Abstract

Nigeria has recently joined the many states which have established de-radicalisation programmes with the aim of re-integrating former combatants and reducing the risk of recidivism. The article engages with debates on how the success of de-radicalisation can be ascertained given the substantial flaws of using recidivism as a measure. It broadens the conception the success of de-radicalisation beyond recidivism rates at the individual level to take into account its social impact, examining how the ideational context of re-integration shapes the efficacy of de-radicalisation programmes. The article argues that re-integration into ideational contexts which are influenced by a radical milieu risks rendering de-radicalisation efforts as counter-productive and being a cause of recidivism. Conversely, de-radicalisation programmes in ideational contexts which are influenced by a referent milieu aligned with state forces, such as in Nigeria, function to overcome community resistance to re-integration. De-radicalisation programmes provide 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. Thus community resistance to re-integrating former combatants in Nigeria is the context in which de-radicalisation programmes can be, paradoxically, more successful as communicative strategies of resolving community tensions. The article makes a conceptual contribution to de-radicalisation studies by broadening what constitutes success in de-radicalisation away from recidivism reduction and by placing greater focus on the implications of social relations with radical milieus and referent milieus on the efficacy of de-radicalisation.
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. There are also positive signs that suggest the military gains have had some success in weakening the group, resulting in a significant reduction in the group’s capabilities, with violent incidents dropping 29 per cent and casualties decreasing by 73 per cent on the previous year.\(^2\) 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).\(^3\) Therefore despite the group no longer being capable of mounting large-scale attacks, 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 needed\(^4\) 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.

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The paper contributes conceptually to a broader discussion on whether de-radicalisation is effective or desirable in order to counter terrorism. It builds upon the argument that the efficacy of de-radicalisation has been conceptualised too narrowly which has de-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, the use of recidivism as a measure of success has been highly criticised - thus studying the effectiveness of the Nigerian programme in any timescale with recidivism as the measure will be fraught with problems. 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. 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 reintegrated into, or it is 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 measures of success and underplaying re-integration into the social context, de-radicalisation programmes are easy targets for being criticised as unsuccessful, unnecessary and nefarious. Recently there has been much interest in the relationship between de-radicalisation and re-integration – best exemplified by the debate in regard to (former) ISIS fighters returning to Europe. 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.

7 For an example of the negative consequences of de-radicalisation, see Qureshi, Asim. "PREVENT: creating "radicals" to strengthen anti-Muslim narratives." Critical Studies on Terrorism 8, no. 1 (2015): 181-191.
De-Radicalisation and Re-Integration

There has been much research on how former combatants can be successfully re-integrated into society, thus reducing the risk they re-engage in violence,⁹ although the causal relationship of de-radicalisation within this process of re-integration is less well understood. While much research on de-radicalisation has acknowledged the need to take into account the context of de-radicalisation,¹⁰ only a few studies have focused on the context of re-integration and its relationship with de-radicalisation (programmes). 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,¹¹ however it is unclear to what extent de-radicalisation programmes facilitate this form of re-integration. In some cases the re-integration programmes have little focus on de-radicalisation or promoting ideological change, and it was other behavioural-oriented measures which were more successful in reducing the risk of recidivism.¹² On the other hand, Barrelle argues that de-radicalisation programmes can facilitate acceptance of a plurality of views within society and that re-integration into mainstream society can reduce the risk of recidivism.¹³ 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

⁹ See Kaplan, Oliver, and Enzo Nussio. "Explaining recidivism of ex-combatants in Colombia." Journal of Conflict Resolution (2016);
the former combatant \textit{because} they have de-radicalised,\textsuperscript{14} 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-radicalization 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-radicalization, the paper provides a complementary framework to assessing effectiveness which circumvents the problems inherent in using recidivism as a measure.

The paper focuses on Nigeria because it presents an ideational context which differs from previous studies on de-radicalisation and re-integration. Violent mobilisation in countries where de-radicalisation initiatives have been prevalent have tended to be characterised by smaller networks of individuals (in Europe and the US) or by a radical milieu where ideological motives have been front and centre of violent mobilisation (in the Middle East and South-East Asia). Thus, conceptually, de-radicalisation initiatives emerge from the assumption that ideological drivers are salient in violent extremism and have been focused on the change and re-integration of the individual, often into a (Western) state-centric conception of society where they and their (former) beliefs are a minority, but less focused on the relationship between the former combatant and the actual society they are re-integrated into. Furthermore, whereas other studies have focused on re-integration of formers into ‘mainstream society’,\textsuperscript{15} the Nigerian case challenges this conception of ‘mainstream’ insofar as Boko Haram former combatants’ communities are more accepting of (non-violent) Islamist politics regionally within an informal consociational state.\textsuperscript{16} Thus the Nigerian case represents different social and ideational relations which challenge a Western-centric conception of ‘mainstream society’, where views and attitudes which may fall under the remit of de-radicalisation in these contexts do not in some communities in Nigeria. Of course, it

