

## Chapter #22

### VALUE COMPONENTS OF LATENT POLITICAL EXTREMISM: RESULTS OF FACTOR ANALYSIS

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#### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was empirical testing of correlation between the "weak signals" of propensity to extremism and characteristics of the system of value orientations of the students. The exploratory research involved 126 students of mathematical specialties of universities of St. Petersburg and Minsk. It established that an uncritical attitude toward extremism is more characteristic to the young people with a low significance of family values and high entertainment value (hedonistic orientation). In addition, we solved the problem of construct validity of the base questionnaire using confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling. The factorial matrix of the questionnaire "Psychological preconditions of extremism" includes "the factor of normative and value prerequisites for extremism", "radicalism in relation to the country's leadership and its information policy" and "factor of uncertainty / confidence in themselves and their future." The model has shown that male students are more prone to extremism statements and manifestation of extremist attitude than female students are.

*Keywords:* value orientation, attitudes toward extremism, college students, confirmatory factor analysis, structural equation modeling.

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

Worldwide, there has been increasing political extremism in the youth environment. *Political extremism* - it is an activity that involves the interaction of opposition groups and individuals, aimed at the seizure and retention of political power or destabilization, with the use of illegal means and methods, including illegitimate extremely radical ideology and violent methods and tools (Goetz, 2011). According to The Convention of the Shanghai cooperation organization, extremism is an act aimed at seizing or maintaining power through the use of violence or forcible change of the constitutional regime of the state, as well as a violent invasion of public security, including the organization of illegal armed groups for the above purposes (Convention., 2016, art. 1). The SCO Convention considers manifestations of extremism as a serious breeding ground for terrorism.

Youth extremism could lead to destabilization of countries and regions. Young people should be considered not only as a part of human capital, which embodies the potential of development of society, but also as a conditional social group of probable risk to national security. Students are the most active and often radical part of modern society. Student youth is considered by the scientists as a group of "rapid accumulation and realization of negative potential of protest" (Voronov, 2014). When dissatisfied with reforms, students could be included in destructive protests and even in the extremist organizations (Olesich, 2009).

Political extremism can appear not only on the activity-behavioral level, but also at a deeper culture- and- values "pre-activity" level, expressed in the form of attitudes, moods, ideas, points of view, beliefs and orientations. Scientists call such manifestations "latent" extremism (Vekhov, 2011; Schneider, 2014). As pointed out by I.V. Vekhov, latent or non-actualized extremism forms the basis of social tension, has a negative impact on the socialization of young people (Vekhov, 2011).

According to G. Le Bon [4], the society is experiencing real revolutions and upheavals if the value orientations and beliefs of the people are involved in the revolutionary process. Values are transforming the structure of consciousness of the masses. Deformation of the values and the meanings of life are the first of the determining factors of destructive and illegal behavior of young people. On the contrary, the value factor can act as a kind of filter that limits negative actions. Not surprisingly, S. Moscovici urged scientists to pay attention to the value aspects of social perceptions (Moscovici, 1993).

In a recent study that examined students from four countries of the Eurasian Union (654 people), the value aspects of social perception and attitudes were included in the diagnostic tools for studying the psychological prerequisites of extremism and radicalization among young people (Deyneka, 2015). The study allowed us to obtain empirical evidence that psychological markers (or "weak signals") of propensity for extremism were, on the one hand, a low value of human life and, on the other hand, a high value of material goods and false social value of national superiority. On the contrary, it turned out, that an important prerequisite for the rejection of political extremism was such political value as patriotism (positive attitude towards the native land and a favorable image of the home state).

The present study was the next step in the search for value correlates of latent extremism.

The empirical research tasks were:

- 1) to study attitudes to extremists and extremist organizations;
- 2) to compare the manifestations of latent political extremism in the groups of respondents from Russia and Belarus;
- 3) to test the construct validity of the latent extremism and radicalism questionnaire using confirmatory factor analysis;
- 4) to find the correlates of latent extremism and radicalism of students with a system of value orientations, measured by the classic M. Rokeach instrument.

## 2. METHOD

The study was based on V.M. Myasishchev's theory of relations (Myasishchev, 1995) and on S. Moscovici's theory of social perceptions (Moscovici, 1993). Both authors considered the personality and its interrelations with the outside world. At the same time, individual experience plays a decisive role in the development of human activities and relations. Awareness and individual selectivity characterize relations or attitudes (according to Myasishchev) and social representations (according to Moscovici). Therefore, questionnaires are an appropriate way to study them.

