

2022

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REPORT

Reintegration



How can extremists be rehabilitated and reintegrated into society?

A majority of those who attach themselves in radical groups ultimately leave them, but it is still not understood why they do so or how to provide more opportunities for them to leave. As the numbers of former extremists increases, the need for effective means of reducing the threat they present to the society becomes more pressing. This report discusses the necessity of researching, developing and evaluating methods of encouraging desistance and reintegration amongst individuals who have been part of extremist movements.



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Introduction

Governments across the world are still uncertain of how to address individuals who have been radicalised

Despite the massive volume of academic and practical research into extremism since 9/11, governments across the world are still uncertain of how to address those individuals who have been radicalised and effect positive change in their behaviour. Several deadly attacks have been carried out in Europe by offenders who had been released from prison and who had been in contact with deradicalization programmes (Koller, 2021). Given the high social and political impact of terrorist attacks, recidivism by extremists must be a matter of extreme concern.

Counter-terrorism policy frameworks tend to emphasise the capture of offenders and the prevention and reduction of political violence as urgent priorities. As such, the issue of disengagement has been comparatively understudied, despite the importance of understanding how and why people leave radical organisations, and how to encourage people to desist from extremist violence. While a majority of those who attach themselves in radical groups ultimately leave them (Bjorgo, 2013), it is still not clearly understood why they do so, how to provide more opportunities for them to do so, and how to minimise the risk posed by these people.

While a majority of those who attach themselves in radical groups ultimately leave them, it is still not clearly understood why they do so

However, the need for reintegration of former extremists is significant – as well as the opportunities for greater understanding of the mechanisms of radicalisation which can be gleaned from this population who can describe their radicalisation trajectories.

The importance of reintegration has been recognised by the European Commission, which followed the EU’s recommendations for effective disengagement and deradicalization strategies in its security agenda.

The European Commission has three focusses for disengagement initiatives: prisons, rehabilitation and reintegration. The European Commission calls for ‘a methodology with common standards and indicators for evaluating the effectiveness of reintegration programmes.’ (Costa et al., 2021) While this approach highlights the importance of focusing on disengagement strategies, it also raises the complicated question of *what works?*

The European Commission has three focusses for disengagement initiatives: prisons, rehabilitation and reintegration

Leaving extremist movements is itself a complicated process. Any individual trying to leave a radical group confronts barriers, which can include hostility and violence from current group members, as well as losing the relationships built within the group, and losing the sense of status and purpose achieved as a group member. Not everyone leaves through their own volition; some are expelled by other group members, others might be arrested and imprisoned, and still others might be convinced to leave by their families and the community they live in. Others leave voluntarily, coming to reject the group whose social and political purposes they formerly shared, seeking to distance themselves from the group's activities. Whichever route out of extremism, there is a huge variation in how well individuals cope, and how they shape their life after leaving an extremist movement. Some try to put it behind them completely; others use their profile and experiences as 'former extremists' to influence others. Some maintain radical beliefs but no longer advocate for them or do so non-violently. Some reintegrate into mainstream society, whereas others remain isolated and may drift back into their original group, or other radical movements. If there are risk factors – such as psychosocial vulnerabilities – which drew an individual into extremist movements in the first place, then these may continue to influence them if they are not addressed.

Whichever route out of extremism, there is a huge variation in how well individuals cope, and how they shape their life after leaving an extremist movement

Early intervention has the potential to arrest a trajectory towards more frequent and severe acts of violence

There is an increasing number of radicalised people confined in places such as prisons and refugee camps, who might mount attacks or recruit others if released, presenting a threat to society. It would be neither practical nor ethical to detain people based on any potential risk they face. Thus, the need to develop effective means of rehabilitation and reintegrating former violent extremists becomes more pressing with time. Given that many extremists are young, early intervention has the potential to arrest a trajectory towards more frequent and severe acts of violence. Hence, rehabilitation of identified extremists is an essential aspect of counter-extremism activity. Exit programmes have been integrated into the broader counter-terrorism systems/framework. (Harris-Hogan et al., 2016; Lewis et al., 2020), and are often implemented before or after an individual is imprisoned (Gielen, 2019).

