

State sustainability and stability in the digital age: discussion materials

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Abstract. The article presents the materials of the discussion held at the National Research Institute of Communications Development (NIIRC). The participants discussed the problems of digitalization of public relations, hybridization of modern political regimes (as a model of adaptation of the state to digital technological transformations); problems of Russia's sustainability in the context of energy wars and the climate agenda. The authors conclude that the relationship between digitalization and the stability of political systems is contradictory. Many advantages of large-scale use of digital technologies, increasing the efficiency of the political and administrative process and improving public and political institutions, in practice can have negative consequences, the key of which affects the stability of political systems. For the development of internal forces that contribute to stability and prevent destabilization, it is proposed to form social immunity.

Keywords: sustainability, stability, technological transformation, digitalization, digital technologies, information, progress, social immunity, diversity

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Introduction

Digitalization is a process that today has covered almost all spheres of life in modern societies. The political and administrative sphere is no exception: in many states, «electronic government», «electronic democracy», «digital diplomacy», etc. are actively implemented. Digitalization is not only a factor in the functioning of political systems, it affects their stability and ability to preserve essential features in the event of external destructive influences, that is, stability.

The impact of digitalization on the sustainability of political systems is insufficiently researched. Meanwhile, this problem is the most important and relevant from both theoretical and practical points of view.

The interaction of digitalization and stability of political systems and states is contradictory. Sometimes political institutions cannot predict the consequences of the introduction of digital technologies, competition for technological advantage is growing, and the ability to proactively respond and make decisions becomes critical. These and other issues were discussed by scientists and experts during a scientific symposium held at the National Research Institute for the Communications Development (NIIRK) in February 2022. We publish part of the discussion materials in this article.

Materials and methods

The participants in the scientific discussion used different, but not contradictory, methodological research approaches. The discussion made it possible to single out the most of them: systemic, neo-institutional, constructivist approaches; method of scenario forecasting, comparative analysis, event analysis, analysis of «digital footprints». Almost all participants in the discussion relied on the methodological approaches developed by M.G. Anokhin (1) and Shabrov O.F. (15; 16; 17). Some author's methods were also presented. Gadzhiev Kh.A. used the method to determine the sustainability index of the political system (8). V.V. Komleva suggested the model of social immunity formation developed and tested by the author (9; 4).

The research materials were: regulatory legal acts, government decisions, digitalization practices, political destabilization practices, and practices for ensuring sustainability and stability.

Results

Digitalization of public relations: progress or degradation? (O.F.Shabrov)

The author understands the development as the transition of the system to a state with a higher ability to adapt. The reverse process is degradation. As a measure of development the author understands the degree of diversity of the system. Progress is a positive dynamics of indicators, moving forward, from the lowest to the highest.

Progress in the field of digitalization is characterized, in particular, by the expansion of the information space and carries a number of negative consequences:

increasing the volume of information, which leads to informational alienation and, as a result, alienation from reality, other people and self-alienation. On this basis, the first problem arises: clip consciousness and big data technologies create opportunities for the formation of virtual needs.

Virtualization of social relations.

A person is formed under the influence of three groups of factors: genetics, family upbringing and social environment. Studies conducted in the United States and Sweden have shown that such human qualities as the degree of trust and gratitude are influenced by genetic factors from 10 to 20%, by families 8–12%, and by society 68–72% (11). We can say that the influence of society is the main factor in the formation of man as a social being.

Therefore, there is an objective need for a look at oneself from the outside, a social assessment. With the virtualization of communication, these processes change. Now Maslow's pyramid of needs is undergoing major changes: the third level of needs (in social approval), moving into virtual reality, is practically leveled. The physiological needs and the need for security are immediately followed by the needs for prestige and self-realization.

Digitalization of relations between a person and the state.

