

# **TIME FOR TOLERANCE**

**A STUDY OF WHAT STUDENTS IN SWEDEN THINK ABOUT EACH  
OTHER AND THE SOCIETY IN GENERAL**

**REPORT SERIES 1:2014**

# Summary

## TIME FOR TOLERANCE

This report has been given the name Time for Tolerance. The title has several meanings. This is firstly because we have now completed three studies and can thus study tolerance from a temporal perspective. By comparing the students attitudes over time, we can state whether they become more or less open and inclusive in their relations with other people. Secondly, the title aims to describe tolerance as a partly inconstant phenomenon. Tolerance does not mean the same thing today as it did in the 1600s. And tolerance will certainly not in ten years' time imply the same things it does today. Thirdly, the title is a call for tolerance.

Tolerance is not just about acceptance and respect. We believe that tolerance is something greater. In our eyes, tolerance can be seen as a staircase. One step involves a basic acceptance of things different from oneself. Another step is about inclusion. Yet another concerns curiosity and openness. By extension, tolerance entails a critical approach to one's own person. In its purest form, tolerance is about seeing one's own faults and shortcomings before demanding the same of other individuals.

We mainly measure intolerance, that is to say negative attitudes. In this context, tolerance means a lack of negative attitudes. But tolerance is, as mentioned above, a concept greater than that. In Chapter 2, we conduct a more thorough review of different ways of looking at tolerance and intolerance.

This is a study of what Swedish students think about themselves and other people. A very important conclusion – one that in certain other contexts is overlooked – is that young people in the Swedish school system express a high degree of general tolerance. For instance, when it comes to attitudes toward immigrants, we estimate that approximately 70 percent of boys and almost 80 percent of girls are very tolerant, or at least generally tolerant (it varies depending on which issue we are studying). Only about 10 percent of boys and about 5 percent of girls expressed a clear intolerance. The rest have a more neutral stance. For a more detailed account of this, see, for example, the conclusions in Chapter 5.

From a temporal perspective, we can see that Swedish students have become more tolerant in their relations with other people. But the levels of tolerance differ. We see, for example, that young people are more sympathetic toward the LGBT people than the other groups we ask about. We study this in more detail in Chapter 4, especially in section 4.3.

We have deliberately refrained from creating measures of "general intolerance." The stances and attitudes that are presented rather apply to specific groups. The reason is that as in previous studies, we believe that intolerance is shaped differently depending on which group it is directed toward. A longer theoretical exposition of how and why we measure attitudes can be found in chapter 1.2.

## OUR SURVEY

Statistics Sweden (SCB) has been responsible for the selection of and data collection in schools. Headmasters and teachers were contacted by SCB, whose field staff then visited classes, handing out and collecting questionnaires. SCB in Örebro compiled data files handled the deregistration of identification data.

A reference group of researchers has been linked to the Living History Forum in the preparatory task of designing the questionnaires. The measuring instruments were reviewed by SCB and tested on students. The results were analysed and the report was written by social scientists affiliated with the Living History Forum. From the responding schools, a total of 473 classes were selected, of which 423 submitted responses from the students, which was 90.4 percent of the classes (excluding 5 classes that should not have been included in the first place). Of the total of 10,303 students (10,584 including those who were excluded) who were asked, 7,391 students responded to the questionnaire.

Our survey from 2009 was characterized by a relatively large loss of pupil responses. Efforts were therefore made to raise the response rate in the 2013 survey. The total share of students who responded to our survey was 71.7 percent. We consider this a very good response rate. Despite the high participation, we chose to calibrate the survey data to compensate for losses and to ensure generalizability of the responses. All analyses were conducted with what are known as calibrated weights. To measure the students attitudes toward vulnerable groups, a wide range of issues and claims related to attitudes were used. These were then analysed using various statistical methods. The survey was designed so that some comparisons could be made with our previous surveys in 2003 and 2009 (see Call & Morgentau, 2004; Löwander, 2010).

