
Individual Disengagement and Deradicalization Pilot Program in Turkey: Methods and Outcomes

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Abstract

Counterterrorism strategies that mainly rely on hard power have long been used to defeat terrorism. In recent years, governments have begun incorporating soft power approaches not as a substitute, but as a complementary strategy to be applied alongside hard power approaches. Disengagement and deradicalization programs are important components of soft power approaches, and are regarded as significant contributors to traditional counterterrorism methods. In this paper, we analyze a locally developed counterterrorism program in Turkey, which resulted in the disengagement and deradicalization of hundreds of militants.

In this paper we present an examination of a pilot program that focused on applying individual disengagement and deradicalization counterterrorism measures that was conducted by the Adana Police Department in Turkey between 2009 and 2015. This program was designed to reach out to the members of extremist groups and their families for the purpose of persuading them to disengage from their groups, change their radical mindsets, and help them reintegrate into society. We also discuss how the change in the government's counterterrorism strategy from one which prioritizes the use of soft power approaches to another, which mostly utilizes the hard power approach, and almost completely discards the soft power method, influenced the implementation of the program.

Keywords:

Individual disengagement, individual deradicalization, terrorist rehabilitation, counterterrorism

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Individual Deradicalization and Disengagement

Deradicalization refers to “the process of abandoning an extremist worldview and concluding that it is not acceptable to use violence to effect social change” (Rabasa, Pettyjohn, Ghez, & Boucek, 2010, p. 1). In short, it is a change in values and attitudes (Gjelsvik & Bjorgo, 2012). It can be described as the opposite of radicalization (Demant, Slooman, Buijs, & Tillie, 2008). Therefore, it is a process of renouncing radical thoughts. Ashour (2009) defines it as delegitimizing the use of violence for political goals, and moving forward to a worldview that promotes social change through social, political, or economic channels, rather than utilizing violence.

Radicalization is a gradual process individuals go through, consisting of various phases, and ultimately the adoption of a worldview which justifies the use of violence (see Borum, 2003; Moghaddam, 2005). Demant et al. (2008) argued that the motivations that drive the process of radicalization should be well-understood in order to reverse the process. They added that deradicalization takes place when an individual’s motivations are no longer consistent with the group’s ideology. They further claimed that people’s view of violence that they have when they first join an extremist group may change over time. That view can mature from a romantic image to a more realistic one, when they encounter actual violence (Demant et al., 2008).

Although some scholars see disengagement as a form of deradicalization (see Demant et al., 2008), these two strategies are usually regarded as different processes. While deradicalization is a shift from an ideology, which justifies the use of violence, to a new belief system, which embrace mainstream values, disengagement is simply a withdrawal from an extremist group (Rabasa et al., 2010). Although these two concepts are closely linked, one does not necessarily generate the other (Horgan, 2009). They may unfold in different sequences, or one can occur without the other (Gjelsvik & Bjorgo, 2012). Reinares (2011) claimed that disengagement is not necessarily an indicator of deradicalization. Accordingly, an individual who disengaged from a terrorist organization can keep his or her radical views. Clubb (2009) describes the situation in which the disengagement depends on receiving something in return, and is not accompanied by deradicalization as “conditional disengagement”. Those who disengage from an extremist group as a result of expecting a benefit from the disengagement program usually carry a risk of re-engagement, because they

may return to their former group when their cost-benefit calculus undergoes a change (Hoeft, 2015). As Schmid (2013) points out, disengagement often occurs without deradicalization. However, scholars also argue that deradicalization can bring about disengagement. For instance, Demant et al. (2008) suggest that renouncing a radical ideology can result in the cessation of radical actions. Thus, deradicalization is expected to induce disengagement. Some scholars believe that a militant should first be disengaged from the extremist group in order to be deradicalized. In this vein, Hoeft (2015) regarded disengagement as a necessary prerequisite for deradicalization.

Rabasa et al. (2010) identified three types of commitment to a group: affective, pragmatic, and ideological³. They argued that while affective commitment is an emotional attachment to the group, pragmatic commitment is related to those factors that encourage an individual to stay in the group, such as material rewards, and the factors that discourage them from disengaging, such as punishment. Ideological commitment, on the other hand, refers to the ideological components that justify the group members' behaviors and beliefs, and is based on the ideology of the group. The degree of commitment to a group that has been made by an individual is a key factor that determines the likelihood of disengagement (Rabasa et al., 2010). Disengagement occurs when one loses one's attachments with the organization. According to Demant et al. (2008), disappointing experiences with the group may decrease the emotional attachment that an individual have with the group. They added that people's ideological attachment may wane when they begin to doubt the ideology of the group. Finally, finding a better alternative can help to break the pragmatic attachments and to provide a basis for disengagement (Demant et al., 2008).

