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THE EMPIRICAL DIMENSION OF THE MILITARY STUDENTS' PERCEPTION ON THE NATIONAL SECURITY OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

Wymiar empiryczny postrzegania bezpieczeństwa narodowego Republiki Moldawii przez studentów wojskowych

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Abstract

The article presents research results on elucidates the perceptions of military students concerning some aspects of national security, generally, and of the Republic of Moldova's security, particularly. The aim was also to delineate some military students' views on general and particular national security issues, encompassing social attitudes that contribute to strengthening national security, certain factors that shape national identity, and both internal and external threats. The research employed a survey methodology, utilizing questionnaires as the principal research instrument to gather data. The research also aimed at an indirect evaluation of the respondents' knowledge about national security and security education. The data reveal that factors, such as residence, significantly impact how patriotic education influences national identity, while traditional values like national symbols and traditions are less influential among older age groups. Despite some gender differences, there are few statistically significant correlations between the information sources military students use to perceive national security threats and their demographic characteristics, indicating a largely uniform influence across gender, age, and residence. This uniformity suggests that institutional training and military culture may provide a consistent framework that shapes students' views on security threats, minimizing the impact of demographic differences.

Keywords: military students, national security, threat perceptions, education for security, Republic of Moldova.

Streszczenie

W artykule przedstawiono wyniki badań, mające na celu wyjaśnienie poglądów studentów wojskowych na temat niektórych aspektów bezpieczeństwa narodowego w ogóle, a w szczególności bezpieczeństwa Republiki Mołdawii. Celem badań była też diagnoza postaw społecznych przyczyniających się do wzmocnienia bezpieczeństwa narodowego, wybranych czynników kształtujących tożsamość narodową oraz zagrożenia wewnętrzne i zewnętrzne. Wykorzystaną metodą badawczą była ankieta, a narzędziem badawczym, służącym do gromadzenia danych – kwestionariusz ankiety. Celem badania była także pośrednia ocena wiedzy respondentów na temat bezpieczeństwa narodowego i edukacji w zakresie bezpieczeństwa. Dane pokazują, że czynniki takie jak miejsce zamieszkania znacząco wpływają na to, jak edukacja patriotyczna wpływa na tożsamość narodową, podczas gdy tradycyjne wartości, takie jak symbole i tradycje narodowe, mają mniejszy wpływ wśród starszych grup wiekowych. Pomimo pewnych różnic między płciami istnieje niewiele statystycznie istotnych korelacji między źródłami informacji, z których korzystają studenci wojskowości w celu postrzegania zagrożeń bezpieczeństwa narodowego, a ich charakterystyką demograficzną, co wskazuje na w dużej mierze jednolity wpływ płci, wieku i miejsca zamieszkania. Ta jednolitość sugeruje, że szkolenie instytucjonalne i kultura wojskowa mogą zapewnić spójne ramy kształtujące poglądy uczniów na temat zagrożeń bezpieczeństwa, minimalizując wpływ różnic demograficznych.

Słowa kluczowe: studenci wojskowi, bezpieczeństwo narodowe, postrzeganie zagrożeń, edukacja dla bezpieczeństwa, Republika Mołdawii.

Introduction

The research draws on a study elaborated by Ilona Urych from the Faculty of National Security at the University of War Studies in Warsaw, titled *Students of Military Classes about Selected Aspects of Poland's National Security: An Empirical Study* (Urych, 2018). While the study conducted at the Armed Forces Military Academy *Alexandru cel Bun* (AFMA) does not precisely replicate Dr. Urych's work, it seeks to establish a foundational approach within the academic and military environment of the Republic of Moldova, incorporating two innovative elements.

The study underscores the significant role of national security's strengthening as a fundamental goal in preserving the sovereignty and stability of a democratic state. Globally, some experts in Security Studies advocate for a collaborative effort among educational institutions under defense ministries to enhance security education (Urych 2016, 2020). The proposed standardization of study programs (curricula) aims to enhance academic and later professional interoperability, aligning closely with the goals of the National Security Strategy, currently under finalization, to advance the Republic of Moldova's national security system in response to both military and non-military risks and threats. The influence of a state on international or regional security environment is determined by its comprehensive structural capabilities, rather than solely by its military prowess, a notion prevalent in past decades. This study is designed to assess the level of national security education among military students, who are in the process of becoming future security providers for the Republic of Moldova.

Analyzing the concept of “education for security” within the context of recent scholarly contributions reveals a profound evolution in understanding the role of education as a strategic component of national and individual security. Firstly, “education for security” is increasingly recognized not just as a mechanism for imparting knowledge about potential threats but as a foundational strategy for empowering individuals and societies to navigate and mitigate these risks effectively. This educational approach extends beyond traditional military and defense studies to include broader societal issues, such as cyber threats, environmental challenges, and public health crises. Such an inclusive perspective underscores the necessity of a comprehensive educational framework that enhances not only technical skills and knowledge but also fosters critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and global awareness. These competencies are essential for developing a nuanced understanding of security in its various dimensions and for cultivating the capability to respond to both conventional and unconventional challenges.

Secondly, the dynamic nature of global threats demands that educational systems remain adaptive and forward-thinking. This implies an ongoing revision of educational content and methods to include emerging topics, such as digital security, human rights, and sustainable development, which are integral to understanding and addressing contemporary security issues. The integration of these topics within security education not only broadens the scope of traditional security studies but also aligns educational initiatives with the broader national security strategies that are crucial for maintaining sovereignty and societal stability in a rapidly changing world.

In summary, “education for security” represents a significant strategic element in shaping the future readiness of individuals and nations to face an increasingly complex array of threats. Its continuous evolution reflects the shifting paradigms in security thinking and the indispensable role of education in cultivating a resilient, informed, and proactive citizenry.

Certain academic approaches of education for security

The academic discourse on “education for security” reveals a vibrant polemic centered on how to adequately prepare the students for the multifaceted challenges of modern security threats. This debate straddles a range of perspectives, from integrating traditional military education to adopting broader, more inclusive educational frameworks. Collectively, these scholarly works illuminate the complex and contentious nature of security education, stressing the importance of an ethically grounded, inclusive, and practical approach that aligns with democratic values and prepares students not just to understand but to effectively respond to the security challenges of the 21st century.

Amidst the polemical landscape, the dialogue concerning the adaptation of security education to modern demands continues to evolve, revealing profound ideological and methodological divisions. Each academic contribution not only interrogates the content

and scope of security education but also its pedagogical approaches and the role of education in shaping societal and individual perceptions of security. “Education for security”, as conceptualized by Krzysztof Drabik (2018, p. 25), is a relatively new construct perceived as a fundamental need for individuals and their social groups, extending beyond mere biological necessities that are essential for survival. This concept was elaborated in the context where security itself is divided into various sub-dimensions, with education gaining particular emphasis due to its direct correlation with national security levels. In the academic discourse surrounding “education for security”, scholars articulate various approaches that interlace theoretical principles with pragmatic outcomes, reflecting a dynamic interplay between educational strategies and security imperatives. This comparative analysis draws upon the insights of Andrzej Pieczywok (2012), Jan Maciejewski and Zdzisław Ludziejewski (2018), Ilona Urych (2019), and Marlena Zadorożna (2018) to elucidate the multifaceted nature of this educational construct.

