

Research on the Extremism Awareness Level of Students

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the problem of awareness of modern students of higher educational institutions about such a socially destructive phenomenon as extremism and its consequences. The authors note that today the problem is gaining high relevance, especially in view of the frequent cases of manipulation of young people minds in order to incite them to extremist activities. The article presents the results of the questionnaire of Moscow Automobile and Road State Technical University students on the topic "The attitude of MADI students to the manifestations of extremism". The respondents were asked the following issues: what is extremism, the level of relevance of the problem in modern Russia, effective ways to counteract extremist activities. The survey also established the respondents' attitude to extremist groups, as well as their own experience of encounters with extremism. As a result of the survey, it was revealed that the majority of the survey participants have some knowledge about extremism and priority measures to combat them. However, the percentage of respondents who expressed loyalty to representatives of extremist organizations, as well as noted a tendency to personally experience negative emotions towards other nationalities and religions, causes wariness. Today's students mostly recognize the need to fight extremism, but tend to shift the responsibility for providing this counteraction to the state, law enforcement agencies and other socio-political structures.

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Ключевые слова: student, higher education, extremism, extremism awareness, research, questionnaire

Introduction

The processes of social transformation that have taken place in Russia over the past decades have not left the vast majority of aspects of socio-political, economic and cultural relations in society unchanged. A sharp jump in the development of digital communication channels, the growing popularity of the virtual environment and social networks made possible the creation of an environment prone to socially dangerous phenomena, including the manifestation of extremism and political manipulation. The risk group is the youth social group – it is this part of society that tends to express confidence in social networks and the Internet, and prefers to carry out the vast majority of activities (communication, search and consumption of information) in a virtual environment.

The relevance of the study is due to the increased need for an acute counteraction on the part of the state and various public institutions to extremist manifestations. Extremist activity is listed by the state as one of the main threats to state and public security.

Public attention is drawn to the increasing incidences of physical violence among young people. Frequently such conflicts among young people based on racial, national and religious differences (Bokarev, 2012; Gnatyuk et al., 2017). Youth extremism, as a rule, manifests itself through aggressive behavior of young people towards others (specific people, social groups and institutions, etc.). Such clashes are not uncommon among students (Minzaripov, 2020). This is most often seen in educational institutions where the educational process takes into account the possibility of integrating foreign students.

Considering the term “extremism” today, one can meet a large number of interpretations, which is due to the interdisciplinary nature of the investigated problem. In the context of the sociological consideration of the problem, extremism is defined as deviant behavior, conscious and ideologically justified, expressed in actions aimed at the complete or partial denial of the existing social structure (Vekhov, 2009).

In modern political science, there is no single definition of the phenomenon of extremism. The differences in definitions depend on the phenomenon aspect chosen for the study. This may include the methods used by extremist groups to achieve their goals, the ideological component of the phenomenon, its practical orientation, or a combination in the approach to determining all of these components. However, the most common approach is to regard extremism as a political practice. So, for example, Goetz (2011) gives the term “extremism” the following interpretation: “the interaction of opposition groups and individuals aimed at seizing and retaining political power or its destabilization using illegal means and methods, including violence (Goetz, 2011)”

The definition of extremism as a socio-political practice can be traced both in the legislative acts of modern states and in international documents that record measures to combat extremism.

In accordance with the Federal Law of the Russian Federation, dated 25 July 2002, No. 114-FZ “On Countering Extremist Activities” (as amended on July 31, 2020 No. 299-FZ), modern Russian legislation also defines extremism as activity: “forcible change of the foundations of the constitutional order and (or) violation of the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation (including alienation of part of the territory of the Russian Federation),

except for the delimitation, demarcation, redemarkation of the state border of the Russian Federation with neighboring states.” (<http://base.garant.ru>)

However, we cannot ignore the viewpoint that youth attitude to life is not limited to politics and can permeate all types of human activity (Belentsov, 2017; Fakhrutdinova & Kondrateva, 2016). From this point of view, extremism is considered not as a phenomenon, but as an ideology that allows the use of extreme measures in order to achieve the desired effect.

Methods

In accordance with the main purpose of this study, we have solved the following tasks:

- 1 The study of the approaches to the definition of the term “extremism” in modern scientific fields was conducted.
- 2 The analysis of the current literature devoted to the phenomenon of extremism as a social phenomenon, including the features and causes of extremism among students, is carried out.
- 3 A questionnaire survey of students of the Moscow Automobile and Road State Technical University was conducted, in order to identify the attitude of today’s students to extremism, determine the level of awareness of this social group about extremism and ways to combat it.

