



Support of democratic values among high school youth.

Research on high school students' attitudes towards selected aspects of extremism



The Slovak National Center for Human Rights, as a national human rights institution, regularly analyzes young people's attitudes to democracy or to human rights in Slovakia. In 2022, the Centre conducted research on high school students' attitudes to get a deeper understanding of the mechanisms and circumstances that contribute to the radicalization of their views.

The research on high school students' attitudes had three goals.



Analyze the tendencies of students towards the democratic and extremist pole.



Analyze the degree of importance of individual aspects of students' extremist attitudes.



Identify risk groups of high school students in terms of potential support for extremist idea.

A questionnaire consisting of 20 statements, the wording of which reflects four defining aspects of extremist attitudes (nationalism, xenophobia, authoritarianism, and anti-elitism) and two forms of their manifestation (cognitive and behavioral), was filled out by 984 high school students. Their selection was representative in terms of region, type of school, size of school, gender, and age of students.

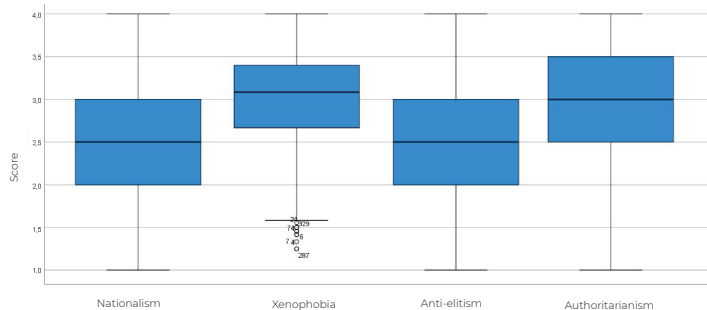
Findings and conclusions

Although a clear indication towards the extremist pole was observed only among a small number of respondents, it does not mean that the rest of the respondents are clearly inclined towards the opposite, democratic pole. The results show that the pro-democratic orientation of young people is not sufficiently strong nor stable. **In general, the students' attitudes are distributed around the center of the monitored scale. This is a crucial indicator of a weakened belief in democratic principles, or rather hesitant support for democracy.**

In the aspects of anti-elitism and nationalism, high school students tend to lean towards the extremist pole more significantly than in the case of authoritarianism and xenophobia. This confirms the theoretical assumptions that, from the point of view of right-wing extremist rhetoric, the aspect of nationalism is its key component. **Educational activities should therefore be focused on enhanced understanding of the danger of nationalist attitudes for the preservation of liberal democracy principles as well as their incompatibility with the concept of human rights and freedoms.**

The strong inclination towards anti-elitism among high school students also underlines the strong level of distrust towards political representation, as well as the strengthening of rhetoric based on the rejection of political elites, rules, and institutions.

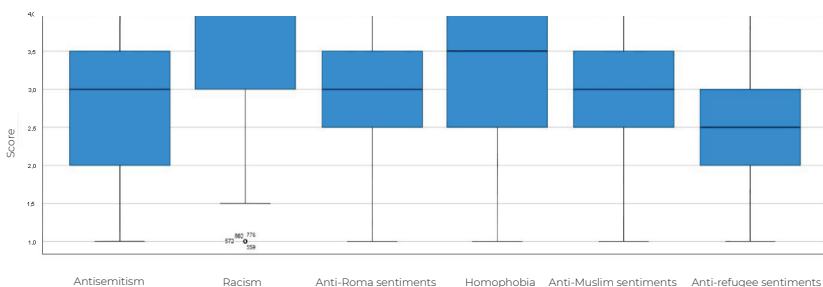
Comparison of the medians of aspects of extremism according to the theoretical model¹



Inclination towards anti-elitism also supports hypotheses about the protest voting and represents a fundamental challenge for the future, given the fact that high school students will soon become the first-time voters.

The type of school and gender are the most significant factors correlating with the inclination towards the extremist pole of attitudes.

Comparison of medians of selected xenophobic attitudes²



Students of secondary vocational schools were in the risk of more significant inclination towards extremist attitudes to a greater extent than students of gymnasiums; boys were also in this risk group to a greater extent than girls.



The study *Support of democratic values among high school youth: Research on high school students' attitudes towards selected aspects of extremism* (Slovak only) is available for download and read online at: <https://bit.ly/3IXZMgW>

^{1,2} The value 4 represents the democratic pole, the value 1 represents the extremist pole.