

Will a Post-Pandemic Society in Russia be Post-Liberal or Conservative?

Yuri P. AVERIN¹,
Valentina A. SUSHKO²

¹ Full Professor, PhD, head of the chair of Sociology Department of Sociology. Lomonosov Moscow State University, Moscow, Russia. Contact e-mail: marfenka28@gmail.com

² Associate Professor, PhD of Sociology Department of Sociology. Lomonosov Moscow State University, Moscow, Russia. Contact e-mail: valentina.sushko@gmail.com

Abstract: The coronavirus outbreak, which has covered a huge number of countries, leading to infection of more than a million people, forcing states to make extraordinary efforts to overcome it, affects the public consciousness, intensifies the people's perception and assessment of measures taken by public authorities to protect the population from the spread of coronavirus.

Keywords: *Pandemic, coronavirus infection; post-pandemic society; post-liberalism; conservative.*

How to cite: Averin, Y.P., & Sushko, V.A. (2020). Will a Post-Pandemic Society in Russia be Post-Liberal or Conservative?. *Postmodern Openings*, 11(1Supl2), 161-168. <https://doi.org/10.18662/po/11.1sup2/148>

Introduction

The widespread expansion of the Internet, which is used by about 80% of Russians (Achkasova, 2018), allows people to constantly receive information about how the epidemic is spreading in their country and in other countries, how many people got the infection, recovered, or died. This information allows us to compare different states in terms of how effective the actions of the authorities are, how efficient the health system is. Such a comparison is ongoing. The Internet is full of assessments of the problems that various states are facing in the process of combating the coronavirus epidemic, assessments of how successfully different states are solving these problems, how and why they succeed or fail to cope with these problems. All this makes people compare their country and other countries in terms of the existing political management of the state in their country and in other countries: how the division of authority between the center and the regions affects the results of the fight against the epidemic, including the comparison of those values which are the cornerstone of this management and which of these values are preferable.

The study of the modernization process in a changing world, which is largely based on a change in the people's value structure, is important from the point of view of understanding the direction of changes in society. The ongoing pandemic associated with the spread of coronavirus infection brings the particular relevance to such studies. It has a huge impact on the people's view of life, on the change in their value structure, making it more liberal or more conservative.

1. Theoretical analysis

The liberal structure of the state is based on freedom of action for each citizen, minimizing state interference in the life of citizens, limiting its authority, free exchange of information, freedom of business activity (von Mises, 2007]. The liberal structure of the state, by its very nature, involves constant changes in society and in government. Such management is characteristic of the USA and countries of most European countries. In these states, central authority has limited powers over regional authorities.

The conservative structure of the state is based on traditional values, rejection of radical reforms, stability and strengthening of security. However, it does not deny development within the framework of the existing system (Garbuzov et al., 2015). In many ways, such management is characteristic of Russia. In Russia, the central authority has much greater powers in relation

to regional authority in comparison with the United States and most of the European countries. There is a high level of centralization of power in Russia.

The state system is based on those values that are inherent in the majority of society. If it does not correspond to these values, then the state system will change. A change in the value structure of citizens leads to a change in their political culture, which in turn leads to a change in state structure. R. Inglehart linked the change in values with the process of modernization. "Modernization is not the final stage of the history. The formation of an advanced society leads to another special shift in basic values - when the value of instrumental rationality characteristic of industrial society decreases. The values of postmodernity become predominant, bringing a number of diverse societal changes, from the equality of women to democratic institutions and the decline of state socialist regimes" (Inglehart, 1996).

Conservative values prevail in Russian society. This is evidenced, in particular, by the results of the election of the President of the Russian Federation in 2012 and in 2014. In 2012, presidential candidate Mikhail Prokhorov, who put forward a liberal development path in his program, proposing a "revolution from the right," won 7.98% of the vote ("Elections in Russia", 2012). The lack of his great support from voters was due to their conservative values (Averin, Dobrenkov, & Dobrenkova, 2013). In 2018, presidential candidates Ksenia Sobchak and Grigory Yavlinsky, who offered voters liberal reorganization programs in Russia, won 1.67% and 1.04% of the vote, respectively ("Elections in Russia", 2012). A study conducted by the author in 2019 (Averin, 2019) showed that in general the Russian population is dominated by "materialistic" values - patriotism, family, health, well-being, stability, and the significance of "post-materialistic" values (creativity and freedom) are significantly lower compared to materialistic values according to Inglehart (as cited by Averin, 2019). Young people, like the older generation, in their value structure are predominantly "materialists", since they have the same values.