As a main method, the questionnaire "*Psychological preconditions of extremism*" (Deyneka, 2015) was used. The questionnaire contains 35 affirmations to express the degree of consent (disagreement) on the 7-point Likert scale (where "7" means "totally agree" and "1" – "completely disagree"). The loyalty to the political system and the leadership of the country; attitude towards extremism in the media; attitude towards extremism on ethnic or religious grounds; respect for the rules and the law; manifestations of aggression; manifestations of destructiveness can be measured by this questionnaire.

In addition, express method for determining attitudes to extremists and extremist organizations was used. For this study, two fragments devoted to the image of the modern extremist and the image of extremist organizations were taken from the questionnaire developed by the Center for political and psychological research commissioned by the Committee on science and the higher school of Administration of St. Petersburg (see: Deyneka, 2015). The respondents had to express the degree of agreement (disagreement) with the characteristics of extremists and extremist organizations, which were cited to answer the questions "How would you describe extremists?" and "How do you feel about extremist organizations?" using a 7-point scale.

The value system studied with the help of a test of the ranking of values by M. Rokeach in the adaptation of A. Gostautas, A. A. Semenov and V. A. Yadov (see: Yadov, 2013).

The exploratory study involved 126 students of mathematical specialties from the universities of Minsk (68 pers.) and St. Petersburg (58 pers.). The total sample consisted of 42% female students and 58% male students; the average age of the respondents was 20.8 years old, (groups balanced by age, but it was not possible to do the same for gender).

### 3. RESULTS

#### 3.1. The attitudes to extremists and extremist organizations

The results of measuring attitudes towards extremists and extremist organizations showed mostly negative attitude towards extremism. Table 1 provides descriptive statistics on the measurement of attitudes towards extremists and extremist organizations. The assessment of extremists as courageous, sincere and fighting for justice is low. Respondents rate political extremists more as criminals who know what they are doing, as mercenaries who are working off someone's money and as adventurers who think about their own benefit and fame. At the same time, the greatest degree of agreement was caused by the characteristic of extremists as misguided people, mad men. Thus, students understand that it is possible to convince young people of political extremism, or believe that psychopathology is the cause of extremism.

*Table 1.*  
*Estimates of the extremists and extremist organizations in the total sample.*

<b>How would you describe the extremists?</b>	<b>M</b>	<b><math>\sigma</math></b>
Courageous, sincere people who are fighting for justice	2,39	1,64
Criminals who understand what they are doing	4,42	1,88
Mistaken people, mad men	4,51	1,68
Adventurers thinking of their own benefit and glory	3,89	1,78
Desperate people driven by circumstances	3,70	1,82
Mercenaries, whose owners stay unknown	4,49	1,94
<b>How do you treat extremist organizations?</b>	<b>M</b>	<b><math>\sigma</math></b>
I fully support them, I'd join them myself	1,51	1,06
In some ways, I even support them, but would never become their member	2,46	1,77
I consider their slogans and methods not acceptable for me	5,18	1,94
I think they should be fought with by any means	4,70	1,78
I do not care	3,09	2,11

Students do not support the activities and methods of extremist organizations and for the most part believe that it is necessary to deal with them in any way.

### 3.2. Analysis of the basic questionnaire data "Psychological prerequisites of extremism"

The analysis of the data of the basic questionnaire "psychological preconditions of extremism" also showed a generally favorable picture of social representations of students about extremism as a negative socio-political phenomenon. At the same time, statistically significant differences between the data in the groups of Russian and Belarusian students were revealed.

Comparative analysis of the questionnaire data (Table 2) showed a more pronounced "request" for absolute freedom of speech among the Belarus students than among the Russian ones (at  $p < 0,001$ ), while demonstrating a smaller degree of awareness of "color revolutions" threats (at  $p < 0,01$ ). They have also shown greater readiness for political activity and covert aggression.

Table 2.

*Statistically reliable differences in the manifestations of susceptibility to political extremism in the groups of respondents from Russia and Belarus.*

№	Statement	Russia		Belarus		p
		M	$\sigma$	M	$\sigma$	
5.	I believe that freedom of speech should not be limited absolutely.	3,90	2,00	<b>5,03</b>	1,44	,001***
9.	Any ideas should be freely spread in the media, even if they seem terrorist or extremist to someone.	2,33	1,39	<b>3,28</b>	1,55	,000***
12.	I am ready to take part in any political activities and events.	<b>3,25</b>	1,77	2,32	1,51	,002**
15.	I enjoy watching various fights and carnage.	2,00	1,48	3,09	1,81	,000***
17.	I absolutely disagree with the actions of our government and believe that they are leading to the decline and destruction of the country	3,21	1,30	<b>4,16</b>	1,60	,001***
26.	I am not a supporter of compliance with laws, rules and regulations.	2,07	1,24	<b>3,24</b>	1,63	,000**
30.	National superiority should be proved at any cost.	2,09	1,38	<b>2,70</b>	1,60	,014**
35.	There is no threat of coups, revolutions and / or the "colored revolutions" for the country	3,58	1,48	<b>4,39</b>	1,82	,009**

