Revisiting the De-Radicalisation or Disengagement Debate: Public Attitudes to the Re-Integration of Terrorists

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Abstract

The article reports on the findings of an experimental survey which was conducted to ascertain the level of support and perceived effectiveness of using de-radicalisation programmes to re-integrate returning foreign fighters. Public support (or the lack of opposition) for re-integration programmes can be important in ensuring the programmes have the time, resources and opportunity to be successful however we know little about what wider society thinks about re-integration programmes. The article explores the extent to which the inclusion of de-radicalisation – in name and content – changes attitudes to a re-integration programme. This is relevant in showing attitudes to de-radicalisation over disengagement and whether de-radicalisation, while perhaps not more effective at the programme-level, is or is not more effective at generating public support for re-integration (and thereby facilitating the process itself). We find that the inclusion of de-radicalisation in the name and content of a re-integration programme to a small extent increases support for re-integration over a programme that uses the terms disengagement and desistance. However, we also find that while de-radicalisation increases support, it also decreases perceived effectiveness, leading respondents to feel it makes the country less safe and less likely to reduce the re-offending rate than if the programme excludes de-radicalisation. We argue this polarising effect is reflective of wider reasons for supporting the policies (e.g. de-radicalisation may be seen as a form of ideational/normative punishment) and that the term de-radicalisation may shift the framing of the problematic to entrenched social structures, thus rendering itself ineffective as a policy treatment. In terms of policy, we argue there is a necessity for greater openness about re-integration programmes and that governments would benefit from selling the programmes to the public. We conclude our paper with a justification of focusing further research on understanding public/community attitudes to re-integration programmes and understanding the PR of counter-terrorism policies more generally.

Keywords: De-radicalisation; Disengagement; Re-Integration

Introduction

One of the key debates with regard to de-radicalisation programmes has been on whether the programmes' emphasis on ideological change (as a means and an end) matters for re-

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integrating violent extremists and ensuring they do not reoffend, or whether practitioners ought to focus primarily on behavioural change encapsulated by terms such as disengagement and desistance (Horgan, 2008; Silke, 2011; Marsden 2016). The concept of de-radicalisation implies a causal relationship between cognitive change in the abandonment of radical ideas and behavioural change to abandon violence. Contrary to simple disengagement, i.e. the role change essential to the reduction of violent participation (Horgan & Braddock, 2010), the attitudinal change of de-radicalisation is often seen as "more enduring, resilient and immune from recidivism" (El-Said, 2015, p. 10; cf. Koehler, 2016). At the very least de-radicalisation implies a normative end in itself regardless of its causal efficacy or relationship with violence, especially in non-academic discourse (Clubb and O'Connor, 2019). However, an extensive amount of literature has highlighted the complex non-linear relationship between radical ideology and behaviour (Ferguson, 2016; Marsden, 2016), cautioning that some who disengage from the latter may still believe in the former (Horgan, 2009, p. 151). Some authors have questioned whether interventions such as de-radicalisation programmes are even necessary to reduce the risk of recidivism (Silke, 2011; Hodwitz, 2019), as disengagement can also occur in the absence of any formalised intervention (Cherney, 2018); in addition, even with prison-based programmes, participants "had already made the decision to change, before they applied" (Silke, 2011, p. 19). The term de-radicalisation has also been highlighted as a misnomer (Raets, 2017; Altier et al., 2014), being used to refer to a wide range of intervention programmes (Horgan & Taylor, 2011), many of which do little to nothing on ideological work (Koehler, 2016). Many programmes do not see disengagement and de-radicalisation in mutually exclusive terms, incorporating elements of both or they tend to focus on addressing attitudes and 'identity issues' (Barrelle 2015) that is not consistently understood as constitutive of de-radicalisation. For that reason, many prefer to describe these programmes in terms of disengagement. Horgan and Braddock (2010) recommend referring to the programmes as "risk reduction programmes" and Sarah Marsden (2016) has argued that desistance better characterises the work of these programmes. In addition, the notion of de-radicalisation has been critiqued normatively, reflecting the wider 'moral legitimacy problem'

which the government and programmes invoke in attempting to change a person's beliefs (Koehler, 2016; Elshimi, 2017; Pettinger, 2017; Heath-Kelly, 2013).

Thus, in this 'de-radicalisation or disengagement' debate, de-radicalisation programmes and de-radicalisation as an independent category has faced substantial criticism in academic research. The aforementioned research on this debate has tended to focus on the internal workings of programmes or its normative implications however there has been less emphasis on contextual factors underpinning and shaping interventions. Contextual factors are commonly identified as important in that they "underlie interventions and lead to specific outcome patterns" (Gielen, 2018, p. 456) and existing research on this area has focused on how social factors influence disengagement and re-integration (Altier et al, 2014; Barelle, 2015; Kaplan and Nussio, 2015; Marsden, 2016). The salience of contextual factors extends beyond the immediacy of the programme insofar as negative public attitudes toward the re-integration of former combatants can undermine attempts at de-radicalisation, underlining how the effectiveness of programmes is also shaped by factors external to the intervention (Clubb and Tapley, 2018). An integral component of that context is whether the public supports de-radicalisation or disengagement programmes, given the potential influence elite and public support can have on the actual delivery of such programmes (Schuurman and Bakker, 2016). The fundamental objective of both programmes is to facilitate a sustainable re-integration of violent extremists back into society, hence public attitudes as *part* of the re-integrative context (whether hostile or supportive) can arguably shape the success of such an endeavour and the quality of re-integration. Thus, the article expands the scope of the 'de-radicalisation or disengagement' debate to explore whether emphasis on de-radicalisation is more or less successful at generating public support for re-integration programmes than if programmes avoid the language and objectives of de-radicalisation.

Understanding public perceptions towards re-integration programmes (and de-radicalisation programmes more generally) is important because public and elite support or opposition can potentially impact the success of the programme. Public debates on whether foreign fighters should be allowed to return clearly influenced elite decision-making in the

case of Shamima Begum; in this case de-radicalisation was (unsuccessfully) proposed as a justification for allowing foreign fighters to return (Foster, 2019; BBC News, 2019). Elsewhere the public's attitudes to de-radicalisation as a means of re-integrating former combatants has been highlighted as significant too – in Nigeria, the re-integration of former Boko Haram fighters has been met with public resistance, which has slowed down efforts to re-integrate fighters who are participating in the government's de-radicalisation programme (Felbab-Brown, 2018). Furthermore, elite and public support, opposition or tolerance of de-radicalisation programmes may have important consequences for the actual delivery insofar as it can facilitate inter-agency co-operation and the provision of government resources (Schuurman and Bakker, 2016). Yet despite the significance of understanding wider attitudes to re-integration programmes (whether these are labelled as de-radicalisation or not), there has been little research on this subject.

