

ATTITUDE TO PATRIOTISM AND DEFENSE OF YOUTH ON THE EXAMPLE OF STUDENTS OF UNIFORMED CLASSES OF THE WEST POMERANIAN PROVINCE

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Purpose: The article presents a comprehensive study of the attitudes of bathers within identifying potential challenges and opportunities as well as recommendations for the future of educational programs on patriotism and defense in Poland.

Design/methodology/approach: The study employs literature analysis, tabular comparisons, and questionnaires of bathers. The approach for the research was based on a desktop evaluation of accessible information from international and national sources. The qualitative data acquired from self-research was used in the statistical analysis. The research group had 277 respondents, and the research was scheduled for May-June 2023.

Findings: Parallels exist in governance and policy alignment, while disparities are evident in economic development and sectoral priorities. These findings offer a nuanced understanding of shared traits and distinct differences shaping the business landscapes and economic paths of these Central European nations.

Research limitations/implications: The research has limitations, such as its specific timeframe and omitted variables.

Practical implications: Practical implications extend to i.a. the need of implementing effective prevention programs (level 1 prevention) of safe behavior on the water and include this from the municipal level through the regional and national levels and introducing of a multi-year, unified national program of education and behavior in water areas, will increase the swimming skills of all age groups and reduce drowning.

Social implications: The study suggests indicating systemic changes in educational programs. Referring to the data presented in a broader perspective, it should be assumed that the appearance of various forms of military activity in the educational process can affect the attitude of the younger generation to military service. The determination of the scope and forms of implementation of defense education should be considered by specialists. The study also showed that among students the individualistic attitude leads primacy over the collective one. Research outcomes also suggest also a kind of dualism among respondents falling between an individualistic attitude and a team-oriented attitude, which, especially in an emergency, can result in unpredictable behavior.

Originality/value: The uniqueness of this research lies in the development of a technique to survey attitudes toward patriotism and defense among young people. The research findings are applicable to both academic discourse and practical implementations, providing unique insights to foster collaboration and development within policymakers' institutions and organizations.

Keywords: Patriotism, defense, youth, education, educational programs.

Category of the paper: research paper.

1. Introduction

The variety of approaches to the essence of patriotism and defense makes these terms difficult to define. In literature, there is a discussion not only about defining the concepts of patriotism and defense, but also about patriotic and defensive attitudes.

Two approaches to the definition of patriotism can be noted among researchers. The first boils down to "(...) citing and deconstructing its dictionary meaning and etymology (after Marzęcki, 2019, p. 10), as well as explanations based on the description of historically observed attitudes of individuals and social groups (...)". The second identifies patriotism with the emotional state to one's country (attachment, loyalty, pride, love) and the enumeration of its attributes, such as culture, values, territory, system, history, government, people (Theiss-Morse, 2009, p. 23). In this sense, patriotism makes it possible for citizens to self-categorize into a specific social group and is described as one of the most important forms of attachment to a social group in the modern World (Marzęcki, 2019). In this case, researchers of the subject have pointed out the functional dualism of such identification with the nation, where "pseudo-patriotism" (conformism of prevailing attitudes, treating other nations as "foreign") and "authentic patriotism" (attachment to the country, nation, national values but based on critical reflection) are specified (Tajfel, 1974). Also, studies of Poles' understanding of the term "patriotism" (*Rozumienie ...*, 2008) indicate different ways in which respondents interpret it. There are also various attempts at its typology (Cf. Burgoński, 2008). Realizing the difference in defining the concept in question both among researchers and in social practice and bearing in mind that from the perspective of the research results presented in this paper, the way patriotism was understood was not important (Table 2), authors decided not to define it explicitly.

Related to the concept of patriotism is the question of the defense attitudes of citizens, the formation of which provides the basis for social unity, sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity (...) (Malinski, 2016, p. 192). The defense consciousness of society thus has the dimension of duty to the Fatherland, as mentioned in Article 5 of the Polish Constitution, which states that "The duty of a Polish citizen is loyalty to the Republic of Poland and concern for the common good". Thus, the formation of patriotic and defensive attitudes will affect the existence of the nation and the state with the ability and effectiveness to defend them (Malinski,

2016). For example, Polish surveys show that "readiness to fight and give one's life for the Fatherland" is mentioned by 88% of Poles as one of the manifestations of patriotism (Patriotyzm..., 2018, pp. 7-8).