2. Analysis of the coronavirus pandemic in Russia and other countries.

What will become a post-pandemic society in Russia? Will there be a modernization shift in basic values after the fight against coronavirus in the world comes to an end? Will they become more liberal or more conservative? In our opinion, this depends on a comparison of the course and results of the struggle against the pandemic in the USA, European

countries and in Russia. The impressions of Russian citizens are formed on the basis of statistical data, evidence of experts (both Russian and foreign) about the state of affairs in the fight against coronavirus and the reasons for the disastrous state of citizens in these countries.

Statistical data show the following. "In the United States, the spread of infection continues and the country remains the leader in the number of cases. At the moment, it is 337 483 infected people with 9 647 dead. 17 654 people were able to recover. According to the latest data, the number of cases increased by more than 25,000 people per day, for comparison, the next highest rate per day does not exceed 5000 diseases. The most infected regions in Europe are Spain (135 032 cases, of which 13 055 died) and Italy (128 948 people, of which 15 887 dead). The country still leads in the death rate of infected people - more than 10%. It is worth noting that Spain continues to experience a decline in mortality. Over the past day 637 people died from infection in the country. In Germany, one of the lowest mortality rates is still observed - less than 2%. In total, the number of cases barely exceeded 100,000, and 1590 died. In France, however, they cannot boast of such low mortality rates; there it is approaching 10%. In total, there are currently 93,773 patients with 8,086 dead ("Data on the infected", 2020).

Foreign and Russian experts and citizens write on the Internet about the causes of the disastrous state in these countries. An analysis of the Russian citizens' discussion of the current situation in various countries shows the following. The Internet is full of the most worried messages. Some headings of articles can be cited, from which it becomes clear what Russian Internet users are faced with. "Everything collapses - the basics weaken." "Causes of the collapse of American medicine" (Manchuk, 2020). "Why is there such a backward medicine in the USA". "What is wrong with American healthcare?". "The Apocalypse in New York. How the megalopolis lives", "CNBC (USA): hospitalization due to coronavirus infection can cost uninsured Americans almost \$ 75 thousand " (Nablyudatel', 2020).

The authors of these reports write about the lack of doctors, medical face masks, medical ventilators, hospital beds, about the compulsion to use tents to accommodate patients, about the politicization of the problem of combating coronavirus, about the inconsistency of the actions of the governors of the US states, about the inability of the US president to make centralized decisions, about the high cost of hospitalization due to a viral infection. Trump is criticized because he introduced quarantine late, so as not to harm the American economy, and because hospitals hide information about the condition of doctors. The Internet discusses ethical issues arising

from the lack of medical equipment for the treatment of seriously ill patients infected with coronavirus. Who should be treated firstly, who should be treated secondly, if there is not enough equipment? Is it necessary to treat elderly people? Is it necessary to treat young people or will they go through the disease and acquire immunity? Is it reasonable not to perform self-isolation to develop collective immunity, as it is done, for example, in Sweden, where in this regard "the Swedish prime minister urged fellow citizens to prepare for "thousands of deaths"? (Balaev, 2020). How many people will die in this case? This statement of the problem causes rejection among Russian citizens. Photographs depicting tents and beds with patients on the streets have a strong impact on the consciousness of citizens.

At the same time, the situation in Russia is much better in comparison with the USA and European countries. The number of patients with coronavirus in Russia on April 8, 2020 amounted to 8672, having increased by 1175 over the past day. This was reported by the Emergency Response Center for Coronavirus Infection Control. The total number of people who recovered was 580. The number of deaths has reached 63 ..." ("Coronavirus: official information", 2020). Such statistical information compels Russian citizens to compare the situation in Russia and in other countries, to look for the reasons for the significant difference. This can be traced by the headings of articles on the Internet: "Our healthcare contrasted with the most developed countries. Let's compare?" (Sdelano u nas, 2020), "Why everything is so bad in Italy, but so far in our country everything is good"(2020). Such comparisons change people's attitudes towards Russian healthcare. "We are not worse than they!" Do not scare us with bad medicine; our healthcare is not worse than in Italy and the USA" (Dela zHITEYSKIYE, 2020). There are appeals to get away from the established stereotypes that Russian medicine is bad, and the healthcare is good in these countries. The assessment of the ability of Russian healthcare to withstand the epidemic is also affected by the fact that Russia helps Italy, the USA, and Serbia with medical equipment during this difficult period ("Putin has proposed", 2020). Putin's appeals to Russian citizens on television play an important role, where he claims that human health comes first, regardless of how things are going in the Russian economy.

