Strategies to Counter Extremism and Radicalisation in Swedish Schools – Managing Salafi Jihadists Attempts to Influence Students

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Abstract

This article focuses on the importance that municipal schools have, and potentially can have, in counteracting radicalisation in relation to Salafist-Jihadist extremism in Sweden. The purpose of the study is to provide a review of previous research into radicalisation, with a specific focus on the role of schools. In addition to the review, there is a minor qualitative interview study with teachers and experts, which has the aim of creating a dialogue in relation to the research problem. Previous research and the interviews show that there are clear signs of anti-democratic views and values in Swedish schools, especially antisemitism and homophobia. A four-field model illustrates different approaches to radicalisation in schools. Repression is something that is primarily dealt with by law and security agencies, however there is no legal support in Sweden for school management or teachers to identify and report students suspected of radicalisation. In the main, the interviewees supported an active, open and critical dialogue as the right strategy. This is also supported by much of the research on radicalisation. It is important that teachers are well-read and have the courage to raise issues that can be seen as controversial by some students. According to several of the teachers, this is not self-evident in a Swedish context where open conflicts of opinion disrupt consensus.

Introduction

Government interest in radicalisation and extremism has increased significantly since the early-2000s. The main reasons are the terrorist attacks that have been carried out in the immediate surroundings, the accession of foreign fighters to IS during 2014-2018, and the growth of right-wing extremism. The development has led to an increasing requirement to find explanations for why and how young people adopt extreme ideological or religious views, and sometimes also commit acts of violence as a result. Increased radicalisation in a Swedish context applies primarily to pro-violence Islamism, right-wing extremism and left-wing extremism. Radicalisation is a growing societal problem: "Today the Security Police can see that there are activities in Sweden where there is long-term and extensive radicalisation. These activities take place, for example, in foundations, schools, associations and companies, which are partly financed by public funds or foreign actors" (SÄPO 2019).[1]

Radicalisation is a complex and relatively unexplored phenomenon. As a concept it has been widely used in government policy and public debate, but it is an under-developed field in the social and behavioural sciences (Sedgwick 2010; Mattsson 2018). Why and how an individual becomes radicalised and what this really means are complicated questions and thus far the answers have rather weak empirical foundations. Nevertheless, there is some kind of common definition: radicalisation is a process in which individuals and groups adopt extremist attitudes or beliefs, where the use of violence is seen as a legitimate

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means of creating political and social change. Some policy-based research has tried to describe radicalisation as an incremental process, however, there is limited empirical support for these models, where the final step is always the use of violence. Instead, studies show that individuals can move in and out of extremism very quickly (Basra and Neumann 2016), without necessarily going through a process of distinct phases that in themselves always result in violence (Hafez and Mullins 2015: 960).

Schools as public institutions are very important societal arenas for young people, not least in relation to extremism and radicalisation. However, where is the boundary for what can be said in a school environment before a report of concern is made to the social services? Which individuals are particularly vulnerable to influence? Are there governmental interventions of a more repressive nature that school management and teachers can, may and should take to counter radicalisation?

This study[2] focuses on young people's radicalisation in relation to Salafist-Jihadist extremism. It is based on earlier research into this topic and uses Sweden, and specifically the role of municipal schools, as case study and example. Salafist-Jihadist extremism and radicalisation is a problem in many European and non-European countries. Using Sweden as a case is relevant for two specific reasons. First, a very high number of Salafi Jihadists from Sweden travelled to join IS in Syria and Iraq from 2013 onwards (Ranstorp et al 2018), and schools are and were important arenas for radicalisation of these, often young, persons. Second, as mentioned before, the Swedish Security Police (SÄPO 2019) has highlighted Islamist extremism as currently the major terrorist threat in Sweden, similar to many other countries in Europe, which makes the case study of general interest. It is not unreasonable to suggest that the review, interviews and analysis carried out is also valid for right-wing or left-wing extremist radicalisation. However, the sources used here are mainly focused on Salafist Jihadism. Salafism is a minority orientation in Sunni Islam based on a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam as formulated and taught in its original form by the first generations of Muslims. This means that it opposes new or modern interpretations of the Qur'an. Salafism is defined by a dichotomous worldview consisting of believers and everyone else, who are considered unfaithful (*takfir*). There are three different orientations within Salafism: puritan, political and pro-violence (jihadist) Salafism. Ranstorp et al (2018:7) state that these three forms have the same ideological framework: an "(…) anti-democratic attitude because following God and God's laws is the only thing allowed". The ideology spread through political Salafism is "(…) often a breeding ground for individuals to embrace Salafist Jihadism". Salafism is increasing all over Europe but mostly as a puritan movement: "Though revolutionary Salafism (Jihadism) is the one that attracts the most attention, it is not predominant: quietist Salafism is actually the dominant form" (Karoui 2018:57).

The purpose of this study is to provide a review of previous research on radicalisation and attempts to influence young people with a specific focus on the role and importance of municipal schools. In addition to the literature review, there is a minor qualitative interview study with teachers and local safety- or social work

officials on how schools and governmental authorities may counter radicalisation and Salafist-Jihadist extremism in Sweden. The study is based on the situation in municipal schools and does not include so-called independent schools, which is an issue in itself and the one that has received the most attention in Swedish government policy in recent years. The focus on municipal schools is obviously a limitation of the study and ideally independent schools would also be included. The reason behind this limitation is that it was not possible to gain access to teachers or other respondents from independent schools.