\textsuperscript{14} Rabasa, Angel, Stacie L. Pettyjohn, Jeremy J. Ghez, and Christopher Boucek. Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists. RAND, 2010.


must be noted that this argument is based on the assumption that the purpose of de-radicalisation is indeed to counter-terrorism and change behaviour as they claim, rather than as a means to project a hegemonic state discourse of identity (i.e. the Critical school’s perspective of its ‘nefarious function’).

Thus the focus of the paper is to discuss how the prospects of de-radicalisation in Nigeria can be evaluated in a situation where typical measures are precarious and reversible. The means by which it does this is to make a conceptual argument on the role of (ideational) context within a state by focusing on ‘bi-national’ contexts which differ from the UK and Australian contexts explored by Marsden and Barrelle respectively. With this objective in mind, examples from Northern Ireland (1990s-2010s) are drawn upon to strengthen conceptual development and to find a counterpoint with Nigeria. Northern Ireland reflects a more formal consociational system where Nationalist and Unionist identities are represented institutionally and there exists geographically defined communities which have ideological affinities with former combatants and their cause. Of course there are many differences between the Nigerian and Northern Irish contexts and are not comparable however the purpose of bringing in the Northern Irish case is it contributes to the conceptual argument for focusing on the ideational context, which then contributes to the primary focus of the paper of understanding how effective de-radicalisation is in Nigeria. To understand de-radicalisation the article examines the impact of ideational relations within society – the ideational context - upon de-radicalisation processes and programmes. Before outlining the conceptual framework, the article provides an overview of the Nigeria’s de-radicalisation initiatives. It

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17 Whether or not de-radicalisation programmes are effective in this regard is another matter to be explored. For an excellent study on de-radicalisation from a Critical Theory perspective, see Elshimi, Mohammed. "De-radicalisation interventions as technologies of the self: a Foucauldian analysis." Critical Studies on Terrorism 8, no. 1 (2015): 110-129.
20 For example, one may argue that there was no de-radicalisation programme in Northern Ireland therefore the fundamental basis for comparison is problematic from the outset, before even considering the many other differences. However, while there was no formal de-radicalisation programme, the disengagement and re-integration of former combatants had many features of collective self-deradicalisation. Internal dialogue within the Provisional IRA prior and during the peace process was crucial in shifting traditional ideological tenets which facilitated a softening of attitudes toward violence.
makes the case for why measuring recidivism rates is not sufficient and that the impact of deradicalisation needs to be broadened to capture its wider social impact.

**The Nigerian De-Radicalisation Programmes**

The Nigerian de-radicalisation programme shares many similarities with the European models in terms of design however the differ considerably in terms of the scale of former combatants, challenges to re-integrating them, and capacity issues which makes recidivism measures even more problematic. Nigeria’s de-radicalisation initiatives have their 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.\(^{21}\) 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.\(^{22}\) The Nigerian prison de-radicalisation programme was publicly launched in 2014, as part of a countering violent extremism (CVE) programme to also include community based counter-radicalisation and strategic communications, and reached the end of its first phase of development and implementation in April 2016.\(^{23}\) 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.\(^{24}\) Since then the number of Boko Haram defectors in prisons, and specifically the rehabilitation programmes, has supposedly increased exponentially to an estimated 800 members.\(^{25}\) De-

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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 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.26

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.27 The Nigerian programme shares this assumption but also frames de-radicalisation as an ends to becoming ‘better citizens, imbued with genuine nationalism’.28 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)”.29 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.30 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 re-integration may be a longer term objective and community needs would have to also be taken into account.31 The article will return to the broader objectives and

impact of de-radicalisation but firstly it will address the question of whether de-radicalisation provides a better quality of disengagement.

