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Conceptualising De-Radicalisation and Former Combatant Re-Integration in Nigeria

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Notes on Contributors

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Conceptualising De-Radicalisation and Former Combatant Re-Integration in Nigeria

Abstract

Nigeria has recently joined the many states which have established de-radicalisation programmes. The article engages with debates on how the success of de-radicalisation can be ascertained given the substantial flaws of using individual-oriented recidivism rates as a measure. Many studies on de-radicalisation emphasise the nee*d to consider the programme's context to facilitate success, yet 'context' has been under*-conceptualised and approached *statically. The paper provides greater agency to 'the context' in distinguishing between the* type of milieus former combatants are re-integrated into and how these emergent social relations shape the scope of de-radicalisation programmes, beyond the traditional over-emphasis on programme participant outcomes as measures of success. The Nigerian de-radicalisation programme has a broader function insofar as it provides former combatants *with 'scripts' of disengagement and function as a brand, signalling to* communities that *former combatants have repented and are 'better citizens, imbued with genuine nationalism'* that resonate with local communities.

Keywords: De-radicalization, Boko Haram, DDR, ex-combatants, radical milieu, countering violent extremism

Introduction

In 2015, President Muhammadu Buhari alleged that as a result of military gains by the Nigerian government, Nigeria had "technically won the war" against Boko Haram, as he claimed they were no longer able to launch conventional attacks and people were returning to their communities. [1] The Nigerian government has now regained most of the territory previously held by Boko Haram and claims these areas are returning to normalcy. However, despite the claims that Boko Haram has been largely defeated, there is evidence it still poses a threat to Nigeria and the West African region, with their expansion into neighbouring countries and continued attacks in Nigeria (43 attacks and 200 civilian deaths in the first half of 2017). [2] Therefore despite the group no longer being capable of engaging in large-scale conflict, its continued activity underlines Boko Haram's resilience and limitations of a military-centred counter-insurgency approach. The limitations of a predominantly military-based strategy for countering Boko Haram has led to a number of initiatives for a more comprehensive approach, one of which has been the use of de-radicalisation programmes. The expansion of de-radicalisation in Nigeria has prompted a public debate on whether or not they are needed [3] and the following paper considers how we can understand whether de-radicalisation programmes can be effective as a 'softer' alternative to the military approach to countering violent extremism and groups such as Boko Haram. Given the programmes are in their infancy, the question of efficacy is approached conceptually to discuss what constitutes success in de-radicalisation and how might such programmes be judged to be successful or not.

The following paper considers how we can understand whether de-radicalisation programmes are effective in countering violent extremism. The question of efficacy is approached conceptually to discuss what constitutes success in de-radicalisation and how might such programmes be judged to be successful or not. The paper builds upon the argument that the efficacy of de-radicalisation has been conceptualised too narrowly which has insufficiently contextualised the role of de-radicalisation in re-integrating former combatants. Firstly, the efficacy of de-radicalisation programmes has predominantly been conceptualised in terms of recidivism reduction, however the use of recidivism as a measure of success has been highly criticised. [4] Secondly, the focus on outcomes of individual programme participants neglects the wider social dimension that de-radicalisation can have

and when it is addressed there is a tendency to frame other consequences in society as primarily negative. [5] De-radicalisation has been framed in terms of individual attitudinal/behavioural change with little examination of the social context in which former combatants (might eventually) be re-integrated into, or it has been viewed as mechanistic push and pull factors and thus neglecting the agency of re-integrating communities and the contextual factors which shape their desire and capacity to facilitate or resist re-integration (thus potentially undermining de-radicalisation). By over-emphasising recidivism as the key measure of success and underplaying re-integration into the social context, de-radicalisation programmes are easy targets for being criticised as unsuccessful, unnecessary and harmful.

Thus, the paper focuses on the re-integration of former combatants in relationship to de-radicalisation. Recently there has been much interest in the relationship between de-radicalisation and re-integration – best exemplified by the debate regarding (former) ISIS fighters returning to Europe. [6] Yet there has thus far been relatively little conceptual discussion on the intersection between de-radicalisation and re-integration and how contextual factors mediate the success of the two. To that end, the paper builds upon the concept of radical milieu to explore how the necessity (and lack thereof) of de-radicalisation varies according to the re-integrating contexts. The paper explores the recent efforts by the Nigerian government to re-integrate Boko Haram members, in part through a formal de-radicalisation initiative. The next section outlines the limitations of framing the effectiveness of de-radicalisation and re-integration of former combatants in terms of recidivism rates.

