

MODERN SOCIAL SYSTEMS IN CONDITIONS OF PERMANENT CRISIS: TRANSFORMATIONS, DYSFUNCTIONS, AND THE ROLE OF SOCIALLY DOMINANT LEADERS

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Received 02.12.2025.

Revised 09.01.2026.

Accepted 27.01.2026.

Keywords:

ABSTRACT

Economic instability, Financial centers, Market transformation, Structural inequalities, Systemic risk.

This scientific publication examines the dynamics of contemporary social systems amid interconnected global crises. The analysis posits that traditional scientific and systemic approaches are insufficient for managing the accelerated social processes of the 21st century. In conditions of high uncertainty and interdependence, social systems face permanent instability and functional exhaustion. The study analyzes health, economic, geopolitical, technological, climatic, and value-based crises as manifestations of systemic dysfunctions.

Special focus is placed on social transformations, the emergence of new global centers of influence, and the disproportionate role of socially dominant leaders. It emphasizes that leadership decisions in times of crisis are often influenced by irrational factors, risking deeper social imbalances. Using post-socialist Bulgaria as an empirical example, the text highlights structural changes marked by inequality and institutional limitations. The conclusions advocate for new interdisciplinary tools to ensure timely forecasting and management of social transformations.



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1. INTRODUCTION

Modern societies are moving along a trajectory that increasingly escapes traditional logical and scientific explanations. Societal processes not only deviate from established models of development but, in many cases, entirely transcend the boundaries of the known and predictable. As a result, classical models of social progress—whether linear, staged, or cyclical—are no longer adequate to explain contemporary realities. This necessitates a fundamental rethinking of both the analytical tools and the conceptual bases in the social sciences.

The traditional model of development assumes stable regularities, viewing social development as a process open to analysis, explanation, and partial management. Today, however, development has become fragmentary, accelerated, and contradictory—mixing progress with destabilization. Therefore, understanding “social development” now requires a sharper focus on not only institutional and economic factors, but also the complex network of interactions, cultural changes, and value conflicts.

The changes we observe bear the typical characteristics of crises, as they are difficult to predict, even more difficult to manage, and often manifest themselves simultaneously in different spheres of public life.

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Economic shocks, political instability, cultural fragmentation, and technological breakthroughs are intertwined in a common context of uncertainty. These crises are not isolated events, but rather a permanent state that puts societies in a mode of continuous adaptation. It is this constant crisis that undermines the possibility of long-term planning and strategic management.

The systems approach, which has long served as the main methodological tool in the social sciences, is proving increasingly incapable of capturing the complexity of contemporary processes. His assumption of the relative stability of elements and the predictability of connections between them does not correspond to the reality of today's social systems. Instead of clearly distinguishable structures and functions, we observe networks of interdependencies that change with extraordinary speed. This makes the analysis fragmentary and often contradictory, and the conclusions quite conditional and difficult to apply in practice.

Faced with this situation, scientists and researchers are faced with a serious methodological challenge. The possibility of conducting qualitative research that can rely on relatively accurate and sustainable results is severely limited. Data quickly lose relevance, social attitudes change dynamically, and the context in which the analysis is carried out is often transformed even before the research is completed. This gives rise to a sense of crisis not only in the societies themselves, but also in the science that tries to understand them.

All known research methods increasingly use a high degree of conditionality. They offer models and interpretations that are valid within limited time and space frames, but are difficult to generalize. On the one hand, this makes them poorly applicable to the management of social processes, and on the other, it calls into question their scientific value. As a result, a paradoxical situation is created in which knowledge about society grows quantitatively, but loses its practical and prognostic value.

The need for new theoretical and methodological approaches is becoming increasingly obvious. Instead of searching for universal laws and models, social sciences should focus on more flexible, interdisciplinary, and contextually sensitive analyses. Only through such a change can a deeper understanding of contemporary social processes be achieved, and prerequisites for more adequate management of development in conditions of constant change and uncertainty be created (Terziev et al., 2025a).

2. CRISES AND THEIR CHARACTERISTICS

All emerging crisis situations in the modern world have several clearly identifiable common characteristics. They do not occur in isolation, but are deeply interconnected, intertwining and reinforcing each other. Their dynamics are distinguished by a high speed of development, which often outpaces the possibilities for scientific

understanding, institutional adaptation, and effective management. It is this acceleration and multi-layeredness that confirms the thesis that modern social development takes place in conditions of permanent crisis, and this state requires new analytical frameworks, an interdisciplinary approach, and a rethinking of classical models of social development.

Within this general crisis state, several main directions can be distinguished that outline the dominant dimensions of crises in modern societies (Terziev et al., 2025a).

2.1. Global health crisis and its consequences

The COVID-19 pandemic is one of the most striking examples of a global crisis in recent decades. According to the World Health Organization, the virus has caused over 7 million officially registered deaths worldwide in 2020–2023, with the real number likely to be significantly higher. Health systems in a number of countries have proven unprepared for the scale of the crisis, exposing chronic deficiencies in medical staff, limited resources, and poor coordination between institutions.

The pandemic has gone far beyond the health sector. The global economy has experienced its sharpest contraction since World War II, with global GDP falling by over 3% in 2020. The massive shift to remote work and online education has transformed labor and social relations, but has also deepened inequalities between different social groups. Decisions have often been made in the face of limited information and conflicting expert assessments, undermining public trust in institutions and scientific authority. In this sense, the pandemic has demonstrated the limits of national policies and questioned the sustainability of global mechanisms for solidarity and cooperation.

2.2. Geopolitical conflicts and the erosion of the international order

In recent years, the world has witnessed an increase in geopolitical tensions and the revival of military conflicts of regional and global significance. Military actions, economic sanctions, and political confrontations undermine the post-war international order built on the principles of multilateralism and collective security. Conflicts lead to the destabilization of entire regions and serious humanitarian consequences.