According to Horgan (Tore Bjorgo & Horgan, 2009), disengagement can result from an disillusionment either arising from a disagreement over the ideology, or the tactics of the group, or arising from a mismatch between the expectations of a party and the realities. It can also occur due to a change in personal priorities (Horgan, 2009). Hwang (2015) added that pressure from parents, humane treatment by the police, cost-benefit calculations, feeling remorse and experiencing disappointments can also lead to disengagement. Bjorgo (Tore Bjorgo, 2009), distinguishes push and pull factors that influence one's decision about leaving

³ In a similar vein, Klandermans (1997) describes three type of commitments: affective, continuance, and normative.

a group. While the term ‘push factors’ refers to those negative factors that make staying in a group unattractive, pull factors refers to those factors that encourage an individual to leave a group by providing them with a better alternative social environment (Bjorgo, 2009). Bjorgo (2009) identifies negative social sanctions, losing faith or confidence in the group, changes in views regarding the use of violence, disillusionment with the group, and getting exhausted as push factors, and a desire for a ‘normal life’ and a professional career, and establishing a family as examples of pull factors. He also identified some factors that make disengagement difficult. A fear of punishment from the group or from the criminal justice system, a loss of protection against the enemies of the group, a lack of bonding with family, friends or the society, and negative stigmatization that will prevent integration into the society or finding an employment situation complicates the decision to disengage (Bjorgo, 2009).

Dalgaard-Nielsen’s (2013) review of sixteen published studies on disengagement revealed three main reasons for taking the decision to exit from violent extremist groups. The first reason is losing faith in the group’s ideology. Losing faith can be a gradual process, however it can also occur suddenly as a result of a dramatic event (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2013). The second reason is group and leadership failure. As with the first reason, disillusionment with the group or the leader can either be a gradual process, or occur as a result of a single experience, such as an ill treatment by the group leader (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2013). The first two reasons are similar to the push factors that were identified by Bjorgo (2009). However, the third reason, “personal and practical circumstances”, includes both push and pull factors such as feelings of guilty, growing older, getting exhausted and longing for a normal life (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2013).

Developing an Effective Disengagement/Deradicalization Program

Horgan and Braddock (2010) studied the challenges in assessing the effectiveness of deradicalization and disengagement programs, and concluded that there are major barriers to evaluating those programs. They argued that there is a lack of explicit criteria for success for the programs, and a lack of reliable data. However, scholars suggested various criteria for those programs to be successful. For instance, it is argued that taking action for disengagement in the early stages is more likely to produce positive results (Rabasa et al., 2010). As mentioned, labeling an individual as a radical can discourage his/her

disengagement. The duration that one spends in an extremist group may increase the likelihood of stigmatization. Additionally, a long term attachment to an extremist group may reduce the strength of the individual's social bonds with the larger society. As a result, the duration of any association in an extremist group may incrementally decrease the willingness of the individual towards disengagement, thereby it can be argued that an intervention in the early stages of this type of engagement will be more effective than a later staged intervention.

Rabasa et al. (2010) argued that implementing counterterrorism measures can make the process of disengagement more attractive, since it increases the cost of staying in the organization. However, they also emphasized that hard measures should be accompanied by soft measures in order to prevent a backfiring effect and further radicalization as a reaction to the hard measures. It is possible to combine these two measures. When law enforcement personnel carry out a counter-terrorism intervention that culminates in an arrest, this creates an opportunity for the law enforcement personnel to negotiate with the members of the extremist group. The conditions the extremists find themselves in, forces them to choose between compromising with the law enforcement officers and taking the risk of going to jail. Thus, it is important to keep in mind that it is beneficial to encourage individuals to participate in a deradicalization program, especially when they are in a situation where they tend to weigh the costs and benefits of leaving the organization (Rabasa et al., 2010). As mentioned above, the militant's arrest clearly provides an opportune time for law enforcement officers and others to carry out an intervention to persuade that individual to leave the organization, since it is a traumatic event and may create a cognitive opening (Rabasa et al., 2010). Bjorgo and Horgan (2009) suggest that after a member of an extremist group is arrested, rehabilitation programs can offer an option to that individual to take part in such a program, as an amnesty. Legislative measures that allow non-punishment, reducing sentences, or non-application of aggravating circumstances can play a role in disengagement efforts by encouraging militants to collaborate with the authorities, as these measures reduce the costs of leaving the extremist groups (della Porta, 2009).

As mentioned, three types of commitment to a group (affective, pragmatic, and ideological commitments) have been identified in the literature. A disengagement/deradicalization program is more likely to succeed when it breaks all three types of commitments (Rabasa et al., 2010). The benefits of leaving the group should

overweigh those of remaining in the group in order to sever the pragmatic attachment. Thus, the program needs to address the reintegration of those who disengage from an extremist group. Another aspect of the program should be winning the hearts of those individuals who have an emotional attachment to the group. Families can play a role in developing alternative emotional attachments. Accordingly, families should also be a part of the disengagement/deradicalization programs. As Rabasa et al. (2010) stated, terrorist organizations offer assistance to the families of their members, hence, a deradicalization program should also address the needs of the families. Humane treatment by the police can also contribute to helping to break an emotional attachment.

