



Religious xenophobia in the everyday consciousness of Russian progressive youth: risk assessment

Inna Shapovalova ¹  Sergey Lebedev ¹  Mirko Blagojević ² 

¹ Belgorod State University,
Belgorod, Russian Federation

² Institute for Social Sciences,
Centre for Sociological and
Anthropological Research,
Belgrade, Serbia

Correspondence

Dr Sergey Lebedev, Professor,
Institute of Social Sciences and
Mass Communications, BelSU,
Russian Federation, Pobedy 85,
308015 Belgorod, Russian Federation.

Email:

serg_ka2001-dar@mail.ru

Abstract

This article is devoted to the sociological analysis of the attitudes of religious xenophobia among the most socially and culturally developed part of modern Russian youth, represented by students. The research discourse is formed at the intersection of the problems of “risk society”, revitalisation of religion, and xenophobia. The main purpose of the study is to obtain a reflexive assessment of the religious characteristics of Russian students in terms of xenophobic reactions, discrimination, and violations of citizens’ rights on religious grounds. The method of data collection was a mass survey of Russian students from one of the regions of the Russian Federation. It was revealed that at least 20% of students find some extremist practices around them. The internet is the leading platform for xenophobic and extremist antisocial practices. In the environment that young people observe, religious xenophobia has a much larger scope than it would seem, and the “isthmus” that brings it into a position of extremism is much narrower than it appears at first glance. The lack of understanding of the continuity between the phenomena of xenophobia and extremism constricts the area of management of the situation and creates the possibility of critical risks of conflicts with destructive consequences.

KEYWORDS

religious xenophobia, religious extremism, youth self-reflection, social attitudes, students

1 INTRODUCTION

The issue of the risks of religious xenophobia in young people's everyday consciousness is relevant in several closely interrelated perspectives, which are at the same time independent. First of all, it should be noted that in the social system, especially in a modern society, young people are carriers of risk per se. "Risk is one of the essential properties of youth" (Zubok 2007: 172). This is due to the objective factor of instability of many young people's social status, their incomplete certainty of the choice of a biographical project, the incomplete formation of professional and family roles and statuses, as well as the subjective factor of a high level of life activity and ideological "responsiveness," accompanied by critical thinking that is not always sufficient. The combined impact of these circumstances makes young people a "risk group" in terms of exposure to charismatic leaders, ideas, and practices.

The second point relates to the significant and still growing importance of the religious factor. "From Buddhism to Islam to new religious and spiritual movements, the theme must now be understood in the context of worldwide, cross-cultural dynamics, partly as a consequence of recent decades' remarkable processes of human mobility" (Cipriani and Ricucci 2020: 4). The revitalisation of religion in the seemingly irreversibly secularised society of late modernity, and the emergence of its multiple traditional and non-traditional replications, hybrid forms, and socio-cultural effects as being "stubborn facts" create a complex aggregate of contradictions and tensions, in which ideology and politics are inevitably involved. All this makes the "religious field" a separate – and special – area of risk that stands out among its other varieties.

Regarding the third point defining the situation, it should be pointed out that xe-

nophobic attitudes are both the most "tenacious" (they represent a kind of anthropological constant that is latently present and manifests itself under the appropriate conditions in almost any society) and quite naturally activated in the era of active migrations and intensive "mixing" of cultures, all of which is inevitably traumatic for a significant part of the involved population. Xenophobia – "fears, alertness and hostility (i.e. phobias) to strangers" (Mukomel' and Pain 2007: 142) – as an "emergency" reaction of human identity to a threat to its habitual life has, by virtue of its archaic nature, a destructive potential and therefore becomes one of the universal threats to the stability of modern multicultural and highly dynamic social systems.

This triad of risks is supplemented and reinforced by factors of increased resource inequality in societies that are "catching up to modernisation," which include post-Soviet Russia. The coincidence of subjective motivation for xenophobia on religious grounds with real or even imaginary inequality in terms of economic, power, cultural, or educational capital acts as a powerful catalyst for xenophobic attitudes. At the same time, the stratification position of the carriers of such attitudes in relation to their object does not cancel out the negative perception, but only varies its shades. In this way, the prestige of the status of an "outsider" (for example, professional or property) is perceived as a violation and challenge to one's own status, and the lack of prestige increases emotional rejection.

Therefore, the assessment of the risks of religious xenophobia among modern youth and in the modern multicultural, highly dynamic, and "turbulent" situation is considered to be a really relevant task of applied sociology (Zubok et al. 2016). This task is particularly important for post-socialist countries, where social stratification

reaches very high levels. In this regard, the Russian case is of interest. It illustrates the manifestations of xenophobia, as can be seen by the student community of one of the leading Russian border universities.

“Progressive youth” is defined in this paper as members of the younger generation who are most capable of and focused on solving a number of important objective social problems and ensuring social progress. The factors that help determine this include self-knowledge, upbringing and education, public administration, specialisation, study, and preservation of the environment. The main composition of progressive youth in modern society is formed by students and graduates of higher educational institutions, as they have the largest index of cultural capital (educational competencies) and social capital (network of social ties) in comparison with other subgroups of youth.

The theoretical framework that defines the sociological methodology of the research is determined by several complementary scientific approaches and conceptual directions. We believe that the most heuristic theories in relation to the topic under study are Ulrich Beck’s theories of social risks, the “strong” version of Jeffrey Alexander’s cultural sociology, and the concept of the secular and religious as “social imaginary” by Charles Taylor.

Risk is a fundamental concept of our research. According to the author of the most developed sociological concept of “risk society”, Beck, risks are a substantial characteristic of modernity (Beck 1992, 1994, 1995). “Risks are constantly produced by society and this production is legitimate, carried out in all spheres of society’s life — economic, political, social” (Yanitsky 2003: 11). Beck does not give any final definition of risk. At the same time, considering the study of his works, it is possible to formulate a working version of the

definition of this concept contextually: as an option, risk represents an increased probability of the occurrence of destructive consequences for the human environment due to the human’s decisions, including routine everyday ones.

In the case under consideration, we’re talking about “risks resulting from changes and destruction of the person’s socio-cultural environment, his daily practices” (Zubok et al. 2016: 14). The likely destructive changes in such an environment are seen here as a latent and obvious increase in the intolerance of one part of society towards another on the basis of religious identification and an increase in the potential for intergroup conflict at the level of values that is expressed in the forms of persistently negative social assessments and emotions, from alienation to aggression. At a minimum, the consequences of the consolidation and development of such attitudes are socio-psychological barriers that prevent the institutional interactions that are necessary for the life of the community. At their worst, such consequences can be acute and prolonged conflicts with criminal manifestations.

Further specification of the subject of the study necessarily suggests the involvement of industry sociologies. Niklas Luhmann points out that “for sociology the topic of risk must therefore be subordinated to the theory of modern society. But there is no such theory... There is no definition of risk that can meet the scientific requirements...” (Luhmann 1993: 6). It seems to us that this question that remains difficult to resolve at the highest level of generalisation requires an answer on the level of mid-range theories and analysis of specific social situations.

As is noted by the researchers of the issue (Short 1984: 715-716; Yanitsky 2003: 14-15), approaches to the study of risk acceptability do not take into account the

need to develop a probabilistic analysis of the state of society as a source of subjectivisation of perception and determination of tolerance thresholds. The corresponding “bridge” from the objective to the subjective basis of risk as a social fact and, accordingly, to its sociological dimension allows us to transfer the cultural-sociological theory of Jeffrey Alexander.

