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Comparative Assessment of the Level of Xenophobia of First- and Third-Year Students Based on a Sociological Survey



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ABSTRACT

The problem of xenophobia, which has emerged as a result of globalisation processes, is acute for most countries of the world, including the Russian Federation, which is characterised by multi-ethnicity and multiculturalism. The social phenomenon of xenophobia causes an increase in social tension and leads to an increase in inter-ethnic and inter-ethnic conflicts. The article presents data obtained in the result of a survey among first- and third-year students of the Financial University studying in the field of "Sociology" in the framework of learning the discipline "English language", confirming the relevance and depth of the problem of ethnocultural contradictions and intolerance in the Russian Federation. The research results indicate an average level of xenophobia and sensitivity to it as a socially significant problem among students. It suggests the need to develop a new cultural policy in Russia that can weaken ethnic negativism, reduce the potential for conflict and reduce the prerequisites for inter-ethnic confrontation.

Keywords: xenophobia; interethnic conflict; social tension; questionnaire; survey; respondents

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ОРИГИНАЛЬНАЯ СТАТЬЯ

Сравнительная оценка уровня ксенофобии студентов первого и третьего года обучения на основе социологического опроса

АННОТАЦИЯ

Проблема ксенофобии, возникшая в результате глобализационных процессов, остро стоит перед большинством стран мира, в том числе Российской Федерацией, которая характеризуется

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многоэтничностью и мультикультурализмом. Социальное явление ксенофобии вызывает рост социальной напряженности и приводит к росту межэтнических и межнациональных конфликтов. В работе представлены данные, полученные в результате проведения опроса среди студентов первого и третьего курсов Финансового университета, обучающихся по направлению «Социология» в рамках изучения дисциплины «Иностранный язык», подтверждающие актуальность и глубину проблемы этнокультурных противоречий и нетерпимости в Российской Федерации. Результаты исследований свидетельствуют о среднем уровне ксенофобии и чувствительности к ней как к социально значимой проблеме среди студенческой молодежи, что говорит о необходимости разработки новой культурной картина в России, способной ослабить этнический негативизм, снизить конфликтный потенциал и уменьшить предпосылки для межэтнического противостояния.

Ключевые слова: ксенофобия; межэтнический конфликт; социальное напряжение; анкетирование; опрос; респонденты

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Description of the problem situation

In recent years a little-studied problem such as xenophobia among young people has become increasingly relevant, which can lead to the creation of far-right groups and various manifestations of intolerance: from “hate speech” (prejudice, stereotyping, stigmatisation, insults and racist jokes) to hate crimes. The basis for the development of such groups is both the generally high level of xenophobia in society and the ultra-right youth subcultures that are developing in Russia today. The rise of xenophobia is perhaps the most discussed topic in both the world and Russian mass media and one of the most acute and urgent social problems.

Introduction

Most countries in the modern world are characterised by polyethnicity and multiculturalism. The problem of coexistence of several ethnic communities is especially important for many states, since ethnic and cultural contradictions between different groups of the population inevitably escalate, subsequently causing social tensions because of migration. At the same time, social tensions, which are exacerbated by economic and political instability, are fueling the growth of inter-ethnic and inter-ethnic conflicts.

The Russian Federation is a multi-ethnic, multicultural and multi-religious state. Its territory

is home to representatives of more than 190 nationalities and ethnic communities, “each of which has its own unique material and spiritual culture. The people who traditionally live on the Russian territory are indigenous peoples and have their own historical role in the formation of Russian statehood” [1, p. 181]. However, often socio-economic instability, the decline in living standards of certain groups of the population, deterioration of a criminogenic situation, the threat of terrorism and religious extremism, strengthen internal migration, forcing ethnic groups to leave their state (or administrative) units. Their transfer to a different cultural and linguistic reality sometimes leads to problems of socio-cultural adaptation that arise as a result of the difference between the cultures of the host society and non-ethnic migrants, their value systems, beliefs, and worldview features [2, p. 115].