## WORRIES ABOUT SOCIETY AND HOPES FOR THE FUTURE

The greatest anxiety expressed by Swedish students was not having a home or not having a job in the future. But we have chosen to focus our analysis on worries about increased immigration and about increased xenophobia. The results indicate differences in students worries about society according to gender. Girls appear more concerned about heightened xenophobia. Boys express a greater concern than girls for increased immigration.

Democratic disaffection correlates highly with concerns about increased immigration. The correlation between satisfaction with democracy and concerns for increased xenophobia was, however, smaller. The analysis also shows that worries about increased xenophobia have increased between 2009 and 2013. Worries about increased immigration have declined over the same period.

In terms of hopes for the future, it appears that socio-economically disadvantaged students harbor fewer hopes of realizing their goals compared to students from stronger socioeconomic domestic conditions.

## EXPOSURE TO INTOLERANCE

Our analyses of exposure to various forms of intolerance indicate that conditions differ. Girls report having been teased or threatened to a greater extent than boys. Boys report that they have been the victims of physical violence to a greater extent than girls. There are also differences based on the pupil's sexual orientation. Compared to students who are heterosexual, students of a bisexual or homosexual orientation report to a greater extent that they are exposed to intolerance. Moreover, there is a pattern that shows that the group of bisexual and homosexual students is exposed to intolerance due to their sexual orientation.

We have also studied exposure to "digital in-

tolerance” – that is, intolerance expressed on the Internet or via SMS. The issues concern exposure due to an individual’s origin, sexual orientation or religion. We see that people who are foreign-born, homosexuals, bisexuals and believing Muslims are subjected to harassment on the Internet to a greater extent than natives, heterosexuals and believing Christians. Our analyses show that exposure to intolerance is as great in school as it is outside of school.

## **INTOLERANCE BASED ON INDIVIDUAL FACTORS**

To study intolerance toward different groups, we created five indexes. We have studied intolerance relating to a number of background factors that concerned the students life circumstances. Our breakdowns of individual factors showed the same patterns as previous studies. We have, however, been able to see that certain variables of individual background correlated to varying degrees depending on which group the students were expressing their attitude toward.

### **Gender, academic year and parents’ level of education**

When studying the students responses from the perspective of gender, age and academic year, we were able to observe a number of things. The analysis has shown great differences between girls’ and boys’ attitudes. The girls harbor significantly more positive attitudes toward each of the five exposed groups than the boys. Boys are most negative toward Roma and Muslims. Girls are most negative toward Roma and immigrants. The greatest difference between boys and girls can be found in their attitudes toward Muslims. Both boys and girls are most positive toward LGBT people.

Attitudes toward the various groups also differ by academic year. Students who are in their final year of upper secondary school generally harbor a

more positive attitude toward each of the vulnerable groups than students in the other surveyed years. Closer analyses show that attitudes in relation to the pupil’s year depend highly upon which upper secondary school programme the pupil is in (see chapter 5).

The parents’ level of education correlates strongly with the attitude toward each group. This factor is most relevant in determining the attitude toward Muslims and Jews, and less so in determining attitudes toward Roma and LGBT people.

## **Religion and foreign background**

We have compared students attitudes based on their religious affiliation and their national background. Students with foreign origins predominate among those who harbor positive attitudes toward both immigrants and Muslims. But their representation is smaller among those with positive attitudes toward Muslims than among those with positive attitudes toward immigrants. This is partly because there are Christians among the students of foreign background, a group that generally harbors more negative attitudes toward Muslims.

A larger proportion of students born abroad express a negative attitude toward Roma compared to the rest. Students who were born in Sweden, and whose parents were both born in Sweden, exhibit more negative attitudes toward migrants and Muslims. Attitudes to Jews do not differ between native and foreign-born students. Attitudes toward Muslims are more negative among students who are Christian than among the others.

