

**Lab-in-Field
Experiments for the
Reintegration of
Violent Extremists:
The Promise of
Prosocial Evaluation**

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ABSTRACT

When an inmate leaves prison following a sentence for terrorism offences, their reintegration will depend on whether they can function as a relatively social member of their community. Obstacles such as stigmatization exist for all former convicts, but among steadfast extremists these barriers will be mutual, if they continue to perceive the ingroup-outgroup dichotomy that fed their extremism in the first place. A simple but effective means for determining the likelihood that returning prisoners will act prosocially towards the 'other' could be the use of so-called lab-in-field games, which provide small incentives to learn how individuals behave in a given situation, rather than just eliciting their sentiment. This chapter outlines the potential for such an approach. It draws on field research conducted in Indonesia in 2018, which involved interviews with 28 former convicted terrorists, regarding their practical experiences with reintegration and interactions in the community.

INTRODUCTION

The societal reintegration of (violent) extremists is becoming a critical section of the counterterrorism policy spectrum in a range of nations. Average terrorism-related prison sentences are getting shorter in the United States, according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation.¹ Sentences vary across Europe but the typical length in several states is fewer than ten years, particularly when probation periods are factored.² Australia is facing an increase in scheduled terrorism-offender prison releases over the next five years.³ And thousands of ISIS supporters from dozens of nations are now subsisting in vast camps in northern Syria, many vying for repatriation.⁴

Research has shown that reoffending rates among violent extremists may be lower than those for other crimes.⁵ But the loaded impact of terrorism adds weight to any related case of recidivism, while heaping pressure on programs aimed at rehabilitation and facilitating post-release transitions. Risk assessment instruments designed for terrorism offenders have become sophisticated in the past ten years or so, but their complexity can also prove a hindrance. Practitioners require advanced training, the associated interviews are time consuming, and persistent uncertainty surrounding terrorism risk factors creates an element of doubt that could arguably outweigh the requisite effort in some contexts.⁶

A practical supplement to specialized risk assessment tools could be the use of so-called lab-in-field experiments, which have been adopted by researchers and development practitioners since the 1970s to establish levels of prosocial behavior among different sample populations.⁷ Recently, these behavioral science exercises have been highlighted for their potential to evaluate preventing violent extremism initiatives.⁸ While inadequate for measuring specific risk, lab-in-field experiments could be effective in

1 Office of the Inspector General, U.S. Department of Justice, “Audit of the Federal Bureau of Prisons’ Monitoring of Inmate Communications to Prevent Radicalization,” *Audit Division 20-042*, March 2020, <https://oig.justice.gov/news/doj-oig-releases-report-bops-monitoring-inmate-communications-prevent-radicalization>.

2 Rajan Basra and Peter R. Neuman, “Prisons and Terrorism: Extremist Offender Management in 10 European Countries,” *International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation*, July 22, 2020, <https://icsr.info/2020/07/22/prisons-and-terrorism-extremist-offender-management-in-10-european-countries/>.

3 Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), “Counterterrorism Yearbook 2020,” March 30, 2020, <https://www.aspi.org.au/report/counterterrorism-yearbook-2020>.

4 Simon Hooper, “Families demand repatriation of all foreign nationals from Syrian Camps,” *Middle East Eye*, October 26, 2020, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/syria-kurds-camps-western-families-repatriation>.

5 Andrew Silke and John Morrison, “Re-Offending by Released Terrorists: Separating Hype from Reality,” *ICCT Policy Brief*, September 2020, <https://icct.nl/app/uploads/2020/09/Re-Offending-by-Released-Terrorist-Prisoners.pdf>.

6 See for example: Randy Borum, “Assessing Risk for Terrorism Involvement,” *Journal of Threat Assessment and Management*, 2, no. 2 (2015): 63-87; Sarah L. Desmarais, Joseph Simons-Rudolph, Christine Shahan Brugh, Eileen Schilling, and Chad Hoggan, “The State of Scientific Knowledge Regarding Factors Associated With Terrorism,” *Journal of Threat Assessment and Management*, 4, no. 4 (2017): 180-209.

7 Hans Binswanger, “Attitudes Toward Risk: Experimental Measurement in Rural India,” *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* 62, no. 3, 1980.

8 Georgia Holmer, Peter Bauman, with Kateira Aryaeinejad, “Measuring Up: Evaluating the Impact of P/CVE Programs,” *United States Institute of Peace*, September 6, 2018, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2018/09/measuring-monitoring-and-evaluating-pcve-programs>.

gauging the likelihood that an individual will assimilate with a community following release from prison or repatriation, the development of those already trying, and the impact of associated programs. They may even provide evidence of disengagement from violent extremist networks.