De-Radicalisation, Recidivism and Re-Integration

One of the most common measures of judging whether a de-radicalisation programme is successful is the recidivism rates of individual ex-programme participants.[7] However, there are a number of criticisms for using recidivism rates as the measure of de-radicalisation, in addition to the obvious problem of ascertaining how genuine the prisoners are in their claims to have changed. Firstly, a wide range of studies have been highly critical of the notion that there is a causal relationship between ideology (attitudes) and (violent) behaviour, and by extension they have been critical of the idea that de-radicalisation has a significant causal effect on changing behaviour and reducing the risk of recidivism.[8] Secondly, recidivism rates for former members of militant groups tend to be substantially lower than 'ordinary criminals', therefore the added value of ideological components in programmes is often

unclear.[9] Thirdly, de-radicalisation programmes often differ in what they are seeking to change among prisoners and in many cases have little to do with the attitudes and beliefs associated with the term 'de-radicalisation'. Therefore, there are problems in attributing the cause of recidivism from the programme, if there is any.[10] A fifth difficulty is, practically, many such programmes do not have sufficient capacity and infrastructure to monitor recidivism rates.[11] Finally, recidivism rates do not take into account that former combatants may remain disengaged but can continue to encourage others to engage in violence, even unintentionally through the glamorisation of violence. In summary, the signs of a de-radicalisation programme having had a significant effect in countering violent extremism are difficult to identify and attribute during and after the de-radicalisation programme when the focus is solely on the former combatants themselves. However, the fact that there are difficulties in ascertaining recidivism rates is not an indication that de-radicalisation programmes are not effective or worthwhile, but rather that the indicators of success sought have been far too narrow to capture the potential changes brought about by de-radicalisation in certain contexts. This has been recognised by others who have sought a more 'qualitative approach' to assessing attitudinal change among individual participants during the programme and in the re-integration phase however recidivism rates still tend to be the preferred measure despite its significant flaws.[12]

While recidivism reduction is an important aspect of countering terrorism, the risk tends to be more greatly influenced by whether the former combatant has successfully re-integrated into society.[13] It is now a near-consensus that the existence of strong links between a former combatant/extremist and their family and community can facilitate successful re-integration and reduce recidivism,[14] however it is unclear to what extent de-radicalisation programmes facilitate or impede this form of re-integration. In some cases re-integration programmes have little focus on de-radicalisation or promoting ideological change, and other behavioural-oriented measures were more successful in reducing the risk of recidivism.[15] On the other hand, Barrelle argues that de-radicalisation programmes can facilitate acceptance of a plurality of views in society and that re-integration into mainstream society can reduce the risk of recidivism.[16] While the article does not contest the arguments of these excellent studies, this nascent but important literature has thus far focused on a few (similar) contexts which may obfuscate the influence of ideational relations between societies within the state. The ability of former combatants to be accepted by family and the community is shaped by the community's ideational relation to the state and to the radical sections of society (the

ideational context). For example, in some contexts, families may face extensive normative pressure from the community to not accept the former combatant because they have de-radicalised,[17] and therefore de-radicalisation programmes would need to take this context into account to ensure they are successful. De-radicalisation programmes which promote ideological change, the renunciation of violence, and successful re-integration into 'mainstream society' through family support are significant factors in shaping whether or not the programmes will be successful, however so is the ideational context which encompasses the relationship between the former combatant and the community they are re-integrated into. Thus, in some cases re-integration and de-radicalisation can be in tension with the goals of recidivism reduction. By seeking to conceptualise how re-integration into different social contexts impinges on the effectiveness of de-radicalisation, the paper provides a complementary framework to assessing effectiveness which circumvents the attribution problems inherent in using recidivism as a measure.

The article argues that the potential 'added-value' of de-radicalisation programmes is not solely in providing a better quality of disengagement (i.e. greater reduction in the risk of recidivism) but by providing a better quality of (ideological) re-integration. By extension, de-radicalisation programmes are more effective when they take into account the ideological make-up of the re-integrating community and what constitutes the normative boundaries of acceptable attitudes and behaviour (i.e. what is radical); not by solely imposing elitist-defined identities which have little resonance in sections of society. This better quality of re-integration goes beyond only ensuring former combatants do not return to violence but by also contributing to transitional justice,[18] greater security in community cohesion and identity and diffusing de-radicalisation throughout the social movement.[19] However to be clear the article is not arguing that de-radicalisation is a silver bullet in all contexts, but rather that the goals of de-radicalisation have been framed narrowly as recidivism reduction or as harmful state-control/posturing, whereas in certain ideational contexts they can have a greater transformative role to play in society. Setting out the contexts as ideal type relations of de-radicalisation programmes and re-integration serves as a heuristic to measure efficacy based on more readily-available and stable factors than connecting recidivism rates with de-radicalisation.

Conceptualising De-Radicalisation and Re-Integration

De-radicalisation has been commonly understood as an abandonment of a radical ideology and the emphasis on ideological abandonment (narrow de-radicalisation) has obfuscated other components of de-radicalisation which include a gradual moderation of beliefs, public renunciation and de-legitimisation of violence (broad de-radicalisation).[20] Given radicalisation is often framed as gradual and complex process of escalation,[21] the article understands de-radicalisation similarly as a complex process of wide attitudinal change which by definition of being a process constitutes de-radicalisation regardless of whether or not it has reached its supposed 'end state' of ideological abandonment. By making this distinction between types of de-radicalisation – ideological changes and changing attitudes and normative beliefs toward behaviour - the article proposes two ideal-types of former combatant agency.