According to the “strong program” of Alexander and his school, “cultural sociology places collective feelings and ideas at the centre of its methods and theories” by virtue of the fundamental assumption that “it is these subjective and deeply hidden feelings that are so often presented as the true rulers of the world” (Alexander 2013: 47). In other words, such “collective idealisations” (let us specify – with a sufficient degree of stability and prevalence within the boundaries of the studied fragment of social space and time) are considered a basic social fact underlying certain behaviours of their carriers and assuming such behaviours with a high degree of probability. The causality of social actions and the further institutionalisation of social relations here, according to definition, “is rooted in direct actors and modes of action (agencies)” (Alexander 2013: 64). “Only when cultural structures are understood in all their complexity and nuances, the true strength and resilience of violence, domination, exile and degradation can be realistically understood” (Alexander 2013: 52) – that is, of virtually all the major destructive manifestations of religious intolerance and xenophobia.

As a consequence, the roots and direct sources of the risk of religious xenophobia are seen in the corresponding collective representations (Durkheim) of the social subject that predispose him to a certain range of social actions and building a particular disposition of relations with other subjects, who find themselves in the role

of the object of the corresponding positioning. Based on this, the attitudes recorded by the surveys can be considered direct indicators of the quantitative and qualitative characteristics of the risk of destructive consequences for the social environment, in which the group/community under study is included.

Finally, another step in the conceptual interpretation of the subject area of the study involves the meaningful positioning of the xenophobic mindset as a religious one. The main subject-thematic intention of (negative) evaluation and interpretation here is the religious identification of “strangers,” real or imaginary.

The key to understanding the specifics of religious xenophobia in modern (late modern) society are the ideas of the modern classicist of philosophy and sociology of religion, Charles Taylor. In accordance with the first of them, the fundamental fact of secularism is the defining “background” for the perception, understanding, evaluation, and building of the disposition of modern man’s attitude towards religion. It manifests itself, along with the low “specific weight” of religious institutions in public and private life, in the fact that religious faith is by default “considered as one of the possible, along with others, choices – and very often this choice is not the easiest” (Taylor 2017: 4). In other words, due to the socio-cultural background of modern man, religiosity is not his “natural” state. For him, such a state is considered to be the secularism of his implicit background knowledge (Taylor 2017: 17), which establishes a quite objective mental distance between him and religion, so that the latter can be perceived and mastered by him only in a reflexive and reflective way (Lebedev 2012; Lebedev, Blagojevic and Pokaninova 2020).

This positioning of cultural categories seems to be based on the fact that “modernity does not have, does not represent and

cannot offer an adequate symbolic complex for the interpretation of the reality of God and the representation of him" (Donati 2019: 174). In the "anamnesis" of the cultural matrix of classical European modernity that was formed by the Enlightenment, there remains a fundamental rejection of tradition and religion as its "cornerstone," which is why the latter was "pushed" by modernity into the realm of the cultural unconscious and naturally became a source of irrational fears for the modern mass consciousness. Over time, this initial attitude was softened and differentiated up to the rationally legitimized "justification" of religion in one or another of its manifestations. However, the price of such secular relegation of religion is the loss of its main –transcendent – dimension. According to Pierpaolo Donati, "modernity represents God either as a relic of superstitions or as the insight immanent to the world and its history" (Donati 2019: 174).

This combination of circumstances results in the trend of ambivalent attitudes toward religion, which is universal for the secular culture of modernity. Religion is marked positively in those cases when it can be convincingly (for a certain group and within a particular range of situations) interpreted in secular, modern categories, and is marked negatively in all other cases – namely, when such convincing interpretation does not work. Taking into account the huge variety of modern religious phenomena and the ambivalence of the political and ideological factor that acts as the main social selector in this area, religious manifestations often receive a dual assessment, while the configurations of the corresponding emotions and interpretations in the mass consciousness can change quite quickly under the influence of circumstances, including random ones.

Thus, the risk of religious xenophobia in the everyday consciousness of Russian

youth that is understood as the probability of certain young people's socially destructive reaction to the religious (or so-perceived) manifestations of "strangers" in the course of everyday interactions is mainly due to the cultural factor. The latter is based on the nature of the "background" of the perception of religion by a typical modern mass consciousness based on the matrix of secularity and secular culture, which predisposes to a reflexive and rational learning of religion, but does not have adequate "tools" for this purpose. This situation results in the fact that at the level of implicit knowledge, religion (or more precisely everything that is labeled as "religion" by the mass consciousness) potentially falls under the probability of negative perception. As a result, manifestations of religion and religiosity that have not received positive legitimation of one kind or another, as well as their carriers, fall into the "risk group" as an object of potential intolerance and xenophobia. On the contrary, it is much easier to inform them of negative legitimation, whether purposefully or spontaneously. In this regard, religious xenophobia seems to be latent in modern humanity and society, although its cultural foundations differ significantly from those that acted in traditional societies.

2 METHOD

The final study was conducted in 2020 and involved 2,514 respondents. The presented data was collected using the method of mass survey (with the use of the combined variants of the sample set: online and face-to-face surveys) of progressive student youth in one of the Russian Federation's regions. The study sample was quota-based in relation to gender, age, and education (humanities, technical and natural sciences). The analysis also uses the materials of monitoring conducted by the authors'

team on the topic of youth xenophobia and extremism that has been carried out since 2015 (the number of respondents for the annual survey is at least 2,000). Information on these studies is also presented in the articles of I. S. Shapovalova and the research team (Shapovalova and Lebedev 2020; Shapovalova, Zavodyan and Valieva 2021).

3 RESULTS

In order to study the issues of religious xenophobia, the International Centre for Sociological Research (Belgorod State University) has been conducting sociological research on relevant topics among progressive youth in Russia since 2015. Russian students fit fully within such a category of young people. The border region of the Russian Federation (Belgorod region) was chosen as the location of the study because it is one of the centres of transmigration flows characterised by progressiveness and a high level of social capital (Lapin 2016).

The main concept of the study is the idea of a complex mechanism for the formation of religious xenophobia as a result of socialisation, personal attitudes, and reactions to the social situation of multireligiousness. The main hypothesis of the research is the assumption about the intermediate nature of the phenomenon of religious xenophobia as being one of the stages of reproduction of religious extremism. The main purpose of the study is to obtain a reflexive assessment of the religious situation regarding progressive youth in terms of manifestations of xenophobic reactions, facts of discrimination, and violations of citizens' rights on religious grounds.

The main indicators illustrating the problem of religious xenophobia among Russian youth were identified as:

- satisfaction with the religious situation in the context of general satisfaction with various aspects of life;
- violation of religious rights and freedoms;
- attitude towards multi-religiousness;
- religious xenophobia and extremism;
- attitude towards religious extremism.

Assessing the indicator of progressive young people's satisfaction with the religious situation in Russia, the majority of respondents expressed a positive assessment – more than 50% are more or less satisfied with the confessional relations and interaction of representatives of different religions. 32.1% are absolutely satisfied with the situation, which puts the assessment of the religious situation in third place among the indicators of the general assessment – the highest absolute satisfaction is diagnosed in the general assessment of young people's life and the financial situation of their families (Figure 1a).

