

Summary

Prevention of radicalization and violent extremism is a concern for most liberal democracies. This is a study of a preventive initiative called the Tolerance Project (TP), which aims to reduce recruitment to extreme nationalist groups across Sweden. The TP is a Holocaust educational programme that is offered to a selected group of 14- and 15-year-olds, aimed at mixing 'at-risk' youths and stable pupils. During 2015 and 2016, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in a Swedish region that was implementing the programme in several localities. At the same time, the largest National Socialist organization in the Nordic countries, the Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM) increased its public visibility and launched a parliamentary branch in Sweden. As a timely example of the TP's ultimate target group this study also examines the legitimization strategy of the NRM. The overall question is how the TP works to prevent extremism, and how it relates to contemporary extreme nationalist groups.

Article I is about how racism and intolerance was problematized by local front-line professionals working with the implementation of the TP. The material indicated several problematizations, which I divided into four categories: generational racism, the growth of the Sweden Democrats (SD), the normalization of racist language and general 'at-risk' youths. This showed that the creation of target groups was based on local understandings of racism and intolerance at the time. The first three categories suggested that racism and intolerance were mainly linked to anti-immigrant discourses, and this was what was mainly to be prevented. Only the fourth category dealt with some of the typical risk factors for engaging in extreme groups later on, such as trouble in coping with school or social isolation. Operating with a broad target group can reduce the risk of stigmatizing vulnerable individuals, but makes it difficult to evaluate success in terms of preventive efficiency.

Article II is about underlying ideas and assumptions about how, or by whom, prevention is to be done in theory and practice. The TP is in line with traditional socialization theory and other preventive strategies emphasizing the importance of significant others – that is, parents, teachers, or peers. Findings suggest some tensions regarding who the tolerance educators perceived to be the most important preventive agents. Most of the educators believed in facilitating parent-child dialogue, as well as in their own significance for young people participating in the programme. There was also a lot of focus on peer group influence. In the locality where I conducted most of the fieldwork, the aim of the course was to create

ambassadors of tolerance – that is, young people with the ability to confront racism and intolerance in the various social contexts in which they were located, whether at home, in school, or in other social arenas. This suggests that prevention is something that is going on in many arenas. The emphasis on young people as intervention allies challenges the idea that prevention is mostly done by adults.

Article III is about how leading figures of the largest National Socialist organization in the Nordic countries attempted to legitimize their ideology in front of a broader audience, in order to potentially attract new members. The findings showed that the Nordic Resistance Movement's (NRM) strategy resembles the transformation of the SD when it comes to articulating mainstream concerns. At the same time, the NRM clearly differs from the SD when it comes to anti-Semitic ideology, which still permeates all aspects of its world view. The persistence of National Socialist ideology in Sweden challenges the governmental description of the White Power movement as having replaced anti-Semitism with anti-Islamism. It also indicates that the longstanding efforts to teach all school children in Sweden about the Holocaust have not been enough to counter the ideology that lay behind it.

To conclude, the TP does well in teaching young people about what happened during World War II and how this relates to current events, while the aim of reducing recruitment to contemporary neo-Nazi groups could be strengthened by further addressing current conspiracies and Holocaust denial. Extreme ideologies, although small phenomena in most liberal democracies, cannot be regarded as isolated from mainstream concerns and should therefore be addressed and understood within the frames of liberal and radical democracy. That is not to say that one should welcome extreme groups in politics, but to allow extreme ideas and views to be part of the dialogue in preventive settings.

The study's title 'Waves of Tolerance' is meant to capture the waves of implementing the Tolerance Project, which, as with many other preventive initiatives, follows specific events or governmental strategies. My suggestion is that prevention should be seen as a constant proactive effort to safeguard democracy, an effort that requires broad societal mobilization.