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POLITICAL WELL-BEING: CONCEPT AND RESEARCH
FRAMEWORK

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Abstract

The paper introduces a political well-being as a research category and phenomenon of the political practice, which is theoretically and practically demanded within the search for the way to ensure an effective consolidation policy. The relevance of this research is also caused by the current socio-political situation which is caused by the global digitalization, development of the digital economy and the emergence of the new challenges. Analysing the correlations and vectors of discrepancies between the concepts of "well-being" and "political well-being", the authors reveal the specifics of the latter based on the philosophical, economic, law, sociology and conflict research paradigms and offer a definition of the political well-being based on the mixed paradigm considering the various components of the political well-being, among them the loyalty to the government and the political decisions, trust in the political elite, and the responsible intellectuals and political and business leaders who are ready and eager to work for the national and state interests, are being the most important. It is concluded that the political well-being is a collective well-being, differs sharply from any kind of individual well-being, and very loosely united to an economic prosperity of a country.

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Keywords: Subjective well-being, political well-being, theoretical framework, government loyalty, economic prosperity, political leaders.



1. Introduction

Contemporary society is characterized by an unprecedented information war, the extreme importance of the cybercommunication and cyberinformation, new technologies of the ideological manipulation, violation of the institutional and value system in the states worldwide and a threat not only of a new "cold" but also of a "hot" war. Fake reasons are enough to start fighting against a sovereign state and the danger of the negative scenarios for the development of several political problems is exacerbated. Today, the contradiction is rising between the new forms and the possibilities to involve the masses in politics to discuss significant world problems and try to find a solution, on the one side, and an increase in the consumption of a low-quality, distorted political information because of the wide spread of the fake news, the degradation of the international law, outright falsifications, lies and mistrust, on the other.

In such conditions, the very formulation of the question of political well-being may seem untimely and utopian. But precisely because of the danger of the changing, the paradigms in the geopolitical confrontation of the world's leading political players, research of the political well-being should be a subject for a special attention in the academic field, and the question of how to achieve and keep the political well-being should be a subject of the special concern for the representatives of the authorities at different levels and structures of the civil society.

2. Problem Statement

The study of the political well-being involves difficulties, which are exacerbated by the fact that there is an amount of uncertainty over the concept and its definition. The researchers who discuss well-being from the point of view of the political science tend to jump between the paradigms and, as the result, rather discuss a social well-being and the efficiency of the government and the political elites' efforts to secure the social and economic well-being of the masses (Beacom, 2018; Churchill, 2011; Kadera & Shair-Rosenfield, 2017; Tronto, 2018; Yonk & Smith, 2018) In the Russian academic discussion and the mass media the concept is almost not familiar. In the analysis of this multidimensional phenomenon, its complex structure and state and national, legal, social, economic, informational, psychological, military, internal and external and many other components of political well-being should be considered together. The multidimensionality of this phenomenon determines the diversity of methodological approaches to its interpretation.

3. Research Questions

In the conceptual comprehension of the political well-being, different schools, frameworks and discourses can compete, offering their views, explanations and interpretations of this phenomenon. What is relevant for the political well-being and what is not? Which one from the variety of the paradigms can explain the political well-being? What are the components of the political well-being? How can the political well-being be described sufficiently and on the contrast to economic, social, family and other individual well-being?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to answer these research questions and to develop the notion of the political well-being which is paying the attention to the existing thoughts related to the intersections of the well-being and politics, but distinguishes the political well-being from the economic well-being, social well-being, family well-being (Churchill, 2011) and other individual well-being.

5. Research Methods

We choose as the research method a comparative analysis of the various major existing paradigms, which are related to well-being in view to find to what extent they are explicable for the political well-being and what the difference between various concepts of the well-being is. The empirical part of the paper is based on the analysis of the primary (social surveys) and secondary (official statements) data.

6. Findings

In the philosophical paradigm, well-being can be interpreted as a conscious principle of an action that directs a person or group to prudence, moderation, discretion, wisdom, which in the end results in happiness. A person realizes what is his good, he can choose the appropriate means for achieving it. Beginning with modern times, in philosophy and everyday consciousness, the semantic core of the concept of prudence is filled with new content, gradually transforming into a moral context (Guslyakova et al, 2015). The philosophical perspective of the problem, actualizing the ethics of virtues, the humanistic principles of politics, moral reflection, which influences the behaviour of people in the sphere of power, nevertheless cannot be effective for analysing such a complex and multi-layered phenomenon as the political well-being. Recently, the index of happiness become very popular for the measuring the quality of life. However, the uncertainty of the content of happiness which is an elusive ideal, its perception as not very much pragmatic and realistic, but something which is predominantly related to the emotions, feelings, and in fact performs as an illusion, which can be quickly changed, does not allow to structure the principles of its achievement in full. This aim to achieve and measure happiness is associated with a whole complex of problems that require a considerable amount of time to solve. This is, to name a few, the eradication of corruption, the formation in the country of a moral climate at all levels of personal and social life, the moral self-sufficiency and political responsibility of the individuals and elites, the ethical conduct of public politicians and officials, etc. However, the value of such a perspective of the study of well-being, including political, is to consider moral values and attitudes, the subjective factor in assessing current events and processes, humanizing the socio-political space. Thus, the index of happiness cannot be used instead of the political well-being and cannot be adequately used in the academic field.