One of the most common measures of judging whether a de-radicalisation programme is successful is the recidivism rates.\(^{32}\) 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.\(^{33}\) Secondly, recidivism rates for former members of militant groups tends to be substantially lower than ‘ordinary criminals’, therefore the added value of ideological components in programmes is often unclear.\(^{34}\) 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.\(^{35}\) A fifth difficulty is, practically, many such programmes have not had sufficient time to be judged on recidivism rates,\(^{36}\) however it is unclear at what point there has been ‘sufficient time’ and whether this can be attributed to de-radicalisation rather than other factors such as ageing. 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 glamourisation of violence.

The Nigerian de-radicalisation programme faces all of these problems in ascertaining its success, in addition to a few of its own unique difficulties. Barkindo and Bryans argue that in their assessment of the Nigerian prisoner programme there some initial positive

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developments shown by reductions of risks in the ongoing assessment programme and improved relations within the prison. However they also highlight the difficulty in using recidivism rates as a measure of success and that it will be important to see if these early levels of engagement and change are sustained and have any eventual impact on released prisoners. In one high-profile case of recidivism a detainee returned to Boko Haram after nine months in a de-radicalisation initiative and two former combatants released from the programme were killed. There are more practical problems in evaluating the Nigerian de-radicalisation programme’s success, namely in limited organisation and technology for keeping track of former fighters upon release. 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. Koehler identifies alternative measures used in de-radicalization programmes however recidivism rates still tends to be the preferred measure despite its significant flaws.

38 Ibid - Barkindo and Bryans pp. 19-20
As it is the predominantly the successful re-integration of the former combatant into the family and community which reduces the risk of recidivism, recidivism rates should not be the indicator of whether de-radicalisation is successful or not but instead whether it serves re-integration. Therefore the question shifts to which contexts and which content of de-radicalisation programme facilitates or impedes successful re-integration. The article argues that the potential ‘added-value’ of de-radicalisation programmes therefore is not in providing a better quality of disengagement (i.e. greater reduction in the risk of recidivism) but by providing a better quality of re-integration. This better quality of re-integration goes beyond ensuring former combatants do not return to violence but by also contributing to transitional justice, greater security in community cohesion and identity and diffusing de-radicalisation throughout the social movement. 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 nefarious 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 and public renunciation and de-legitimisation of violence (broad de-radicalisation). Given radicalisation is often framed as gradual and complex process of escalation, the article understands de-radicalisation similarly as a complex process of wide attitudinal


45 Omar Ashour discusses how de-radicalisation can have a domino-effect within a movement. Ashour, Omar. The de-radicalization of Jihadists: Transforming armed Islamist movements. Routledge, 2009.


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.48 Defector former combatant cohorts are characterised by seeking disengagement from involvement in the movement, though this may not mean they are de-radicalised.49 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.50 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 contexts.

The Nigerian de-radicalisation programme is primarily characterised by former combatants who are defectors who are 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 constitution of the de-radicalisation programme was in part by design, and in part as a reflection of the dynamics of conflict and the lack of ‘ripeness’ or readiness to

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48 We see the impact over time of different cohorts of former combatants on a conflict and the discourse of disengagement. Alonso and Bada highlight the different attitudes between former ETA combatants who disengaged earlier and later in the conflict, where the former tends to be more clearly in renouncing violence than the latter. Alonso, Rogelio, and Javier Díaz Bada. "What role have former ETA terrorists played in counterterrorism and counter radicalization initiatives in Spain?." Studies in Conflict & Terrorism (2016).


50 Speckhard, Wakim & Shajkovci (Feb 28, 2017) ISIS and Foreign Fighter Returnees – Prosecute or Raise their Voices against ISIS? ICSVE Brief Reports http://www.icsve.org/brief-reports/isis-and-foreign-fighter-returnees-prosecute-or-raise-their-voices-against-isis/
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. One of the main strategies in this area used by the Jonathan administration was the setting up of the Committee on Dialogue and Peaceful Resolution of Security Challenges in the North in 2013, which was tasked with engaging with Boko Haram leaders and working towards disarmament of their members. The failure of these attempts reflects in part a lack of readiness to collectively disengage within the movement, particularly the more committed members. Thus the focus of the voluntary de-radicalisation programme targeted reintegrating followers but not the more ‘hard-core’ committed members of Boko Haram responsible for mass atrocities. It attracted defectors who were coerced, pressured or circumstantially motivated into joining, less committed to the tactics of Abubakr Shekau’s Boko Haram or attracted by the prospect of escaping imprisonment. The article argues that this specific type of former combatant places them into different social relations from those former combatants who may be more ideologically committed or more deeply embedded in the respective group. Understanding the type of social relations that former combatants are re-integrated into, in an ideational sense, has consequences for de-radicalisation programmes.