For around twenty years, counter-extremism programmes have been designed to address the specific risks presented by extremists, in countries such as Indonesia, Nigeria, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Somalia, and Yemen (Khalil, 2018). Such programmes have a variety of methods and targets. Some explicitly targeted jihadis through providing alternative understandings of Islam, while others ignored ideology entirely and focused on the psychosocial reintegration for people from a variety of radical movements.

It is harder to measure
attitudinal change than
changes in behaviour

While these programmes often take innovative and research-based approaches to tackling radicalised persons, their effectiveness is under-researched (Bjorgo, 2013) and poorly evaluated (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2013; Lewis et al., 2020). There is a particular lack of random controlled trials, the gold standard of scientific research (Lewis et al., 2020); most reports on programme outcomes are qualitative in nature. This is partly due to the difficulty of measuring the impacts of programmes (Feddes & Gallucci, 2015; Horgan & Braddock, 2010; Pistone et al., 2019) and in comparing the efficacy of programmes with very different goals and methods. It is harder to measure attitudinal change than changes in behaviour, even though attitudinal changes on the topic of the permissibility of political violence may be more likely to provide long-term security to the community. In some cases, those in charge of the programmes are opaque on their methodology for commercial reasons.

Particularly, funding bodies are eager to see short-term benefits of experimental programmes. This leads to short reporting cycles which do not capture the full impact of interventions over time, limiting studies to early responses only, which may not be representative of the programme's longitudinal impact. It is important that programmes create lasting change, and this must be measured to capture unexpected and long-term outcomes, including long-term follow-up studies after a programme ceases to operate.

Reintegration

Since Islamist terrorists tended to claim a strong scriptural support for their acts, it seemed natural to draw connections between religion, and other strong ideological positions as a leading towards extremism

Since 9/11, there has been an increasing focus on ideology as the primary motivator behind terrorist attacks. Since Islamist terrorists tended to claim a strong scriptural support for their acts, it seemed natural to draw connections between religion, and other strong ideological positions as a leading towards extremism. The first programmes to deal with extremists were shaped by this framework and were created in countries with a strong Islamic ethos. Hence, approaches to and understandings of deradicalization as an ideological position remain common. For instance, Subagyo (2021) describes deradicalization as ‘an effort to eradicate and eliminate individual’s radical thinking by fostering an understanding of religious values that are inclusive, friendly, moderate, and peaceful.’

As Schmid (2013) notes, radicalisation is a contested and unclear term, recently coined to describe Islamist terrorism as if it were categorically different from earlier conceptualisations of political violence. Due to an intense focus on the nature of Islam post 9/11, the role of ideology in political violence became emphasised at the expense of understanding social, economic, political and psychological components.

Deradicalization likewise lacks a strong conceptual grounding since it derives from the same ideological framework.

However, the role of ideology has been overstated as a factor driving radicalisation and is now seen as only one part of a more complicated picture. Thus, ideological change should not be the only goal of reintegration measures. For instance, while some 20,000 militants were detained in Iraq during the mid-2000s, less than 5% could be described as having had strong ideological motivations (de Kerchoue et al., 2015).

As such, many of these individuals could be reintegrated safely without challenging their ideology, since they had engaged in violent activities more to fulfil socio-economic needs such as for financial or social rewards than out of religious conviction. For the vast majority of these individuals, the most important intervention would be the provision of other forms of support and rehabilitation so that they could identify pro-social means of addressing their needs, whether these were economic, social or psychological.

