Understanding Deradicalization

Methods, tools and programs for countering violent extremism

Daniel Koehler
Koehler’s book is the most methodologically rigorous, theoretically-informed, and comprehensive on this topic, to date. He brings immense depth of both experience and scholarship to this important volume.

Michael J. Williams, Georgia State University, USA

Very few subjects have recently received more attention than the subject of deradicalisation, particularly since the 9/11 attacks on World Trade Centre and the Pentagon. Yet, very few studies have provided either a comprehensively detailed inventory for such programs or even a framework that enables policy-makers and practitioners to design and effectively implement deradicalisation programs in different contexts. Understanding Deradicalization: Methods, Tools and Programs for Countering Violent Extremism by Daniel Koehler simply does both in an accessible, entertaining and consistent manner. It is the only book to build what amounts to genuine theory of deradicalisation programs. The book is an essential reading for students of politics, terrorism, security studies, Middle East, European Union and international relations at all levels.

Hamed El-Said, Manchester Metropolitan University Business School, UK

Understanding Deradicalization provides the most comprehensive, up-to-date overview of worldwide efforts to bring extremists and those on the path to violent extremism back into mainstream society. As Director of the German Institute on Radicalization and Deradicalization Studies, Daniel Koehler combines practical experience with academic expertise. With this encyclopaedic monograph, he has written a seminal text against which all others in this field will be judged for years to come.

Alex P. Schmid, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT), Netherlands

This is the single most comprehensive work I have read on de-radicalisation processes and programs. Daniel Koehler has made a valuable contribution to both the literature on terrorism and de-radicalisation. Very highly recommended to anyone interested in understanding the dynamics of transition from armed to unarmed activism.

Omar Ashour, University of Exeter, UK

Daniel Koehler is widely recognized as a pioneer in both the practical and theoretical aspects of de-radicalization. In this book he condenses his immense knowledge, making it a must read for anybody interested in extremism and terrorism.

Lorenzo Vidino, George Washington University, USA

A pathfinder for practitioners and scholars, Koehler’s book is the most comprehensive study on global deradicalization programs.

Rohan Gunaratna, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore
This book provides a comprehensive guide to the different aspects of deradicalization theories, programs, and methods.

It analyzes the practical and theoretical aspects of deradicalization programs and the methods being employed to bring extremists and terrorist back to a non-violent life. The book includes in-depth case studies on programs and former extremists, including interviews with former German neo-Nazis and families of jihadists who have received deradicalization counseling. Using a coherent theory of radicalization and deradicalization, it integrates existing programs into a typology and methodology regarding the effects and concepts behind deradicalization. In addition, a current state of the art assessment of deradicalization programs provides a collection of programs and landscapes worldwide. It thereby functions as a unique guide for practitioners and policy makers in need of evaluation or construction of such programs, as well as a resource pool for academics interested in research about deradicalization programs and processes. The major aim of this book is to consolidate the existing scholarship on deradicalization and to move the field forward by proposing a coherent theory of deradicalization, including ways to measure effectiveness, standard methods and procedures, different actors of such programs, and cooperation on a national and international level. In essence, this work enables the reader to identify how, when, and why deradicalization programs work, how they can be built and structured, and to identify their limitations.

This book will be of interest to students of radicalization, counter-terrorism, radical Islam, criminology, security studies, and IR.

Daniel Koehler is Director of the German Institute on Radicalization and Deradicalization Studies (GIRDS), Germany and Fellow at George Washington University’s Program on Extremism.
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Methods, tools and programs for countering violent extremism  
Daniel Koehler
Understanding Deradicalization
Methods, tools and programs for countering violent extremism

Daniel Koehler
Again, For Tine
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Foreword