The study combines the tools of theoretical and empirical methods. The theoretical part of the work is based on the analysis and comparison of the literature devoted to the study of the problem of extremism in general, as well as the manifestations of extremism among young people, especially among students.

The practical part of the research consists in conducting a survey, then processing and analyzing the results of the survey. In total, respondents were asked to answer 17 questions during the survey. The structure of the questionnaire consists of three sections:

- 1 Questions aimed at determining the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents (age, sex, place of residence).
- 2 Questions related to respondents’ ideas about extremism and their attitude to the phenomenon.
- 3 Questions on the respondents’ position on the methods of countering extremism used today.

The survey was conducted between November 2020 and January 2021. The respondents were 169 students of the Moscow Automobile and Road State Technical University aged from 17 to 25 years. 8% of respondents indicated the age under 18, 35% – from 18 to 20 years, 57% – from 20 to 25 years. The respondents were distributed by sex as follows: 68% of the respondents identified themselves as male and 32% as female.

Results and Discussion

The analysis of the results obtained during the survey allows us to draw a number of conclusions about the level of students’ awareness about extremism and their attitude to this phenomenon.

To the question “Do you know what extremism is?”, more than half of the respondents (55%) answered “I know”. 37% of respondents chose the answer “vaguely imagine”. Only 8% said they did not know what extremism was. Next, the survey participants were asked to answer whether they had experienced any manifestations of extremism. The structure of the responses shows that 9% of respondents often encountered extremist activities. 45% reported isolated incidents, and 46% said they had never encountered extremism.

To achieve one of the primary tasks of the study – to identify the attitude of students to the manifestations of extremism – the questionnaire included the question “How do you feel about the representatives of extremist organizations?”. The structure of the respondents’ responses is shown in Figure 1.

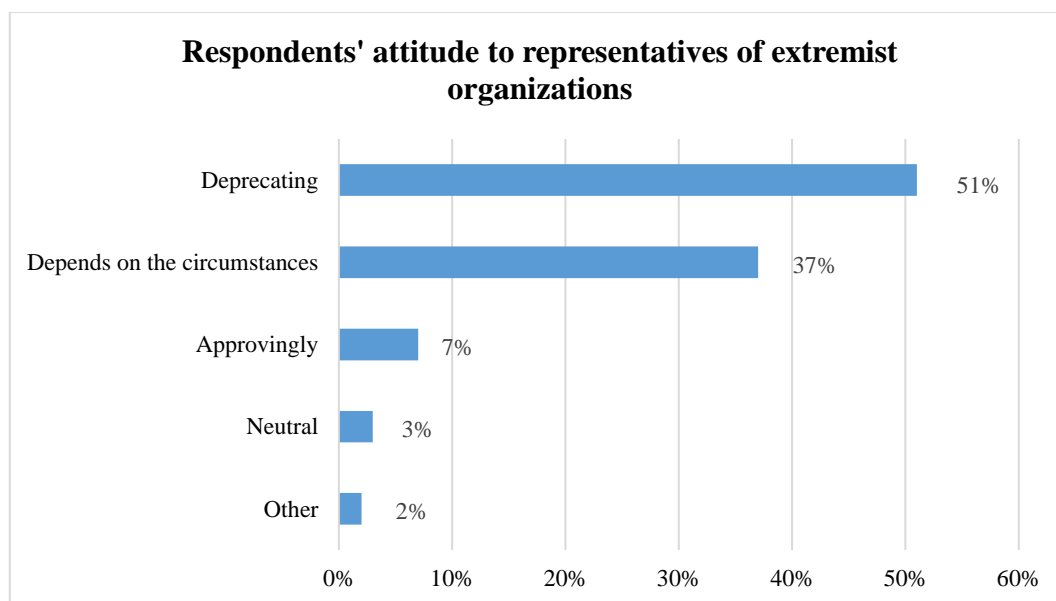


Figure 1. Distribution of respondents' answers to the question “How do you feel about representatives of extremist organizations?”

