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YOUTH EXTREMISM IN THE CONTEXT OF IDEOLOGY ISSUES

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Abstract

The article aims to analyze social transformations in society that change integrity of the cultural space of Russian society, form new opposing segments. All these social transformations cause such social phenomena as intergenerational discrimination, antisocial orientations and illegal behavior of young people, youth extremism, ethnocentrism and terrorism. The authors focus on their causes – unsafe and dangerous behavior of the youth. The phenomenon of youth extremism and extremism is studied from various methodological points; special attention is paid to the sociocultural approach. An attempt to prove that these forms of social behavior are risk factors and threats to national security was made. Youth extremism is often used by various influential political groups and parties in their interests, since it is uncompromising, more spontaneous, and has no ideological basis. The authors conclude that youth extremism is due to the level of development of spiritual culture and severity of socio-economic processes threatening public and spiritual security. They destroy social ties, disrupt social institutions and cultural values. The problem of national self-identification is becoming acute. The problem can be solved by forming a cohesive society and ensuring spiritual security of youth, which is a priority task of patriotic and ideological education.

1. Introduction

The social life of modern Russia is characterized by radical and global changes in ideology, economics, politics, law, education, culture, which is manifested in the modernization of the system of social values, socialization vectors associated with the younger generation. There are positive factors (youth independence, personal responsibility). Nevertheless, close attention should be paid to the current problems – the collapse of integrity of the cultural space of Russia manifested in segments alien and hostile to each other which can cause global confrontation of cultural values, disintegration of the younger generation, intergenerational discrimination. These problems are due to the fact that ideologized society develops fundamental values in young people. In extreme situations, they stabilize social relations. Otherwise, rejection of universal valid ideals contributes to the fact that the desire for success, social prestige, wealth becomes a motivational value having ugly, asocial forms – antisocial orientations, youth extremism and terrorism.

The article attempts to identify and analyze causes and consequences of unsafe and dangerous behavior of young people in the modern social space.

2. Problem Statement

The phenomenon of extreme youth and youth extremism has been studied by researchers for a long time. According to sociologists, extremeness is a form of maximalism of a young person (social group), causing an identity crisis, due to age-related psychophysiological characteristics, transitive social status, the contradictory nature of spiritual values, as well as historical reasons related to the transitiveness of the modern era (Zubok & Chuprov, 2008). The extremeness of youth has manifested itself especially vividly, since its inherent uncertainty of sociocultural and ethnocultural identification exacerbates its self-esteem and assessment of external factors, giving rise to the image of a "stranger". Young people sharply react to crisis conditions in society, especially when the crisis is protracted. The resulting contradiction of self-consciousness is the absence of ideology which manifests itself in spiritual deviant practices of young people in the form of nihilism and fanaticism, reinforcing socio-political extremeness closely adjacent to youth extremism.

In these conditions, it is necessary to distinguish between the concepts "extremism" and "extremism". If all manifestations of youth activity are strictly driven into the "allowed / prohibited" framework, and extremism is reduced to political forms, any creativity, including social one, will go beyond the limits of what is allowed.

Due to the fact that the article deals with extremism in the youth environment, the article tries to formulate definitions of extremism based on the analysis of existing approaches.

Extremism is a denial of the laws existing in society, cultural norms and values, their destruction and disappearance of their regulatory functions. Extremism is an anti-civilization process leading to a revival of barbarism and savagery (Motroshilova, 2010). Extremism is a complex phenomenon involving certain forms of ideology and elements of group self-organization. Therefore, opposition cannot be reduced to legislative and law enforcement measures. An integrated approach is required. Intentions and ideas differ from practical extremist actions. It is important for specialized organizations to take into

account interests of youth, identify social tension and alienation in society, an ability to prevent such situations. The most reliable preventive measure is to increase the level of culture, ideology, patriotism in the youth environment.

3.   Research Questions

The article aims to answer the questions: "Where is the security border between extremism in the broad sense and extremism in its political form in the youth environment?" "Is such a social factor as ideology and civil self-consciousness restraining in extremism?"

It seems that extremism can be attributed to a threat to national security, since young people are not only a specific socio-demographic group with their own forms of behavior. They are subjects with value orientations and norms (Campelo et al., 2018). Unfortunately, destroying the spiritual potential of youth, society closes its path to prosperous future.