De-radicalisation is predicated on the initial agential decision to disengage from a course of action. The paper distinguishes between agency in terms of cohorts, whereby stages of conflict and the ebbs and flows of mobilisation are characterised by combatants disengaging individually, as loose social networks, or collectively over time.[22] Defector former combatant cohorts are characterised by seeking disengagement from involvement in the movement, though this may not mean they are de-radicalised.[23] They tend to disengage individually, were less committed ideologically to the movement in the first place, and have limited engagement politically beyond providing intelligence and demoralising active combatants.[24] Active former combatant cohorts refer to individual or collective actors who disengage from violence and participation in violent groups but exercise agency either in a capacity as part of the movement or counter-movement, thus often staying in touch physically or symbolically with the radical milieu and sympathisers. Of course, these distinctions are ideal types which overlap and can be further developed, however it is important to distinguish between former combatant interests post-disengagement as these trajectories place them in relation to different ideational contexts.

The article argues that the ideational context shapes the extent de-radicalisation programmes will be successful or not in re-integration. Ideational context is used to refer to the relationship between the ideas held by former combatant following participation in de-radicalisation programmes and ideational make-up of the community and state – the milieu - they are re-integrated into. Traditionally, the context of former combatant re-integration has been conceptualised as constituting different routes or fields in which they are integrated, such as the economy, society and politics.[25] The paper expands this to consider re-integration

in to ideational spaces, whereby communities (loosely defined) have shared or dominant norms, values, culture and political ideology. The theory being put forward is that ideal-types of ideational contexts can be identified where the emergent properties of the social relations underpinning de-radicalisation and re-integration shape the extent de-radicalisation programmes can have the aforementioned transformative role in society.

To better conceptualise ideal-types of ideational re-integration, the paper builds upon the concept of 'radical milieu' developed by Malthaner and Waldmann who make distinctions between three social circles: the terrorist group; the radical milieu; and the broader environment, which includes, ethnic constituencies from which they emerge, the reference groups, the state and/or 'other' reference-groups.[26] The term radical milieu was coined initially by Peter Waldmann to refer to a segment of a population which sympathises with terrorists, shares their perspectives, approves of certain forms of violence, and to varying degrees supports them morally and logically.[27] What distinguishes the radical milieu from typical sympathisers is that there is a form of social structure which is responsible for the in-group cohesion. The radical milieu provides longevity to terrorist activities, without which groups will over the course of time become weak. Malthaner and Waldmann go further to outline the conceptualisation of the radical milieu. Firstly, the radical milieu is a relational entity, consisting of shared experiences, symbols, and frameworks of interpretation. Secondly, the radical dimension of the milieu is used to denote a commitment to violence which is argued to be the constitutive and defining feature of the radical milieu. Radical milieus take different forms in terms of size, spatial concentration or dispersion, social composition and in terms of how stable or fluid they are. The form of radical milieus is in part shaped by the reach and capacity of the state where shantytowns, for example, may give a radical milieu space to expand.[28] Exiting radical milieus is often seen as synonymous with de-radicalisation,[29] however the article argues that this limits the possibility for transformation within the radical milieu, especially where the defining feature of supporting violence becomes more nuanced and conditional in the type and context in which violence is legitimate. Therefore while the two often do not sit well together, the article views de-radicalisation and participation in the radical milieu as not necessarily mutually exclusive

Malthaner and Waldmann distinguish the radical milieu from the reference-group – those sections of society that terrorist groups claim to represent – as the radical milieu are characterised by patterns of actual social relationships and face-to-face interaction.[30] The article extends this distinction further. It is important to also distinguish between the radical

milieu, the referent-sympathiser milieu, and the antagonistic milieu. Social groups outside the radical milieu, by definition, are characterised by their lack of support or opposition to violence or their lack of social cohesion. However, these distinctions are required given the fluidity of in-group cohesion developing among sympathisers over time and that there is a significant difference between not supporting violence (but supporting the cause) and opposing violence. [31] The antagonistic milieu refers to those sections of society and institutions which are actively mobilised against the terrorist group and radical milieu, not only opposing its use of violence but also contesting its shared experiences, symbols and frameworks of interpretation. The referent milieu, by definition of the radical and sympathiser milieu, is distinguished by its opposition to the use of violence but shares many of the experiences, symbols and framings of the radical milieu.[32] The following paper refers to the referent-sympathiser milieu in the Nigerian context to refer to both of these milieus and to capture the movement between these positions.