The action of these two factors calls into question the effectiveness of the mechanisms of representative democracy that have developed in the last century, or democracy, the meaning of which is that the voter gives a politician or party a mandate to represent their interests in government bodies. To the extent that virtual socialized voters proceed from virtual personal needs when voting, they are unable to correctly assess their own interest, and their totality is not a people, but a population. In addition, modern technologies, including the promising Deep Fake technologies that simulate real politicians (21), do not allow voters to have a real idea of who they are handing their mandate to. Finally, as J. Soros rightly notes, "states have to pay more and more attention to the requirements of international capital to the detriment of the expectations of their own citizens" (19). And the implementation of the "Soft Power" strategy - "forcing other peoples to want the results you want to receive" (12) allows you to form the necessary expectations by promoting your own values in their consciousness. Cross-border communication using modern digital technologies makes this strategy particularly effective. In other words, in modern

democracies the people/population is no longer the only source of power. There is a full-blown crisis of representative democracy.

The problem of global governance.

One of the immutable principles of cybernetics is the principle of necessary diversity: in order to control, the control subsystem must have no less variety than the controlled one (2). On the other hand, there is a fundamental limit to increasing the degree of diversity of any system, including the governing one, the so-called “principle of the fragility of the good” (10). The problem of the modern era is a sharp increase in the degree of diversity of social systems in the post-industrial era, noted at the end of the last century by E. Toffler and multiplied today by ethnic diversity due to mass migration, the expansion of the information space and the claims of transnational elites to global governance.

Prospects for solving this problem, aggravated by the anthropogenic load on nature that has gone beyond the permissible limits, are:

- reduction of the world’s population «from 7 billion to two and a half, two, or even up to 1.5 billion people...»;
- restriction of access of the controlled to information;
- creation of a new subspecies of the “service man” (“limited self-awareness”, “controlled reproduction”, “cheap food”);
- unification of cultures through the introduction of «universal values» into the consciousness of people.

It is obvious that humanity is today at the point of bifurcation. In the era of digitalization, progress has entered into a tough confrontation with the development of man and society. It is important that the further development of society be based on moral and ethical foundations.

On the need to form social immunity as a factor of socio-political stability and stability (V.V.Komleva)

A critical factor in sustainability is social immunity. An analysis of this phenomenon is described in our publications (9), and the methodology for the formation of social immunity was verified in the research in the Republic of Crimea (4). Social immunity is defined by us as the ability of society to recognize threats to stability and sustainability and respond to them in the same way as the system center reacts. Social immunity develops society’s immunity to alien influences, reducing the effect and risks of such influences. The perception of alienness is manifested in the ability of society to identify external influences as destabilizing (according to the principle of “friends / foes”, “useful / harmful”, “developing / killing”, etc.) and react negatively to such influences.

How does society develop social immunity to external and internal destabilizing influences? Specific technologies and techniques are poorly described. Of the authors known to us, such a study was carried out by Z.A. Zhapuev (22), and much earlier - on the example of the USSR A. Zinoviev (23). According to A. Zinoviev, the USSR used such mechanisms for the formation of social immunity as: limiting contacts with the outside world (“Iron Curtain”),

a system of education (communist), the use of sanctions (“punitive measures”) against those who succumbed to external influences, the creation of conditions under which the immediate environment made sure that people did not fall under external influences. I don’t want to comment on the personal position of A. Zinoviev (an authoritative philosopher), but I note that social immunity in the USSR was ensured by the ability of the system to show an attractive goal for the development of a social system, where each member of society saw his own perspective and entered his personal life scenario into the public one (socialism, communism, universal equality and welfare of all, etc.); the attractiveness of the way of life in the USSR (social justice, accessibility of education, medicine and other significant social services); the possibility of influencing the process of making political decisions and the clarity of the conditions and filters for entering political elites and management systems; realization of rights (including women), etc.

Most of these mechanisms would be in high demand in modern society.

The conceptual model of the formation of social immunity (9) that we propose reflects the logical connection between the goals and objectives of the subjects and objects of interaction, factors affecting political stability, methods and resources that should be used to achieve the goals and objectives. The conceptual model covers in general terms the existing dependencies, trends, patterns and is the basis for specific actions. The use of this model will allow achieving a synergistic effect when using various technological methods by different actors.

The fundamental positions on the basis of which the model was developed:

1. In a situation of external destabilizing influences, under the condition of developed social immunity against destabilizing influences, the system is able to independently maintain homeostasis, maintain an equilibrium position within controlled boundaries with small changes, maintain its internal potential for control and integration of parts of the system. External influences will not have a destabilizing effect if they are assessed by the majority of the population as alien, violating the normal development of the social system and its foundations that satisfy society.