A normative starting point for this article is that schools should and might potentially have a significant role in counteracting extremism and radicalisation. However, as will be shown in this article, the question of how schools can counter extremism is not an entirely easy one to answer. The article is arranged in four sections. Following this introduction and a short methodological discussion, a description of the legal and ethical framework for school institutions is presented, along with a review of earlier research on radicalisation and the role of schools. The interviews are subsequently presented and analysed. Finally, a synthesis is made between the review and interviews, and conclusions are drawn.

Methods Analysing Extremism, Radicalisation and Terrorism

Schuurman (2019) notes that academic research on terrorism was initiated in the 1960s and 70s, but that it grew exponentially after the attacks in the United States in 2001. The research is usually applied and has an instrumental purpose: to help governmental authorities counter terrorism and extremism. The research is thus usually policy-oriented and is based on collaboration between researchers and governments. This study follows a similar logic. However, the review of earlier research is also based on critical approaches to the policy-oriented tradition, and on research that is not normative. The review shows that research is often based on qualitative interview studies and that there is a lack of quantitative studies (see Rostami et al, 2018). This is not very strange. The research problems that are handled and the questions that are asked are often qualitative and it is difficult to gain access to empirical data through quantitative methods. Within the framework of this study, it would be interesting, for example, to get a statistically general review of teachers and students' attitudes or experiences of influence attempts, channels and pro-violence extremism. But this is not the purpose of this study, which instead intends to provide a review of the state of knowledge regarding schools' role and significance and to create an understanding of the phenomenon through qualitative interviews. However, the review does refer to the most comprehensive quantitative study of violent extremism in Sweden; an analysis of register data from the Police and the Security Police register (Rostami et al 2018). The review is not total but consists of a strategic selection of studies, articles and reports in the field that are considered significant. The review is mainly descriptive but also includes some analytical reflection.

The interviews were conducted in late spring and autumn 2020 with a total of eleven people. Six of these interviewees were teachers and five of them worked with safety and social issues (including school collaboration) at the municipal level. Creswell (2013) highlights that the qualitative approach needs to fit the issue in question and Prasad (2017) notes that qualitative research is not a uniform set

of techniques. The issue in question in this study is indeed qualitative since the overall aim is increase understanding of the social phenomenon at stake. The circumstances surrounding radicalisation as an interview topic are complex and therefore certain measures, that would not be needed in studies about other less controversial topics, have been made. The purpose of the interviews was partly to increase the understanding of how professional school actors work with and view radicalisation, partly to understand the problems with radicalisation that exist in schools in vulnerable areas in Sweden. The interviews do not test the theories and earlier research results and are not representative, but are used to create a dialogue about the research problem with local professionals in the selected context.

The teachers all have experience from schools in vulnerable areas with high crime rates and social exclusion. Other interviewees have worked or are now working with violent extremism in various ways and have experience of school collaboration. The interviewees are not experts of radicalisation in educational settings, but have experience of this as well as earlier counter-measures. The interviewees were selected through contacts that was taken with managerial school and safety officials in three municipalities that have vulnerable areas and are known for having problems with Salafist-jihadism. When selecting candidates for the interviews a purposeful sampling of information-rich individuals, considered able to make interesting contributions to the study, was made. The interviewees were asked not to name students or otherwise reveal who the students are (however, this should be obvious to teachers and school staff as this is in accordance with school law and the law on secrecy).

The guide follows a planned order, but as the interview form is semi-structured, this may mean that the questions were not dealt with in that order. The guide was structured with different questions around three main themes: experiences of students' media use, attitudes towards democracy, religion and Swedish society, and experienced influence attempts towards the students (for example through social media, persons or other channels) especially regarding Salafist-jihadism. The interviewees were further informed that he/she would not be named and that further reporting of results avoids making it possible to identify interviewees in any other way.

Five out of the eleven respondents were interviewed using the Zoom video platform and the six others were interviewed by telephone. This was a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic situation and regulations, but it did not cause any problems since were conducted in a smooth and open manner. There are both advantages and disadvantages with making distance interviews. Besides being cost and time effective, distance interviews establish a safe environment for the participants to express their views (Creswell, 2013). Still, there are some obstacles, especially concerning the fact that distance communication does not lead to full social exchange of signals. The time of the interviews ranged between 30 and 60 minutes each.

The data analysis follows Creswell (2013) spiral approach comprising four main stages: (1) data managing, (2) data sense-making, (3) data coding, and (4) data representation. The first stage was problematic since the interviewees (following the ethical approvement) were guaranteed full anonymity and that the

interviews were not recorded. Notes were taken by the interviewer during the interview. This is not optimal, but needed due to the topic and risks associated with this in contemporary society. This leads to the stage concerning data sense-making. As the interviewer I took notes during the interview as much as possible. But it is not possible to compare these notes with qualitative transcripts and the quotes in the result section are re-constructs of the interview notes, made in the most careful way that is possible. Time was spent directly after every interview to reconstruct what had been said. The coding stage followed the interview guide and the three main areas, where different quotes were placed under different themes connected to the question areas. Even if the purpose of the study is not to be representative at a general level, the coding and the quotes that are highlighted in the results section are interpreted as typical (albeit especially clear) examples of patterns from the interviews that were made. The study is supposed to increase understanding of the research problem and does not claim to be of statistical relevance, still the results may be of analytical and explorative relevance for further research.