The foundational goals of security education are outlined with an emphasis on competency development crucial for safe societal integration (Pieczywok, 2012, p. 215). This aim aligns with the perspectives of J. Maciejewski and Z. Ludziejewski (2018, p. 94), who advocate for a holistic preparation that spans peacetime and conflict scenarios, thereby integrating the acquisition of specialized knowledge and skills to manage diverse threats. This approach underpins an educational framework that not only prepares individuals for threats but also cultivates fundamental attitudes and values conducive to societal security.

The security education’s curriculum is highlighted as a dynamic entity by I. Urych (2019, p. 22), who argues for continuous adaptation to meet future challenges and threats. This perspective is particularly resonant with the broader and historically enriched view provided by A. Pieczywok (2018, p. 101), who contextualizes education for security within a spectrum of didactic activities ranging from civil to ecological education, influenced by various societal factors. These insights suggest a pedagogical approach where theoretical learning and practical application are interwoven, fostering both awareness and actionable competencies in security contexts.

The scope of security education, as discussed by M. Zadorożna (2018, p. 134), underscores an expanded etymology that includes non-military threats like migration, reflecting a shift from traditional to contemporary security challenges. This broadening of scope suggests a responsive educational system that adapts to global and local security dynamics, thereby preparing individuals not only for traditional threats but also for modern challenges that affect societal stability.

I. Urych (2019, p. 26) reiterates the importance of an ongoing educational process that involves personality development, attitude shaping, and knowledge transfer to navigate various threats effectively. This continuous learning process is critical in ensuring that security education remains relevant across different life stages and societal changes,

integrating new research findings and pedagogical techniques to enhance the efficacy of security education.

The comparative insights drawn from these scholars illustrate a consensus on the necessity of an adaptive, comprehensive security education framework that addresses both immediate and emergent societal needs. The future of “education for security” concept, as indicated by the ongoing research and pedagogical evolution discussed by these authors, will likely focus on expanding the understanding of security to include cultural, emotional, and ecological dimensions, further enriching the educational approaches and strategies employed in this field.

In conclusion, the academic perspectives analyzed here collectively advocate for a security education paradigm that is robust, adaptive, and inclusive, capable of preparing individuals and societies to face a complex array of threats with resilience and informed action. The dialogue between these scholarly views enriches our understanding of “education for security” as a critical and evolving educational endeavor.

In summary, the academic polemics surrounding “education for security” reveal a dynamic interplay of competing views and ideologies. These discussions highlight the urgent need for educational strategies that are not only adaptable and comprehensive but also critically engage with the ethical, practical, and philosophical challenges posed by the modern security environment. Such strategies must endeavor to equip students with the necessary knowledge and skills to navigate and respond effectively to the complex security challenges they will face in their futures.

Research methodology

The study encompasses a detailed description of the research methodology followed by an analysis of the empirical data aimed at constructing a comprehensive overview of the perceptions and insights held by military students at the AFMA regarding various facets of the Republic of Moldova’s national security. This analysis includes an examination of social attitudes that contribute to the reinforcement of national security, elements that shape national identity, and the various threats to national security. Additionally, the investigation identified the primary sources from which respondents acquire their information about national security. In conclusion, the study provides responses to the initial research questions, substantiating the imperative for additional research on the elucidated topics.

The research employed a survey methodology, utilizing questionnaires as the principal research instrument to gather data (Sava, 2013; Soeters, et al., 2014). The focal point of this study is the exploration of perceptions and perspectives held by students at the Armed Forces Military Academy (AFMA) concerning various facets of national security in the Republic of Moldova. The primary aim of this investigation is to eluci-

date the respondents' views on national security elements, particularly emphasizing social attitudes that contribute to the strengthening of national security, the determinants of national identity, and the various threats to national security. An additional aim is to indirectly evaluate the respondents' knowledge regarding national security issues. The distribution and completion of the questionnaires were conducted in an online format, ensuring the anonymity of all participants.

The central research issue in this investigation involves formulating reliable perceptual models concerning various conditions and characteristics of national security in the Republic of Moldova, as perceived by students at the AFMA. This includes examining both the direct and indirect factors influencing national security, emanating from within the state and beyond its borders. Arising from this core research problem, the study seeks to address the following questions:

1. What social attitudes are perceived to consolidate the national security according to the respondents?
2. According to the respondents, what factors are instrumental in shaping national identity?
3. In the opinion of the respondents, what are the prevailing threats to national security?
4. What are the key sources of information used by respondents concerning national security in the Republic of Moldova?

The study employed independent variables of gender, with two categories: women and men, and origin, with two sub-categories: urban or rural, alongside age as variables. The research was conducted from January 11 to February 23, 2022, within AFMA. Responses were recorded using a Likert scale where 4 signifies "Totally Agree", 3 notes "Partially Agree", 2 indicates "Partially Disagree", and 1 reflects "Totally Disagree".

This inquiry represents a pilot exploratory study designed to perform an initial analysis of the data to discern emerging trends and patterns relevant to the research focus. The research aims to collate and refine knowledge concerning the military environment to potentially develop a comprehensive and systematic study akin to those conducted in social psychology, but situated within the domain of military studies (Chelcea, 2001). The research objectives are also oriented towards validating the efficacy of the research instrument employed, including verifying the appropriateness of the selected questions, the relevance of the issue area, and the clarity of the messages and instructions used in the research tools. Given the nature of this study, it involved a sample of 149 military students from AFMA. The sampling method used was a non-random or non-probability type known as an opinion sample, drawing participants from the ranks of AFMA military students.

Presentation of items

The study is designed to develop a comprehensive profile of military students of the AFMA by examining several dimensions, the first of which pertains to the military traditions within their families. This dimension includes the following variables: presence of a mother, father, grandparent, uncle, or distant relative, who serves or has served in the armed forces, and instances, where the students are the first in their family to serve in the National Army of the Republic of Moldova.

The second dimension explores the development of social attitudes among military students that are conducive to enhancing the national security. These attitudes include social activity, patriotism, the fostering of civil society, social relationships, a sense of community belonging, respect for national heritage and traditions, cooperative skills, upbringing and education in an environment where the family values were pillars, trust in honesty, national consciousness, respect for the law, and respect for traditions are emphasized.

The third dimension examines the factors that shape the national identity. This includes an understanding of history and national heritage, patriotic education, national symbols and their respect, the cultivation of national traditions, education, shared cultural values, the common good and group interests, family dynamics, spirituality and the Christian religion, and language.

The fourth and fifth dimensions of this study delineate a broad spectrum of threats to the national security of the Republic of Moldova, classified according to whether they are external or internal. The external threats encompass international criminal activity, regional armed conflicts, migration, interstate competition for dominance and geopolitical transformation, instability of state alliances, cyber threats, the proliferation of radical and nationalist ideologies, hybrid conflicts, the atheization of Europe alongside a crisis of values, competition for raw materials and energy resources including the challenge of insufficient diversification, and terrorism. The internal threats include political instability, the rise of extremism, a crisis in the authority of state institutions, legal loopholes or the misapplication of democratic laws, vague definitions of national interests, the spread of group-specific interests, the Transnistrian conflict affecting eastern districts, deterioration of socio-professional conditions among citizens, pervasive corruption, an energy crisis, unemployment, intellectual exodus, demographic challenges such as aging, declining birth rates, rising mortality rates, and a shrinking workforce, widespread poverty, and the erosion of moral values replaced by material consumerism. These categories are drawn from the various sections of the National Security Strategy draft of the Republic of Moldova (Draft of National Security Strategy, 2016).