It is often claimed that youth extremism is based on ethnocentrism. In its extreme form, it is a combination of emotional and sensory states, group conflicting ideas and ideology of hostility of some ethnic groups. This form of politically oriented ethnocentrism is one of the types of extremism (Zinchenko et al., 2016). The lack of ideology contributes to ethnocentrism and extremism.

Young people become subjects of extremist actions without a special intention or any ideological basis. This can be due to the contradictions arising when a young person enters social structures, the clash with strict requirements of society (Zubok & Chuprov, 2008). These contradictions are reinforced by several special factors, lability of consciousness, uncertainty of social identifications and the intermediate nature of social status, unstable, contradictory conditions in which young people are not able to implement their potential. The economic, political, sociocultural transformations in Russian society have influenced the formation of new youth groups which later developed into organized extremist ones. These contradictions contribute to the formation of such types of consciousness, behavior, social and group characteristics of young people that violate boundaries permitted by laws and norms, which cause latent extremism in the form of aggression, cruel actions of young people aimed to destroy dissidents (Smirnov, 2011). This form of extremism blurs the line between sociocultural extremism and youth political extremism, since youth are characterized by emotional decision-making.

Thus, youth extremism is not similar to extremism of existing socio-political groups that have an ideological connotation. Ideology is one of the components of public consciousness, the ideological part of the superstructure determined by the basis of society, economic relations, political, legal, moral, and religious types of consciousness (Kim et al., 2014; Osipov & Moskvichev, 2010). In any case, ideology always strengthens power, expresses interests of dominant social groups, the social and political elite. It is one of the important sources of institutional changes. This is a subjective model through which the person perceives and evaluates reality (Hagan et al., 1999).

In addition, there is another problem. In the context of globalization and general informatization of society, youth extremism is developing quickly; youth extremist movements instantly and spontaneously affect consciousness and behavior of youth. Extremist movements (groups) performed their activities at the regional and community levels; in the 21st century, thanks to information and communication technologies, extremist activities are performed at a global level, turning into interethnic extremist

movements, including information wars (for example, the terrorist organization ISIS). Representatives of such extremist movements can interact with a huge audience, defend their ideology, beliefs, recruit new supporters. In these conditions, extremism becomes dangerous for society (Gelfand et al., 2013), including youth. Unlike an adult, young people are uncompromising and more spontaneous, lack any ideological basis, are often used in the interests of various influential political groups. In modern social conditions, the youth of Russia is a potential reserve of extremism and terrorism.

4.   Purpose of the Study

The aim of the article is to analyze social changes taking place in modern society, causing intergenerational discrimination, antisocial orientations and illegal behavior of young people, youth extremism, ethnocentrism and terrorism. The article also aims to identify and analyze causes and consequences of unsafe and dangerous behavior of youth.

5.   Research Methods

The article compares results of the sociological study of the youth of Smolensk, Russia. The questionnaire and informal group interviewing were used (the age criterion was 20–25 years, N = 25/25, 2016, 20–25 years, N = 25/25, 2019). The questions were developed taking into account the purpose of the study: priority of life positions in relation to youth extremism, ideology, patriotism, civil identity, as constraints to its manifestation, ensuring spiritual security of youth and national security. The general population is represented by students and working youth of both sexes, aged 17–26 years. The study was conducted in 2012, 2016, 2019. The quota of the sample was determined by the statistical data of the region. The total sample size was 1,500.

6.   Findings

Based on the empirical data on the attitudes to extremism and views on ideology, we presented the results of a comparative analysis of informal interviews of working youth and students.

Majority of respondents surveyed in 2016 condemn manifestations of extremism and terrorism in young people (70.7 %, most of them are students), 1/5 of them did not think about this problem (19.1 %, most of them are young workers); but 10.2 % of the respondents are loyal to extremism and terrorism and consider them a form of "youth expression" (Fomchenkova, 2016).

In 2019, the number of persons loyal to extremism and terrorism increased to 17.1 % and amounted to 1/6, and the number of people condemning extremism and terrorism decreased especially in students (66.8 %). Working young people have certain social guarantees (profession, salary, benefits, social status, family and children) unlike students who are still experimenting, gaining knowledge, which can provoke extremist ideas.

More specific questions were asked: "Would you join extremist organizations?" – 7.6 % of respondents answered "Yes" if it is well-paid (2016). In 2019, this indicator increased by 2.1 % (9.7 %). It is clear that respondents are ready to support political extremism. They have no restraining cultural values.