Note: \*\* - at  $p < 0,01$ ; \*\*\* - at  $p < 0,001$

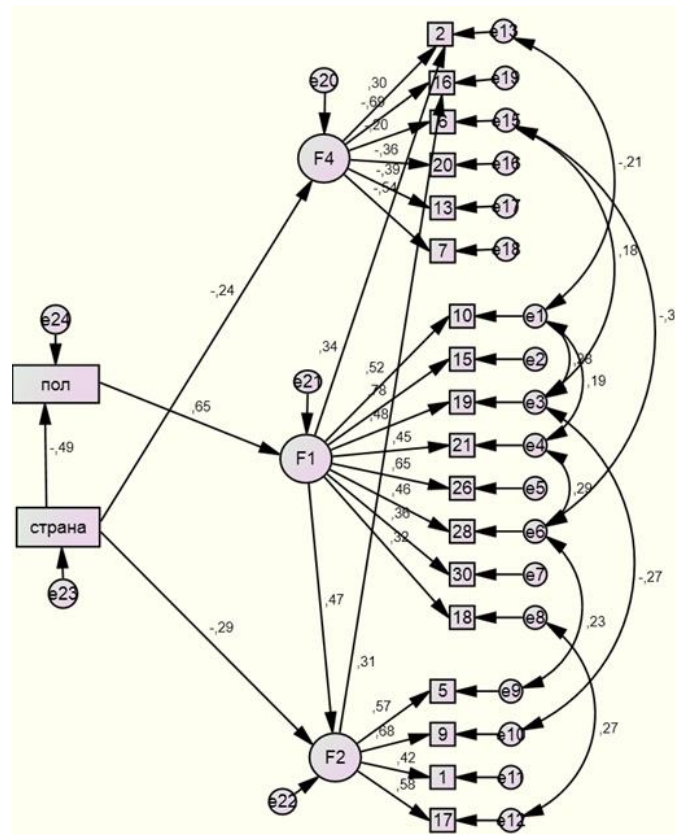
The groups compared were similar in age but different in gender. In the sample of Belarusian students were more men. Due to the differences between groups of students, the question arose as to which factor of cultural and political (country) or gender led to these differences? To solve this problem, the confirmatory factor analysis and modeling of structural equations were carried out.

### 3.3. Results of confirmatory factor analysis of data of the questionnaire

The data of the questionnaire on latent extremism have been subject not only to explorative, but also to confirmatory factor analysis. It showed that only three factors (F1, F2, F4) were significantly correlated with the variable "country" in the 5-factor model of exploratory factor analysis, so the remaining of two factors (F3 and F5) have been excluded. Figure 1 may serve an illustration of both the results of a factor analysis and the final structural equation modeling. First, let us focus on the interpretation of the three factors of the model.

Figure 1.

The basic model of the influence of variables "country" and "gender" on the factors predisposing to extremism or extremist statements. Indicators of the model's suitability:  $CMIN = 173,086$ ;  $df = 156$ ;  $p = ,166$ ;  $CMIN / DF = 1,110$ ;  $CFI = ,881$ ;  $RMSEA = 0,30$ .



Factor **F1**, which we call the "factor of normative value prerequisites for extremism" includes such phenomena as: 1) aggression and its channeling; 2) low law-abidance, especially for the satisfaction of material interests; 3) value deformation of radicalist type. To decipher the content of factor F1, below are a few statements of the questionnaire with their numbers.

***The allegations related to aggression:***

№15 (I enjoy watching different fights and carnage);

№10 (I could use force in response to an insult or humiliation);

№19 (I do not condemn aggression as a response to the aggression of others).

***The allegations related to low law-abidance or unlawful conduct:***

№26 (I am not a supporter of compliance with laws, rules and regulations);

№21 (For good money I am willing to do a job that is not legal);

№28 (For the sake of earnings I would agree to do something that might blight my country (smuggling, disclosing classified information, etc.)).

***Statements, indicating value deformation:***

№30 (national superiority should be proved at any cost);

№18 (Human life is not the most important value in this world).