Based on the responses received, it can be concluded that the vast majority of respondents have a negative attitude towards representatives of extremist groups and express condemnation of this phenomenon. However, 37% of respondents form their attitude to extremists depending on the particular circumstances, which causes a certain wariness. It is most likely that this approach is due to a lack of knowledge about extremism as a socially dangerous phenomenon, as well as its negative consequences for society and the state as a whole. Despite the fact that the number of respondents who expressed their approval of extremist activities is quite low (8%), the presence of such responses allows us to judge the insufficiency of today’s measures aimed at combating extremism.

The questionnaire also included questions related to the level of hostility in society towards other nationalities and adherents of other faiths. To the question “How often do you think people feel hostility or irritation towards people of a different nationality/religion?” slightly less than half of the respondents (49%) chose the answer “sometimes”. According to 34% of respondents, negative emotions towards representatives of other nationalities and/or religions are common; 17% believe that differences based on nationality/religion do not cause hostility in society. The next stage of the survey was to determine the degree of dislike of the respondents themselves in relation to representatives of other religions and nationalities. The

statistics of the responses showed that in total, more than 57% of the respondents tend to experience negative emotions towards representatives of other nationalities and religions always or in most cases, and 43% expressed the absence of such hostility and a tolerant attitude.

The participants of the survey were also asked to answer the question whether they had personally been in conflict situations that arose because of national differences. 78% of respondents said that they did not take part in such conflicts, and 21% gave a positive answer to the question.

Within the framework of the study, it is also highly relevant to determine not only the level of awareness of students about the phenomenon of extremism itself, but also the level of awareness of this youth group about ways to prevent and counteract extremist manifestations. According to the results of the survey, 63% of respondents know where to appeal in cases of extremism, and the remaining 37% do not have such information.

An even smaller number of students are willing to take part in the fight against extremism when it comes to providing assistance to law enforcement officials to counter extremist activities – only a third of respondents (34%) are willing to provide such assistance. 66% of respondents stated that they had no intention to help law enforcement agencies in the fight against terrorism.

In the final part of the questionnaire, the respondents answered a number of questions aimed at identifying the degree of relevance of the problem of extremism for modern students, as well as ideas about ways to counter extremist manifestations. The survey participants assessed the relevance of the problem of extremism in Russia and the place of respondents' residence on a five-point scale, according to which "1" is absolutely not a relevant problem for Russia, and "5" is a very high degree of relevance of this problem. The response statistics are shown below in Figure 2 and Figure 3.

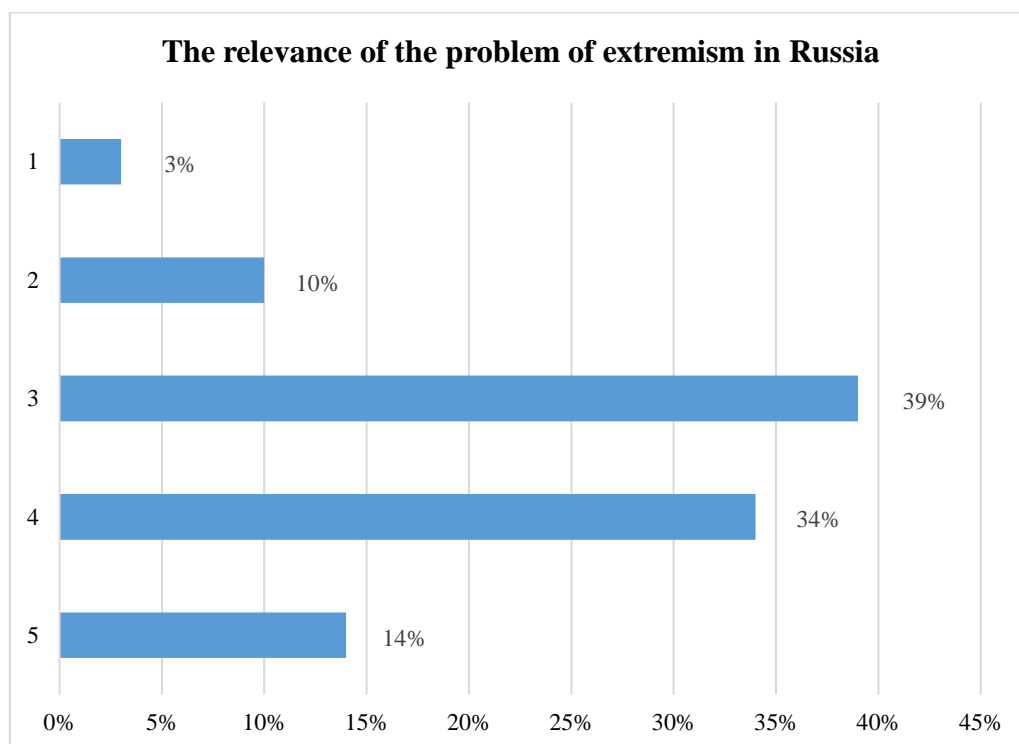


Figure 2. Distribution of respondents' answers to the question "How urgent is the problem of extremism in Russia?"