Changing mindsets may be particularly challenging

Changing mindsets may be particularly challenging, as opposed to addressing people's practical and emotional needs. In 2008, forensic psychologist John Horgan (2008) concluded that of the dozens of former terrorists he interviewed, while almost all of them had disengaged, not one had deradicalized. If risk minimisation is the goal, then the fact that former extremists retain radical beliefs does not imply that the programme has failed, however.

In fact, radical political beliefs are not necessarily strongly predictive of violence: the majority of people with radical beliefs do not deploy any form of violence to promote their agendas (Moghaddam, 2009). Many people have extreme beliefs which do not lead to violence; many of the perpetrators of political violence had only weak connections to the supposed guiding ideology of the movement with which they aligned themselves.

Measures to address individuals who are a part of violent movements may be better understood from a holistic approach that places rehabilitation within a broader framing which considers economic, social, cultural, and psychological aspects of an individual's experience - with spiritual needs considered where appropriate.

For this reason, the focus of this report is social, emotional, and psychological reintegration, rather than attempts to challenge a problematic worldview which is considered toxic or extreme.

It is also recognised that state efforts to change political opinions are problematic within a framework of human rights and democracy. From women's activism for the vote to postcolonial liberation movements, positions which were considered extreme or radical in their time have since become uncontroversial and are now seen as positive steps towards a more egalitarian world.

State efforts to change political opinions are problematic within a framework of human rights and democracy

Democracy depends on a diversity of actors participating in political life through peaceful channels. Facilitating peaceful means of expressing political opinions may reduce the likelihood of criminal activism. Barrelle (2011) notes that former radical environmentalists ceased extreme activities when they graduated from university and found employment and were then able to pursue their ideological goals through non-violent, socially legitimate methods.

Repluralization

Rather than challenging ideological positions – which can sometimes lead to doubling down, and a sense of persecution – more promising approaches may lie in teaching critical thinking and fact-checking skills (Costa et al., 2021; Jugl, 2022), to ensure that people are less vulnerable to manipulation and more able to assess, qualify and moderate their beliefs.

Extremist movements are known for their black-and-white thinking, creating simplistic worldviews which avoid the complexity of reality, and filling a psychological need.

Hansen (2020) notes that the underlying mindset of extremism is ‘de-pluralization’:

‘De-contestation’ or ‘de-pluralization’ is, in fact, the core dynamic of radicalization, which at the beginning postulates and defines specific religious or political problems (e.g. the suffering of Muslims in Syria, unemployment of members of the ‘Aryan’ race) and contextualizes these with the recruit’s individual biographical experiences and background. This process connects global or abstract issues with micro-social events and their psychological impacts (e.g. conflicts in the family, discrimination).

De-pluralization focusses exclusively on a specific, single social cause and provides a justification for this which is both emotively charged and prohibits any narratives which might challenge it. Such worldviews tend towards cognitive simplicity, which reduces the emotional strain of dealing with contradictions. These worldviews are both developed and amplified in extremist groups, buttressed by out-group stereotypes – this kind of stereotyping often resulting in hostile attitudes (Jugl, 2022). Cognitive rigidity and Othering complicate the processes of rehabilitation through creating barriers to participation in a pluralist society (Jensen et al., 2020).

These issues have the potential to be addressed through improving critical thinking skills (Costa et al., 2021) and a process of self-reflection (Jugl, 2022).



Generating more complex and pluralistic understandings of politics, society and economics will tend to undermine the simplistic narratives of cause and effect inherent to the extremist worldview

As such, if an individual is able to generate more complex and pluralistic understandings of politics, society and economics (Ashour, 2010), and can have more varied social experiences, this will tend to undermine the simplistic narratives of cause and effect inherent to the extremist worldview. It is also likely to reduce their hostility towards out-group members and those who do not cleave to their world view. Similarly, psychological interventions will provide perspective on negative experiences, decontextualising politics from personal experiences thus diminishing their emotional impact and thereby their power.