2. This kind of immunity is developed in conditions of public trust in the system center, approval of its activities, internal cohesion of society, consistent public consciousness and social memory, compliance of the decisions of the system center with public ideas about social justice, a decent quality of life, rights and freedoms. The development of immunity against external influences is possible only with the effective integrated activity of institutions to ensure these conditions.

3. A special condition for the development of social immunity against external destabilizing influences is the presence of constructive opposition within the system itself. Such opposition is important because it periodically makes «social inoculations» in the form of constructive public criticism. It tests the immune system of society for dissatisfaction with the actions of the system center, conflict of values, current vectors of socio-political sentiments, readiness for open protests; tests the system center and the elite for cohesion and the presence of conflicting interests, the ability to integrate and mobilize society in defense of integrity and values.

4. A priority role in the formation of social immunity is played by institutions that create a normative framework for the stability of the social system. However, with the development of the information society, new actors appear, whose activities take place in a virtual environment.

5. Not all external influences should be seen as destabilizing the socio-political system. Thanks to some of them, the system itself becomes more competitive, reflecting the state and adopting other experience. But there are destructive influences, which we mean when we talk about destabilization.

We divided the conditions for social immunity into three groups: 1) the conditions necessary for the emergence and development of social immunity; 2) conditions that support social immunity; 3) conditions under which it is possible to test the ability of social immunity to identify and respond to alien influences.

Let's briefly describe these conditions.

The conditions necessary for the emergence and development of social immunity are the results of socialization. In the process of socialization, the following are formed: 1) values, spiritual foundations shared by the majority of society; 2) social bonds (in the form of social expectations and sanctions); 3) consistent social memory; 4) social connections, the value of which is much higher than the benefits offered by external actors. The most important institutions that shape these conditions are the family, the system of upbringing, education, the media, and religion. Separately, we single out the institutions of political socialization, which include socio-political associations, youth organizations that make it possible to assimilate the norms and values of the political system and the culture of political competition inherent in a particular society. However, without the maintenance of social immunity, laid down by the institutions of socialization, without public approval of reactions to external influences, immunity will fade. In other words, internal conditions are necessary to maintain social immunity.

The key conditions for maintaining social immunity are the following:

- the attractiveness of the society for its members, manifested in the level and quality of life (satisfying the majority of society), the opportunity to realize their potential, a high assessment of the fairness of the distribution of benefits and resources;
- existential security, manifested in the fear of losing the existing stability; confidence in the present and future, in the absence of threats to life, health, rights, freedoms and the system of generally accepted and reference values and spiritual foundations;
- the ability to influence the process of making managerial decisions, which is manifested in the accessibility of political institutions and authorities, in the development of the expert potential of civil society institutions.

It is advisable to direct the activities of political institutions (especially authorities), economic institutions (especially those that distribute economic benefits and resources), and institutions of control, supervision, and security to the formation of this group of conditions. Of course, the mass media play an important role in supporting public opinion.

To understand whether social immunity works, it must be periodically tested. This will make it possible to understand to what extent society allows external influences and

where is the limit, after which they are assessed as destabilizing. The conditions under which it is possible to test social immunity are: the presence of constructive opposition and civil society institutions with high expert potential. The existence of such conditions depends on the ability of the political opposition to perform its functions (to be precisely the opposition and offer constructive alternatives to solving problems) and on the activity of civil society institutions and civil initiatives. In other words, to ensure social stability, a set of internal conditions is needed under which social immunity against alien influences is formed, maintained and periodically tested.

If this exists, then a system of interdependencies of the goal (desired state of stability), conditions for the development of the mechanism of social immunity, the mechanism itself and institutions that ensure its development, maintenance and verification are formed.

The mechanisms of formation of social immunity have been described previously (9). Here I'll list the most significant: the mechanism of social memory, social cohesion, existential security, institutional and systemic trust. These mechanisms have been described in detail on the example of the Republic of Crimea (2).

