontekste formirovaniia grazhdanskoi identichnosti," *Obshchestvo: filosofia, istoria, kultura*, Issue 11, 2016, p. 10.

⁷ 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.

⁸ See: H.V. Dzutsev, *Sovremennaiia Chechnia: protsessy sociokulturnoi transformatsii. Etnosotsiologicheskoe issledovanie*, Monograf, 2nd enlarged and revised edition, ISPI RAS, Moscow, 2011, 396 pp.

⁹ M. Betilmerzaeva, A. Salgiriev, M. Soltamuradov, V. Gaziev, "Sociological Studies of Institutional Trust in Chechen Society," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 19, Issue 1, 2018, pp. 66-76.

¹⁰ M. Yakh'iaev, "Fanatism i terrorism," *Islamovedenie*, No. 4, 2010, p. 51.

speech of the U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres focused on the ethical and legal aspect of the phenomenon of terrorism, which is, in fact, “fundamentally the decline and destruction of human rights.”¹¹ Terrorism on a country-wide scale can, to a certain degree, be the reflection of the criminogenic situation in the country. In order to determine the general situation in the Republic, the respondents were offered the following question: “To what extent do you agree with the following statement: ‘Terrorism in the Chechen Republic is a concentrated reflection of the general criminogenic situation in the Russian Federation?’” (see Table 1). The responses in 2003 were distributed in the following manner: “completely agree”—52.3%; “mostly agree”—26.7%; “mostly disagree”—5.9%; “completely disagree”—6.9%; “not sure”—8.1%. The 2017 results were as follows: “completely agree”—44.0%; “mostly agree”—18.0%; “mostly disagree”—2.0%; “completely disagree”—10.0%; “not sure”—26.0%.

Thus, the number of respondents who either partly or completely agree with the statement that “terrorism in the Chechen Republic is a concentrated reflection of the criminogenic situation in the Russian Federation,” has decreased by 0.8% and 8.7%, respectively, and the share of those who completely disagree with this statement has increased by 3.1%. However, the significant share of those unsure of how to answer this question in 2017 is disturbing.

Assessment of the General Situation in the Region

Table 1

**To What Extent Do You Agree with the Following Statement:
“Terrorism in the Chechen Republic is a Concentrated Reflection of
the General Criminogenic Situation in the Russian Federation?”**

Respondents' Answer	Share of Respondents Who Gave a Corresponding Answer, %	
	2003	2017
Completely agree	52.3	44.0
Mostly agree	26.7	18.0
Mostly disagree	5.9	2.0
Completely disagree	6.9	10.0
Not sure	8.1	26.0

The dynamic changes of the responses to the question “What is your attitude to the Russian government’s agenda in the Chechen Republic, which is aimed at its reintegration into the political and cultural space of the Russian Federation?” are reflected in Table 2. In 2003, the respondents’ answers were distributed in the following manner: “completely approve”—20.9%; “mostly approve”—32.0%; “mostly disapprove”—16.2%; “completely disapprove”—16.6%; “another re-

¹¹ *Secretary-General’s Speech at SOAS, University of London, on “Counter-Terrorism and Human Rights: Winning the Fight while Upholding Our Values”*, available at [<https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2017-11-16/secretary-general%E2%80%99s-speech-soas-university-london-%E2%80%9Ccounter-terrorism%9C>], 13 January, 2018.

sponse”—1.5%; “not sure”—12.9%. The 2017 results are as follows: “completely approve”—30.0%; “mostly approve”—32.0%; “mostly disapprove”—4.0%; “completely disapprove”—10.0%; “another response”—14.0%; “not sure”—2.0%.

In 2017, 62% of the respondents have completely or mostly approved of the Russian Federation’s agenda. The share of disapproving respondents had decreased to 14.0% against 32.8% in 2003. The dynamics of the “another response” and “not sure” responses are of interest. While the share of those who responded “not sure” decreased from 12.9% to 2.0%, the share of “another response” increased sharply from 1.5% to 14.0%. The content of the answers provided by this group of respondents requires a special analysis.