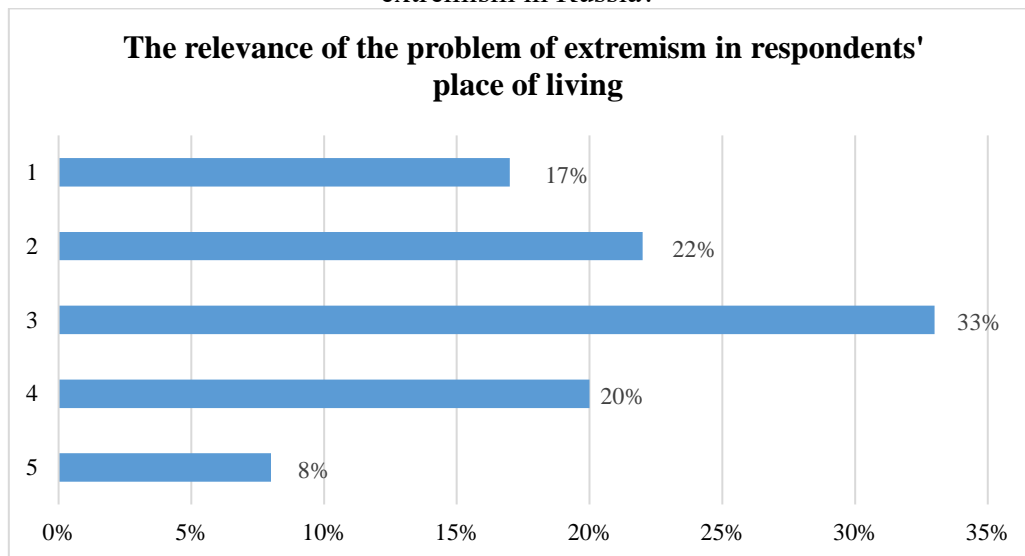


Figure 3. Distribution of respondents' answers to the question "How urgent is the problem of extremism in your place of living?"

These response statistics shows that respondents are not inclined to devalue the problem of extremism or, on the contrary, to attach increased importance to it. The survey participants consider the manifestation of extremism to be an average urgent problem both across the country and in the projection of the current place of respondents' living. However, there is a significant difference in the number of respondents who chose the answers "1" or "5". Based on it, we can conclude that on a more global scale (on a national level) the survey participants consider the problem of extremism to be more urgent than the problem in their regions of residence.

Next, the respondents were asked to answer questions related to measures to counter extremism in modern realities. To the question "On whom, in your opinion, does the solution of the problems of countering extremism depend?" the responses were distributed as follows: "from law enforcement agencies" – 31%, "from the effectiveness of legislation" – 30%, "from the general population" – 29%. The lowest number of respondents said that the opposition to extremist activities depends on them personally.

The questionnaire also suggested choosing the measures that the respondents believe should be taken to effectively counter extremism (Figure 4).