The Legal and Ethical Framework in Swedish Schools

School as such is a central institution for the socialization of young people. But the question of how school leaders and teachers can and should act to counter radicalisation and extremism is not easy to answer. Basically, this is a legal issue. In its regulation letter for 2018, the National Agency for Education was commissioned by the government to investigate the role of schools in the work against violent extremism, on a legal basis. In the reporting of the assignment, this role appears to be very limited. If school management or staff find that children are doing badly or risk being hurt, a report of concern must be made to the social services. This can also be done when the school perceives that students are on their way into or already are part in an extremist environment. In the same report, the National Agency for Education states that schools do not have the right to control, identify or report the opinions of individual "(…) children and students or various possible signs of radicalisation into violent extremism to the police, security police or local coordinators. This is so since these activities are not part of the school's mission" (Skolverket 2018:5). Several legal rights prevent this form of action: children's and students' freedom of expression, the right to seek information, freedom of religion, freedom of association and protection of personal integrity and against discrimination. The report also refers to a research-based assessment that more definitely limits the school's opportunities to influence attitudes or perceptions. According to law scholars it is not a problem that the school in general promotes the school's values, the school does not have the right to target a certain student (Skolverket 2018:15).

To some extent, of course, these issues are dealt with within the current School Law, which among other things governs how a teacher may deal with disorder and insecurity in schools. The Education Act, Chapter 5, describes, among other things, "disciplinary and other special measures". Section 6 states that "The principal or a teacher may take the immediate and temporary measures that are justified to ensure the students' security and peace of mind or to come to terms with a student's disruptive behaviour". Furthermore, various examples are given

of what this means: expulsion, detention, temporary relocation, temporary placement at another school unit, suspension and disposal of objects. Taking these measures always has to be well-motivated and reasonable. Suspension may only apply for the time necessary for a quick investigation of what other measures may be needed. A student may not be suspended for a longer period of time than one week, nor on more occasions than twice per calendar semester. According to the Education Act (ibid.: 6), the caretaker has the right to make decisions for the child. It is also stated that school secrecy can be violated if "(…) it is obvious that the interest in the information being provided takes precedence over the interest that secrecy is to protect" (ibid.:77). This right to share information applies, for example, between schools, but not between a municipal school and an independent school, social services or health or health authorities. Confidentiality (OSL) "(…) does not prevent information from being provided to an individual or to another authority, if it is necessary for the executive authority to be able to carry out its activities". This may mean that it is possible to inform the caregivers "basic information" (ibid.:80). However, this must be done with great care and as little information as possible must be disclosed.

Review of Earlier Research on Radicalisation and the Role of the School

The Swedish Center against Violent Extremism (CVE) states in a study on violent Islamism that data from the Security Police show that radicalisation occurs primarily among individuals between 15 and 30 years and that recruitment "(…) to the environment took place mainly by older individuals attracting younger, also in the schoolyards" (CVE 2020:37). This said, many extremists remain radicalised even as they get older. One of the few quantitative studies on violent extremism in Sweden (Rostami et al 2018) provides, based on individual data from the Police and Security Police, a fairly reliable picture of Salafist jihadists. The study includes 785 individuals in what is referred to as the Islamist environment (ibid.:25). 72 per cent of individuals in this group are foreign-born and the average age is 25 years (minimum age is 15 years). In comparison with other groups included in the study - biker gangs, gang criminals and white supremacist groups - the Islamist environment is characterized by fewer individuals having received a psychiatric diagnosis (23 percent) or been the subject of interventions from the social services (12 percent). The level of education varies but is generally higher than for the other groups, with the exception of autonomous left-wing extremists. About 43 percent of the individuals in the Islamist milieu have a high school education, 14 percent have a post-secondary education for less than three years, while nine percent have a college education (ibid.:40). The data provides some answers to the background factors that lead to an increased risk of radicalisation, but as a whole the data does not show any simple causal relations. Rather, the data shows the difficulties in identifying who the at-risk individuals really are. Previous international research has, similarly, found that it is very difficult to fully explain the emergence of extremism and radicalisation through the use of an individual method or discipline (Crone 2016; Borum 2011: 15). Extremists have different backgrounds and some also have both higher education and come from ordinary

middle-class areas (Gosh et al 2018). With that said, another Swedish study shows that over 70 percent of those who travelled to join IS came from vulnerable areas in municipalities in Västra Götaland, Stockholm, Skåne and Örebro (Gustafsson & Ranstorp 2017).