Thus, the social immunity of society against destabilizing influences is of critical importance for ensuring socio-political stability. Social immunity makes it possible to identify among the multitude of influences precisely those that destabilize society, that alien and threaten its integrity. The development and performance of the mechanism of social immunity is associated with the mechanisms of social memory, social cohesion, existential security, institutional and systemic trust. Of decisive importance for maintaining social immunity and identifying external influences as destabilizing in assessing the degree of their threat are the internal conditions of the life of society, to the development of which it is advisable to direct the efforts of responsible institutions.

Hybridization of modern political regimes as a model of state adaptation to digital technological transformations (S.V.Volodenkov)

With the spread and improvement of digital communication technologies, the intensification and penetration of digital information flows into key areas of the state and society life, a state of technological turbulence has arisen, which is characterized by the predominance of a variety of technologies over a variety of systems (state-administrative and political). If we recall the law of necessary diversity of W.R. Ashby, the complexity and diversity of a control system to maintain its effective viability must exceed the complexity and diversity of those controlled systems that it manages.

In other words, at a certain point, the diversity of the digital space of socio-political communications and digital technological infrastructure turned out to be higher than the complexity of control systems inherent in traditional political regimes. As a result, traditional state institutions of power turned out to be unprepared to confront new technological models of information and communication work with the population, models

of mobilizing protest masses, situations of discrediting national political elites, and seizing the initiative in the process of forming an information agenda.

For this reason, technologically advanced states were forced to adapt their management systems to the new sociotechnical reality in a forced mode, increasing their own diversity and reducing the diversity of the digital communication space.

In this regard, one of the most realistic scenarios for the adaptation of state management systems is the “hybrid” scenario of the merging of state institutions and tech giants into a single system of state-political management. This scenario seems to us one of the most promising from the standpoint of government institutions and large technocorporations (but not society).

The potential of state-corporate symbiosis is due to several factors at once:

- a) traditional political regimes already have the legitimacy necessary to govern society, which makes it possible to “technologize” the existing public administration systems in a soft variant - without transition periods and socio-political upheavals characteristic of states in which a regime change occurs;
- b) due to the technological diversity of corporations in the general management system, state institutions of power are also able to significantly increase their own complexity and diversity, which, as a result, is a necessary condition for ensuring the effective management of complex social systems (in accordance with Ashby’s law);
- c) the global technological infrastructure owned by large corporations can be quickly integrated into a new type of digital state-political management system, together with all the billions of audiences of global digital platforms, and the available Big Data arrays, combined with modern artificial intelligence technologies and self-learning neural network algorithms, allow us successfully form not only national, but also supranational systems of «smart» management and control in the socio-political sphere.

Digitalization and sustainability of political systems: the ambivalence of the relationship (Kh.A.Gadzhiev)

Digitalization in a general can be understood in three meanings: 1) as a global transition from the use of analog technologies to digital ones; 2) as a large-scale implementation of digital technologies into various spheres of human activity (primarily computer technologies and the Internet); 3) as an increase of the role of digital technologies in the life of society, as a result their use by a person moves to a qualitatively new level and they become the most important social value (6, p.150-151). Each of the three presented meanings can be considered as a certain level of the digitalization process, these levels replace each other in turn. As a result, now most modern societies are in the third stage of digitalization, when digital technologies have become an important part and value in people’s lives. This is clearly seen in the statistics. So, by the beginning of 2022 (data for January), the number of mobile device users worldwide amounted to 5.31 billion people (this is 67.1% of the world’s population). There were 4.95 billion Internet users worldwide (62.5% of the world’s population), although ten years ago (in January

2012) there were about 2.18 billion people; finally, the number of active users of social media (social networks, messengers, video hosting, etc.) by January 2022 amounted to about 4.62 billion people (58.4%), while in January 2012 there were about 1.48 billion people of such users¹.