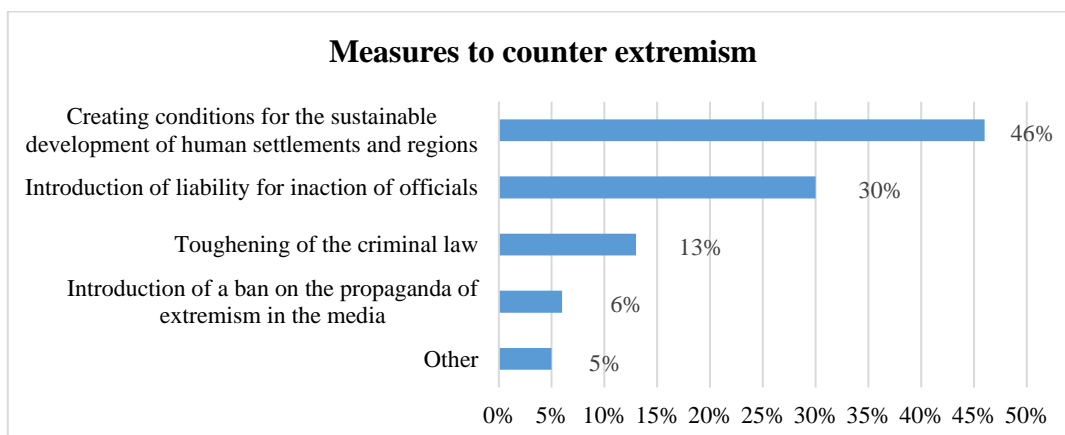


Figure 4. Distribution of respondents' answers to the question "What do you think should be done to effectively counter extremism?"

The distribution of responses shows that according to the respondents' opinion, the priority measure in the fight against extremism is the need to create conditions for the sustainable development of settlements and regions – this position was expressed by 46% of respondents. However, the fight against extremist activities through the influence of the state on the mass media, which has been particularly evident in the Russian media field in recent years, is not an effective enough measure in countering extremism for the vast majority of respondents.

The final issue of the study was to identify the factors that, from the students' point of view, are catalysts in the process of increasing the sustainability of the development of regions and localities. As the most effective measure, the majority of respondents identified an increase in the level of wages and social security of residents (36%). The least number of respondents chose the answer "limiting migration" (10%). Almost an equal number of participants in the study believe that the most effective way to increase the sustainability of the development of regions and localities is to reduce the unemployment rate by opening new jobs (25%) and the development of road transport infrastructure that provides increased mobility and quality of life for the population (27%).

Summary

Young people as a social group are characterized by such features of behavior and ways of perceiving the environment as: increased energy, the desire to find their own way of life, maximalism, passionarity. The combination of these traits with an insufficiently formed consciousness and, as a result, exposure to outside influence, as well as an increased desire for self-realization through any methods makes young people one of the most vulnerable to extremist influence social group. Researchers working on this topic support this point of view. For example, researchers. Zubok and Chuprov believe that young people are characterized by incompleteness of social status, marginality of social positions and uncertainty of social identifications (Chuprov & Zubok, 2008). Young people, including students, are also at high risk of being involved in extremist activity due to the current situation in the country: the crisis of Russian socio-political system, the uneven development of the regions, the growing economic inequality of a significant part of the population, and young people in particular, the crisis of the value system in Russian society (Fakhrutdinova et al., 2019; Maklakova et al., 2019).

Thus, today there is an acute problem of the necessity to raise awareness of students about socially dangerous phenomena, including extremism. Determining the level of students' knowledge about extremist manifestations is one of the primary tasks for higher educational institutions, the successful implementation of which will allow forming an educational and extracurricular process focused on well-timed detection and counteraction of extremism in the student environment.

Conclusions

The results of the study allow us to make sure that today the situation with the level of awareness of students about extremism is quite difficult. Despite the fact that the majority of the survey participants have some knowledge about extremist activities and priority measures

to combat them, the percentage of respondents who expressed loyalty to representatives of extremist organizations, as well as noted a tendency to personally experience negative emotions towards other nationalities and religions, makes us doubt the sufficiency of anti-extremist measures implemented today.

Students generally recognize the existence of problems in modern society and understand the degree of its urgency (Maklakova et al., 2019). In addition, the respondents show an understanding of what measures in the fight against extremism have real effectiveness (Petrova & Romanova, 2018).

However, it is indicative of the tendency of young people to stay away from the practical solution of the extremism problem, as well as their refusal of potential assistance by law enforcement agencies in this struggle. A whole complex of reasons causes such statistics: the distrust of law enforcement agencies inherent in young people, the fear of negative consequences of such assistance, and a low awareness of the consequences of extremist activities for the development of society and its institutions. Thus, we can conclude that today's students mostly recognize the need to fight extremism, but tend to shift the responsibility for providing this counteraction to the state, law enforcement agencies and other socio-political structures. Only a small part of the respondents agreed with the statement that the solution to the problem depends on the people themselves.

We conclude that the awareness of modern students about extremism as a socially dangerous phenomenon cannot be called low, but its level is insufficient to conduct effective counteraction. Based on this, we can talk about the need to strengthen the current agenda on the danger of extremism, as well as adjust the activities of public institutions, including higher education institutions, in terms of raising awareness of young people about the destructive nature of extremist manifestations.

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