

## Conference Paper

# The Prevalence of the Ideas of Nationalism Among Young People (The Case of Young People of Yekaterinburg, Russia)

Nadezhda Ivanovna Sivkova, Anastasia Nikolaevna Novgorodtseva, Elena Leonidovna Sysolyatina, and Sergey Viktorovich Kunshchikov

Ural Federal University named after the first President of Russia B. N. Yeltsin, Yekaterinburg, Russian Federation

## Abstract

The ideas of nationalism in the practical discourse of the media and the speeches of politicians are often negative; the ideas of the superiority of some nationalities over others and the spread of conflicts are emphasized. From the point of view of scientific discourse, nationalism is perceived both as a negative and as a positive phenomenon for maintaining the stability and the fundamental strength of the state. The importance of studying the prevalence of the ideas of nationalism is associated with working with young people who often act as a “risk group,” that is, those who, failing to understand the depth of the process, are prone to sympathize and even participate in nationalist events and organizations. To identify the prevalence of nationalist orientations, a sociological survey was conducted in the form of an enquiry (N = 638) among various categories of young people (students in schools, colleges, technical schools, and universities). It is shown that among the young people there is no adequate idea of nationalism, which is often disguised as patriotism. A university student can most adequately assess the existence of nationalist orientations in publications on social networks, in the media, in the speeches of political leaders, therefore, schoolchildren and students of secondary vocational education are most susceptible to the development and distribution of nationalist ideas. A special group — a risk group — includes students in a difficult financial situation.

**Keywords:** nationalism, patriotism, prevention of nationalism, youth, sociological research.

Corresponding Author:

Nadezhda Ivanovna Sivkova  
sergey.kunshchikov@urfu.ru

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## 1. Introduction

From time to time, some people via the media and social networks encourage young people to actively defend the interests of the Russians by all means, both in other countries and within Russia. Despite the fact that in Russia, in the Urals, there are few ethnic conflicts, the forces that assert nationalist orientations and attitudes in the youth environment through social networks continue to operate. According to S.A. Panarin, “... nationalism has not yet mastered the minds of the bulk of Russians,

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although such “predecessors” and “resemblances” of nationalism as selective ethnic xenophobia and nostalgia for lost greatpowerness are widespread among them” [7]. Therefore, it is important to constantly monitor the level of perception of such ideas by young people, intensifying the work to develop a culture of respectful communication with representatives of different countries and peoples. The Middle Urals and the Sverdlovsk Region are of particular interest for research, since this is not only one of the most multinational regions of Russia, but also a region that “traditionally is the territory of national peace and harmony” [15]. More than 160 nationalities live peacefully within the region. The focus on Yekaterinburg is all the more interesting, since the city becomes the center for significant international events — the World Cup was held here, the international industrial trade fair INNOPROM and the Global Manufacturing and Industrialization Summit (GMIS — 2019) are held annually, and the upcoming Universiade will attract young people from different countries of the former Soviet Union and beyond to Yekaterinburg, which makes this topic even more relevant, as young people are most vulnerable to the perception of nationalist sentiment” [8].

## 2. Methodology and Methods

The difficulty of studying nationalism lies in the fact that this concept is very ambiguous. Firstly, it is actively used in everyday life, in the speeches of politicians and in official political documents. Secondly, in science itself there are different interpretations of this phenomenon at the theoretical level, this is observed both among foreign (Anderson, B. [1], Bonikowski, B. [19], Breuilly, J. [4], Gellner, E. [10], Hobsbawm, E. [11], Kedourie, E. [13], Kohn, H. [2], Mann, M. [14], Smith, A. D. [20], etc.), and Russian researchers (Ilyin, I.A. [12], Tishkov, V.A. [19], Drobizheva, L.M. [6], etc.). Some see nationalism as a political doctrine, ideology, or political principle. Other authors see it as a specific feeling, way of thinking, speaking and acting, symbol or language [21]. Thirdly, in modern science and political practice there is no unity in the evaluative understanding of nationalism: some tend to see it as a negative phenomenon, while other authors identify both positive and negative sides therein [9, 16, 22].

All this causes difficulties in finding adequate empirical indicators to study this phenomenon. In this study, nationalism is understood as the superiority of one nation or ethnic group over another (negative orientation). Since the titular nation in Russia is the Russians, it was decided to investigate the nationalistic aspirations of just the Russians, and the main empirical indicator was the perception by young people of those entities that spread the idea of protecting the interests of the Russians as a particular group.

This description was initially aimed at identifying nationalist orientations, since, firstly, it implies using any means to protect interests, and secondly, it implies the protection of only one group of people, distinguished by ethnicity.