There is no modern society that is entirely free from xenophobia and “does not experience occasional outbursts of aggression against its ‘strangers’. The absence of barriers between those who considered the majority of the population, ‘our’ and ‘not our’, indifference, or weakness of repulsion (or attraction of someone else) would be to limit atrophy, amorphous social relationships and ethnic solidarity, indistinguishability important and unimportant. It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to imagine such an ab-

normal situation. A society without xenophobia is a utopia of an absolutely closed and isolated island community" [3, p. 80].

Xenophobia is expressed primarily as verbal hostility or aggression against "strangers" (such negative oral attitudes are often called "hate speech"). Usually, xenophobic manifestations are restrained by regulated norms of socially acceptable behaviour, which restricts the open manifestation of aggression, intolerance to "others", and open hostility in the developed countries of the world. The same can be said about Russia. Here, the expression of openly racist, antisemitic, or xenophobic views is perceived as undesirable radicalism (fascism), threatening instability, social unrest, and general disorganisation of life, which always (since the late 1980s) causes clear condemnation from public opinion [4, p. 34–35].

In principle, xenophobia cannot be eliminated, since the elements that give rise to it play a significant role in the systems of basic ethnological and social identification, and, therefore, in maintaining social order in society. Negativism, hostility, and ethnic hostility to "others" – as components of xenophobia in general – are a necessary condition for the formation and reproduction of a mass positive idea of one's own community, a set of mechanisms for collective self-determination. A means for the constitution of values, including ideal values of "We". Xenophobia can not be destroyed. One can only regulate, to some extent, its most destructive manifestations [5, p. 283]. Its social danger lies not in the very content of negative prejudices and ideas, but in their abuse and use by various social forces and state institutions – political and social parties and movements, the media, which mobilise the masses to take active actions against "strangers", appeal to the police and courts, and perpetuate the discriminatory position of minorities of different nature and types.

A more in-depth look at the nature of xenophobia leads to the conclusion that it focuses on several problematic points or nodes in the reproduction of the social structure or social order of a given society. The establishment of social distance in the processes of reproduction of social community (prohibition or restriction, unwillingness to see "strangers") is manifested

in the form of a negative assessment or attitude towards:

a) marriage with "strangers" (ethnically or racially "strangers");

b) prohibition of access to the "community" (residence on the territory of the dominant community, unwillingness to live near or work together with "strangers", communicate with "foreigners");

c) access to symbolic positions of prestige, authority, influence or dominance in the social structure – regulation (control, restriction) of employment in law enforcement agencies or the armed forces (prohibition of access to structures that have a monopoly on violence), in education systems, mass communications;

d) access to the highest positions in the social hierarchy of society – to power, government, leadership, to the "other's", "stranger's" as President, embodying and protecting the symbolic merits and values of the entire collective whole.

The expression of negativism concerning imaginary "strangers" (with whom in everyday practice the absolute majority of the population, members of a community or group have never dealt) serves as a means to articulate their own virtues, values or significant qualities, but in a negative form, self-affirmation without close connection with achievements. Only starting from a more or less pronounced image of the "stranger", the traditional and poorly structured, undifferentiated social environment of the "ethnic majority" can express its own positive qualities. The "stranger" is needed here as a condition and projection of everything bad and repressed in self-esteem, which the group tries to get rid of by attributing these properties to an imaginary "other". In this case, the level of aggression is low, since interaction with the virtual "other" is conditional, devoid of direct practical significance for everyday life [4, p. 35].

The nature of xenophobia is not limited to or is not limited to the reasons that usually explain the widespread negative attitude of officials, followed by the nonprofessional, to visitors. The reasons for it are deeper; they lie in the fact that in a crisis situation, the damaged consciousness of people needs to rely on someone who should live worse than themselves. Hence the "ethological" demand for aggressive prosecution of these

“lower-ranking” individuals. It is not surprising, therefore, that none of the seemingly “rational” reasons is gaining as much as the baseless latent dislike that increases from the centres of social life to its periphery [3, p. 74].