It needs to be underlined, that of fundamental importance in the development of the above attitudes is patriotic education and defense, the main goals of which are: forming a bond with the Fatherland and civic awareness, developing respect for pro-social attitudes and the common good, forming respect for one's own country (Belowski, 2018, p. 105). It is also not insignificant to form a sense of participation in the life of the community contributing to the growth of the level of social capital of the community and society and the growth of social participation (Zakrzewska, 2024). Thus, the duration as well as the quality of patriotic and defense education will determine the patriotic and defense attitudes of young people. This is particularly important in the present times, when values are losing their meaning and patriotism is becoming a platitude in the eyes of the younger generation. Highly motivated and aware of patriotic-defense issues, young people can influence the defense of the state through their attitude and behavior (Marzecki, 2019).

The purpose of this article is an attempt to present the attitude to patriotism and defense of youth in Poland on the example of students of uniformed classes considering the research conducted by the academics of the University of Szczecin on a group of 277 students in May and June 2023.

2. Development of the functioning of defense education of schoolchildren in Poland – historical background

The functioning of defense education for schoolchildren in Poland began after gaining independence in 1918. Between 1918 and 1939, it manifested itself in two areas of preparing young people for military service. The first area of activity was patriotic upbringing combined with the development of the expected civic attitudes of the reborn Polish state, and the second element was practical military preparation, particularly physical exercises combined with elements of drill, shooting and topography. Activities in this area were under the supervision and control of the State Office of Physical Education and Military Preparedness (Wojtycza, 2012).

Defense education of schoolchildren from 1945 to 1990 was subordinated to the needs of the armed forces and the functioning of Poland within the Warsaw Soviet Pact bloc of countries. These activities were carried out as part of the subject of military training and, since 1967, defensive training. The defense preparation of society was also carried out by organizations such as the National Defense League, the Polish Scouting Association, which in their statutory activities also realized elements of military preparation of youth. During this period, there were

no other forms of defense preparation in secondary schools. The exception were military high schools, which were located within the structure of the Ministry of Defense (Zaczek-Zaczyński, 2020).

The process of political change in Poland after 1989 also influenced the departure of mass youth preparation for military service. After Poland access to NATO in 1999, the issue of changing the approach to defense education for schoolchildren also evolved. At the beginning of the 21st century, the subject of defensive training was replaced in 2009 by so-called Education for Security, which did not include curricular content on military activities such as shooting and topography.

The formation of uniformed classes after 2000 was primarily associated with grassroots initiatives of schools and teachers, and the functioning of legal formula provided a variety of solutions at the level of secondary education.

Uniformed classes (military, police, firefighters and border guards) have been operating in Poland for the past twenty years on the basis of educational regulations on innovative activities of schools or pedagogical experiments and implemented various programs.

This form of defense education allows not only to acquire personnel resources for the professional armed forces, but also to prepare personnel reserves for the defense system, including the non-military subsystem. An essential element of this is the voluntary nature of this form of defense education for Polish youth. Not without significance here is the substantive and financial support of the state implemented at the level of the Ministry of Defense, as well as the practical participation of patron military units in the defense education of young people.

Defensive education of Polish society in the 21st century is a system of education, which refers in particular to defensive education in schools. Activities carried out in uniformed classes include not only elements of post-defense preparation, i.e. acquisition of shooting skills, but also behavior in the event of other dangers resulting from warfare or disasters, such as first aid, rescue and humanitarian aid. An element of this education are also activities aimed at building civic and patriotic attitudes in young people. By implementing defense education in uniformed classes, a lot of attention is also paid to bringing closer the problems of conflicts and international law, as well as the activities of organizations that stabilize peace in the world.