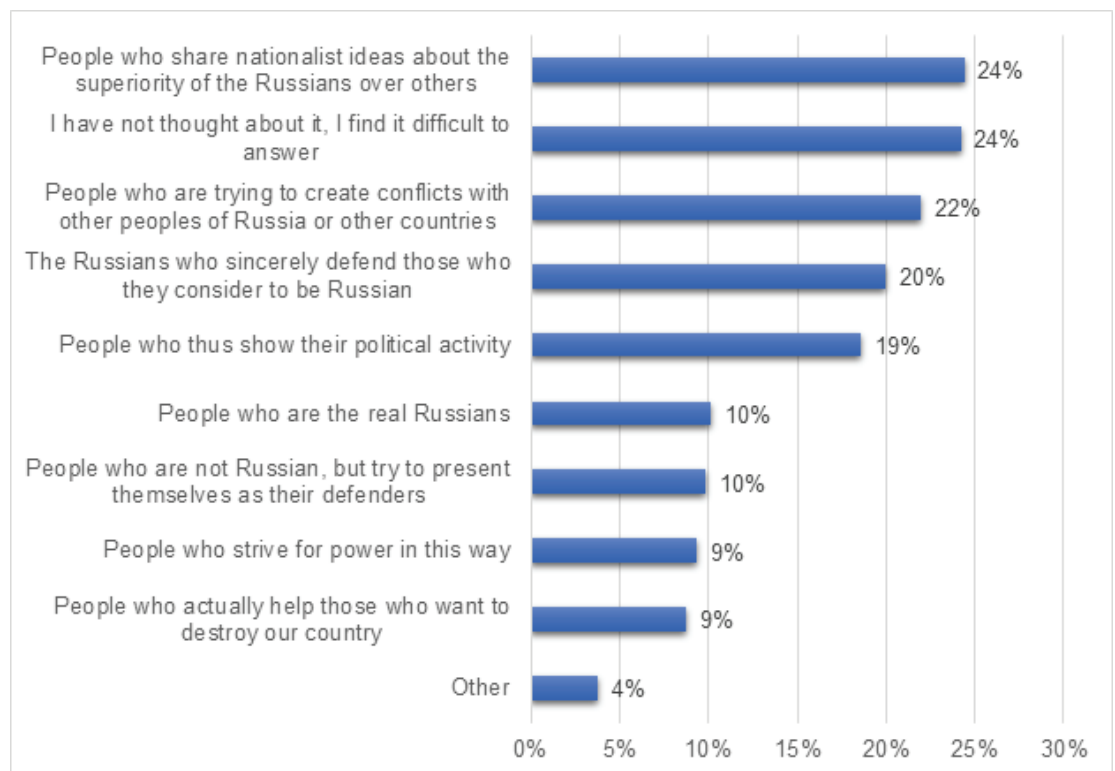
In 2018, a study was conducted that examined the prevalence of the ideas of nationalism among the young people in Yekaterinburg. The method of collecting information is an enquiry and its type — questionnaire survey. The choice of questionnaire is associated with the characteristics of the object of study, when the sample contains existing “nests” — according to the status of students in institutions of different levels: general education, secondary vocational, and higher education. 638 people were interviewed. Of these, 54.5% are women and 45.5% are men. The age of the respondents was from 15 to 22 years, the average age was 18.1 years. In general, 36% university students, 30% of students of colleges and technical schools, and 34% of schoolchildren in Yekaterinburg took part in the study.

### 3. Results and Discussion

As it turned out, young people do not even imagine the devastating consequences of the growth of nationalism in the country, since only 24% consider the idea of the superiority of one nation over another nationalistic and 22% associate nationalism with the initiation of conflicts with other nations and ethnic groups. Only 9% believe that nationalism is closely linked to forces that can destroy the country.

Consequently, young people do not have a formed and adequate idea of the essence of nationalism. To a certain extent, there is a confusion of ideas about nationalism and patriotism, that is, nationalistic ideas are painted as patriotism. It can be assumed that the growth of patriotism in our country may enhance the growth of nationalist tendencies. This alarming conclusion is made in connection with the fact that one in five considers the distributors of these ideas to be true defenders of the Russians, and 10% consider them the true Russians. This trend is confirmed by both Russian and foreign researchers — “... as D. Druckman writes, there are studies in which nationalism is not opposed to patriotism, but is perceived as its development, a kind of “sophistication” [17]. It is important to note that nationalist ideas are shared more by students of technical schools and colleges than by schoolchildren or students. Among students of technical schools, there are twice as many as those who sincerely believe that those who call for the assertion of Russian interests are real Russians.

