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**International Terrorism: How Can Prevention and Repression  
Keep Pace?**

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**How can civic education counter Islamist propaganda? - A  
remark**

Abstract

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Some time ago, the HUFFINGTON POST sardonically stated that there were five times as many baseball players organised in sports clubs than there were Salafists in Germany. However inapt this comparison may be: In numbers, Salafism and its supporters are, in fact, a manageable phenomenon. But in respect of its potential for hostility to democracy, exclusion and violence, the relevance of Salafism is high in Germany. It would be irresponsible to discount it as a marginal phenomenon which will finally resolve itself.

It is often demanded that civic education has to address the problem. And that's right. Salafism is a religiously cloaked political ideology which is not compatible with liberal democracy as it rejects fundamental human rights and a man-made secular community, and ties any right to a supposed higher instance. Consequently, it is a form of political extremism, and the prevention of extremism is a core task of civic education. At the same time, prevention of extremism is an interdisciplinary subject of civic education. It is no super-weapon against anti-democratic attitudes and behaviour but gets in line with prevention measures such as youth welfare and social work, information centres, assistance to those who wish to leave an organisation and the efforts made by the security authorities as a component of a comprehensive prevention strategy which has to be explained further. Self-radicalising or already radicalised juveniles and, even more, adults can hardly or not at all be reached by civic education. This is where other actors come into play. Only a realistic approach in the awareness of our own limits and possibilities can warrant the success of the individual components.

Civic education has to concentrate on its strengths, which is to promote independent opinion-making on the basis of democratic principles. It cannot - and does not want to - counter-campaign the reality-distorting representations of the IS and other terrorist groups or public appearances of Salafist preachers in Germany. As a general tendency, civic education with its justifiably high standards will always be defeated by such propaganda. The claim that civic education in this context is no propaganda, is more than mere sophistry. Far from any fair balance, propaganda uses deception and emotionalisation to spread alleged absolute truths and recruit supporters. Civic education knows only one unalterable value: Openness of political and social processes.

Various target group-specific instruments of civil education, both proven and new, come into question to consolidate this openness. First of all, general prevention must not be neglected, even in the face of concrete threats endangering democracy, like Salafists. Broadband democracy building which explains political processes and shows possibilities for participation is the best measure to curb and control the spreading of extremist ideologies. As schools are the only places in society where entire age cohorts can be reached they play a key role in this context. Even though exaggerated expectations on schools are inappropriate and can scarcely be fulfilled, it may yet be noted that the almost nationwide weakening of political and social education as a school subject is a highly counterproductive move - not only, but especially from the extremism prevention perspective. Extracurricular and non-formal civil education in Germany is strongly positioned but often it can no longer balance out these deficits.

Where the analysis of the concrete phenomenon of Salafism is concerned, the classical means of information of the Federal Agency are available as a matter of course: They include the online dossier on Islamism, issue-specific purchases for our series of publications, special issues of the magazine "Informationen zur politischen Bildung" (information for civic education) or the weekly journal "Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte" (APuZ) (politics and contemporary history).

A focal issue of civic education within the context of the prevention of Salafism is the qualification of skilled personnel and disseminators. This work is as unspectacular as indispensable. We offer, for example, instructional material for teachers to deal with the issue of Salafism with relation to everyday life. Equally important are meetings and further training for skilled personnel which we offer in co-operation with players from civil society and the scientific community to provide a solid foundation for youth work against radicalisation processes. As a low-threshold offer for skilled personnel we have installed the "Infodienst Radikalisierungsprävention" (an online information service dealing with the prevention of radicalisation) which provides, inter alia, information on this phenomenon and expert tips. It also contains a database for networking with the relevant players in this field of issues.

A relatively new field in which civic education proves its innovativeness are target group-specific online offers for young people who may be regarded as prone to radicalisation. Civic education can and must deal also with this difficult issue. In this field, we co-operate with Youtube stars, who enjoy high popularity and credibility among young persons. This is a peer-to-peer approach at its best: Within the framework of the project "Begriffswelten Islam" ["terms and concepts of Islam"] the Youtubers try to deconstruct the strict black-or-white interpretations of Islam by religious extremists. They also tackle anti-Muslim and Islamophobic discourses. To this end they present animated information films, expert talks and their own contributions and encourage reflection on the extremists' alleged truths in interpreting Islam. Close to the young persons' real life, alternative interpretations of key terms of Islam are offered and discussed. Young persons are motivated and enabled to maturely, critically and actively participate in the debates on Islam and form their own opinion while the aforementioned principles of civic education are likewise respected.

Ultimately, the prevention of radicalisation remains a task for society as a whole, for different actors. Civic education is a key to the problem. What is needed, however, is a whole bunch of keys.