Mentioned concerns were related to disengagement. However, a complete rehabilitation program should not focus solely on disengaging individuals from extremist groups, but also on changing their radical ideologies. For Bjorgo and Horgan (2009), disengagement is more important than deradicalization and therefore, an effective rehabilitation program should address the process of changing the behaviors firstly, and the ideologies, secondly. However, Rabasa et al. (2010) argued that a rehabilitation program that simply promotes a change in behavior is not likely to be a successful one; rather, it should go beyond it and trigger a change in an individual's beliefs. Focusing on disengagement may be easier than deradicalization, however, an individual that disengages from a terrorist organization without changing his or her ideology may return to terrorism again if conditions change (Rabasa et al., 2010). Thus, designing and developing a program that aims at both disengagement and deradicalization can be more productive in the long term than a program that restricts itself to breaking one's attachment with the extremist group.

Deradicalization is a reversal of the radicalization process (Della Porta & LaFree, 2012). Therefore, a rehabilitation program should carefully-assess the radicalization process of the targeted individuals and then develop a program that can reverse the course. For this purpose, it is important to take into consideration the dissimilarities between different types of extremist groups. Bjorgo (2011) points out that such programs should be designed in a way that are tailored to specifics of extremist groups. Researchers have thus described different methods for disengagement that are unique to each type of group. For instance, Rabasa et al. (2010) distinguish Islamist extremists from the members of other extremist groups in terms of their willingness to abandon their radical ideologies, because it is rooted in their religion and

they believe that it is a religious obligation. They concluded that a deradicalization program targeting Islamist extremists should include the teaching of peaceful Islam which condemns terrorism, so that it can convince those radicals that renouncing extremism is not renouncing their faith. Examining various disengagement and deradicalization initiatives also reveals different approaches when treating militants from different types of extremist groups. For instance, while South East Asian and Middle Eastern programs focus on ideological and theological reeducation, European programs focus more on reintegration, and place emphasis on social and economic assistance in connection with disengagement (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2013).

Kruglanski et al. (2014) distinguished two types of deradicalization attempt targeted Islamic extremists: explicit and implicit. The explicit deradicalization attempt aims at changing their mindset and usually carried out by Muslim clerics, who teach detainees moderate Islam and correct their interpretation of the holy book. Implicit deradicalization attempts, on the other hand, aim at facilitating the reintegration of the detainees into society. These types can also be applied to other terrorist groups. For instance, opinion leaders of the same race can play a role in changing the ideology of nationalist extremists. The core idea at the heart of a deradicalization program is that it triggers both a cognitive opening and helps them to reintegrate into society. On one side of the deradicalization effort, there should be an attempt to shift the radical mindset, and on the other side of the effort, there should be a social and economic counseling program. Rabasa et al. (2010) underscored the fact that in order to be an effective deradicalization program, the program should address the needs of rehabilitated individuals, and provide an opportunity for continued counseling. In deciding to leave the group, as mentioned above, individuals weigh the costs and benefits in an effort to decide whether it is a good idea or not to leave their group. When they believe that they can overcome the obstacles that occur during their reintegration into the society, they are more likely risk leaving the group. Thus, helping those individuals in multiple aspects of life to achieve a healthy integration can increase the effectiveness of both disengagement and deradicalization efforts.

Methodology

The data for this study was obtained from the Adana Police Department. One of the writers of this paper (U. K. Evlek) was a member of the program team. For this study, we were not allowed to use individual level data. Since we were not able to provide demographic information about the program participants, we could only provide general statistics including the number of militants from each type of extremist group and their families that were reached under the program, the number of program participants who disengaged from their groups, and the number of families who did or did not support the program. The dataset employed covered the year 2012 only. Thus, the results below reflect the outcomes that were achieved only in this one year. During the implementation phase of the program, the program team conducted an evaluation of the program, but the results were not documented in a publicly accessible manner⁴.

In this report, we provide a general description of the program by identifying its key features and the steps involved in the disengagement process. We report and discuss the outcomes of the program, and compare the results between each type of extremist organization. We also discuss the general counterterrorism framework in Turkey, how this studied program fit with Turkey's counterterrorism policies, and how political turmoil and dramatic shifts in counterterrorism policies in Turkey had an influence over this and other CVE programs.

Terrorism and Counterterrorism in Turkey

Traditionally, there are three major terrorist groups in Turkey: Marxist-Leninist, Kurdish separatist, and radical Islamist terrorist groups. Marxist-Leninist groups, which seek to establish a Marxist regime in Turkey, were predominant in 1970s and 1980s. Although there are still active leftist groups in Turkey, they mostly lost their power after the Cold War ended (Sozen, 2006).