Still, it is possible to identify a set of basic conditions that together increase the likelihood of radicalisation (Hafez and Mullins 2015). First, radicalisation seems to be stimulated by feelings of disappointment and anger over perceived injustice. These negative emotions can arise in different situations, such as poverty, unemployment, disagreement with the political development of the majority society, stigmatization, racism or exclusion. These negative experiences can lead people to adopt extremist attitudes (Hafez and Mullins 2015: 961) but cannot be seen as direct causes. Second, extremist networks almost always play a key role when a person or group becomes radicalised (Stark and Bainbridge 1980). People who become radicalised tend to become this through social ties with extremist friends, family members or charismatic recruiters. Advocacy measures can be crucial for vulnerable and susceptible individuals, who feel that they have been treated unfairly or excluded. Influence occurs both through direct interaction (e.g. between an adult and student) or through online propaganda. Radicalisation tends to involve active involvement rather than passive consumption of extremist information. The typical pattern is that individuals go through the process of radicalisation not on their own but together with a group of like-minded people (Cottee 2011). Third, stories and ideologies play a central role in most cases of radicalisation (Halverson et al. 2011). Extremist stories and ideologies arouse people's emotions, make individuals agree on a political issue, gather crowds and activate them to carry out actions, sometimes in the form of violence (Presser 2018). Propaganda that is spread online are important for extremist movements, but there is no agreement on the exact role that propaganda has for radicalisation (Meleagrou-Hitchens and Kaderbhai 2017). In connection with the mapping of register data, Rostami et al (2018) also conducted twelve interviews with individuals who participated in violent extremism. The study shows that it is often a special event that triggers the radicalisation process, such as being expelled from school or getting rid of one's job. The time from high school and into adulthood is a socially unstable time when "(…) social control is weakened" (ibid., P. 64), which creates a breeding ground for extremism. As pointed out earlier, the next step of the radicalisation process takes place through interaction with others, such as friends, recruiters, online or in associations. As a summary, Gosh et al (p. 124) have compiled a list of factors that are important for radicalisation based on an analysis of secondary data. The probability of radicalisation increases in connection with:

1. A perceived threat to individual and collective identity that arises when one feels that one's ethnicity, culture or religion is threatened on a personal or group level.
2. Perceived marginalization in relation to the majority society.
3. Feeling of ideological necessity - something must be done in response to what you see or experience.
4. Hatred towards another group (may be a religious group as well as a Western country) which is often based on revenge for perceived injustice, which in turn is a motive for violence.

5. Political or religious beliefs that legitimize violence.
6. A turning point - a reaction to a personal tragedy or also just a response to being bored and seeing extremism as exciting and something cool.
7. Globalization, which has created opportunities to build networks and spread propaganda.
8. Media content on extremist websites.
9. Systematic inequality, segregation and lack of trust.

The role and significance of schools

The importance of education and school in counteracting extremism and radicalisation has been the subject of a number of research projects. Niemi et al (2019) correctly state that the increase of terrorist attacks takes place in parallel with the growth of nationalist and xenophobic movements. This is also something that is noticeable in the interviews conducted in this project. The teachers interviewed refer to both experiences of dealing with Salafist jihadism and right-wing extremism. Sweden, like many other countries, has suffered from increased polarization in society, where different values come into conflict with each other. Identity-political conflicts arise quickly and escalate through social media platforms where different groups push their particular issues in opposition to each other and to what is perceived as an establishment. The role and importance of the school in creating a common society where individuals have respect for each other cannot be underestimated.

Gosh et al (2017, p. 119) "(…) proposes that education should be seen as a valuable tool in countering religious extremism by building resilient communities through critical, ethical and active citizenship". The same researchers believe that society's efforts to counter radicalisation and terrorism are mainly reactive and thus focused on various repressive measures that are implemented against already radicalised groups or individuals. Focus should according to them also be placed on developing methods for working preventively through education and the school as an institution. But authorities and community representatives are not alone in taking an interest in the school as an arena. Impact on young people in school environments is also something that extremists invest in as a means of recruitment and creating support. Salafists have also led independent schools in Sweden and conveyed non-democratic values and derogatory views of women, homosexuals or Jews (Ranstorp et al 2018). Extremist groups also act towards young people via social media and various propaganda channels and shape their worldview, which is then taken further into school environments according to Gosh et al (2017:120), who, however, do not advocate reactive or repressive measures but instead that "(…) education must promote a critical understanding of the world and develop the values and skills of critical and resilient citizenship".

Niemi et al (2018) state that in some strategies (e.g. the Prevent program in the U.K. or the 'Prévenir pour protéger' PNPR in France) have been adopted that are focusing identifying, controlling and reporting students who are assumed to be or who may become radicalised. Through manuals and guidelines, risk students are identified based on various background variables. These programs have faced much criticism as they are considered to be based on simplified assumptions

(Sieckelinck et al. 2015:4) since it is usually not one but several background factors that together may increase the risk of violent actions. In Sweden Mattsson is probably the most published scholar in the field of extremism and schools (e.g. Mattsson 2018). In Sjöen & Mattsson (2020) it is analyzed how Norway has developed anti-radicalisation strategies and programs aimed at schools; something that started already in 2008 with inspiration from other countries. The empirical data consists of 16 interviews with upper secondary school teachers in Norway, which are analyzed through critical discourse analysis. The conclusion is very critical: that the prevailing security discourse in society has spread to teachers' reasoning and attitudes. The reasoning is similar to the one in Mattsson (2018) which is also based on critical discourse analyzes of documents and interview statements. Mattsson states that there is a lack of empirical research that shows positive effects of programs and initiatives: research on the prevention of violent extremism has a short history and is based more on policy studies than actual behavioural science.