The ideational contexts in which former combatants are integrated differ in terms of the relations between these ideal-typical milieus; the arrangements of these social relations shape the potential effectiveness of de-radicalisation. Re-integration in Nigeria takes place in a context where former combatants are integrated into referent and antagonistic milieus, considerably cut off from a radical or sympathiser milieu. While this ideational context presents problems for re-integration the paper argues it is this type of social context where de-radicalisation programmes are a tool to overcome barriers to re-integration. Thus, the effectiveness of de-radicalisation in this context emerges not from recidivism rate reductions or behavioural/attitudinal changes of participants. Instead, the success of de-radicalisation should be judged in terms of whether it is successful in generating support for re-integration among the referent and antagonistic milieus and by bringing former combatant narratives into alignment with the re-integrating milieu. The next section provides an overview of the Nigerian de-radicalisation programme and how it was constructed to re-integrate defector former combatants into a certain type of milieu.

The Nigerian De-Radicalisation Programme and the Re-Integrating Context

The following section outlines how Nigeria's ideologically informed de-radicalisation programme seeks recidivism-reduction and re-integration of defector former combatants into a referent milieu as opposed to a radical or sympathiser milieu. By designing the de-

radicalisation programme around this specific social relationship, it limits the programme's traditional scope as providing a better quality of disengagement but presents opportunities in facilitating re-integration. Nigeria's de-radicalisation initiative has its roots in the government's 2014 National Security Strategy, which called for an expansion of a 'soft approach' which would include a countering violent extremism programme. The three components of the strategy were counter-radicalisation, communication, and de-radicalisation. [33] This includes the official de-radicalisation programmes which have developed in prisons and other government-run facilities, the policy of amnesties being offered to former Boko Haram combatants as part of Operation Safe Corridor, and in local initiatives and informal efforts to re-integrate former Boko Haram combatants into communities.[34] The Nigerian prison de-radicalisation programme was publicly launched in 2014, and reached the end of its first phase of development and implementation in April 2016.[35] In 2015, hundreds of Boko Haram members were in detention, with forty-seven having taken up the government's safe-passage offer of prison sentences with counselling support in the de-radicalisation programmes. [36] Since then the number of Boko Haram defectors in prisons, and specifically the rehabilitation programmes, has supposedly increased exponentially to an estimated 800 members. [37] De-radicalisation and re-integration programmes have continued to expand beyond the initial prison programme: on 22nd August 2017, the Chief of Defence Staff, Abayomi Olonisakin, spoke at a National Stakeholders' Forum on Re-integration in the North-East and said 96 ex-combatants in camp in Gombe and 565 women and children were being prepared for a 12-week rehabilitation programme.[38]

The Nigerian programme has adopted the dominant understanding of de-radicalisation as of a process in which people reject the radical ideology they once embraced. The fundamental assumption that underpins de-radicalisation programmes is that de-radicalisation – as an abandonment of a radical ideology - ensures a better quality of disengagement by reducing the risk of recidivism. [39] The Nigerian programme shares this assumption but also frames de-radicalisation as a means to becoming 'better citizens, imbued with genuine nationalism'.[40] The Office of the National Security Advisor (ONSA) established the prison programme's eventual goal as being to "change the beliefs, views, values and attitudes of the violent extremist prisoners (de-radicalisation) rather than only changing their behaviour (disengagement from violence)". [41] Working towards this goal the programme used an individualised approach, identifying the risk-related needs of each prisoner, in order to implement interventions to reduce their risk of engaging or advocating violent extremism.[42]

The overarching de-radicalisation initiatives in Nigeria have the intended goal of supporting the re-integration of former combatants into society through educational support, although it is recognised that full re-integration may be a longer term objective and community needs would have to also be taken into account.[43]

The Nigerian de-radicalisation programme is primarily characterised by former combatants who are defectors seeking an exit from Boko Haram and not seeking to continue fighting for the cause by different means, as would be associated with active former combatants. The focus on encouraging defectors as opposed to collective disengagement (which tends to involve re-integrating active former combatants) can be understood in the context of unsuccessful attempts by the previous Nigerian government to engage in negotiations and offer an amnesty to the Boko Haram leadership. [44] The Nigerian de-radicalisation programme aims to re-integrate defector former combatants into a section of society which can be characterised as a referent milieu, by and large, dominated and controlled by an antagonistic milieu of government troops and vigilante forces. Firstly, public sympathy for Boko Haram has plummeted in northern Nigeria and while support for some markers of Islamist politics, such as greater Sharia law, remain significant, views which may be constitutive of the radical or sympathiser milieus have also declined. [45] Of course, this is not to say it is a reflection across northern Nigeria uniformly or that it is a durable attitudinal change – it could be there is a greater dissatisfaction with the tactics of Boko Haram rather than their broader agenda. Secondly, the state and the Civilian Joint Task Force, have relative control over this ideational context. The Civilian Joint Task Force started as a grassroots group of anti-Boko Haram vigilantes who have expanded significantly (with 26,000 members in Borno state)[46] and have come to play a considerable role in helping the government in their counter-Boko Haram efforts. [47] The paper contends this relationship between former combatant type and milieu type is important to understand the effectiveness of de-radicalisation programmes.

