**HOW DID NATIONALISM ACT AS A MAJOR CAUSE OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR**

# Definition of Nationalism:

The word Nationalism has been defined in different words by different entities each of whom try to emphasize certain aspects that people associate with the word when used as both verb or noun.

Nationalism is an ideology that emphasizes loyalty, devotion, or allegiance to a nation or nation-state and holds that such obligations outweigh other individual or group interests (Kohn, H. (2023, June 20). nationalism. Encyclopedia Britannica. https://www.britannica.com/topic/nationalism)

Nationalism is an idea and movement that holds that the nation should be congruent with the state.[1] [2] As a movement, it tends to promote the interests of a particular nation (as in a group of people), [3] especially with the aim of gaining and maintaining the nation's sovereignty (self-governance) over its homeland to create a nation-state. It holds that each nation should govern itself, free from outside interference (self-determination), that a nation is a natural and ideal basis for a polity, [4] and that the nation is the only rightful source of political power.[3][5] It further aims to build and maintain a single national identity, based on a combination of shared social characteristics such as culture, ethnicity, geographic location, language, politics (or the government), religion, traditions and belief in a shared singular history,[6][7] and to promote national unity or solidarity.[3] Nationalism, therefore, seeks to preserve and foster a nation's traditional culture.[8] There are various definitions of a "nation", which leads to different types of nationalism.[9] The two main divergent forms are ethnic nationalism and civic nationalism. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nationalism)

Nationalism means loyalty and devotion to a nation especially as expressed in a glorifying of one nation above all others and a stressing of the promotion of its culture and interests (https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/nationalism)

In short nationalism refers to the belief that a particular nation or ethnic group has a unique identity and is entitled to self-rule or self-determination and that sense of common identity has often caused the group to want to impose its values and believes on other entities in an attempt to expand it size / boundaries and ultimately increase its power and influence. It is therefore clear that by its nature, nationalism has great potential to cause conflicts between people who consider themselves to belong to different “states” or nations. The following is a discussion on how nationalism actually contributed to the outbreak of World War 1 between the years 1914 to 1918.

# Sources of nationalism

Nationalism is mostly a product of Europe’s complex history spanning the rise of popular sovereign empires and periods of economic growth and social transformation all contributed to nationalist sentiments.

Some historians believe nationalism was encouraged and harnessed by European elites to encourage loyalty and compliance. Others believe that nationalism was a by-product of economic and imperial expansion, growth and prosperity as compared to other nations and empires who in contrast, were dismissed as inferiors or rivals.

The campaigns by Politicians, diplomats, royals and media contributed to this nationalism in their speeches, publications and rhetoric formed a popular culture of provocative stories, such as rumours about rival nations and their evil intentions. Nationalist ideas could also be found in literature, music, theatre and art. In each country, nationalism was underpinned by different attitudes, themes and events. Nationalist sentiments were fuelled by a sense of historical destiny and, therefore, closely tied to the history and development of each nation.

The effects of this growing nationalism were an inflated confidence in one’s nation, its government, economy and military power. Many nationalists also became blind to the faults of their own nation. In matters of foreign affairs or global competition, they were convinced that their country was fair, righteous and beyond fault. In contrast, nationalists criticised rival nations to the point of demonisation, caricaturing them as aggressive, scheming, deceitful, backward or uncivilised. Nationalist press reports convinced many readers the interests of their country were being threatened by the plotting, scheming and hungry imperialism of its rival nations.

# DISCUSSION

Nationalism may have been a significant cause in the outbreak of World War I, but it was not the sole cause. There are other factors that also contributed to the outbreak of the war including but not limited to imperialism, alliances, and militarism.

Imperialism refers to the policy or practice of expanding a nation’s power and influence through colonization also known as annexation. This led to competition between the major European powers for colonies and resources, which contributed to rivalry and tensions.

Alliances were also a significant factor, as many nations formed military alliances with each other for protection and security. However, these alliances also meant that any conflict between two nations could quickly escalate into a larger conflict involving multiple nations as each nation appeals to its allies.

Militarism, or the belief in the importance of military strength and preparedness, also played a role. Many nations believed that having a strong military was necessary to protect their interests and maintain their power, leading to an arms race and increased tensions between nations.

In the years preceding the First World War, nationalism was on the rise across Europe, with many nations seeking to assert their independence, influence and power. As each nation sought to expand their territory and influence, there emerged tensions & competition leading to alliances and inevitable groupings ultimately leading to war. (<https://studymind.co.uk/questions/to-what-extent-was-nationalism-the-main-cause-of-wwi/>).

Many Europeans, particularly citizens of the so-called Great Powers ([Britain](https://alphahistory.com/worldwar1/great-britain/), [France](https://alphahistory.com/worldwar1/france/) and Germany) had convinced themselves of the cultural, economic and military supremacy of their nation. According to historian Lawrence Rosenthal, Nationalism was a prominent force in early 20th century Europe and a significant cause of World War I because he defines Nationalism as “an intense form of patriotism or loyalty to one’s country. Nationalists exaggerate the importance or virtues of their home country, placing its interests above those of other nations”. (https://alphahistory.com/worldwar1/nationalism)

The 19th century was a period of continuous change and competition in Europe which saw great growth in European imperialism as well as the rise of nationalism, which swept across the continent. For example, both Germany and Italy formally unified as countries in 1871. In both cases, smaller kingdoms joined into one larger country and saw the people of each country identify with each other nationalistically, thus, nationalism played a significant role in carving up Europe between different groups of people who disagreed and did not trust each other to an extremely high degree. Some nations felt threatened by the nationalism of other nations, which led to several different crises. Every European nation experienced a growth in nationalism in the lead up to the 1914 outbreak of World War I (https://www.historycrunch.com/nationalism-as-a-cause-of-world-war-i.html )

# CONCLUSION

Overall, while nationalism was an important factor in the outbreak of World War I, it was just one of several complex and interrelated factors that contributed to the conflict.

It is difficult to determine whether nationalism played a larger role in the outbreak of WWI than other factors because all of the factors were interconnected and contributed to the complex web of tensions and rivalries that led to the war. However, it is clear that nationalism played a significant role in the rise of extremist political movements in many European countries (especially Britain, Germany, France, and Russia) which were affected most by the world war1.

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