Programmes

Prior to 9/11, the focus on addressing extremists through social programmes was found in Europe, where there were interventions to deal with far-right activists and neo-Nazis. While these recognisably dealt with the same issues as later programmes, they operated more in the realm of crime prevention. Post-9/11 interventions into extremism followed the legacy of other crime reduction programmes, including those used to extract members of street gangs (Bjorgo & Horgan, 2008).

Within street gangs, members joined because they were seeking a sense of identity and purpose and left with growing maturity and negative experiences within the group, and then needed social support to reintegrate within their communities, and in some cases avoid persecution from fellow gang members. These trajectories are strikingly similar to many former extremists' experiences. Additionally, the conceptualisation of some programmes addressing extremist some deradicalization programmes took influences from organisations involved in extracting and 'deprogramming' cult members.

Within the international aid sector, the requirement for disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) is key to peacebuilding in the aftermath of civil war. The United Nations (2010) define reintegration as 'process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income.'

Reintegration makes former combatants' stakeholders in the peace process, which is essential to achieving sustainable peace, and may address the grievances that led an individual to align with a radical group initially. The reintegration aspect of DDR is also significant to extremism occurring outside armed conflict, involving similar mechanisms of disengagement from violence and re-engagement with the community.

After 9/11, deradicalization efforts became more well known to the public. Yemen was the first country to develop a state-led programme to combat Islamism, introducing the Committee for Religious Dialogue in 2001. Emphasis was placed on the illegitimacy of violence using arguments drawn from scripture. Saudi Arabia introduced a similar programme in the same year, focussing on broader social support which added social support after prison, and which engaged with prisoners' families (Rabasa et al., 2010; Wagner, 2010).

Each country has developed programmes according to their own insights and concerns

Each country has developed programmes according to their own insights and concerns. For instance, family reintegration is a particularly strong focus in Singapore and Malaysia; the framing of Islamic law is significant in Moroccan projects. Such diversity in approaches provides a wealth of experience but is complex to analyse for efficacy due to discrepant methodologies and data collection.

Routes to rehabilitation

The origin of an individual's trajectory out of extremism can be voluntary or involuntary. On one hand, a person might leave an extremist group out of disillusionment and abandonment of the group's ideas and then go on to seek help in rebuilding their lives; on the other, a person might be imprisoned for ideologically motivated violence and then placed in deradicalization programmes in prison against their will.

There may be a grey area between these positions, for example if a person is expelled from a radical group for dissenting with their current positions and strategies (Barrelle, 2015), or if participation in a prison programme is not mandatory, but would help a prisoners' case for early release. Disillusionment is a major reason for disengagement and provides an opportunity for intervention. But leaving an extremist movement can also provoke negative emotions: Bérubé et al. (2019) note that common emotions in former extremists are exhaustion, isolation and regret.

Prisoners who have been charged with terrorism offences are less likely to be reoffenders than their peers (Hodwitz, 2021). This suggests that reintegration support is likely to be comparatively effective, despite the lack of agency implied in mandatory programmes, given that imprisonment alone has a better result with extremists than with criminals with no political motivation. Mandatory programmes in a prison setting are more likely to be completed than those which people can leave freely, and this may increase their potential for success.

Such programmes also provide a stable environment and the potential for prolonged monitoring through probation services. There is an obvious risk during the transition period when an individual is released since the return to civilian life can be disruptive and lead to relapse. Voluntary programmes benefit from the self-selecting nature of participants, as well as their ability to provide support in the community. However, mandatory programmes may have better retention due to the disincentives for disengagement from the programme.

When an individual is released from prison there is a risk the return to civilian life can be disruptive and lead to relapse

Approaches

It is essential to develop collaborative networks, involving non-governmental and civil society organisations, including community and religious institutions, local businesses, and activists as well as the programme's participants

Rehabilitation measures are often the purview by the state, whether as part of the criminal justice or welfare system. However, former extremists are likely to be suspicious of governments, which will tend to diminish the credibility of the services provided. Hence, it is essential to develop collaborative networks, involving non-governmental and civil society organisations, including community and religious institutions, local businesses, and activists as well as the programme's participants (Muhammad & Hiariej, 2021).

