Common Characteristics of "Successful" Deradicalization Programs of the Past

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What is NSI Reachback?

The Joint Staff, Deputy Director for Global Operations (DDGO), jointly with other elements in the Joint Staff, Services, and United States Government (USG) Agencies, has established a Reachback capability based on the Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) team's global network of scholars and area experts. It provides Combatant Commands with population-based and regional expertise in support of ongoing operations. The Reachback team combines written and interview elicitations with additional research and analyses to provide concise responses to time-sensitive questions.

This report responds to one of a series of questions posed by USCENTCOM about the strategic implications of destabilizing population dynamics within the Central Region.[1]

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Question of Focus

[B2] Are there examples of successful deradicalization in history that we can draw lessons from?

Common Characteristics of "Successful" Deradicalization Programs of the Past[2]

Bottom Line Up Front

There is no "one size fits all" approach to disengagement and deradicalization—disengagement and deradicalization programs should be tailored to the specific environments and individuals/groups of interest. However, analysis of historical cases of disengagement and deradicalization programs reveals what appear to be several common characteristics of programs that have demonstrated some levels of success: creating a sense of hope and purpose, building a sense of community, providing individual attention and regimented daily schedules, and ensuring sustainable, long-term commitment following completion of the program (i.e., after-care). While designing disengagement and deradicalization programs to include these characteristics could serve as a useful starting point, they should not be considered universal, or guarantees of successful deradicalization. Rigorous research and analysis is still needed in order to solidify our understanding of, and ability to measure, "success" with respect to deradicalization programs.

Introduction

This report considers whether there are examples of successful deradicalization programs in history from which lessons can be drawn. The wide variety of context- and environment-specific circumstances in which historical disengagement and deradicalization programs originated and developed make comparing specific programs challenging (Horgan & Braddock, 2009; RAN, 2019). Therefore, to assess this question, a case study research approach was employed, using 30 historical cases, to generate a robust understanding of both past and present disengagement and deradicalization programs. The analysis focuses on potentially common characteristics or components across those disengagement and deradicalization programs that have demonstrated some level of success, and thus may be of particular relevance for formulating new initiatives.

Before discussing the results of the analysis, it is important to define some of the key terminology. For the purpose of this analysis, the following definitions were used:

- **Radicalization:** A process whereby individuals (and even groups) develop, over time, a mindset that can—under the right circumstances and opportunities—increase the risk that he or she will engage in violent extremism or terrorism (Clutterbuck, 2015).
- **Disengagement:** The process involving a change in role or function that is usually associated with a reduction of violent participation… as a process whereby an individual's role within a violent organization may change from active violence to a less active, non-violent role (Horgan, 2009).

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[2] The following subject matter experts kindly contributed to this analysis: **Basma Alloush** (Norwegian Refugee Council), **Dr. Mia Bloom** (Georgia State University), **Dr. Arie Kruglanski** (University of Maryland), **Dr. Sarah Marsden** (Lancaster University), **Dr. Fathali Moghaddam** (Georgetown University), and **Dr. Siobhan O'Neil** (United Nations University).

