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**ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS ASPECTS OF TOLERANCE OF ALTAI
POPULATION**

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the characteristic of ethnoreligious tolerance of Altai Krai population (Russia) on the basis of sociological poll of 1100 people: 62% were female and 38% were male respondents. All respondents were divided into four groups by age: 1) 16–21 years, 2) 22–35 years, 3) 36–45 years, 4) 46–60 years. The most part of respondents belong to the first age group (54.8%). The second and the third group of respondents made 22.9% and 13.8% respectively, and the fourth group made 8.5%. Such distribution on age proceeded from the task to look at degree of religiousness, tolerance and valuable orientations of youth first of all, as it is this group who is exposed to the influence of transformational changes of modern culture. As a result of the research, it was concluded that the majority of the respondents is familiar with all the world religions and much less is interested in new religious movements. The tolerance level at Altai Krai residents is rather high and people in general are very well-wishing to representatives of different cultures and nationalities. About 90% of respondents can easily find contact with people of other ethnic origin. According to the majority of respondents, religious situation in Altai Krai should be estimated as stable. At the same time, 22.3% of respondents note that still there are contradictions on religious grounds in the region, first of all with representatives of Islam religion.

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1. Introduction

Studying of ethnic and religious aspects of identity and tolerance development of population in various regions of Russia is one of the urgent directions of modern researches (Drobizheva, 2013; Panova, 2012; etc.). Over the last two decades disintegration of traditional institutes of socialization of society in respect of transfer of socially important values and standards of behavior to the younger generation has taken place in Russia. The influence of institutes of family, school, education system, as well as the importance of state, work, public associations and movements has fallen. At the same time we can see the increase in influence of institution of religion in society both for the objective reasons, and as a result of the state policy of the Russian Federation as well. Therefore, it is no coincidence this problematic was found in the center of attention of many researchers of religion of the country, and that has found reflection in numerous publications and in the subject area of certain conferences. As an example, we can mention International scientific and practical conference "Social functions of religion and conditions of modernization of society: the 21st century" that took place in Moscow in March, 2011. At the same time, scientists note that since 1989, firstly in the USSR, and then in the Russian Federation, the tendency of growth of population religiousness has been observed, especially till 1996. Since 1996 this tendency began to slow down, and since 2004 there comes the period of stabilization of religiousness level. That is significant that the respondents who referred themselves to the category of "believers" often gave negative answers about regular church ceremonies, visits of a church, keeping fasts or about any other important elements of religious culture.

It should be mentioned that recently the question of tolerance in modern society rises even more often. This criterion is used concerning ethnic, gender and religious issues. The question of tolerance concerning religious and ethnic origin is one of the most critical problems for today. The difficulty in development of tolerance relations is caused by the multiconfessional and multiethnic situation in Russia, as well as by development of population identity in the former Soviet Union in general (Drobizheva & Golovakha 2007, p. 9; Akulova, 2012, p. 493; Zhigunova, 2010, p. 60; Romanenko, 2002, p. 180). The present problematic is not less important for studying of ethnoreligious tolerance in border regions of Russia and in countries of Asia, first of all, on the border with Mongolia and China. Partly such sociological researches were already conducted by the author in the Western Mongolia bordering on the Russian Altai (Dashkovskiy, 2015).

2. Problem Statement

There are various research approaches to the concept of tolerance. Without dwelling on a wide range of opinions of scientists on this problem (Kupina, Khomyakov, 2005; Mosolov, 2013; Kamenchuk, 2012; Khomyakov, 2005; etc.), we will note only a few fundamental stands. According to N. A. Pobeda, tolerance is a difficult and contradictory social phenomenon which semantic and substantial components are being formed over a long period of time. Different cultures presuppose various models of tolerance. Incorporating values and social interests, mental guidelines and stereotypes, being a way of survival in constantly changing world, tolerance appears as a golden ratio between freedom and responsibility, it demands accurate definition of borders in which it can be described and explained on each concrete time

period of society development (Pobeda, 2007, p. 13). T. Z. Adamyants believes that the term tolerance has replaced such traditional for the Russian mentality concepts as spirituality, harmony and morality. The multiple meaning of semantic components concealed in the term gives the grounds not only to friendliness and mutual respect, but also to asocial manifestations (Adamyants, 2012, p. 85).