While these efforts may be complex to coordinate, they can bring together a combination of techniques and perspectives.

Those working directly with former extremists need to be persuasive and be able to build a rapport (Neuman, 2010). Some programmes have been delivered by former extremists themselves, who have additional credibility due to their own experiences.

Where religion is a significant part of ideology, religious experts and institutions may have a role in providing alternative understandings of scripture, history and religious practice.

A combination of governmental and non-governmental input means that civil liberties can be protected whilst the state's goals can be clearly articulated (Demant et al., 2008). For the preservation of civil liberties, it is essential that third parties retain independence, even if they are state funded. Working with community groups brings credibility, local knowledge and the networking capacity to connect with local groups and services. This is likely to provide the best levels of support for former extremists, who may be particularly vulnerable due to the loss of the tight-knit connectivity of an extremist group. Similarly, third party groups bring in fresh ideas (Bartlett & Birdwell, 2010), and are able to respond to their experiences with their clients nimbly.

Several focuses have been identified within existing programmes. These comprise:

Psychosocial counselling

Psychosocial counselling can help provide insight into self-awareness, anger management, critical thinking and stress management.

Psychosocial support and monitoring after successful reintegration is likely to reduce the chance of recidivism.

While this change in understanding can be developed with the help of a facilitator, it is important that this is done without creating alienating power dynamics. An individual's understanding of their own motivations is useful for them to explore their circumstances and to set goals for their future. The process of setting and achieving practical and personal goals can provide a sense of progress and accomplishment.

It is important that psychosocial processes are based in an understanding of the dignity and security of the individual and are conducted with compassion - while refusing to allow a perpetrator to minimise responsibility for their crimes. Other forms of therapy can be used according to the client's needs, where appropriate.

Data generated from individuals' understandings can be aggregated into useful data for understanding drivers towards violent extremism from a first-hand perspective. Since extremists often recruit vulnerable, excluded and marginalised people, this evidence can help identify risk, in order to develop strategies to increase the resilience of the broader population and at-risk communities.

Extremists often recruit vulnerable, excluded and marginalised people. Evidence gathered from these individuals can help identify risk, in order to develop strategies to increase the resilience of the broader population and at-risk communities

Skill-building

Besides interpersonal skills such as anger management, former extremists may lack practical skills necessary for integration. These include speaking and writing the national language, numeracy, as well as basic life-skills for dealing with the practical tasks of citizenship, which can include learning accurate historical and political understandings to challenge misinformation circulating in extremist circles.

Such understandings should be embedded in the ability to verify information and seek out informed positions, in order to develop cognitive skills to resist biased and emotive propaganda from extremist organisations. In the case of economic exclusion, remedies can also include skills training for the workplace in order to access employment opportunities. It can also provide directions to social services and continuing educational opportunities where appropriate.

Education is crucial in the transmission of values such as democracy and human rights, and in developing social cohesion

As Sahar and Kaunert (2022) note, education is crucial in the transmission of values such as democracy and human rights, and in developing social cohesion. It also serves as an effective way of addressing social grievances through redressing inequalities and promoting social mobility. Horizontal inequalities – inequalities based on identity – are significant drivers of intergroup conflict. Educational and employment opportunities can redress these inequalities.

Financial reintegration

For the UN's DDR programmes (United Nations, 2010), financial reintegration is central to the reintegration process: business developments including start-up grants and training provide stability to demobilised combatants and reduce the risk of return to radical groups in order to support themselves. Financial reintegration may be as useful for the rehabilitation of former extremists. As Demant et al (2008) recognise, many recruits into radical movements are young. Hence, they may miss out on vital educational and employment milestones and find it difficult to integrate into the job market due to time spent in radical movements.