Main body

To identify the level of xenophobia among students, I used the quantitative questionnaire method. It required compliance with several rules when compiling the questionnaire: the use of optimal types of questions, their sequence, total number, correctness, the relevance of questions, and compliance with the purpose of the study [6, p. 229]. The survey method is, if not the central one, then the most basic one for use in the study of public issues, since it allows us to study not only the phenomenon quantitatively, but also to use the obtained data in the development of qualitative tools [7, p. 64]. Besides, the survey is one of the research methods in pedagogy. It is used to get feedback on the degree of acquisition of professional competencies, along with traditional forms of control of students' knowledge. The survey also has the potential for indirect educational and educational impact, such as increasing students' tolerance, motivation for more profound and better study of the material, forming a sense of belonging, the need for knowledge, introspection, understanding and evaluating various phenomena occurring in society [8, p. 134].

Two groups of 1st- and 3rd-year students were polled. Each group consisted of 16 people. The results are presented below (Table).

Comparison of the results of the survey of first- and third-year students revealed the following: the majority of first-year respondents – students are “negative” (40%) to the slogan “Russia for Russians”. In comparison, slightly less than half of the third-year respondents are “rather negative” (44 per cent) to the statement of Russian nationalists. Though it seems that the answers differ a lot, in general, the feeling of both groups reflects the negative attitude.

The second and third questions which reveal the respondents' attitude to Jews and Gypsies received the following answers: “neutral” – the majority in the two reference groups (60 per cent and 53 per cent in the first year, 61 per cent in the third year), “positive” and “rather positive” –

the first year marked within 20 per cent against 11 per cent and 28 per cent in the third year.

The responses to the question about passing a bill which allows same-sex marriage in Russia were the following: the answers of the first-year students were almost equally distributed across the options: about 20 per cent expressed each attitude from “negative” to “positive”. The third-year students, on the other hand, most responded with the “neutral” attitude (38 per cent) and about a third (28 per cent) preferred the “positive” option. It is possible to notice that the responses of the third-year students have a slight shift to the positive way compared to the students of the first year. This fact should be taken into account.

The following question concerned the treatment of migrant workers from Central Asian countries (Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan). About a third of first-year students expressed a neutral attitude (33 per cent), and two-thirds of first-year respondents are “rather negative” and “rather positive” (27 per cent). Half of the third-year respondents answered “neutral” (50 per cent), and a third of third-year students chose “rather negative” (28 per cent). Again, the third-year students' responses slightly moved towards the “positive” direction; it should be remembered as well.

The next question referred to the attitude of students to Muslims. The results of both groups are generally similar: slightly less than half of the first- and third-year respondents (40 and 44 per cent accordingly) expressed a neutral attitude. Also, two-thirds of first-year students answered “rather negative” and “rather positive” (27 per cent), while a fifth of third-year respondents chose “rather positive” (22 per cent). Once more, the third-year respondents are more prone to select the options that set attitudes in a more “positive” direction.

The following given question is about students' attitudes to mixed and same-sex marriage. It turned out that half of the first-year respondents are neutral about these phenomena (53 per cent, 47 per cent). Still, at the same time, a fifth answered “rather positively” about their attitude to mixed marriages (20 per cent), and two-fifths of first-year respondents are both negative and positive about same-sex marriage (20 per cent); a third of third-year students surveyed have a positive attitude to the phenomenon of mixed