Within the framework of the dynamics of general satisfaction with the religious situation, we can observe a progressive increase in absolute satisfaction with small wave-like dynamics of the indicator of the respondents' general satisfaction and dissatisfaction (Figure 1b).

According to young people, this assessment is related to the reflection of, first of all, the observance of religious rights and freedoms in Russian society, the importance of which is emphasized by 81.9% of respondents. Protection from persecution for religious beliefs is currently valued by 70.4% of respondents. This is the second most positive assessment after the perceived importance of protection against infringement of rights on the ground of national origin. However, the fear of religious discrimination is experienced by 8.0% of the surveyed representatives of progres-

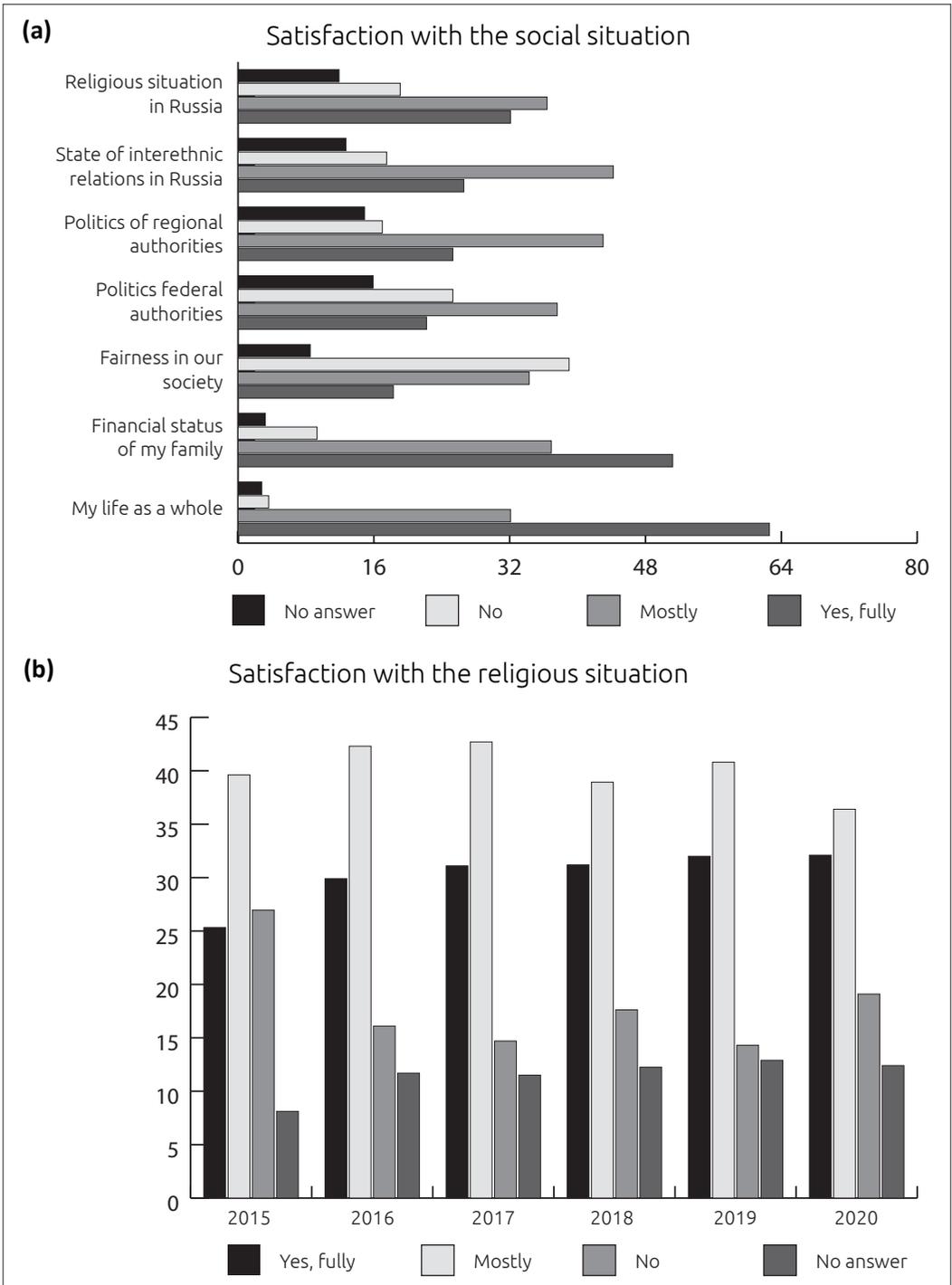


Figure 1 Progressive youth's satisfaction with the social situation in Russia (a) Dynamics of Russian youth's satisfaction with the religious situation (b)