This chapter will explore the utility of lab-in-field experiments for assessing the reintegration of violent extremists. First, it will outline relevant theories of radicalization which emphasize the social nature of the process and the formation of ingroup-outgroup perspectives and preferences. It will then describe the design and function of lab-in-field games and provide examples of applicable research projects, before illustrating how and why this approach could be employed for possibly reforming violent extremists. This final section will draw on the author's field research into the societal reintegration of former prisoners convicted of terrorism offences in Indonesia, where several hundred individuals have been released or repatriated in recent years.

US VERSUS THEM

The study of terrorism and its drivers is a contentious field, with definitional uncertainty and schools of thought influenced by broader political discourse. One of the few points of consensus in the analysis of 'radicalization,' for example, is that no single profile or straightforward pathway can explain the process towards violence. Instead, an array of psychological, relational, and structural conditions are potential ingredients, depending on the temporal context and environmental circumstances.⁹ But a prominent theme among some of the discipline's most influential scholars is the fundamentally social nature of becoming and remaining a member of a violent extremist network.¹⁰

For Marc Sageman, terrorist organizations comprise groups of individuals who most often know each other through long-standing friendships or family connections, and further develop resolute bonds based on trust and mutual affection.¹¹ The draw of membership to a clandestine association can also be driven by a desire for the development of belonging, solidarity and acceptance—particularly among young people seeking direction.¹² Relationships may grow stronger through reciprocated activism, and eventually a collective social identity supersedes that of the individual, establishing a dedicated loyalty strengthened through cycles of group activity, peer pressure, and communal protection.¹³

9 See: Alex P. Schmid, "Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review," *ICCT Research Paper*, March 2013, <https://icct.nl/publication/radicalisation-de-radicalisation-counter-radicalisation-a-conceptual-discussion-and-literature-review/>.

10 See: Randy Borum, "Radicalization into Violent Extremism I: A Review of Social Science Theories," *Journal of Strategic Security* 4, no. 4 (2011).

11 Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 24.

12 Martha Crenshaw, "Theories of terrorism: Instrumental and organizational approaches," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 10, no. 4 (1987): 20.

13 Remy Cross and David A. Snow, "Radicalism within the Context of Social Movements: Processes and Types," *Journal of Strategic Security* 4, no. 4 (2011): 120; Martha Crenshaw, "The Psychology of Terrorism: An Agenda for the 21st Century," *Political Psychology* 2, no. 2 (2000): 414; Jamie Bartlett and Carl Miller, "The Edge of Violence: Towards Telling the Difference Between Violent and Non-Violent Radicalization," *Terrorism & Political Violence* 24, no. 1 (2012): 16; See also, The Lord Alderdice, "The individual, the group and the psychology of terrorism," *International Review of Psychiatry* 19, no. 3 (2007).

This subordination of individual identity to that of the collective “provides the most powerful lens to understand terrorism psychology and behavior,” according to Jerrold Post.¹⁴ Social and organizational dynamics not only shape the process of incremental individual involvement; John Horgan has argued that perceptions of group factors play perhaps the most critical role in decisions to engage in terrorist activity and maintain involvement.¹⁵ While a strong social identity formed within a group establishes devotion to collective goals, radicalization is often a sustained reaction to perceived threats to the ingroup from real or imagined outgroup adversaries.¹⁶

Ingroup-outgroup divisions exist among an array of everyday identity markers, from fans of sporting teams to musical taste; but as J.M. Berger explains, extremists remove all associated subjectivity, defining outgroup beliefs and practices in sharp contrast to those of the ingroup.¹⁷ Any common grey space is subsumed by either black or white. Perceiving themselves to be morally superior, the ingroup loses their ability to see the world from the perspective of the ‘other,’ and outsiders are demonized through narratives of threat and/or persecution.¹⁸ Any sympathy for outgroup members, or even attempts to understand their position, will be deemed a betrayal of loyalty to the extremist ingroup, leading to accusations of “whose side are you on?”¹⁹

It may be natural to uphold such an exclusivist mindset when a person spends significant time with other ingroup members (offline, online, or both), but perhaps less so when frequent social interactions are more varied. Researchers suggest that it is “considerably harder to demonize the ‘other’ when one has the opportunity to meet, play, and work together for a substantial length of time.”²⁰ Managed carefully, societal reintegration initiatives following a prison sentence for terrorism offences or repatriation from a camp in Syria could provide these types of regular engagements. Actual and potential constructive interaction between (former) extremists and people outside their perceived ingroup can be measured by determining testable preferences for prosocial behavior.