Currently, security is not a matter that concerns only the operation of the armed forces, but affects society as a whole. Armed conflicts are not only military in nature and take place on many levels, which practically affect every citizen, especially civilians who are not directly involved in combat.

The implementation of education of young people in uniformed classes in the field of security and defense is to build awareness about threats and allows them to acquire skills to respond to these threats. It also makes it possible to be sure that in the event of an external threat, e.g. war, attack, a defensively prepared society will know how and what to do to counter the aggressor.

Uniformed class education programs within school facilities are regional in scope and are linked to institutional support from entities such as the Polish Armed Forces under the Certified Military Uniformed Classes (CWKM) program (Certyfikowane..., 2023). This has been in operation since 2017 and consists of providing uniform military training in high schools and preparing volunteers for military service. In addition to the core curriculum, students also follow a program of "military education" - These totals 185 hours of theoretical and practical classes (Serwis..., 2024).

Starting in 2020, secondary schools can apply to the Minister of National Defense for permission to establish military preparation branches (OPW). This possibility was provided by an amendment to the Education Law and the Law on Financing Educational Tasks, on the basis of which military preparation branches will be created in public and non-public secondary schools. The first branches of military preparation were launched in the 2020/2021 school year, and successively every year more will be created. The introduction of military preparation branches affiliated with the Ministry of Defense does not interfere with the possibility of further operation of classes with a military profile and other uniformed specialties, based on pedagogical innovations and experiments implemented by schools.

3. Research outcomes

As mentioned before, the purpose of the article was to study the attitudes towards patriotism and defense of uniformed classes, which, due to their characteristics, are particularly oriented towards them.

The research was conducted in May-June 2023 among students of uniformed classes from 10 secondary schools located in 7 counties of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship participating in the project of educational reunion of uniformed classes organized by the University of Szczecin and the Marshal's Office of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship. The students who participated in the study were: 7th High School in Szczecin, West Pomeranian Center for Maritime and Polytechnic Education in Szczecin, High School in Chojna (Gryfino County), I High School in Gryfino (Gryfino County), II High School in Stargard, High School in Kalisz Pomorski (Stargard County), Private High School in Białogard, High School in Gościn (Kolobrzeg County), High School in Trzebiatów (Gryfice County), 1st High School in Goleniów (Goleniów County).

A total of 277 uniformed class students were surveyed, of whom 146 (52.71%) are male, 128 (46.21%) are female. 3 respondents (1.08%) did not specify their gender. Most students, 184 (66.43%), are urban residents. Among the respondents, representatives of military profile classes dominated (131 respondents - 47.29%). The second in number were students of police classes (88 respondents - 31.77%), and the third were firefighting classes (17 respondents -

6.14%). The other category included 37 respondents (13.36%). Most respondents (189 - 68.23%) came from families with uniform traditions¹.

Respondents were asked to identify what they consider to be the most important dangers that may affect Poland in the nearest future (Table 1).

Table 1.

Respondents' opinions on the most serious threats to Poland's security in the nearest future

Selection option	N	%
International conflicts	198	71.48
Aggression from other countries	201	72.56
Terrorism	96	34.66
Organized crime	59	21.30
Corruption	77	27.80
Financial crises	146	52.71
Loss of jobs	85	30.69
Climate change	80	28.88
Natural disasters	75	27.08
I see no significant threats to Poland's security	8	2.89
Another answer	1	0.36
Total:	835	*301.44

* Data does not sup up to 100% because respondents were allowed to indicate more than one answer.

Source: own research.

In first place, the surveyed students pay attention to aggression by other countries (201 respondents - 72.56%) and international conflicts (198 respondents - 71.48%). The current war in Ukraine seems to have a strong influence on students' choices. Another important threat cited by students is financial crises (146 respondents - 52.71%). They see terrorism as a lesser threat (96 respondents - 34.66%). Loss of jobs worries 85 respondents (30.69%), and climate change worries 80 respondents (28.88%). Corruption (77 respondents - 27.8%) and natural disasters (75 respondents - 27.08%) had similar numbers of indications. Organized crime as a threat is listed by 59 respondents (21.30%). The fewest respondents do not see threats to Poland's security. They account for only 2, 89% of respondents (8 respondents). It seems that the mentioned order of indicating threats to security is not related to the specifics of the uniformed classes and is determined by the present issues. A particular influence on these opinions seems to be exerted by the ongoing armed conflict beyond Poland's eastern border armed conflict.