Source: authors' own calculations

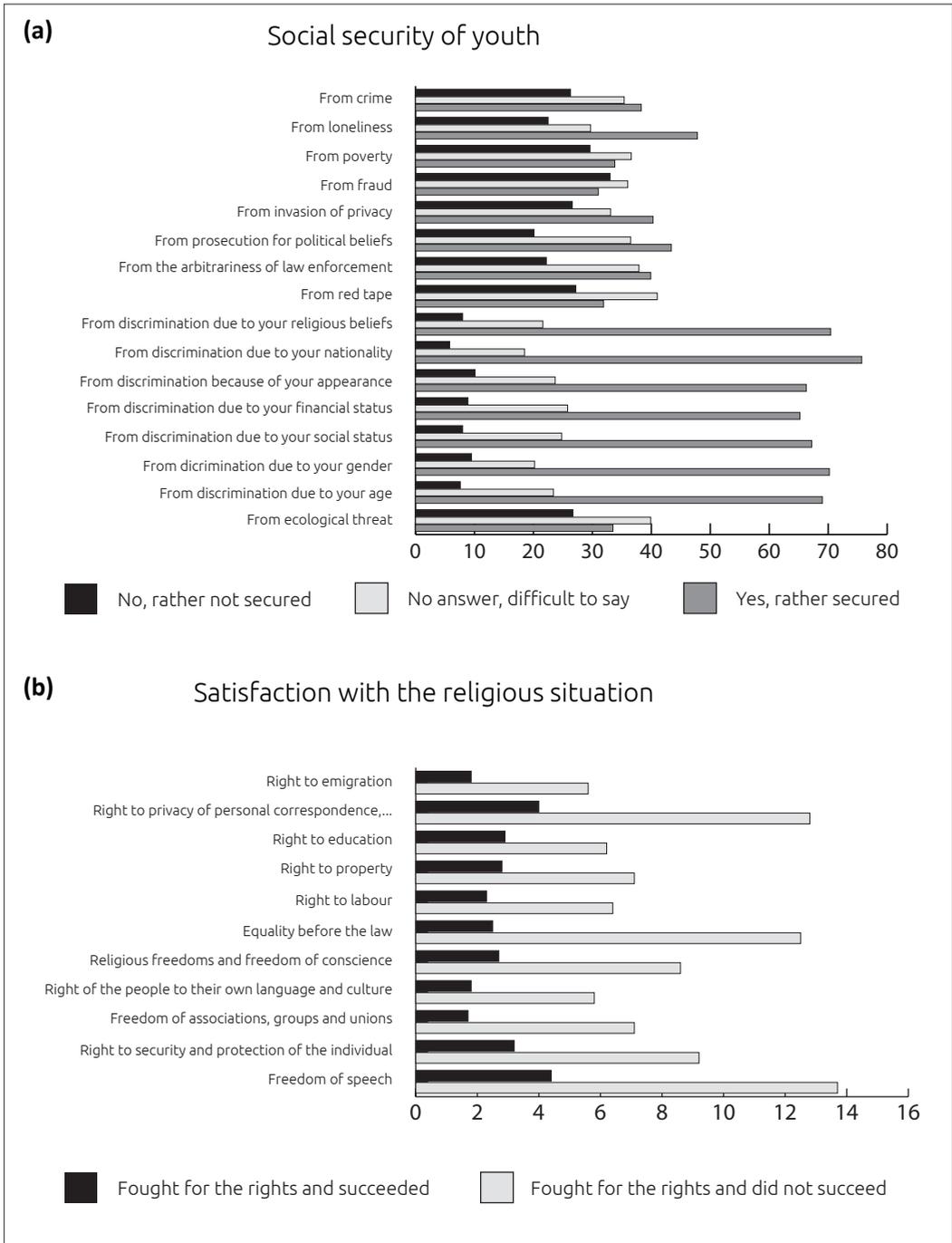


Figure 2 Assessment of Russian youth’s security from social threats (a) Violation of the rights and freedoms of Russian young people and the result of defending their own rights in 2020 (b)

Source: authors’ own calculations

sive youth in Russia (Figure 2a). 11.3% of respondents have experienced violations of their religious rights and freedoms (Figure 2b). At the same time, trying to defend their right to religious choice, 8.6% of young people have failed, and only 2.7% of them have been successful in their protest. Against the background of violations of other rights and freedoms in Russian society, religious rights come in fifth place in terms of the number of recorded cases of protest. They are ahead of violations of the rights of freedom of speech, equality before the law, the right to privacy, and the right to personal security.

In different fields, multi-religiousness can be perceived in different ways, which gives us an idea of the structure of xenophobic trends in this area. Thus, multi-religiousness in the educational environment is perceived by the modern youth of Russia as a mostly positive phenomenon (Figure 3a) – 95.1% give a more or less positive as-

essment to this situation, which is determined by the fact that in the student community, the combination of representatives of different religions and nations develops communication skills and cross-cultural communication (85.9% of those who answered positively), and promotes the spread of knowledge about different cultures and customs (70.8%), as well as Russian culture outside the country (39.9%). Only 1.3% of young people express a negative opinion, explaining their position by arguing that this situation leads to interethnic conflicts and hostility within the university (62.5% of those who answered negatively), makes it difficult to apply uniform requirements to students in the educational process, reduces the quality of learning (62.5%), contributes to the division of students into more and less privileged ones (37.5%), and prevents normal communication in the student and university environment (34.4%).

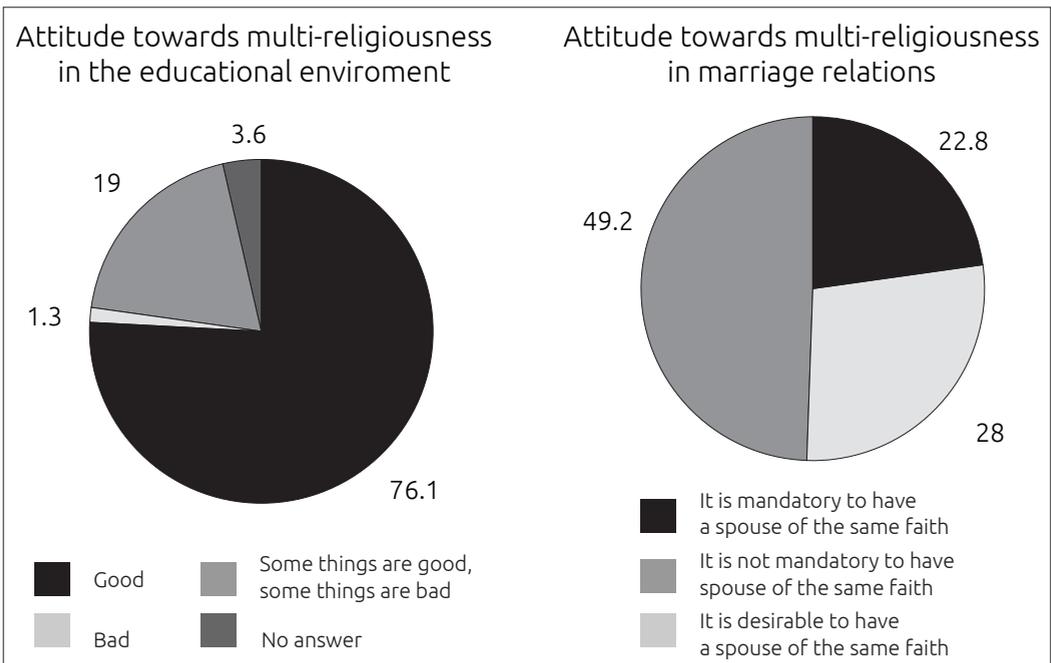


Figure 3 Assessment of multi-religiousness in Russian educational institutions (a) Assessment of multi-religiousness in marital relations (b)

Source: authors' own calculations

At the same time, 22.8% emphasise the importance of a single faith in marriages, while 28.0% indicate the need for mono-religious relations in the family, which as a whole added up to more than 50% of young people’s attitudes to the unity of religion in the family (Figure 3b).

Studying the respondents’ manifestations of xenophobia towards people of a different religion, it was determined that calm, neutral, or positive reactions of curiosity predominate (such answers were chosen by 93.9% of young people). Negative reactions to a different religion are shown by 3.0% of young people, while only 1.0% of respondents react aggressively (Figure 4a). The analysis distributes the reasons for such a negative perception of another religion among four causal blocks: differences in cultural and value meanings and behavioural patterns (33.7%), a sociality of behaviour (38.6%), personal qualities of representatives of another religion (31.7%), and respondents’ intolerance to another religion (6.1%) (Figure 4b).

The respondents also note the manifestations of xenophobic trends and religious intolerance in the external environment, including such cases in relation to themselves (demonstrating religious beliefs or the presence of signs of possible confessional affiliation). Thus, the main place of manifestation of this format of social interaction is the internet – 47.4% of respondents note such occurrences on social networks and online media. They also see the greatest number of xenophobic manifestations towards themselves on the internet (8.9%). The second most likely place to witness or experience religious xenophobia is the street and shopping areas (35.8%), while the mass media comes in third. Despite the fact that the environment of an educational institution takes the last place on this list, 21.7% of young people report cases of religious xenophobia in universities and 5.0% of respondents have been personally affected by xenophobia (Figure 5a).