Table 2

**What is Your Attitude to the Russian Government’s Agenda
in the Chechen Republic, Which is Aimed at its Reintegration into the Political and
Cultural Space of the Russian Federation?**

Respondents’ Answer	Share of Respondents Who Gave a Corresponding Answer, %	
	2003	2017
Completely approve	20.9	30.0
Mostly approve	32.0	32.0
Mostly disapprove	16.2	4.0
Completely disapprove	16.6	10.0
Another response	1.5	14.0
Not sure / Refused to answer	12.9	2.0

“In your opinion, what are the most important problems that the Chechen Republic is currently facing?” (see Table 3). The responses to this question in 2003 were distributed as follows: “unemployment”—19.3%; “quick socioeconomic recovery”—22.8%; “restoration and construction of residential housing fund of the Chechen Republic”—27.9%; “protecting the population from social cataclysms, social vulnerabilities, respect for human rights”—7.6%; “weak education system”—5.6%; “complete restitution of financial damages to the population”—13.7%; “immediate reintegration of the Chechen Republic into the legal framework of the Russian Federation”—2.0%; “complete safety of the Chechen Republic population, peaceful life”—28.1%; “strengthening the Chechen Republic Ministry of Internal Affairs and other executive bodies”—6.3%; “electing the Parliament and President”—2.7%; “bringing back the refugees”—1.5%; “recruitment of honest professionals”—2.0%; “people’s health, quality of healthcare”—5.4%; “restoration of cultural centers”—4.1%; “restoration of the industrial sphere”—4.8%; “nation’s degradation and assimilation”—0.5%; “establishing law and order”—8.5%; “protection of low-income and disabled populations”—0.9%; “environmental issues”—1.1%; “restoration of agriculture”—2.4%; “fighting alcoholism, drug addiction and crime”—3.8%; “housing and utilities sphere (roads, electricity, gas)—3.0%, “numerous problems”—0.8%; “fighting terrorism”—2.7%; “corruption”—1.1%; “more stringent control over the expenditure of funds allocated for the restoration of the Chechen Republic”—0.5%; “resolving youth-related issues”—0.8%; “inter-nation and ethnic conflicts”—0.2%; “lack of a national idea”—0.2%; “not sure”—15.7%.

The 2017 results were as follows: “unemployment”—62.0%; “quick socioeconomic recovery”—6.0%; “restoration and construction of residential housing fund of the Chechen Republic”—2.0%; “protecting the population from social cataclysms, social vulnerabilities, respect for human rights”—6.0%; “weak education system”—36.0%; “complete restitution of financial damages to the population”—12.0%; “immediate reintegration of the Chechen Republic into the legal framework of the Russian Federation”—4.0%; “complete safety of the Chechen Republic population, peaceful life”—4.0%; “strengthening the Chechen Republic Ministry of Internal Affairs and other executive bodies”—0.0%; “electing the Parliament and President”—0.0%; “bringing back the refugees”—0.0%; “recruitment of honest professionals”—16.0%; “people’s health, quality of healthcare”—30.0%; “restoration of cultural centers”—0.0%; “restoration of the industrial sphere”—22.0%; “nation’s degradation and assimilation”—6.0%; “establishing law and order”—10.0%; “protection of low-income and disabled populations”—18.0%; “environmental issues”—8.0%; “restoration of agriculture”—20.0%; “fighting alcoholism, drug addiction, and crime”—10.0%; “housing and utilities sphere (roads, electricity, gas)—28.0%, “numerous problems”—16.0%; “fighting terrorism”—14.0%; “corruption”—32.0%; “more stringent control over the expenditure of funds allocated for the restoration of the Chechen Republic”—10.0%; “resolving the youth-related issues”—16.0%; “inter-nation and ethnic conflicts”—0.0%; “lack of a national idea”—2.0%; “not sure”—6.0%.

The evaluation of the dynamic changes in society’s attitudes towards the relative significance of specific issues is of a great research interest. In 2003, the respondents have named issue of complete safety of the Chechen Republic population, peaceful life (28.1%) as one of the poignant problems, while today the share of the Republic’s population that consider this problem one of the primary ones had decreased to 4.0%; restoration and construction of the residential housing fund was named by 27.9% then and 2.0% now; quick socioeconomic recovery was named by 22.8%, and 6.0% today. In 2017, in the context of a generally positive attitude towards the current sociopolitical situation in the Republic, the following issues have moved to the forefront according to the respondents: unemployment (62%); weak education system (36.0%); corruption (32.0%); people’s health, quality of healthcare (30.0%).

It is a welcome development that the respondents in the Republic no longer observe a problem like “inter-nation and ethnic conflicts.” The share of those who have a difficult time outlining any specific problems has also decreased from 15.7% in 2003 to 6.0% in 2017.

Table 3

In Your Opinion, What are the Primary Problems that Chechen Republic is Currently Facing?

