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Political Aspects of Demographic Processes in Muslim Community in Russia

Aspectos políticos de los procesos demográficos en la comunidad musulmana en Rusia

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ABSTRACT

This research is devoted to the specifics of the influence of demographic processes in the muslim community of Russia on political aspects. The study of the data obtained made it possible to determine the specific aspects of the impact of demographic processes on muslim community and to describe the socio-political mean of these processes for russian society. The results obtained are consistent with the conclusions of a number of researchers, expand the existing understanding of the nature of demographic processes among muslims, and determine the specific results of their impact on russian society.

Keywords: Conflict, muslim community, political demography, politics, risks.

RESUMEN

Esta investigación está dedicada a los detalles de la influencia de los procesos demográficos en la comunidad musulmana de Rusia en los aspectos políticos. El estudio de los datos obtenidos permitió determinar los aspectos específicos del impacto de los procesos demográficos en la comunidad musulmana y describir el significado sociopolítico de estos procesos para la sociedad rusa. Los resultados obtenidos son consistentes con las conclusiones de una serie de investigadores, amplían la comprensión existente de la naturaleza de los procesos demográficos entre los musulmanes, y determinan los resultados específicos de su impacto en la sociedad rusa.

Palabras clave: Comunidad musulmana, conflicto, demografía política, política, riesgos.

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INTRODUCTION

The study of demographic processes in the Muslim environment is highly important since the successful demographic development of Russia in the XXI century will be largely determined by the demographic contribution of the "Muslim" regions of the country. The data by V.Ia.Belokrinitskii shows that the proportion of Muslims in Russia in 1989-2002 increased from 8% to 10% (Belokrenitsky: 2008, pp.3-31). According to V.T. Sakaev, the proportion of Muslims in 2002-2010 increased to 10.5% (Sakaev: 2013, pp.214-221). By 2030, Pew Research Center predicts an increase in the share of Muslims in Russia by another 3% (PEW: 2011).

A number of Russian researchers, such as A. Malashenko (Malashenko: 2006, pp.30-43) and (Malashenko: 2015), V. Belokrinitskii (Belokrenitsky: 2008, pp.3-31) and (Belokrenitsky: 2009), A. Starostin (Malashenko&Starostin: 2016), D. Mukhitdinov (Mukhitdinov: 2015) and others devoted their studies to the demographic development of Muslims in several Russian regions. Such researchers as M. Laruelle (Laruelle: 2016), B. Akhmetkarimov (Akhmetkarimov: 2019, pp.180-197), L. Almazova (Almazova: 2015, pp.113-120), V. Sakaev (Sakaev: 2018, pp.92-98) and (Sakaev: 2016, pp.159-165) and others studied the some aspects of influence of the Muslim community on political processes in Russian regions.

At the same time, the actual influence of demographic processes among Russian Muslims on the socio-political sphere, so far, mainly remain beyond the attention of researchers. It is necessary to fill this gap and analyze the socio-political risks these processes entail.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted on the basis of Political Demography' analysis, including relying on the Structural-Demographic theory presented in the works by Jack A. Goldstone (Goldstone: 2018, pp.1-28), and the research approaches used to analyze religious demography in the works by Brian J. Grim (Johnson & Grim: 2013, p.393).

The sources of the study were the current data of Russian Statistic Service and other published statistic information, such as "Demographic Yearbook of Russia" (Demograficheskii zhegodnik Rossi: 2017, p.263), "Russian Statistical Yearbook" (Rossiiskii statisticheski zhegodnik: 2017, p.686) and the collection "Regions of Russia: the main socio-economic indicators of cities" (Regionu: 2016, p.442).

During the conducting of study, the authors faced the problem of determining its basis. There are some difficulties for defining the concept of "Muslims" in Russia. Where the boundaries of the concept of "Muslim community" are can be determined, given that it is based on religious identity, which is very difficult feature for the fixation? Here, two approaches are possible: sociological approach (based on self-identification) and statistical approach. The latter includes the conditional term "ethnic Muslims" - that is, peoples traditionally professing Islam, and includes both "practicing Muslims" and "secular Muslims". In our study, under the determining the boundaries of the Muslim community, we will rely on a statistical approach.

The study was carried out through analysis of demographic processes in regions where "ethnic Muslims" make up 50% or more of the population. There are the Republic of Tatarstan, the Republic of Bashkortostan, the Chechen Republic, the Republic of Ingushetia, the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic, the Karachay-Cherkess Republic, and the Republic of Dagestan (Shao et al.: 2020, p.102530).

Other regions of Russian Federation where the Muslim population are less than 50% of total population were out of the our subject for research.