According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the number of forcibly displaced persons in the world exceeds 110 million people, which is a historical record. Migration flows put pressure on the social systems of host countries and further intensify internal political and social tensions. The erosion of trust between states and the weakening of international institutions create a sense of growing uncertainty and a lack of effective mechanisms for preventing and managing conflicts.

2.3. Economic and financial instability

The modern economic environment is characterized by increased instability and systemic risks. The world has

entered a period of high inflationary pressures since the pandemic, with inflation reaching its highest levels in decades in many advanced economies. Disrupted supply chains, geopolitical conflicts, and energy insecurity have contributed to a sharp rise in the prices of basic goods and services.

These processes have deepened social inequalities both between countries and within societies. While some sectors and economic entities have benefited from the crises, significant groups of the population have faced a decline in real incomes and increasing insecurity. Traditional economic policy instruments (monetary and fiscal) often prove insufficient or lead to short-term effects, without offering sustainable solutions for long-term development.

2.4. Technological crisis and digital transformation

The accelerated development of digital technologies and artificial intelligence is giving rise to a new type of crisis related to control, regulation, and the social consequences of technological progress. On the one hand, digitalization increases efficiency and creates new economic opportunities, while on the other hand, it leads to transformations in the labor market and the risk of exclusion of entire social groups.

The spread of disinformation and manipulated content on social networks undermines public trust and democratic processes. In addition, the development of mass surveillance technologies raises serious questions about the protection of personal data and civil liberties. Societies often fail to create adequate regulatory frameworks at the same speed as technologies develop, which deepens the feeling of institutional backwardness.

2.5. Crisis of values and social identity

A crisis of values is deepening in parallel with economic and political turmoil. The polarization of societies, the growing distrust between social groups, and conflicts over identity, culture, and belonging are leading to the breakdown of common symbolic and value frameworks. As a result, social interaction is becoming increasingly conflictual, and the ability of societies to reach consensus on key issues is increasingly limited. The crisis of values does not manifest itself as a one-time event, but as a prolonged state of tension that undermines social solidarity and a sense of community.

2.6. Climate and ecological crisis

Climate change represents one of the most long-term and systemic threats to social development. The increase in average global temperatures, the increase in extreme weather events, and the degradation of ecosystems have direct economic and social consequences. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, recent years have been among the warmest in the history of instrumental measurements.

Environmental crises lead to resource scarcity, threaten food security, and stimulate new migration flows. Despite a scientific consensus on the causes and risks, policy responses are often slow and fragmented. This

further reinforces the feeling of governance helplessness and highlights the discrepancy between the scale of the problem and the capacity of modern societies to respond adequately.

3. SOCIAL PROCESSES, TRANSFORMATIONS, AND FUNCTIONING OF SOCIAL SYSTEMS

The ongoing social processes in modern societies are of particular scientific and public interest, not least because they directly or indirectly affect a significant part of the planet's population. In the conditions of globalization and a high degree of interdependence between states and societies, local social processes are increasingly acquiring global significance. Such large-scale social transformations are not unprecedented in history. Humanity has gone through profound social, economic, and political changes in different periods. However, modern transformations are distinguished by their intensity, speed, and complexity, which makes them difficult to compare with previous historical periods.

Historical analysis often speaks of a certain cyclicity in the development and transformation of social systems. Although such logic has a certain analytical value, it should not be absolutized. Each social transformation has its own specific context, determined by economic, technological, demographic, and cultural factors. In this sense, the study of contemporary social processes, as well as the behavior and role of emerging social leaders, becomes a key element for the strategic management and guidance of these processes (Terziev et al., 2025a).

Social systems have their own characteristics and regularities and cannot exist in isolation from the environment in which they function. Regardless of the many definitions and interpretations that exist in scientific and popular literature, social systems have a common function, which is to form and regulate social attitudes, behavior, and interactions of individuals. In this context, states can be viewed as relatively autonomous social systems, and in a broader sense, global society can be analyzed as a complex and multi-level social system. The functioning of social systems is inconceivable without the presence of rules, norms, and institutional frameworks. These rules are created in order to satisfy the basic and derived needs of individuals participating in the system and to ensure relative stability and predictability. However, in the process of development, social systems inevitably reach a point at which the existing set of rules begins to lose its legitimacy and effectiveness. The rules no longer correspond to the changed realities and expectations, which gives rise to social tension and dissatisfaction. This state often becomes a prerequisite for a deep transformation or even for the destruction of the existing social system.

The transition from one social system to another is usually accompanied by cataclysms, such as economic collapses, political instability, social conflicts, and increased uncertainty. Historical experience shows that

such periods of transformation rarely proceed smoothly and painlessly. The turbulence that precedes these changes can be seen as an indicator that the system has entered a phase of exhaustion and that transformation is a matter of time.

Signals of impending changes in social systems manifest themselves in the form of a series of events and processes that follow a certain logic and sequence. Among them, the increased frequency of regional military conflicts, the growing tension in individual communities, mass protests, the crisis of trust in institutions, and the increasing social inequality can be highlighted. All these manifestations create a feeling of discomfort and instability in the coexistence of social groups.

A significant problem in this context is the discrepancy between the actions and expectations of those who govern social systems and those of the individuals who participate in them. When strategic goals and management decisions do not correspond to the real needs and expectations of society, a rupture in the social system becomes inevitable. Such a discrepancy increases the risk of social conflicts and accelerates the processes of destabilization.

Practically all the elements that characterize a state of tension and defection of existing social systems are present. The internal and external environments function in the conditions of a series of mutually reinforcing crises. This not only creates a feeling of failure of the existing social model, but also portends the inevitability of new transformations. The rules that have provided relative stability up to this point have exhausted their functionality and increasingly clearly need to be replaced with new ones, adequate to the changed conditions.