Students perceive the proponents of such ideas in a most adequate manner. This is understandable since, in a university, students master a cycle of humanitarian disciplines



**Figure 1:** Opinion of the Respondents about Those Who Urges Young People to Protect the Interests of the Russians, (% of respondents)

(political science, sociology, law) that in no small part explain the causes of destructive processes both in Russian society and in the world as a whole. In addition, the students' level of consciousness and responsibility for their lives and decisions increases. The influence of education on nationalist orientations is also noted in the works of foreign researchers [5].

The study showed that, as young people get older, the level of their criticality in relation to nationalism increases. For example, while among teenagers, 19.8% believe that such ideas are spread by nationalists, then among older people, 37% already have such ideas, which is almost twice as much. The same applies to those who are trying to create conflicts — while 18% of teenagers are convinced of this, then among young people aged 20–22, 34% believe so.

The study showed that almost every third respondent came across similar ideas in the media, in the classroom, or on social networks. More often students of technical schools and universities, and to lesser extent students of schools, come across ideas of nationalism.

There is no consensus among young people regarding the need to combat this phenomenon. Only 17% believe that the struggle is not necessary due to the fact that there are respectful relations between nationalities. It turns out that the remaining

TABLE 1: Opinion of the respondents about who encourages young people to protect the interests of the Russians depending on the respondent's place of study (in % by column)

|   | In school | In a college or a technical school | In a university |
|---|-----------|------------------------------------|-----------------|
| The Russians who sincerely defend those who they consider to be Russian                   | 19.2%     | 21.6%                              | 19.4%           |
| People who are the real Russians  | 8.9%      | 15.7%                              | 6.3%            |
| People who are not Russian, but try to present themselves as their defenders              | 11.2%     | 9.3%                               | 8.9%            |
| People who thus show their political activity   | 20.1%     | 13.2%                              | 21.9%           |
| People who share nationalist ideas about the superiority of the Russians over others      | 21.9%     | 22.1%                              | 28.7%           |
| People who are trying to create conflicts with other peoples of Russia or other countries | 16.1%     | 18.1%                              | 30.8%           |
| People who strive for power in this way   | 7.6%      | 9.3%                               | 11.0%           |
| People who actually help those who want to destroy our country                            | 8.0%      | 8.3%                               | 9.7%            |
| Other   | 4.9%      | 3.4%                               | 3.0%            |
| I did not think about it, I find it difficult to answer                                   | 30.4%     | 25.0%                              | 17.7%           |

\* (the sum of answers exceeds 100%, as respondents could select several answers)