Factor the **F2**, called by us the "**radicalism factor in relation to the information policy and the government of the country**" most of all load the statements:

№9 (Any ideas should be freely spread in the mass media, even if they seem terrorist or extremist to someone); №5 (I believe that freedom of speech should not be limited by absolutely anything);

№17 (I absolutely disagree with the actions of our government and believe that they are leading the country to decline and destruction);

№1 (I believe that the ends always justify the means).

Factor **F4** or the "**factor of confidence /doubt in oneself and in the future**" most of all load the statements: №16 (I have clear plans for 5 years ahead); №7 (I feel my country needs me);

№13 (effort, in my opinion, is the main factor of good earnings);

№20 (I'm not afraid I'll be jobless after graduation);

№6 to a lesser extent (It's important to maintain cultural traditions in society) and

№2 with an opposite sign (I never take part in socially useful activities).

Symptoms of all three factors, revealing "faint signals" of propensity to extremism or extremist statements, were significantly higher expressed in students from Belarus, which may be due to the fact that in the Minsk pilot sample there were more young men, than in the sample from St. Petersburg.

Therefore, using SEM (structural equation modeling) the following hypotheses were tested:

1) The gender of the respondents affects the degree of intensity of F1, F2 and F4;

2) Differences between students from Belarus and Russia appear in the degree of intensity of F1, F2 and F4;

3) The gender of the subjects and the variable "country" both have an influence on the intensity of the F1, F2 and F4 values.

The empirical model check of the effect of variables "country" and "gender" on those tested for latent extremism showed that the original model requires adjustment, as part of the directional bonds was not statistically significant, and the ratio of  $\chi^2 / df$  is statistically significant. In the basic model, after adjustments, directional bonds were included, from the variable "country" to F2 ( $\beta = -0.29$ ,  $p = 0.007$ ) and F4 ( $\beta = -0.24$ ,  $p = 0.087$ ), as well as the indirect impact of the variable "country" to variable F1 (country-> gender:  $\beta = -0.49$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; gender-> F1:  $\beta = 0.65$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Figure 1 shows the final model.

It confirmed that the gender of the respondents influences on the degree of intensity of F1 (aggression and its channeling, low law-abidance, especially for the satisfaction of material interests, deformation of values towards radicalism). Young men are more prone to extremist statements than girls are. Indirect gender impact of the variable "country" on the

first factor revealed. The Belarusian sample contained more young men, which led to more marked tendency to extremist statements of students from Belarus. Social and cultural differences of latent extremism manifested in the expression of signs of the radicalism factor in relation to the country's leadership and its information policy among students of mathematical specialties from Belarus.

### **3.4. Results of correlation analysis between latent extremism and value orientations**

Correlation analysis of data study showed, that among those students that maximize the value of freedom, there were fewer people, who define extremists as criminals, and among those who value family above all there were less people, defining extremists as misguided individuals. The older the participants were, the more they rejected for themselves the slogans and methods of extremist organizations, considering them not acceptable.

The results of the study on the interrelationship of the system of values and "weak signals" of propensity to extremism allowed revealing two cores of terminal value orientations system of opposing modalities to extremism, that have been expressed most prominently in students from Belarus.

From the standpoint of prevention of extremism, the focus on happy family life proved to be quite positive. Students whose ideals or the meaning of life (five priority terminal values) contain such value as a "happy family life", rejected violence ( $p < 0, 01$ ), aggression, revenge ( $p < 0,001$ ) and unnecessary risk for the sake of new experiences ( $p < 0.01$ ). They also expressed less desire to view scenes of slaughter and fights ( $p < 0, 05$ ).

From the standpoint of prevention of extremism, the focus on "entertainment" proved negative. Hedonistic orientation was a certain marker of predisposition to radical settings. Its priority is highly significantly correlated with disregard to social regulators as the laws and norms ( $p < 0.01$ ) and low law-abidance, as well as radical attitudes in ethnic relations ( $p < 0.01$ ), with a low value of human life ( $p < 0.05$ ) and possibility of violence and aggressive revenge ( $p < 0, 05$ ).

Instrumental values also showed easily interpreted bonds with the 'weak signals' of propensity to extremism. The value of "strong will" showed a positive bond with manifestations of law-abidance, ethical principles of patriotism and identification with the country (disagreement even for big money to blight the country), as well as a negative perception of undue risk for the sake of new experiences. The value of "courage in defending one's views" turned out to be associated with a more critical attitude toward the political system, the value of freedom of speech and willingness to show aggression in response to the aggression of others.