The behavioral analysis of contemporary social and political leaders also suggests the approach of a period of dramatic changes. Historically, the role of strong social leaders is most clearly manifested in periods of profound transformations, a manifestation of which we have observed after the end of the two world wars. At such moments, it is precisely leadership decisions that determine the framework and rules of the emerging social systems, affecting both large and small social communities.

The changes that are about to be accepted by individuals within the framework of the new social systems will not be equally bearable for everyone. For some people, they may prove difficult to accept, for others, practically insurmountable, and for still others, even threaten their physical survival. This further complicates the process of transformation and raises serious ethical and social questions.

It is obvious that in the modern world, new approaches and models for building social systems based on different rules of interaction and a new type of social relations are being sought. In this process, new social leaders will play a key role, who will determine the direction and nature of the changes.

The lack of sufficient in-depth research and effective tools for planning and forecasting these processes is a serious challenge. Even when some of the information is

limited for national security reasons, the need for interdisciplinary research involving experts from different scientific fields remains undeniable.

Social inequalities continue to deepen and create prerequisites for changing existing social systems. Paradoxically, even in the conditions of improving macroeconomic indicators and relatively favorable dynamics on the labor market, social problems remain deep and difficult to overcome. This shows that the mechanical application of economic measures is not enough to solve structural social problems.

The example of Bulgaria is indicative in this regard. By the end of the second quarter of 2024, the unemployment rate in the country was about 4.3% of the economically active population aged 15 to 64 - a relatively low level in a European and global context. Nevertheless, social inequalities not only persist, but also deepen. Data from national institutions show the presence of persistently vulnerable groups on the labor market – people with low education, long-term unemployed, people without professional qualifications, people with reduced work capacity, and young people under 29 years of age.

The set of policies used to influence social inequalities – active and passive labor market policies – is well known and widely implemented in different countries. Passive policies are usually aimed at financial support through social transfers, while active policies aim at integration through employment, training, and qualification. In certain periods, these policies are combined with the aim of temporarily controlling social tension, but they rarely lead to big structural changes. All this reveals the defects of existing social systems and their tendency to enter into recurring crisis states. Identifying these defects is not always easy, which leads to cyclicity and repetition of critical situations. As a result, social systems experience serious difficulties in dealing with the multitude of crises, and all participants in them are subjected to negative social, economic, and psychological impacts to varying degrees.

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4. POST-SOCIALIST TRANSFORMATIONS IN BULGARIA

The political and economic transformations at the end of the 20th century marked the beginning of one of the most profound and controversial periods in the modern history of Bulgaria and the countries of the former socialist camp. The collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the dismantling of the socialist system led to a sharp break in the established political, economic, and social ties. Although the political transition itself developed in a relatively short historical period, its social consequences turned out to be long-term and deeply structural.

The termination of the planned economic model and the transition to a market economy took place in conditions of limited institutional capacity and lack of accumulated practical experience. Economic fluctuations during the first years of the transition led to a collapse in production, a sharp decline in gross domestic product, and the loss of foreign markets. This gave rise to mass social insecurity and phenomena that had been unknown or weakly expressed in Bulgarian society until then - prolonged unemployment, impoverishment, and social marginalization of entire groups of the population. Local communities are forced to seek short-term and often painful solutions to deal with the crisis, which leads to the implementation of unpopular economic and social measures with severe consequences for the living standards of the population.

The social environment turns out to be the most sensitive area during the political and economic transition. The consequences on the labor market are so large-scale that in their intensity they can only be compared with the periods of the First and Second World Wars. Bulgarian society is facing deep trials, expressed in a sharp increase in unemployment, the impoverishment of broad social strata, and the erosion of social security.

The planned economy practically ceases to function, which leads to the closure of a large part of industrial enterprises and the complete disappearance of entire industries. The economic ties built for decades within the socialist bloc are interrupted, and the economy shrinks to a limited number of activities, mainly in the service and trade sectors. This creates a structural imbalance that, for a long time, hinders the recovery of the labor.

The consequences for employment are dramatic and are often described as close to a national catastrophe. The newly formed primary labor market in the conditions of a market economy is unable to absorb the growing number of people of working age. Mass layoffs become an everyday occurrence, with unemployment levels reaching critical levels in a number of regions of the country. This leads to a deepening of regional and social inequalities and an increase in public tension.

Social discontent finds expression in mass protests, strikes, and demonstrations. In parallel, the country is faced with hyperinflationary processes, difficulties in servicing the external debt, and an acute shortage of essential goods. In certain periods, it even leads to the

introduction of a coupon system - a measure typical of wartime conditions, which further emphasizes the depth of the crisis.

Employment services begin to play a key role as intermediaries between the unemployed and employers, but they themselves operate in conditions of limited capacity and lack adequate expertise. Professionals are facing completely new challenges, as until then, employment was regulated centrally. The number of job seekers significantly exceeds the number of vacancies, including among highly qualified individuals with significant work experience, making it extremely difficult to stabilize local labor markets.

Significant transformations are also occurring in the Bulgarian army, which is transitioning from conscript to professional military service. This process is accompanied by a drastic reduction in personnel, with about two-thirds of those employed being laid off. The social adaptation of these individuals, who possess specific skills and habits, is proving to be extremely difficult and necessitates the need for targeted retraining and social integration programs.

A particularly vulnerable group in this period is young people who complete their higher education without any professional experience. In the conditions of a shrinking labor market and limited demand for personnel, their opportunities for realization are minimal, which leads to migration processes and the outflow of human capital.

This entire complex of problems necessitates the urgent adoption of measures to limit social tension and to provide time resources to deal with structural deficits. Of particular importance is the definition of target groups on the labor market, which allows the formulation of more adequate and targeted policies.