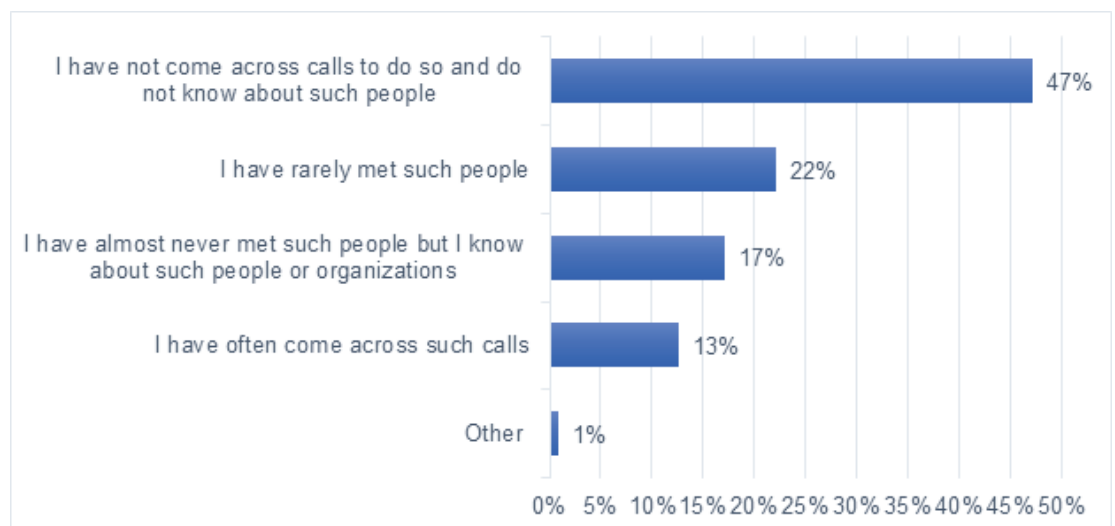
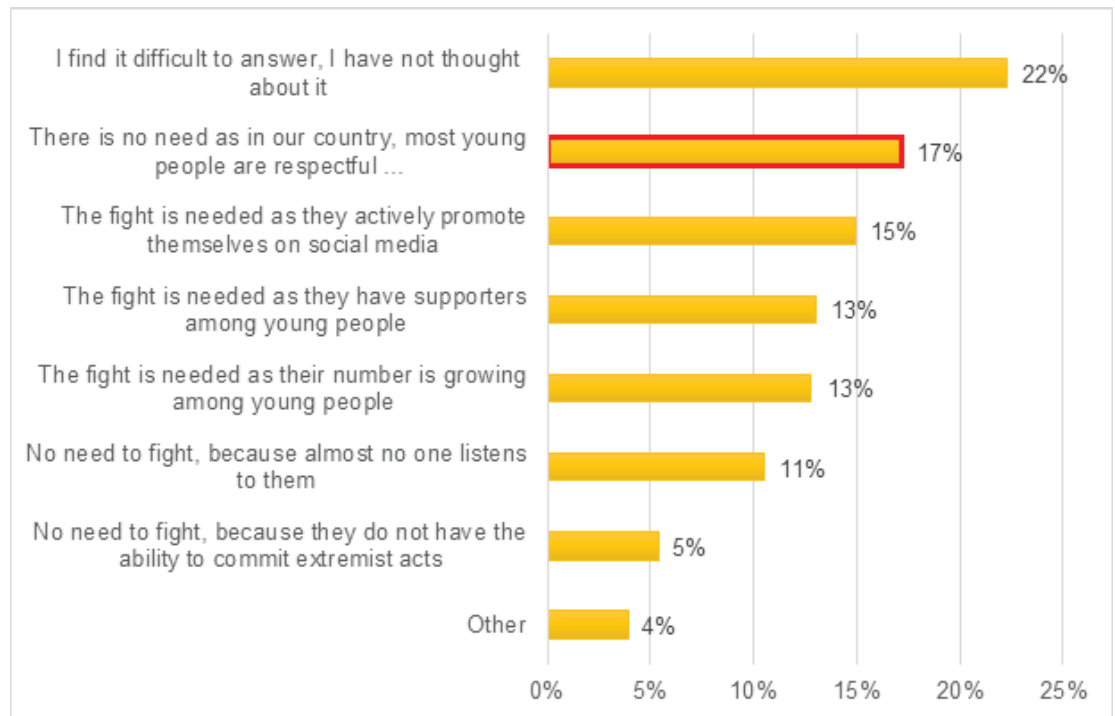


Figure 2: The Attitude of Young People in Yekaterinburg toward the Spread of Nationalist Ideas (% of respondents)

83% do not share this opinion! They do not believe in respectful relations between nationalities.

The motivation for the need to combat the manifestations of nationalism among students and schoolchildren is somewhat different. School students motivate the need



**Figure 3:** The Need to Fight Those Who Spread the Ideas of Nationalism among Young People of Yekaterinburg (% of respondents)

to fight due to the increase in the number of nationalist activists among young people more often than college and university students, and students — due to the increase in supporters of the ideas of nationalism. This suggests that school students are somewhat more susceptible to nationalist ideas.

The study showed that young people periodically meet with information aimed at asserting special rights for Russians in Russia. At the same time, the proportion of students receiving such information among students (17%) is doubled compared to school students. An important feature of its distribution is that it is aimed at the approval of nationalist ideas among young people in difficult financial situations. If among young people belonging to the middle class, 33.5% receive such information, then among the poor already 43.8%.

It should be noted that about 30% of respondents believe that supporters of such ideas do not pose a serious danger, because they seem to be real Russian people, sincerely defending their rights. Most of these are among college students. The understanding that such an idea is a hidden form of nationalism covers only 29% of university students. Among schoolchildren and college students, it is lower — 22%. In addition, about 30% of respondents have not thought about this problem at all.

## 4. Conclusions

Currently, a relatively small part of school students and students of secondary vocational educational institutions understand the essence and content of nationalism and the forms of its manifestation. University students have more mature ideas on this issue, however, mainly among students of the humanities and to a lesser extent among those majoring in a technical field.

Limited ideas about nationalism and its manifestation in our country lead to the fact that among students of schools and colleges the idea that there is no need to specifically fight those who promote such concepts is affirmed among university students, the share of those who think so rises more significantly. A clear understanding of the need for such a fight exists on average in 40% of respondents — to a greater extent among university students of the humanities and to a lesser extent among school students, college students, and university students receiving technical education.

These data indicate the presence of a serious problem with preventing nationalism in any form of its manifestation among students of schools, colleges, and universities. This prevention is essential because “... nationalism is evil, selfish assertion and contempt and even hatred of other nations. Nationalism breeds chauvinism and xenophobia, and it must be resolutely distinguished from patriotism” [3].

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