There are a handful of studies which have focused on similar areas which are useful to build upon. Caitlyn Ambrozik's (2018) study on whether the term 'Counter Violent Extremism' is supported more or less than an alternative term finds little difference overall in support depending on the term used, although Liberals tend to be more sceptical of policies referred to as CVE. The second piece of research, Msall (2017), conducted a small n survey of Kuwaiti students and focused on attitudes to de-radicalisation. In this study we see that support for de-radicalisation tends to be divided in terms of support, with participants' attitudes varying in terms of whether programme participants are deemed to deserve a second chance – thus highlighting contestation between support for rehabilitative measures and punitive measures. However it does not control for the impact the type of policy specifically has on attitudes therefore it is not possible to differentiate the impact de-radicalisation has on attitudes. Iyengar demonstrates how the framing of a counter-terrorism policy will shape the attribution of a preferred treatment: counter-terrorism policies framed in terms of concrete events (episodic frames) are more likely to identify responsibility to individual characteristics, therefore eliciting greater support for policies targeting individual tendencies through counter-terrorism measures involving stronger punishment; policies framed in terms of collective

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outcomes and public policy debates (thematic frames) are more likely to elicit societal attributions of responsibility, whereby improvements in societal conditions ought to be the treatment (1991). The article builds upon this literature, which points to several salient factors to consider: the significance of terminology in shaping support for a policy; the salience of the policy content (i.e. their framing and their rehabilitative/punitive dimension) and how it reflects wider public dispositions such as political alignment and what informs the attribution of responsibility; and the utility of experimental designs in identifying how each of these shape attitudes to a policy. However de-radicalisation is qualitatively different from the objects previous studies addressed (apart from Msall 2017) insofar as it implicitly or explicitly locates the responsibility of terrorism within society (e.g. radical ideology, Islamism, or in some cases Islam) and the individual (who are 'vulnerable' and 'brainwashed'). De-radicalisation policy touches upon the security *and* community institutions, practice and discourses, which lends itself to a potential appeal across traditional political alignments (at least in Western states). In other words de-radicalisation is hybridised conceptually and practically: its hybrid nature will shape public perceptions differently from traditional counter-terrorism policies or policies more overtly in the pre-criminal, preventative, and rehabilitative space.

The following article explores, regardless of the actual effectiveness of de-radicalisation programmes, the extent to which the use of de-radicalisation as a term and policy content changes the support and perceived effectiveness of re-integration programmes. This is achieved through the use of an experimental survey – the benefit of this approach is, rather than asking directly what perceptions of a programme are, we are able to provide a baseline to measure how attitudes change toward a programme when de-radicalisation is included. The article works on the hypothesis that the inclusion of de-radicalisation, in name and content, changes attitudes to a re-integration programme.[2] While this hypothesis may appear to set the bar low, the potential that there *may* be no (statistically) significant

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[2] Subsequently, our null hypothesis for the t-test was: the inclusion of de-radicalisation in the name and content of the re-integration programme does not change attitudes to the re-integration programme.

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difference is reasonable, based on Ambrozik's (2018) findings on the impact of different terminology for support of CVE programmes. Therefore, the study explores not only whether de-radicalisation does change opinion but will also provide indication of how significant a change it makes. However, we do not hypothesize which direction attitudes shift because existing research suggests public opinion tends to be divided roughly equally, influenced very slightly according to political alignment (Clubb and O'Connor, 2019; Ambrozik, 2018). Furthermore, research by Jarvis and Lister (2015) on public attitudes to counter-terrorism in the UK suggests that opinion may differ in terms of the general support for a policy and whether people believe the policy works (indicating support may be driven by reasons other than effectiveness). Therefore, it is not clear which direction attitudinal change will travel although tentatively we may expect the difference in support and perceived effectiveness to polarize rather than travel 'for' or 'against' in a clear and consistent direction. To address the hypothesis we deploy an experimental survey designed to test whether the inclusion of de-radicalisation (the treatment) over disengagement and desistance (the control) changes support for a re-integration programme. The article presents the headline results of the experimental survey and offers a discussion of the possible explanations for the results.

Methods

The aim of the article is to explore the extent attitudes to a re-integration programme shifts if the programme is framed as a de-radicalisation programme - to this end, an experimental survey design is used. Experimental methods are becoming more common in terrorism research and are the gold standard when it comes to causal inference (Gerber & Green, 2012; Mullinx et al, 2015; Braddock 2019). The use of experimental research designs are often called for but lacking in the field of terrorism despite their acceptance as a rigorous method of causal inference (See Braddock 2019). Survey respondents are randomly assigned to different experimental conditions, such as a vignette where key terms are varied for different groups of respondents to prime them with a scenario and thereby test the effect of

the treatment on their responses to a survey (Sniderman and Piazza, 1993; Gilens, 2001; Braddock 2019). Experimental surveys allow us to isolate the impact of a specific variable therefore minimising any confounding variables from the study (Mutz, 2011). By only changing one independent variable (for instance including/excluding the term de-radicalisation) in the treatment while keeping all else constant, we can be confident that any difference in outcome of results for the dependent variable in the surveys is a causal effect of that independent variable. The article adopts a post-test only survey design with a control group. In this type of experimental survey, participants are randomly assigned to a treatment (experimental) condition and a control condition. The purpose is to ensure participants in the control group are not exposed to the treatment stimulus however all participants respond to the same measurement scales, which allows us to evaluate the stimulus relative to the baseline control (Braddock 2019 pg. 8). Braddock (2019) highlights the weakness of this research design is the potential for sensitisation to the purpose of the study – we limited this potential by ensuring no reference to the control or treatment conditions were made outside the stimulus, therefore the project was presented to all participants as focusing on returning foreign fighters.