De-Radicalisation and Re-Integration in Nigeria

There are two components of the Nigerian re-integrating context which impinges upon the potential for de-radicalisation programmes to be successful. Firstly, the social relationship which the de-radicalisation programme seeks to invoke (i.e. defector former combatants- referent/antagonistic milieus) further exacerbates the attribution problem which

makes recidivism reduction a poor indicator of success. When defector former combatants are re-integrated the risk of recidivism is lower, but it is the environment and not de-radicalisation which contributes to this. Secondly, while the re-integrating context reduces the risk of recidivism through monitoring and social enforcement against re-joining Boko Haram, it also contains a series of barriers which frustrate re-integration. These barriers include an inability to protect former combatants and competing priorities from elsewhere, which most notably create suspicion of re-integration. While this re-integrating context may frustrate the objectives of de-radicalisation programmes in its traditional sense and obfuscate the extent to which it is successful or not, it also opens up opportunities for de-radicalisation programmes to facilitate re-integration and overcome barriers to re-integration among the milieus.

The Nigerian de-radicalisation programme is built upon a social context which makes using recidivism reduction as an indicator of success or failure problematic. The Nigerian de-radicalisation programme faces all of the aforementioned problems in ascertaining its success through recidivism rates. Barkindo and Bryans argue that in their assessment of the Nigerian de-radicalisation programme there were some initial positive developments shown by reductions of risks in the ongoing assessment programme and improved relations within the prison.[48] However they also highlight the difficulty in using recidivism rates as a measure of success, stating it will be important to see if early levels of engagement and change are sustained and have any eventual impact on released prisoners.[49] Nevertheless, the argument being developed here is that the problems of recidivism indicators derive also from the type of social relationship the de-radicalisation programme seeks to form and reinforce.

The re-integrating context raises questions of the extent to which de-radicalisation programmes are necessary to reduce the risk of recidivism. The current cohort of Boko Haram former combatants does not constitute the ideological core of the movement. Many Boko Haram former combatants were coerced into joining, joined because of joblessness and poverty, or seeking greater religious knowledge.[50] Most former combatants have re-entered communities where they are under constant surveillance by others in the community, particularly the CJTF. This has implications for the de-radicalisation programme insofar as the risk of recidivism is reduced by enforcing disengagement through monitoring by security forces and enforcing of social norms by communities resistant to the radical milieu. Thus, recidivism indicators are not only problematic for understanding the outcomes of de-radicalisation programmes, they are specifically not suited for capturing the role of de-radicalisation programmes where defector former combatants are to be re-integrated into a

context in which the radical and sympathiser milieus are largely absent. They are not suited insofar as the attribution problem is further exacerbated – i.e. how is it known if recidivism reduction or relapse was due to the programme or the push and pull factors of the re-integrating context – but it also reduces the potential impact of de-radicalisation to the individual and underplays its role in changing attitudes within the re-integrating milieus. The attribution problem can be addressed by conceptualising the social relations which de-radicalisation programmes seek to invoke and identifying the causal influence the re-integrating milieu, as a form of structure, has upon re-integrating former combatants. In doing so, it is possible to identify what impact de-radicalisation programmes have upon re-integration, but it also broadens the transformative role of de-radicalisation programmes beyond former combatant attitudinal change and recidivism reduction.

One of the difficulties which undermine the de-radicalisation programme's efforts is the push-back against the re-integration of former Boko Haram. Communities fear that re-integrated former combatants will continue to spread Boko Haram's support for violence even if the group is defeated and there is scepticism of those former combatants who do denounce violence.[51] While the surveillance of re-integrated former combatants may reduce the likelihood of them re-engaging in violence (even if there is no actual intent), community suspicion and poor discipline among the security forces led to the killing of two former combatants released from the programme.[52] The backlash extends to the prison where the de-radicalisation programme takes place, where more than 100 prisoners protested against the perceived preferential treatment Boko Haram prisoners received.[53] Efforts at re-integrating former Boko Haram combatants is further made difficult by pressures to prioritise resettling the two million people who were displaced by the conflict and that the government ought to provide equity in opportunity to youth to also provide support to those who stayed and did not go to join Boko Haram.[54] Thus, while successful re-integration can reduce the risk of recidivism and enforce norms due to the limited presence of a radical and sympathiser milieu, the Nigerian re-integrating context presents problems for de-radicalisation programmes insofar as there is community push-back against re-integration. Excessive force by the Nigerian security forces and the CJTF, such as the killing of re-integrated former combatants and the high levels of suspicion by communities, risks being counter-productive in deterring participation in the programme or by pushing former combatants to re-integrate into social spaces where the state has less control.[55] Therefore, the success and failure of recidivism

reduction, in this context, is not related to de-radicalisation but on the successful re-integration into the referent milieu.