- **Deradicalization:** An attitudinal shift away from supporting violence as a means for achieving political or ideological goals.
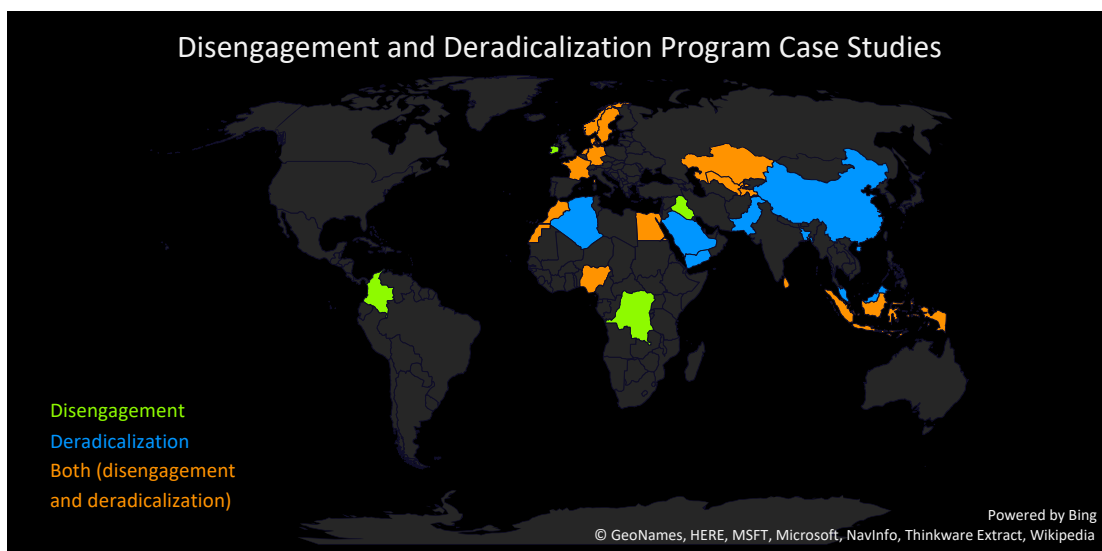
Disengagement vs. Deradicalization

As part of this analysis, we distinguish between disengagement (changing behavior) and deradicalization (changing ideas). Disengagement stresses behavioral change where acts of violence and extremism are left behind; deradicalization stresses attitudinal and psychological change, where attempts are made to change the mindset, sympathies, and attitudes of an individual. This distinction is important, as our knowledge and understanding of disengagement processes may be more realistic and practical than that of deradicalization processes (Horgan & Braddock, 2009; El Said, 2015). Prior research has shown that changing behavior is more realistic than changing attitudes. It is also the more immediate task for reducing conflict and violence. For these reasons, this report assesses both disengagement and deradicalization. Doing so also provides the additional benefit of increasing the scope of case studies available for consideration.

The Case Studies

The 30 disengagement and deradicalization case studies span geographic locations across the globe, with target groups that range from millions in the case of de-Nazification to hundreds in the case of Northern Ireland's early release program (see below for a full list of the case studies explored). Some programs target groups or segments of a population, while others focus on the individual level. The radicalization targets of the case studies were a mix of political and religious groups and individuals. Significant components of each program, be they social, economic, political, legal, or religious in nature, were extracted and cataloged. Motivational factors, leadership influences, local community interactions, and the role of family were also captured.

The mix of case studies explored includes five programs that focus on disengagement, nine programs that focus on deradicalization, and sixteen programs that focus on both. However, nearly all of the programs are de facto disengagement programs, regardless of how they were explicitly defined. Often the goal of a program may be to stimulate deradicalization, but the metrics of success are behavioral in nature (e.g., recidivism rates, membership declines, decreased violence).

Disengagement and Deradicalization Program Case Studies

Disengagement
Deradicalization
Both (disengagement and deradicalization)

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Defining "Successful" Deradicalization

Evaluating the success of disengagement and deradicalization programs can be challenging. Measuring deradicalization poses further challenges, representing, as it does, attitudinal and psychological changes—assessing an individual's thoughts and values is extremely difficult, if not impossible (Horgan & Braddock, 2009). Additionally, programs aimed at disengagement and deradicalization rarely have established criteria for evaluating success of various initiatives. Even when they do, such criteria are often difficult to verify, largely due to insufficient data, and secrecy surrounding the programs (Horgan & Braddock, 2009; Weber et al., 2018; Johnston, 2009). Low recidivism rates are sometimes cited as a measure of perceived success; however, similar issues with data availability and sufficiency make accurately measuring recidivism difficult. Perhaps more importantly, there is little consensus as to whether recidivism rates are even the most appropriate measure for evaluating the success of disengagement and deradicalization programs (Horgan & Braddock, 2009; Porges & Stern, 2010; Weber et al., 2018; Johnston, 2009). Ultimately, there appears to be little consensus as to what exactly constitutes a successful disengagement or deradicalization program, and claims of success in relation to such programs are often difficult to verify.

