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Monitoring extremist sentiments as a diagnostic and preventive toolkit of anti-extremist activities (experience in the Kemerovo region)

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Abstract. The paper demonstrates the potentials of the diagnostic and preventive method used by the author when building a program for informational and prevention counteraction against extremism. The quantitative values for each "extremist" indicators, including gender aspects, are shown on the example of some results that were obtained according to the survey data (November 2018). The correlation coefficients between those indicators which reflect the level of systematicity of extremist ideas, reflected in the mass consciousness of young students, are also provided and discussed in the paper.

Keywords: extremist sentiment, prevention, extremism, indicators, symbolism

1. Introduction

One of the key tasks of modern domestic politics in Russia is the counteraction of extremist activity and its extreme form, which is terrorism. Anti-extremist activity of the state includes a wide range of methods and tools, starting from legislative and enforcement an including informational and preventive ones, implemented both by the state executive bodies and a number of civil society institutions.

In the process of conducting information and preventive measures, the defining role is played by an analysis of the level, spectrum, and structure of extremist sentiments in the mass consciousness of society members, especially its youth segment, which is more inclined to accept destructive ideas due to certain characteristics (age, psychophysiological, and social status).

One of the implementable methods of diagnosing extremist sentiment is the method of regional monitoring of extremist sentiments and manifestations among the young people, which has been developed by the Candidate of Historical Sciences, Associate Professor of the Kemerovo State Medical University V. V. Shiller and used in the Kemerovo region since 2015 [2], [3].

The presence in the structure of students' consciousness, including the gender aspect, of a number of elements is the basic indicators for further monitoring, including the following: commitment or a positive attitude towards destructive religious or pseudo-religious cults; commitment to the Nazi ideology; a tolerant attitude towards the leaders of Nazi Germany and fascist Italy; a positive attitude towards public demonstrations of Nazi paraphernalia or symbolism; a negative attitude towards individual national minorities; negative attitudes towards Christianity and the Russian Orthodox Church; a positive attitude towards the ideology of nationalism.

Each indicator is rated on a four-point scale, where the range of assessments varies from "unacceptable" to "permissible."

The number of elections and the results for all indicators in absolute and relative forms are calculated for each assessment and then constructed into a database. Results are generalized by settlements, gender groups, and in the whole region.

Conclusions on the state of the level of extremist manifestations in each group are defined on the dynamics of quantitative indicators through an assessment of the situation on a scale from "positive" to "critical." *A quantitative assessment of each indicator does not show the presence of stable, conceptually formed destructive views, but demonstrates the potential electoral and social support of leaders of extremist organizations who plan to come to power either by force or lawfully through elections.* The final calculations give an idea of the level of possible support for the orientation and provisions of a particular destructive organization by young people and allow us to determine the proportion of those who would support the regime in case the =extremists come to power. As a matter of fact, we can assess their chances of holding out and gaining a foothold in power. We use the calculation of correlation indicators followed by the compilation of a correlation matrix to identify and designate the proportion of extremists themselves, as well as assess the level of consistency and the nature of extremist views.

2. Materials and Methods

As a part of the practical implementation of the monitoring concept, a total of eight measurement waves were conducted in the Kemerovo region: 1st wave – April-May 2015; 2nd wave – September-October 2015; 3d wave: March-April 2016; 4th wave: September-November 2016; 5th wave: April-June 2017; 6th wave: September-November 2017; 7th wave: February-May 2018; 8th wave: November 2018.

In total, more than 9,000 respondents – students of general education institutions and students of secondary and higher vocational educational institutions of the region – were covered over a four-year period in the Kemerovo Region.

Monitoring measurements were also conducted in the summer and autumn of 2017 in the Sverdlovsk region, in the cities of Bogdanovich and Serov. The sampling study covered 320 people represented by the senior students and students of secondary vocational schools. Two thousand schoolchildren and students of 4 districts of the Chelyabinsk region were surveyed using the monitoring methodology in October 2018. At the same time, monitoring measurements were carried out in the Altai Republic, where one and a half thousand respondents from the senior schoolchildren and students of the system of secondary vocational education and the Gorno-Altai State University were selected. On the basis of our measurements, we created an electronic database of more than 13,000 respondents, the processing results of which are presented below.

To calculate the main indicators and quantitative data processing of the questionnaire, we used basic parameters of descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, cluster analysis, one of the multidimensional statistical research methods, as well as the technique of statistical data processing in the form of disk diagrams and dynamic histograms.

3. Results

Data processing and results interpretation were carried out in the Kemerovo region, administrative territories in the survey sample, taking into account the gender aspect. The results are presented for all the waves, and the data of monitoring measurements (7th and 8th waves) carried out in the Kemerovo region are compared.