One more specific question is "Why would you join an extremist organization?" The answers were distributed as follows (in a decreasing order): money, extreme sports (experiencing a sense of danger), self-expression, aggression. There is a set of sociocultural factors that do not constrain the urge to extremism. Money is the most important factor. As for self-expression and aggression, it is a form of denial of cultural values – psychologism (Fomchenkova, 2016).

According to the results obtained, the destruction of patriotic foundations, namely duty and security is observed. In 2012, more than half of the respondents (52.1 %) said that serving the Fatherland is the least important life value. 34.8 % of the respondents see patriotic education as a means of ensuring the national security.

A 2016 study showed that these positions have changed significantly. In particular, about half of the respondents (41.1 %) said that "serving the Fatherland" is important. 46.7 % are sure that patriotic education can ensure national security, but 12.2 % did not think about ideology and patriotism. There has been a positive trend in the development of patriotic consciousness. This is due to the fact that during these years significant socio-territorial changes associated with the reunification of Russia and the Crimea (2014) began, and the concept "homeland", ideological and patriotic feelings have been reassessed. In addition, according to the results, the opinion of the young people surveyed in 2016 changed due to the fact that elements of ideological and patriotic education were implemented in the socialization of the young generation, civil-patriotic and historical programs, media propaganda of the heroism of Soviet people. At the same time, the majority of young people (61.1 %) believed that citizenship, patriotism could ensure national security. The share of people for whom civic position is crucial increased from 50.7 % in 2012 to 61.1 % in 2016.

The 2019 study revealed a negative trend. 55.4 % of respondents said that "serving the Fatherland" is not important, only 1/3 of the respondents (30.7 %) believed that patriotic education could ensure national security, and 13.9 % did not think about the importance of ideology and patriotism. The changes in the trend are caused by economic indicators of well-being, reforms that are not supported by the majority of the members of society, legitimacy of elections. It is difficult for young people to occupy a worthy niche in social production; they adapt and simply survive in these endless socio-economic transformations.

In the youth surveyed in 2012, the unconditional denial of the ideals of communist society was expressed. People reject communist ideas in favor of individual values, interests. Young people surveyed in 2016 have a different understanding of patriotism than young people interviewed in 2019 for whom personal interests and values were more important than public ones; the content of the spiritual sphere does not correspond to the structure of social relations, which are separated from the spiritual content, and become threats in the form of nihilism, cynicism, humiliation of personal dignity, extremism, terrorism and other destructive spiritual phenomena.

The results of the study confirm that youth extremism, like extremism in general, including political, is determined by the level of development of spiritual culture and severity of socio-economic processes. With a high level of spiritual culture, extremism is blocked by actions of special state agencies and personal norms and moral prohibitions. If the level of spiritual culture is low, society and the government are passive, young people seek to overcome social contradictions using radical means,

experiencing social unsettlement and cultural uncertainty, seeing the possibility of their resolution in utopian ideologies. As a result of such actions, there is a threat to spiritual security of youth and society. In case of such provocative actions, specific circumstances that destroy social ties, disrupt social institutions and customs, traditions and cultural values arise. Spiritual emptiness causes extremism (Fomchenkova, 2016).

7.   Conclusion

Extremism of youth which has an age and sociocultural nature should not be confused with political extremism. Youth extremism, as well as extremism in general, including political one, is determined by the level of development of spiritual culture and severity of socio-economic processes. However, young people are most likely to experience social disorder and cultural uncertainty, therefore they seek to overcome social contradictions by radical means, based on the utopian ideologies. As a result of such radical and unrealistic actions, there is a threat to public and spiritual security. The result is the destruction of social ties, disorganization of social institutions and destruction of cultural property.

The lack of civic ideology in the basic value systems of modern young people makes it possible for them to develop mundane practicalism and utilitarianism. Alienated Russian youth spontaneously develops a selfish orientation toward material wealth.

Due to new geopolitical risks, the problem of national self-identification, national identity, comprehensive defense capability, including the upbringing of Russian citizens aimed at strengthening Russian statehood is crucial. At the present stage of development, a new impetus for the spiritual development of Russian citizens, formation of a single cohesive society through ensuring spiritual security of youth should be a priority task of patriotic and ideological education.

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