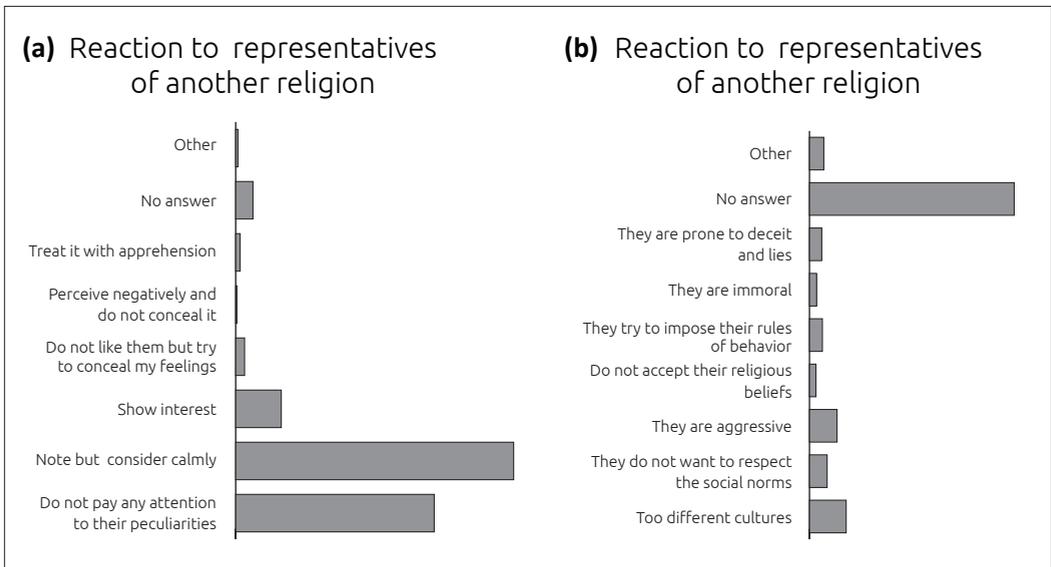


Figure 4 The attitude of progressive Russian youth to representatives of other religions (a) The reasons for young people’s negative attitude towards people of other religions (b)

Source: authors’ own calculations

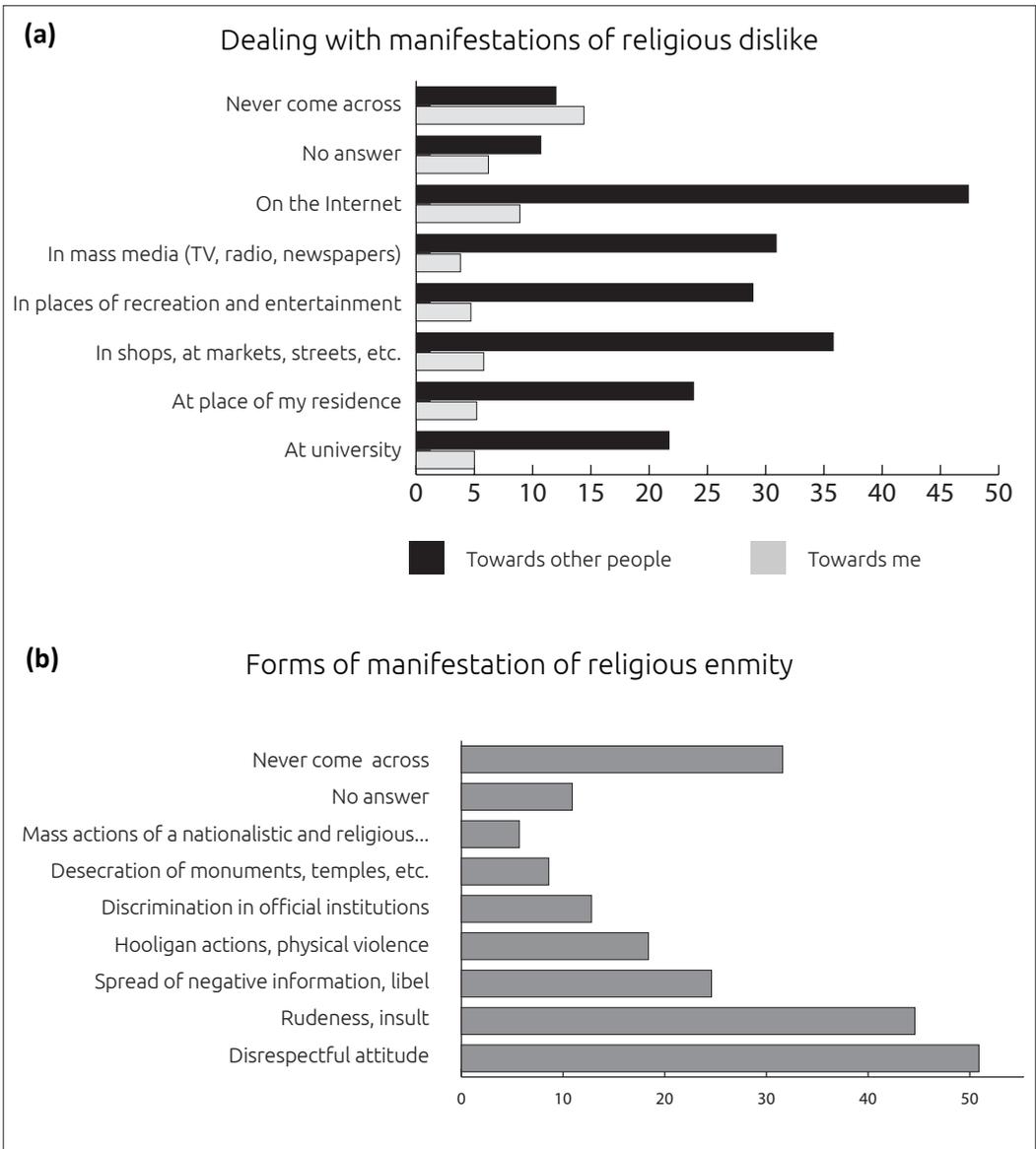


Figure 5 Local manifestations of religious xenophobia in the social environment recorded by Russian youth (a) Forms of religious intolerance and xenophobia (b)

Source: authors' own calculations

The most common form of such a negative manifestation is a disrespectful attitude, as indicated by 50.9% of respondents. Unacceptable rudeness and insults have been experienced by 44.6% of those who have faced cases of religious xenophobia.

On the list of other manifestations, mass demonstrations against nationality and religion are also recorded – they are a minority, but 5.7% for such a large-scale phenomenon is a critical indicator (Figure 5b).

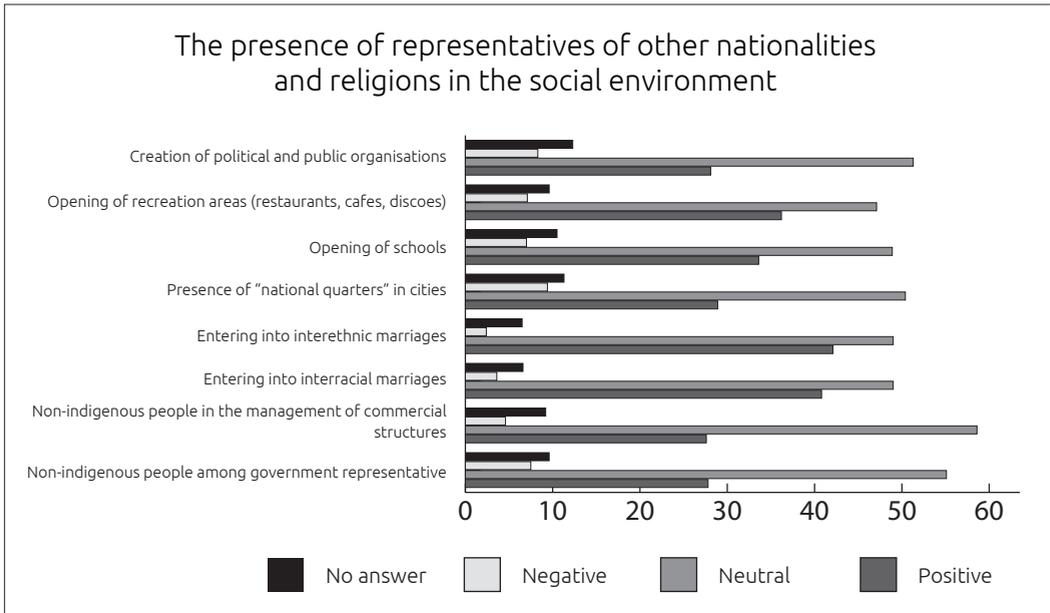


Figure 6 Respondents' attitude to the presence of representatives of other nationalities and religions in various social spheres

