By John F. Morrison et al.

The Role Of (Dis)Trust In Disengagement And Deradicalisation

WHEN DESIGNING A DISENGAGEMENT OR DERADICALISATION PROGRAMME, WHO DELIVERS IT AND HOW MUCH THEY ARE TRUSTED NEEDS CAREFUL CONSIDERATION.

"Perhaps a useful starting point for what follows is the assumption that terrorists are ordinary people to the extent that they are not distinguishable from other 'ordinary' people who make choices in the contexts in which they find themselves."[1]

By treating the psychological normality of terrorist actors as our starting point we must, therefore, apply our external understanding of ordinary, non-terrorist decision-making processes to this population. Included in this should also be a consideration of the roles which trust and distrust play.

> **Trust has a role to play at each stage of the terrorist career, from initial involvement to sustained engagement, right through to disengagement and deradicalisation.**

It has been proposed that the dichotomous variable of (dis)trust can and does play a significant role in the psychology of terrorism. Trust has a role to play at each stage of the terrorist career, from initial involvement to sustained engagement, right through to disengagement and deradicalisation.[2] There have been a variety of forms of trust identified. This has included, among others:

ABSTRACT TRUST:

Trust in a system or principle (e.g. trust in democracy or trust in an ideology used to justify terrorist activity).

FUNCTIONAL TRUST:

Trust in a practical relationship with others (e.g. trust in an employee to do their job or trust in a terrorist organisation to successfully complete an attack).

PERSONAL TRUST:

Trust in others that exceeds functionality and concerns the quality and nature of the personal relationship between individuals (e.g. trust in a friend or trust in a terrorist comrade).

Each of these forms of trust can play a role in an individual's involvement in terrorism. When we look specifically at the role which (dis)trust has played in relation to disengagement and deradicalisation, we can see that a deterioration in the functional and personal trust in the leadership and rank and file membership of

1 Taylor, M., & Horgan, J. (2006). A conceptual framework for addressing psychological process in the development of the terrorist. Terrorism and political violence, 18(4), 585–601.
2 Morrison, J. F. (2017). The trustworthy terrorist: The role of trust in the psychology of terrorism. In Victims and Perpetrators of Terrorism (pp. 133–148). Routledge.



the terrorist organisation can play a significant role in pushing an individual away from terrorism.

If members do not trust their comrades enough to collaborate with them, this can play a significant part in pushing them outside of the groups. Similarly, if there is elevated trust in those external actors and institutions external from the terrorist group and opposed to the utilisation of terrorist violence, this can assist in the facilitation of an exit from terrorism. Alongside this, if there is a dissipation in abstract trust of an ideology there can be clear opportunities for both disengagement and deradicalisation. This is present in relation to both programme-based and natural exit from terrorism.

In their 2015 assessment of the disengagement and deradicalisation literature, Gill, Bouhana, and Morrison[3] identified 13 core reasons for disengagement. Of these, eight factors can be directly linked to the dichotomous theme of [dis]trust, namely:

- Mistreatment
- Ideological differences
- Differences in tactical preferences
- Differences in strategic preferences
- Disillusionment with group hypocrisy
- Unmet expectations
- Cognitive dissonance
- Loss of social support

We can see that these factors are linked to a deterioration in abstract, functional, and personal trust. Those who have differences in tactical or strategic preferences or have witnessed a loss in social support may no longer trust the terrorist organisation to achieve its end goals, and thus have a deterioration in functional trust.

There may be a deterioration in personal trust if the individual is the victim of, or witnesses, mistreatment at the hands of the leadership or rank and file membership. This may also decline if there is perceived group hypocrisy, as those who have ideological differences or have experienced cognitive dissonance through their

3 Gill, P., Bouhana, N., & Morrison, J. (2015). Individual disengagement from terrorism. Sage.

sympathetic treatment by those with the security forces, may experience a deterioration in abstract trust.

TRUST AS A FILTER

Within the systematic review of the disengagement and deradicalisation literature (dis)trust was identified as playing a key filtering role in the disengagement and deradicalisation decision-making processes. It was found that the opportunities to leave a terrorist organisation are more likely to be successful when they are offered by an individual, organisation, or entity that is perceived by the would-be defector as being trustworthy. The same opportunity provided by a distrusted or less trusted entity is significantly less likely to lead to an organisational exit.