## **The significance of educational circumstances**

We have analysed the school children’s attitudes based on four factors that concern the students educational circumstances. The breakdowns show

the same pattern for the attitudes toward each group. Intolerance is generally higher in schools with a small proportion of trained teachers to students compared to schools with a large proportion of trained teachers to students. Moreover, we note that both pupil satisfaction with their school and quiet in the classroom correlate with the students attitudes.

Students who enjoy school express more positive attitudes than those who do not enjoy school. Similarly, students who have reported that their classrooms are calm express more positive attitudes than those who have answered that their classrooms are characterized by mess and disorder.

We cannot say that these educational circumstances contribute to increased intolerance. Instead, our conclusion is that reducing intolerance is a greater challenge in these schools.

### **Interest in politics and democratic disaffection**

Breakdowns by interest in politics and satisfaction with democracy have given mixed results. Attitudes toward Roma and LGBT people correlate less with political interest than attitudes toward the other three groups do. A pupil's interest in politics appears to be most significant in determining his or her attitude toward Jews. It turns out that students who are very interested in politics have a considerably more positive attitude toward Jews than students who are not interested in politics.

A satisfaction with democracy gives rise to greater differences than political interest. The analysis shows that attitudes toward LGBT people correlate only moderately with this factor. By contrast, the other indexes show strong correlations with satisfaction with democracy. One conclusion is that discontent with the system goes hand in hand with hostility toward several social groups.

## **INTERPERSONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL TRUST**

One goal of our study has been to examine a variety of perspectives that can be linked to how Swedish school children relate to other people. We have therefore studied the students interpersonal trust. Different groups of students show different levels of trust. Boys trust other people to a greater extent than girls do. It also appears that school children who like their neighborhoods place more trust in people than students who do not like their neighborhoods. The same pattern applies to well-being in the classroom.

The result also shows that students who trust immigrants to a greater extent also exhibit a higher level of trust in people in general compared to students who do not trust immigrants. In addition, it appears that upper secondary school students in programmes that prepare them for higher education trust others to a greater extent than students in vocational programmes do.

Swedish students express greater trust for teachers than for headmasters. The analysis also shows that there is a small percentage that have some or a lot of trust for parliamentary and municipal politicians. Those who are satisfied with democracy generally exhibit higher levels of trust than those who are not satisfied with democracy. Girls are found to have higher levels of trust than boys for teachers and religious leaders. Boys have higher levels of trust than girls for both members of the national parliament and local politicians. Boys also have higher levels of trust for the government than girls do. A majority of the students have some or a lot of trust for the police. Girls generally have higher levels of trust for the police than boys do.

Our analysis shows that trust correlates with intolerance (although the correlation is relatively weak). The higher the trust is for the various professional groups and institutions, the less intolerant the students. This relationship has proven to

be strongest when it comes to students attitudes toward Jews.

## **STANCE ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND OUTLOOK ON RACISM AND NAZISM**

We have asked the students in our survey about their attitudes toward some human rights. Students showed strong support for all rights they were asked to side with or against. It turns out that their support has increased over time. The strongest support that has been measured concerns the right to free education. The weakest support concerns the human right to settle wherever one wants. It appears that the difference between boys' and girls' attitudes is very small. Moreover, the difference in attitudes is small when broken down by academic year.

About a third of students believe that racism and Nazism are a problem in Sweden today. This proportion was the same in our previous study (see Löwander, 2010). Only about 10 percent of the students in our study agree with the statements that everyone in society is treated equally and that everyone in society has the same opportunities. In these areas, there are no noticeable differences in the students responses when broken down by gender or academic year.

## **CHANGES OVER TIME**

Swedish students are becoming more tolerant. For example, we asked students about their attitude toward the claims that there is too much talk about the Holocaust and the extermination of Jews, that Jews have too much influence in today's world, and that immigrants from countries outside of Europe should return to their home countries. Our analyses show that Swedish school children respond to each statement more tolerantly today than they did ten years ago.