The first anti-radicalisation programs were established in the early 2000s. The UK was the first, launching the CONTEST (Countering Terrorist Strategy) program in 2003; the following year, a declaration was made on Combating Terrorism within the EU and in 2011 an action plan and an expert group (RAN) were established (Mattsson 2018: 23). Mattsson believes that state-sanctioned programs where teachers are expected to point out and report potentially radicalised students violate school law and the school values, in line with the National Agency for Educations (2018) assessment. Simply put, this type of program is seen as counterproductive and also as an intervention into the school's democratic mission. This critique is well-argued but Mattsson's own studies may also be said to have an ideological filter. Among other things, it is stated that radicalisation studies confuse causes behind terrorism with reasons why individuals become terrorists: "Preventing the latter does not solve the basic problem itself, i.e. conditions in society that contribute to terrorism" (Mattsson 2018:33). According to this reasoning, the responsibility for radicalisation and terrorism does never relate the individual but is entirely related to the structures of society. This reasoning is not unreasonable but a bit extreme; both structural causes and individual factors are relevant for explaining radicalisation.

Elwick & Jerome (2019) have analysed the British school program Prevent. Through this program thousands of British teachers have been instructed and trained in how to identify signs of radicalisation in individual students: "As a result of this legislation, schools have to balance the need to fulfill their responsibilities under the duty – often understood to include monitoring and surveillance - with their definitive purpose to educate their students" (ibid.:338). The interview study shows how the strategy and methods in Prevent are implemented by teachers in different ways depending on the context and the teacher's perspective. On the one hand there are examples of when some teachers quite uncritically adopt and reinforce a prejudiced view of Muslims, on the other hand there are examples of when the program is applied more pragmatically and with a - which was also intended – constructive front against all form of extremism. Moffat & Gerard (2020) have conducted another interview study with teachers focusing on Prevent which shows the risk of negative consequences for the relations and openness in discussions about religion and politics between teachers and students.

A study by Busher & Thomas (2019) has a more comprehensive empirical material than those mentioned above, but is also focused on teachers and their opinions. Based on 70 interviews and a small survey, the researchers state that the implementation of Prevent in practice does not confirm the negative possible effects that the program was assumed to have by many critics (stigma, threats to freedom of expression, etc.). The enactment of the policy by teachers was professional and sometimes constructive (ibid.:459).

Interview Study: Voices from the field

Views on schools, democracy, state and religion

A field worker states that the school has an: "(…) enormous importance for children at risk. It is one of the most important protective factors. This applies even more to children in vulnerable areas". The parents' attitude is crucial, but it is often difficult to engage parents in school. The reasons for this are several: "The parents are shaped in countries where you do not get involved in what the school does, you have poor knowledge of how the Swedish school works and perhaps lack of language skills" (same field worker). Sometimes teachers and school management perceive it as if the parents in these areas lack competence and interest, but the interviewee believes that this is incorrect. It is possible to engage parents, according to the field worker.

The teachers have diverse views on the students' relationship to school and society's values and principles. In a school where there are mainly students who have just arrived in Sweden, the teachers find that there is a positive belief in Sweden and that there is a sense of belonging. In this school, active work is being done to inform how things work in Sweden. There is rarely any strong opposition to this, but sometimes there can be discussions, often linked to religion and culture. In another school, the teacher notices clear differences in the view of democracy and the importance of religion. This is made visible in rather heated discussions during classes in social science or religion.

> "They do not see themself as Swedish and few have any knowledge about Swedish politics or society. Even those who are relatively established and have settled well in Sweden usually have a strong identification with the origin country or group. Religious identification has become increasingly important - especially the difference between Sunni and Shia. Before the Iraq war in 2003, I do not think many people cared. But today I experience that students who are Sunni Muslims constantly speak disparagingly of Shia Muslims. The conflicts mostly concern second-generation immigrants, almost never the new arrivals. There are religiously based contradictions both above and below the surface. I do what I can to provide knowledge about history, Salafism and so on. But it is hard. Behind these values are either the parents or an imam" (teacher interview 2020-08-12).

Overall, the school's classroom still appears to be a place where there is usually a fairly open discussion about values and attitudes. One interviewee state that "most students think that there should be equality between men and women"

even though there are exceptions. Another teacher believes that there are both students who think everything is better in Sweden and those who think it is too bureaucratic and individualistic. There are also cases where students feel unpopular: "There is a concern among Afghan boys that in Sweden they hate Afghans. Among other things, you see this on Facebook and are afraid to go out", according to another teacher. What happens outside the school has a great impact on what happens in the school, but there are great opportunities to create constructive and critical discussions there which in turn have an effect outside the school. In some cases, the interviews describe a power struggle between the values and norms that are conveyed in the students' home environment and those that are conveyed in the school. A fight that is difficult to win. The fact that the family is a primary socializing agent is not unique to these groups, but to all young people. But sometimes it is not the values of the family that are in conflict with the school, but external actors (imams, youth leaders and the like) who have managed to create strong relationships with a student outside the school and increase the conflict.

> *"Outside school, there may be a power struggle that is felt mainly among students of Arab and African origin. How they should live, who to be loyal to and so on. This is usually based on faith, but it does not always show up in school. / The home is the most important place for the students. You can discuss different things at school but it is at home things are decided" (teacher interview 2020-09-22).*

Views on gender equality, diversity and other groups

Teachers in vulnerable areas sometimes encounter opinions about Jews, homosexuals and various ethnic groups that are derogatory. Sometimes these opinions are not communicated in the open but noticeable through body language or other signals. The teachers that are interviewed do not think that the view of women is the biggest problem in school [which it might be in religiously based independent schools, but they are not included here]. There is no real discussion among the students that boys and girls should be separated in the schools the teachers work in. It is extremely rare for a male student to refuse to take a female student by the hand. However, teachers may encounter examples where students are subjected to so called honour culture outside of school. These examples often are about norms on whether you should be allowed to choose who you want to be with or if it is the family that chooses a partner for you. "There have been students who have taken pictures of who hang out at school and who are then sent to their relatives", says one teacher.

