

Tolerance in post-conflict societies

Introduction

Even though democracy is a system of procedures by which the majorities tend to have their ways, i.e. the majority rule, democracy is also a system which requires a respect for the existence of minorities and even disliked minorities. Social and political tolerance is therefore one of the most important cornerstones for the development of stable and peaceful democracies. (Gibson p.324 f) Most studies on tolerance have focused on western democracies with emphasis on political tolerance towards the most disliked groups. Therefore, theories on how tolerance and intolerance behave have been developed mostly in stable and peaceful democracies. However, this study has the purpose of changing the context to an area which not yet has been given that great attention within research, namely tolerance in societies which have been affected by armed conflicts. (Marquart-Pyatt & Paxton, p.90, 107)

It is inevitable that armed conflicts will lead to the breakdown of many important values which uphold society, e.g. trust, respect for human rights and transparency. Tolerance towards different groups in society is one of these basic values and needs therefore to be given special attention to in processes of construction of peace. One disliked group which is central in this question is former combatants within illegal armed groups. These are groups which have taken up arms towards the military, other armed groups and, in almost every case, civilians. An important aspect of peace construction and reconciliation is therefore the reintegration of these former combatants. (Nussio & Oppenheim, p.2)

Within *Programa Promoción de la Convivencia*, UNDP in Colombia works for the promotion of social reintegration in communities affected by armed conflicts. It has its origin in a strategy to promote reintegration with two key concepts: reconciliation and coexistence. The concept of coexistence includes many important aspects of reintegration, such as trust and culture of peace. My investigation will take its starting-point from this program and focus will be on the aspect of tolerance where the latest evaluations from 2011 show an interesting variation among the members of communities concerning the issue of tolerance towards former combatant (left- and right winged) in reintegration processes. (PNUD p.6 ff)

Research on tolerance has during the last years drawn its attention to contexts outside the western societies which have led to new interesting discoveries on how tolerance can behave. (Marquart-Pyatt & Paxton, p.105 ff) One of these discoveries are results on how education promotes tolerance. In earlier studies there have been a clear causality between education and tolerance where highly educated persons have been more tolerant, i.e. education leads to tolerance. (Weil, p.458, Bobo & Licari, p.287) However, when applying this hypothesis on new contexts the pattern is not that clear which is the case in above mentioned communities. Colombia is therefore an interesting case to study because even though it is a least likely case¹ for the theory, as a war torn society with generally high levels of intolerance, it still presents variation. (PNUD p.154) This indicates firstly that education, per se, not

¹ Partly free democracy according to Freedom House, www.freedomhouse.org

enhances tolerance and secondly arises the question of what enhances tolerance in least likely cases. This requires more in depths studies to investigate: what aspects of education lead to tolerance?

Purpose and research question

The purpose is therefore to investigate more in depth and explain the variation of tolerance in relation to education within a least likely case such as Colombia which manifests interesting variation. How come? Do they do something differently in education at local levels? The study will test different theories on tolerance and education in order to analyze mechanisms which enhance tolerance. The research question states: *what mechanisms within education enhance and promote tolerance?*

The contributions of this thesis are both empirical and theoretical. Theoretically the studies on tolerance have mainly focused on western stable democracies and this thesis aim to test the theories in a new, more fragile, context. It is also a contribution to the discourse on reconciliation processes which is an area of research which mainly has focused on macro level institutions. (Prieto p.529) Education and schools are fundamental and essential state institutions which exist almost everywhere, even in post-conflict societies. These can be important instruments for the promotion of reconciliation and it is therefore important to know in what way they can promote tolerance. This thesis furthermore has a empirical contribution to the colombian context which undergoes a transition phase to post-conflict. Not much research has been done on how coexistence and tolerance work in this context and this thesis will enrich our knowledge about Colombia. (Prieto p.529) Finally the study is a contribution to the Sida financed UNDP program by providing an input on their work to promote reconciliation.

Theory

The positive relationship between higher levels of education and political liberalism, especially tolerance, has been one of the most consistent findings in empirical social research ever since the 1950s. However, these findings have as mentioned been questioned. (Weil, p.458, Hazama p.3, Sullivan, Piereson and Marcus p.14) Therefore, it is important to more thoroughly investigate what aspects of education that can lead to tolerance. There are several orientations within this field:

Firstly, the democratic learning theory argues that tolerance must be learned and it can be learned through increased contact with diverse groups or through increased contact with socializing institutions. Through interaction in education individuals increase their familiarity with diverse ideas and people. Scholars talk about schools as institutions for democracy which socialize individuals to democratic norms in learning by doing. (Marquart-Pyatt & Paxton, p.93, Hinckley, p.190) Secondly, theories also state that the actual subjects and contents of the education can affect tolerance i.e. what is being taught. Education will lead to a spread of information which will increased knowledge and this will affect values and attitudes towards others. (Bobo & Licari, p.286, Weldon, p.332, Weil, p.460) Thirdly, there is the psychodynamic theory which states e.g. that better educated people tend to be more stable and secure as individuals and therefore are better able to handle diversities. (Weil, p.459, Weldon, p.332 ff)

Method and research design

This study will thus have its starting-point from the study made by UNDP. The quantitative data presents results on how education and tolerance correlate or absence of correlation. However, this is not enough to investigate mechanisms behind the variation. Therefore two municipalities, San Carlos and San Luis, have been selected for a qualitative comparative study. These municipalities show an interesting variation where San Carlos shows a statistically significant correlation which supports the hypothesis that education enhances tolerance and where results from San Luis present no correlation between education and tolerance. These municipalities have been selected due to their difference in the Y-variable and that they are as similar as possible in other important aspects such as geographical region, level of education, unemployment, crimes etc., i.e. method of difference. (Teorell p.226).²

The study will be conducted in these municipalities where I will collect primary data through semi-structured interviews. In order to find mechanisms for tolerance I will develop questions with the basis of the theoretical framework. The objects for my interviews will be teachers and students in schools as well as persons in charge of education on municipality level. The answers will provide me with material to investigate why these municipalities differ. I will also complement the investigation with secondary sources such as policy documents on education and curriculums.

I have good knowledge about Colombia due to many visits which will be of great value for the execution of the study. I have also established reliable contacts within UNDP through my internship in 2013. They have good connections to the municipalities through their regional offices and have offered me assistance in the field.

Preliminary budget and other practicalities

The field study will be carried out in San Carlos and San Luis in the region Antioquia. I will have the regional capital Medellín as my base and from there go to the different municipalities. The plan is to be in the country from the middle of April this year until the end of June.

The most critical part of the study is to get access to the villages and the right persons to interview which is difficult to determine 100 % from Sweden. In a worst case scenario I will need to change the focus of the study to fit the actual material which I do get access to. In that case I will choose another aspect of coexistence within the UNDP investigation, e.g. relation between civic trust in national and local institutions which also has shown a variation that contradicts some present theories.

Preliminary budget (SEK)

Airfare: 10 000

Other transportation: 2 000

Accommodation: 7 000

General expenses: 6 000

² If it is in reality difficult to carry through an investigation in these municipalities, the data presents alternatives.

Vaccinations, insurance etc: 2 000

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