The Kurdistan Workers' Party (known as the PKK), is the leading terrorist group fighting for the foundation of an independent Kurdish state in the southeastern part of Turkey, and has long been the main threat to Turkey's national security. After the leader and the founder of the PKK, Abdullah Ocalan, was captured by Turkish forces in 1999, the terrorist organization

⁴ Some of the results of the program were previously reported in the author's (U. K. Evlek) Master's Thesis.

abandoned its initial strategy, which was aimed at establishing an independent Kurdish state, and adopted a new strategy that prioritized the recognition of the Kurdish identity and having equal rights (Yilmaz, 2011). However, the group did not stop carrying out terrorist attacks against Turkish security forces until a cease-fire agreement was achieved in 2013. The peace process (a.k.a. the solution process) enacted between the Turkish government and the PKK after that did not last long. The truce between the parties has always been fragile, and real progress towards peace has never been accomplished (Waldman & Caliskan, 2015). In 2015, the so-called peace process ceased to exist, and another era of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict began. In this new era, the Turkish government shifted its counterterrorism strategy against the PKK, which they had employed during the peace process, from a soft power approach to waging a full scale war, which is led mostly by the army and police special operation units. The main factor that has influenced the peace process has been the state of affairs in Syria. After the civil war in Syria broke out in 2011, the Turkish government adopted a strong position against the Assad regime, and supported opposition groups to oust Assad. PYD, the PKK affiliated Kurdish group in Syria, somehow took sides with the Assad regime after the Syrian civil war began. The Syrian regime forces left the Kurdish dominated Syrian border zone with Turkey to the PYD (Hinnebusch, 2015). Since Syria hosted PKK militants, including Abdullah Ocalan, for a long time within its territories, the Turkish government was afraid of the influence that Assad would have over the PKK. To prevent a PKK-affiliated Kurdish zone on the Turkish-Syrian border, Turkish authorities incited jihadist groups to organize attacks against the PYD (Uslu, 2016). When ISIS attacked the Kurdish populated areas on the border, the PKK leaders blamed the Turkish government for supporting jihadist groups (Uslu, 2016), and this initiated waves of protests in Turkey (Dalay, 2015). Consequently, both sides of the peace agreement lost their trust with each other, and the already fragile truce was completely broken.

The emergence of radical Islamist terrorist groups in Turkey occurred mostly after the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979 (Caglar, 2006). The early Islamist groups in Turkey were domestic rather than transnational. However, after 9/11, transnational Islamist terrorist groups, such as al-Qaeda, gained momentum and found sympathizers in Turkey. The first large scale al-Qaeda perpetrated terrorist attack in Europe took place in Turkey, and resulted in 57 casualties and hundreds of wounded (Uslu, 2016). Turkey supported the US led global

war on terrorism, and conducted an effective counterterrorism strategy against the radical Islamist terrorist network until 2012 (Uslu, 2016). As mentioned, Turkey took a position against the Assad regime, after the start of the Syrian civil war. Consequently, the government has turned a blind eye to radical Islamist groups, and does not pursue a set of effective counterterrorism policies against them, as they are fighting against Assad. Turkey's foreign policy choices have made her both a source and transit country for the Islamic State in Iraq and Sham (ISIS) as a result. According to Uslu (2016), Turkey's direct and indirect support for jihadists has turned the country into a "jihadi highway".

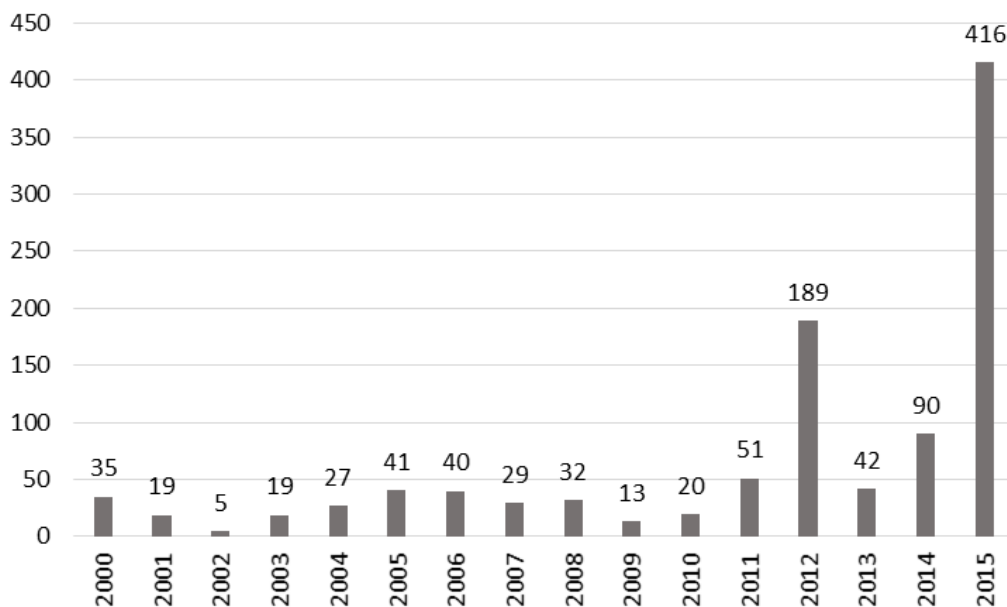


Figure 1. Number of terrorist attacks in Turkey, 2000-2015

Data: Global Terrorism Database (START, 2016)