Respondents' Answer	Share of Respondents Who Gave a Corresponding Answer, %	
	2003	2017
1. Unemployment	19.3	62.0
2. Quick socioeconomic recovery	22.8	6.0
3. Restoration and construction of residential housing fund of the Chechen Republic	27.9	2.0
4. Protecting the population from social cataclysms, social vulnerabilities, respect for human rights	7.6	6.0
5. Weak education system	5.6	36.0

Table 3 (continued)

Respondents' Answer	Share of Respondents Who Gave a Corresponding Answer, %	
	2003	2017
6. Complete restitution of financial damages to the population	13.7	12.0
7. Immediate reintegration of the Chechen Republic into the legal framework of the Russian Federation	2.0	4.0
8. Complete safety of the Chechen Republic population, peaceful life	28.1	4.0
9. Strengthening the Chechen Republic Ministry of Internal Affairs and other executive bodies	6.3	0.0
10. Electing the Parliament and President	2.7	0.0
11. Bringing back the refugees	1.5	0.0
12. Recruitment of honest professionals	2.0	16.0
13. People's health, quality of healthcare	5.4	30.0
14. Restoration of cultural centers	4.1	0.0
15. Restoration of the industrial sphere	4.8	22.0
16. Nation's degradation and assimilation	0.5	6.0
17. Establishing law and order	8.5	10.0
18. Protection of low-income and disabled populations	0.9	18.0
19. Environmental issues	1.1	8.0
20. Restoration of agriculture	2.4	20.0
21. Fighting alcoholism, drug addiction, and crime	3.8	10.0
22. Housing and utilities sphere (roads, electricity, gas)	3.0	28.0
23. Numerous problems	0.8	16.0
24. Fighting terrorism	2.7	14.0
25. Corruption	1.1	32.0
26. More stringent control over the expenditure of funds allocated for the restoration of the Chechen Republic	0.5	10.0
27. Resolving youth-related issues	0.8	16.0
28. Inter-nation and ethnic conflicts	0.2	0.0
29. Lack of a national idea	0.2	2.0
30. Not sure	15.7	6.0

Analysis of the answers to the question of a change in living conditions in the Republic in the last two years yielded the following results (see Table 4). In 2003, 47.5% of the respondents answered

“improved,” 10.0% answered “declined”, “remained the same”—33.8%; and 8.7%—“not sure.” The 2017 results are as follows: “improved”—56.0%, “declined”—6.0%, “remained the same”—12.0% and “not sure”—26.0%. Thus, the comparative analysis of the obtained data demonstrates a positive trend in the attitudes toward ongoing changes: 56% in 2017 against 47.5% in 2003, while the share of responders who think that living conditions have declined is decreasing—6.0% in 2017 against 10.0% in 2003. There is also a positive trend in the share of the response that states that living conditions “remained the same”—12.0% in 2017 against 33.8% in 2003. The only troubling issue is the significant increase in the share of people who are not sure about their response—26.0% in 2017 against 8.7% in 2003. We can generally observe a positive trend in the attitudes towards the living condition changes in the republic.

Positive Change Trend

Table 4

How Do You Think the Living Conditions
in the Republic Have Changed Over the Last Two Years?

Respondents' Answer	Share of Respondents Who Gave a Corresponding Answer, %	
	2003	2017
1. Improved	47.5	56.0
2. Declined	10.0	6.0
3. Remained the same	33.8	12.0
4. Not sure	8.7	26.0

The answers to the question of “What has improved in the living conditions in the Republic over the last two years?” are of much interest (see Table 5). The explication of the answers to this question demonstrates the evolution of the very nature of the changes experienced by the Republic. In 2003, 32.9% of respondents considered the changes in the social policy sphere to be the greatest, while in 2017 the most active development was taking place in the sphere of restoration and reconstruction of the city and the Republic, according to 36% of the respondents. The “turn towards peace, no military operations and voluntary return of refugees” took the second place in 2003, with a 9.5%; this item retained its spot in 2017, but the share of respondents that selected it increased threefold to 28.0%. The third place was taken by the “electricity and gas supply (housing and utilities sphere), it has become cleaner” with 6.9%, and in 2017 the share of respondents who saw an improvement constituted as much as 16%. Positive shifts in the attitudes towards living conditions in the Republic in 2017 compared to 2003 were notable in the following areas: “expansion of the scale and quality of education,” “opening of an Internet-center,” “normalization of the situation,” “improvement in the transportation sphere,” “opportunity to receive an education and study,” “more professional work of the law enforcement structures,” “economic situation,” “functioning of kindergartens, schools and other organizations,” “functioning of hospitals and healthcare services,” “functioning of enterprises,” “agriculture.” The only issue that demonstrated a negative trend is the resolution of the unemployment problem: according to the respondents, in 2003 the resolution of this issue was in the fourth place with 6.8%, while in 2017 it was only 6.0%.