We compared the generalized figures obtained by summing up all the quantitative values of the indicators for all the waves conducted in the period from 2015 to 2018 for the initial evaluation of the results obtained (Figure 1). The results clearly demonstrate a slight decrease in the extremist sentiment among the students in the Kemerovo region, while maintaining a stable level.
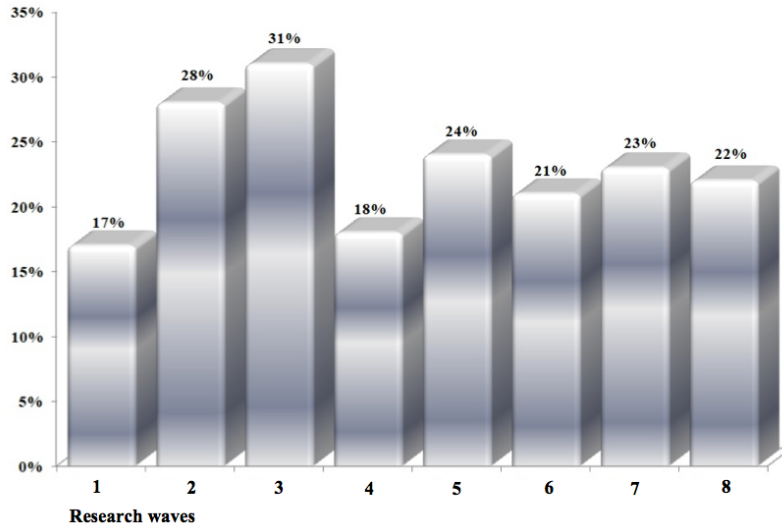
Fig. 1. The overall dynamics of extremist sentiments and manifestations in the youth environment of the Kemerovo region in 2015-2018 [1].

1 – Hitler's heroization; 2 – praising Nazi symbols; 3 – a negative attitude towards the Caucasians and Central Asians; 4 – veneration of Satan; 5 – a negative attitude towards Jesus Christ; 6 – a negative attitude towards the Jews; 7 – a negative attitude towards the Russian Orthodox Church; 8 – a negative attitude towards Islam; 9 – nationalism; 10 – a positive attitude to paganism.
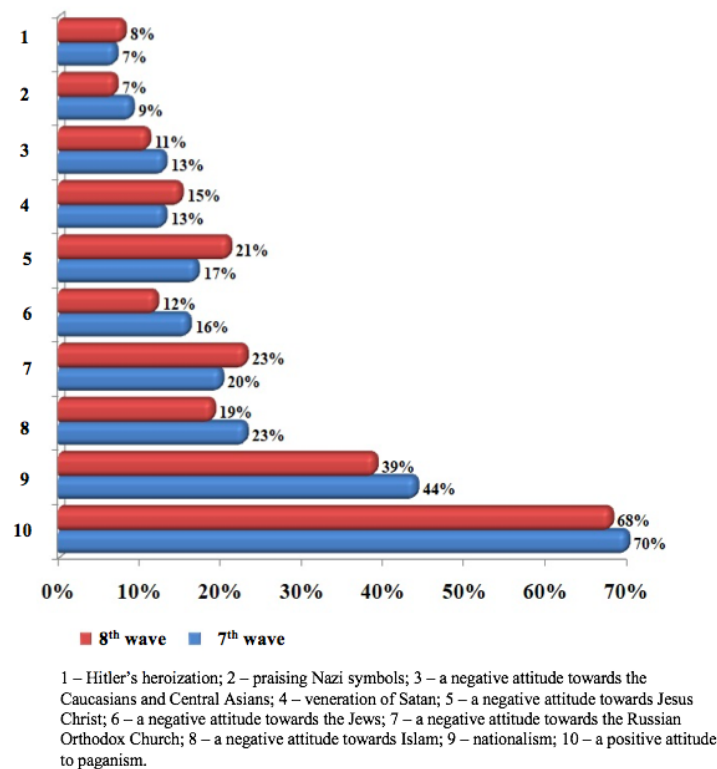
Fig. 2. A comparative analysis of indicators of extremist sentiments and manifestations in the youth environment as a whole on the 7th and 8th wave of monitoring measurements in the Kemerovo Region [1].

A general slight decrease in extremist sentiment among the youth, recorded as part of the 8th wave of measurements carried out in the Kemerovo Region, does not imply an automatic decrease in all indicators characterizing them. Part of the indicators may decrease, reflecting the tendency to lose interest in a particular topic due to growing up, personal enrichment, changes in a social status, completing the process of resocialization, or active work of security officials regarding these ideas, forming a cautious attitude to their further propaganda and dissemination through applied punishments, and the other part can actively soar.