The problem of formation of tolerant consciousness is connected with development of the globalization which is followed by fight for redivision of territories and spheres of influence, possession of natural and human resources. External and internal forms of collisions are revealed in terrorism, religious fundamentalism, radicalism and totalitarian government, which destroy the dignity of the person and oppose the country to the civilized principles of development. They characterize the power component in fight for national, corporate and personal interests (Akulova, 2012, p. 493). Researchers note that the level of tolerance in society is proportional to the level of its rationality. If a certain group is encapsulated, closed on internal mass stereotypes and dogmas and does not comprise the factors pushing on rationalization of its own culture bases in the context of its universal presence, such society will be inevitably inclined to intolerance (Zhigunova, 2010, p. 62).

Thus, tolerance can be considered as a special value which is expressed in the aspiration of a person to build the relations with other people without any compulsion, by means of dialogue and free and responsible choice. Tolerance assumes readiness to accept other people such as they are, to respect their views and opinions and to interact with them on the basis of consent. It should not come to indifference, conformism or infringement of one's own interests. First of all, tolerance assumes reciprocity and active position of all the interested parties (Zhigunova, 2010, p. 262; Loginov, 2013, p. 44-49).

3. Research Questions

Analyzing the data of a sociological research, it is important to specify that the system of valuable orientations is not given once and for all, as with changes of living conditions and a person itself, new values appear, and sometimes it is even full or partial reevaluation. Valuable orientations of youth as a most dynamic part of the Russian society are the first to undergo the changes caused by various processes taking place in society. To develop the specified problematic, the blocks of questions defining the relations of respondents to religious and ethnic spheres are formulated in the present research.

4. Purpose of the Study

The investigation of attitude of Altai Krai residents to religion in general shows that most of respondents (59.7%) noted that it is important for a person to be a believer. 17.4% of respondents found it difficult to answer the question, and 22.9% of respondents turned out to be atheists. Among the believers, 79.1% of the interviewed in the region rated themselves as Orthodox, 0.9% as Buddhist, 6% as Muslim, 3% as Catholic and 2.4% as Protestant. Other respondents (about 8.6%) answered that they profess other religious system.

Allocation of religious confessions as the certain subject of socialization and adaptation is determined not only by specifics, character, tasks, purposes and directions of their activity in comparison

with other public associations, but also by the fact that according to their status, position and social activity they actually are large subjects of influence, that do not lock on government institutions.

The most part of respondents are aware of various religious organizations and spiritual movements in Russia and Altai Krai. The majority of the region inhabitants is familiar with all the world religions and much less is interested in new religious movements of various characters (Fig. 1).