All participants of the study were exposed to a manipulated vignette stimuli prior to answering three measurement scale models. The vignette was constructed as a newspaper story of a government framing its re-integration policy toward returning foreign fighters. Several variables were identified and fixed across the treatment and control group to isolate the effect of the treatment on respondent responses. Firstly, the provider of the intervention – states, NGOs, religious authorities, the military – were deemed likely to influence attitudes to the intervention therefore we focused the vignette on a government intervention provider (the UK government). Secondly, the vignette was manipulated to emphasise that the target of the programme was returning foreign fighters, removing ambiguity over whether the policy operates in the pre and post-criminal space. We see elsewhere how the conflation of de-radicalisation with Prevent in the UK can shape the media's framing of de-radicalisation interventions (Clubb and O'Connor 2019). Thirdly, the returning foreign fighters were

emphasised as ISIS fighters to ensure respondents focused on one type of fighter rather than, for example, considering anti-ISIS returning foreign fighters, given the potential differences in sympathy of the latter over the former. Fourthly, the geographical location of the intervention was limited to the UK due to the potential impact different locations may have on support for an intervention. For example, Neumann (2010) mentions how de-radicalisation is less likely to be supported in a Western state than it is in a non-Western state. Finally, an episodic framing of the counter-terrorism policy was also used across all groups to isolate the effect of the treatment, given how Iyengar (1991) illustrates how thematic and episodic framing would shape attitudes to counter-terrorism policy. Thus, the vignette focuses on the implementation of a re-integration programme in response to the issue of returning foreign fighters, it only describes the name and content of the re-integration programme from the government's perspective rather than discussing the issue thematically, which could involve discussing the consequences of re-integration or whether de-radicalisation is possible for example. Nevertheless, as we argue later on, while the use of episodic framing across the control and treatment groups is important methodologically, we cannot discount the possibility that the term de-radicalisation leads respondents to consider the issue thematically.

The study uses a 2x2 survey design, therefore varying two aspects of the vignette – the name of the programme and the programme content – thus producing one control group and three treatment groups (see Table 1). The name of the programme in the control group vignette was 'disengagement and desistance programme' and the treatment for the name variable was 'de-radicalisation programme', thus providing a baseline to ascertain the effect of the treatment. The programme content variable for the treatment group sought to highlight the specific interventions used in a de-radicalisation programme, therefore it stated the aim of the programme is to change radical ideology, linking radical ideology to terrorism. Of course, many programmes referred to as de-radicalisation do not explicitly aim to change radical ideology and many disengagement programmes do attempt to change radical ideology, however it is ideological change as an ends and means which defines and differentiates de-radicalisation conceptually. By 'ends', the programme aims to lead to ideological change but

this can be brought about by a range of intervention types (e.g. skills development, motivational interviews), and 'means' refers to the interventions programmes use that seek to change an ideology (e.g. ideological debates, the use of religious scholars). The treatment vignette which changed the content of the intervention contained both elements of a de-radicalisation intervention. The disengagement control group content made no reference to ideological change as a means or end and framed the intervention as offering practical support to facilitate rehabilitation. Once again this represents an ideal type of disengagement as some de-radicalisation programmes also emphasise how they offer practical support and rehabilitation. The variation of the name and content of the programme in a 2x2 design was chosen to have a cumulative effect because the main aim of the project is to identify how de-radicalisation changes attitudes to the programme.

Table 1: Control and Treatment Group Configurations

Experiment Group	Programme Name	Programme Content
"Disengagement" Control Group	Disengagement and Desistance Programme	No ideological change focus in programme
"Derad/IC" Treatment 1	De-Radicalisation Programme	Ideological change a key part of programme
"Derad/Disengage" Treatment 2	De-Radicalisation Programme	No ideological change focus in programme
"Disengage/IC" Treatment 3	Disengagement and Desistance Programme	Ideological change a key part of programme

For the survey, participants were recruited and randomly allocated through Prolific. Prolific is used to advertise the survey to a database of respondents and respondents were filtered randomly to one of the four surveys on Online Surveys. Upon completing the survey, Prolific provides a unique identifier which links respondents' data held by Prolific (e.g. sex, profession, political alignment) with the responses to the survey questions.[3] A number of studies have used online platforms to recruit survey participants as they can overcome

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[3] Respondents were paid £1.20 for completing the survey, administered through Prolific. The project was funded through the Laidlaw Scholarship and the West African Centre for Counter Extremism. Ethical approval for the research was provided by the University of Leeds.

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problems in other sampling methods and they provide ease of access to respondents broadly reflective of the UK (Heinrich et al, 2017). Online surveying has made running experimental surveys much more accessible and affordable as well as ideal for survey experiments (Campbell & Cowley, 2014). Approximately 150 participants were recruited in each of the four groups making 597 total participants. We excluded participants from taking part in more than one of the surveys and users were randomly allocated to each survey group. Participants were therefore assigned to the control or a treatment group randomly whereby every participant had an equal chance of being in each group. By randomly assigning participants to either a treatment or control group, we can ensure treatments are exogenous to the results and isolate causation (Morton and Williams, 2010). However, it is important to note that we are not claiming that this sampling method provides a representative sample – the objective of the experimental design is to provide internal validity between the control and treatment group rather than the survey to be representative of a general population.

Following exposing the respondents to the stimuli, they then responded to three measurement scales to ascertain the influence of the treatment which we analyse as three models. Following reading the vignette, respondents were asked: do you support the programme (model 1); does the programme make the UK safer (model 2); and does the programme reduce re-offending (model 3). While the first question aimed to identify general support, questions two and three were used to indicate perceived effectiveness. Safety to the UK was used as an indicator for effectiveness because the UK government framed its policy in these terms and state security is often the primary goal of such interventions. Furthermore, the contested nature of safety helps to capture views that attempting to de-radicalise can be counter-productive by challenging the safety of its citizens or its democratic values of freedom of speech. The question on re-offending was used because recidivism reduction remains the main indicator for the effectiveness of de-radicalisation (See Koehler 2016). Each question used a five-point Likert scale (strongly agree was measured on the higher end of the scale) and we included an option for respondents to answer 'don't know' which were excluded from the results. The data analysis consisted of participant responses being coded

into the Stata stats programme. An ANOVA test was carried out to compare the responses of the control group with each of the treatment groups, thereby indicating whether the difference between the control and treatment is statistically significant. Given the aim of the research was to identify whether the inclusion of de-radicalisation in the framing of a re-integration programme changed attitudes relative to the disengagement framing, the method was appropriate to provide assurance that the difference in the mean of each group was not by chance.