RESULTS

The specifics of demographic processes in regions where “ethnic Muslims” make up 50% or more of the population. We can actually subdivide regions with a predominantly Muslim population into 2 groups. The first group includes the Republic of Tatarstan and the Republic of Bashkortostan, which demonstrate slightly better indicators but, in general, similar demographic development trends to Russian regions with a predominantly non-Muslim population. The second group consists of the republics of the Northern Caucasus, which demonstrate fundamentally different demographic trends.

In general, all “Muslim regions” show a higher life expectancy, which, obviously, will contribute to a further increase in their population, primarily representatives of the “Muslim peoples”, whose representatives demonstrate higher demographic indicators.

At the same time, the total fertility rate is higher than the all-Russian indicator in only 4 studied regions (with the exception of Karachay-Cherkessia, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria), and in the Chechen Republic, it exceeds by 1.5 times.

As for the coefficient of natural population growth, it is higher in all regions, and in Chechnya, Ingushetia and Dagestan it exceeds the all-Russian indicator by more than 10 times. That is, almost all of these regions are regions with a growing population.

At the same time, in all the republics of the Northern Caucasus, unlike Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, the infant mortality rate is higher than the all-Russian one, and in Chechnya, Ingushetia and Dagestan it exceeds by more than 1.5 times. This indicator is the most important criterion that reflects the level of development of medicine, the well-being of the population, and socio-economic development. Thus, these regions, de facto, can be attributed to socially disadvantaged regions.

We should emphasize here that Ingushetia, Chechnya, and Kabardino-Balkaria are among the ten most populated regions of the Russian Federation. In a number of cities in these regions, population density is comparable to that of St. Petersburg and the many cities of the Moscow region. At the same time, these regions, as we have already indicated, show a serious natural increase in the population, which will cause in the future an influx of additional contingents of youth and, of course, will increase pressure on the labor market. Only migration can reduce this excess pressure, and all regions (with the exception of the Republic of Ingushetia) have a negative migration balance. In this regard, Ingushetia is a very specific case; the migration outflow of the population is practically not recorded here.

It should be especially noted that the cities of the North Caucasus republics have their coefficient of natural population growth several times higher than the all-Russian one (for example, in the cities of Dagestan and Chechnya, it amounts to the inconceivable for Russia values - from 9.0 to 17.0). Thus, the cities here are turning into centers of concentration of children and adolescents, which can provoke an increase in youth crime, because it is known that more than 45% of all crimes in Russia are committed by people under 29 years. To prevent this process, it is necessary to strengthen the socio-economic base and the socio-cultural sphere of cities, which requires serious financial resources.

Another important aspect of the Political demography' analysis is the share of the rural population. Statistics show a high share of the rural population: in Chechnya, Ingushetia, Karachay-Cherkessia, and Dagestan, it exceeds 50%; in Kabardino-Balkaria - 48%. Such a territorial structure of the population creates the potential for further active urbanization in the short and medium-term. Subject to the current overpopulation of cities in the Northern Caucasus republics, this additional influx will only increase pressure on urban infrastructures, competition in the labor market, provoke interethnic tension in a number of regions, and increase the proportion of people with a “traditional” type of thinking and the psychology of a rural person in the urban population (that is, in fact, marginalized). In fact, this is a regional “population bomb”.

An additional criterion for our analysis is the share of youth. Here, we also observe a high share of youth in a number of cities (Grozny, Khasav-Yurt, Nazran - over 30% of the city's population), which is considered a factor that creates a potential for all kinds of socio-political disasters; in fact, this can be described as a "potentially explosive atmosphere". The situation is saved only by the migration outflow of youth but in some cities, it either does not exist at all (for example, Kaspiysk, Nazran) or is on minimal level (for example, Khasav-Yurt, Derbent) (Starodubrovskaya&Sokolov: 2013, p.280).

Characteristics of the socio-economic situation in the North Caucasian regions. All of the above specific features of the demographic development of the North Caucasian republics are superimposed on an unfavorable socio-economic situation. The indicated regions statistically show the following: low average salary in the region (approximately 30% lower than the national average); low housing provision (Ingushetia - 60%, Chechnya - 70%, Dagestan - 75%, Karachay-Cherkessia and Kabardino-Balkaria - 80% of all-Russian indicators); a high share of the population with incomes below the subsistence level (Ingushetia - 32%, Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachay-Cherkessia - 25%, Chechnya - 18%, in general in Russia - 13%); the unemployment rate is 2-3 times higher than in the country as a whole (in the Russian Federation - 5.5% of the economically active population); the level of social support (up to there are federal budget expenditures per inhabitant) in all republics, except the Chechen Republic, is lower than all-Russian indicators (moreover, in Dagestan and Ingushetia it is almost 2 times lower); the level of medical care in Dagestan, Ingushetia, and Chechnya are 25-30% lower than the national level (Freeks: 2016, pp.236-248).