Source: authors' own calculations

One of the most striking illustrations of religious xenophobia are the answers to the question about the limits of access of representatives of other nationalities (and, accordingly, religions) to secular life and its spheres (Figure 6). Thus, the formation of "national quarters" in young people's residences causes the greatest denial while answering this question (9.4%). Second on the list of denials is the creation of political and public organisations by representatives of minority nationalities (8.3%), while third is the presence of non-indigenous nationalities among the authorities (7.5%). Young people provide the strongest support for interethnic and interracial marriages, as well as the creation of a national leisure infrastructure (40-42.1%, 36.2%). Young people provide the least approval for the possibility of party and commercial activity of "others" (27.6-27.8%).

Separately, the study assessed the manifestations of religious extremism as a terminal form of religious xenophobia. A quarter of the young people surveyed considered this problem serious, a third of the respondents did not consider it so serious in Russian society, and 39.5% found it difficult to assess the situation (Figure 7a). These responses correlate with fears for their lives and the lives of their loved ones among 23.0% of respondents, and the absence of such fears among 48.6% (Figure 7b). At the same time, 5.9% believe in the presence of radical people in the inner circle of communication.

In order to build the topography of the transformation of xenophobia into religious extremism, it is important to understand the boundaries and examples of such manifestations in social situations involving progressive youth in Russia. The main situations for diagnosis occur on the

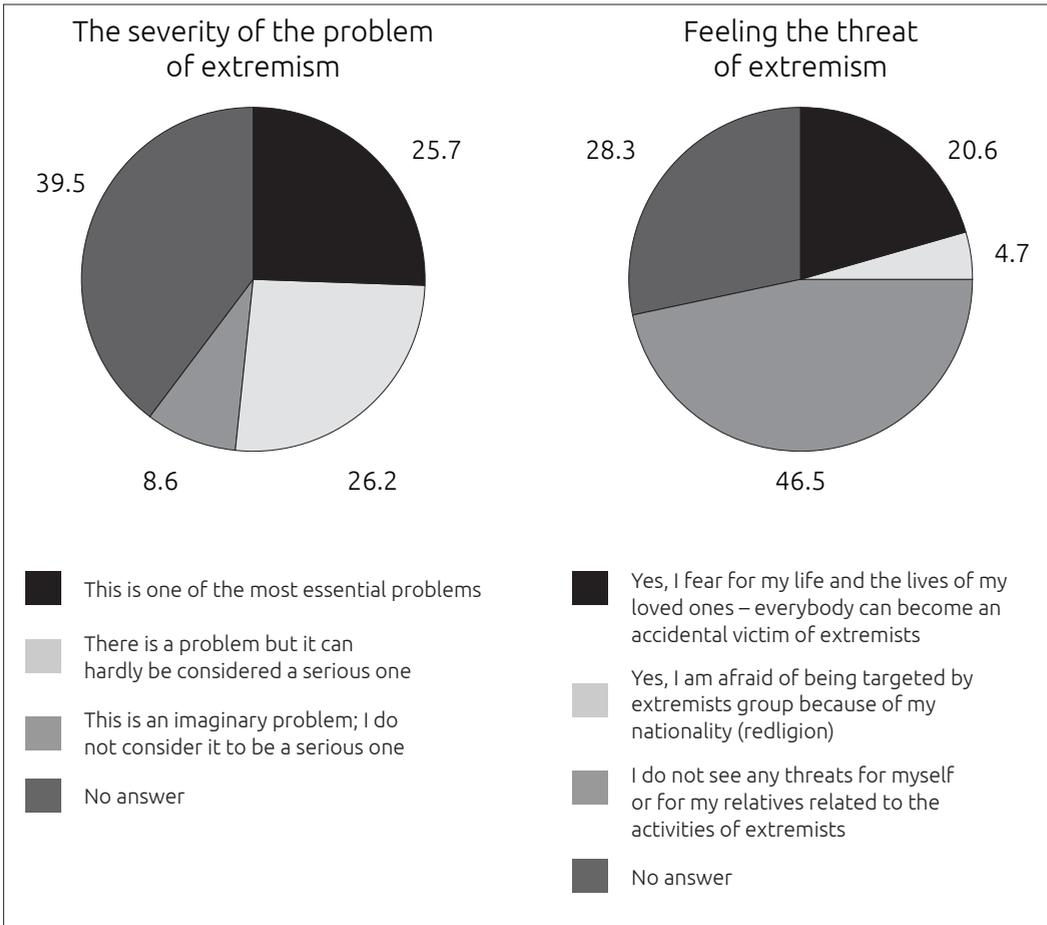


Figure 7 Assessment of the problem of religious extremism in modern Russian society (a) Subjective assessment of the threat from manifestations of religious extremism (b)

Source: authors' own calculations

internet, the immediate environment (communication zone), the educational environment, and people's place of residence (table).

The cases represented in the smallest number are: distribution of leaflets of an extremist nature, attempts to involve people in extremist actions and unauthorised protests, advertising of websites and extremist organisations and attempts to involve respondents in them, distribution of extremist symbols, and information about the preparation of terrorist attacks. More

than 90% of the surveyed young people say they've never experienced such things. The most common situations are: veiled calls for violence and discrimination, creating a negative image or statements in an offensive context in relation to a religious or ethnic group, and statements about the inferiority of representatives from another religious or ethnic group.