The sixth dimension explores the diverse sources from which military students derive their understanding of contemporary threats to national security. These sources include the Internet, teachers, platoon commanders, hierarchical authority, recently read

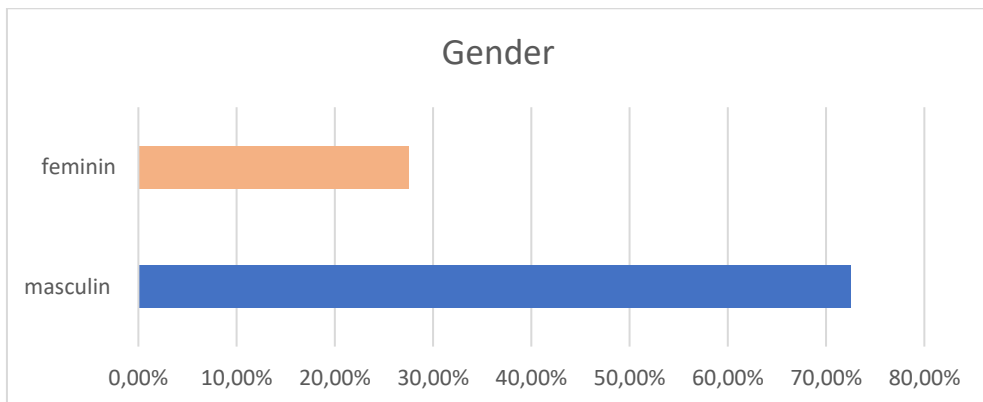
books, textbooks, mass media, educational courses, family influences including parents and other relatives, personal identification of threats, colleagues/friends, national traditions, religious teachings, and even computer games.

Demographic references

The study engaged a total of 149 military students as participants. These students predominantly ranged in age from 20 to 23 years, with one outlier aged over 29 years. The demographic distribution included 56% of participants originating from urban areas and 44% from rural settings. Regarding gender composition, the sample was 72.5% male and 27.5% female. The gender distribution within the study population is detailed graphically in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Sample structure by gender

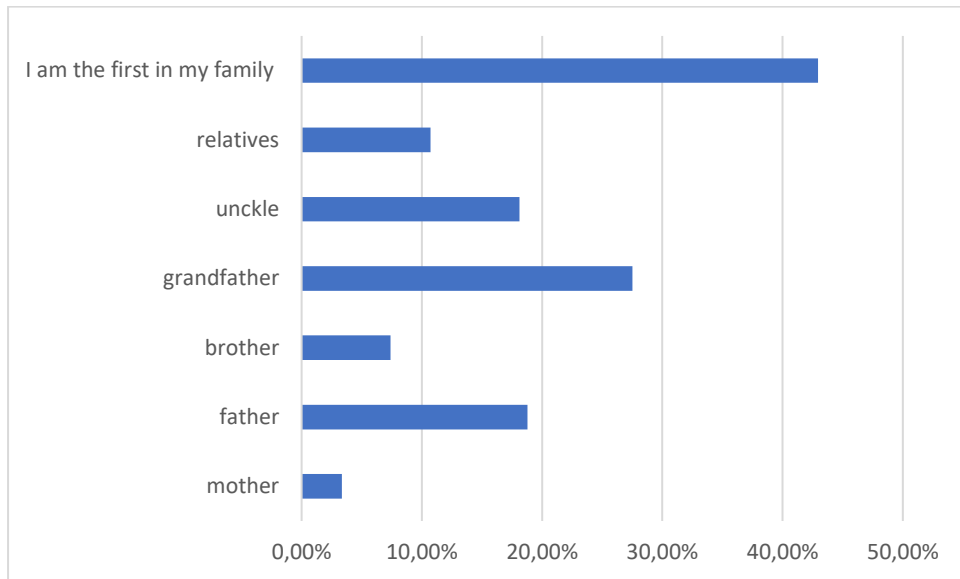


Source: The author's research.

The study facilitated an examination of the prevalence of military traditions within the families of military students. Analysis of the research findings reveals that 57% of respondents have a history of military service in their families. Notably, 27.5% of the participants reported having a grandfather who served in the armed forces, while approximately 18.8% mentioned that their father either serves or has served in the National Army. Additionally, a smaller proportion of respondents indicated that a distant relative (10.7%), a brother (7.4%), or their mother (3.4%) is or has been involved in the armed forces. The distribution of family military traditions among the respondents is graphically depicted in Figure 2.

Figure 2

The structure of the respondents according to the military traditions in the family



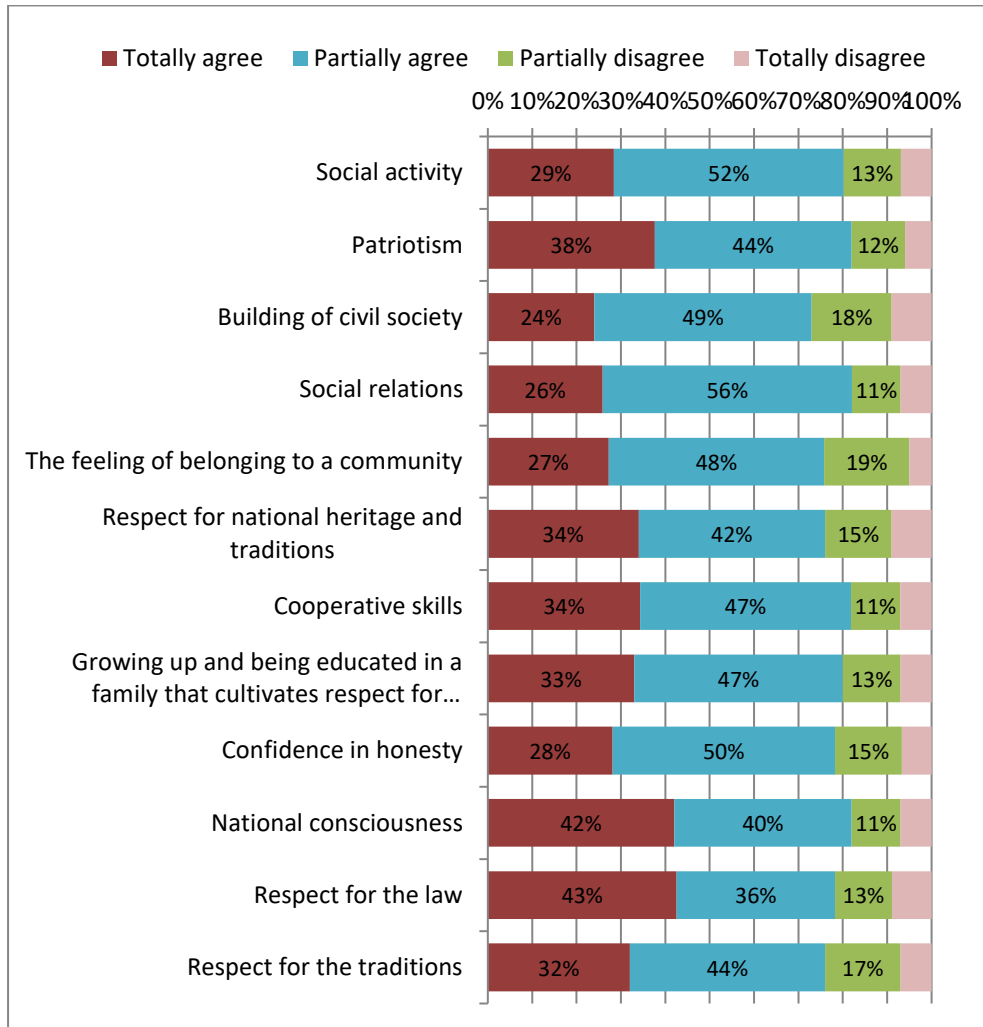
Source: The author's research.