One teacher experience that the use of the niqab (opaque veil that covers the entire face except the eyes) has increased in her school.

> *"Twelve years ago, two girls at my school came there in niqabs. Then it was decided that they were not allowed to wear the niqab in the classroom so that one could see the faces. Now there are several new students who wear the niqab, including two students who read the children's and leisure program but who then cannot practice what they learn. For some other groups in the school, these niqabs are perceived as direct threats. I think government Sweden is a*

> *coward who does not stop this. It makes integration more difficult"*
> *(teacher interview 2020-08-12).*

Teachers generally think that the derogatory view of Jews and homosexuals is the one that is most explicit. Anti-Semitism is widespread and is communicated during classes in religion or social science. There are also widespread conspiracy theories about Jews.

> *"Homosexuality is something that many find strange and wrong. It goes deep - in the countries their family comes from, there is sometimes the death penalty for homosexuals. It is forbidden, haram" (teacher interview 2020-08-18).*

The view of homosexuals in particular is difficult to discuss, according to another teacher. In connection with these discussions, he experienced that quite a number of students who had homophobic attitudes chose not to participate in the discussions.

Attempts to influence school students

Few teachers have encountered direct attempts by Salafist jihadists to influence their students. This is not strange as any attempts to influence hardly take place in the classrooms but in environments and situations where the teachers are not present. Some teachers say that they have heard of nearby mosques or certain associations where there are attempts at radicalisation. But they do not really know. Some other teachers state that some students speak Arabic to each other and that it is then difficult to know what is being said. But overall, there are no teachers who know of any student who openly sympathizes with, for example, IS or other terrorist organizations. However, there has been some support in various discussions for why IS was established.

> *"I have met very marginal sympathy for IS. I sometimes understood in discussions that there was some sympathy among some students. I remember a discussion after the Paris attack [the assassination attempt on Charlie Hebdo's editorial board in 2015] where there were students who said that they understood why it happened, that they felt offended themselves" (teacher interview 2020-08-18).*

A field worker with long experience of radicalisation states that attempts to influence sometimes take place through various associations that also try to create collaborations with the schools. The focus of an association may be a harmless activity (for example environmental activities or sports) that is offered to students, but behind this activity there is an extremist group and the association is used as a springboard for radicalisation. Another type of influence is exercised by parents' associations that pursue moral issues that violate the school's values. This is difficult to handle for the schools as they also need contact with parents.

Strategies to counter radicalisation

An experienced teacher believes that it is possible to influence ideas that are not compatible with the basic liberal democratic values that apply in Swedish society. The first reaction when he as a teacher discusses and (in a nuanced way) questions

religious views is usually very negative. The teacher notes that some students get shocked as it is completely taboo to question their religion, religious ideas and scriptures.

> *"It is possible to question their ideas - but it is important to be well versed for yourself because otherwise they do not trust you. There are many good teachers, but the consensus culture in Sweden means that many do not want to address issues that create conflict. This is a big problem. To handle the discussions, factual knowledge is crucial because there will be tough discussions and many are quite well-read. At the same time, you have to avoid polarization and not paint everything in black and white. Some criticisms must be acknowledged, for example that the invasion of Iraq was carried out on the wrong grounds or that Israel's occupation of the West Bank is not right"* (teacher interview 2020-08-12).

Another teacher is on the same train of thought. In connection with students expressing anti-Semitic views, he first became angry and tried to correct them. But eventually he came up with a more effective tactic.

> *"You do not tell them things, it is more about discussing them. It does not work to crack down on their reasoning - the ideas come from their upbringing, home and parents. But there is also a limit and it must be marked in the discussions"* (teacher interview 2020-08-18).

The teachers interviewed are quite consistent about which strategies and tactics are most meaningful in counteracting radicalisation in the school. School is an important arena and a teacher states that conversations and meetings are the only way to influence.

> *"I know that I have reached some students and that change has taken place. For example, it can be about letting them meet and listen to people who come from outside with different experiences. As a teacher, you have several years to build trust. Sometimes you can play ping-pong with them to make them trust you"* (teacher interview 2020-04-23).

Monitoring and reporting students who are perceived to be exposed to radicalisation is not something that the interviewees highlight as an effective strategy. A field worker in the social services states that it is very difficult for teachers to judge who is radicalised.

A safety coordinator thinks that cooperation between the safety unit and the school works very well. The most important effort is to increase the school staff's ability to decode early signs of radicalisation so that they do not end up in extreme situations, but can make efforts at an early stage. The interviewee conducts training for school staff to increase knowledge about signs of extremism and how to counteract this.