DO UNTO OTHERS

Prosocial behavior describes acts such as helping, sharing, donating, cooperating, and volunteering.²¹ While behavioral reciprocity has been branded a universal norm since at least the 1960s, prosocial behavior may be also performed “without conscious, explicitly felt anticipations of reciprocated rewards,” pro-

14 Jerrold Post, “‘When hatred is bred to the bone:’ the social psychology of terrorism,” *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 26, no. 4 (2010): 15. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-6632.2010.05694.x>.

15 John Horgan, *The Psychology of Terrorism* (New York: Routledge, 2004), Chapter 5.

16 Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, “Mechanisms of Political Radicalization: Pathways Toward Terrorism,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20, no. 3 (2008).

17 J.M. Berger, *Extremism* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2018), Chapter 3.

18 Randy Borum, “Radicalization into Violent Extremism I: A Review of Social Science Theories,” *Journal of Strategic Security* 4, no. 4 (2011).

19 Marc Sageman, *Misunderstanding Terrorism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 156.

20 Seth J. Schwartz, Curtis S. Dunkel, and Alan S. Waterman, “Terrorism: An Identity Theory Perspective,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 32, no. 6 (2009): 552.

21 Arthur P. Brief and Stephan J. Motowildlo, “Prosocial Organisational Behaviors,” *Academy of Management Review* 11, no. 4 (1986): 710.

vided the associated costs are not overly taxing.²² Whether learned as good practice in childhood or through some innate social function of being human, people often simply help other people. Selfless acts to benefit others may be common to virtually every culture on earth, but not unconditionally. Researchers have found that actors behave more prosocially to members of their ingroup than perceived outsiders, across a variety of contexts.²³ One study concluded the strength of an individual's identification to a particular group impacts the way they balance individual and collective interests.²⁴

Such findings are the result of experiments involving behavioral science games, which are becoming popular policy tools for development practitioners seeking increased program efficiency and more effective targeting.²⁵ Among the first so-called lab-in-field experiments in this discipline were conducted in the late 1970s to measure the effects of risk-taking on behavioral outcomes among farmers in India.²⁶ In recent years, these experimental exercises have been played with a range of target populations in different contexts, from young football players with experience of conflict in Sierra Leone, to juvenile delinquents in Chicago, to snack food consumers in rural Thailand.²⁷ While the design and variation of the actual games played are only constrained by the creativity of the researchers, many are based on a few classic examples.

The Dictator Game is generally a two-player exercise in which one person must decide how to divide a prescribed amount of money between themselves and the other player, which tests altruism and fairness preferences. A majority of players have been found to transfer roughly 20 per cent of the allotment.²⁸ Slightly more complex is the Ultimatum Game, where the first player decides what portion to offer the second player, before the potential recipient chooses to either accept the division so that each player receives something, or refuse (and punish), resulting in neither player receiving anything.²⁹ A third common exercise is the Trust Game, in which player one again decides how much of an allotted sum to give

22 Alvin Gouldner, "The Norm of Reciprocity: A Preliminary Statement," *American Sociological Review* 25, no. 2 (1960); Leonard Berkowitz and Louise R. Daniel, "Responsibility and Dependency," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 66, no. 5 (1963).

23 Jim A. C. Everett, Nadira S. Faber, and Molly Crockett, "Preferences and beliefs in ingroup favouritism," *Frontiers in Behavioral Neuroscience* 9, no. 15 (2015).

24 Delia Baldassarri, and Guy Grossman, "The Effect of Group Attachment and Social Position on Prosocial Behavior. Evidence from Lab-in-the-Field Experiments," *PLoS ONE* 8, no. 3 (2013).

25 Pamela Jakiela, "What Are We Learning from Lab-in-the-Field Experiments in Developing Countries?," *Center for Global Development*, June 6, 2019, <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/what-are-we-learning-lab-field-experiments-developing-countries>.

26 Hans Binswanger, "Attitudes Toward Risk: Experimental Measurement in Rural India," *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* 62, no. 3, 1980.

27 Francesco Cecchi, Koen Leuvel, and Maarten Voors, "Conflict Exposure and Competitiveness: Experimental Evidence from the Football Field in Sierra Leone," *The University of Chicago* (February 2016); Sara B. Heller, Anuj K. Shah, Jonathan Guryan, Jens Ludwig, Sendhil Mullainathan, and Harold A. Pollack, "Thinking, Fast and Slow? Some Field Experiments to Reduce Crime and Dropout in Chicago," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 132, no. 1 (2017); Antonia Grohmann, and Sahra Sakha, "The effect of peer observation on consumption choices: evidence from a lab-in-field experiment," *Applied Economics* 51, no. 55 (2019).