This kind of comparison is not limited to medicine. They transfer to assessment of the ability of the state, its political organization to protect citizens in emergency situations. In television news, Russian citizens see that the President and the Prime Minister of the Russian Federation give instructions to regional leaders, government ministers on measures to combat the coronavirus, and they all follow these instructions, sometimes

even doing more than necessary. They compare all this with how little the President of the United States, by virtue of his authority, can influence the actions of state governors and how it interferes with the fight against the coronavirus epidemic. From these comparisons, citizens can conclude that the political organization of the state in Russia is better than in the United States and Western European countries. The higher level of centralization of power allows better protection of citizens from disasters in emergency situations. This conclusion strengthens in the minds of people the significance of the Russian state in its current state as value, rejection of liberal values, and rejection of minimizing the role of the Russian state in society. This conclusion is reinforced by how China has successfully dealt with its centralized power with the coronavirus epidemic (Gusarov, 2020). The centralization of power has helped China in the fight against the epidemic, and it helps Russia as well.

Conclusions

The formation of the increased importance of the state took place in Russia for many centuries in connection with the need to constantly defend itself from attacks of hostile states. Today's events related to assessing the activities of the Russian state in comparison with other states in the context of the coronavirus epidemic can only strengthen the significance of its current political organization in the minds of Russian citizens, and strengthen the values that form the attitude towards it today. "In the existing political and economic conditions of the life of Russian society, strong external pressure that jeopardizes its security, instrumental values that determine ideal ways of behavior - active and warlike patriotism - come first. Such behavior serves as a tool to protect the fundamental values", family, homeland, security, self-preservation (Averin, 2019).

The coronavirus epidemic in Russia is only starting. It has not yet passed its peak. "WHO called "Italian scenario" of coronavirus unlikely for Russia." If this forecast is true, then conservative values in the minds of Russian citizens will only strengthen, and Russian society will become even more conservative. If the Italian or even the American scenario will repeat in Russia, then Russian citizens will say that neither our authorities, nor the authorities of foreign countries could cope with the epidemic of coronavirus. Our state is not better than theirs, but also it is not worse. Russian society will remain as conservative as it is now. At the same time, criticism of the state power will arise; requirements for its effectiveness will increase. Most likely, there will be changes in the government, in the health system, and

ministers will be replaced. Moreover, the vast majority of Russian citizens will also support President Putin V.V. and the existing political organization of state power in Russia.

Thus, the coronavirus infection pandemic can significantly affect the development of Russian society after the pandemic, stop the liberal changes that are emerging in the minds of people or reverse them.

Acknowledgement

This article was prepared with the financial support of the Russian Foundation for Basic Research as part of the research project No. 19-011-00548 Competition A. "The influence of the quality of life on the formation of the value structure of the Russian population."

References

- Achkasova, K. (2018). Televizionnyye izmereniya 2018-2019 [Television measurements 2018-2019]. *Mediascope "Technology" Division*.
https://conf.mediascope.net/archive/upload/files/2018/mediascope_conference_2018_tv.pdf.
- Averin, Yu. P. (2019). Vozdejstvie kachestva zhizni rossijskogo naseleniya na ego cennostnyuyu strukturu [The impact of the quality of life of the Russian population on its value structure]. *Sociology*, 4, 87-110.
- Averin, Yu. P., Dobrenkov, V. I., & Dobrenkova, E. V. (2013). *Kachestvo zhizni rossijskikh grazhdan i ego vliyaniye na ih politicheskie i ekonomicheskie predpochteniya: po rezul'tatam sociologicheskogo issledovaniya* [The quality of life of Russian citizens and its impact on their political and economic preferences: according to the results of a sociological study]. Russia: Academic Project Publishing House.
- Balaev, A. (2020, April 7). SHvedskij prem'er prizval sograzhdan gotovit'sya k «tysyacham smertej» [The Swedish prime minister urged fellow citizens to prepare for "thousands of deaths"]. *Profile*.
<https://profile.ru/news/society/shvedskij-premer-prizval-sograzhdan-gotovitsya-k-tysyacham-smertej-276537/>.
- Dannye po zarazhennym v mire - vecher 6 aprelya [Data on the infected in the world - evening of April 6]. (2020, April 6).
<https://zen.yandex.ru/media/terfootball/dannye-po-zarazhennym-v-mire-vecher-6-aprelia-5e8b2891f3d7cd02ce77a078>.
- Dela zhiteyskiye (2020, April 2). My ne khuzhe "ikhnikh"! Ne nado nas pugat' plokhoy meditsinoy, chay ne khuzhe Italii i SSHA [We are no worse than theirs! Do not scare us with bad medicine, tea is not worse than Italy and the USA]. *Yandex.Zen*.