The internet is where people are most likely to witness or experience xenophobic and extremist antisocial practices. Aside from this, 1.6% of respondents heard infor-

Table 1 Age and gender structure of population infected with COVID-19

Meanings:	Never encountered	Yes, on the internet	Yes, in the immediate environment	Yes, in an educat. institution	Yes, at my place of residence
Information about an upcoming terrorist attack	90.8	8.3	0.8	0.4	1.6
Open calls for violence against representatives of other nationalities and religions	86.6	13	1.4	0.7	1.6
Open calls for discrimination on any grounds	82.4	16	2.4	1.3	1.4
Veiled calls for violence and discrimination	79.4	18	2.8	1.9	2.4
Creating a negative image of an ethnic or religious group	81	16.6	2.7	2.1	3.3
Statements about the inferiority of another ethnic or religious group and its representatives	82.6	14.9	2.4	1.6	2.8
Accusations of a particular ethnic or religious group's negative influence on society and the state	81.8	16.1	2.7	1.6	2.7
Referring to an ethnic or religious group or its representatives as such in a derogatory or offensive context	81	16.5	2.8	1.7	2.8
Calls to prevent the consolidation of migrants belonging to a particular ethnic or religious group in the region (district, city, etc.)	88.2	9.8	1.7	1.1	2.7
Attempts to involve you in unauthorised protests	93.2	5.6	0.9	0.6	1.9
Attempts to involve you in a religious (or other) organisation similar to a sect	91.2	6.2	1.4	0.6	1
Attempts to involve you in activities (actions) of an extremist nature	94	4.7	0.8	0.6	3
Distribution of extremist leaflets	94.2	4.3	1.1	0.8	1
Use and distribution of symbols of extremist organisations movements	91.7	6.2	1.1	0.9	0.9
Advertising websites of extremist organisations or with extremist information	92	6.7	1.2	0.7	1.4

Source: authors' own calculations

mation about an impending terrorist attack in their place of residence, while 1.4% heard open calls for violence from people around them, including in their inner circle. As far as extremist practices go, the respondents' surrounding community is the second most likely space (after the internet) to experience or witness veiled calls for violence and discrimination on religious and national grounds (2.8%), as well as attempts to involve people in a religious organisation similar to a sect (1.4%). On the other hand, respondents were most likely to identify propaganda and demonstration of xenophobic and extremist manifestations in their place of residence. Educational institutions are less represented on this list than other locations. There, respondents were less likely to encounter negative images of an ethnic or religious group and veiled calls for violence and discrimination.

4 DISCUSSION

Being a component of the social perimeter of young people's socialisation, the religious situation in Russian society is not the primary focus of the overall assessment of social satisfaction. Fewer than 20% of young people are introduced to religious traditions at the level of superficial immersion, which transforms religious practices into general cultural ones. As a rule, religious consciousness is directed to the establishment of moral and ethical norms governing one's behaviour. This situation is typical for most regions of Russia, where orthodox religious principles are not widespread and secularism is the way of life of the absolute majority. Against this background, the assessment of the religious situation on the part of young people is typically "condescending", or to be more precise, superficial; it's often associated with a focus on social clichés and events.

This is what can be seen in young people's assessments; it's what provides the micro-dynamics of minor fluctuations during six years of monitoring.

Despite all of the above, a fifth of the young people surveyed notice the existing problems, which are reflected in the registration of indicators of religious xenophobia and, as a consequence, extremism. This is also evidenced by protests in connection with the violation of religious rights and freedoms, which were faced by every ninth respondent. Besides, as we can see, the locus of absence of civil rights is also being formed in this regard – most of the protests, in fact, did not lead to anything. Despite the young people's very vague perception of religious differences in the "even" religious situation in the regions of Russia, we see that religious xenophobia is noticed by young people and, moreover, on a very serious scale.

It all begins with a contradiction: the contradiction of the existence, on the one hand, of a visible tolerance for multi-religiousness, the "relegation" of the factor of religious affiliation to the zone of insignificant ones when making a communicative choice, and, on the other hand, the elevation of the factor of belonging to a particular religion to a "species" attribute, to the demonstration of real religious xenophobia at the level of close, interpersonal communication. This is demonstrated most clearly by the discrepancy between the adoption of multi-religiousness in the educational environment and in family-marriage relations. Relevant groups of respondents who have an absolutely xenophobic reaction differ almost 20 times, and if you combine them with groups that exhibit "soft xenophobia," then the fear of close communication with people of other faiths in the educational environment increases to more than 50% in relation to the family.

This is, perhaps, the true picture of the “xenophobic reality” in relation to religion – a hidden format that is not demonstrated, but uses a rather rigid framework as a “background” in assimilation, adaptation, equality, freedom, democracy, and many more aspects. This hidden format does not allow us to see the true picture covered by “small” statistics – we are lulled by the figure that 3% of young people react negatively to otherness (Figure 4a). However, as the layers of social desirability are “removed,” we see the estimate of xenophobia approach 50%. For example, we see this on the internet (47.9%, Figure 5a), in people’s place of residence, and in the mass media (more than 30%); and the quality of manifestations – including disrespect, rudeness and insult (50% and 44%), which can no longer be hidden by the reaction “I don’t like them, but I try to hide my feelings” or “they make me uneasy.” Special attention should be paid to the restrictions on equal rights that the respondents build, preventing representatives of other religions and nations from entering the zone of government, business, or creating their own locations on the “autochthonous” territory (Figure 6).

Our research shows that religious xenophobia, both in the youth environment and in the environment that young people observe, has a much larger scope than we think, and the “isthmus” that brings it into a position of extremism is much narrower than it looks at first sight. Almost every fourth young person is really afraid of extremist attacks against themselves and their loved ones, while 4.1% of respondents perceive this threat as being made specifically against their religion and nationality.

The real figures of the diagnosis of extremist manifestations faced by Russian youth are quite disturbing evidence for our statement. We see that at least 20% of

young people notice some extremist practices around them, encountering the mechanism of reproduction of xenophobia and extremism in everyday life and even in their immediate environment. This “tip of the iceberg” of extremism that is ostracised and persecuted creates the illusion of effective work towards the eradication of such phenomena. The lack of understanding of the continuity between the phenomena of xenophobia and extremism gives a sense of relative control; in reality it constricts the area of management of the situation and creates the possibility of critical risks of conflicts with extremely destructive consequences.

5 CONCLUSION

The risk of religious xenophobia in the everyday consciousness of Russian youth, as the probability of a socially destructive reaction of young people to religious (or so-perceived) manifestations of “strangers” in the course of everyday interactions, is culturally determined. The “background” of the perception of religion by a typical modern mass consciousness is based on the matrix of secularity – a secular culture that predisposes people to a reflexive and rational absorption of religion, but does not have adequate “tools” for this purpose. As a result, everything related to religion is initially perceived ambivalently by modern people and, accordingly, falls into the potential risk zone of xenophobic attitudes.

The concept of the study is based on the idea of a complex mechanism for the formation of religious xenophobia against a background of socialisation, personal attitudes, and actual reactions to the social reality of multi-religiousness. The main hypothesis of the research is the intermediate nature of the phenomenon of religious xenophobia, as being one of the

stages of reproduction of religious extremism. The main purpose of the study was to obtain a reflexive assessment of the religious situation among progressive Russian youth represented by students in terms of the manifestation of xenophobic reactions, facts of discrimination, and violations of citizens' rights on religious grounds.

Against the background of violations of other rights and freedoms in Russian society, religious rights take fifth place in terms of the number of fixed protests. They come ahead of violations of the right to freedom of speech, equality before the law, the right to privacy, and the right to personal security. At the same time, almost every fourth young person is actually afraid of extremist attacks against themselves and their loved ones, while 4.1% perceive this threat as being made specifically against their religion and nationality.

The internet is the leading space for various formats of xenophobic and extremist activities and the reproduction of antisocial practices. The next most common locus of extremist practices is the respondents' immediate environment, in terms of veiled calls for violence, discrimination on religious and national grounds, and attempts to involve others in a religious organisation similar to a sect. In other moments, most respondents note propaganda and demonstrations of xenophobic and extremist manifestations mainly in their place of residence. Educational organisations are less represented on the list than other locations. There, respondents were less likely to encounter negative images of an ethnic or religious group and veiled calls for violence and discrimination.