Social attitudes contributing to national security as perceived by military students

The research identified social attitudes that military students perceive as conducive to enhancing national security, as illustrated in Figure 3. The most prominently endorsed attitudes, which garnered significant consensus, include patriotism, national consciousness, and social relations, each cited by 82% of respondents. Close behind, social activity and cooperation skills were highlighted by 81% of participants. Other attitudes valued highly were being raised in families that emphasize respect for family values (80%), adherence to the law (79%), trustworthiness (78%), and respect for national heritage and traditions (76%). Additionally, 76% of respondents also valued respect for traditions, 75% felt a sense of community belonging, and 73% supported the building of civil society. Notably, three-quarters of the sample unequivocally viewed patriotism, national consciousness, and social relations as foundational pillars of national security.

Figure 3

The social attitudes favorable to strengthening national security in the perception of military students



Source: The author's research.

It is important to highlight that, based on the Pearson correlation coefficient, several significant correlations were identified between social attitudes and the independent variables of gender, age, and residential environment. The detailed correlation analysis is presented in Table 1, which systematically examines the relationship between these social attitudes and the specified independent variables.

Table 1

Correlation analysis between social attitudes and independent variables: gender, age, residential environment, using the Pearson coefficient

The social attitudes favorable to strengthening national security		Variables		
		Gender	Age	Residence
Social activity	Pearson Correlation	-,031	-,197	-,024
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,711	,016	,773
Patriotism	Pearson Correlation	-,068	-,029	,000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,410	,725	,997
Building of civil society	Pearson Correlation	-,045	-,232	,034
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,583	,004	,685
Social relations	Pearson Correlation	-,030	-,173	,049
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,720	,035	,550
The feeling of belonging to a community	Pearson Correlation	-,194*	-,267	,129
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,018	,001	,116
Respect for national heritage and traditions	Pearson Correlation	-,096	-,294	,109
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,242	,000	,187
Cooperative skills	Pearson Correlation	-,046	-,061	,073
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,581	,459	,376
Growing up and being educated in a family that cultivates respect for family values	Pearson Correlation	-,038	-,128	,038
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,643	,121	,644
Confidence in honesty	Pearson Correlation	-,018	-,146	,033
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,826	,075	,692
National consciousness	Pearson Correlation	-,095	-,104	-,002
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,248	,208	,980
Respect for the law	Pearson Correlation	,008	-,034	,023
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,923	,684	,779
Respect of traditions	Pearson Correlation	-,124	-,162	-,004
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,131	,049	,957

Source: The author's research.

To interpret the statistical data provided in the table, it's important to understand the meaning of the *Pearson correlation coefficient* and the *significance values* listed under "Sig. (2-tailed)." The *Pearson correlation coefficient* measures the linear relationship between two variables, ranging from -1 to 1. A coefficient close to 1 indicates a strong positive relationship, a coefficient close to -1 indicates a strong negative relationship, and a coefficient close to 0 indicates no linear relationship. This *significance value* indicates the probability that the observed correlation occurred by chance if the true correlation is zero (null hypothesis). A commonly used threshold to declare statistical significance is 0.05. If the significance value is less than 0.05, the correlation is considered statistically significant, implying that it is unlikely to have occurred by chance.

Referring to *Social activity*, age: $r = -0.197$, ($p = 0.016$), suggests a small, statistically significant negative relationship with age. As age increases, the social activity that favors strengthening national security decreases. Mentioning *Building of civil society*, age: $r = -0.232$, $p = 0.004$, indicates a small, statistically significant negative relationship. Older individuals may be less inclined to engage in activities that favor the building of civil society for strengthening national security. Noticing the *Feeling of belonging to a community*, $r = -0.194$ (gender), -0.267 (age), $p = 0.018$ (gender), $p = 0.001$ (age), it shows a significant negative correlation with both gender and age, suggesting both older individuals and potentially males feel less belonging, impacting attitudes towards national security. Specifying the *Respect for national heritage and traditions*, age: $r = -0.294$, $p = 0.000$, there is a moderate negative correlation with age that is statistically significant. This implies that as age increases, respect for national heritage and traditions, as it relates to strengthening national security, decreases. Noting the *Respect of traditions*, age: $r = -0.162$, $p = 0.049$, indicates a small but statistically significant negative correlation with age, suggesting older age groups may respect traditions less in the context of national security.

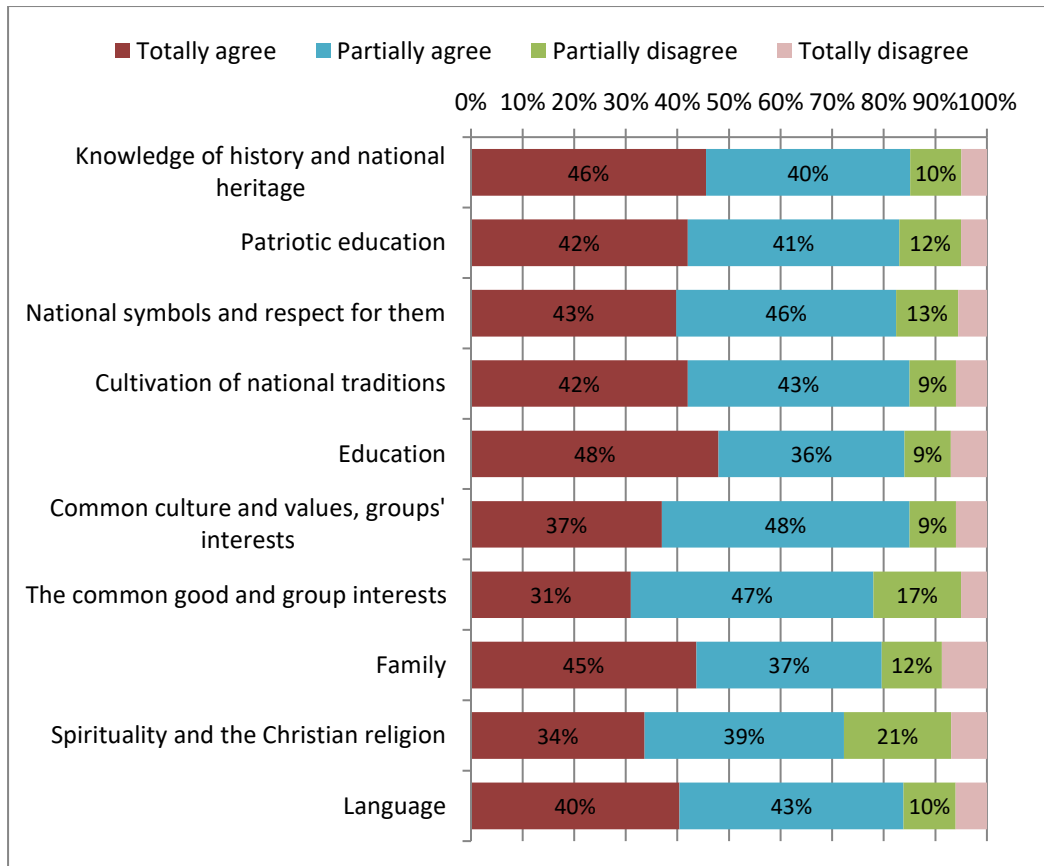
The data suggest that older *age* generally correlates negatively with various attitudes toward strengthening national security, such as *social activity*, *the building of civil society*, and *respect for national heritage and traditions*. These findings could be indicative of generational differences in values or perceptions of national security. The correlations concerning *gender* and *residence* are generally not statistically significant except for the feeling of belonging to a community, where gender shows a negative correlation. This could suggest that males might feel less of this belonging compared to females, impacting their attitudes towards national security. In general, the statistically significant results point to *age* as a more determining factor than *gender* or *residence* in influencing *social attitudes* related to strengthening national security.