In this context, the following main risk groups are identified: unemployed young people up to 29 years of age without work experience in the specialty; persons over 55 years of age; persons with low or no education; unemployed without professional qualifications; persons with permanent disabilities; long-term unemployed; and persons benefiting from temporary protection. Each of these groups requires a specific approach and a combination of measures regulated in the current legislation.

Of particular importance during this period are passive labor market policies related to the payment of cash benefits and social assistance. The amount and duration of these benefits are determined depending on the length of service and previous income, with the aim of temporarily ensuring minimum social protection. In addition, active policies aimed at temporary employment, training, and retraining are also applied.

A widespread measure is the community service programs, which engage unemployed persons in activities such as cleaning, landscaping, and security of public facilities. Although these programs have limited long-term employment effects, they perform an important social function to temporarily relieve tension. In parallel, employment companies are being established on a model borrowed from German practice, which

employs registered unemployed people with funds from the state budget.

Literacy and qualification programs are also being implemented in areas with a mixed population, aimed at improving basic skills and increasing employment opportunities. Stimulating employers by assuming social security contributions on the wages of employed and unemployed people is also part of the package of measures, although their effectiveness varies depending on regional conditions.

Despite all the actions taken, stabilization of the labor market is slow and with severe fluctuations. Governments have repeatedly been forced to increase social spending and implement temporary solutions that limit social tension rather than solve structural problems. These processes are characteristic of all post-socialist countries and have continued with varying intensity for more than two decades.

At a later stage, more structured policies were introduced through national and regional employment action plans, which aimed at a better match between labor demand and supply. However, the differences between local labor markets remain significant to this day, as a direct consequence of the deep and prolonged transformations of the transition from a planned to a market economy.

Political transformations inevitably go hand in hand with economic changes, and their social consequences are most pronounced in the sphere of employment. The dominance of the secondary labor market, financed mainly by the state budget, leads to a distortion of real market mechanisms and makes it difficult to objectively analyze processes. In a dynamic and crisis environment, decisions are often taken under pressure and out of necessity, which leads to temporary stabilization, but not to a lasting overcoming of the social and economic crises that have arisen (Terziev et al., 2025a).

5. FORMATION OF NEW SOCIAL SYSTEMS

The ongoing social processes in modern societies are of particular scientific and practical interest, as they directly or indirectly affect a significant part of the planet's population. In conditions of global interdependence and accelerated communication, local social changes are increasingly acquiring a transnational character. Similar processes, accompanied by large-scale social transformations, have also manifested themselves in previous historical eras, but their modern scope, intensity, and complexity significantly distinguish them from past analogies. Although one can speak of a certain cyclicity in the development of societies, each new transformation has a high degree of specificity, determined by the specific historical, technological, and cultural context.

The study of these processes, as well as the mechanisms of formation and establishment of new social leaders, is of key importance for the strategic management of social development. Social systems do not exist in isolation, but

function in constant interrelation with their internal and external environment. Regardless of the variety of definitions and interpretations in the scientific literature, they perform the fundamental function of forming social attitudes, values, and behavioral patterns of individuals. In this sense, states can be viewed as relatively independent social systems, and global society as a complex metasystem in which multiple substructures interact.

A special place in the analysis of modern social systems is occupied by the concept of the welfare state. The welfare state is a form of social organization in which the state or a well-established network of social institutions takes an active role in protecting and promoting the economic and social well-being of citizens. This model is based on the principles of equal opportunities, social justice, and social responsibility towards vulnerable groups that cannot independently provide minimal conditions for a decent life (Terziev et al., 2025a, 2025b). The form and trajectory of the welfare state vary significantly across countries and regions. What they have in common is the presence of private-public partnerships through which social services are administered and provided, as well as the multi-level territorial management of social policies. Historically, the first elements of the welfare state, such as public pensions and social security systems, appeared as early as the late 19th century in industrializing Western societies. Events such as World War I, the Great Depression, and World War II played a crucial role in expanding the social functions of the state, with the most mature forms of the welfare state being established in the post-war period.

The historical origin of the concept is associated with the German term "Sozialstaat", used as early as the 1870s to describe the social reforms introduced as part of Otto von Bismarck's policies. In the English-speaking world, the concept was established later, with intellectual and political debates in the first half of the 20th century playing a significant role in its popularization. These ideas reflect the desire to overcome the deep social divisions created by industrialization and to recognize the social value of labor.

Before an in-depth analysis of the processes in social systems, it is necessary to clarify the concept of "social structure". In sociology, it denotes the relatively stable forms of social organization that build society and, to a significant extent, determine the actions and interactions of individuals. In macro-sociological terms, social structure is associated with systems of social stratification, institutions, and relations between large social groups. In meso-sociology, the emphasis is on the networks of interactions between individuals and organizations, and in micro-sociology, on the role of norms and expectations that guide individual behavior. Social systems function on the basis of a set of rules, norms, and institutional mechanisms designed to satisfy certain needs of their participants and to ensure relative stability. However, in the process of development, these rules often become exhausted and begin to be perceived

as inadequate or unfair. It is this distortion of the normative framework that becomes one of the main prerequisites for profound social changes or the destruction of existing systems. Periods of transformation are usually accompanied by serious cataclysms that put societies under great stress.

Although historians and sociologists often speak of cyclicity in the development of social systems, this logic has limited explanatory power. Changes do not occur automatically, but are the result of specific circumstances and factors, such as economic, political, technological, and cultural, that put pressure on the system. The turbulence that precedes transformations can be seen as a signal that the existing model has reached the limits of its functionality.

Signals of impending changes are manifested through a series of events and processes that follow a certain logic – the increase in regional conflicts, the growth of social tension, a crisis of trust in institutions, and the deepening of social inequalities. The discrepancy between the actions of the ruling elites and the expectations of broad social groups proves to be particularly problematic. When this gap deepens, the destabilization of the social system becomes practically inevitable.