In addition to community opposition to re-integrating former combatants, the Nigerian context is particularly distinct from other countries implementing de-radicalisation programmes insofar as it has other re-integration programmes existing. The Nigerian government is seeking to re-integrate Niger Delta militants through an economically-oriented Disarmament, Demobilization and Re-Integration programme, which has split public opinion and influenced community perceptions of the Boko Haram de-radicalisation programme. [56] Related is the question of whether the CJTF will also be re-integrated and how this can be achieved [57]. The Nigerian government has integrated CJTF members into the Nigerian security forces with the promise of having a plan for their re-integration.[58] Yet it is unclear whether the government is capable of sustainably absorbing all 26,000 members of the CJTF into the security forces or elsewhere and concerns have been noted that failure to fully (re)-integrate them could be dangerous.[59] In effect, the Nigerian government is faced with a situation where it seeks to re-integrate three different types of former combatants (Boko Haram, the CJTF, and Niger Delta militants), differentiated by their level of threat and level of popular support within the state, which subsequently creates competition and restraints in re-integration. Support for the Boko Haram de-radicalisation programme has been tainted by comparisons with DDR in the Niger Delta, which itself creates resentment in terms of resource allocation and the perceived lack of effectiveness.[60] Taking these factors into account, there are significant barriers to re-integration which may seem to limit the chances of the de-radicalisation programme having much success. However, barriers to re-integration are common regardless of there being de-radicalisation programmes in place. The article contends that while the Nigerian context may seem likely to frustrate de-radicalisation efforts, it presents an opportunity for de-radicalisation to overcome barriers to re-integration.

Broadening the Role of De-Radicalisation

The success of the Nigerian de-radicalisation programme is not dependent on whether the programme content reduces the risk of recidivism, and neither are occurrences of recidivism an indication that they are failing. The social relationship which the de-radicalisation programme seeks to invoke is counter-intuitive to traditional objectives of de-radicalisation: specifically, defector former combatants would not need de-radicalised to

reduce the risk of recidivism when integrated in an environment where there is no radical milieu. The successful re-integration of defector former combatants into the referent/antagonist milieu is sufficient in reducing the risk of recidivism, however there are a series of barriers which frustrate re-integration. In the Nigerian context, the success of de-radicalisation programmes is not found in whether it can change individual attitudes but whether it can change and re-align social relations, namely in facilitating re-integration of a type of former combatants into a referent milieu.

It is argued that despite being problematic for de-radicalisation programmes in a traditional sense, the re-integrating context under examination highlights a more substantial role for de-radicalisation insofar as, rather than changing the minds and behaviour of former combatants, it's main marker of effectiveness is in generating support for re-integration. The Nigerian de-radicalisation programme recognises community resistance to re-integrating former Boko Haram combatants, with the head of the Nigerian de-radicalisation programme emphasising the importance of community engagement in providing like-for-like government support in training and vocational skills for locals as well as the re-integrated former combatants, and elsewhere recognising whether there is a market for such skills.[61] However, the development of jobs and skills do not constitute the core of a de-radicalisation programme which emphasise ideological and attitudinal change; to conflate traditional DDR programmes with de-radicalisation further exacerbates the attribution problem and weakens the function of distinct de-radicalisation programmes.

Nigeria's de-radicalisation programme has another feature which has the potential to facilitate re-integration, yet it has been overlooked as the emphasis of the programme has been on either attitudinal change among the former combatants or socio-economic measures at re-integration. De-radicalisation's broader function is the ideological re-integration of former combatants into the referent milieu which manifest in changes on both sides of the social relationship. For former combatants: the success of de-radicalisation has been traditionally viewed as requiring genuine attitudinal change or ideological abandonment, yet a greater priority is providing former combatants with 'scripts' which facilitates their re-integration into a specific milieu. By perfecting stories which justify disengagement in a manner which resonates with the re-integrating milieu, former combatants are in a better position to ingratiate themselves with local communities. For example, the programme reinforces former combatant narratives that challenge Boko Haram's claim to reflect the values of 'true Islam' and challenges Boko Haram's claim to be a means of deepening

religious awareness. Returning to points made earlier, the Nigerian de-radicalisation programme is specifically and uniquely framed to the public by appeals to the compatibility of religious and national identity. Justifying disengagement in this manner only makes sense in relation to the referent milieu in Northern Nigeria. In other words, the de-radicalisation programme facilitates ideological re-integration however this is shaped more by the re-integrating context than necessarily changing the individual former combatant's mind-set. Thus, a key strength of the Nigerian de-radicalisation programme is its religious framing and emphasis on Nigerian identity – not because changing or adopting religious views has a causal effect on behaviour but because it facilitates ideological re-integration of defector former combatants into the referent milieu. While the ideological components of de-radicalisation programmes may have little clear role in shaping recidivism rates, they are important in shaping public opinion on re-integrating former combatants.