Findings

The hypothesis of the study was the inclusion of de-radicalisation into the framing of a government's returning foreign fighter re-integration programme would change respondent's attitudes (in either direction) to the programme in comparison to a control group which did not include de-radicalisation. The significance behind the hypothesis would be to show how de-radicalisation changes support and perceived effectiveness of a programme, which can then potentially impact upon the actual delivery and success of the programme. Initially we provide a set of descriptive statistics looking at the dependent variables and breaking them down by treatment group. We then move onto conduct a series of ANOVA models to test the effects of the different experimental treatments on the three dependent variables. We examine treatment effects on support for the programme, perceptions of security, and perceptions of recidivism reduction.

As shown in Figure 1, we see that respondents tend to cluster around the mid-point of the scale (5 = strongly agree; 1 = strongly disagree) regardless of question asked, suggesting that there is some uncertainty about the re-integration programme, whether this includes or excludes de-radicalisation. We do observe that support for de-radicalisation programmes are significantly higher than perceptions of effectiveness and security with the exception of the control group (disengage/disengage). The lack of significant differences between support, security and recidivism reduction in the control group compared to the treatment groups

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suggests that the experimental stimuli have widened perceptions between support and perceptions about both security and recidivism, a finding we will discuss in more detail below.

Figure 1: Mean Attitudes Towards the Re-Integration Programme - All Respondents and by Treatment Group
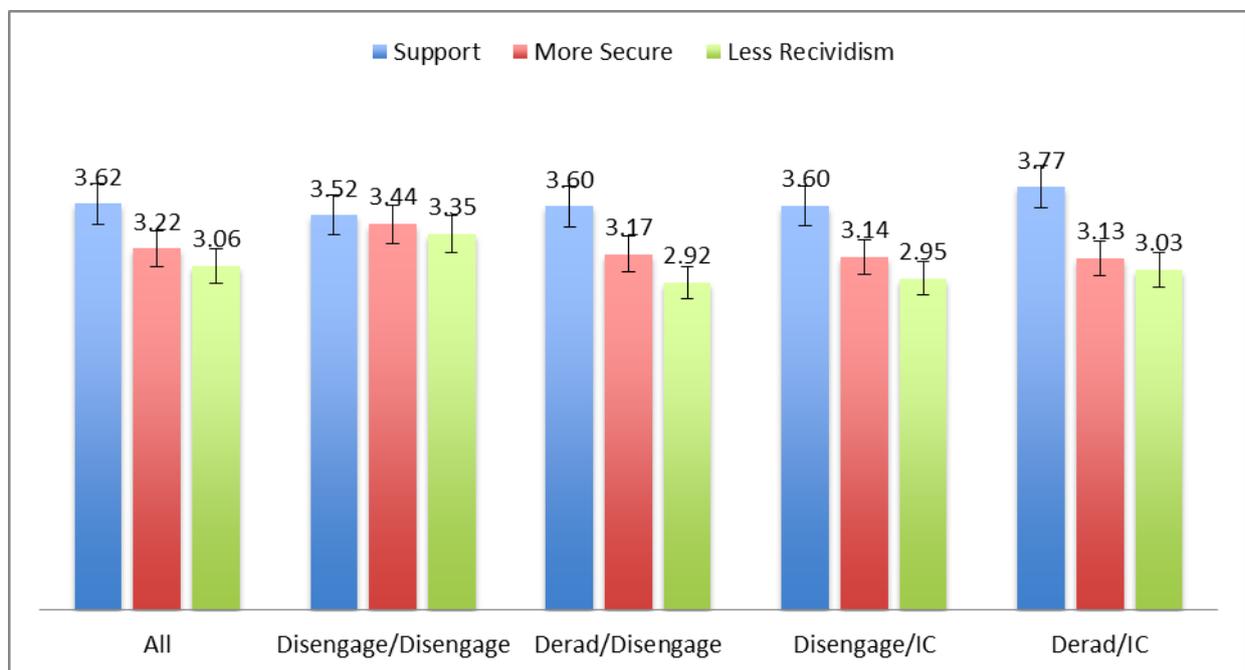
One potential criticism of the study is it uses single-item measures as dependent variables, yet we use this approach in line with other studies that have deployed experimental survey designs (Johns and Davies, 2014; Heinrich et al 2017; Johns and Davies, 2019). Furthermore, we check whether the respondents see the three dependent variables as being conceptually different. Conducting a Variance Inflated Factor (VIF) test we find no evidence of strong multicollinearity between the variables (see Table 2). None of the VIF scores come

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anywhere close the critical 5 value and as such we are confident that respondents were conceptually able to differentiate between the variables.

Table 2: Variance Inflation Factor Test

Variable	VIF	1/VIF
Support	1.66	0.6
More Secure	2.12	0.472
Less Recidivism	1.84	0.544
Mean VIF	1.87	

For our ANOVA results we present the findings both as a table and a set of marginal effects graphs that show effective sizes with respect to the control group. Moving onto the first set of ANOVA models (Table 3) we find that the F-Score for models 2 and 3 are significant: the experimental treatments make a difference to public perceptions of the programmes to reduce the risk of recidivism and to increase security. The η^2 values for each of the models tell us the effect sizes of the treatments. Looking at the respective η^2 values for all three models we see that the experimental treatments had the greatest effect on recidivism with a η^2 of .026, whereas for perceptions of security the effect was .014 and for support of the programme the impact was at its lowest at .007. When looking at model 1 on support for the programme, we find that the experimental conditions make no statistically significant difference to overall support. Relabelling and changing the content of the programmes will have a greater impact on respondent perceptions of the risk of recidivism than on national security or programme support. However, when we examine the marginal effect graphs, we develop a better understanding of how respondents view.