All elements of systemic tension in modern social systems are present. The internal and external environment function in the conditions of a series of interconnected crises that create a sense of exhaustion of the existing model. The rules that guaranteed relative stability in the past no longer correspond to the realities of the present and must be replaced with new normative and institutional frameworks adequate to the emerging social systems.

The analysis of the behavior of modern social and political leaders clearly shows the approach of a period of dramatic transformations. Historical experience shows that at such times, the role of leadership is decisive – both after the First and Second World Wars, it was the strong social leaders who set the parameters of the new social models. Their decisions influenced all levels of social organization and shaped the rules of functioning of the new systems.

The changes that are about to be accepted by individuals within the framework of the new social systems will not be equally bearable for everyone. For some, they will be difficult, for others unacceptable, and for still others, objectively impossible, which gives rise to serious social and ethical dilemmas. This further complicates the process of transformation and emphasizes the need for careful planning and management.

It is obvious that modern societies are in an active phase of searching for new models of social organization. The formation of new social systems implies the creation of different rules of interaction that will lead to a new type of social relations. In this process, new social leaders will play a key role, whose ability to balance between stability and change will be decisive for the direction of future development.

The lack of sufficiently in-depth research and effective tools for planning and forecasting these processes

remains a serious problem. Even when some of the information is limited for national security reasons, the need for rapid development of interdisciplinary research with the participation of experts from different fields is undeniable. Only through such an approach can a better understanding and more adequate management of the processes of formation of new social systems be achieved (Terziev et al., 2025a, 2025c).

6. FORMATION OF NEW SOCIAL CENTERS

Ongoing geopolitical changes logically imply profound transformations in social systems. The growing instability of the international order, the erosion of the established balances of power, and the emergence of new actors on the global stage lead to a restructuring of social relations. Increasingly, analysts and researchers predict dramatic changes that will lead to the formation of new social, economic, and political centers of influence. Although the question of when and with what intensity these changes will be realized remains open, there are sufficient empirical grounds to outline the main directions of their development.

Despite the difficulty of analyzing multidirectional and dynamic information with a high degree of accuracy, several relatively stable centers of influence can be identified. What they have in common is the possession of significant economic, financial, military, political, and cultural potential, which allows them not only to influence existing social systems but also to actively shape them. It is this ability for structural impact that creates prerequisites for relative predictability, but at the same time gives rise to a high degree of uncertainty about the future direction of global social development (Terziev et al., 2025a; 2025b; 2025c; 2025d).

6.1. Formed global financial centers

Financial centers occupy a key place in the process of forming new social systems, as the concentration of capital, investment flows, and financial instruments has a direct impact on the economic stability and social structure of societies. In this context, the data from the Global Financial Centers Index (GFCI), developed jointly by Z/Yen Partners (London) and the China Development Institute (CDI) in Shenzhen, is particularly indicative.

According to the 33rd edition of the index, New York retains its leading position as the most influential global financial center, followed by London and Singapore. GFCI 33 provides an assessment of the competitiveness of 120 leading financial centers, based on both quantitative indicators and expert assessments. The index uses over 150 instrumental factors provided by international organizations such as the World Bank, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the Economist Intelligence Unit, and the United Nations. These data are combined with tens of thousands of assessments of financial market

participants, making the GFCI one of the most authoritative guidelines for political and investment decisions.

The dominant role of these financial centers allows them to exert a significant influence on global economic processes, including financial stability, access to capital, and the development of social policies in individual countries. In this sense, financial centers function not only as economic, but also as social centers of power and influence.

6.2. Established global economic centers

Along with financial centers, global economic centers play a significant role in shaping new social realities. Despite differences in assessments and methodologies, the United States, the European Union, and the Asian region are most often identified as leading economic centers, with a clearly pronounced role for China, Japan, and South Korea.

The frequently used indicator of economic power (gross domestic product per capita) provides only a partial idea of the real potential of these centers. The more complete picture requires an analysis of other factors, such as production capacity, technological development, innovation activity, demographic trends, and the degree of integration into global value chains. It is the combination of these elements that transforms given regions into sustainable economic cores with a long-term impact on social systems.

6.3. Formed world military centers

Military power remains a key factor in the global distribution of influence, especially in conditions of growing geopolitical tension. The military potential of states is determined not only by the size of the armed forces, but also by the level of technological development, combat readiness, strategic capabilities, and integration of high-tech weapons systems.

According to data on the size of the armed forces, the largest armies in the world are maintained by China, the United States, India, Russia, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Countries such as South Korea, Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, and Vietnam, which also have significant military capacity, can be added to this group. The concentration of military power in these countries provides them with serious influence not only on a regional but also on a global scale, directly affecting political decisions and social processes.

6.4. World political centers

Political influence is another key dimension in the formation of new social centers. For decades, Washington has established itself as a dominant global political center, capable of influencing the public policies of many countries through diplomatic, economic, and military instruments. At certain periods, this influence is also realized through coercive mechanisms, which give rise to criticism and resistance from other global actors. However, the dynamics of international relations lead to the establishment of other significant political centers.

Moscow and Beijing are increasingly demonstrating their ambition and capacity to exert influence that goes far beyond their regional borders. Their actions in recent years show a desire for active participation in the formation of the new global order. Historical experience shows that both countries have occupied leading positions at different stages of the development of the international system, which further strengthens the legitimacy of their claims to global influence.

Along with them, other political centers of increasing importance in different parts of the world can be identified, whose influence gradually goes beyond the regional context. This multi-center distribution of political power creates the prerequisites for a more complex and less predictable global environment.