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

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the relationship between the ideas held by former combatant following participation in de-radicalisation programmes and ideational make-up of the community and state 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. 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. The radical milieu term 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. 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

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58 Waldmann, Peter. "The radical milieu: The under-investigated relationship between terrorists and sympathetic communities." Perspectives on Terrorism 2, no. 9 (2010). Pg. 25;
a radical milieu space to expand. Exiting radical milieus often seen as synonymous with de-radicalisation, 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. 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 there 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. 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 milieu, is characterised by its opposition to the use of violence but shares many of the experiences, symbols and framings of the radical milieu. A subset of the referent milieu are sympathisers, whose defining characteristic is the lack of in-group cohesion and an unwillingness to support violence in a meaningful way or to exercise agency on behalf of the movement.

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 effectiveness of de-radicalisation. For the sake of parsimony, the paper distinguishes between two ideational contexts, the first type of context (e.g. Nigeria 2010s) are communities which consist of members of the referent and antagonistic milieus, and the second type (e.g. Northern Ireland 1990s-2010s) being a community – whether this is a suburb, city or nation – which consists of or is heavily influenced by members of the radical and sympathiser milieus. The paper explores how cohort re-integration into these different contexts shapes and influences the effectiveness of de-radicalisation programmes and the types of de-radicalisation best deployed in each case.

**The Effectiveness of De-Radicalisation in Re-Integration**

The paper argues that, in addition to the extent of violence committed by Boko Haram, the lack of a relationship between the former combatant cohort and the radical milieu presents challenges for re-integration which de-radicalisation programmes can help to address. The social spaces former combatants are being re-integrated into in Nigeria are not dominated or influenced by the radical milieu but can be characterised as the referent-sympathiser milieu, particularly having shifted more toward the referent spectrum over the last few years of violence. Instead, 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)\(^63\) and come to play a considerable role in helping the government in their counter-Boko Haram efforts.\(^64\) This context contrasts with the situation in Northern Ireland during the period the main militant groups disengaged from the 1990s onwards. Years of cultivation (and coercion) of support in local areas and the de-legitimisation of the state and security forces had fostered social spaces where a radical milieu developed largely at the

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expense of state influence. The disengagement of groups such as the Provisional IRA led former combatants to re-integrate into these social spaces most notably as community workers (activists) or in the local peace tourism industry. These two different relational contexts have implications for de-radicalisation. In the former, de-radicalisation re-aligns former combatants with dominant views within dominant attitudes in the local community and by enforcing social norms, with the security services reducing the risk of recidivism by monitoring them (for as long as these are not too excessive). In the case of the latter, any substantive de-radicalisation would likely not resonate and would risk breaking the bond with the radical milieu (incentivising a return to violence), however softer forms of de-radicalisation (discrediting the utility of violence) may reduce the risk of recidivism. Thus the structure and relationship with society, and the radical milieu, can engender different forms of de-radicalisation which some programmes can counter-productively seek to discourage. Thus in Northern Ireland de-radicalisation would have been counter-productive to disengagement (and recidivism reduction), whereas the Nigerian de-radicalisation programme can facilitate re-integration into referent-sympathiser milieus, which in turn reduces the risk of recidivism.

One of the difficulties which undermine the de-radicalization programme’s efforts is the push-back against the reintegration of former Boko Haram combatants back into communities. Communities fear that reintegrated 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. 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. For Boko Haram prisoners not within the de-radicalisation programme, prison conditions have been

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described as ‘teeming, choleric military jails’, which have been investigated for human rights abuses, including for accusations of execution of prisoners. The application of a Niger Delta-style DDR programme to Boko Haram has been rejected, not only because of the dubious success of the former and its perceived unfairness among the general population, but also because of the stark differences between the two types of conflicts. Niger Delta militants were motivated by the unfair distribution of oil resources in the region and the government has sought their disengagement by providing former combatants with financial support to facilitate their reintegration. Ebiede argues that the types and targets of Boko Haram violence would make community acceptance more difficult to achieve and the financial incentives which underpinned the Niger Delta DDR programme will not be sufficient to attract Boko Haram members who have been influenced by the group’s ideology and ‘culture of violence’. Efforts at reintegrating 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 equal opportunities to youth and also provide support to those who stayed and did not go to join Boko Haram. Nevertheless, community resistance to reintegrating former Boko Haram combatants is recognised, 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 reintegrated former combatants, and elsewhere recognising whether there is a market for such skills.