28 See: Daniel Kahneman, Jack L. Knetsch, and Richard Thaler, "Fairness as a Constraint on Profit Seeking: Entitlements in the Market," *The American Economic Review* 76, no. 4 (1986): 728-741.

29 Steven D. Levitt and John A. List, "What Do Laboratory Experiments Measuring Social Preference Reveal About the Real World?" *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 21, no. 2 (2007): 155.

to player two, which is then multiplied by a predetermined number, before player two decides how much of her acquisition to give back to player one.³⁰

These descriptions are bare-boned representations of what are often more creative designs deemed appropriate for the specific experiment at hand. Beyond altruism and fairness, the games test for motivations such as conditional reciprocity, inequity aversion, and risk-taking in a social setting.³¹ Lab-in-field exercises are generally simple to run, relatively inexpensive, and genuine (while small) financial payoffs tend to ensure that participants consider their decisions carefully and seriously.³² Of course, there are a number of caveats and complications that need to be considered with any experimental design. Particular moral and/or cultural considerations may influence results, as well as the type and degree of scrutiny a player receives as they make their decisions (even simply from the person conducting the experiment).³³ Appropriate control groups also play an important role in determining specific preferences and presenting convincing comparisons.³⁴

EXAMPLES FROM THE (LAB-IN) FIELD

While projects using behavioral science laboratory experiments in communities focus on a diverse range of issues, studies looking at post-conflict dynamics or prison populations may offer examples relevant to the reintegration of violent extremists. Gilligan, Pasquale, and Samii researched the impact of Nepal's ten-year civil war on social cohesion in areas affected by wartime violence.³⁵ After mapping applicable communities and randomly selecting an even number of conflict-affected and not-conflict-affected townships among 48 identified districts, the team played four lab-in-field games to discern differences in sentiment. For instance, a dictator game asked subjects to donate a portion of money to an unnamed local family in need, while another tested the willingness to gamble on reciprocated cooperation. The project ultimately concluded that "community-level exposure to fatal civil-war violence increases community-level social cohesion."³⁶

An earlier study in post-war Bosnia used similar methods to measure cooperation across ethnic divisions; or more specifically, whether "ethnic groups from Bosnia exhibit norms of fairness that are different for

30 Matteo M. Galizzi, "On the external validity of social preference games: a systematic lab-if-field study," *Management Science* 65, no. 3 (2018).

31 Levitt and List, "What Do Laboratory Experiments Measuring Social Preference Reveal," 154-155

32 Armin Falk and James J. Heckman, "Lab Experiments Are a Major Source of Knowledge in the Social Sciences," *IZA Discussion Paper No. 4520* (2009): 3-4.

33 John A. List, "Why Economists Should Conduct Field Experiments and 14 Tips for Pulling One Off," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 25, no. 3 (2011).

34 Kurt Braddock, *Experimentation & Quasi-Experimentation in Countering Violent Extremism: Directions of Future Inquiry* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.37805/rve2020.1>.

35 Michael J. Gilligan, Benjamin J. Pasquale, and Cyrus Samii, "Civil War and Social Cohesion: Lab-in-the-Field Evidence from Nepal," *American Journal of Political Science* 58, no. 3 (2014): 604-619.

36 Ibid, 616.

their ingroup then for an outgroup.”³⁷ A form of the dictator game was again used to have participants decide how much of an allocated sum of money (often a day’s average wage) to share with an anonymous counterpart from a different ethnic group, and how much to keep for themselves. The authors highlighted research suggesting that members of different ethnic groups often discriminate against others based on perceived trust. But through their experiments in Bosnia-Herzegovina, they found evidence of “considerable fairness both within and between ethnic groups.”³⁸ This was deemed comparatively convincing, as the findings from the game-based study relied on actual behavior rather than previous research that focused on eliciting attitudes towards outgroups in Bosnia.³⁹

In Italy, a team of researchers conducted prisoner dilemma games with actual prisoners (and control groups of students) to test varied levels of behavioral cooperation among regular prisoners and convicted members of the organized criminal group, the Camorra. Nese et al. employed both a ‘one-shot’ prisoners’ dilemma game and a second involving three participants with the possibility of third-party punishment.⁴⁰ The games used tokens worth €0.30, which were later paid out to students or credited to the inmates’ prison accounts.⁴¹ A three-way comparison showed the *Camorristi* displayed higher degrees of cooperativeness than both students and regular criminals respectively and a stronger tendency to punish defectors than the unaffiliated inmates, who demonstrated an opportunism in sharp contrast to the honor codes of the Camorra.⁴²