Table 3: ANOVA Models

	Model 1 Support	Model 2 Security	Model 3 Recidivism
Partial SS	4.608	8.585	15.277
MS	1.536	2.862	5.092
F-Score	1.35	2.56**	4.60***
η^2	.007	.014	.026
N	548	549	524
AIC	1629.426	1623.104	1544.303
BIC	1.536	1640.337	1561.340
Root MSE	1.066	1.058	1.05214

***>0.01 **>0.05 *>0.10

Figure 2 presents the marginal effects of the treatments on respondent attitudes towards the re-integration programme. The redline represents the control group, if the 95 per cent confidence intervals overlap with this redline we are unable to say that the effect of the treatment was significant in relation to the control group. Likewise if the confidence intervals overlap with the other treatment groups we are unable to say that one particular treatment is more effective than another. Importantly, the results are in a dramatically different direction to the other models – the treatment effect increases support for the programme. With regard to support for the programme, we observe that two of the treatments are statistically indistinguishable from the control group and one treatment increases support, although only at the 90 per cent level. Thus, the inclusion of de-radicalisation within the framing of the re-integration programme makes no statistical difference in the framings which are mixed but makes a statistical difference – *slightly increasing support for the programme* – in the framing which most explicitly refers to de-radicalisation. The main significant conclusion to draw

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from this finding is the inclusion of de-radicalisation does not *decrease* support for the programme, which is important given assumptions that de-radicalisation is likely to be unpopular among the public; instead, we find that it makes no difference to support and possibly even increases support to a small degree.

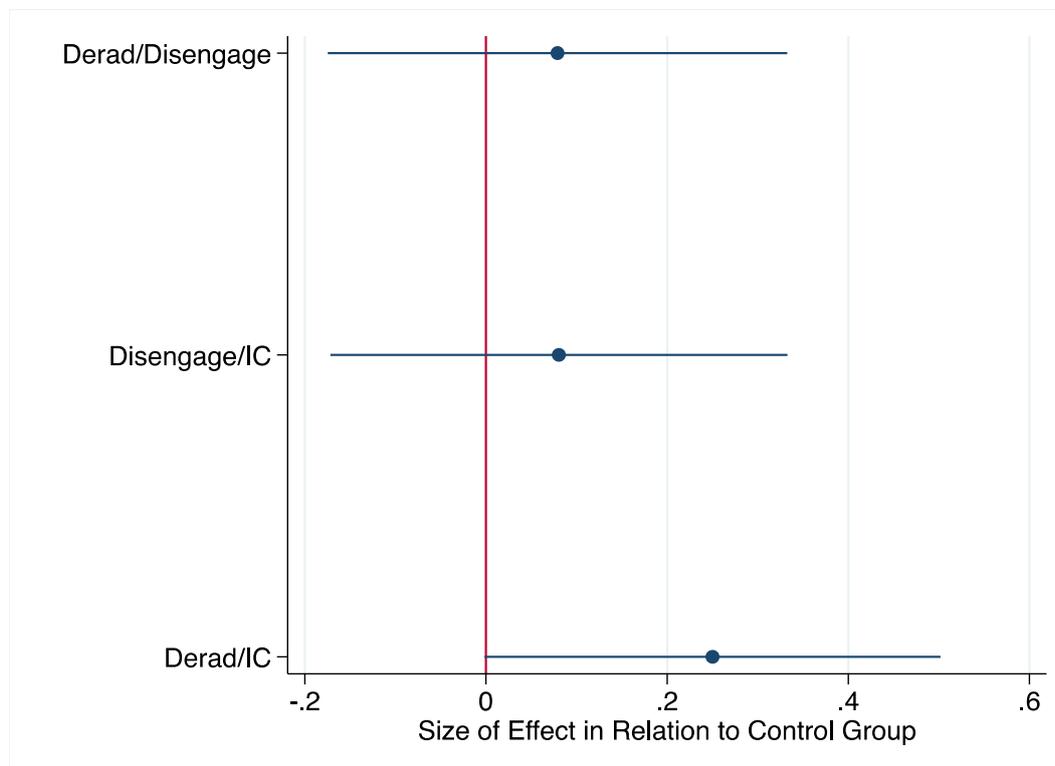**Figure 2: Marginal Effects on Support for the Re-Integration Programme**

Figure 3 presents the marginal effects relating to model 2, which examines respondent perceptions about whether the re-integration programme makes the UK more secure. All of the experimental conditions in model 2 are significantly lower than the control group. While the treatment effect for model 1 saw either no statistical difference or an increase in support, the treatment effect for model 2 shifts responses in the opposite direction. We see that all three experimental conditions *reduce* respondents' beliefs that these programmes will make the UK more secure in comparison to the control group. We find no distinguishable difference

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between the experimental treatments, rather they all simply lack the credibility to convey an improvement in UK national security as a function of relabelling and changing the content of the programmes. The findings suggest that support for the programme is not necessarily related to perceptions of whether it will improve security: a programme labelled as de-radicalisation and containing de-radicalisation content will slightly *increase support* for a re-integration programme *and decrease* the perception it makes the nation safer.

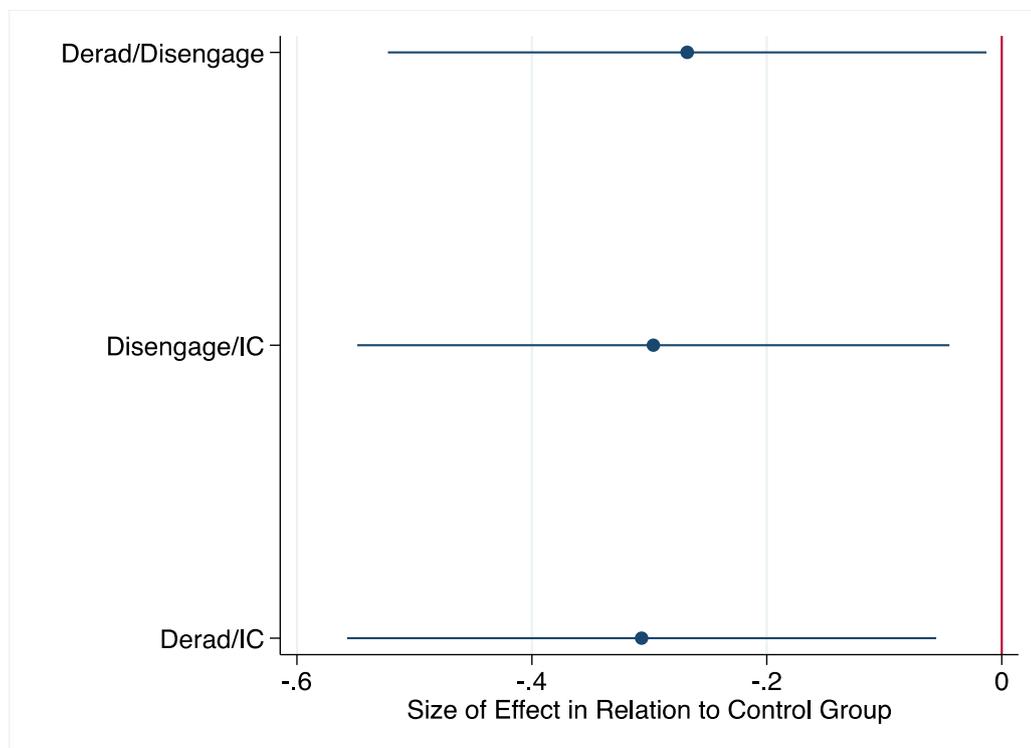**Figure 3: Marginal Effects on Perceptions of UK National Security**