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However, a reluctance to accept former combatants by the community at large is not uncommon – in Northern Ireland, former Loyalist and Republican combatant organisations emerged precisely in response to the difficulty ex-prisoners experienced in reintegrating. Nevertheless, community resistance to reintegration should not obfuscate that reintegration may be more fluid where the radical milieu forms a geographically defined community: Loyalists former combatants in Northern Ireland, for example, may be disadvantaged in reintegrating into the job market however they have greater social capital in ‘Loyalist neighbourhoods’. Thus, community push-back against reintegration may channel former combatants into certain spaces of society, if they exist, and here the trajectory can vary. In Northern Ireland, the integration of former combatant into a near-formal network in the community sector served to channel efforts to peace and conflict transformation activities rather than posing a substantial risk of recidivism. This can be partly attributed to relative power of the pro-peace process side of the movement and the financial incentives through the peace process funding which provided a role for former combatants in generating cooperation between geographically and structurally defined radical milieus. Community push-back and resistance is a common feature of re-integrating former combatants however it is the extent former combatants constitute a network, the form of the radical milieu and their relationship with it which shapes whether community resistance will be ‘problematic’.

Another complication is that demobilised Boko Haram combatants would have to be reintegrated into communities that include members of the Civilian Joint Task Force, a government-supported vigilante group engaged in fighting Boko Haram. The social spaces former combatants are being re-integrated into in Nigeria are not dominated or influenced by the radical milieu; instead, the state, through the Civilian Joint Task Force, has relative control over this ideational context. This context 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. However excessive force, such as the killing of re-integrated former

74 Clubb, Gordon. ""From Terrorists to Peacekeepers": The IRA's Disengagement and the Role of Community Networks." Studies in Conflict & Terrorism 37, no. 10 (2014): 842-861.
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.\textsuperscript{76}

Related is the question of whether the CJTF will also be re-integrated and how this can be achieved\textsuperscript{77}. While there have been some complaints the CJTF has not received payments and have not been given sufficient support in training and employment, the Nigerian government has integrated some CJTF members into the Nigerian security forces with the promise of having a plan for their reintegration.\textsuperscript{78} 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.\textsuperscript{79} 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.\textsuperscript{80}


Contrast this with Northern Ireland where: 1) former combatants in the peace process cohort was less pluralistic insofar as the different combatants had overlapping objectives;\textsuperscript{81}, 2) there were fewer former combatants to re-integrate and greater (alternative) resources and routes to re-integrate them and relatively weaker and fewer interest groups (such as victims) to lobby against them;\textsuperscript{82} and 3) former combatants were reintegrated into communities who can be described as their radical milieu, or at the very least sympathetic.\textsuperscript{83} The relationship between former combatants on one hand, and the state and Loyalist paramilitary groups on the other hand, was characterised by geographical and structural separation.\textsuperscript{84} Whereas in the case of Northern Ireland the separation provided space for former combatants to act as bridges between communities, in Nigeria Boko Haram former combatants are largely isolated within communities not characterised as a radical milieu and with either a relatively strong state or vigilante control. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind the differences in former combatant cohort between the cases: the current cohort of Boko Haram former combatants do not constitute the ideological core of the movement as was by and large the case in Northern Ireland from the 1990s onwards. Many Boko Haram former combatants were coerced into joining, joined because of joblessness and poverty, or seeking greater religious knowledge.\textsuperscript{85} Thus, there is a risk that the current cohort of former combatants, largely indifferent to Boko Haram’s goals and put off by its means, are constructed as a threat and an aggrieved ‘community’ by association with the de-radicalisation programme.

\textsuperscript{81} Loyalists and the CJTF are similar insofar as both were aligned with the state against another group. Loyalist violence was intertwined with the existence of Republican violence and subsequently subsided soon after the Provisional IRA’s disengagement was officially completed.

\textsuperscript{82} By alternative resources and routes I refer to the self-organising dimension of former combatants into ex-prisoner groups which provided services the state would not and also the availability of EU funding which in part fashioned ‘community worker’ roles. With regard to victims, the perceived injustice of re-integrating former combatants has certainly been noted and is a significant one, as discussed by Argomaniz, Javier, and Orla Lynch. ”Introduction to the Special Issue: The Complexity of Terrorism—Victims, Perpetrators and Radicalization.” (2017): Studies in Conflict and Terrorism, 1-16.