Regarding the question whether a television presenter should be allowed to wear a veil, we note

a big change in the students attitudes. A majority of the respondents thinks this should be allowed. In the survey from 2003, 42 percent thought this should be allowed. The corresponding share in 2009 was 49 percent. In our study from 2013, 60 percent of the students responded that it should be permissible for a television presenter to wear a veil. The increase is evident for both boys and girls.

A majority of the students thinks Sweden should welcome refugees. This level is constant over time. There are also high percentages of students who, between 2003 and 2013, believe that all individuals are born equal and that one can make friends with anybody. We note, however, that a larger percentage in 2013 than in 2009 believe that immigration threatens to destroy Swedish culture and that immigrants ought to try to emulate Swedes.

## **ATTITUDE TOWARD RELIGIONS**

Our analysis of stances toward world religions and belief systems shows that Swedish students are most positive toward Christianity and least positive toward Islam. Girls are more positive than boys toward the five world religions. Boys are more positive than girls toward atheism. The difference between upper secondary school students in vocational programmes and those in programmes preparatory for higher education is big when it comes to all the religions and belief systems we asked about. Students in vocational programmes are the most negative toward Islam and Judaism. It appears that students who were born in Sweden and whose parents were both born in Sweden constitute the group that is most negative toward all religions, compared to students who were either born abroad themselves, or who have at least one parent born outside of Sweden.

We have run a number of correlation tests between a pupil's attitude toward religion and group-specific intolerance. Our analyses show

that the attitude toward Islam correlates with intolerance against Muslims. The more negative a pupil is toward the religion, the more negative he or she is toward the Muslim group. The same applies to Judaism and Jews. The correlation between attitudes toward Islam and Muslims is stronger than that between attitudes toward Judaism and Jews.

Our conclusion is that intolerance toward individuals and groups is linked to one's attitude toward the religion of the group. We cannot make any statement on what causes what. It may thus be that the attitude toward Jews, for example, affects the pupil's attitude toward Judaism, and vice versa. The analysis shows, however, that a negative attitude toward a religion is connected to the attitude toward the group that may practice the religion.

## **SPECIAL STUDY - HOSTILITY TOWARD IMMIGRANTS**

The Living History Forum has, within the framework of the intolerance study, conducted a joint project with Malmö University. One result of this collaboration is presented in this report (see Chapter 5). Professor Pieter Bevelander and Professor Jonas Otterbeck are the authors.

The theme of this special study is intolerance toward immigrants. The analyses were carried out in part based on three geographic levels – Sweden as a whole, Skåne county and the city of Malmö.

The factor that has the greatest explanatory power is the upper secondary school programme the students attend. Gender, socio-economic

background in the form of parental education, and whether the person has any friends who are immigrants are also of great importance. Moreover, geography is significant. This is consistent with previous studies of the attitudes of young people, conducted by both the Living History Forum and others.

The analysis has shown that the pupil's programme of study in upper secondary school is more important than his or her academic year. Those who are in programmes that prepare the students for higher education are more tolerant in the upper years. For the group in vocational programmes, this relationship is inverted. The conclusion is that the kind of programme a pupil is in is the single strongest factor signaling tolerance or intolerance. Another conclusion is that students are positive toward immigrants as a group, but more sceptical about immigration. In the comparison between Sweden at large and Skåne, the chapter's authors found that youth in Skåne are significantly more intolerant than adolescents on average in Sweden. The analysis also shows that Malmö youth are significantly less intolerant than Swedish adolescents on average. This is consistent with previous research, which has indicated that Skåne in particular (but also southern Sweden in general) has a long tradition of political opposition to immigration and immigrants.

One conclusion is that interactions with immigrants lead to a higher degree of acceptance, openness and tolerance rather than the contrary.