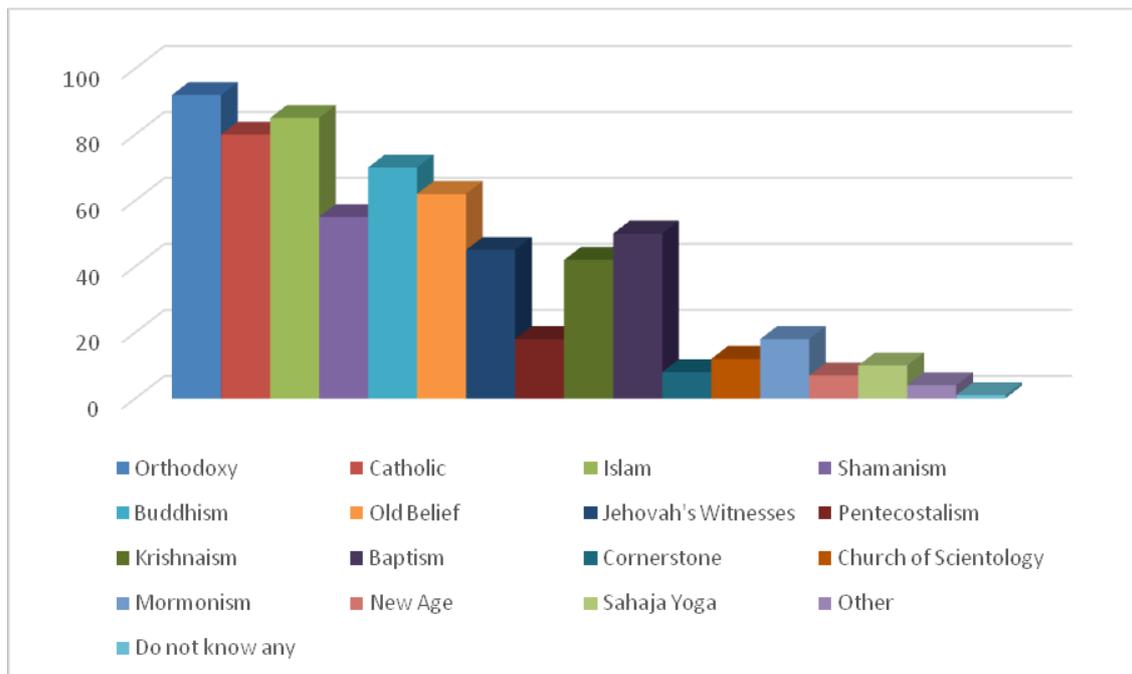


Figure 01. Percentage of the respondents familiar with various religious movements in Altai Krai.

To specify the level of religiousness of the respondents positioning themselves as followers of a certain religion, they were asked additional questions. In particular, most of the interviewed believers (75.7%) stated that they celebrated religious holidays at home. It is possible to assume that some part of the respondents follow the requirements of belief by tradition or custom, but do not firmly believe in God. This situation is also confirmed by other part of a question: "Do you visit temple (mosque, church, etc.)?" 55.1% of the total number of respondents answered that they visited churches very seldom (Fig. 3).

According to results of the monitoring carried out in Altai Krai, in respect of religious organizations that do not relate to traditional religions, most of respondents estimate their attitude as neutral (41%). 34% of respondents have positive attitude to the non-traditional religious organizations. At the same time, the polls have shown that 9% of respondents feel negative to the religious organizations of other nonconventional character, 4% of respondents feel worried about other religious organizations, and 7% of respondents emphasized that they feel fear facing other religion (Fig. 2).

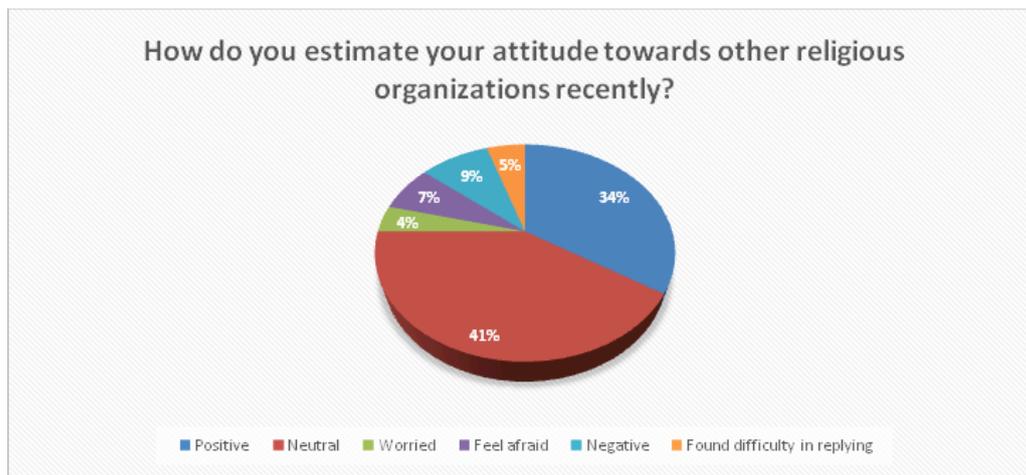


Figure 02. The attitude of the respondents to the religious organizations, nonconventional for them.

Modern society, existing in the conditions of multiculturalism and poly-religiousness, generates certain reactions of socium participants. This indicator conditions tolerance positions in respect of the religious cultures set not only by society value norms in general, but also by each specific individual. The higher are the indicators of readiness for dialogue with other religious culture and indicators of trust and sympathies, the higher is tolerance level in society. According to the provided data, most of respondents (36%) have indifferent attitude towards other religious culture, 25% show interest, 18% trust other religious culture and feel sympathy for it, and 11% of respondents are ready to accept new truth and to implement it. Among negative emotions which respondents experience in respect of the other religious cultures, aggression takes 7%, 5% is for mistrust and 4% are worry and fear.