Thus, demographically, regions with a predominantly Muslim population can be divided into 2 groups:

Regions of the Volga and Ural regions (Tatarstan and Bashkortostan), where the demographic situation is somewhat better than in the whole country but the trends and dynamics are similar.

Republics of the Northern Caucasus (primarily Chechnya, Dagestan, and Ingushetia), which are distinguished by a rapidly growing population, a "young" population, high birth rates, and long life expectancy.

Speaking about the main socio-political risks of demographic processes in Muslim regions, it should be emphasized that, in our opinion, they are primarily associated with the following factors:

A high proportion of young people, together with the insufficient development of the socio-cultural sphere and high unemployment, which increase the likelihood of youth being involved in criminal, extremist, or terrorist organizations, contribute to the radicalization of the population and create a conflict potential.

The high population density in combination with ongoing urbanization processes, which creates risks of conflicts against limited resources and increasing competition in the labor market (in some regions this may be intensified by competition between ethnic groups).

DISCUSSION

These findings are consistent with the results of a study by Starodubrovskaya and Sokolov (Starodubrovskaya&Sokolov: 2013, p.280). In particular, these authors distinguished the so-called "demographic conflict factors" in the Northern Caucasus, including those that formed the "potential for violence" in the region. Moreover, the authors of this study believe that official fertility rates can be underestimated compared to real ones. We can agree with the opinion of I.V. Starodubrovskaya and D.V. Sokolov that migration from the Northern Caucasus regions, on the one hand, reduces the conflict potential in them, and on the other, provokes conflicts in the host regions, as "migrants from the Northern Caucasus fall into a new institutional environment, devoid of the restraining mechanisms of traditional society but alien in character". The authors of this study also emphasize the factors of marginalization, isolation, and exclusion of rural migrants arriving in the cities of the region. We agree with the opinion of these authors that it is the rural residents who arrive in the cities that carry significant conflict potential.

At the same time, we do not share the point of view of I.V. Starodubrovskaya and D.V. Sokolov which that due to the demographic transition there will be a dramatic change in demographic trends in the regions

of the Northern Caucasus in the near future, which should, in their opinion, reduce the conflict potential, at least among certain ethnic groups. In our opinion, the state policy of stimulating the birth rate, which has been implemented in Russia in different formats since the second half of the 2000s, has the greatest impact in the regions with the most backward indicators of socio-economic development and the continuing traditional way of life. Similar regions are the majority of the Republics of the Northern Caucasus. Thus, demography does not reduce its pressure on society.

In this regard, the position of M. Laruelle, who believes that the Northern Caucasus is waiting for a new "baby boom" in the 2020s, seems more appropriate to us, given the age structure of the population.

CONCLUSION

Summing up, it can be stated that modern conflicts in the Northern Caucasus, in particular in Ingushetia and Dagestan, associated, as is known, with changing borders, are primarily due to the demographic characteristics of the regions and the ongoing demographic processes. The regions of the Northern Caucasus continue to be "explosive territories" inside Russia, the conflict potential remains and can be triggered by any significant reason (this was shown by the situation with the demarcation of borders with Chechnya in these regions). During the pandemic we can face new social and political conflicts in these regions which could be provoked by demographic features and high level of poor and unemployment (lockdown and high level of mortality from COVID-19 can lead to protests against local and federal authorities).

These risks can be overcome with two tools: firstly, by improving the socio-economic situation and bridging the socio-economic "gap" with the rest of Russia; secondly, by stimulating internal and external immigration from these regions. However, these features have their limitations. In particular, increased economic support for the regions of the Northern Caucasus may meet discontent and resistance in other regions of the country, where the slogan "Stop feeding the Caucasus!" is already quite popular. Migration from the regions of the Northern Caucasus to other Russian regions often provokes conflicts with local residents, even with local Muslims, as it recently happened in Bashkortostan, where there was a conflict between Bashkirs and Chechens (in 2018 in Baimaksky district).

Thus, the demographic processes in the Muslim environment in Russia have specific characteristics (growing population, a high share of young people, migration potential, urbanization processes, etc.), which can create conflict potential, exacerbated by the relative poverty of the population in a number of regions inhabited predominantly with "Ethnic Muslims".

Given the continuing growth of the Muslim community in Russia, it is necessary to consider emerging risks and take preventive measures to minimize them.

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