Conclusion

The Nigerian government has followed the trend set by other countries that have set up de-radicalisation programmes to change and re-integrate Islamist former combatants. The fundamental questions posed with regard to de-radicalisation programmes – of their efficacy and appropriateness – are relevant in the Nigerian case too. The paper has sought to engage in the public debate on whether de-radicalisation programmes in Nigeria are necessary to counter Boko Haram. Criticism against de-radicalisation in Nigeria has revolved around whether the programme is effective, how success can be measured, and whether it is desirable in the context of community backlash. The paper has argued that de-radicalisation programmes can be successful however this requires shifting away from focusing on attitudinal change among former combatants and the use of recidivism reduction as an indicator of success. Despite high-profile cases of successes and failures, recidivism is not solely suitable to judge the Nigerian initiatives on this basis because of the limited time lapsed and poor recording of re-integration. More important is the difficulty in ascertaining what causal role the de-radicalisation programme and its constituent parts had on desistance and recidivism. Instead, the potential success of the de-radicalisation programme can emerge from the social relations which underpin re-integration: the context of community push-back against re-integration provides the conditions for a de-radicalisation programme to be more successful. Counter-intuitively, the barriers to re-integration in Nigeria constitute the

opportunity for de-radicalisation to facilitate ideological re-integration and assuage concerns of the re-integrating milieu. Thus, rather than serving to reduce the risk of recidivism through ideological or attitudinal change among former combatants, the salience and role of the de-radicalisation initiatives is to transmit the re-integrating community's conception of appropriate forms of identity and to generate support from the public and at the international level. De-radicalisation in Nigeria provides former combatants with a publicly acknowledged 'brand' of repentance and framings (i.e. how to sell their disengagement to the re-integrating audience) by which they can re-integrate with potentially less community resistance.

Nigeria presents a unique case study for future research on de-radicalisation and re-integration insofar as there are a series of different re-integration programmes in operation. We can expect this plurality of re-integration challenges added to with the release of 'hard-core' ideologically committed Boko Haram members in addition to the cohort discussed in the paper. The paper has been limited in applying the framework to other re-integrating contexts and in demonstrating frame resonance, yet the paper provides a foundation for future research by conceptualising the role of context in shaping de-radicalisation and re-integration Furthermore, the paper's conceptual framework and the Nigerian case points to the significance of actively framing de-radicalisation as a means to achieving programme objectives. As yet, no research has explored how governments and programmes frame de-radicalisation and the extent to which different frame-types resonate. The return of Islamic State foreign fighters to Europe presents a significant challenge in re-integration. While de-radicalisation programmes may reduce their likelihood of re-offending, another significant challenge is to ensure there is public support for their re-integration given community resistance or acceptance of re-integration is often the main factor in risk of recidivism.

Notes

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[1] BBC. "Nigeria Boko Haram: Militants 'technically defeated"

[2] Kazeem. "Nigeria keeps saying it has defeated Boko Haram against all the evidence"; SBM Intel. "WITH CONTINUING BOKO HARAM ATTACKS WHAT IS THE STATE OF THE NORTH EAST?"; Kazee. "Boko Haram's latest attacks will dent Nigerians' hopes Buhari can end the insurgency soon".

[3] Punch. "Boko Haram: Deradicalisation, a misplaced strategy".

[4] Horgan and Braddock. "Rehabilitating the terrorists? 267-291.

[5] For an example of the negative consequences of de-radicalisation, see Qureshi. "PREVENT: creating "radicals" to strengthen anti-Muslim narratives." 181-191.; Kundnani. "Radicalisation: the journey of a concept." 3-25.

[6] Holmer, and Shtuni. Returning Foreign Fighters and the Reintegration Imperative.; Speckhard, Wakim & Shajkovci ISIS and Foreign Fighter Returnees

[7] Koehler. Understanding Deradicalization

[8] Moskalenko, and McCauley. "Measuring political mobilization". 239-260.

[9] Silke. "Disengagement or deradicalization". 18-21.

[10] Barkindo, and Bryans. "De-Radicalising Prisoners in Nigeria".

[11] Ibid; Anyadike. "Boko Haram: Nigeria winning the battle but losing the war?"

[12] Barkindo, and Bryans. "De-Radicalising Prisoners in Nigeria"; Koehler. Understanding Deradicalization.

[13] Kaplan, and Nussio. "Explaining recidivism of ex-combatants in Colombia."

[14] Ibid; Rabasa, Pettyjohn, Ghez, and Boucek. Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists.

[15] Marsden, Reintegrating radicals; Schuurman and Bakker: Reintegrating jihadist extremists.