To interpret the data obtained as a result of the 8th wave, we compared them with the data of monitoring measurements obtained during the 7th wave in the winter-spring of 2018 (Figure 2).

An analysis of extremist attitudes in the gender aspect demonstrates a clearly expressed gender specificity in the priority choice of indicators *(*Figure 3).

1 – Hitler's heroization; 2 – praising Nazi symbols; 3 – a negative attitude towards the Caucasians and Central Asians; 4 – veneration of Satan; 5 – a negative attitude towards Jesus Christ; 6 – a negative attitude towards the Jews; 7 – a negative attitude towards the Russian Orthodox Church; 8 – a negative attitude towards Islam; 9 – nationalism; 10 – a positive attitude to paganism.
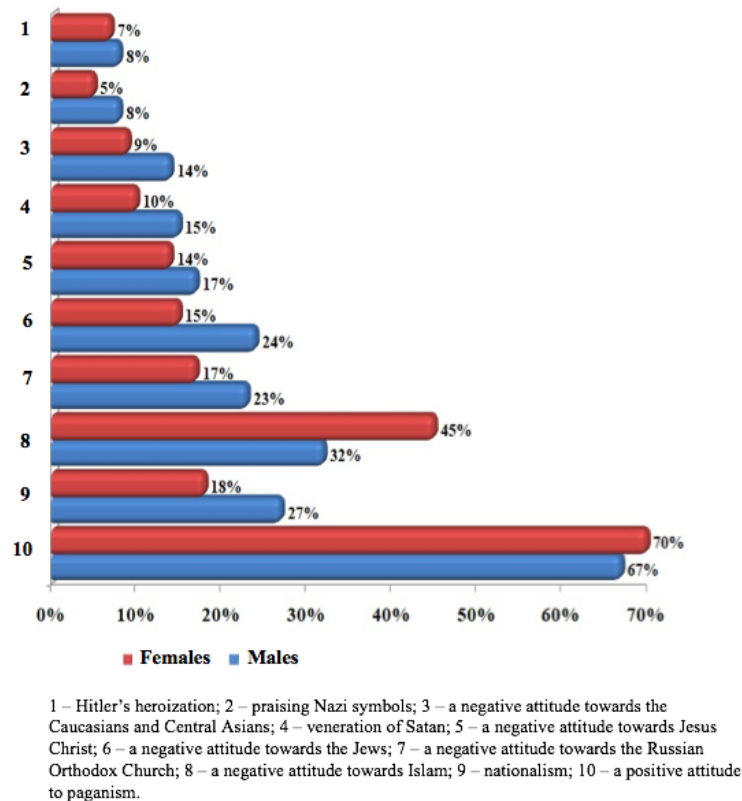
Fig. 3. Extremist sentiments of students in the Kemerovo Region surveyed within the framework of the 8th wave, in the gender aspect [1].

In addition to calculating the relative values for each indicator, reflecting the level of extremist sentiment on a separate aspect, we consider the correlation coefficients between the indicators to assess the degree of consistency of extremist ideas in the current respondents' worldview, determining the choice of preventive information strategy.

The scale used in statistics sets up evaluating the obtained results as follows: 0-0.3 – a very weak correlation, 0.4-0.7 – a medium strength, 0.8-1 – a high correlation. The calculations of correlations in the sample within the 8 wave showed the relationship of the average power of 0.5 only between the indicators "*Glorification of Hitler and other leaders of the Third Reich*" and "*Positive attitude toward Nazi symbolism*" [1].

4. Discussion

A slight decrease in extremist sentiment could have happened due to the tightening of anti-extremist legislation with simultaneous liberalization of certain norms, government actions to establish control over certain segments of the Internet, including the popular Telegram messenger, active educational work carried out by social activists, representatives of religious circles and the academic community, as well as various human rights organizations that are engaged in the creation of informational materials and leaflets on "How not to become an extremist against your will?." We should not evaluate the fading dynamics as a definite decrease in extremist sentiments among young people, since with a high degree of probability we are dealing with the usual defense against state influence,

manifested in disguising their attitudes and attitudes towards those manifestations considered extremist in terms of the law.

Within the framework of the 8th wave, there are noticeably higher values of some indicators compared with the data of the 7th wave. Four out of ten indicators, including "*Negative attitude towards the Russian Orthodox Church,*" "*Negative attitude towards Jesus Christ and Christianity,*" "*Positive attitude towards Satan and Satanism,*" as well as "*Glorification of Hitler and other leaders of the Third Reich*", the proportion of indicators is higher than results obtained in the Kemerovo region as a whole in the winter and spring of 2018 (see Figure 2).