- <https://zen.yandex.ru/media/id/5c49a9c414034b00b11f6737/my-ne-huje-ihnih-ne-nado-nas-pugat-plohoi-medicinnoi-chai-ne-huje-italii-i-ssha-5e85757564a4b71b3b05d2e0>.
- Garbuzov, V. N., Ivakhnik, V. G., Lyubin, V. P., Makarenko, B. I., Makarkin, A. V., Nazarova, N. V., & Filippov, A. F (2015) *Konservativizm i razvitiye Osnovy obshchestvennogo soglasiya* [Conservatism and development Fundamentals of social cohesion]. Moscow, Russia: Alpina Publishing House.
- Gusarov, S. (2020, April 7). Sutki bez smertey v Kitaye i hospitalizatsiya Dzhonsona: kak obstoyat dela s pandemiyey koronavirusa v mire [A day without death in China and Johnson's hospitalization: how are things going with the coronavirus pandemic in the world]. *RT-Novosti*.
<https://russian.rt.com/world/article/735243-koronavirus-covid-19-mir> .
- Inglhart, R. F. (1995). Changing Values, Economic Development, and Political Change. *International Social Sciences Journal*, XLVII(47), 3(145), 379-403.
- Koronavirus: oficial'naya informatsiya [Coronavirus: official information]. (2020). *Mos.ru*. <https://www.mos.ru/city/projects/covid-19/>
- Ludwig von Mises (2010). *Liberalism*. SUA: Ludwig von Mises Institute.
- Manchuk, A. (2020, March 4). Vse rushitsya - fundament potryasen. Prichiny kraha amerikanskoj mediciny ["Everything collapses - the foundation is shaken." Causes of the collapse of American medicine]. *YkpauHa.py*.
<https://ukraina.ru/opinion/20200403/1027253371.html> .
- Nablyudatel' (2020, March 27). Kollaps meditsiny v SSHA [The collapse of medicine in the United States.]. *Yandex.Zen*.
<https://zen.yandex.ru/media/id/5e57b61d161a0b098eda6b51/kollaps-mediciny-v-ssha-5e7d7ae38297f36c7269222a> .
- Pochemu v Italii tak vse plokho, a u nas poka khorosho [Why everything is so bad in Italy, but so far in our country everything is good]. (2020, March 30). *Yandex.Zen*.
<https://zen.yandex.ru/media/id/5c49a9c414034b00b11f6737/my-ne-huje-ihnih-ne-nado-nas-pugat-plohoi-medicinnoi-chai-ne-huje-italii-i-ssha-5e85757564a4b71b3b05d2e0> .
- Putin predlozhl novye mery podderzhki iz-za pandemii [Putin has proposed new support measures because of the pandemic]. (2020, April 8). *RIA Novosti*.
<https://ria.ru/20200408/1569755721.html>.
- Sdelano u nas (2020, March 30). Nasha meditsina na fone samykh razvitykh stran. Davayte sravnim? [Our medicine is against the backdrop of the most developed countries. Let's compare?]. *Yandex.Zen*.
<https://zen.yandex.ru/media/sdelanounas.ru/nasha-medicina-na-fone-samyh-razvityh-stran-davaite-sravnim-5e823f44549f6e4aecfb1699>.
- Vybory v Rossii [Elections in Russia]. (2012, March 8). *Vybor Rossii*.
http://rusvybor.blogspot.com/2012/03/blog-post_08.html .