The identification of new social centers of influence requires a complex analysis of economic, financial, military, and political factors. There is no doubt that these centers will continue to actively participate in the already begun social transformations and will strive to expand their spheres of influence. It is their interaction and competition that will play a decisive role in the direction and nature of the formation of new social systems on a global scale (Terziev et al., 2025a; 2025b; 2025c; 2025d).

7. THE ROLE OF SOCIALLY DOMINANT LEADERS IN THE EMERGENCE AND DEEPENING OF CRISES

The role of socially dominant leaders in the emergence and deepening of crises occupies a central place in the analysis of contemporary social transformations. The fear arising from the ongoing and often difficult-to-explain social and political realities is not exaggerated; on the contrary, it becomes a sustainable state for both the societies directly affected and for external observers. Contradictory, inconsistent, and often ambiguous political messages undermine the sense of security and rational orientation of individuals, which leads to increased collective anxiety and distrust of institutions and leaders.

In the European and Bulgarian political context, societies have long been accustomed to incomplete, compromising, or even symbolic political messages. However, in recent years, there has been a growing expectation for more balanced, competent, and strategically oriented leadership. Instead, political wandering and postponement of decisions often occur, which occurs against the backdrop of a publicly visible unpreparedness to manage complex and interconnected crises. This creates a feeling of stagnation and exhaustion with the legitimacy of existing political models (Terziev et al., 2025a).

Personal and collective existence within the framework of established political systems gradually loses its meaningful and functional value. The inability of these systems to self-preserve and respond adequately to a dynamically changing world is a clear indicator that they are entering a stage of deep transformation. Such periods

are usually accompanied by painful transitional states characterized by conflicts, social polarization, and institutional instability. Historical experience shows that such processes rarely proceed smoothly, which makes the social costs of transformation particularly high.

Naturally, the question arises about the fate of political reality in such moments of systemic crisis, as well as about the place of the individual in this process. If the second question has a relatively simpler existential answer, then the first is significantly more complex and multi-layered. The social system, understood as a set of relationships, institutions, and norms, inevitably goes through a phase of rethinking and reconstruction. This implies a transformation of political models of governance and the very principles on which they are built (Petrova et al., 2025).

The failures, ups, and downs of various political realities show that crises are not an exception, but rather a natural stage in the development of social systems. The analysis and comparison of these processes have not only theoretical, but also practical value, as they allow us to identify recurring patterns and potential risks. New social processes will inevitably contain both familiar elements and completely new and difficult to predict characteristics that will require different approaches to management and adaptation.

In the process of forming a new political reality, attempts are often made to preserve certain elements of the old system. However, these efforts are rarely sustainable, since individual elements exist in close interrelation with the overall structure. Even when certain institutions or practices are formally preserved, they usually function in a completely changed context and with different social meanings.

When the defects of a political system reach a point where they cannot be corrected by reform, its destruction often occurs in an avalanche-like manner. The consequences of such a breakdown are spread unevenly, affecting different social groups and territories with different intensity. This gives rise to fluctuations and reactions that are often misunderstood due to their novelty and unpredictability. The lack of adequate interpretative frameworks further complicates social adaptation.

The contemporary environment is saturated with numerous signals of systemic changes, which are amplified by technological opportunities for the creation and dissemination of information. Actors who have greater resources and influence are significantly more effective in imposing interpretations and shaping public opinion. This process is not aimed solely at survival, but rather at asserting dominance and control over emerging social dependencies.

In this context, socially dominant leaders play a crucial role. They not only claim leadership but also actively participate in defining the new social relations that subsequently shape political and institutional systems. Political realities are a consequence, not the root cause, of these social relations. From a historical perspective, the upheavals in the newly formed social systems are

short, but for their participants, they are experienced as long and exhausting periods of uncertainty.

These processes are inherently extremely complex and difficult to predict. Even with a significant amount of data and information, the impact of individual elements cannot be accurately measured. Social defects accumulated over time exert cumulative pressure on the system and accelerate its transformation. The main question remains not whether change will occur, but how societies will go through this long and risky process.

The effectiveness of any social system is closely related to its economic and financial resources, but also to the behavioral patterns of its leaders. History knows many cases in which the individual behavior of specific leaders has had a disproportionately large impact on the development of entire social systems. These behavioral factors can both accelerate transformation and lead to long-term stagnation and inefficiency.

Historical analysis clearly shows that major social transformations often take place under the influence of new social leaders. A typical example in this regard is the socialist system in the Soviet Union, whose evolution and subsequent collapse were strongly influenced by the actions and decisions of key political figures. Despite its theoretical validity, socialism as a system turns out to be highly dependent on leadership models, which calls into question its sustainability.

Socialism as a political philosophy encompasses a wide range of economic and social models, characterized by various forms of public ownership and state intervention. Despite the diversity of interpretations, the common aspiration is towards social justice and the limitation of social inequalities. However, the practical application of these ideas shows significant discrepancies between theory and reality, especially in the context of centralized management and a command economy.

A particularly telling example of the role of a socially dominant leader in the process of systemic transformation is Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev. His policy of “perestroika” and “glasnost” aimed at modernization and humanization of the socialist system, but instead of stabilization, it led to an acceleration of the processes of disintegration. This clearly illustrates the dual role of leadership as a potential driver of reform and as a catalyst for a systemic crisis.

It can be noted that the role of socially dominant leaders in the emergence of crises is key, but not unambiguous. They act within the framework of existing social structures and constraints, but through their decisions can significantly accelerate or slow down the processes of transformation. Understanding this role is essential for the analysis of modern social systems and the search for more sustainable models of social development.

The study of current modern social processes acquires particular significance in conditions of accelerated dynamics and increasing unpredictability. Unlike the more recent historical past, when social changes manifested themselves through relatively stable and recognizable signals, today transformations occur suddenly, often without prior indications, and with a high

degree of intensity. This places social systems in the need for rapid and timely reactions, which can rarely be based on a thorough and complete analysis.