Questions of criticism of religion and ethnoses have rather disputable context and an ambiguous assessment in science. Existence of the matter in society generates a tendency to dissimilar and contradictory assessment of existence of religion and ethnoses. Most of respondents (32%) believe that the right to freedom of conscience causes the need of criticism of religion, and 18% consider that the authorities must have the right to fine or take into custody people, who publicly criticize nationalities. 8% of the respondents offered their own option on the issue, and other respondents have found it difficult to answer the question.

The opportunity to visit religious and cultural objects of other faiths is an indicator of tolerance and interest in other cultures and religions. More than a half of men and women affirmatively answered the question "Would you come into the church of not "your" religion?", and that is reflected in the Diagram 3.

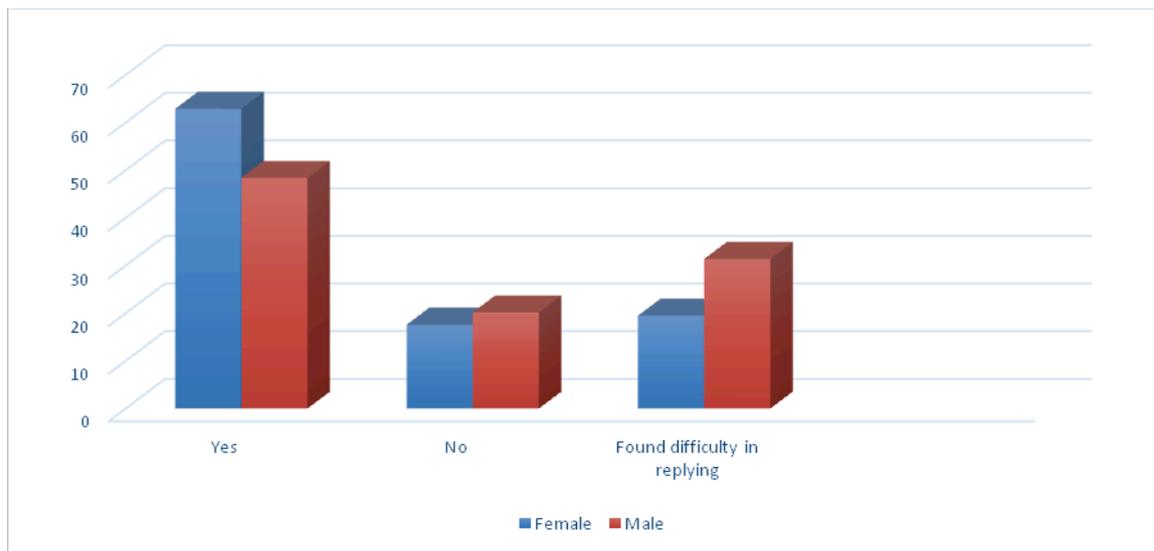


Figure 03. The degree of readiness of male and female believers to visit churches belonging to other religious organization.

It is also significant that execution of religious practices is important for 23.5% of respondents. 44.7% do not consider them important, and 31.8% of respondents find it difficult to answer the question.

In the following block of questions of the research the emphasis is made on detection of opinion of respondents on ethnic issues and extremism prevention which is important for ethno-confessional researches at the present stage of science development (Tishkov, 2004). The efficiency of international relations depends on frequency and depth of contacts; relative equality of rights; numerical relation of the nations and ethnic groups and obvious distinctive characteristics which are language, psychology and religion. International contacts can become complicated by virtue of distinctions of cultural character. The difference both in verbal and in nonverbal forms of communication of people belonging to different cultures leads to incorrect interpretation of feelings, intentions and motives of partners in communication. Culturally caused distinctions are not limited only to area of interaction, but extend to the traditional interests, values, norms, rules and standards of the relations characteristic for representatives of the specific people.

The international relations can be implemented in the form of contacts between specific representatives of different ethnic communities, i.e. at the interpersonal level. These contacts are capable to exert positive impact when hostility goes down, negative perception of representatives of other ethnic communities decreases, and internal tension of a person weakens. On the other hand, such contacts can also make a negative impact when prejudices and rejection of "strangers" become stronger.

According to confessional criterion it is possible to estimate the degree of dissatisfaction of respondents with the existing situation and to retrace the level of their tolerance. The feelings of respondents are mostly affected by communication on interreligious grounds (33%). Contradictions in feelings at one fifth of respondents are caused also by the neighborhood with representatives of other religion; performance of ceremonial actions causes irritation to 14% of respondents (Fig. 4).