There is a slight decrease in the most capacious basic indicator underlying or influencing other indicators characterizing extremist sentiments ("*Positive attitude towards Slavic paganism*".) It steadily occupies the first positions on the results of all measurements carried out by us for four years on the territory of the Kemerovo Region, as well as sample measurements taken in the Sverdlovsk Region, the Altai Republic, and the Chelyabinsk Region during the synchronous 8th wave period (see Figure 2). "Slavic paganism" is accepted by part of the modern youth, it is understood as not a *historical Slavic paganism,* which existed in reality and left behind a minimal number of archaeological artifacts, traces, and remnants of the pagan past, collected by ethnographers of the XIX-XX centuries in the northern and southern territories of our country, but *the neo-pagan anti-historical doctrine is based on neo-Nazi ideology.*

Results from a gender perspective show certain specificity. In the male group, eight indicators exceed the indicators for the female group (see Figure 3). In the female group, two indicators have higher values: "*Positive attitude towards Slavic paganism*" (70% in the female group vs 67% in the male group) and "*Nationalism*" (45% in the female group vs 32% in the male group), which is quite typical for students of the Kemerovo region and is registered for a number of years (see Figure 3). According to the 4th wave, the ratio of gender responses in the indicator "*Positive attitude towards Slavic paganism*" was 75% of female vs 59% of male, according to the 5th wave: 68% of female vs 52% of male, according to the 6th wave: 65% of female vs 58% of male; the data of the 7th wave demonstrates the following results: 74% of female against 65% of male. Almost the same dynamics can be traced by the indicator "*Nationalism.*" According to the results of the 4th wave, 24% of female and 19% of male were positive to this form of ideology; according to the 5th wave, it was 28% of female and 18% of male; the 6th wave: 27% of female and 29% of male; the 7th wave: 47% of female against 41% of male. Only within the 6th wave, the proportion of male respondents was a little higher than that of the female group. The results of the remaining waves give approximately the same picture.

Higher intolerance is observed in the male group compared to the female *to other nationalities*, including Caucasians and immigrants from Central Asia, a *more serious dislike for Islam and the Russian Orthodox Church*, *a positive attitude towards Satan and Satanism, as well as Hitler and Nazi symbols* (see Figure 3).

In general we can say that for the women's group to a greater extent is characterized by *a positive attitude towards destructive ideologies and negative forms of religious manifestations*, and it is *an ethno-confessional intolerance* for men.

The resulting correlation coefficient between Hitler's glorification and a positive attitude towards Nazi symbolism indicates a steady identification of Nazi symbols with Adolf Hitler's persona and indicates the presence of "Hitlerization of consciousness" among some students in the Kemerovo region living in most of its administrative territories. In general, this trend has been monitored by us for four years. The situation with this relationship is as follows: 0.6 (1st wave), 0.5 (2nd wave), 0.6 (3rd wave), 0.5 (4th wave), 0.5 (5th wave), 0.5 (6th wave), 0.5 (7th wave).

5. Conclusion

According to the measurements carried out as part of the monitoring of the 8th wave, there is a slight decrease in the formally recorded level of extremist sentiment among young people, which was a reaction to the tightening of anti-extremist legislation and the strengthening of law enforcement practice on "extremist" articles by law enforcement agencies, in our personal opinion. The indicator

characterizing a positive attitude to Slavic paganism, ideas of which are the fundamental for the main part of extremist manifestations, including nationalism, national, and religious intolerance, positive attitude to Adolf Hitler and his companions, as well as the Nazi symbolism, continue to remain high. An assessment of extremist attitudes in the gender aspect gives grounds to assert that the women's group to a greater extent is characterized by *a positive attitude towards destructive ideologies and negative forms of religious manifestations*, and for men in terms of the *ethno-confessional intolerance*. Stable links in the calculation of correlations are fixed between the following indicators: *The glorification of Hitler and other leaders of the Third Reich*" and "*A positive attitude towards Nazi symbolism.*"

The results suggest one of the key areas of information work on the prevention of extremism in the Kemerovo region is an active information work aimed at destroying the positive image of extremism in the mass consciousness of young people.

In addition, it is necessary to focus on the historical analysis of the modern "Slavic paganism," revealing its pseudo-historical essence, debunking myths that have developed with regard to "Slavic pagan symbolism." Moreover, it is necessary to show the side of paganism that propagandists hide based on historical sources, which us human sacrifices recorded by archaeologists during excavations of mounds, as well as reflected in a number of historical documents.

6. Acknowledgment

References

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