Here, both job and entrepreneurship opportunities can be ways of handling integration and generating a sense of purpose and pride. Often, through staff or customers, workplaces are more diverse than the groups that extremists belonged to and can provide a source of exposure to different ideas and worldviews.

Community integration

Extremist groups are often based on powerful internal bonds: as a tight-knit, mission-oriented organisation, often operating underground, there are strong pressures for social bonding. Such relationships are both hard to break and to replace, and an individual leaving a radical group may feel unmoored and disoriented. Hence, embeddedness in a community with strong ties can provide a sense of connection. Communities are at the heart of human flourishing. Yet it may be difficult for former extremists to become embedded within a community, particularly if they are notorious for their criminal acts, or if they have rejected that community in the past or brought it into disrepute through their extremist activism (Bjorgo, 2013).

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Former extremists may have strained relationships with their family and former neighbours due to their ideologies or behaviours. However, reintegration cannot occur without community support.

Often, participation in an extremist network provides a social support network, which may be as valuable to the participant as the sense of mission or other aspects of radicalisation. If these social networks are not replaced, then the individual risks drifting back into contact with former associates from radical movements.

Wider social contact can also bring an individual into contact with other people outside their circle. This not only presents them with ideas that may challenge their worldview but can also inspire them to recognise the humanity of people they had previously considered to be their enemies.

Relationships

Relationships outside the group are particularly significant in promoting change (Bérubé et al., 2019). For many, the most important aspect of reintegration is family, friends, and partners. Family involvement has been identified as a strong indicator of successful positive change. Those with family support tend to reintegrate more quickly than those who do not.

Reintegration programmes can engage with family and other contacts of a former extremist to understand their issues and their history with the individual, and to engage them in reinforcing positive change.

Families themselves may need support – and providing such support might also have a positive influence on the former extremist. This could be financial support in the absence of a breadwinner, or social support if they find themselves stigmatised for the behaviour of their relative. However, it is also the case that some families may provide a risk of re-radicalisation if they share extreme beliefs, while other families may be abusive and cause trauma that could lead to relapse. Hence, while supportive families are a valuable resource for deradicalization efforts, the opposite can be true of dysfunctional or radicalised families.

Monitoring

While embedding a person within social networks maximises the chance of reintegration, it also provides a means of identifying issues and providing support. Reintegration programmes may build connections within the community, recognising that contact with families, neighbours, peers and employers can provide useful information for the individual's progress if the rehabilitation process faces problems along the way. Coaches within the community can provide social, emotional and practical support towards a positive trajectory out of violent extremism. This can, where necessary, include relationships with police and security forces in order to flag concerns around potential violent activity.

Families, neighbours, peers and employers can provide useful information for the individual's progress if the rehabilitation process faces problems

Monitoring may also flag new potential opportunities through identifying other factors which have a positive bearing on an individual's rehabilitation

Monitoring has other benefits besides providing advance warning about potential relapse; it provides long-term data to adjudicate the benefits of the programme. It may also flag new potential opportunities through identifying other factors which have a positive bearing on an individual's rehabilitation.

Programme evaluation

Barrelle (2015) describes the goals of interventions as follows:

Proactive self-development... moves a person towards a state of connectedness and wellbeing as indicated by the presence of: a range of supportive and meaningful relationships in the community; psychological and physical health; the personal/social resources to participate in life; a stable sense of self; a range of social identities; a coherent set of ideas and beliefs that enable peaceful cohabitation; and non-violent action orientation such that the individual can participate in their own life, or wider community life to the full extent that they wish without hurting others.

Such a wide range of goals is necessarily hard to measure, given that each factor inevitably varies with the individual and is difficult to assess in any form of standardised measure. Typically, funding bodies with a security agenda are most interested in desistance from violence which has clear social benefits from their perspective rather than reintegration, which has a far vaguer profile. Similarly, those who run programmes may be more motivated to participate in an analysis if their approach is successful, and they may present their results in an optimistic manner. However, the information from programmes which are less successful may also be valuable.