These data show that tolerance level at Altai Krai residents is rather high, and people in general are very well-wishing to representatives of other cultures and other nationalities. About 90% of respondents can easily find contact with people belonging to other ethnic groups (Fig. 5).

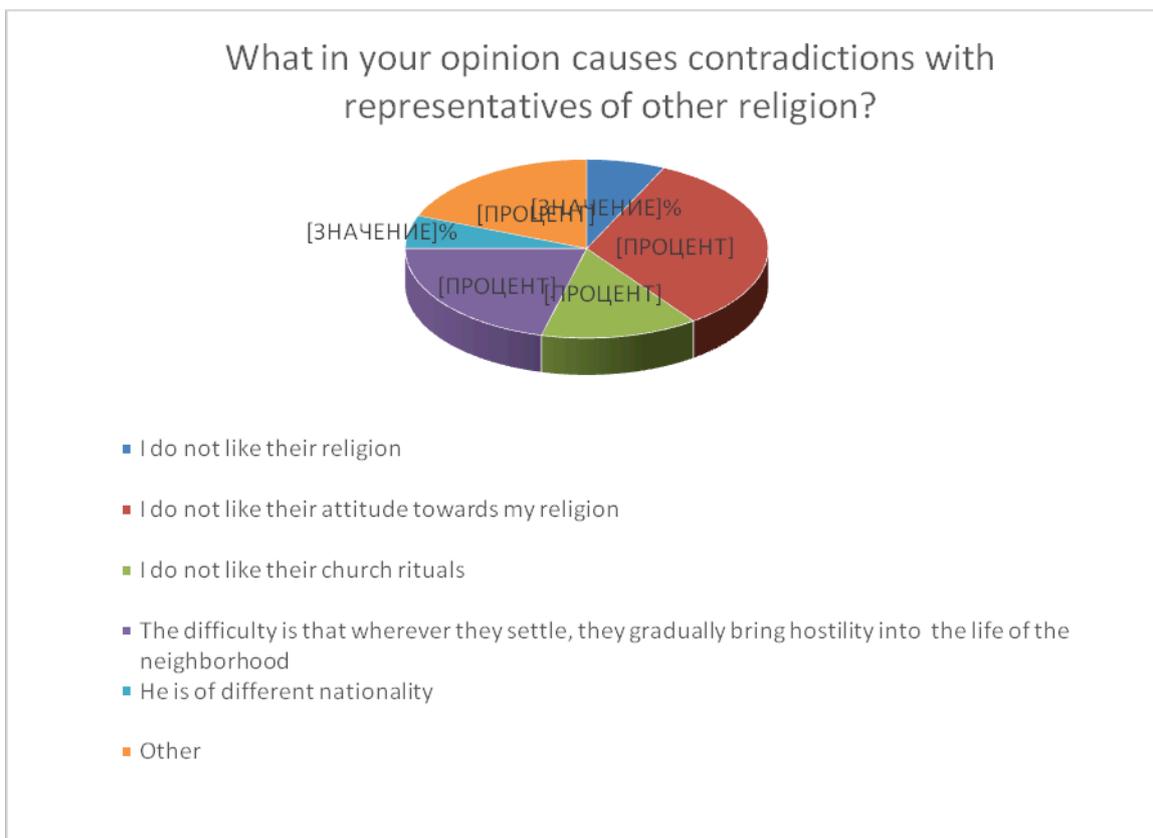


Figure 04. The factors influencing on the origin of ethno-confessional contradictions (according to respondents).