Despite these challenges, this analysis provides a preliminary evaluation of the relative levels of success of the disengagement and deradicalization programs examined. This evaluation relied largely on qualitative assessments and other publicly available information and evaluations of the programs. Those assessments typically highlighted recidivism and rehabilitation rates among participants, interview and survey data of participants, general decreases in violence across society, and impact on the group and/or ideology within society as the basis for evaluation. This data was used to code our cases as either "generally successful" or "generally unsuccessful." Cases evaluated as having demonstrated mixed success (both elements of success and failure) were coded as such. Additionally, in some cases, there was simply not enough publicly available information to accurately evaluate a program. These cases were coded as not having enough information to evaluate.

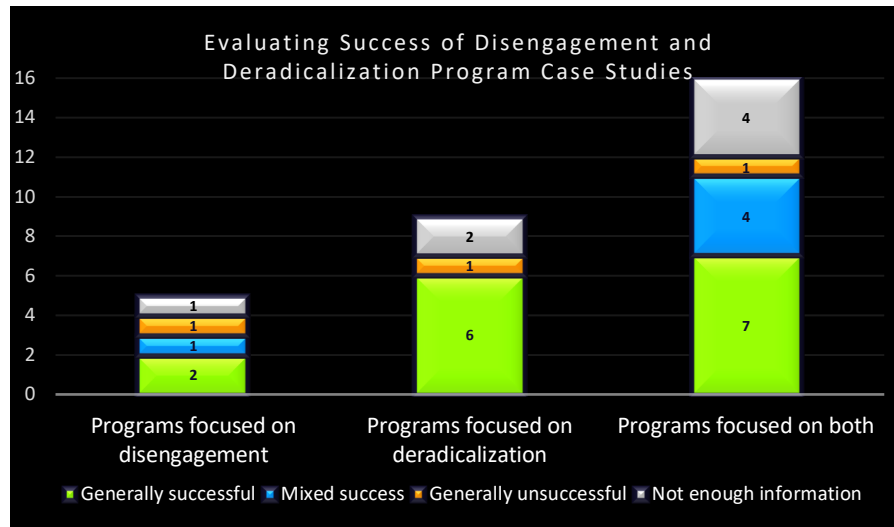| Disengagement and Deradicalization Case Studies				
Program	Location	Program Targets	Program Context	Success Coding
De-Nazification [1945-1948]	Germany	Adult members of the Nazi Party	Post-WWII; societal level focus	Mixed success
EXIT Norway [1997-present]	Norway	Far right-wing extremists, particularly youth neo-Nazi sympathizers	Increasing far right-wing activity; individual and societal level focus	Generally successful
EXIT Sweden [1998-present]	Sweden	Far right-wing extremists seeking to disengage from group, particularly neo-Nazi sympathizers	Increasing far right-wing activity; individual level focus	Generally successful
EXIT Germany [2000-present]	Germany	Far right-wing extremists seeking to disengage from group, particularly neo-Nazi sympathizers	Increasing far right-wing activity; individual level focus	Generally successful
Northern Ireland's early release strategy [1998-present]	Northern Ireland	Prisoners of the IRA, Provisional IRA, Ulster Volunteer Force, and Ulster Defense Association	Government efforts to work toward peace and ending political violence; individual and societal level focus	Generally successful
Denmark's Aarhus Program [2007-present]	Denmark	Initially, far right-wing extremists, particularly neo-Nazi sympathizers; more recently, Muslims who are	Increasing far right-wing activity; increasing number of people returning home from	Mixed success