Determinants of national identity as perceived by military students

The purpose of this study was to ascertain the factors that military students believe shape national identity, as depicted in Figure 4. The results indicate that national identity, from the perspective of military students, is most strongly influenced by national symbols and respect for them (89%), knowledge of history and national heritage (86%), and the cultivation of national traditions (85%). Equally significant are culture and shared values (85%), education (84%), and patriotic education (83%). Language and family also play crucial roles, each cited by 83% and 82% of respondents respectively. Further, the common good and group interests are seen as important by 78% of the participants, while spirituality and Christian religion received the lowest emphasis, with 73% recognizing its impact.

Figure 4

Factors influencing national identity as perceived by military students



Source: The author's research.

In summary, the perceptions and insights of military students suggest that national identity is predominantly influenced by elements, such as national symbols and their respect, knowledge of history and national heritage, cultivation of national traditions, shared culture and values, and education. An analytical review of the study's findings indicates that there is a statistically significant correlation between these factors shaping national identity and the independent variables of gender, age, and residential environment, as quantified by the Pearson correlation coefficient (Table 2).

Table 2

Correlation analysis between factors shaping national identity and independent variables: gender, age, residential environment, using the Pearson coefficient

The factors that shape national identity		Variables		
		Gender	Age	Residence
Knowledge of history and national heritage	Pearson Correlation	-,117	,005	-,126
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,155	,955	,127
Patriotic education	Pearson Correlation	-,149	,042	-,197
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,070	,614	,016
National symbols and respect for them	Pearson Correlation	-,193*	,010	-,127
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,018	,903	,122
Cultivation of national traditions	Pearson Correlation	-,116	-,190	-,155
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,159	,020	,059
Education	Pearson Correlation	-,032	-,090	-,085
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,696	,278	,305
Common culture and values	Pearson Correlation	-,037	-,062	-,140
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,653	,450	,090
The common good and group interests	Pearson Correlation	-,038	-,145	-,037
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,647	,077	,654
The family	Pearson Correlation	-,158	-,105	-,063
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,055	,200	,444
Spirituality and the Christian religion	Pearson Correlation	-,074	-,149	-,073
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,370	,069	,378
Language	Pearson Correlation	-,144	-,150	-,093
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,079	,068	,259

Source: The author's research.

Analysis by factor reflects the follow picture: concerning the *Knowledge of history and national heritage*, gender: $r = -0.117$, ($p = 0.155$), residence: $r = -0.126$ ($p = 0.127$), the negative correlations suggest a slight decrease in the importance of this factor among different genders and residents, though not significantly. Mentioning the *Patriotic education*, residence: $r = -0.197$ ($p = 0.016$), it indicates a significant negative correlation with residence, suggesting variations in the perception of patriotic education's importance based on living environment. Specifying the *National symbols and respect for them*, gender: $r = -0.193$ ($p = 0.018$), a significant negative correlation with gender suggests that respect for national symbols varies significantly between males and females. Noticing the *Cultivation of national traditions*, age: $r = -0.190$ ($p = 0.020$), indicates a significant negative correlation with age, suggesting older individuals may value national traditions less. Explaining the result for *Education*, no significant correlations, suggesting uniformity in the perception of education's role in shaping national identity across demographics. Noting the *Common culture and values*, residence: $r = -0.140$ ($p = 0.090$), it shows a negative trend with residence, but not significant. Referring to the *Common good and group interests*, age: $r = -0.145$ ($p = 0.077$), a negative correlation with age suggests older individuals might value common good and group interests less, though this is not statistically significant. The results for *Family*, gender: $r = -0.158$ (nearly significant, $p = 0.055$), a stronger negative correlation with gender suggests differences in how the family's role in shaping identity is perceived by males and females. Mentioning the *Spirituality and the Christian religion*, age: $r = -0.149$ (nearly significant, $p = 0.069$), indicates older individuals might value spirituality and religion less in shaping national identity, almost reaching significance. Specifying the results for *Language*, age: $r = -0.150$ (Nearly significant, $p = 0.068$), it shows a trend where older individuals might place less importance on language in shaping national identity, nearly significant.

The analysis highlights some significant correlations for factors like *residence* with *patriotic education* and *gender* with *respect for national symbols*, suggesting these demographics influence how certain factors are perceived in shaping the national identity. Other factors, such as the role of *education* and *common culture*, demonstrate less variation across demographics, indicating a more uniform perception.