The process of digitalization has so radically changed the information field, integrated new technologies into the life of societies, that we can talk about the formed digital space, into which more and more spheres of human activity are being transferred. The political and administrative sphere was no exception. It uses not only those technologies that can qualitatively improve public services, but also those that change the system of relations «power-society». And if we evaluate the consequences of the expansion of the use of digital technologies, which is happening in many modern states, then they are ambiguous, there are positive and negative consequences. If we talk about the positive, then we should note the many opportunities that open up for improving channels and feedback mechanisms; expanding opportunities for increasing the level of transparency and openness in the functioning of the political and administrative apparatus of the state; the development of civil society institutions and their ever-increasing influence in the future on the process of making government decisions; increasing the level of efficiency in monitoring the mood of the masses and identifying emerging social and political conflicts in order to take preventive measures to prevent them; expanding opportunities for effective regulation of interethnic and interfaith relations, etc.

But in addition to the benefits, there are many challenges and risks. Particular attention is required to those that may adversely affect the socio-political sustainability and stability of political systems. Let us immediately make a reservation about what should be understood by the sustainability and stability of the political system, since these are different phenomena that it is important not to identify. Sustainability is the ability of a political system, despite the external destructive impact, to keep unchanged that part of its elements and the relations established between them that determine its integrity and essence, while political stability should be understood as the state of the political system in which it functions in a given mode and in accordance with the intended vector of development, while maintaining its essential characteristics by keeping the deviations that appear as a result of external influence within the established threshold values. This is more clearly seen in practice (7, pp. 23-24). Thus, any large-scale mass protests, attempts to change political regimes and carry out coups d'état, obviously, indicate that political systems are in an unsustainable state at such moments. But if as a result of such attempts there are no significant changes in the political system, it retains the basic principles of its functioning and essential features, then we can say that the system is sufficiently stable (for example, in Venezuela in 2002, in South Sudan in 2013, in Burundi in 2015, in Turkey in 2016, in Belarus in 2020, in Kazakhstan in 2022, etc.).

¹ Kemp S. Digital 2022: Global Overview Report / DataReportal. 26 JANUARY 2022. URL: <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-global-overview-report> (accessed: 12.04.2022)

The world practice of recent years has clearly illustrated that the digital space, or rather, its correct and rational state regulation, the ability to effectively use its advantages, is increasingly becoming the most important factor in stability/instability and sustainability/un sustainability of political systems. Since the political and administrative sphere is the sphere in which the development and implementation of the goals and strategies of social development take place, any miscalculations and abuses (this applies to politics and political struggle) create serious risks for all other spheres of public life. This can directly affect the state of the political system and, as a result, its ability to overcome negative impulses that threaten the preservation of the integrity and essential features of the system, i.e. – sustainability.

Today, often, by appealing to security, states are increasing control over society in the digital space. This requires broad access of the authorities to large amounts of information and to citizens' data. But this may not be perceived positively in society, especially when in countries that officially declare liberal democratic values. As a result, a factor of conflict arises in the system of relations «power-society», and this may negatively affect the level of public support for the ruling elites. And this is one of the most important components of the sustainability and stability of the political system.

In addition to the ambiguous public attitude to the access of the authorities to information and data, the provision of these opportunities to a narrow group of people (the ruling elites of a particular state) creates the risk of misuse (in particular, when using personal data) for obtaining the advantages in the course of political struggle or the preservation of one's own power. There are examples of states in which wide access to personal information and control is fixed at the level of the law (the most striking example is China).

Another political and administrative area in which the consequences of the active and intensive implementation of digital technologies are contradictory is the sphere of public services. With the implementation of «electronic government», it became possible to simplify and speed up their provision. Moreover, the digitalization of public authorities can significantly improve their quality. But other difficulties arise: for the effective operation of the system, sufficient digital literacy of the population and the availability of necessary technical devices are required for citizens. This affects the older generation most painfully, but they are the ones who most often need more public services and social security.

As for public administration in general, there are problems of a different type: the transfer of important aspects of public administration activities to the digital space actualizes the problem of cyber-attacks and hacks. They can pose a serious threat to public security and the preservation of sensitive government information and data. It is not without reason that cyber threats and the need to ensure cyber security are increasingly being discussed on the political agenda; because the lack of protection of political systems is becoming a key risk to their stability and sustainability (clear examples are the color revolutions of recent years in the Arab countries and the post-Soviet space).