		returning home from fighting in Syria	fighting in Syria; individual and societal level focus	
France's Centre for Prevention, Integration, and Citizenship [2016]	France	Islamic extremists in France	Increasing violence and terror attacks; individual level focus	Generally unsuccessful
France's current deradicalization strategy [2016-present]	France	Islamic extremists in France	Increasing violence and terror attacks; individual and societal level focus	Not enough information
Dutch deradicalization strategy against Moluccan radicals [1970s]	Netherlands	South Moluccan minorities, including increasingly violent youth	Increasing protest and violence among South Moluccan minority population; societal level focus	Generally successful
Dutch pilot deradicalization program in Winschoten [2007-2008]	Netherlands	Young far right-wing extremists	Increasing far right-wing extremist sentiment and activity; individual level focus	Generally successful
Saudi Arabia's counseling program [2004-present]	Saudi Arabia	Detained extremists/terrorists	Increasing terrorist activity and violence within Saudi borders; individual and societal level focus	Generally successful
Yemen's Religious Dialogue Committee [2002-present]	Yemen	Members and sympathizers of al-Qaeda	Increasing terrorist activity and violence within Yemen's borders; individual and societal level focus	Not enough information
Egypt's deradicalization strategy against al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya and al-Jihad [1997-present]	Egypt	Members of al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya (IG) and al-Jihad (AJ)	Arrest and imprisonment of key group leaders, and their subsequent denouncement of violence; societal level focus	Generally successful
De-Baathification [2003]	Iraq	Members of the Baath Party	War in Iraq; dismissal of Baath Party from government posts; societal level focus	Generally unsuccessful
Sons of Iraq (Sunni Awakening) [2005-2009]	Iraq	Iraqi Sunnis	War in Iraq; defeat of Saddam Hussein; increasing sectarian violence; societal level focus	Not enough information
Algeria's deradicalization program [2005-present]	Algeria	Islamic extremists	Post-civil war; societal level focus	Generally successful
Morocco's deradicalization strategy [2013-present]	Morocco	Islamic extremists	Increasing number of people traveling to Syria to fight and then returning home; societal level focus	Mixed success
Nigeria's Operation Safe Corridor [2016-present]	Nigeria	Members of Boko Haram	Increasing terrorist activity and violence within Nigeria's borders; individual and societal level focus	Generally unsuccessful
Congo's disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration strategy against M23 Movement [2013-present]	Congo	M23 rebels	Perpetual conflict; societal level focus	Mixed success
Pakistan's deradicalization and rehabilitation program [2009-present]	Pakistan	Detained extremists/terrorists, particularly those from Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)	Increasing terrorist activity and violence within Pakistani borders; post-military operations against the TTP; individual and societal level focus	Generally successful

Sri Lanka's rehabilitation program for the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ealam [2009-present]	Sri Lanka	Detained members of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ealam (LTTE)	Post-civil war conflict; individual and societal level focus	Generally successful
Bangladesh's deradicalization strategy [2005-present]	Bangladesh	Islamic extremists	Increasing extremist sympathy and activity; societal level focus	Generally successful
Indonesia's disengagement Program [2002-present]	Indonesia	Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) extremists, particularly those detained and/or in prison	Increasing JI activity and violence; disillusionment with and subsequent disengagement from JI by former commanders; individual and societal level focus	Mixed success
Singapore's deradicalization program [2003-present]	Singapore	Detained Islamic extremists	Increasing detainment and imprisonment of extremists; individual and societal level focus	Generally successful
Malaysia's deradicalization program [2002-present]	Malaysia	Detained Islamic extremists	Increasing detainment and imprisonment of extremists; individual and societal level focus	Generally successful
Kazakhstan's deradicalization strategy [2019-present]	Kazakhstan	Islamic extremists	Increasing number of people returning home from fighting in Syria; individual level focus	Not enough information
Tajikistan's deradicalization strategy [2019-present]	Tajikistan	Islamic extremists	Increasing number of people returning home from fighting in Syria; individual level focus	Not enough information
Uzbekistan's deradicalization strategy [2019-present]	Uzbekistan	Islamic extremists	Increasing number of people returning home from fighting in Syria; individual level focus	Not enough information
China's activities against Uighurs [2017-present]	China	Uighur minorities	Increasing detainment of Uighur minorities; individual and societal level focus	Not enough information
Colombia's disengagement and reincorporation program [1997-present]	Colombia	FARC rebels	Increasing violence; efforts between government and FARC leaders to work toward peace; societal level focus	Generally successful