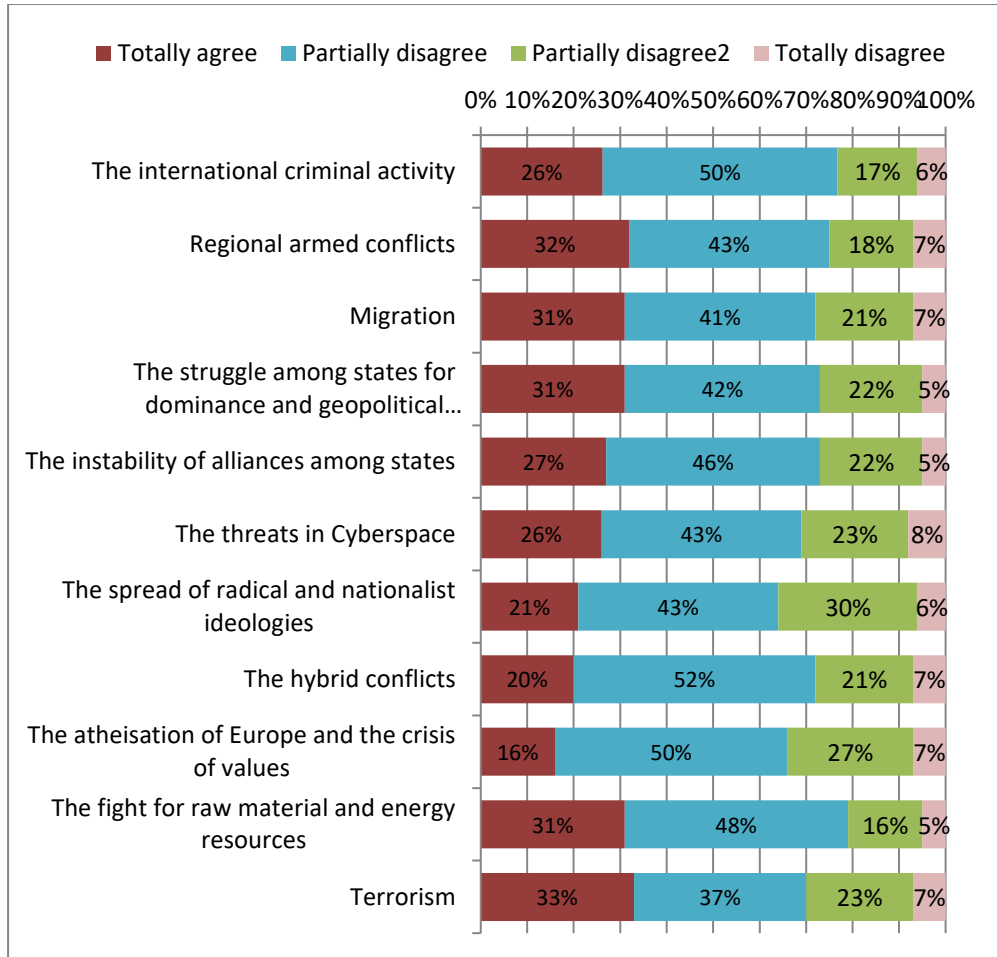
The external threats to national security in the perception of military students

The military students have delineated a range of pivotal external threats to national security as follows: competition for raw materials and energy resources (79%), international criminal activities (76%), regional armed conflicts (75%), competition among states for dominance and geopolitical transformation (73%), instability in state alliances (73%), migration (72%), hybrid conflicts (72%), terrorism (70%), cyber threats (69%), and the proliferation of radical and nationalist ideologies (64%). Additionally, the

atheization of Europe coupled with a crisis of values was identified by 56% of respondents. These perceived external threats to national security, as articulated by military students, are systematically illustrated in Figure 5.¹

Figure 5

External threats to national security as perceived by military students



Source: The author's research.

¹The list of external threats to national security has been created based on an analysis of the results of studies in the form of expert interviews performed as a part of the project titled Cultural identity of Poles and the security of Poles. The project has been performed for the National Center for Culture in Warsaw by the Chair of Education and Non-Government Forms of Security of the Faculty of National Security of the War Studies University in 2016. As well as, the list was adjust according the National Security Strategy project, 2016 edition.

In summary, military students perceive the primary external threats to national security to include the competition for raw materials and energy resources, international criminal activities, regional armed conflicts, interstate rivalries for dominance and geopolitical transformation, and the instability of international alliances.

Regarding other analyzed dimensions, the distribution of responses across respondent groups was relatively uniform, and no statistically significant correlations were identified (Table 3).

Table 3

Correlation analysis of external threats to national security with independent variables: gender, age, and residential environment, utilizing the Pearson coefficient

The external threats to national security		Variables		
		Gender	Age	Residence
The international criminal activity	Pearson Correlation	-,011	-,022	-,118
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,890	,790	,152
Regional armed conflicts	Pearson Correlation	-,034	-,092	-,155
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,677	,263	,059
Migration	Pearson Correlation	,052	,059	-,118
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,526	,476	,153
The struggle among states for dominance and geopolitical transformations	Pearson Correlation	-,078	,010	-,092
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,345	,900	,262
The instability of alliances among states	Pearson Correlation	-,099	,013	-,111
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,229	,871	,177
The threats in Cyberspace	Pearson Correlation	-,064	,062	-,094
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,441	,450	,256
The spread of radical and nationalist ideologies	Pearson Correlation	-,129	,121	-,109
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,118	,140	,186
The hybrid conflicts	Pearson Correlation	-,097	,072	-,067
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,241	,380	,416
The atheization of Europe and the crisis of values	Pearson Correlation	-,117	,036	-,013
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,156	,659	,878
The fight for raw material and energy resources	Pearson Correlation	-,030	,058	-,007
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,716	,480	,933
Terrorism	Pearson Correlation	-,010	,082	-,092
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,900	,323	,265

Source: The author's research.

Referring to the analysis of specific threats, one noted that the data suggest that perceptions of various external threats to national security do not significantly differ by gender, age, or residence among the respondents. Most of the external threats listed show very weak to weak correlations with demographic factors, and none reach statistical significance, suggesting a generally uniform perception across these variables.

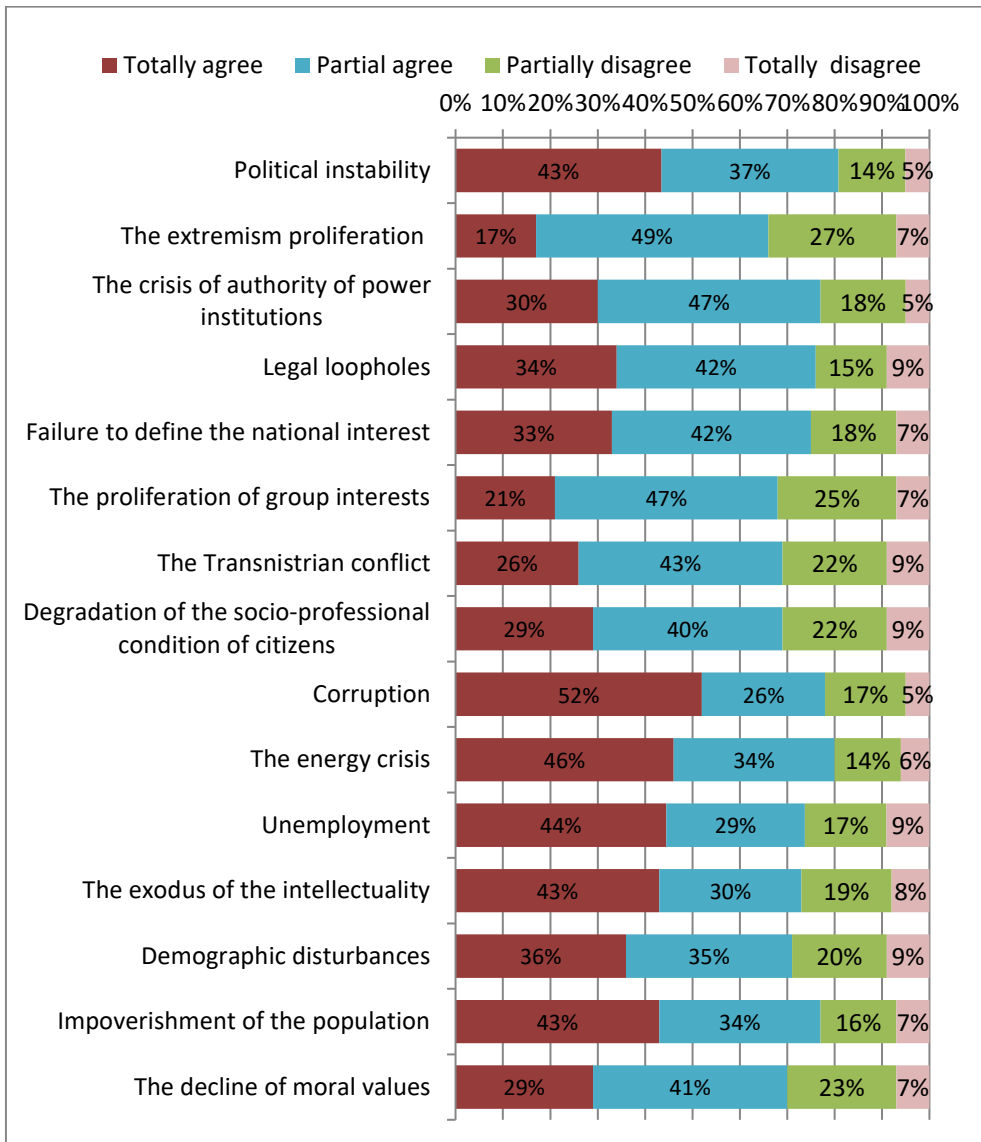
The domestic threats to national security as perceived by military students