Figure 4 presents the marginal effects graph for model 3, which details responses on whether the programme will reduce the likelihood of reoffending (i.e. recidivism). As can be seen in Figure 4, all of the experimental conditions are significantly lower than the control group. All of the treatments reduce perceptions that the programme will be effective at reducing the likelihood of terrorists reoffending. Given the primary rationale for de-

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radicalisation interventions is they offer a reduction in the risk of recidivism over other forms of intervention, it is surprising that any reference to de-radicalisation decreases respondent's perception of a programmes' efficacy in this regard, over programmes that exclude de-radicalisation entirely. However, each of the treatments have a similar effect with no one experimental condition being significantly more likely than another to reduce perceptions about recidivism compared to the control group. We also see that the effect sizes are on average stronger than the treatments in model 2 and 3 which supports the η^2 discussed above. However, the difference in strength is not statistically significant. The treatments in both models 2 and 3 undermine perceptions of security and reduced recidivism to a similar level. In sum, de-radicalisation has a significant effect on how a re-integration programme is perceived: emphasising de-radicalisation within a programme reduces the perceived effectiveness of the programme but paradoxically either increases support or does not change support. The findings are important because they challenge the assumption that de-radicalisation programmes are likely to be unpopular (Neumann, 2010), it suggests that framing a programme in terms of disengagement and desistance is more likely to boost the perceived effectiveness of the programme, and that support for a re-integration programme framed in terms of de-radicalisation is not necessarily related to its perceived effectiveness (at least in terms of national security and recidivism reduction).

Figure 4: Marginal Effects on Perceptions of Recidivism
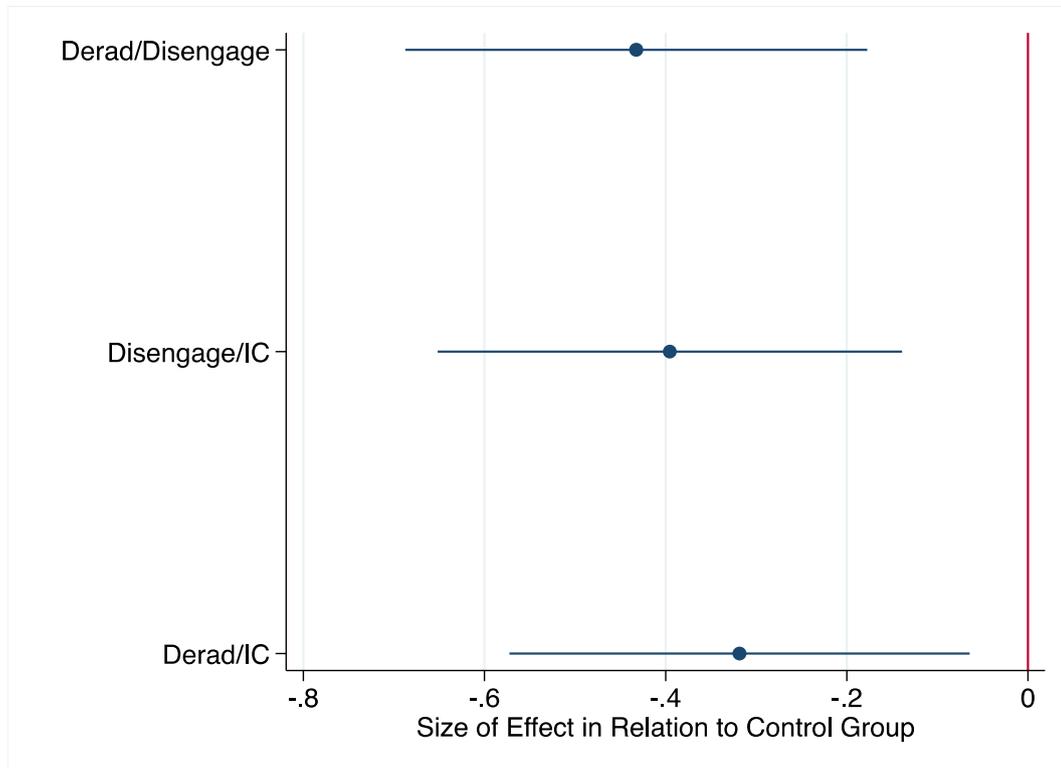
The results of the survey experiment show that programmes framed in terms of de-radicalisation changes attitudes to the programme in comparison to a programme which excludes it. The experiment sought to isolate the effect of the treatment by exposing respondents to a similar situation and the findings show that attitudes to a re-integration programme for returning foreign fighters vary according to what the programme is called and what are the objectives and means of the programme. While for several reasons it was difficult to hypothesise which direction the change in attitudes would go, the results are unexpected in the sense the treatment effect is not consistent between support and perceived effectiveness: instead, the treatment increased support for the programme but also made respondents perceive it to be less effective. Based on the survey experiment results, a re-

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integration programme framed in terms of disengagement and desistance, excluding reference to de-radicalisation and ideological intervention, is likely to generate relatively less opposition to the programme and fewer people questioning its effectiveness. A programme framed in terms of de-radicalisation is likely to marginally increase support for the programme but also decreasing perceived effectiveness, also ironically in the key area – recidivism reduction – which is used to justify the contribution of de-radicalisation over other interventions. Finally, it is also worthwhile highlighting how much support there is for the re-integration programme across all groups. While of course our focus is on the comparability between the treatment and control group and all four groups are not representative, in the context of hostile media reporting and the perception that UK's policies on the matter are 'toxic' (Clubb and O'Connor 2019), our findings do provide some indication that the government policy (however framed) is largely supported.