Several case studies emerged as demonstrating notable levels of success. Saudi Arabia's deradicalization program is considered to represent one of the more robust and extensive approaches to deradicalization ever established and is largely recognized as having demonstrated some successes (Kruglanski, 2019; Horgan & Braddock, 2009; Casptack, 2015; al-Khatti, 2019; Johnston, 2009). Sri Lanka's deradicalization program is estimated to have disengaged and deradicalized over 12,000 former members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam since the end of the country's civil war in 2009 (Kruglanski, 2019; Weber et al., 2018). Exit Programs in Norway, Sweden, and Germany have been recognized as demonstrating some levels of success in disengaging and deradicalizing individuals from far right-wing groups (RAN, 2019; Hardy, 2019; Kruglanski & Fishman, 2009). Finally, Denmark's Aarhus Program is considered to have had some success in disengaging and deradicalizing individuals from both far right-wing and Islamic extremist groups (Kruglanski, 2019; Mansel, 2015; Higgins, 2015; Bertelson, 2015).

Overall, of the 30 disengagement and deradicalization programs assessed as part of this analysis, fifteen were evaluated as being generally successful, five as being of mixed success, three as being generally unsuccessful,

and seven were unable to be classified due to insufficiently available information and/or newness of the program.

Common Components of Disengagement and Deradicalization Programs that Have Demonstrated Some Levels of Success

While the importance of tailoring and targeting disengagement and deradicalization programs to specific environments and target audiences cannot be overstated (Horgan, 2008; Horgan & Braddock, 2009; RAN, 2019; Porges & Stern, 2010; Johnston, 2009), analysis of cases that have demonstrated some level of success reveals several common components. Notably, these components generally align with Kruglanski's (2019) conception of deradicalization through what he offers as the 3N (needs, narratives, and networks) model of radicalization (Kruglanski, 2019; Weber & Kruglanski, 2017).[3] Thus, while disengagement and deradicalization programs should be individualized to the specific context, Kruglanski's 3N model may offer a useful framework to build upon.

These common components of disengagement and deradicalization programs that have demonstrated some level of success include:

- **Creating a sense of hope and purpose.** Disengagement and deradicalization programs that have had some level of success often incorporate components focused on creating a sense of hope and purpose among individuals involved in the program. Bloom (2019) and Alloush (2019) find that disengagement and deradicalization efforts are more likely to succeed when they provide targeted individuals with activities and opportunities that stimulate feelings of hope and purpose—whether this is accomplished through providing educational or training opportunities, economic or employment opportunities, mentorship, counseling, or other related initiatives (Alloush, 2019; Bloom, 2019; Kruglanski, 2019). This

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[3] Kruglanski (2019) describes the 3N Model this way: "the **need** underlying radicalization is the need for personal significance. It is served by a cultural **narrative** that identifies violence and self-sacrifice for the group as the road to significance, and it is supported by a social **network** that validates the narrative and dispenses rewards in the form of respect and admiration to those who launch violence as recommended in the narrative. Deradicalization identifies alternative ways of gaining personal significance through good works and constructive contributions to society. Religious clerics who preach moderation could provide the right narrative for deradicalization, similarly families (that are moderate) could provide the supportive network for moderation. Deradicalization and counter radicalization can be accomplished but they require a whole society effort to address the 3Ns of radicalization."

aligns with the *need* element of Kruglanski's 3N model in that it helps individuals identify alternative ways of gaining personal significance, for example, through constructive contributions to society.

- **Creating a sense of community.** Disengagement and deradicalization programs that have had some levels of success have generally incorporated components focused on creating a sense of community and providing support networks for individuals enrolled in the program (Moghaddam, 2019; Kruglanski, 2019; Bloom, 2019). In some cases, this meant mobilizing parents and creating parental network groups, particularly in support of younger individuals. In other cases, the focus was on providing alternative friendship networks, exposure to new communities, or mentorship opportunities. Creating a sense of community other than one centered on violent extremism aligns with the *network* and *narrative* elements of Kruglanski's 3N model in that it helps individuals establish new, more moderate support networks that can provide more moderate narratives.

- **Providing individual attention and regimented day-to-day schedules.** Providing close, individual attention, facilitating one-on-one relationships, and ensuring that individuals are kept busy within regimented daily schedules also emerged as a common component of disengagement and deradicalization programs that have had some levels of success (Bloom, 2019; Porges & Stern, 2010). Individualized attention and well-structured daily schedules aligns with all three elements of Kruglanski's 3N model; it helps guide individuals toward alternative ways of gaining personal significance, and helps them establish new, more moderate support networks that can provide more moderate narratives.