The military students have identified a series of critical internal threats to the security of the Republic of Moldova. These threats include political instability and the energy crisis, each cited by 80% of respondents. Corruption was noted by 78% of the students, closely followed by a crisis in the authority of state power institutions and the impoverishment of the population, both at 77%. Legal loopholes were identified by 76% of respondents, and an undefined national interest by 75%. Additional concerns include unemployment and the exodus of intellectuals, each reported by 73% of students, demographic disturbances by 71%, a decline in moral values by 70%, the ongoing conflict in the eastern districts at 69%, and similar concern for the degradation of the socio-professional condition of citizens. The proliferation of group interests and the spread of extremism were noted by 67% and 65% of respondents, respectively. These perceptions of internal threats to national security are illustrated in Figure 6.²

²The list of internal threats to the national security of the Republic of Moldova was created based on the National Security Strategy project, 2016 edition.

Figure 6

Domestic threats to national security as perceived by military students



Source: The author's research.

In conclusion, according to the military students, the principal internal threats to national security include political instability, the energy crisis, corruption, the crisis of authority within state institutions, the impoverishment of the population, legal loopholes, and an undefined national interest. Regarding other analyzed aspects, the distribution of responses across respondent groups was uniform, with no significant correlations detected among them (Table 4).

Table 4

Correlation analysis of domestic threats to national security with independent variables: gender, age, and residential environment, utilizing the Pearson coefficient

The domestic threats to national security		Variables		
		Gender	Age	Residence
Political instability	Pearson Correlation	-,054	,019	-,091
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,511	,815	,272
The proliferation of extremism	Pearson Correlation	-,072	,054	-,066
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,386	,511	,425
The crisis of authority of power institutions	Pearson Correlation	-,095	,029	,056
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,247	,723	,498
Legal loopholes	Pearson Correlation	,007	,078	-,105
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,929	,344	,201
Failure to define the national interest	Pearson Correlation	,021	,011	,069
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,795	,890	,401
The proliferation of group interests	Pearson Correlation	-,107	,003	-,007
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,196	,975	,930
The Transnistrian conflict	Pearson Correlation	-,080	,049	-,002
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,334	,552	,977
Degradation of the socio-professional condition of citizens	Pearson Correlation	-,037	-,067	,010
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,650	,415	,902
Corruption	Pearson Correlation	-,029	,031	-,079
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,726	,704	,338
The energy crisis	Pearson Correlation	-,033	,043	-,054
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,687	,606	,516
Unemployment	Pearson Correlation	,026	,027	-,052
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,756	,739	,525
The exodus of the intellectuality	Pearson Correlation	-,098	,046	-,026
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,234	,576	,754
Demographic disturbances	Pearson Correlation	-,018	,008	-,004
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,825	,924	,961
Impoverishment of the population	Pearson Correlation	,020	-,001	-,103
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,809	,987	,212
The decline of moral values	Pearson Correlation	-,046	-,063	-,125
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,580	,443	,130

Source: The author's research.

The data suggests that none of the domestic threats to national security shows a strong or statistically significant correlation with demographic variables like gender, age, or residence. This indicates that perceptions of these threats are relatively uniform across different demographic groups within the sample. This uniformity might suggest

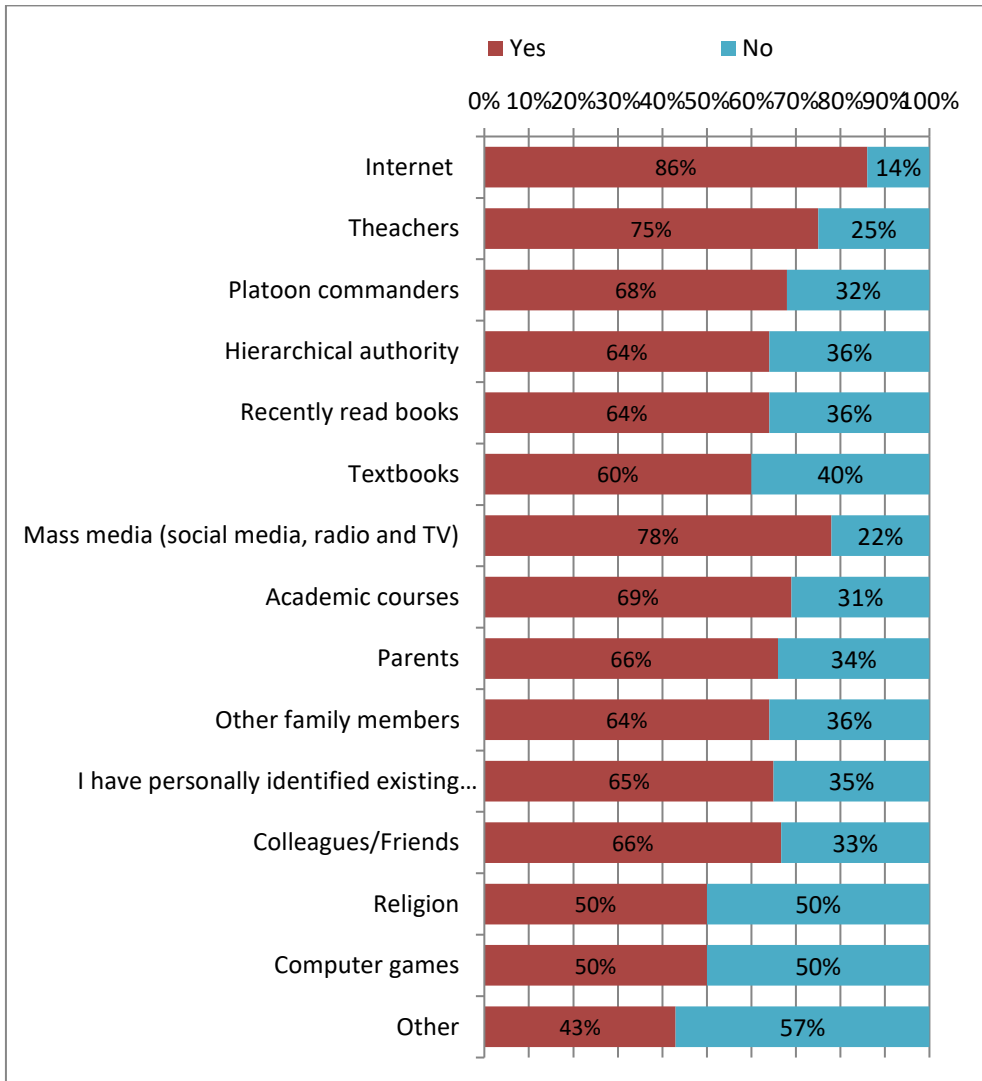
that these perceptions are influenced more by broader societal or cultural factors than by individual demographic characteristics.