Figure 1 shows the number of terrorist attacks in Turkey between 2000 and 2015. As the data revealed, the numbers of terrorist incidents increased remarkably after the Syrian civil war began. The numbers went down in 2013 compared to 2012, when Turkey reached a peace agreement with PKK. The number of incidents increased enormously in 2015 due to the end of the peace agreement, and the course of events in Syria. Turkey's miscalculation regarding the power balances in Syria got the country stuck in a very difficult position. Turkey now faces a real homegrown terrorism threat emanating from those citizens who were recruited

and trained by ISIS. Turkey has already become a target of a number of ISIS terrorist attacks. Besides that, the country missed the opportunity to end the decades-long Turkish-Kurdish conflict. The ruling party in Turkey, the AKP, and the President Erdogan were unable to oust the Assad regime, despite all their efforts. To sum up, it can be argued that Turkey's counterterrorism policy is not stable, rather it is periodic in character. Particularly in recent years, it is almost in a constant state of change. Those policy changes negatively impact the strategies that the law enforcement agencies implement in their jurisdictions. For instance, many police departments had to stop counterterrorism operations against the PKK, after the government forged a peace agreement with the group. Similarly, they had to suspend deradicalization and rehabilitation programs, after the agreement was broken.

The Pilot Program

Overview of the Program

The Disengagement and Deradicalization Pilot Program was developed in 2009 as an effort to disengage individuals from terrorist organizations, shift their radical ideologies, and reintegrate them into the society by counseling, helping in obtaining a job, and receiving healthcare, housing, and education. The program was first designed by the Adana Police Department (APD) in 2009. When the program started producing positive results, and gained attention, other police departments began developing similar programs, using APD's program as a template. Those programs have mostly been conducted by police intelligence and counterterrorism units.

The studied program targeted individuals who joined the activities of left wing, faith-based or nationalist/separatist extremist groups. The program was a part of a broader countering violent extremism program conducted by the Adana Police Department (APD) and was supported by the National Directorate of Security. Police, local officials, and community leaders are involved in the program and are used as interlocutors. The city where the pilot program was implemented, Adana, is one of the largest cities in Turkey with a population of more than two million citizens.

The program was part of a broader counterterrorism strategy, which underscored the importance of employing both soft and hard approaches simultaneously in the combat against terrorism. On the one side of the counterterrorism strategy, law enforcement worked to win

the hearts and minds of the militants with the help of other local institutions; and on the other side, they used hard power against those who did not disengage from the extremist groups despite all of the efforts carried out when using soft power. The disengagement and deradicalization program represented the soft power approach.

There are several deradicalization programs instituted by states that aim at rehabilitating terrorism suspects in detention facilities (Kruglanski et al., 2014). The APD's disengagement and deradicalization pilot program reaches out to suspected individuals not only in detention facilities or in prisons, but also at the early stages of their engagement. The program begins by informing and counseling individuals when they first show any inclination towards extremist groups. As mentioned, radicalization is a process: individuals go through, and consists of different stages and those who arrive the final stage become radicalized potential terrorist. NYPD's radicalization model (Silber & Bhatt, 2007) identified pre-radicalization, and self-identification stages of radicalization. In these early stages, individuals are seeking a new identity, and they begin associated themselves with like-minded individuals. Wiktorowicz' 2004 study found that those who engaged with al-Muhajiroun, a jihadist organization, experienced an identity crisis before their engagement (Wiktorowicz, 2004). There may be some visible signs of inclinations towards radicalization. Those signs can include approaching members of the extremist groups, or joining legal activities or demonstrations that are carried out by these groups to seek for a new identity. The next step would be the indoctrination stage, as identified by Silber and Bhatt (2007), in which they begin adopting radical ideologies. APD's pilot program firstly detects those individuals who arrive this stage⁵. Police intelligence units closely monitor the activities of the extremist groups, and easily detect new recruits. Those new recruits may have never been involved in any illegal or terrorist activities. The first step of the program is to get in contact with those individuals who have recently joined the extremist group. Program officers get in contact with those individuals usually by phone, and inform them that they are at risk of being radicalized and drawn into terrorist activities. They are advised that if they continue to be a member of that group, they are more likely to engage in criminal or terrorist activity and most probably go to jail sooner or later. Furthermore, they are asked to meet with program officers either in the police department or

⁵ APD also aims at preventing those individuals at earlier stages from being engaged in extremist groups. However, it is beyond the scope of the disengagement program and of this paper.

in another safe place that is convenient for them. At this stage they are also informed that if they choose to leave the group, they will be entered into a rehabilitation program in which they will be provided with both material and nonmaterial supports. If they choose not to leave the group, law enforcement personnel may start monitoring those individual more closely, as they are considered potential threats. At the same time, program officers make contact with the parents of these individuals, usually if they are young, and make them aware of their child’s situation. They ask those family members to cooperate with the law enforcement personnel to help their child disengage from the extremist groups.