Another applicable example is a longitudinal lab-in-field experiment to determine changes in prosocial behavior among prison inmates who had successfully completed a rehabilitation program in California.⁴³ Trust and dictator games were played with 80 inmates—38 control subjects and 42 who took part in a specific program called Guiding Rage Into Power (GRIP), which explores the origins of violent behavior and develops positive coping mechanisms.⁴⁴ The games were administered before and after the one-year course. The research team concluded that “trust [had] significantly increased in GRIP participants compared to the control group.”⁴⁵ The authors argued their findings suggested the program effectively strengthened the prisoners’ prosocial preferences and attitudes, which would potentially foster their rehabilitation and post-release reintegration.⁴⁶

37 Sam Whitt and Rick K. Wilson, “The Dictator Game, Fairness and Ethnicity in Postwar Bosnia,” *American Journal of Political Science* 51, no. 3 (2007): 655-668.

38 *Ibid*, 662.

39 *Ibid*, 666.

40 Annamaria Nese, Niall O’Higgins, Patrizia Sbriglia, and Maurizio Scudiero, “Cooperation, punishment and organized crime: a lab-in-the-field experiment in southern Italy,” *European Economic Review* 107 (2018): 86-98.

41 *Ibid*, 91.

42 *Ibid*, 97.

43 Mario A. Maggioni, Domenico Rossignoli, Simona Beretta, and Sara Balestri, “Trust behind bars: Measuring change in inmates’ prosocial preferences,” *Journal of Economic Psychology* 64 (2018): 89-104.

44 See: Insight-Out, “Guiding Rage Into Power: A One-Year Accountability and Healing Program,” <https://grip-traininginstitute.org>

45 Maggioni et al., “Trust behind bars,” 99.

46 *Ibid*.

Each of these examples offers food for thought when considering how lab-in-field experiments might benefit initiatives aimed at facilitating the reintegration of violent extremists following prison sentences or repatriation. To further outline the possible benefits, it will be practical to consider how these processes play out. Recent experiences in Indonesia provide a useful case study.

CONNECTIONS, COMMITMENT, & COMMUNITY

Given the importance of social dynamics and relational bonds among expert conceptions of radicalization theory, the modern history of Islamist militancy in Indonesia offers a pertinent example. While the jihadist movement has its origins in the Southeast Asian nation's fight for independence in the 1940s, a significant period came in the 1980s, when dozens of Indonesians made their way to the Afghan-Pakistan border where they trained and studied with the mujahideen. Most returned to Southeast Asia in the 1990s, extending and transferring their training in the Southern Philippines, and injecting themselves into remote conflicts back in Indonesia, which erupted following the end of President Suharto's long reign of power in the late 1990s.⁴⁷

Experts on the subject have highlighted the importance of strong personal ties among militants, established in Afghanistan and later in the Philippines.⁴⁸ When aspects of communal conflict on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi radicalized in the early 2000s, observers stressed that the solidarity formed overseas was “almost certainly more important than ideology or money in facilitating partnerships among jihadist groups.”⁴⁹ These links grew stronger through common business interests, enrolment in certain Islamic boarding schools, and, crucially, inter-movement marriage, which created a “complex web of familial relationships” and entrenched the exclusivist ingroup identity.⁵⁰

To some extent, the 2010s rise of the Islamic State (ISIS) in the Middle East altered ideological, strategic, and tactical dimensions of the jihadi movement in Indonesia, but personal relationships have remained central to recruitment and network cohesion. Research by Julie Chernov Hwang and Kirsten Schulze found that social bonds were the “common thread in encouraging entry as well as fostering commitment” to the militant networks.⁵¹ Drawing on a dataset of 106 Indonesians, the authors identified four primary pathways to involvement: small religious study groups (known as *pengajian*); family connections; participation in domestic conflict; and close-knit boarding school communities. For Indonesian ISIS

47 See: Solahudin, *The Roots of Terrorism in Indonesia* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2013).

48 International Crisis Group, “Jemaah Islamiyah in South East Asia: Damaged but Still Dangerous,” *ICG Asia Report no. 63*, August 26, 2003, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/indonesia/jemaah-islamiyah-south-east-asia-damaged-still-dangerous>.

49 International Crisis Group, “Indonesia Backgrounder: Jihad in Central Sulawesi,” *ICG Asia Report no. 74*, February 3, 2004, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/indonesia/indonesia-backgrounder-jihad-central-sulawesi>.

50 Sulastri Osman, “Jemaah Islamiyah: Of Kin and Kind,” *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 29, no. 2 (2010): 164.