> **With the state viewed by terrorists as the enemy, a purely state-sponsored initiative will find significant difficulties in achieving the trust necessary to succeed.**

Trust is most important at the initial stages of disengagement. However, if one is to have a sustained exit, these and other trusting relationships must be maintained.

Connected to this is the role of distrust. When one becomes disillusioned with the membership and/or leadership of the terrorist organisation this can lead to heightened levels of distrust, which, in turn, can be a push factor driving an individual out of the group.

What was presented in the review already largely shows how the deterioration in trust within the terrorist organisation can push a person towards their exit. However, similarly positive trusting relationships with those external from the movement can have the positive effect of pulling a person out of the extremist organisation.

TRUST AND PROGRAMMES

Considering all of this, when establishing a disengagement or deradicalisation programme, paying attention to who would deliver such a programme is as important as the content of the programme, potentially even more important. Furthermore, the local context is key when deciding on who is best placed to lead and deliver the programme.[4]

Knowing who is most trusted and distrusted and by who is essential knowledge in the design stage of any successful programme. This must be constantly reviewed and reassessed throughout the delivery of the programme, as the trusted actors and institutions can and do change.

If those running the programmes are trusted, there is more likely to be a positive attitude towards the programme. This positive attitude, shaped by social relations and personal trust, has been found to be a key predictor in the ultimate success of the programme[5] and has been proposed as a prerequisite to any effective analysis of any individual going through a disengagement, deradicalisation, or reintegration programme.[6] Without that trust, an individual's engagement in the extremist lifestyle may be further prolonged.

4 Weeks, D. (2018). Doing derad: an analysis of the UK system. Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, 41(7), 523–540.
5 Milla, M. N., Hudiyana, J., & Arifin, H. H. (2020). Attitude toward rehabilitation as a key predictor for adopting alternative identities in deradicalization programs: An investigation of terrorist detainees' profiles. Asian Journal of Social Psychology, 23(1), 15–28.
6 Van der Heide, L., & Schuurman, B. (2018). Reintegrating terrorists in the Netherlands: Evaluating the Dutch approach. Journal for Deradicalization, (17), 196–239.

A lack of trust is a particular issue when designing state-sponsored CVE or reintegration initiatives. This can be elevated by any perceived lack of transparency in relation to partnerships.[7] With the state viewed by terrorists as the enemy, a purely state-sponsored initiative will find significant difficulties in achieving the trust necessary to succeed.[8] Therefore, NGOs may, at times, be best placed to succeed in any disengagement or deradicalisation initiative, as their status is not inherently tied to the political establishment that many of those disengaging will have been fighting against, potentially, for years.

It is the trust which NGOs can garner, due to their ostensible independence, that provides the opportunity for former extremists to be open to the external actors assisting in their exit – this is most pertinent during the initial stages of physical disengagement when they take the crucial step of trusting an organisation to assist in their transition to a new life. However, if this trust was to be questioned at a later stage in this process there is still the possibility of it negatively affecting the continuation of the disengagement process.

FORMERS

One may naturally consider formers acting as mentors as being among the most trusted. However, a former extremist does not intrinsically bolster an individual's credibility or trustworthiness, as these mentors must often retain the perception of independence from the state in the eyes of their mentees.[9] This is in parallel to maintaining the trust of any existing state sponsors, which can be a difficult balancing act, as by accepting governmental funding, a mentor's credibility can be undermined. Therefore, to be effective, these mentors must be given the freedom to demonstrate some level of independence from state-run organisations where it is possible, safe, and ethical.

IN SUMMARY

When designing a disengagement or deradicalisation programme, there needs to be careful consideration of the organisation and/or individual(s) delivering the programme and how much they are trusted or distrusted by the individuals and communities the programme is designed for. The trusted individuals and organisations will potentially differ by location, therefore, there needs to also be the requisite local knowledge when designing and implementing the programmes, and time spent developing the trust which will enable the successful application of the programme(s).

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7 Grossman, M., & Barolsky, V. (2019). Reintegrating children, women and families returning to Australia from foreign conflict zones: The role of community support; Weeks, D. (2018). Doing derad: an analysis of the UK system. Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, 41(7), 523–540.
8 Christensen, T. W. (2020). Civil actors' role in deradicalisation and disengagement initiatives: When trust is essential. In Routledge Handbook of Deradicalisation and Disengagement (pp. 143–155). Routledge.
9 Weeks, D. (2018). Doing derad: an analysis of the UK system. Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, 41(7), 523–540.



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