In the analysis of the political well-being, the economic paradigm is obvious, as economics and politics are inextricably linked. The recent international developments (the increasing pressure on Russia, the expansion of sanctions, ignoring and direct violation of the international norms, the bombardment of Syria by missiles from the United States, Britain, France without the sanctions of the UN Security Council and coordination with the parliaments of their countries, etc.) clearly demonstrate the fact that the impact of politics on the economy is increasing as economic relations become more complex, geo-economics and sanctions become an instrument of geopolitical restraint. There is one more aspect that updates this

foreshortening of political well-being research. This is the formation of the new socio-political relations in connection with the general digitalization, the development of the digital economy and the emergence of new types of challenges and risks (Blumberg, 2018). Assessments of specialists in the socio-political consequences of the digital revolution are directly opposite (Nikiporets-Takigawa, 2017). However, all researchers are agree about the emergence of such inevitable phenomena as the new instruments for expanding the format of total control over the behaviour and thoughts of citizens and politicians through social networks monitoring, interfering in the electoral processes of other countries via the internet, as well as increasing unemployment because of the disappearance of a number of professions, the widening of disparities in the labour market, change in the life goals of millions of people, etc. (Nikiporets-Takigawa & Pain, 2016). All these new challenges and changes actualize the question of the political well-being achievement and maintenance, revealing new facets and perspectives in it. Only the state which has in its armoury all it needs for managing economic and social processes can minimize these and other threats and challenges.

The law paradigm is very important in the study of political well-being. The paradox is that the importance of the national legal mechanisms within a country increases when the principles of the international law is ignored and directly violated by the leaders who target only their national and geopolitical interest as can be seen today in the system of world politics and international relations.

In the study of well-being, a long-standing tradition has a sociological paradigm. Within the framework of this paradigm, some authors identify a socio-political direction in the study of well-being, which expands the research capabilities of this multifaceted phenomenon. However, the main emphasis in such studies is not so much on political components as on the social context of the concept, the conditions of social life, the striving of citizens to social security, the provision of the common good as a strategic goal of the state social policy. Recently, this paradigm is focused on the search for effective state mechanisms to ensure favourable social conditions for life and human development, raising the level and quality of life of citizens. This paradigm is important, but it ignores the actual political components of this phenomenon. Yet, from the perspective of the political science the social policy can be considered as a means of legitimizing power. We interpret social policy through state activities aimed at ensuring the social well-being of the population through the harmonization of diverse social relations, ensuring social stability, civil peace and harmony based on the principles of social justice, social partnership and solidarity. This kind of political measures allow one to minimize social and political tensions, to prevent its growth into an open political conflict, the overcoming of which will require huge social costs.

Well-being in the context of the sociological approach correlates with such concepts as welfare, living standard, quality of life. Welfare is an integrative indicator of how the population is provided with material welfare, social, spiritual and other benefits. The living standard demonstrates the level of consumption, personal comfort and how the diverse needs of people are satisfied. Reaching and maintaining a stable state of social well-being is impossible without meeting the requirements of the world economic standards. However, there is no rigid direct dependence of the political well-being on them. For the political well-being, other indicators are more important: level of political consciousness, the public opinion, the popularity of the political representations of the leading political actors (elites and citizens), political culture which include political values, political participation patterns and the perception of current

political reality. With a lower standard of living, compared to other countries that are economically more prosperous, the political well-being in this country may be higher. This is evident in the cohesion of people, in the approval for decisions and actions of the authorities, in the desire to defend and disseminate their values, when the masses proud on the achievements of their country, which do not always correlate with the economic sphere and social indicators.