51 Julie Chernov Hwang and Kirsten E. Schulze, “Why They Join: Pathways into Indonesian Jihadist Organizations,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* (2018): 1.

supporters, like those from a range of nations, true commitment involved abandoning their former social networks and travelling to Syria for a new life and identity.⁵²

COUNTERTERRORISM, INCARCERATION, & REINTEGRATION

In October 2002, coordinated bombing attacks in a nightlife district on the resort island of Bali killed over 200 people. The Indonesian government quickly bolstered its anti-terrorism legislation, and with support from foreign partners, established what became highly effective counterterrorism capabilities within the national police force. A unit called Special Detachment 88 (Densus 88) has been particularly successful, arresting and prosecuting well over a thousand people on terrorism related charges. Legislative updates in 2018 provided additional powers to conduct investigations and further avenues for prosecution. Barring sporadic, small-scale attacks mostly aimed at police themselves, the ISIS-energized jihadist networks in Indonesia have been quite efficiently thwarted and dismantled in recent years.

The Indonesian prison system thus has seen hundreds of prisoners convicted of terrorism pass through its gates. A small minority are serving lengthy sentences for involvement in serious crimes and attack plots, but most are in for relatively limited periods, especially those who secure remission by cooperating with authorities. In a 2020 report looking at recidivism among convicted terrorists in Indonesia, data from the Jakarta-based Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC) showed that of the 825 individuals sentenced for terrorism offences between 2002 and May 2020 94 had either been re-arrested on terrorism charges, travelled to join ISIS, or otherwise engaged in violent extremist activity.⁵³ Over 120 prisoners were scheduled to be released by the end of 2020, and a further 150 in 2021.⁵⁴ Several hundred Indonesians have also been repatriated by the Turkish government since 2017, after failing to join ISIS in Syria.⁵⁵

Inmates who decide to cooperate are exposed to initiatives aimed at de-radicalization in prison. Those who return from abroad and could not be prosecuted have undergone a one-month program to prepare them for reintegration.⁵⁶ Much of this work from the Indonesian government is conducted by the national counterterrorism agency, *Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Terorisme* (BNPT). The agency sends officers to visit some of the responsive former prisoners at home, offering modest seed grants to help start a business.⁵⁷ Small non-governmental organizations (NGOS) also provide assistance, which may not be as

52 Ibid, 7.

53 Institute for the Policy Analysis of Conflict, "Terrorism, Recidivism and Planned Releases in Indonesia," *IPAC Report No. 66*, September 4, 2020.

54 Ibid, 10.

55 Chaula Rininta Anindya, "The Deradicalisation Programme for Indonesian Deportees: A Vacuum in Coordination," *Journal for Deradicalization* 18 (Spring 2019).

56 Ibid.

57 Cameron Sumpter, "Reintegration in Indonesia: Extremists, Start-ups and Occasional Engagements," *ICCT Perspective*, February 19, 2019, <https://icct.nl/publication/reintegration-in-indonesia-extremists-start-ups-and-occasional-engagements/>.

well-resourced as state efforts but are fortified with local networks and more frequent engagements. Complicating matters, however, are similarly charitable organizations that are loosely connected to the jihadist movement and seek to keep (former) prisoners and their families engaged in the networks.⁵⁸

COMMUNITY & STIGMATIZATION

Together with colleagues from the University of Indonesia, I conducted a study in 2018 that sought to learn how recently released convicted terrorists cope with life on the outside. Through interviews with 28 former prisoners, we asked about their practical experiences in terms of finding paid employment, reconnecting with their family and friends, accepting assistance from state and civil society organizations, and being welcomed or shunned by people in the community.⁵⁹ An important distinction among Indonesians released following terrorism sentences is whether they agreed to comply with certain requirements while in prison. Cooperation would lead to participation in targeted rehabilitation activities and subsequent reintegration support—in contrast to those who refused to cooperate with the government, remained steadfast to their convictions, and ignored attempts to engage.

The majority of those interviewed for our project comprised the former, which suggests their level of commitment to the extremist cause was lower than those who reject interaction with the authorities. Many of our participants may have decided on their own to disengage from the movement following a cost-benefit analysis behind bars or through disillusionment over their network's tactics or leadership. Others may have been strategically cooperating with outsiders in order to reap the benefits while they consider a role change or a retirement from activity, given they had already sacrificed their freedom. As only one interview was possible with each individual, and we were skeptical of receiving truthful answers about illegal activity, we decided to avoid asking about their ongoing commitment to any ideology, organization, or movement. We were most interested in understanding social acceptance and stigmatization.