Modern youth`s level of xenophobia

	Year of learning	Negative, %	Rather Negative, %	Neutral, %	Rather Positive, %	Positive, %
How do you feel about the statement "Russia is for the Russians"?	1	40	27	13	20	0
	3	22	44	28	0	6
What is your attitude to the Jews?	1	0	0	60	20	20
	3	0	0	61	11	28
What is your attitude to the Roma?	1	7	7	53	20	13
	3	6	6	61	16	11
How do you feel about passing a bill which allows same-sex marriage in Russia?	1	27	13	20	20	20
	3	11	11	39	11	28
What is your attitude to the migrant workers from Central Asian countries?	1	13	27	33	27	0
	3	0	28	50	17	5
What is your attitude to the Muslims?	1	7	27	40	27	0
	3	0	17	44	22	17
What is your attitude to mixed marriages?	1	7	7	53	20	13
	3	6	17	22	22	33
How do you feel about same-sex couples?	1	20	7	47	7	20
	3	6	22	44	11	17
What is your attitude to immigrants from Africa?	1	7	20	47	20	7
	3	0	10	56	6	28
What is your attitude to atheists?	1	0	0	27	40	33
	3	0	11	33	22	33
Do you dislike a person of a different nationality?	1	27	40	27	7	0
	3	61	17	22	0	0
Do you consider yourself a sexist?	1	73	20	0	7	0
	3	55	17	22	6	0
How do you feel about enactment the law on restriction of immigrants from some countries`entry to the RF?	1	20	20	47	7	7
	3	6	38	33	17	6
Do you accept a person who believes a different religion?	1	0	0	33	27	40
	3	0	6	39	16	39
Do you support ethnic discrimination?	1	67	20	13	0	0
	3	78	6	16	0	0
Do you support feminism?	1	33	0	33	13	21
	3	6	22	33	17	22
How do you feel about the opinion: "Extra restrictions should be imposed on immigrants` rights"?	1	27	33	33	7	0
	3	22	28	28	22	0
What is your attitude to the agnostics?	1	7	7	40	27	20
	3	0	0	61	17	22
Do you agree with the statement that people of colour are worse than white people?	1	60	27	7	7	0
	3	88	0	6	6	0
Do you think men should have more rights than women?	1	67	13	20	0	0
	3	67	11	16	6	0

Source: compiled by the author.

marriages (33 per cent), while two-fifths of third-year students expressed a neutral and somewhat positive attitude (22 per cent). Almost half of the third-year students are neutral about same-sex marriage (44 per cent), and a fifth are “rather negative” (22 per cent).

Expressing their attitude to immigrants from Africa, about half of the representatives of the first and third year chose “neutral” (47 per cent, 56 per cent); “rather negative” and “rather positive” – two-fifths of the first year (20 per cent), and “positive” – about a third of third-year students. One more time, the responses of the third-year students tend to change from “negative” to more “positive” way comparing to the first-year students.

When asked about their attitude to atheists, first-year students preferred the option “rather positive” (40 per cent), as well as “positive” (33 per cent) and “neutral” (27 per cent). Two-thirds of third-year students responded “more positive” (33 per cent), as well as “neutral” (33 per cent), and a fifth were “more positive” (22 per cent).

Next, students were asked to answer a question about whether they dislike a person of another nationality. First-year students preferred the “rather negative” option (40 per cent), while two-thirds of first-year students chose the “negative” and “neutral” (27 per cent). More than half of third-year students do not dislike a foreign person (61 per cent). Yet again, it is worth mentioning that the third-year students appear to be more endurable than the first-year students.

Three-quarters of first-year students do not believe that they are sexist (73 per cent), as do half of the third-year students (55 per cent), and only a fifth of third-year students are half-inclined to sexism (22 per cent). It might seem odd enough that the third-year are more prone to sexism, considering that in the previous questions, it is possible to observe a trend of tolerance among the third-year students.

Half of the first-year students, when asked about the publication of a law that prohibits the entry of immigrants from certain countries, preferred the neutral side (47 per cent), and 40 per cent of first-year students are more opposed. Just over a third of third-year students are more likely to oppose the law (38 per cent), and about a third have taken a neutral position

(33 per cent). As might be expected of third-year students, they would most likely express the “negative” attitude, yet again, this is quite an ambiguous situation.

As for the attitude to a person of a different religion, first-year students are mostly “positive” (40%), and two-thirds chose “neutral” and “rather positive” (33 per cent, 27 per cent). Third-year respondents responded equally “neutral” and “positive” (39 per cent).