Respondents were also asked about their attitudes toward patriotism (Table 2).

¹ None of the analyzed characteristics of the respondents showed a statistically significant correlation and, therefore, were not included in further analysis.

Table 2.*Respondents' opinions on the statement "Patriotism is important"*

Selection option	N	%
I completely agree	148	53.43
I rather agree	104	37.55
I rather disagree	3	1.08
I completely disagree	1	0.36
I have no opinion	20	7.22
No data available	1	0.36
Total:	277	100.00

Source: own research.

For most respondents, patriotism is an important value. 252 students (90.98%) define their attitude to this value in this way (*completely agree* - 148 respondents or 53.43%; *rather agree* - 104 respondents or 37.55%). This figure is similar to the indications obtained in the uniformed classes (Urych, 2018, p. 151) in which 94% of students express interest in the values (85%, *to a great extent*, 9% *to a small extent*), as well as to the results of CBOS in 2018, in which 88% of respondents expressed themselves in a similar manner (39.00% definitely consider themselves patriots, 49.00% rather yes) (*Patriotyzm...*, 2018, p. 6), and definitely higher than the results of the November 2022 survey (*Patriotyzm po...*, 2022), in which 71% of Poles described themselves as patriots (48.00% definitely consider themselves patriots, and 23.00% rather yes). Thus, it can be concluded that membership in uniformed classes does not modify patriotic attitudes. It is merely an expression of the pro-social attitude of the students who were surveyed, which has its roots in Polish culture.

The attitudes of uniformed class students toward military service as an important component of national security were also examined (Table 3).

Table 3.*Respondents' opinions on the importance of military service to maintain security in Poland*

Selection option	N	%
Very important	212	76.53
Important	56	20.22
Of little importance	3	1.08
Never mind	-	-
No data available	6	2.17
Total:	277	100.00

Source: own research.

268 respondents (96.75%) consider it an important element (very important - 212 students i.e. 76.53%; important - 56 respondents i.e. 20.22%). These views, especially in the context of the threats mentioned by the respondents (Table 1), are obvious in nature. After all, the military is one of the most important elements of security. Since most students raise the importance of military service, it can be assumed that the characteristics of the respondents do not affect their opinions. At the same time, it should be remembered that the very membership of a uniformed class means that we are dealing with a certain type of students. In their educational process, various forms of military activity appear more than in other types of classes. The result is that

they are more involved in the defense sphere than the average citizen (*Polacy o...*, 2023). An additional factor reinforcing the discussed perception of the importance of military service is the fact that respondents choosing education in uniformed classes indicate that they associate their professional future with the military², and thus have a personal interest in emphasizing the importance of military service.

Respondents were asked to express their opinion on the importance of military service for peace in Poland (Table 4).

Table 4.

Respondents' opinions on the importance of military service for peacekeeping in Poland

Selection option	N	%
Very important	182	65.70
Important	78	28.16
Of little importance	7	2.53
Never mind	2	0.72
No data available	8	2.89
Total:	277	100.00

Source: own research.

260 students (93.86%) believe that military service is an important element in maintaining peace in Poland. This indication basically coincides with students' opinions on the importance of military service in maintaining security in Poland (Table 3). It seems that the two concepts are combined by students.

The study attempted to determine which individualistic or collectivistic values are placed first by students in uniformed classes (Table 5).

Table 5.

Respondents' opinions on the statement "National security is more important than privacy"

Selection option	N	%
I completely agree	22	7.94
I rather agree	85	30.69
I rather disagree	93	33.57
I completely disagree	28	10.11
I have no opinion	45	16.25
No data available	4	1.44
Total:	277	100.00

Source: own research.