\textsuperscript{83} By community, we are not referring to large-scale identity descriptors such as Catholic, Protestant, or even Republican and Loyalist. Radical milieu refers to physical ties and community therefore refers to geographical areas where former combatants have traditionally had popular support. This distinction is important because Loyalist and Republican former combatants have faced difficulties in re-integrating (particularly into the job market) and Loyalist former combatants were particularly ostracised by the mainstream Unionist community even if they maintain influence, control and support in pockets of society.


Conversely, this stigma would exist regardless of participation in the de-radicalisation programme, which could instead build greater trust with the re-integrating community.

The paper has sought to distinguish between two different ideational contexts in Nigeria and Northern Ireland to illustrate how context shapes the outcomes of a de-radicalisation programme. In the Nigerian case, defector former combatants entered a de-radicalisation programme and will be re-integrated into communities where relations with the radical milieu are weak or non-existent. Since the context provides the mechanisms to reduce the risk of recidivism (i.e. monitoring by security forces and strong norms against recidivism), the contribution of de-radicalisation to the re-integration process is to re-align the former combatant’s attitudes with the re-integrating community, which may not necessarily imply de-radicalisation as we know it. For example, the framing of re-integration in religious terms underlines that the attitudinal change which aligns former combatants with the re-integrating community is not ideological per se, but instead, emphasising the denunciation of past and present participation and use of violence. Here, de-radicalisation can provide former combatants the ‘scripts’ or disengagement framing to better ingratiate themselves in local communities. Participation in de-radicalisation acts as a ‘brand’ or guarantee to the community. Although conversely in some cases there is a risk that association with the de-radicalisation programme stigmatises defector former combatants as having been ideologically committed or guilty of mass violence when they were not. Programmes demanding broader de-radicalisation – as in ideological transformation – may unintentionally continue to neglect community needs by not providing some form of ideological re-integration (keeping in mind the distinctions between prevalent community ideologies and culture, and the ideology of the group and radical milieu). Of course, community push-back can undermine these efforts but de-radicalisation programmes, in this ideational context, facilitate the smoothing of relations between the defector cohort and the referent-sympathiser community.

This differs from the Northern Ireland context, where disengagement was driven by a cohort of active former combatants who were re-integrated into a radical milieu where they exercised more relative influence than the state in some spheres of life. While this cohort disengaged voluntarily without entering a formal de-radicalisation programme, internal
dialogue within the movement constituted a form of self de-radicalisation. De-radicalisation programmes in this context are counter-productive as broad de-radicalisation (ideological change and even the de-legitimisation of violence) would create tensions and undermine control and credibility of former combatants within the radical milieu. Instead, a gradual disengagement and re-integration facilitated changes within large sections of the radical milieu whereby violence in the present was de-legitimised and in the past was de-glamorised.

Distinguishing the ideational context is important to understand the causal role of de-radicalisation in CVE and to understand its success. Focusing on the individual level and their attitudinal change misses the context in which they re-integrate, which shapes the risk of recidivism and the type of de-radicalisation needed in different ways. However the type of former combatant cohort is also important: it is not inconceivable that in the future - following splits within Boko Haram - the group pursues collective disengagement which may be facilitated through continued (non-violent) activism. In such a hypothetical case, these active former combatants will most likely be re-integrated into a radical milieu, thus changing the needs and expectations of a de-radicalisation programme for this cohort.

The importance of distinguishing between types of re-integration and therefore different types of de-radicalisation is underlined by the plurality of DDR programmes in Nigeria, where similar solutions are applied to different problems and creating a system of resource competition between programmes which can paralyse re-integration.

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. 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 reintegration. More important is the difficulty in ascertaining what causal role the de-radicalisation programme

and its constituent parts had on desistance and recidivism. The potential success of the de-radicalisation programme emerges from the favourable 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.

In Nigeria, the ideational context which former combatants are located tends to be controlled by the CJTF which on the one hand monitors and enforces desistance while on the other hand, excessive force by the CJTF pushes former combatants to move elsewhere where there is less state control. The Nigerian de-radicalisation programme targets former combatants who are defectors and less ideologically driven, most of the activities undertaken within the initiative are focused more on ideological alignment with local identities rather than abandonment of locally prevalent beliefs or the imposition of a state identity which would differ greatly. Thus rather than serving to reduce the risk of recidivism, 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 should not be seen solely as a nefarious endeavour as it provides former combatants with a publically 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.

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