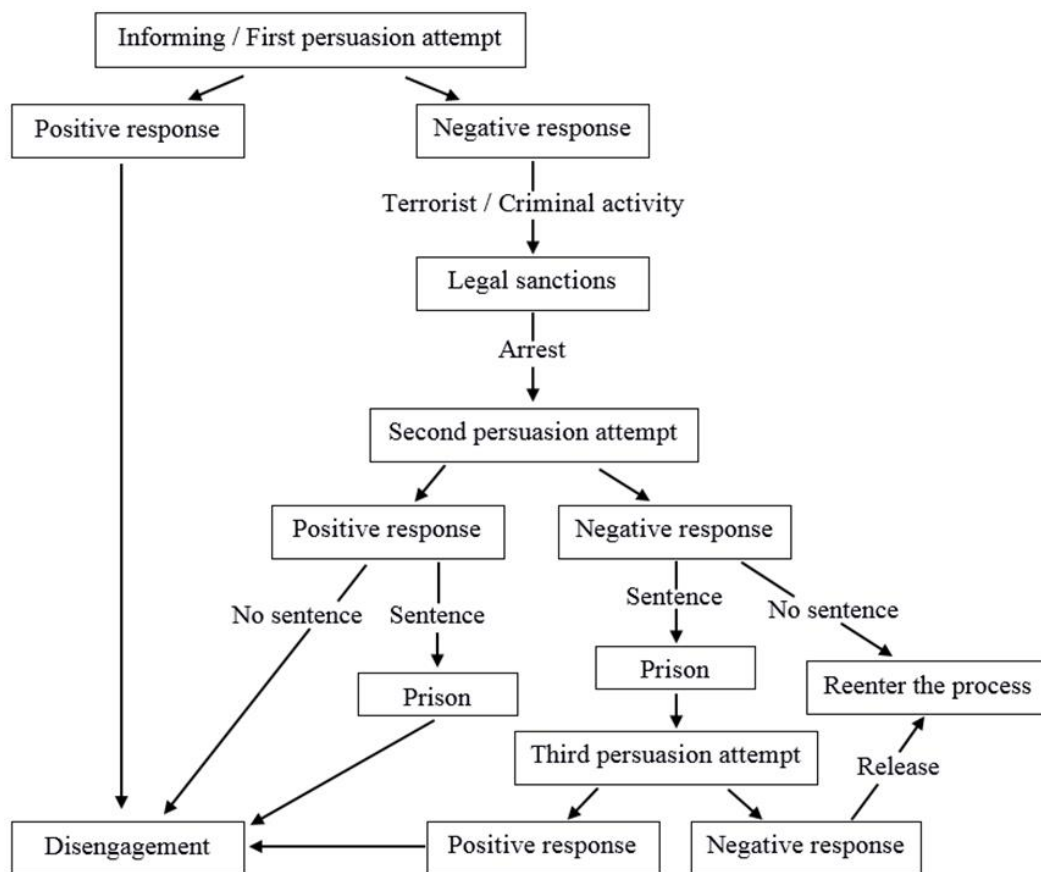


Figure 2. Steps involved in the disengagement processes

The second persuasion attempt usually takes place when militants are under arrest. As mentioned, the situations that they are in force them to make a choice. They are informed that if they compromise with the law enforcement personnel and accept the idea of disengaging

from the group, they will have the opportunity to benefit from an amnesty depending on their situation. Even if they are not included in the scope of an amnesty, they will be more likely to obtain a concession from the prosecutor. They are also informed that besides the benefits resulting from lesser punishment or, in some cases, no punishment, they will also receive some material and nonmaterial supports, including assistance for their families, and social aids. When those individuals who refuse to compromise with law enforcement do not receive a sentence, they are re-entered into the process. If they are sentenced to a prison term, program officers will carry out another persuasion attempt while they are in prison. Again, if they choose to disengage from the group, they are entered into the rehabilitation program.

The officers do not only meet with militants to convince them to disengage from the group, but also meet with their families or those who have an influence over them. Militants often have negative views and prejudices towards government officials. Those who could not be persuaded by officials, can sometimes be persuaded by their families and friends. New young recruits to the extremist groups usually hide their engagement from their parents, as this is generally not approved by them. The officers get in touch with those parents, and inform them that their children are on a dangerous path, and they may face legal sanctions in the future, if they keep moving in the same direction.