107 students (38.63%: 7.94% - *completely agree* and 30.69% - *rather agree*) recognize the primacy of national security over the individual value of guaranteeing a sense of privacy. Slightly more respondents, 18 students (5.05%), believe the opposite (43.68%: 33.57% - *rather disagree* and 10.11% - *completely disagree*). Thus, it can be concluded that at this level of education, there is a slight predominance of those who put personal values above national values. Similar results were obtained in surveys conducted among students of military classes

² In the surveys discussed within this paper, as many as 67.2% of students in uniformed classes indicated that they associate their future with these services (*study in security-related fields* 23.47%; *work in uniformed services* 24.19%; *professional military service*, 19.86%).

(Urych, 2018, p. 169), who valued *freedom (personal independence, freedom of choice)* more than *national security (security from attack)*. At this point, one should wonder whether this tendency is not the result of the peculiarities of the developmental period in which the respondents find themselves. It is characterized, among other things, by a greater focus on selfish than pro-social motivation factors (Brzezińska et al., 2016; Czerwińska-Jaśkiewicz, 2015; Oleszkowicz, Senejko, 2011).

Attempts were made, also, to determine which element is more important to respondents - the national or state factor (Table 6).

Table 6.

Opinions on the statement "National security is more important than citizens' freedoms"

Selection option	N	%
I completely agree	22	7.94
I rather agree	74	26.71
I rather disagree	86	31.05
I completely disagree	40	14.44
I have no opinion	46	16.61
No data available	9	3.25
Total:	277	100.00

Source: own research.

Security is not as important to the students surveyed as civil liberties. 126 students (45.49%) think so. In contrast, 96 respondents (34.65%) hold the opposite view. This may indicate the primacy of state values over national values, as evidenced by young people's attachment to civic values. Civil liberties may also be associated in the minds of respondents with the right to personal self-determination, which is particularly important to them during this period of development.

It was also examined which values, traditionally attributed to uniformed services, are most important to students (Table 7).

Table 7.

Opinions on values important to uniformed services

Selection option	N	%	Rank
Loyalty	189	68.23	III
Obedience	94	33.94	VIII
Courage	241	87.00	I
Determination	137	49.46	VI
Integrity	172	62.09	V
Integrity	78	28.16	IX
Collaboration	183	66.06	IV
Ability to work in a team	198	71.48	II
Empathy	59	21.30	X
Concern for others	132	47.65	VII
Total:	1483	*535.38	-

* Data do not add up to 100% because respondents were allowed to indicate more than one answer.

Source: own research.

For students, courage is the most important value (241 students - 87.00%). Next is the ability to work in a team (198 students - 71.48%). The next indication is loyalty (189 people - 68.23%), cooperation (183 students - 66.06%) and honesty (172 people - 62.09%). Slightly fewer indications are determination (137 people - 49.46%) and concern for others (132 people - 47.65%). The least indications were obedience (94 people - 33.94%), integrity (78 people - 28.16%) and empathy (59 people - 21.30%). It can be concluded that, except for one personal trait (courage), values of a collective nature (ability to work in a team, cooperation, loyalty) dominate. They have a rather "traditional" character, which is, so to speak, inscribed in the image of the uniformed services. These features are currently regulated by the Ordinance of the Minister of Defense of Republic of Poland (*Rozporządzenie...*, 2015, p. 1; *Rozporządzenie...*, 2024, p. 2). At the same time, it should be remembered that nowadays it is considered that the cohesion of groups belonging to the category of uniformed services is a very important aspect of its effective functioning (Shils, Janowitz, 1948; Griffith, 2007; MacCoun, Hix, 2010; *Cohesion...*, 1993; Siebold, 2011; King, 2013). It is understood that such a level of integration of group members that allows them to sustain their commitment to each other, the organization and the tasks carried out (Henderson, 1985). Its manifestation is the convergence of the daily goals of an individual member with those of the group, and a sense of strong bonding and willingness to support each other, as well as loyalty and willingness to make the highest sacrifices for members of one's own team. References to the role of empathy in the uniformed services in different situational contexts can be found in the literature (Cutright, 2022; Stone, 2018). In this context, concern for others and empathy should be valued values among uniformed class students. Meanwhile, they are mentioned by respondents at seventh (concern for others 47% of indications) and empathy at tenth place (empathy 21.30%). It is noteworthy that in the hierarchy of values important to the uniformed services, the trait that is inseparable from the military is *obedience* is only in the eighth position (33.94%). It seems that such a low position of this trait among students of uniformed classes may indirectly confirm the validity of earlier statements (Table 5) that the age of the surveyed young people, may have an impact on the opinions presented by them.