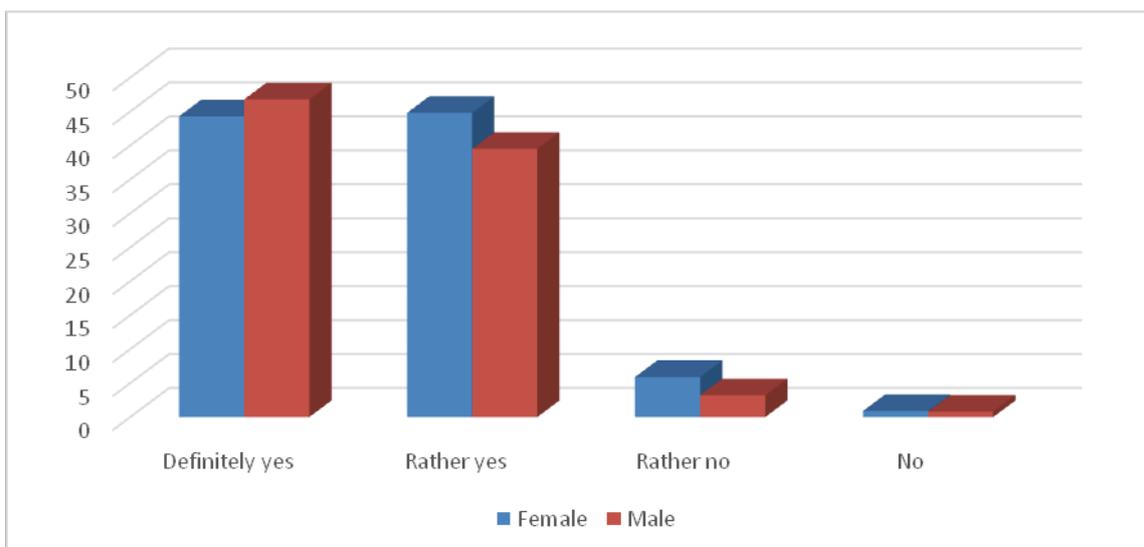


Figure 05. The percentage of the respondents ready for an interethnic dialogue.

Russia is a multiconfessional country, and the interaction of different religious groups takes place in society every day. In connection with the aforesaid, the question of religious situation in the Russian

Federation comes naturally. According to the polls, a half of population of the country considers the religious situation in the Russian Federation stable in general. One third of the respondents consider the religious situation in the country rather unstable and even conflict (Fig. 6).

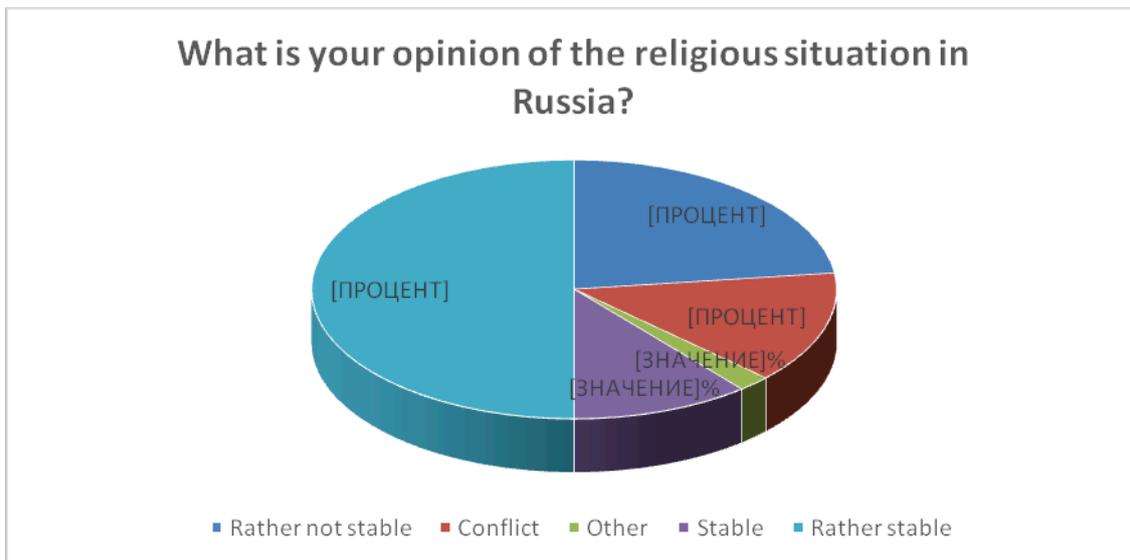


Figure 06. The attitude of the respondents to the religious situation in Russia.

The Altai region is considered one of the most stable among other Russian regions in spite of the fact that there are more than 250 religious organizations in Altai Krai. According to most of respondents, the religious situation in Altai Krai should be estimated as stable, though the 22.3% note that there are still contradictions on religious grounds in the region (Fig. 6). Among them the greatest number of respondents (42.9%) believe that contradictions appear with representatives of Islam. 11.7% of respondents believe that problems rise with representatives of Judaism, 9% – with representatives of Protestantism, 9% – with Orthodox Christians. 17% of respondents consider that contradictions rise with representatives of the new religious movements (Fig. 7).