By accepting the offer from the law enforcement personnel, militants (hereafter ex-militants) acquire, vocational training, employment, housing, healthcare, social and financial aids, counseling, and psychological support and treatment. They are monitored for six months after they accept the offer to ensure whether they have broken all their attachments with the group, and remain disengaged. During this six-month period, program officers keep in touch with ex-militants to provide them with a range of pledged material and nonmaterial supports. For those who reject the offer to disengage from the extremist group, and continue to be involved in terrorist activities, the hard power approach is implemented.

Deradicalization and disengagement efforts within the program are not necessarily sequential, but are overlapping. During the meetings with militants, interlocutors do not only inform them about the benefits that they can receive if they leave the group, or the costs they have to bear if they remain, but also aim at changing their mindset. It was observed during the implementation of the program that when the interlocutors could win the hearts and minds of the militants, they were viewed as being credible. It is a well-known fact that terrorist

organizations propagandize their members into believing that if they are arrested they will be maltreated or tortured. The humane treatment of the militants induces a cognitive opening. When they feel that the police (and the government) are sincere in helping them, they start questioning their own ideologies.

As mentioned above, reversing the process of radicalization requires a good understanding of the motivations that drive individuals to acquire a violent extremist ideology in the first place. Since each terrorist organization uses different forms of motivation in efforts to recruit and radicalize individuals, the motivations that are used by targeted terrorist groups should be well examined in order to ensure the deradicalization efforts will be successful. For the purpose of deradicalization, this present program aimed to eliminate the motivations that foster radicalization. The program was designed to demotivate individuals from participating in the radicalization process, as well as to motivate them towards deradicalization. The program team had a great level of knowledge about the characteristics of the terrorist groups in the city, and their strategies for motivating their members. They used this knowledge to design specific motivations for deradicalization. A move towards moderation in radical beliefs is also considered a success. In some cases, the program failed to deradicalize militants, but succeeded in alleviating their violent ideologies to a certain degree. This is considered a success, because these individuals are possibly less likely to become involved in a terrorist attack, although they are not completely deradicalized.

The Outcomes

The data showed that the results of the program differed between each type of extremist group. Figure 3 revealed that the program achieved more success in influencing nationalist groups, followed by left-wing groups and faith-based groups, respectively. Program officers met with 333 nationalist militants, and were able to convince 226 of them to disengage from the extremist group they were associated with. It was also observed that 12 militants among those remaining in the group decreased their negative activities. They did not fully disengage from the group, though, but they did reduce their involvement with the group. Meetings between the officers and 74 militants in left-wing organizations resulted in the disengagement of 33 militants from the group. Among the remaining forty-one militants, eight of them lowered their engagement, while ten of them went to jail. It is worth noting that twenty-four

of the militants who decided to disengage from the group were new recruits, and none of the new recruits that met with the officers chose to stay in the group. Although the program was least successful among the members of faith-based groups, it proved its effectiveness even in that type of extremist group. Twenty militants out of forty-eight agreed to leave their group.

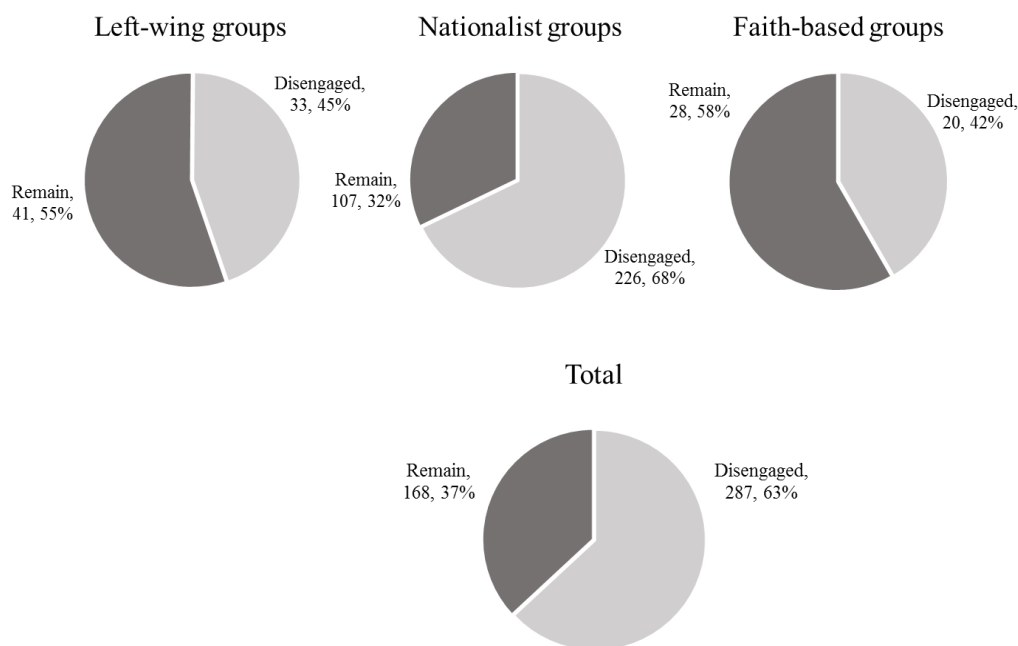


Figure 3. Individuals who disengage vs. those who remain in extremist groups by group type