## **4. DISCUSSION**

Researchers identify different groups of factors and prerequisites of political extremism that due to the complexity and diversity of this phenomenon (Koomen & Pligt, 2016; Raizberg & Lysenko, 2015; Schneider, 2014; Voronov, 2014; Yurchevsky, 2012). There are geopolitical and cultural-historical, socio-economic and psychological factors of political extremism. In this regard, some authors express "serious doubts about trying to identify clear profiles of a potential extremist that could help anticipate violent individuals and groups" (Ilardi, 2013). Koomen and van der Pligt write: "our understanding has increased, but this does not mean that we can offer an adequate diagnostic tool to predict *who* will turn to violence and *when* or that we can identify a fixed number of antecedents affecting an

individual decision to opt for violence or a fixed number of stages that people go through when they decide to turn to political violence” (Koomen & Pligt, 2016, p. 259).

Sharing the view that the phenomenon of political extremism is complex and poly-factorial, nevertheless, it is possible to diagnose the prerequisites of extremism, in particular the value components of latent extremism.

As a result of this study, the problem of construct validity of the base questionnaire for the study of latent extremism was decided using confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling. Three factors of latent extremism obtained.

The factor of normative and values prerequisites to political extremism has shown interrelations of psycho-physiological, behavioral and cultural-values levels. He included such phenomena as 1) aggression and its replacement; 2) low law-abiding, especially for the sake of satisfaction of material interest; 3) value deformations of radicalism (low value of human life and hypertrophied national superiority). The content of the first factor of latent extremism echoes the opinion of other authors. Koomen & Pligt (2016) emphasize the role of ethnic stereotypes and prejudices in political violence. In his article, Kruglanski & Fishman (2009) examine in detail the cultural prerequisites for reducing the value of life and increasing the value of death. L.N. Aksenovskaya considers extremism as a counterculture, as a mechanism of destruction of culture as a whole and "a kind of cultural and social suicide" (Aksenovskaya, 2006, p.11).

The factor of radicalism towards the country's leadership and its information policy contains important political and psychological markers of latent extremism. In particular, it is a manifestation of categorical. Extremists demonstrate a strong desire to achieve their goals, following the principle of "ends justify means" (Gurr, 1970). As the important traits of extremism and radicalism scientists see the desire to deny and to be categorical (Schneider, 2014); the tendency to dichotomous, "black and white" thinking (Kruglanski & Fishman, 2006; Victoroff, 2005). Failure to exercise any control over information also indicates a person's lack of maturity. This position prevents awareness of threats to information security for the nation (and the individual) and the dangerous consequences of information wars.

The factor of diffidence and uncertainty about the future (lack of confidence, lack of commitment, potential uselessness and pessimism concerning professional self-realization, inadequate notion of the "input-output" balance) create prerequisites for youth extremism. Encumbered by social infantilism, they contribute to the strengthening of irrational behavior (Deyneka, 2013).

Analysis of new data related to extremists and extremist organizations confirmed the result previously obtained in the student groups (Deyneka, 2015) negative in general attitudes towards extremism. At the same time, there were differences in the manifestations of latent extremism measured by the questionnaire among students from Russia and Belarus. The differences are due to both gender and cultural environment. In the communitarian societies, the market competition contradictions alleviated by the experience and values of life in a collective (Kramnik, 2003). The role of community values in the prevention of illegal behavior confirmed in the group of Belarus students. It turned out that to be engaged in not entirely legitimate work for money are more willing those, whose value orientation "the happiness of others" is far in the periphery of the system of values. The more important for Belarusian students was the value of "high requirements to life", the less they showed the conditions of law-abiding behavior ( $p < 0,01$ ) and less susceptible to psychological violence in society. The instrumental value of "responsibility", on the contrary, was significantly positively correlated with the manifestations of ethical principles of the citizen.



## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The results of measuring attitudes towards extremists and extremist organizations showed mostly negative attitude towards extremism. At the same time, most of the students consider extremists as not only criminals and mercenaries, but also as madmen, which contradicts the data of scientists.

The results of a comparative analysis of latent political extremism among students from Russia and Belarus showed that Belarusian students have more pronounced desire for absolute freedom of speech and less awareness of the threats of "color revolutions", as well as more readiness for political actions and hidden aggression. Differences were caused not only by the political and cultural environment, but mainly by gender.

Using confirmatory factor analysis and structural modeling method, we were able to create a shorter version of the questionnaire, eliminating the variable "country" and "gender", which allows to use the questionnaire "Psychological preconditions of extremism" among the Russian-speaking students of post-Soviet countries, taking into account gender differences.

The deformation of the system of values enhances the susceptibility to extremist activity. A noncritical attitude toward extremism is more characteristic of young people with a low significance of family value and high entertainment value, combined with high demands.

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