While answering the question “Do you Support ethnic discrimination?”, the majority of first-year students opted for “No” (67 per cent), as did third-year students (78%). Further, about a third of first-year students do not support feminism (33 per cent), another third took a neutral position (33 per cent), and a fifth responded positively (20 per cent). Among third-year students, a third chose “neutral” (33 per cent), a fifth instead do not support feminism (22 per cent), and another fifth consider themselves supporters of feminist ideology (22 per cent). All in all, the third-year students seem to support feminism just a little more rather than students of the first year, which partially contradicts the previously expressed trend towards tolerance.

About a third of first-year students disagree (27 per cent) or almost disagree (33 per cent) with the opinion that immigrants in Russia should be further rights restricted, and another third are neutral about this statement (33 per cent). Third-year students responded as follows: 22 per cent – against, 28 per cent – rather against, 28 per cent – neutral, 22 per cent – rather for.

When asked about the attitude to representatives of agnosticism, first-year students mostly chose “neutral” (40 per cent), a fifth – “rather positive” (27 per cent) and another fifth – “positive” (20 per cent). The majority of undergraduates expressed a neutral attitude (61 per cent), and a fifth – “positive” (22 per cent). Remarkably, here, the obtained data once again confirms the trend of tolerance among third-year students.

As for the question: “Do you agree with the statement that people of colour are worse than white people?” the respondents gave the following answers: the majority of first-year students do not agree with this opinion (60%), and a third rather disagree (27 per cent). The absolute majority of third-year students equally expressed a

negative attitude to the above statement (88 per cent).

Finally, the last question was as follows: “Do you think that men should have more rights than women?” First-year students and upperclassmen equally disagree entirely with this statement (67 per cent). About a fifth of respondents in both the first and third year took a neutral position (20 per cent, 16 per cent).

A comparative analysis of the results of two groups of different years of study was carried out, taking into account their representativeness (similar educational and cultural capital of the two groups was taken into account).

On the whole, the overall data shows that the responses of the first-year and the third-year students are generally the same. Still, it is possible to notice that some cases provide the basis for formulating a hypothesis: the degree of tolerance among the third-year students is somewhat higher than that of first-year students. The questions about an attitude to the migrants from Central Asia, Muslims, immigrants from Africa and others confirm the hypothesis.

Even so, at the same time, some facts refute the formulated hypothesis – the questions about sexism, feminism and law on restriction of the entry in Russia of the immigrants. Not all of the results of the study were predicted by the hypothesis which means that it is not confirmed. It is worth mentioning that there could always be some other explanation for why a given study obtained the results it did. The reasons may vary: from simple dishonesty or forgetfulness to respondents’ unwillingness to answer about their personal feelings and motives, the Lapierre paradox or uncertainty in attitudes

towards ethnic, national, religious, sexual and other social groups.

Conclusion

Thus, two surveys were conducted between two groups of the first and third year of the Sociology course of the Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation. A comparative analysis of the results of each reference group was conducted, which revealed differences in attitude and perception, and assessed the degree of xenophobia and hostility to foreigners among first-year and third-year students. Obtaining quantitative data will contribute to the formation of a cultural picture of the world, which is a set of knowledge and ideas about the values of their own culture and the culture of other ethnic groups. It implies an understanding of national character traits, ethnic and religious mentalities, and knowledge of each other’s traditions and customs. The new cultural picture of the world should serve as the basis for a dialogue in which the interaction, interpenetration, mutual influence and enrichment of multi-ethnic cultures takes place. It also means openness, preservation of national traditions of ethnic groups and orientation towards preserving the diversity of life, but not the denial of ethnic differences and the desire to erase them. “Such a multicultural environment is an effective tool for recognising the cultural identity of peoples and forming political tolerance, ensuring national integration and identification” [9, p. 95]. Only this can reduce the potential for conflict, reduce the prerequisites for interethnic confrontation, create a culture of interethnic communication, and limit the spread of xenophobia.

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