About 20 years ago, I interviewed former and active members of the Irish Republican Army. I wanted to understand the reality of running an underground organization from a financial standpoint, and happened to begin that research at an interesting time. The Irish peace process was in its nascent stages with an uneasy series of ceasefires being observed. Yet, deep within and across the IRA’s ranks, all was not well. Uncertainty and disappointment had begun to creep in. Unhappy with the new direction of the movement, many members decided they wanted to get out of the IRA once and for all. Others had a different reaction. So incensed were some by the perceived betrayal of Irish Republican principles by the IRA leadership that they splintered off to create small, deadly factions of their own. From my perspective, a research project that began with a focus on IRA fundraising was slowly turning into a bigger story about betrayal and disillusionment. The years that followed revealed fascinating dynamics. Many who left the IRA retained rigid views about the legitimacy of Irish Republican violence, while others, overwhelmed by new realities, struggled to justify to themselves and others why they had for so long done such terrible things to others in the name of Irish ‘freedom.’ Disengaging from the IRA did not necessarily mean ‘deradicalization’ for all, but for some it clearly did. This would be revealed across many other violent extremist movements too. In fact, so frequent were accounts of disengagement that one inevitable consequence of a life in terrorism seems to be that if, in fact, you are a terrorist, sooner or later you will become disillusioned. The critical question is what happens as a result of that. Do you stay or do you go? And in either case, do you retain your core beliefs or do those change too?

Research on disengagement and deradicalization has since flourished. One especially interesting development is how initiatives to facilitate deradicalization have come into being. There are over 40 deradicalization programs currently operating around the world. They are all a little bit different from one another and come in all shapes and sizes. Some are big, some are small. Some enjoy the financial backing of wealthy states, while others remain the peripheral projects of one or two industrious individuals who do it just because they care about making a difference. But what all deradicalization programs, initiatives, or
efforts share is an attempt to rehabilitate and reintegrate those who were once involved in terrorism in order to reduce the risk of those same people one day re-engaging in terrorism. No easy feat!

Radicalization remains, and rightly so, a deeply contested concept. That will not change any time soon, but those who care about the extraordinary social and psychological toll associated with terrorism cannot sit idly by while academics and politicians pontificate on whether we are using appropriate definitions, language, and terminology. Fortunately, the world has people like Daniel Koehler eager to tackle such a challenge. So much of what is typically written about deradicalization is by pundits, scholars, and think-tank analysts who just regurgitate what has been said elsewhere. What is presented in this book is a universe apart from that. If Daniel just provided us with a solid theory of deradicalization, that in itself would be laudable, but instead he has given us something truly valuable and rare—giving equal respect to theory and practice. As I write these words, Daniel is in Minneapolis, Minnesota, at the invitation of a federal judge who has sought his input into the possible creation of a deradicalization initiative there. His experience and expertise on these issues is informed by a long history of challenging interviews with almost 50 former neo-Nazis, over 100 family members of jihadists, and countless consultations with just about everyone involved in the practice of deradicalization around the world. In other words, we should all listen very carefully to what Daniel Koehler has to say about this topic. This book is the first comprehensive attempt to merge theory and practice of deradicalization. It builds on earlier work, critically developing and, in many cases, vastly improving on it. Daniel has set a new benchmark for the entire field of terrorism studies. For those of you reading this right now and wondering what you need to create, evaluate, or improve a deradicalization program—everything you need is right here in these pages.

John Horgan,

Georgia State University
This book would not have been possible without the support of a number of people who helped to shape the first ideas, encouraged their implementation, and provided advice.

First and foremost, without the many hours of intense debates and discussions with Tine about theories and practical aspects of deradicalization work, as well as the shared practical experiences, this book would not have advanced beyond a descriptive account. I am deeply in debt for the opportunity to reflect on my thoughts with an exceptionally sharp and critical mind such as hers.

I also owe special thanks to a group of extraordinary scholars, who I was honored to work with in recent years and who have greatly inspired this work, as well as shaped it. First and foremost, John Horgan, who is one of most dedicated advocates for high quality deradicalization programs that I know. Also, Hamed El-Said, Omar Ashour, Rohan Gunaratna, Tore Bjørgo, and many others, who built the foundations for deradicalization research; this field would not exist without them. They have inspired my own research and practical work.