In the Russian case, among the evidences are the negative massive response to the humiliation of Russian athletes at the 2018 Olympics, fabricated political scandals, double standards against Russia, etc. (Kiselev & Smirnova, 2017). Despite criticism, the overwhelming majority of Russians support the decisions and actions of the authorities. This was reflected in the unprecedented support of Vladimir Putin in the March 18, 2018 elections, and a credit of trust, which allowed these elections to be considered a referendum. Of course, the public consciousness can easily change its vector from mass support of the authorities to mass protests, but the more important is the joint efforts of the authorities and society to minimize the causes and neutralize forces that can resist consolidation policy. Sociological studies record a stable trend associated with the consolidated position of Russians on foreign policy issues, broad support for the foreign policy course of the state. This applies to such events as the entry of Crimea and Sevastopol into the Russian Federation (Kagarlitsky, 2016; Prokazina, 2015), the 2014 Winter Olympics and the Paralympic Games, humanitarian assistance to Donetsk and Luhansk (Drobot, Pospelova, Utiabaeva, & Petrovskaya, 2016), Russia's activities in the international arena, etc.. The reorientation of the mass consciousness of Russians to the problems of world politics and international relations has provided serious progress in public opinion and sentiment, a high consolidation of society and support for the government, whose growth is directly proportional to the aggressive anti-Russian policies of several states and creates a good basis for the continuation of the consolidation policy.

There is another difference between political well-being and social welfare. The feeling of social well-being can be expressed on an individual level, have an individual character. Moreover, the degree of proximity to the center of power allows some groups to significantly expand the set of social benefits for their members (the living standard in this case are crucially higher for the elite). On the contrary, political well-being is always group in character, as it is formed by the opposing competitors in the process of the implementation of socially significant interests. Political well-being is an indicator of the effectiveness of the mechanism of redistribution of the most important social resources, including material ones.

Political well-being cannot be considered as once and for all achieved state and it should not be idealized. This is a very dynamic phenomenon, the integral components of which are conflicts, crises, the activities of the system and non-system opposition, incongruous and directly opposite points of view and positions. In any political system, there is a disloyal minority that does not share or support a consensus on the fundamental issues. Therefore, in the study of the political well-being, the conflictological paradigm, along with the other frames, can be an adequate tool for analysis (Kadera and Shair-Rosenfield, 2017; Kagarlitsky, 2016). Conflictological paradigm allows us to find a common ground between the opposing groups, to start a dialogue, to strengthen readiness for a compromise and thereby to increase the level of the real political well-being in the country, which directly depends on the ability of the political system and its leaders to develop the consensus.

We discussed various research paradigms to approach the denotation of the political well-being. And no one of this paradigm is less essential for us. The political well-being is a dynamic phenomenon, therefore in its investigation a mixed paradigm can be fruitful. This paradigm allows us to identify a set of institutional and non-institutional, internal and external factors that affect the dynamics of changes in the behavior and attitude of subjects to power and among themselves, the transformation of the content of this phenomenon in time and space. It allows one to follow the reaction of the authorities to the demands of the population, new challenges and risks, and vice versa, that is, to identify the directions of the permanent variability of the characteristics of political well-being, the dynamic change in the states of perception of political reality as successful or not.

On the base of proposed mixed paradigm, we can consider that political well-being unites a wide variety of the components. Among the most important of them, in our opinion, are the following: the trust to the government and its decisions, the legitimacy of power, including ideological legitimacy; domination in the country's political space of the responsible intellectuals and political elite together with the socially oriented business, whose activities are guided by the national and state interests. In the structure of political well-being, a special role belongs to national and public security in sense of not a lack of danger, but the ability of state and public structures to adequately respond to the new challenges and risks that directly threaten the stability and development of the society and its various segments (Semchenkov, 2017).

7. Conclusion

Drawing the conclusion from the above-mentioned, we can give the following definition for the political well-being. Political well-being is a permanent aggregate, consolidated and purposeful activity of individuals, social groups, communities and political elite to use political power to protect national, state and individual interests through the maintenance of the social dialogue, the constant choice of priorities and the most promising areas of social development. This is the segment of politics that demonstrates people's trust or mistrust towards the ruling elite, its decisions on the most acute problems of domestic and foreign policy, and readiness to act together for the sake of the country's progressive development.

This integrated approach to the political well-being, considering economic, legal, social, political and other aspects, is the most adequate to this phenomenon. The complex approach is conditioned by at least two circumstances. First, political well-being is a multilayered phenomenon, therefore each paradigm of research can characterize only one of its aspects and only all paradigms together can grasp it adequately. Secondly, many components closely intertwine and interact in political well-being, and in certain period some of the components can prevail over others.

Political well-being can be analyzed within the various methodological frames, but in these frames all the actors of the political well-being should be taken into consideration. Social well-being, especially its material component, can be achieved at the expense of the own resources of a person (parents, relatives, inheritance, profitable marriage, prestigious and highly paid job, etc.). Political well-being cannot be achieved and felt on an individual level and it is always the result of the collective, cumulative activity of many actors of the political interaction at the level of power structures, civil society institutions and individuals.

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