Discussion

Research on de-radicalisation has primarily focused on the effectiveness of programmes, specifically how such programmes can be measured and whether they are even necessary to reduce the risk of recidivism. Thus, when considering to what extent de-radicalisation is supported, whether by the public or by the media, it may be reasonable to assume that support is linked to perceived effectiveness. Yet the survey experiment findings provide evidence that indicate support for de-radicalisation is not linked to perceived effectiveness: perceived effectiveness of programmes declined among respondents when de-radicalisation was included in the programme *despite* support increasing (in at least one treatment group). Of course, the two questions do not capture all aspects of what may constitute an effective programme nevertheless reducing the likelihood of re-offending is a fundamental claim of de-radicalisation programmes. The UK government frames its own programme's objectives in terms of increasing safety but the fact that respondents felt the programme does not make the UK safer when the programme is framed as 'de-radicalisation' instead of 'disengagement and

desistance', or when the objective of the programme is to facilitate de-radicalisation, provides a good indication of the respondents' perception of how effective the programmes are in achieving their fundamental objectives. The results show that there are consequences for labelling a programme as de-radicalisation or publicly including de-radicalisation objectives within a programme: perceived effectiveness declines *despite* entrenching support for the programme.

The disconnect between support and perceived effectiveness suggests there are reasons other than effectiveness which accounts for why respondents were more supportive. While further research is necessary to expand upon what influences support for re-integration programmes and de-radicalisation, one noteworthy point worth considering is how de-radicalisation as a discourse accounts for this polarising effect (insofar as support increases while perceived effectiveness declines), specifically in the undefined and contested problem it seeks to address. It is possible to support a policy despite thinking it may not be effective yet the interesting question is why one policy-framing invokes ineffectiveness over another where there is little evidence either way on the matter? One argument is there is something internal to the logic of de-radicalisation that communicates a lack of efficacy and limited agency, something which the technical and neutral language of 'disengagement and desistance' does not convey. Inclusion of de-radicalisation may inadvertently frame the problem as unsolvable or at least more difficult to resolve by invoking wider psychological traits, structures, religions and cultures within individuals and society which are more challenging to address, and therefore for some respondents de-radicalisation of returning foreign fighters represents an unrealisable utopia. From this perspective, not only do de-radicalisation programmes face significant practical and normative problems (Koehler, 2017; Pettinger, 2017) but also their ability to generate wider support is self-defeating in that it makes programmes seem less effective. In effect, the use of de-radicalisation may shift a programme's goal-posts beyond what is realistically achievable.

Another similar point relates to the type of frames which de-radicalisation invokes that disengagement does not in terms of the attribution of responsibility for an issue and therefore

the identification of a solution (Iyengar 1991). From this perspective, one could argue that the inclusion of de-radicalisation in policy frames the issue thematically because the term communicates a narrative of change and automatically attributes responsibility, in addition presumably to invoking further associations among respondents than a neutral, technical term would. Building on Iyengar's argument, the direction of attitudinal change produced by the treatment can be linked to de-radicalisation framing the issue thematically while disengagement and desistance was consistent with the episodic framing of the vignette. Iyengar argues that such thematic framing of terrorism (a) increases respondents' responsibility attributions for terrorism to a variety of inadequate societal conditions, and (b) polarises treatment attributions for counter-terrorism policy to either prescribing improvements in societal conditions or stronger punishment as appropriate treatments. These sharply diverging patterns may well account for the polarising effect of de-radicalisation: greater opposition for the treatment could derive from the perceived misattribution of the problem to ideology and the counter-productive consequences this invokes (i.e. the suspect community narrative); greater support for the treatment may locate the problem in governments not doing enough to tackle ideology and/or tackling ideology may be viewed as a punitive measure, which could account for why it invokes support from some respondents but also a decline in perceived effectiveness (i.e. it does not matter it works but merely that the government is a) 'doing something' and b) is punitive in an ideational sense. These are possible (theoretical) explanations for why the language of de-radicalisation has a causal effect on attitudes toward a re-integration programme, and while we find them compelling it is not to exclude other possible explanations that future research will elaborate on.

From a practitioner perspective, this trade-off between (slightly) increased support and decreased perceived effectiveness might be an opportunity or a constraint. This point comes back to why re-integration programmes require support and from whom support is preferable. An evaluation of a Dutch re-integration programme indicates that perceived effectiveness may be important for multi-agency partnerships (Schuurman and Bakker, 2016), which are fundamental for any re-integration programme, because different institutions need to share

relevant information for assessing risk and developing appropriate support packages, hence they need to trust each other (RAN, 2018). Of course, it is reasonable to assume that the evaluation of effectiveness by government and judicial stakeholders would be evidence-based and therefore not affected by the terminology a programme uses, or they would assume that de-radicalisation objectives are de facto in/effective. Nevertheless, given re-integration programmes draw upon a wide range of stakeholders in society, references to de-radicalisation in the programme may also reduce the perceived effectiveness among stakeholders and challenge co-operation. First-line practitioners may also benefit from generating support for a programme among the wider public and our study indicates that de-radicalisation to an extent makes people more willing to support the re-integration of foreign fighters than a programme which does not frame its work in terms of de-radicalisation. While we need to exercise caution on the generalisability of the findings, we can see this as potentially important where there is resistance to re-integration such as in Nigeria – arguably extensive framing of re-integration in terms of de-radicalisation can increase support. However, it is worth mentioning that while de-radicalisation framing (in the label and content of a programme) may increase support for a re-integration programme among a potential 'general population', the impact of this treatment was relatively small and it cannot be assumed that a small increase in support would occur among sections of society most useful in delivering the programme and the most requiring support in order to facilitate re-integration. While more research is required on this point, if de-radicalisation does not increase support among members of society who are integral to the success of re-integration, for example if it decreases support among communities whose co-operation is important, then framing a programme as de-radicalisation could be counter-productive. Thus, in terms of generating public support, there appears to be a potential advantage in *not* using a de-radicalisation framing in order to generate greater attitudinal support for a re-integration programme. Instead, framing a policy in terms of disengagement and desistance, while to some extent generating relatively less support, was more consistently supported and raised less opposition.