In addition to those academic experts, I can say that I have been fortunate enough to work in recent years with some of the best practitioners in the world in the field of deradicalization. I experienced an exceptionally fulfilling time exchanging thoughts, methods, and experiences with them, and I am happy to call them friends. These experts have spent endless hours helping others to reform their lives with incredible commitment and energy, such as, for example, Morton Hjørnholm in Denmark and Simon Cornwall in England.

Of course, I also want to thank all the families and former extremists who trusted me, my methods, and my philosophy regarding deradicalization and counter-radicalization. I learned more that I could have ever imagined by being allowed to help them.

Of course, this book would also have not been possible without the support from Routledge. Andrew Humphrys’ and Hannah Ferguson’s dedication and professionalism, in particular, was a steady source of encouragement.

My deepest thanks to you all.
## Abbreviations

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AQIM</td>
<td>Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb</td>
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<td>AVE</td>
<td>Against Violent Extremism</td>
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<tr>
<td>BAMF</td>
<td>Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge</td>
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<td>BfV</td>
<td>Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz</td>
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<td>BIGREX</td>
<td>Beratungs- und Interventionsgruppe gegen Rechtsextremismus</td>
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<td>CONTEST</td>
<td>Counter Terrorism Strategy</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPAI</td>
<td>Correctional Program Assessment Inventory</td>
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<td>CPC</td>
<td>Correctional Program Checklist</td>
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<tr>
<td>CVE</td>
<td>Countering Violent Extremism</td>
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<tr>
<td>DDP</td>
<td>Deradicalization and Disengagement Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDR</td>
<td>Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENOD</td>
<td>European Network on Deradicalization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ERG</td>
<td>Extremism Risk Guidance</td>
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<tr>
<td>ETA</td>
<td>Euskadi Ta Askatasuna</td>
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<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>FARC</td>
<td>Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia</td>
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<tr>
<td>GCTF</td>
<td>Global Counterterrorism Forum</td>
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<tr>
<td>GIRDS</td>
<td>German Institute on Radicalization and Deradicalization</td>
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<tr>
<td>HATIF</td>
<td>Heraus aus Terrorismus und Islamistischem Fundamentalismus</td>
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<tr>
<td>HUMINT</td>
<td>Human Intelligence</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICCT</td>
<td>International Centre for Counter-Terrorism</td>
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<td>IRA</td>
<td>Irish Republican Army</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISD</td>
<td>Institute for Strategic Dialogue</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISIL</td>
<td>Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant</td>
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<td>JI</td>
<td>Jemaah Islamiyah</td>
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<tr>
<td>LTTE</td>
<td>Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam</td>
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<tr>
<td>MAUT</td>
<td>Multi-Attribute Utility Technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>North Atlantic Treaty Organization</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
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<td>NRM</td>
<td>New Religious Movements</td>
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<td>ONUCA</td>
<td>United Nations Observer Group in Central America</td>
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<td>OSINT</td>
<td>Open Source Intelligence</td>
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<td>PTSD</td>
<td>Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder</td>
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<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<tr>
<td>RAN</td>
<td>Radicalization Awareness Network</td>
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<td>RNR</td>
<td>Risk-Need-Responsivity</td>
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<td>RRG</td>
<td>Religious Rehabilitation Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>SAVE</td>
<td>Sisters against Violent Extremism</td>
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<td>SIGINT</td>
<td>Signal Intelligence</td>
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<tr>
<td>SMT</td>
<td>Social Movement Theory</td>
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<tr>
<td>TI</td>
<td>Transparency International</td>
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<tr>
<td>UAE</td>
<td>United Arab Emirates</td>
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<tr>
<td>UCLAT</td>
<td>Unité de Coordination de la Lutte Anti-Terroriste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNICRI</td>
<td>United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNSC</td>
<td>United Nations Security Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>VERA</td>
<td>Violent Extremism Risk Assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>VPD</td>
<td>Victim-Perpetrator Dialogue</td>
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1 Introduction