- **Providing sustainable, long-term commitment following completion of the program (i.e., after-care).** Disengagement and deradicalization programs that have had some level of success have generally provided after-care and support for individuals beyond completion of the program (Porges & Stern, 2010; RAN, 2019; Johnston, 2009). This can include a host of initiatives, including ensuring economic or employment opportunities, community engagement and outreach, mentorship, counseling, and other related activities focused on ensuring the sustained disengagement and deradicalization of an individual. Here again, this component aligns with all three elements of Kruglanski's 3N model.

Assessing the Impact of Environmental Factors on Success of Programs

As part of this analysis, several environmental factors (type of radicalization, type of governing system, political environment, level of military defeat for those radicalized) were explored against the case study dataset in an attempt to assess whether there are any commonalities associated with successful disengagement and deradicalization initiatives that might provide some initial insights for further study. Ultimately, it appears unclear as to whether any of the environmental conditions explored have any real or significant impact on whether or not disengagement and deradicalization efforts demonstrate success. There is little difference between the coded success of the cases based on environmental condition, though it is important to note that this may be, in part, due to limitations of the dataset. Nevertheless, the results are presented below.

Does the Type of Radicalization (i.e., Political Radicalization vs. Religious Radicalization) Impact Success?

Of the 23 disengagement and deradicalization programs explored that could be coded for success, ten targeted political radicalization, eleven targeted religious radicalization, and two targeted both political and religious radicalization. Of the ten programs focused on political radicalization, seven were generally successful (70%), one was generally unsuccessful (10%), and two had mixed success (20%). Similarly, of the eleven programs focused on religious radicalization, seven were generally successful (63%), two were generally unsuccessful (18%), and two had mixed success (18%). Of the two programs focused on both political and religious radicalization, one was generally successful (50%), and one had mixed success (50%). Overall, across the programs examined as part of this analysis, there was little difference between the success levels of those that targeted political radicalization and those that targeted religious radicalization.
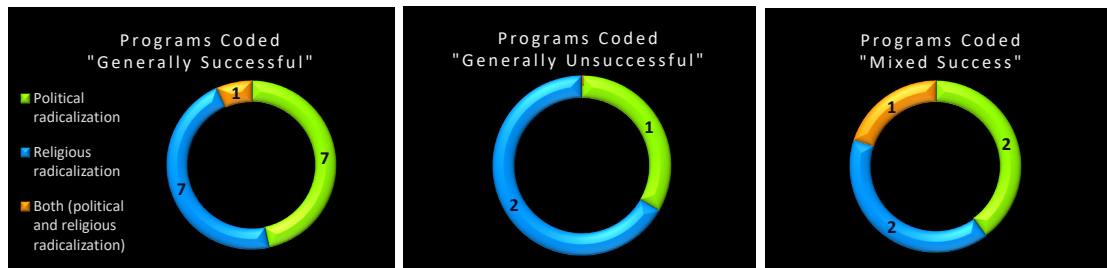
Does the Governing System (i.e., Democratic vs. Non-Democratic) of the State in which the Program is Conducted Impact Success?

Of the 23 disengagement and deradicalization programs explored that could be coded for success, eighteen were conducted under the authority of democratic governments,[4] while four were conducted under the authority of non-democratic governing systems.[5] Of the eighteen programs conducted under democratic governments, thirteen were generally successful (72%), two were generally unsuccessful (11%), and three had mixed success (16%). Of the four programs conducted under non-democratic governing systems, two were generally successful (50%), one was generally unsuccessful (25%), and one had mixed success (25%). Overall, across the programs examined as part of this analysis, while programs conducted under democratic governing systems had somewhat higher levels of success, a majority of cases were classified as generally successful across both governing systems.[6]