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Thus, from the perspective of generating public support and good public relations, the study's findings suggest practitioners are best to avoid framing re-integration programmes in terms of de-radicalisation because: a) the increase in support is small and in some cases is statistically insignificant; b) there is uncertainty in whether de-radicalisation increases support for a policy among key audiences; c) and the inclusion of de-radicalisation decreases perceived effectiveness. Of course, an important factor to consider is how much agency practitioners have in framing their programmes. Research on how the Daily Mail (UK) frames de-radicalisation shows that programmes are often labelled by the media as de-radicalisation despite the programmes not officially being labelled as de-radicalisation and technically not being de-radicalisation programmes in terms of their content (Clubb and O'Connor, 2018). Furthermore, forthcoming research by the authors shows a tendency for government sources in the UK to be less active in framing de-radicalisation within the media than in Nigeria and Singapore, which is argued to shape the extent media frames de-radicalisation as a desirable and effective policy. In effect, the lack of active framing by governments, ironically for fear of a public backlash, leads to more critical actors framing the policy and often in more negative terms. Thus, generating the potential PR benefits by avoiding framing a programme in terms of de-radicalisation may not be sufficient given a reluctance by (Western) governments to actively sell the programmes, which leads to the programmes being framed as de-radicalisation. In this case, the PR battle for re-integration programmes may be self-defeating insofar as the public tendency to conceptualize such interventions in the language of de-radicalisation also reframes the problematic and the expectations of success which cannot be met. In the public domain, de-radicalisation is easily rendered unsuccessful even in its successes, for example the recent London Bridge attack indicates even, for instance, a hypothetical 1.5 per cent recidivism rate is indicative of a failing programme. Nevertheless, attitudinal trends toward re-integration programmes when de-radicalisation is or is not used are not fixed but are perhaps a consequence of how de-radicalisation has been framed within society. Therefore, it is not inevitably perceived as more negative and nor does it fully justify abandoning the terminology and practice of de-radicalisation wholesale, consequently our

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findings may reflect UK perspectives more strongly than in other states where government officials have been more open and active in selling the benefits of their programmes.

Conclusion

One key area that requires further research is on (public) attitudes to re-integration programmes, whether in the context of counter-terrorism or in peace-building and conflict transformation. The perception of the programmes within communities is important because community acquiescence and support can be central for the success of re-integration – re-integration of former fighters in Nigeria and foreign fighters in the UK has faced opposition among the public and within key communities, undermining attempts to reduce the risk of recidivism. Generating support for re-integration programmes is challenged by politicians who seek short-term gain by opposing programmes and by a general reluctance by governments to publicly discuss and attempt to sell the programmes to their constituents – it is possible the assumption that it is better to remain silent on the programmes leads more critical voices the space to shape how the public understands the programmes. While there is a need to understand public attitudes to re-integration programmes, especially those referred to as de-radicalisation programmes, there is a substantial gap in research on the subject. The following article has made some first steps to developing knowledge of how de-radicalisation shapes perceptions of re-integration programmes. The study was limited in the number of variables which could be discussed, yet a more expansive experimental survey would benefit by varying the actor initiating the programme (government agency; security services; NGO), the type of actor being targeted in an intervention (testing actors in the post and pre-criminal space; Islamist versus non-Islamist returning fighters; male and female returnees), the inclusion and exclusion of different professionals within a programme (e.g. the use of Imams, the use of former extremists), and the types of support upon re-integration (e.g. social and family support, education and vocational training, probation services and aftercare). An experimental survey which analyses the influence of these factors on responses would help

identify the significant factors which shape support and opposition to re-integration among certain sections of society, not just in the UK but in other countries such as Nigeria where successful re-integration of former combatants is important for protecting the local population and achieving peace and reconciliation. Of course, experimental surveys are useful in identifying how the elements of a programme and the framing of a programme (i.e. through narratives of citizenship, security, rehabilitation and redemption) shape support for a re-integration programme, other research methods would need to be applied to understand support for such programmes. The sections of society most important for re-integration's success can be a minority and they may hold significant and disproportionate influence on whether the programme works while having attitudes that diverge from the general population, therefore the use of focus groups and interviews can be useful in identifying who the most salient actors are and then to identify their support/opposition to re-integration.

Another consideration for future research which stems from this article is re-visiting the de-radicalisation or disengagement debate. This debate has tended to focus on whether de-radicalisation is necessary to reduce the risk of recidivism over a focus primarily on behavioural change. While this debate has been primarily concerned with the effectiveness of de-radicalisation or disengagement, the possibility that de-radicalisation may or may not potentially generate greater support for interventions has not been taken into consideration. As mentioned above, the support for policies needs to be taken into account given the necessity of support for the interventions to be successful. The article's findings are limited in their generalisability to the UK context however the level of support for de-radicalisation is surprising given the wider hostility to related policies such as Prevent, where it has been generally accepted to be a 'toxic brand'. We may also expect that the levels of support for de-radicalisation would be higher in countries such as Nigeria, at least if public opinion reflects the highly supportive framing of de-radicalisation found in Nigerian newspapers (Clubb et al, forthcoming). While the study contributes only tentative results on general attitudes to de-radicalisation, it does show surprising attitudes to de-radicalisation in relation to re-integration programmes: the use of de-radicalisation to an extent increases support for a programme but

decreases the perceived effectiveness of a programme. This article's findings suggest there is a public relations (PR) trade-off by using de-radicalisation, and while this may be seen positively, the key factor would be whether the decline in perceived effectiveness is the key factor in shaping whether communities are willing to engage with and facilitate re-integration. If future research were to question whether the use of de-radicalisation increases support and perceived effectiveness for a programme, it would seem untenable to justify the continuation of de-radicalisation as an intellectual and practical endeavour, particularly where the term de-radicalisation becomes associated with nefarious authoritarian programmes such as in China (Fifield 2019). De-radicalisation has been consistently viewed as an intellectual and policy 'fad' – increased public interest in 2015 re-energised interest in de-radicalisation – yet if it is to continue as a focus of research then research also needs to expand beyond measuring programme effectiveness to consider wider dynamics such as the PR of de-radicalisation and how such interventions can be sold to the public.

Acknowledgment

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ISSN: 2363-9849

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