For instance, Taskarina and Nuri (2021) identify the failings of the Indonesian programme to deradicalize former extremists. In two years, 47 people who had undergone deradicalization programmes went on to reoffend. They point out the need for evaluation and monitoring and for the involvement of stakeholders besides the government in order to make Indonesia's programme more effective and eliminate less effective practices.

Besides problems of small samples and limited case studies, programmes differ in so many fundamental ways, it becomes impossible to compare their efficacy. Moreover, given that each programme will operate within a particular community and target different types of individuals, there are different norms and values at play within each scenario.

With rehabilitation now firmly on the policy agenda, the need to establish what practices are effective is urgent.

Implications

The process of reintegration is slow, and may be subject to setbacks, due to the complex psychological and sociological issues involved in changing mindsets and identities. The process might be further complicated by difficulties in finding housing and employment for former extremists.

Funding bodies frequently require monitoring of reintegration programmes. They particularly seek short-term results so that their expenditure can be justified within a sector where it is still unclear which methods are the most successful, and which is eager for results.

However, from both perspectives longer-term interventions might be necessary in order to measure long-term successes, including indirect impacts, such as former extremists' impact on levels of radicalisation in their local communities. There is a need to be clear on what success looks like and how it is measured, which would allow for greater comparison of the effectiveness of various programmes. The need for accurate data on 'what works' is pressing.

From existing research, it is clear that programmes need to be contextualised the needs of the target population: this includes paying attention to the psychosocial, cultural, economic and religious needs of the individual. While state-run programmes provide security and connections with the criminal justice and penal systems, those developed in the community often have more credibility. They are also more knowledgeable about the factors and networks on the ground which might threaten or promote the rehabilitation of former extremists.

Khalil (2018) recommends that programmes start with large-scale interventions (community level projects, such as sports teams) which are designed to impact multiple people, in order that the most susceptible to reintegration are reached effectively. Afterwards, individuals with more needs can be directed towards more intensive interventions, which can be developed from an understanding of the needs of the clients gathered in initial stages.

Ideally, rehabilitation efforts should be developed responsively according to the individual needs of the client

Ideally, rehabilitation efforts should be developed responsively according to the individual needs of the client. All these strategies are far more complicated and difficult to deliver in countries with less available resources, underdeveloped social infrastructure and more significant issues in radicalisation.

For instance, some communities may collectively share radical beliefs, or be controlled by radical groups, meaning that rather than supporting desistance, they may lead an individual back into an extremist mindset. Culturally and economically, the push factors towards extremism will remain in place if, for instance, young men are unable to find jobs and develop an adult social status in their communities. Here, it may be valuable to balance a focus on individuals with community dynamics through development measures and addressing disputes and grievances within the community.

With extremism identified as a pressing social problem and the ranks of former extremists increasing, rehabilitation has potential benefits that should make it central to any strategy in building social cohesion and countering terrorism. Programmes should be sustainably funded, carefully designed, robustly overseen, and keep long term records for evaluation purposes to provide the vital data on how we can support those individuals leaving extremist organisations. Lewis et al. (2020) have developed a thorough discussion of potential ways of measuring the impact of rehabilitation programmes.

While there has been progress in terms of developing theory and approaches to rehabilitating former extremists, there is a need to formalise and evaluate the work in progress, build the capacity of communities to develop rehabilitative services, and identify priority areas to address.



From the hundreds of convicted extremists in British prisons to the camps for Islamic State fighters in Iraq, the pressure to find a way to manage the risk presented by extremists is increasing. There is a pressing need to develop an infrastructure of rehabilitation services through networking with experts, communities, and funding bodies – and for long-term evaluation of the impacts of these projects.

Investment in reintegration measures has the potential to minimise risk, but also to help understand the drivers of extremism, and to help build connections within communities that need support.

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