4. Conclusions and findings

Analysis of the survey results allows us to conclude that participation in uniformed classes does not affect perceptions of security threats (Table 1). It seems that the factor influencing students' opinions is the existing socio-political and geopolitical situation in Europe - particularly the ongoing war in Ukraine. The nature of the classes in question also modifies students' patriotic attitudes to a small extent (Table 2) - they are more an expression of the culture of the collective than an effect of the specifics of the educational process in these units.

On the other hand, learning in uniformed units highly determines respondents' opinions on military service (Tables 3 and 4). **Therefore, it should be concluded that the programmatic training dedicated to uniformed classes prepared jointly by the Ministry of Education with the Polish Armed Forces brings the expected and contributes to the growth of post-defense awareness of young people.** Referring to the data presented in a broader perspective, it should be assumed that the appearance of various forms of military activity in the educational process can affect the attitude of the younger generation to military service. Of course, the determination of the scope and forms of implementation of defense education should be considered by specialists. The study also showed (Tables 5, 6) that among students the individualistic attitude leads primacy over the collective one. Admittedly, this attitude may be due to the developmental age of the students surveyed, but nevertheless, placing greater emphasis on pro-social elements in the educational process may contribute to an increase in the importance of elements of a communal nature among youth. This is an important aspect of the activities of the uniformed services, since readiness to provide support in various urgent situations is the primary goal of their activities. Respondents consider courage, teamwork, loyalty cooperation and honesty as the most important values (Table 7) catalyzing attitudes that foster social capital, participation and social cohesion. Consideration of the values from the perspective of the effectiveness of dispatch groups indicates that they are dominated by "technically" important elements for the efficient operation of services (*courage* - 1st place; *teamwork skills* - 2nd place; *loyalty* - 3rd place). Less important are those of a communal nature, shaping social relations (*integrity* - 9th place; *empathy* - 10th place). Empathy makes it possible to better understand the intentions of individual team members, which increases the efficiency of their work. It also allows you to empathize with the situation of the injured, and thus better respond to their needs. At the same time, it should be remembered that the nature of the activities of the uniformed services is not only related to direct intervention in situations, but also to preventive activities, which are related to the ability to interact with people from different social backgrounds. In such direct contacts, the possession of the two qualities mentioned above seems essential. Therefore, combining the two will increase the effectiveness of the teams' activities. Thus, it would be good for the educational program of uniformed classes to include such activities that consider both components simultaneously.

In summary, the results obtained indicate that the defense education program is quite effective, especially with regard to students' attitudes toward military service. This differentiates them from the general Polish population (*Polacy o...*, 2023) and this suggests that the introduction of various forms of defense education at school may be a way to change the opinion of Poles on the issue in question. At the same time, it seems that the programs implemented in uniformed classes do not fully meet their assumptions regarding "building civic and patriotic attitudes" since the opinions expressed by the respondents do not differ substantially from the general population. From this perspective, two scenarios of behavior can be adopted. The first of a non-distinctive nature, assumes that graduates of uniformed schools are supposed to present

a “general” state of the society in which they function - this allows them to better understand it and thus act more effectively in it. In the second, it would have to be assumed that uniformed services, are role models for the social environment in which they function. From this perspective, the assumptions implemented by the programs in the uniformed classes are insufficient and need to be corrected. In addition, the data suggests a kind of dualism among respondents falling between an individualistic attitude (Table 5) and a team-oriented attitude (Table 7), which, especially in an emergency, can result in unpredictable behavior. It is worth deepening this research area and from this perspective, looking at the educational programs of uniformed classes.

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