The emergence and establishment of new socially dominant leaders is becoming a key factor in the direction and speed of these transformations. Their influence is manifested not only through their formal powers but also through their personal behavioral characteristics, value orientations, ideas, and sometimes irrational views. It is this combination of rational and irrational elements that makes their impact on social systems particularly strong and in many cases decisive. This necessitates the development of a new criterion and analytical apparatus capable of providing relatively rapid, reliable, and objective information about these processes, a task whose implementation is extremely difficult in real conditions. Social processes during severe crisis situations are characterized by an accelerated pace of development, which makes their detailed and systematic description practically impossible. Traditional research approaches often prove to be inapplicable or belated, which necessitates the search for alternative methodological solutions. The analysis of the behavioral models of socially dominant leaders acquires particular importance, since it is through them that key decisions are made in crisis conditions.

In this process, researchers face two main groups of problems. The first is related to access to accurate, timely, and reliable information. Data collected through statistical and sociological methods are often incomplete, delayed, or subject to institutional control and filtration, especially when it comes to issues affecting national security. Even when such information exists, its use for scientific analysis is limited and highly contextual.

The second group of problems arises from the difficulty in assessing the dynamically changing behavioral characteristics of the leaders themselves. The personality traits, motivation, and management style of the socially dominant leader are not static quantities, but are transformed in the course of his management and under the pressure of the crisis environment. Publicly available information about these processes is usually formed through the media and other secondary sources, which further complicates the construction of an objective and reliable analytical picture.

In certain situations, overcoming these two groups of difficulties may prove to be practically impossible, which calls into question the applicability of classical research approaches. Nevertheless, the need for an analysis of the influence of socially dominant leaders on social processes remains indisputable. Even partial, conditional, and contextual conclusions can have significant value for understanding the direction of development of social systems.

Historical experience provides numerous analogous examples in which the behavior of leaders in conditions of severe crises cannot be explained solely by rational economic or political arguments. The two world wars can be conditionally considered as such social processes in which the decisions of dominant leaders changed not

only the course, but also the very logic of the development of societies. The essential difference from modern processes is the speed – historical transformations proceeded significantly slower compared to today's accelerated social dynamics.

The factors of the internal and external environment today are changing not only qualitatively, but also quantitatively, which enhances their impact on social processes. Although the study of these factors is of essential importance, the question remains open to what extent they actually influence the decisions and behavior of socially dominant leaders. In many cases, this answer becomes clear only post facto, when a certain stage of social transformation has already been completed.

Leaders who have concentrated power and significant resources, political, economic, military, and financial, tend to make decisions of a pronounced operational and short-term nature in crisis situations. These decisions are often based not so much on long-term strategic logic as on psychological, ideological, or personal motives. In moments of acute crisis, the instruments of power are usually concentrated in the hands of a small group of individuals, which further increases the importance of individual leadership behavior.

The analysis of modern global social processes allows us to conclude that they are, to a significant extent, guided by a new type of socially dominant leaders. The term “new” should be understood conditionally, as in many cases it refers to actors who previously held leading positions in states, corporations, or international structures, but only in the current context have they acquired a decisive influence on global processes.

The imposition of new social rules and regulatory mechanisms within the framework of emerging social systems seems practically inevitable. These processes more often occur in an evolutionary than in a revolutionary form, but are nevertheless accompanied by local conflicts, financial turmoil, and political instability. Resistance to change is a natural reaction of social systems, but it cannot stop the long-term logic of transformation.

Unfortunately, scientific analysis of these processes often lags behind their real development. Although retrospective studies have their value, their practical usefulness is significantly more limited compared to timely analytical efforts. This is precisely why early, albeit incomplete, studies are of key importance in preparing societies for new social realities.

The understanding that societies can rely only on their current level of preparedness carries serious risks. There are good reasons to believe that some communities and their leaders will find themselves unprepared or even unable to function adequately in the new social environment. This makes the need for systematic research and early adaptation not just an academic matter, but a strategic priority for future social development (Terziev et al., 2025a).

8. DYSFUNCTIONS OF SOCIAL SYSTEMS – DYNAMICS, MANIFESTATIONS, AND CONSEQUENCES

Social systems function on the basis of clearly or implicitly formulated rules, norms, and internal dependencies that regulate the interactions between individuals and institutions. Their fundamental goal is to ensure relative stability and meet the needs of their participants – economic, social, cultural, and existential. When these systems begin to produce tension instead of security, an objective danger to their sustainable existence arises. It is at this point that the first manifestations of systemic dysfunction can be identified. The tension in social systems is expressed in a growing discrepancy between the expectations and needs of the participants and the real opportunities that the system provides. This discrepancy can be the result of both the emergence of new social needs and values in the course of development and the accumulation of internal contradictions that have been ignored or temporarily compensated for a long time. In conditions of crisis, these contradictions come to the surface and begin to act as a catalyst for change.

Although tensions in social systems can be classified according to different criteria – economic, political, cultural, or institutional. More significant is their impact on the overall logic of the functioning of the system. Crises, regardless of their origin, give rise to dynamics of change that can lead to both adaptation and evolutionary development, and to radical transformation or even collapse. In this sense, dysfunctions are not an exception, but a natural stage in the life cycle of social systems.

Attempts to preserve existing social systems in their original or seemingly stable form are characteristic of periods of increasing tension. However, when structural defects are deep and systemic, such efforts rarely lead to a sustainable result. Social elites and ruling groups formulate new requirements and visions of development, which are often aimed at preserving their power and influence, but at the same time accelerate the processes of transformation.

The objective prerequisites for change are reinforced by the emergence of new paradigms and social demands, as well as by the multitude of interconnected crises – economic, political, ecological, and value-based. Leading social leaders contribute to this through their behavior, public messages, and decisions that create expectations for radical change, even when there is no clearly outlined strategy for its implementation.