Sources of information for military students on contemporary threats to the national security of the Republic of Moldova

The study conclusively demonstrates that military students primarily obtain information about the threats to the national security of the Republic of Moldova from the Internet, with a significant 86% utilizing this medium. Additional sources include mass media – social media, radio, and television – cited by 78% of the students, and educational interactions with teachers, which inform 75% of the students. Information is also garnered during lessons or courses (69%), through discussions with platoon commanders (68%), and from parents (66%). An equal percentage of students (66%) discuss these issues with colleagues/friends, and 65% have personally identified existing threats. Informational input from hierarchical authority, recently read books, and other family members each account for 64%, while family stories and textbooks are slightly less influential at 61% and 60%, respectively. Lesser sources include religion and computer games, each cited by 50% of students, and other miscellaneous sources at 43%. The distribution of these information sources among military students is depicted in Figure 7.

Figure 7

Information sources for military students on contemporary threats to the national security of the Republic of Moldova



Source: The author's research.

Statistical analysis has determined that there are no notable percentage differences between male (57%) and female (56%) students in their ability to independently identify threats to national security. Regarding other examined variables, the distribution of responses across respondent groups was uniform, and no significant correlations were observed. This suggests a homogeneous perception and understanding across different demographics (Table 5).

Table 5

Correlation analysis between information sources on contemporary threats to national security and independent variables: gender, age, and residential environment, using the Pearson coefficient

The sources of the military students on the contemporary threats to the national security		Variables		
		Gender	Age	Residence
The Internet	Pearson Correlation	-,069	,110	-,121
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,404	,181	,143
Teachers	Pearson Correlation	,008	,159	,016
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,927	,053	,843
Platoon commanders	Pearson Correlation	-,117	-,031	,117
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,157	,710	,156
Hierarchical authority	Pearson Correlation	-,106	-,055	,097
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,199	,508	,238
Recently read books	Pearson Correlation	-,016	,073	-,012
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,850	,373	,881
Textbooks	Pearson Correlation	,031	,001	-,005
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,708	,991	,949
Mass media (social media, radio and TV)	Pearson Correlation	,117	-,086	-,082
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,155	,297	,320
Lessons/courses	Pearson Correlation	-,003	,054	,007
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,975	,512	,929
The parents	Pearson Correlation	,047	-,044	-,104
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,565	,596	,206
Other family members	Pearson Correlation	,040	-,068	-,021
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,628	,412	,796
I have personally identified existing threats	Pearson Correlation	,002	-,120	-,043
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,983	,143	,600
Colleague/Friends	Pearson Correlation	-,008	-,041	-,067
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,927	,623	,416
National traditions	Pearson Correlation	-,014	-,094	-,137
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,869	,254	,095
Religion	Pearson Correlation	-,068	-,088	,018
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,407	,283	,832
Computer games	Pearson Correlation	-,118	,016	-,066
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,153	,851	,426
Other	Pearson Correlation	-,075	-,126	,053
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,365	,126	,522

Source: The author's research.

Mentioning the *Teachers*, there is a very weak positive correlation with all variables and nearly significant with age ($p = 0.053$), suggesting a potential influence as students age. Specifying the *National traditions*, there is nearly significant with residence ($p = 0.095$). Overall, the data suggests that there are very few statistically significant correlations between the sources used by military students to learn about national security threats and their demographic characteristics. This indicates a generally uniform influence of these sources across different demographic groups. Notably, the most consistent correlations appear to be related to age, although they generally remain below the threshold for statistical significance.

Conclusions

The aim of this study was to explore the perceptions of military students regarding various aspects of national security, specifically in relation to the Republic of Moldova. This included examining social attitudes that enhance national security, the factors that shape national identity, and the diverse threats to national security. Another goal was to indirectly evaluate the students' knowledge of national security and their level of education in this area. The analysis facilitated the achievement of these objectives and provided answers to the research questions posed.

1. The military students identified several social key attitudes that contribute to the strengthening of national security: patriotism, national consciousness, and social relations, each noted by 82% of respondents. Social activity and cooperation skills were highlighted by 81%, with other attitudes ranging between 80% and 73%.
2. According to the military students, national identity is primarily influenced by national symbols and respect for them (89%), knowledge of history and national heritage (86%), cultivation of national traditions and shared cultural and common values (85%), education (84%), patriotic education (83%), language (83%), and family (82%). The common good and group interests (78%) and spirituality and Christian religion (73%) were also significant.
3. The military students perceived the most significant external threats to include the competition for raw materials and energy resources (79%), international criminal activity (76%), and regional armed conflicts (75%). Other notable threats encompassed interstate struggles for dominance and geopolitical transformation (73%), instability of state alliances (73%), migration (72%), hybrid conflicts (72%), terrorism (70%), cyber threats (69%), the proliferation of radical and nationalist ideologies (64%), and the atheization of Europe coupled with a values crisis (56%). These find-

ings underscore the complex interplay of social, cultural, and political factors that influence perceptions of national security among military students.

4. The military students in the Republic of Moldova have identified several key internal threats to national security. These include political instability and the energy crisis, each recognized by 80% of the participants, followed closely by corruption (78%), a crisis of authority in state power institutions, and the impoverishment of the population (both 77%). Other notable concerns include legal loopholes (76%), an unclear definition of the national interest (75%), high unemployment rates, and the intellectual exodus (both 73%), along with demographic disturbances (71%), a decline in moral values (70%), the conflict in the Eastern districts (69%), socio-professional degradation (69%), and the rising influence of group interests and extremism (67% and 65%, respectively).
5. The study reveals that the primary source of information for military students on contemporary threats to national security is the Internet (86%), followed by the media (78%), teachers (75%), and educational courses (69%). Other sources include platoon commanders (68%), parents and colleagues/friends (66%), personal identification of threats (65%), hierarchical authority and recently read books (64%), and other family members (64%). Notably, the Internet remains the dominant source across all genders, with no significant gender differences detected in the independent identification of threats.

The research successfully conducted an indirect assessment of students' knowledge in national security and security education, identified their main sources of information on national security, and collected qualitative data reflecting the general perspective regarding hierarchical interactions and trust levels towards superiors and faculty. These findings are intended for internal use to enhance educational practices.

In light of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine initiated by the Russian Federation on February 24, 2022, there is an urgent need for a deeper and more rigorous exploration of risks and threats to national security at AFMA. The study underscores the necessity of engaging students and master's candidates in more intensive debates and continuously updating the pedagogical approaches and curriculum in Security and Defense Studies. Furthermore, the accreditation of the AFMA BA, MA and PhD programs is very important, enabling ongoing assessments of security education levels, which will inform future longitudinal studies on the perceptions of national security among military students, master's and PhD candidates within AFMA.

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