Collaboration between municipalities' safety and CVE functions and schools

The school is an important institution for the municipalities' security coordinators, the police and social workers who work in vulnerable environments. Several

security chiefs state that the school's role as an arena for extremism has been a recurring discussion. In the early 2000s, for example, the discussion was about whether politically right-wing parties should be allowed to rent premises within schools. Today, there is still a discussion about how to deal with both teachers and students who have right-wing extremist views, but the focus is now primarily on Salafism, for example linked to the establishment of independent schools with a Muslim focus. Those interviewed within the municipalities' security functions have varying experiences of collaboration with schools. Some argue that schools in their municipalities rarely ask for support and that they are not prioritized either - they are considered to fall outside the core mission of a school. Someone has some understanding of this as it is about a difficult balance between freedom of opinion and efforts to counter radicalisation. The same interviewees perceive that the school management partly does not have the energy or strong motivation to work with anti-radicalisation measures, and partly sees national initiatives as orders from above. Another interviewee says: "We have good contact with the schools. There are some who problematize what we work with based on the school's mission, and that's perfectly okay, it's important to discuss" (safety coordinator).

The problems have escalated in recent years and even since IS 2017-2019 lost all of the areas they occupied. Travel has ceased but radicalisation is ongoing and increasing, according to teachers and security coordinators. The latter group notes that Salafist associations and mosques organize lectures and activities that attract increasingly younger people. Increased polarization occurs. According to a security chief, the boundary to criminal activity is not entirely clear sometimes. In parallel, there is an online propaganda offensive. A coordinator says that:

> "For a period, most focus was on travelling to IS. This also had effects in schools. Most of those who travelled were over 18 years old but had siblings who were younger and went to school. How should the school handle these students? In the vulnerable areas, there were both those who sympathized with IS and those who hated them, among the latter not least the Kurdish group, Shia Muslims and Christians. School sometimes became an arena for this conflict. It was not illegal to neither sympathize with nor join IS then. It was difficult to handle for both the school and us" (coordinator interview 2020-09-27).

One security coordinator conclude that the vulnerable areas are increasingly being taken over by Salafist groups and that we-and-them thinking is increasing:

> "It is not that violent Salafism dominates, but those who pursue this have realized that it is smarter to work politically, to act within the system and influence in that way. This is done through schools, associations, political parties and so on" (coordinator interview 2020-10-02).

In addition to the initiatives mentioned above, the municipality's safety and CVE coordinators works with knowledge building: training and information for teachers, principals and school staff. Sometimes checklists for radicalisation are presented. The question is of course: how big is the problem? In a larger

municipality, the security coordinator has had 160 conversations over 2015-2020 about individuals who have been anticipated to be radicalised. This material includes both young people who have participated in groups online and extreme cases with travelers to IS areas. Of these 160 calls, a third come from schools with cases involving individual students, which then usually lead to reports of concern to the social services. Most cases concern high school students, but there are also cases from primary school. One interviewee believes that behind the radicalisation there is a search for the identity of young people who are insecure: "The problem in vulnerable areas is that young people lack employment and community outside of school. They then take advantage of offers to join mosques and associations. Young people in vulnerable areas are extremely vulnerable and susceptible". According to an interviewee, there are also employees in the schools who are Salafists and who have the opportunity to indirectly influence students, but it is very difficult to prove that this happens.

Analysis and Conclusions

To state that the school as an institution is one of the environments in society where young people should and should be socialized as democratic citizens is not controversial. The Education Act (Section 5) clearly states that: "Education shall be designed in accordance with fundamental democratic values and human rights such as the inviolability of human life, the freedom and integrity of the individual, the equal value of all human beings, equality and solidarity between people". But what conditions does the state have to deal with to encounter extremism as a public problem? How can school leaders and teachers deal with students who explicitly or implicitly adopt anti-democratic values and attitudes? How should school leaders and teachers act when they discover that individual students are being drawn into extremist movements and show signs of initiating some form of radicalisation process? The legal review in this article shows that the conditions for public administration and management in regards to extremism in schools are constrained. It is permissible for teachers as public servants to propagate the democratic values contained in the Education Act, but teachers do not really have the right to directly try to influence an individual student's opinions as this is assumed to violate freedom of opinion and other rights. Teachers and school staff have certain legal coercive measures that can be resorted to in the event of disorderly conduct towards individual students, but lack actual sanctions to act against extremism or radicalised students at individual level. What school management or teachers can do is report a concern to the social services, but confidentiality rules mean that such information may not be shared with other authorities. Law thus gives school managements and teachers extremely limited opportunities to act when they experience signs of radicalisation in individual students.

The review of previous research shows that there are quite modest empirical studies of how radicalisation processes take place. However, the existing studies show, in simple terms, that radicalisation mainly takes place among individuals between the ages of 15-25, that radicalisation is stimulated by feelings of disappointment and anger (often accentuated by an event that is negative for the individual), that it is strengthened and established through interaction. with others

(friends, family members, leaders and recruiters) as well as online in various forums and that ideological propaganda stories are of great importance. A Swedish register study shows that the proportion of foreign-born Islamists is 72%, that the level of education is higher than compared with white power groups, gang criminals or motorcycle gangs and that only 12 percent have been the subject of interventions from the social services while 23 percent have a psychiatric diagnosis. In other words, it is difficult to get a simple profile picture of those who are particularly prone to radicalisation. However, there is less doubt that young people with a foreign background in particularly vulnerable areas are vulnerable to influence - and that school can be both an arena for attempts to influence (e.g. through associations or mosques that sometimes form alliances with schools) and an arena for countermeasures where teachers and other school staff have great opportunities to both identify problems and to act.