Table 5

**What Has Improved in the Living Conditions
in the Republic over the Last Two Years?**

Respondents' Answers	Share of Respondents Who Gave a Corresponding Answer, %	
	2003	2017
1. Social policy is working (pensions, wages, compensations, benefits, standard of living)	32.9	14.0
2. Issue of unemployment is being resolved	6.8	6.0
3. Turn towards peace, no military operations and voluntary return of refugees	9.5	28.0
4. Expansion of the scale and quality of education	3.6	10.0
5. Opening of an Internet-center	0.6	6.0
6. Electricity and gas supply (housing and utilities sphere), it has become cleaner	6.9	16.0
7. Restoration of the Chechen Republic residential housing fund	6.2	8.0
8. Normalization of the situation	5.0	22.0
9. Restoration and reconstruction of the city and the Republic	3.8	36.0
10. Improvement in the transportation sphere	2.6	8.0
11. Opportunity to receive an education and study	3.2	12.0
12. More professional work of the law enforcement structures	3.6	8.0
13. Nothing improved	7.6	8.0
14. Economic situation	0.9	6.0
15. Functioning of kindergartens, schools and other organizations	3.2	16.0
16. Functioning of hospitals and healthcare services	2.6	10.0
17. Functioning of enterprises	1.1	4.0
18. Agriculture	0.5	6.0
19. Not sure	33.8	26.0

Answers to the question “What specific areas of decline do you see in the Republic compared to two years ago?” (see Table 6) draw attention by the ambiguousness of the outlined problems and require a deeper analysis.

Table 6

**What Specific Areas of Decline Do You See
in the Republic Compared to Two Years Ago?**

Respondents' Answers	Share of Respondents Who Gave a Corresponding Answer, %	
	2003	2017
1. Housing and utilities sphere (water, gas, roads, living conditions)	2.7	10.0
2. Obtrusive behavior of armed people	0.5	6.0
3. Disappearance and sale of young people, personal and public security	17.8	4.0
4. Legal vulnerability	5.1	14.0
5. Corruption	4.2	22.0
6. No decline in any area	8.0	22.0
7. Fear of the unknown	2.1	4.0
8. Absence of reconstruction	2.4	2.0
9. People's health, decline in the population's morale	1.4	12.0
10. Financial state and material wealth	1.7	10.0
11. People have no control over anything, no freedom of choice or freedom of speech	0.9	10.0
12. Nothing has changed	3.2	
13. Terrorism, explosions	6.6	2.0
14. Environmental situation	1.2	
15. Fight with crime, drug addiction, alcoholism	4.7	2.0
16. Nighttime lawlessness	2.6	
17. Strengthening the Chechen Republic Ministry of Internal Affairs and other executive bodies	2.4	
18. Complicated access to / insufficient education	0.6	4.0
19. Lack of stability	1.1	14.0
20. Humiliation of youth	0.5	12.0
21. The industry is recovering very slowly	0.6	10.0
22. Growing bureaucracy	0.2	14.0
23. Deterioration in the work of the Ministry of Education	0.2	2.0
24. Social conditions	0.2	4.0
25. Nothing is being done to bring the refugees back	0.2	
26. Not sure	50.6	24.0

Conclusion

The results obtained in the sociological survey lead to the following conclusions:

- (1) the analysis of the attitude to the Russian government's agenda in the Chechen Republic, which is aimed at its reintegration into the political and cultural space of the Russian Federation, as well as uncovering the shifts in the emphasis placed by the respondents on various problems that the Chechen Republic faced in 2003 and 2017 demonstrate positive dynamics in the evolution of the relationship between the authorities and the society;
 - (2) unemployment remains one of the sensitive social problems for the Republic, a problem that demands attention at both regional and federal level;
 - (3) the observed disproportions in the attitudes to both positive and negative changes in the development of many social spheres in the Republic demonstrate the need for a closer interaction of the people and the authorities, with the aim of preventing a conflict of their interests.
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