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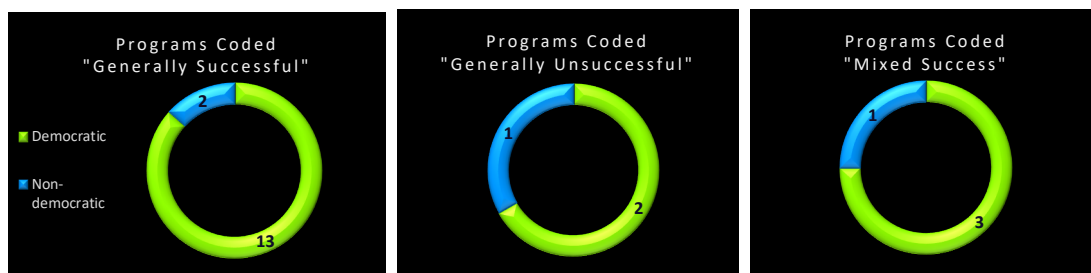
[4] Polity scores from the Center for Systemic Peace were used to aid in coding for governing system.

[5] One program, the de-Nazification program of the 1940s, was classified as conducted under the authority of both democratic and non-democratic systems, as it was conducted by the four separate powers occupying respective territory in Germany, three of which were classified as democratic (the United States, Britain, and France) and one of which was classified as non-democratic (the Soviet Union).

[6] It is also important to note that the majority of cases conducted under non-democratic governing systems in the overall dataset were not able to be evaluated for success due to insufficiently available information, thus limiting what can be gleaned from this comparison.

Does the Political Environment (Post-Conflict Government vs. Non-Post-Conflict Government) of the State in which the Program is Conducted Impact Success?

Of the 23 disengagement and deradicalization programs explored that could be coded for success, six were conducted under the authority of a post-conflict government, while seventeen were conducted under the authority of a non-post-conflict government.[7] Of the six programs conducted under post-conflict governments, three were generally successful (50%), one was generally unsuccessful (16%), and two had mixed success (33%). Of the seventeen programs conducted under non-post conflict governments, twelve were generally successful (70%), two were generally unsuccessful (11%), and three had mixed success (17%). Here again, across the programs examined as part of this analysis, the majority of cases were classified as either generally successful or of mixed success across both political environments.
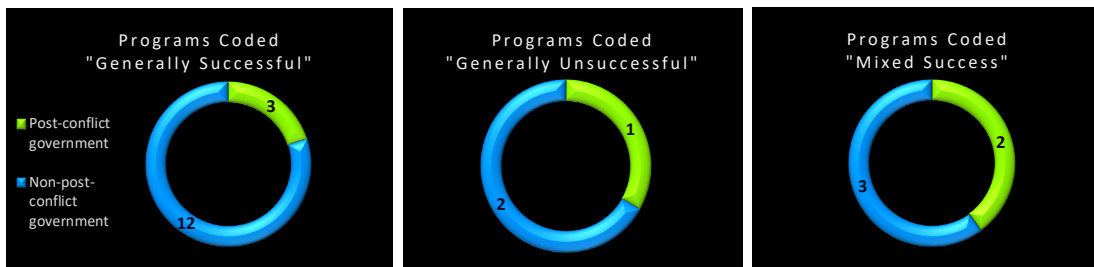
Is Military Defeat a Meaningful Predictor of Successful Disengagement and Deradicalization at the Group Level?

Of the 23 disengagement and deradicalization programs explored that could be coded for success, seven targeted groups that suffered significant military defeat in a recent conflict (e.g., the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka following civil war in the country), whereas sixteen targeted groups that did not necessarily suffer recent and significant military defeat. Of the seven programs that targeted groups that recently suffered significant military defeat, four were generally successful (57%), one was generally unsuccessful (14%), and two had mixed success (28%). Of the sixteen programs that targeted groups that did not recently suffer significant military defeat, eleven were generally successful (68%), two were generally unsuccessful (12%), and three has mixed success (18%). Here again, the majority of cases were classified as generally successful across both programs that targeted recently defeated groups and those that targeted groups that did not suffer such recent defeat.

[7] For the purpose of this analysis, a "post-conflict government" is one that has engaged in kinetic conflict, either internally or externally, within several years of initiation of the program.

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