The question is, of course, which strategies and tactics are most effective? Most studies with links to the school's role are based on analyses of documents or interviews. A common conclusion, however, is that it appears that preventive work should be the focus from a school perspective. The state can support preventive work in different ways by developing public policy, strategies, educational or strategic communication interventions. Legal restrictions and the school's mission do not really provide an opportunity for school managements and teachers to work with repressive efforts in this context. One question then is whether there is reason to open up for such efforts in the future? There is a lot of published research that has examined notions of and attitudes to national repressive efforts (especially British program Prevent). Mattson (2018) is one of several who are directly critical of Prevent and similar programs that are based on teachers identifying and reporting students who are believed to be about to become radicalised. There are several good arguments against this type of program, for example that teachers do not have the right skills to make such assessments, that such efforts lead to reduced trust between teachers and students and that there is a risk of stigmatization of in this case Muslim children. But there are also arguments that the school and teachers should be attentive and know where they can and should turn if they perceive that an individual student is about to be radicalised. A report of concern to the social services is in this case a very weak tool, while an opportunity to notify the police is more logical. But from a broader perspective and also taking into account the interviews conducted in this project, there is no support for building and launching a program aimed at teachers and school staff identifying and reporting individuals. It is also not legally possible.

The interviews with teachers indicate that there is an awareness of the risk of radicalisation of students in vulnerable areas. For obvious reasons, teachers have no clear insight into how students are directly affected by actors outside the classroom. The picture given by both teachers and safety coordinators is clear: developments are going in the wrong direction and the risk of radicalisation is increasing. The teachers interviewed in this project have a special interest in questions about how extremism can be handled, which is important to emphasize. Two approaches are prominent. Firstly, the importance of the teacher being well-read and daring to raise issues that can be seen as controversial by some students

is emphasized. According to several of the teachers, this is not self-evident in a Swedish context where open conflicts of opinion break off consensus. But classrooms are important as arenas for critical discussion, which can rarely take place outside. Secondly, teachers perceive that there are clear signs of anti-democratic views and values, especially in the form of anti-Semitism and homophobia. There are also examples of situations where students are exposed to oppression of honour that is exercised in school.

A simple four-field model (below) illustrates four different approaches to radicalisation in school (and indeed in society as a whole) that may also be of value from a wider public administration view, developing frameworks for managing extremism. The teachers are clear that it is active and critical dialogue that is the right strategy from a preventive perspective. This is also supported by much of the research on radicalisation and schooling presented in this article. There are teachers and safety coordinators (this is not a representative study, it should be emphasized again) who state that there are schools and teachers who are deliberately avoidant, as it is difficult to have discussions in a classroom. The assassination of a French teacher in October 2020 who showed caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad as part of teaching of freedom of speech can lead to even more deliberate avoidance. But the strategy to focus on a critical and open discussion is crucial for counteraction (Gosh et al 2017, p. 126).

Repression is something that is primarily handled by law and security authorities, but there is no legal support in Sweden for school managements or teachers to identify and report suspected radicalised students. There is also no evidence-based support for such a strategy, implemented in a broader program, to have good effects. On the other hand, it may seem strange that individual teachers or principals do not really have any right at all to directly try to influence students who express extremist views or to report to the police when they suspect that students are heading into radicalisation.

Figure 1: Four Generic Governmental Strategies to Counter Radicalisation and Extremism
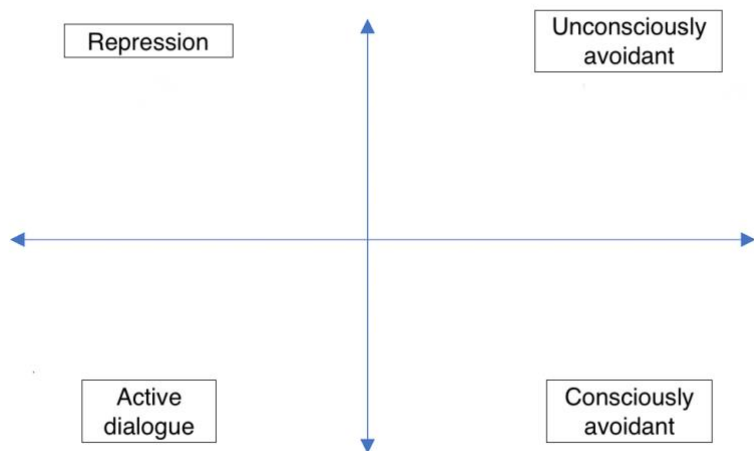
Gosh et al (2016, p. 6) summarize important input on the issue of how schools and education systems should deal with radicalisation and extremism by highlighting the importance of several different strategies. In vulnerable areas where many residents have low education, manipulative stories are more likely to take root and opportunities to make money can also be important. Where education levels are higher, extremists appeal even more through emotional and intellectual arguments about equality and injustice. But overall, according to Gosh et al, it is important in schools to address critical and controversial issues and thereby develop critical thinking, democratic values and respect for diversity. In conclusion, more training is needed for teachers about extremism in general and not least about Salafist jihadism. The responsibility for such an intervention is a national public administrative task of increasing importance.

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Notes

[1]All texts in and from Swedish sources have been translated by the author.