In January 2014, the European Commission released a revised strategy to combat violent extremist radicalization and recruitment to terrorism, introducing a much stronger focus on intervention and deradicalization policies (Council of the European Union, 2014). Every EU member state was urged to create national disengagement and exit programs. Building on the insights of the Commission’s Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN)—a network of practitioners and government officials focusing on different aspects of radicalization and counter-radicalization work initiated in 2011—the strategic value of these programs regarding internal safety and counter-terrorism was recognized and implemented by the EU. On a European level, this newly adapted counter-radicalization strategy is exemplary of a globally increased interest in methods and programs aiming to reduce individual commitment to terrorist groups and their ideologies, as well as counter the attraction of individuals deemed to be ‘at risk’ from these extremist and violent movements. In 2014, for example, the United Nations Security Council adopted resolution 2178, pointing out the need for effective reintegration and rehabilitation programs for combatants returning from Syria or Iraq to their home countries (United Nations Security Council, 2014). In early 2015, the United States hosted an international high-level “Summit on Countering Violent Extremism (CVE)” and started to (carefully) introduce this concept at the US community level. In virtually all current conflict areas and countries affected by so-called ‘home-grown radicalization’ the debate about counter-radicalization, rehabilitation, or deradicalization programs has found a much broader audience in recent years. New programs, networks, good practice collections, and statements from former extremists become public on a regular basis, even though working with extremist offenders is not a new concept.

Nevertheless, after the 9/11 and subsequent terror attacks, Western and non-Western states alike recognized the need for alternatives to repression and prosecution as a means to fight terrorism, violent radicalization, and extremism on their own turf, realizing that it would be impossible to ‘bomb’ and ‘arrest’ one’s way out of the terrorist threat. In addition, numerous attacks that followed—for example, in Madrid (March 2004), Amsterdam (November 2004) London (July 2005), Stockholm (December 2010), Brussels (May
2014), and Paris (January and November 2015), as well as various foiled plots—included large numbers of perpetrators being born and raised in the countries they attacked. Thus, they had obviously radicalized ‘at home.’ In consequence, Western governments tried to introduce various CVE strategies designed to combat home-grown radicalization by looking at experiences in their own social and work environments and civil societies, but also drawing on promising and innovative approaches developed in Middle Eastern and Southeast Asian countries. After the 9/11 attacks, many—mostly prison-based programs—were introduced there to deal with a growing amount of inmates swept into the prisons after the US-led ‘War on Terror’ had begun. Theological debates were conducted by religious authorities in their attempts to ‘deradicalize’ prisoners suspected of holding extremist views in Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Indonesia, and Malaysia, among others.

But what exactly is ‘deradicalization,’ how it is achieved, measured, and controlled? There are many different concepts and terms used worldwide—for example, ‘reintegration,’ ‘rehabilitation,’ ‘re-education,’ ‘desistance’ (primary and secondary), ‘disengagement,’ ‘deprogramming,’ ‘disaffiliation,’ ‘debiasing’—to describe, albeit roughly, a similar process of turning from a position of endorsing and using violence to abstinence from violent means and/or attitudes. However, it is much more complicated than that. Leading experts have found the “lack of conceptual clarity in the emerging discourse on deradicalization striking” (Bjørgo & Horgan, 2009, p. 3). Seemingly being applied to a wide array of policies and tools with “virtually no conceptual development in the area” (Horgan, 2009a, p. 17) has led to political and practical action executed with largely absent theoretical frameworks or clear-cut concepts. So far, research has only marginally helped to build a comprehensive evidence base to be used. Compared with the abundant body of works concerned with violent radicalization processes or collective routes into terrorist actions “our understanding of the causal processes of disengagement from terrorism remains theoretical or speculative” (Gill, Bouhana, & Morrison, 2015, p. 245) and research on terrorist disengagement “remains conceptually and theoretically underdeveloped,” as well as “devoid of conceptual clarity” (Altier, Thoroughgood, & Horgan, 2014, p. 647). Nevertheless, multiple programs working in this area have been implemented around the world, despite the fact that to this day the academic and expert landscape has not even agreed on the most fundamental aspects of how these programs should be conducted, evaluated, or designed in the first place. Practical and theoretical knowledge from disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs, criminological research about reintegration of multiple offenders, research focusing on joining and leaving cults or youth gangs, and many other fields were more or less randomly integrated into some programs and research without a unifying theory of ‘deradicalization.’