An early BNPT blueprint for deradicalization and reintegration following prison stated that meetings would be held with relevant community stakeholders to prepare for the return of former extremist inmates to the given neighborhood, but such occasions are rare in practice.⁶⁰ Coordination generally depends on existing relationships among government officials, police, and local authorities. Sometimes community leaders known as Rukun Warga (RW) or Rukun Tetangga (RT) are involved in managing a prisoner's return, while in other cases they may not even be aware of the individual's presence or the type of crime they had committed.

58 V. Arianty and Muh Taufiqurrohman, "Extremist charities spread in Indonesia," *East Asia Forum*, March 17, 2020, <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2020/03/17/extremist-charities-spread-in-indonesia/>.

59 Cameron Sumpter, Yuslikha K. Wardhani, and Sapto Priyanto, "Testing Transitions: Extremist Prisoners Re-Entering Indonesian Society," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2019).

60 See: Deputi Bidang Pencegahan, Perlindungan dan Deradikalisasi, Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Terorisme (2013), *Blueprint Deradikalisasi*, 84.

ACCEPTANCE: A TWO-WAY STREET

Half of our project’s participants were living in communities in and around the nation’s capital and largest city, Jakarta. The other half were in a small city in Central Java called Surakarta (or Solo), which has a history of militant Islamism in certain neighborhoods. Generally, the prisoners returning to the greater Jakarta area reported feeling ostracized by their communities, while the Solo natives largely felt accepted. The sample size of 28 was probably too small to make any concrete claims about this distinction, but accounts of individual experiences illustrated the extent to which reintegration following a prison sentence is a fundamentally social process, ideally requiring acceptance and engagement from both sides. Most of the participants may well have already disengaged from the movement in terms of intent to commit violence, but their responses showed they often saw themselves as outcasts from broader society.

One man who was released in 2015 after serving five-and-a-half years for firearm trafficking said when he went home: “it’s not like someone just returning to their village from Jakarta—I mean, they don’t welcome us gladly. They may be polite in person but in their heads is a question mark... They keep their distance if we approach them or try to talk to them. It’s difficult to start interacting again.”⁶¹ Another younger militant who walked free in 2017 after almost five years inside was frustrated that he couldn’t find a job: “It’s impossible,” he said. “Not even my friends trust me, let alone a new employer.”⁶² Others felt repudiated from both the general public and their former network. An ex-prisoner who served five years of an eight-year sentence said: “I received stigma from friends in my old community—the ISIS people. They accused me of being an infidel, godless, hypocrite and so on. Then I also got it from society, because they consider us criminals... I ended up moving to a new house because of negative rumors in the community.”⁶³

Those who returned to an area without being noticed tried to conceal their history: “We still hide the fact I was in prison from the neighbors,” said a former who served just over four years of a seven-year sentence. “Because they’re new people and I’m worried they won’t accept us,” he explained.⁶⁴ “None of the neighbors knows about my background,” revealed another. “If they knew, they would be rude to us—that’s why I try to hide it.”⁶⁵ An ex-Jemaah Islamiyah member released in 2014 moved back to a community full of family members who supported him, but he struggled to fit in with wider society: “Negative stigma is the main obstacle... The terrorism stigma is there, right, so when I apply for jobs—well, many people are still afraid of us.”⁶⁶ Another said he found it hard to develop new relationships outside his old network: “I feel excluded actually, but that’s just how it is.”⁶⁷

61 Interview with former prisoner, Surakarta (April 2018)

62 Interview with former prisoner, Jakarta (March 2018)

63 Interview with former prisoner, Jakarta (March 2018)

64 Interview with former prisoner, Jakarta (March 2018)

65 Interview with former prisoner, Jakarta (March 2018)

66 Interview with former prisoner, Jakarta (March 2018)

67 Interview with former prisoner, Jakarta (March 2018)

Some of the participants claimed to have made attempts to prove themselves and gain the trust of their communities. One man who served ten years for accommodating a wanted terrorism suspect said he consciously tries to overcome ostracism. “If I see that anyone is keeping their distance from me, I would treat them—invite them for a meal... the important thing is that we open ourselves up for communication.”⁶⁸ Taking initiative following release, another former said he visited the neighborhood head as soon as he returned. “I also got actively involved in neighborhood watch patrols,” he claimed. “Interacting with others depends on ourselves, right,” added a man released in 2016 after three years behind bars. “If we open up, then, Inshallah, we can change. But if we stay exclusive, well, we’ll always be kicked down by the government.”⁶⁹ Another former militant acknowledged that earning acceptance takes time, recalling that people at his local market were initially afraid of him. “After seeing our behavior for one year, they start to think: Oh, they’re normal people.”⁷⁰