Program officers also met with the family members of the militants to ask for their support for the disengagement efforts. Figure 4 shows that although the results differed between each type of extremist groups, the majority of the families supported the disengagement efforts. All of the families of the militants that were engaged in left-wing extremist groups, except one, supported the program. The officers met with a considerable number of families of nationalist militants. Out of 326 families, 316 agreed to support the program and help the officers to dissuade their children from remaining in the extremist groups. Families of the militants in faith-based groups were less supportive compared to families of those engaged in other groups. While nineteen families approved the program and assisted in program goals, five families rejected being part of the program.

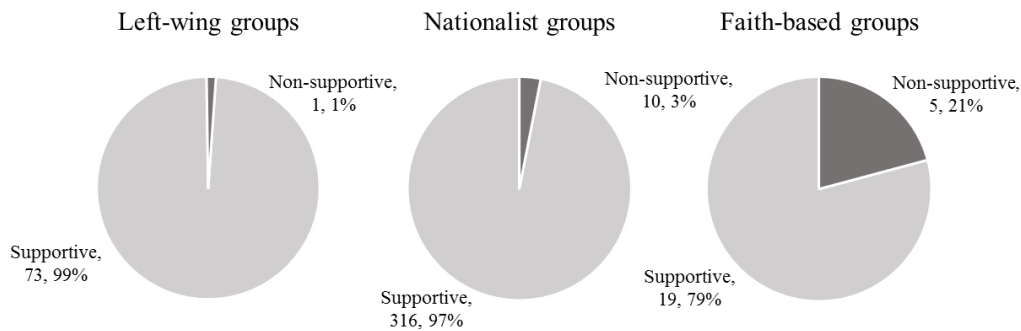


Figure 4. Family support for disengagement efforts by group type

Conclusion

Although policing and security measures are vital in combating terrorism, taking proactive measures are also important in preventing the development of extremist behaviors. Preventing radicalization and the deradicalization of those already radicalized are two essential aspects of proactive counterterrorism strategies. Outcomes of the various disengagement and deradicalization programs that have been implemented in various countries of the world have shown that it is possible to change the behaviors and the beliefs of individuals who have embraced radical ideas, even those who have engaged in terrorist activities.

The studied pilot program encouraged 455 militants in 2012 to disengage from being associated with extremist groups, and impelled them to recant their radical ideologies. The results of the disengagement efforts were encouraging: in that more than sixty percent of the militants with whom program officers met decided to leave the group. The program employed a holistic approach towards disengagement, deradicalization, and reintegration. Although the Adana Police Department led the program, other institutions involved in the program played an important role. This approach seemed to be the driving factor behind the successful implementation of the program.

The program had some limitations. First, there were no clear distinction between what was done for disengagement and what was done for deradicalization. The efforts for these two counterterrorism measures usually overlapped. We did not have a reliable data on the numbers of militants or ex-militants who were de-radicalized.

Second, the program developed a single disengagement approach and applied that approach to different types of extremist groups with small variations. It might be better to

design specific strategies for each type of group. Members of different extremist groups have different motivations. Therefore, demotivating radicals from extremist activities requires an approach that is unique to each type of extremist group. It would be more effective to create different teams for each type of group, and train the team members in accordance with their assigned group type, so that they can be specialized in deradicalization and disengagement for specific extremist groups.

In spite of these limitations, the program was a well-designed counterterrorism effort which resulted in the disengagement and deradicalization of hundreds of militants. When we bear in mind the fact that the program was a pilot program, it will readily be seen that it would have produced more positive results if it could have been consistently supported by the government. The question that comes to mind is: “Why was this successful program terminated?” The answer, in short, is related to the Turkish government’s inconsistent and unstable policies on counterterrorism, which has changed several times over the last few years. In the countries in which the governmental and administrative structure is strongly centralized, domestic and international policies, including counterterrorism policies, are strictly dominated and controlled by the central government. Local governments and institutions are hardly involved in the decision making process, and they face many difficulties when they attempt to develop local counterterrorism strategies. Any change in the government’s counterterrorism policies can directly influence the local efforts. In the second half of 2015, the Turkish government shifted from a counterterrorism approach which merges the use of soft and hard powers, to a new approach which depends mostly on using hard power, especially against a Kurdish nationalist and separatist terrorist organization, called the PKK. After that shift, many local initiatives such as this studied one were suspended, and law enforcement agencies were directed to follow a different strategy against extremist groups.

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