As a concept, the term usually denotes a process of individual or collective cognitive change from criminal, radical, or extremist identities to a non-criminal or moderate psychological state. ‘Deradicalization’ has to be strongly
differentiated from ‘disengagement,’ which denotes the mere behavioral role change (from offending to non-offending), while leaving the ideological or psychological aspect aside (cf. Bjørgo & Horgan, 2009; Dechesne, 2011; Horgan, 2009b; Horgan & Braddock, 2010; Köhler, 2013; Noricks, 2009). A debate around the role and effect of including that ideological change as a premise, success factor, or even goal for these programs has split the expert community, with those on the one side arguing that ‘disengagement’ would be much more feasible, cheaper, and effective (i.e., not including ideological change; e.g., see Horgan, 2009a; Noricks, 2009) and those on the other arguing that the role of ideology or attitude would be so important that leaving them aside might create a higher risk for recidivism (e.g., see Rabasa, Pettyjohn, Ghez, & Boucek, 2010). Nevertheless, some leading researchers have remained sceptical about the true length of ‘deradicalization,’ in terms of leaving the ideology behind as well. Horgan (2009a), for example, has found that looking at the former terrorists he interviewed between 2006 and 2008, who were from various backgrounds, “almost all (…) could be described as disengaged, the vast majority of them could not be said to be ‘deradicalized’” (Horgan, 2009a, p. 27). This observation points to one core problem of ‘deradicalization’ research and practice: individuals can be disengaged (i.e., not engaging in criminal behavior), while still being committed to a radical ideology. On the other hand, it may also occur that individuals remain part of a radical group and commit crimes without adhering to the cause. This, in turn, means that methods designed to counter or intervene in that area are automatically reaching into the grey zone of pre-criminal space. Owing to different political cultures and legal definitions, the question whether it is morally and legally legitimate to attempt to change a person’s political and religious beliefs (or ideology) is consequently very controversial internationally. Nevertheless, many actors involved recognize that there is usually a highly problematic path on the radicalization process before an individual or group acts illegally. Hence, retrospectively looking back after a terrorist attack, the radicalization processes that occur, due to a certain ‘radical’ ideology leading up to it, seem to justify practical approaches to avert such pathways. On the other hand, non-violent and legal activism—from the perspective of civil society and grassroots initiatives, as well as human rights and legal aspects—might be in danger of being targeted through government-led Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), based on state-sanctioned definitions of ‘extreme’ and ‘moderate.’ This ‘streamlining’ might, in fact, criminalize and suppress legitimate forms of social protest, as well as infringe upon the freedom of political opinion. Not without reason, many Western societies have been very careful to include ‘ideological’ elements in their criminal codes, avoiding the creation of ‘political policies’ or law-based political discrimination.

Nevertheless, reintegration programs for former combatants as part of peacekeeping operations have a long tradition, which includes working with former guerrilla fighters and extremists (e.g., FARC, IRA, ETA). These reintegration programs have oftentimes been seen as an important tool to
fight violent resistance, insurgency, and extremism. However, focusing on attitudes and ideological motivations are part of the development that more or less became widely discussed after the 9/11 attacks. Consequently, in 2008, *Time Magazine* voted the idea of “reversing radicalism” to be number four on the list of most important future revolutions (Ripley, 2008).

Mostly, programs focusing on helping individuals and groups to leave violent radicalism behind, exit terrorist groups, and critically reassess the underlying ideology (deradicalization and disengagement programs (DDP)) have been seen as tools for social reintegration and rehabilitation, as well as preventing further involvement within violent movements. But they have also been underestimated in terms of the effects that successful deradicalization programs can have on these radical milieus and groups. However, the academic and practitioner critique of the ‘securitization’ process of social programs expresses the fear that police, intelligence, and even military organizations are slowly annihilating the primary success factors of these programs—their civil society and ‘soft’ approaches—by adopting and utilizing them as tools for a classical repressive mode of operations (e.g., for intelligence gathering, identification of dangerous individuals, and surveillance). However, besides the social and civil society component of deradicalization programs, certain aspects and effects might very well be a valuable part of the programs, in the effort to contain or counter terrorist threats. In addition to this, it has to be noted that the vast majority of these programs around the world are currently conducted by police, intelligence, or military forces anyway. While these effects are highly dependent on many aspects (e.g., actor, target group, definitions, working standards, goals), the international academic and political debate about the nature, scope, and structure of these programs is still highly diversified.