[16] Barrelle,. "Pro-integration: disengagement from and life after extremism." 129-142.

[17] Rabasa, Pettyjohn, Ghez, and Boucek. Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists.

[18] Mühlhausen. "Conflict Management, Transitional Justice and De-radicalization–Different, but common goals." 260-291.

[19] Omar Ashour discusses how de-radicalisation can have a domino-effect within a movement. Ashour, Omar. The de-radicalization of Jihadists.

[20] Clubb. De-radicalization, disengagement and the attitudes-behavior debate.

[21] Hafez and Mullins. "The radicalization puzzle".

[22] Alonso, and Bada. "What role have former ETA terrorists played in counter terrorism and counter radicalization initiatives in Spain?."

[23] For a discussion on causes of disengagement, see Altier, Thoroughgood, and Horgan. "Turning away from terrorism" 647-661.

[24] Speckhard, Wakim and Shajkovci. ISIS and Foreign Fighter Returnees

[25] "Kaplan and Nussio. ""Community counts"; Söderström. "The concept of political reintegration in current peace research." (2013).

[26] Waldmann. "The radical milieu".

[27] Ibid, 25.

[28] Malthaner and Waldmann. "The radical milieu" 979-998.

[29] Former combatants in Norther Ireland have been influential in challenging support for violence within communities. See Dwyer, "Expanding DDR"; Joyce, and Lynch. "Doing Peace" 1-19.;
Ferguson, McDaid and McAuley. Social movements, structural violence and conflict transformation in Northern Ireland

[30] Malthaner, and Waldmann. "The radical milieu" 979-998.

[31] For a distinction between non-violence and not-violence and its implications for counter terrorism, see Schmid. "Violent and non-violent extremism"

[32] Malthaner and Waldmann. "The radical milieu" 979-998.

[33] Barkindo and Bryans. "De-Radicalising Prisoners in Nigeria" 1-25.

[34] Centre for Democracy and Development. "Stakeholders' Dialogue on Government Approaches to Managing Defecting Violent Extremists". 2.

[35] Barkindo, and Bryans. "De-Radicalising Prisoners in Nigeria" 4

[36] Hinshaw and McGroarty. "Nigeria Reaches Out to Former Boko Haram Fighters, Victims; Government Offers Ex-Militants Rehabilitation at Prison Complex, while also Aiding Women they Traumatized."

[37] Ujunwa . "Rehabilitation camp for Boko Haram fighters to open in April"

[38] Premium Times. "Nigerian govt promises to de-radicalise repentant Boko Haram members"

[39] Doosje et al. "Terrorism, radicalization and de-radicalization." 82; Clubb, "De-radicalization, disengagement and the attitudes-behavior debate".

[40] Abare. "52 Boko Haram ex-combatants undergo rehabilitation in Gombe –Military".

[41] Barkindo, and Bryans. "De-Radicalising Prisoners in Nigeria". 6

[42] Ibid. 11

[43] Anyadikei. "The Road to Redemption? Unmaking Nigeria's Boko Haram"; Felbab-Brown. "Under the hot Sahel sun".

[44] Agbiboa. "Resistance to Boko Haram"

[45] Olojo. "Nigeria's troubled North"; Lipka. "Muslims and Islam"

[46] The Economist. "Nigerian vigilante"

[47] Agbiboa. "Resistance to Boko Haram" 14.

[48] Barkindo, and Bryans. "De-Radicalising Prisoners in Nigeria" 18-20

[49] Ibid. 19-20

[50] Linetsky. "Nigeria after Boko Haram"; Mercy Corps. "Motivations and empty promises"

[51] Felbab-Brown. "Under the hot Sahel sun: "Post"-Boko Haram challenges in Niger and Nigeria"; Linetsky. "Nigeria after Boko Haram".

[52] ; Anyadike. "Boko Haram: Nigeria winning the battle but losing the war?".

[53] Hinshaw and McGroarty. "Nigeria Reaches Out to Former Boko Haram Fighters, Victims"; Anyadike. "The Road to Redemption?".

[54] Anyadike. "How jobs can help Niger win the war against Boko Haram".

[55] Mercy Corps. "Motivations and empty promises"

[56] Ebiede. "Reintegrating Boko Haram".

[57]Felbab-Brown, Vanda. "Under the hot Sahel sun"; Campbell. "Buhari Discusses the Future of the Civilian Joint Task Force".

[58] Oduah. "Nigeria Vigilantes Ponder Future After Fighting Boko Haram".

[59] The Economist. "Nigerian vigilantes"; Oduah. "Nigeria Vigilantes Ponder Future After Fighting Boko Haram".

[60]Ebiede. "Nigeria: Amnesty and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration for Boko Haram?".; Ebiede. "Reintegrating Boko Haram".

[61]Anyadike. "The Road to Redemption?" Felbab-Brown. "Under the hot Sahel sun"

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