In general, against the background of young people's vague perception of religious differences amid the "even" religious situation in the regions of Russia, religious

xenophobia is present on a very serious scale among the interviewed young people. The statistic that 3% of young people react negatively to otherness shows only the "tip of the iceberg." The true picture of the "xenophobic reality" in relation to the manifestations of religion is characterised by a hidden format that sets a rather rigid framework within the "background" of assimilation, adaptation, equality, freedom, democracy, and many more aspects. As the "layers are removed," we see xenophobia in nearly 50% of young people: on the internet (47.9%), in people's place of residence, and in the mass media (more than 30%); and the quality of manifestations including disrespect, rudeness, and insult (50 and 44%), which are already precedents and symptoms of directly destructive aggression. Special attention should be paid to the restrictions on equal rights that the respondents build, preventing representatives of other religions and nations from entering the fields of government or business, and creating their own locations on the "autochthonous" territory.

Thus, religious xenophobia, both in the youth environment and in the environment that young people observe, has a much larger scope than we think, and the "isthmus" that brings it into a position of extremism is much narrower than it appears at first sight. At least 20% of respondents find some extremist practices around them, encountering the mechanism of reproduction of xenophobia and extremism in everyday life and even in their immediate environment. The lack of understanding of the continuity between the phenomena of xenophobia and extremism gives a sense of relative control that in reality constricts the area of management of the situation and creates the possibility of critical risks of conflicts with extremely destructive consequences.

REFERENCES

- Alexander, G. (2013). *Smysly sotsial'noy zhizni: Kul'tursotsiologiya*. Moscow: «Praksis».
- Beck, U. (1995). *Ecological Enlightenment. Essays on the Politics of the Risk Society*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press.
- Beck, U. (1994). The Reinvention of Politics: Towards a Theory of Reflexive Modernization. In Beck, U. *Reflexive modernization. Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order* (pp. 1-55). Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Beck, U. (1992). *Risk Society. Toward a New Modernity*. London: Sage.
- Cipriani, R., & Ricucci, R. (2020). Introduction. Discussing religions in a globalized world. Trends, changes and novelties. *Nauchnyy rezul'tat. Sotsiologiya i upravleniye*, 6 (3), 4-8.
- Donati, P. (2019). *Relyatsionnaya teoriya obshchestva: sotsial'naya zhizn' s tochkii zreniya kriticheskogo realizma* (comp. Kostrova, E. A.). Moscow: PSTGU.
- Lapin, N.I. (Ed.). (2016). *Atlas modernizatsii Rossii i ee regionov: socioekonomicheskie i sociokul'turnye tendentsii i problemy*. Moscow: Ves' Mir.
- Lebedev, S.D. (2012). Refleksivnyj potencial pravoslavnoj kul'tury v Rossii, 1990–2000-e gg.: k sociologicheskomu analizu problem. *Sociologicheskij zhurnal*, 3, 129-142.
- Lebedev, S., Blagojević, M., & Pokaninova, E. (2020). Value- and reflection-based approach to indicators of Orthodox religiosity of the population. *Stanovništvo*, 58(1), 47–61. <https://doi.org/10.2298/STNV200322002L>
- Luhmann, N. (1993). *Risk: A Sociological Theory*. N.Y.: Walter de Gruyter, Inc.
- Mukomel', V. I., & Pain, E. A. (Eds.). (2007). *Tolerantnost' protiv ksenofobii (zarubezhnyy i rossiyskiy opyt)*. Moscow: Institut sotsiologii RAN, "Academia".
- Shapovalova, I. S., & Lebedev, S. D. (2020). Sotsial'naya travma i tsennosti pokoleniy: Velikaya Otechestvennaya vojna v istoricheskoy pamyati studentcheskoy molodezhi. *Nauchnyy rezul'tat. Sotsiologiya i upravleniye*, 6 (2), 3-18. <https://doi.org/10.18413/2408-9338-2020-6-2-0-1>
- Shapovalova, I. S., Zavodyan, I. S., & Valieva, I. N. (2021). Molodezh' rossiyskogo prigranich'ya: problema etnicheskoy identichnosti i tolerantnosti. *Nauchnyy rezul'tat. Sotsiologiya i upravleniye*, 7(1), 21-38.
- Short, J. F. (1984). The Social Fabric of Risk: Towards the Social Transformation of Risk Analysis. *American Sociological Review*, 49, 711-725.
- Taylor, Ch. (2017). *Sekulyarnyy vek*. Moscow: BBI.
- Yanitsky, O. N. (2003). Sotsiologiya riska: klyuchevyye idei. *Mir Rossii*, 1, 3-33.
- Zubok, Y. A., Chuprov, V. I., Shapovalova, I. S., & Kisilenko, A. V. (2016). *Riski transformiruyushcheyasya sredy obitaniya: problema issledovaniya i upravleniya*. Belgorod: "EPITSENTR".
- Zubok, Y. A. (2007). *Fenomen riska v sotsiologii: opyt issledovaniya molodozhi*. Moscow: Mysl'.

How to cite: Shapovalova, I., Lebedev, S., & Blagojević, M. (2022). Religious xenophobia in the everyday consciousness of Russian progressive youth: risk assessment. *Stanovništvo*, 60(1), 97–115. <https://doi.org/10.2298/STNV2201097S>

Verska ksenofobija u svakodnevnoj svesti ruske napredne omladine: procena rizika

Sažetak

Članak je posvećen sociološkoj analizi stavova o verskoj ksenofobiji socijalno i kulturno najprogresivnijeg dela savremene ruske omladine, koji predstavlja studentska omladina. U temelju istraživačkog diskursa jesu pojmovi „društva rizika“, revitalizacije religije i ksenofobije. Osnovni cilj istraživanja sastoji se u tome da se istraže vrednosti „napredne“ ruske studentske omladine u kontekstu njihovih stavova o ksenofobiji, diskriminaciji i kršenju verskih prava građana. Iskustvena obaveštenja prikupljena su anketiranjem studenata jednim delom u onlajn formatu, a drugim delom direktnim anketiranjem studenata Belgorodskog regiona u Ruskoj Federaciji. Na taj način uzorak čini 2.514 ispitanika. Uzorak je kvotni u odnosu na pol, uzrast i obrazovanje (humanističko, tehničko i prirodno-naučno). Otkriveno je da najmanje 20% ispitanika nalazi neke ekstremističke prakse, susreće se sa ksenofobijom i ekstremizmom u svakodnevnom životu u svom najbližem okruženju. Podaci pokazuju da je od svih načina pojavljivanja istraživanih pojava, internet predvodnik ksenofobičnih, ekstremističkih i antidruštvenih praksi. Verska ksenofobija, sa kojom se mladi susreću, ima mnogo veći obim nego što se čini, a „spojnica“ koja ksenofobiju prevodi u poziciju ekstremizma je mnogo uža nego što to na prvi pogled izgleda. Nerazumevanje kontinualne veze između fenomena ksenofobije i ekstremizma sužava mogućnost upravljanja situacijom i povećava verovatnoću rizičnih konflikata sa krajnje destruktivnim posledicama.

Ključne reči:

verska ksenofobija, verski ekstremizam, samosvest mladih, društveni stavovi, studenti