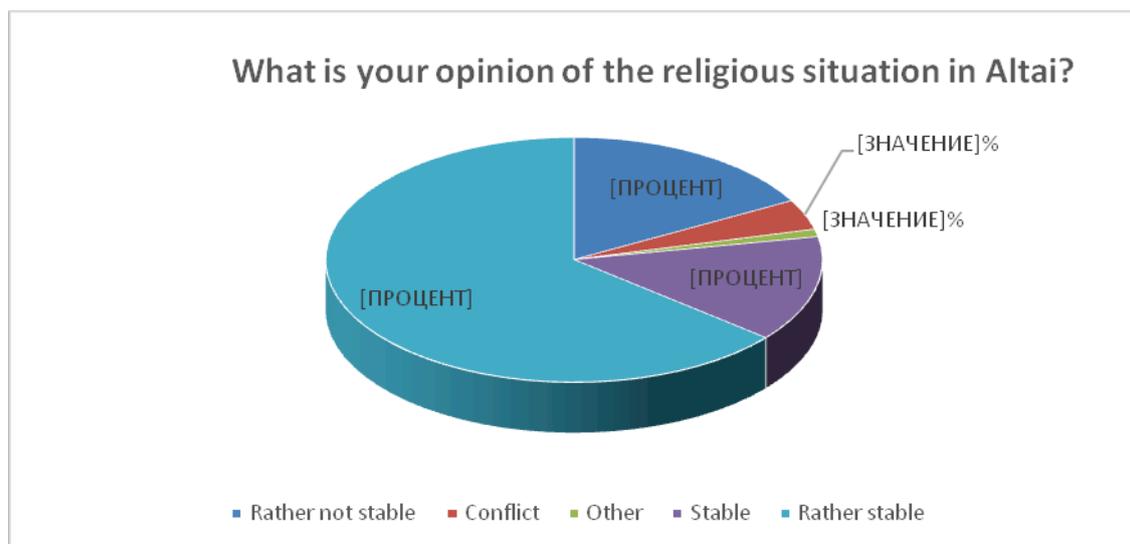


Figure 07. The attitude of the respondents to the religious situation in Altai Krai.

5. Research Methods

The studying of features of ethnoreligious tolerance of Altai population was carried out on the basis of analysis of the sociological survey conducted in 2013 among residents of Altai Krai (the Russian Federation). The total number of the poll participants was 1100 (100%): 62% were females and 38% were male respondents. All respondents were divided into four groups by age: 1) 16–21 years, 2) 22–35 years, 3) 36–45 years, 4) 46–60 years. The most part of respondents belong to the first age group (54.8%). The second and the third group of respondents made 22.9% and 13.8% respectively, and the fourth group made 8.5%. Such distribution on age proceeded from the task to look at the degree of religiousness, tolerance and valuable orientations of youth first of all, as it is this group who is exposed to the influence of transformational changes of modern culture. The ratio of respondents in a position city/ village is caused by features of selection in which urban community makes 58.5%, and rural community makes 41.5%.

6. Findings

Thus, polls confirm that the majority of Altai Krai residents not only feel free to communicate, but also maintain friendly relations with people of other nationalities (about 80%) and have a clear notion about their culture. Indicators of interethnic tolerance are either mixed marriages, or ideas of acceptability of multiethnic family and marital relations. It is important to emphasize that in this aspect we can see rather high rates of tolerant behavior. It is interesting to note that more than 40% of respondents would agree to interethnic marriage (and nearly a half of male respondents at that) that points to rather high level of tolerant consciousness. However respondents, and especially female, would less willingly agree to marry an adherent of a different faith.

In general the introduced research data demonstrate that at the present stage the population takes religion questions a little wary and more seriously, than the questions of nationality and interethnic relations.

7. Conclusion

Thus, the conducted sociological research at the preliminary stage of analysis and data processing already makes it possible to draw a conclusion that the system of valuable orientations of Altai Krai residents in general is characterized by prevalence of tolerant behavior, strengthening of the multicultural paradigm and prevalence of the interethnic and interconfessional complementarity principles. Perhaps not the least role in such situation belongs to historical multi-ethnicity and multi-confessionality of Altai, as well as to the state policy in the sphere of international and interreligious relations.

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