In the process of social interaction, dominant leaders use the entire available set of tools – institutional, communication, and symbolic- to impose their visions and interests. These visions do not always coincide with the real needs and expectations of the majority of participants in the social system, which leads to additional instability. The uncertain social environment, in turn, gives rise to new and often contradictory expectations for the future, which deepen the feeling of systemic crisis.

Scientific and research approaches to the management of social changes provide valuable but limited tools for analysis. In conditions of accelerated dynamics and high complexity, they often give partial or even misleading results, especially when applied mechanically and without taking into account the context. This requires a critical attitude towards their applicability and the need for interdisciplinary and adaptive analytical frameworks. Historical retrospection shows that social systems increasingly begin to obey the managerial views and decisions of socially dominant leaders. These decisions are not always the result of rational analysis, but rather a desire for the rapid realization of strategic goals. In certain situations, dominant leaders seek to transform existing social systems, adapting them to their views and interests. In other, more extreme cases, they try to destroy existing structures and build new systems in their place. From the point of view of participants in social systems, such processes are often perceived as the most critical and traumatic. For dominant leaders, however, they may seem pragmatic and even inevitable. In the course of these transformations, various factors of the internal and external environment – economic, technological, cultural, and geopolitical – have an ambiguous influence. They can be carriers of both progressive and regressive ideas, the meaning and support of which change over time.

It would be illusory to assume that newly created or transformed social systems will achieve complete sustainability and acceptability for all participants. The new rules and conditions of functioning inevitably subject individuals to tests that they have not experienced in previous stages of their development. As a result, most participants strive for adaptation, but a significant part of them turn out to be unable to adapt.

Conditionally, these individuals can be divided into two main groups. The first includes individuals and communities that consciously reject the new social rules due to value or ideological disagreement. The second group includes those who, due to their social, cultural, or economic status, turn out to be structurally unsuitable for the new conditions. Although the number of these groups is often not sufficient to stop the system from moving forward, their existence is an indicator of deep social faults.

The growing number of dysfunctions shows that current social systems are in a state of increased vulnerability and even potential collapse. Impact processes are becoming increasingly complex to study and manage, as they are subject to counterintuitive influences and mutually reinforcing factors. Different causes often lead to similar consequences, which makes it difficult to formulate unambiguous explanations and effective management decisions.

It is undeniable that societies around the world are entering a period of profound changes that will transform both the nature of social systems and the rules of their functioning. Existing research methods provide only partial answers to their future development, which poses serious challenges to the scientific community.

The main challenges are related to the speed at which scientific research must develop and the need to combine different analytical approaches. Only by integrating sociological, economic, political, and behavioral analyses can a more accurate and adequate picture of the ongoing processes be achieved and more substantiated conclusions be formulated regarding the future of social systems (Terziev et al., 2025a; Georgiev & Solovev, 2024a; 2024b; Simeonov, 2025; Georgiev & Simeonov, 2025).

9. CONCLUSION

The sequence and superposition of multiple crises at the beginning of the 21st century led to a permanent deepening of imbalances in social systems. The different scale, intensity, and speed of impact of these crises subject societies to a series of cyclical, but unequal in nature, tests, which are increasingly difficult to understand within the framework of traditional analytical models. Social systems find themselves placed in conditions of permanent tension, in which stability is not a sustainable state, but a temporary result of continuous adaptation efforts.

Establishing the real scale of the changes occurring both at the macro level - global and national social structures, and at the micro level - individual behavior, social attitudes, and local communities, proves to be extremely complex. The consequences of these changes are often nonlinear, mutually reinforcing, and difficult to predict. In this context, the use of a standard set of scientific methods and management approaches proves to be insufficient for the adequate description, analysis, and forecasting of the ongoing processes. The main limiting factor is the accelerated dynamics of social transformations, which do not provide the necessary time for in-depth and objective analysis before making decisions.

The processes examined in this paper clearly show that modern social systems function in conditions of structural uncertainty, caused by the combined impact of health, economic, geopolitical, technological, and value crises. In this environment, the role of socially dominant

leaders acquires particular importance, since their decisions, behavioral models, and interpretations of reality can accelerate, slow down, or radically change the direction of social development. Leadership is being established not only as a management resource, but also as a factor capable of creating or deepening systemic dysfunctions.

The analysis of the dysfunctions of social systems shows that the discrepancy between the expectations of participants and the real capabilities of the system is becoming a key source of tension. Attempts to preserve existing models through partial and short-term measures increasingly rarely lead to sustainable results. Instead, they often postpone inevitable transformations and increase the social cost of future changes. In this sense, crises should not be viewed solely as a threat, but also as an indicator of the exhaustion of a given model of social organization.

The present analysis confirms the thesis that societies are already in an active phase of forming new social systems, new rules of interaction, and new centers of influence. This process is accompanied by resistance, social conflicts, and uneven adaptation, but it also opens up opportunities for rethinking the principles of social justice, efficiency, and solidarity. The ability of individuals and communities to adapt to these changes becomes a decisive factor for their future social inclusion or exclusion.

The study of these processes requires full-scale, interdisciplinary efforts and the accumulation of diverse research experience. A synthesis between sociology, economics, political science, psychology, and leadership studies is needed to allow a better understanding of the complex nature of contemporary social transformations. This is essential not only for the scientific understanding of crises, but also for the development of more effective strategies for planning, management, and exiting the critical states in which social systems find themselves.

Acknowledgement:

The author would like to thank the reviewers for their valuable comments and suggestions, which helped to improve the quality of this paper.

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Modern Social Systems in Conditions of Permanent Crisis: Transformations, Dysfunctions, and the Role of Socially Dominant Leaders