SENTIMENT, BEHAVIOR, & RECEPTION

The interviews also revealed attitudes towards and experiences with reintegration assistance and the tribulations of trying to start a small business to make ends meet and focus on something constructive. From the answers outlined above, it is fairly clear that social acceptance was important to many of the participants, which is encouraging, but also raises further questions. Above all, it is difficult to know whether (or the extent to which) they were telling the truth. While the conversations were relaxed and they appeared authentic, the desire to be considered positively by others could be a practical concern to facilitate day-to-day activities and function in the local economy. Seeking acceptance does not necessarily mean one intends to reciprocate that faith. Perhaps this is too cynical, as some of the participants seemed to have genuinely pursued new relationships, but attitude change is more effectively observed through behavior than sentiment.

This is where lab-in-field experiments would be useful. A majority of the former prisoners we interviewed appeared to have disengaged from violent extremism, and most may have been on personal journeys of deradicalization as they adapt to post-prison life. Playing experimental games with such participants would therefore expect to demonstrate quite diverse prosocial behavior. They could reveal accurate interpretations of how former members of an extremist network now view people who they once considered the ‘others’ of an outgroup. Similar to the study with prisoners in California, longitudinal lab-in-field games could be employed before and after a deradicalization program or course of reintegration assistance, together with a control group to evaluate effectiveness. Experiments could also be conducted among community residents to measure attitudes toward prospective returning prisoners. Results could then be factored into locally tailored reintegration programs.

68 Interview with former prisoner, Surakarta (April 2018)

69 Interview with former prisoner, Surakarta (April 2018)

70 Interview with former prisoner, Surakarta (April 2018)

It would be most revealing to conduct lab-in-field games with uncooperative violent extremist prisoners as they finish their sentence and face freedom. Inmates who refuse to sign declarations of loyalty to the state, which are required to apply for remission and receive parole in Indonesia, would be an ideal target population, and could be held up against those who met the requirements. Outgoing prisoners choosing to remain ideologically aligned to their movement are difficult for BNPT officers to engage when they return home, as programs and assistance are voluntary. Militant jihadist organizations in Indonesia tend to brand any engagement with the government, or civil society organizations, as an unacceptable betrayal of the ingroup and pressure members to reject any associated assistance. Convincing hard-liners to play behavioral science games may be difficult, but given the financial incentive involved, a carefully framed experiment conducted by the right people might grant participation even among the more extreme. Findings would identify individuals capable of outgroup sympathy and therefore those more likely to undergo a process of change under certain conditions.

CONCLUSION

Radicalization to violent extremism is most often a social process with deeply antisocial outcomes. As people replace their individual identity with that of a group's, they demonize anyone outside the ingroup through discrimination and support for organized violence. After spending several years in prison for the pursuit of communal goals, an individual's commitment to the cause may have waned, at least to the point where everyday interaction with outgroup members becomes possible, and even cordial. Alternatively, the prison experience may have reinforced their dedication to the extremist ingroup, and any post-prison outgroup social engagements are either avoided or endured for purely practical reasons. Determining an outgoing prisoner's mindset along these lines is clearly helpful in theory, but not easily gleaned in practice.

Risk assessment instruments for violent extremist offenders are important tools for targeting rehabilitation programs effectively and making decisions regarding parole, ongoing threats, and required surveillance. The most prominent and effective examples are based on a method known as structured professional judgement, which involves a combination of detailed metrics and personal interpretation (science and art). Relevant agencies in Indonesia have been trialing different risk assessment suggestions for years, but procedures are time consuming and require a level of expertise that is not always readily available. Lab-in-field experiments are not a substitute for risk assessment, but these incentivized games can provide telling evidence of an individual's likely social behavior in the real world, and the prospect of productive reintegration outcomes.

Key Takeaways for Researchers

Based on the insights from this chapter, researchers pursuing similar studies should take into account the following:

- Lab-in-field experiments such as the dictator game can be used to determine levels of prosocial behavior.
- Measuring empathetic behavior can provide evidence of potential reintegration outcomes and possibly indicate signs of disengagement from violent extremism.
- Participant and control groups should be clearly defined, including, for example, cooperative former prisoners convicted of terrorism, uncooperative former prisoners, members of receiving communities, and the general public.
- Gameplay incentives need to be sufficiently valuable to ensure that decisions are taken seriously.
- The identity and behaviour of the person facilitating each game is important, as perceptions towards them and the general dynamics of their presence can impact in-game decisions.
- Games should also take place in neutral locations with limited spectators who could influence the choices made.
- Various versions of lab-in-field games measure different prosocial preferences so experiments must be designed with specific groups in mind, taking into account variables such as culture and socio-economic factors.

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