Sustainable Russia in the context of energy wars and the climate agenda (I.A.Guliyev)

A number of other challenges facing Russia are also related to digitalization issues. Some of them are intensifying, connecting with the processes of digitalization. These include:

1) Energy transition. Now the fourth energy transition is taking place, which reflects the objective reality and does not depend on the decisions of groups, individuals, countries. The change in priority energy carriers is due to the change in the needs of society, the formation of a new energy consumption paradigm.

This is a philosophical problem. If you look at history, it becomes clear how previous transitions took place. The first transition is from firewood to coal, the second is from coal to oil, the third is from oil to natural gas. None of these energy transitions has been accompanied by the abandonment of other energy sources. Everything happened naturally against the background of a gradual increase in the share of one of the priority energy resources. Now we are forced to move from oil and gas to renewable energy sources. This is where the problems associated with interfering with the natural course of the energy revolution begin.

There are sad examples of this phenomenon in Europe: the countries of Europe forced the increase in the share of renewable energy sources and as a result there was a recent energy crisis. Industry, aircraft, transport are tied to energy.

2) Climate agenda. The Paris Agreement, under which it is planned to achieve «carbon neutrality» by 2060. The European partners have warned the Russian Federation that a cross-border carbon tax will be determined for those products that have a large amount of CO₂ emissions. This is a challenge for Russia's industry and energy sector.

3) Sanctions policy. Sanctions also have a negative impact on the energy sector. There are countries that are forcing sanctions. They argue that it is necessary to introduce, as in the case of Iran, an embargo on energy resources. But no one dares to do this because of the "boomerang effect" that threatens them. For example, the unprecedented change in gas and oil prices has already had a negative impact on the European market. A complete rejection of energy resources (oil and gas) supplied from the Russian Federation is impossible for European neighbors, because there is no alternative to Russian pipeline supplies. Deliveries on tankers take much longer time.

Discussion

Thus, the impact of digitalization on the state, its political and administrative institutions and public administration in general is ambiguous and ambivalent. Today it

1. Kemp S. Digital 2022: Global Overview Report / DataReportal. 26 JANUARY 2022. URL: <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-global-overview-report>.

is difficult to say that a total focus on digitalization has and will have extremely positive consequences, but the fact is that this process is inevitable and is already leading to fundamental changes in “traditional” political and administrative institutions. Modern states are forced to adapt to this process and improve their institutional structures on its basis. And their ability to preserve the essential features of their political systems, to be sustainable will depend on how flexible and strategically they will manage to integrate new digital mechanisms into their usual decision-making procedures.

In this sense, the incorrect implementation of such important goals of digitalization of the political and administrative sphere (which, by the way, are officially postulated as a priority), as increasing the openness of the state and developing institutions for the political participation of citizens, can be considered rather as an omission of states. The participation of citizens in the political and administrative process, in terms of ensuring and maintaining the stability and sustainability of the political system, should not be limited to the possibility of citizens only passively receive information about government decisions taken, about the activities of politicians and officials (including through publications on their public pages in social networks and special digital platforms). The opportunity to come up with public initiatives and petitions, as well as participation in public discussions, should not be only formal. The participation of citizens in the political and administrative process through digital technologies is the way for the development of feedback channels and mechanisms. That is necessary for both the authorities and society; necessary for socio-political stability, and for the stability of the political system, and for political development as a whole.

Conclusions

The digitalization of public life brings not only advantages; this process has deep social contradictions that can lead to destabilization and disruption of the stability of the socio-political system. First of all, we are talking about the contradictions associated with the functioning of social systems.

First, this is the impact of the virtualization of relations between power and society on the functioning of representative democracy and the choice of voters. Secondly, technological progress and the laws of the development of human societies have come into conflict with each other, and questions of a moral and ethical nature arise. Thirdly, emerging socio-technical systems are becoming more complex and diverse than their control systems.

In the context of digitalization, external influences are becoming more and more diverse, more and more diverse new socio-political practices are emerging, which makes the socio-political system more vulnerable. In addition, the energy balance is being disrupted; risks and threats to Russia's national security arise in the face of sanctions pressure and the imposition of foreign energy policy standards. Under these conditions, it is advisable to draw the attention of the control centers to the need to form social immunity, which will allow society to respond to destabilization under the influence of the control center.

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