By now, almost all Western countries have had experience with different programs in the field of deradicalization. Particularly since the outbreak of the Syrian conflict in 2011, the perceived threat stemming from returning foreign fighters has pushed many governments to develop, build, and finance programs dealing with counter-radicalization at an early stage or intervention and deradicalization at a later stage. Returning foreign fighters from Syria and Iraq have pressured this issue, mostly because of two reasons: first, in many countries a large number of (presumed) ideologically radicalized and brutalized individuals might end up in prison and spread their ideology; and second, many returnees might not be held legally responsible, due to a lack of evidence, and might be let free, thus creating the fear of sleepers or traumatized individuals re-entering their home countries and radicalizing further, as well as conducting attacks. Prevention, early intervention, and deradicalization programs promise to close that gap and ease the workload of authorities and intelligence.

Although these programs can be highly effective in terms of interrupting violent radicalization processes and gaining knowledge about the insights of radical and violent groups, the field is highly under-researched. As mentioned
above, not much is known about individual deradicalization processes and even less is known about the structures and methods behind these vastly different programs around the world claiming to bring individuals and groups back from violent radicalism to peaceful participation in their societies. Some leading and ground-breaking publications in this field (e.g., Bjørgo & Horgan, 2009; El-Said, 2015; Horgan, 2009b; Rabasa et al., 2010) have not been successful in motivating a comprehensive field of ‘deradicalization’ studies and remain highly important but isolated insights into some programs and individual biographies of former terrorists and extremists. It can therefore be claimed that the practical elements of deradicalization have highly outpaced the theoretical background. We know that individuals leave violent radical groups every day around the world and that many of these groups cease to exist after a relatively short period of activity. Consequently, there must be a way to structurally foster and support that process. In addition, deradicalization programs are being created and run globally without much theoretical backing behind them, which results in a very urgent necessity to build a basic knowledge and toolkit for deradicalization practitioners and researchers.

Based on the author’s extensive personal practical experience in the field of deradicalization, as well as a large amount of empirical case studies, this book bridges the gap for the first time between academic and practical perspectives on ‘deradicalization.’ In addition, it combines the most important lessons from programs conducted in the West and in the Middle East/South-East Asia (as well as other regions) and offers a comprehensive theory of ‘deradicalization,’ including highly relevant practical discussions of, for example, evaluation, training, typology of programs, core mechanisms of programs, and quality standards. A survey of the most relevant deradicalization programs around the world will show how different types of programs have developed within the context of their various different political cultures and geographical contexts, being influenced by the nature of the threat identified, political and religious philosophies applied, as well as aspiring different goals. However, many of these programs have studied each other and attempted to implement ‘best practice’ or ‘lessons learned concerning what works.’

After explaining the methods and sources of this study in Chapter 2, an extensive literature review about the current state of the art deradicalization processes and programs introduces those factors and pathways that are widely agreed upon as essential for understanding individual and collective movements out of violence and extremism. Relevant studies from other disciplines, such as criminology, leaving New Religious Movements (NRMs), violent youth gangs, and general role change, are discussed in detail as well.

Chapter 3 provides an in-depth discussion about the theory behind deradicalization and radicalization processes and the role of (radical) ideologies in these processes. It builds up an understanding of the dynamics behind pathways towards violent radicalism and back to non-violent activism. Discussing the state of the art in radicalization research, it is shown that the core mechanism
behind radicalization can be conceptualized as a process of ‘de-pluralization’ of political concepts and values and—combined with a specific ideology—ultimately leads to violence as one valid course of action. On the other hand, the processes leading back from radicalism entail, essentially, a ‘re-pluralization’ of those concepts and values. For both parts, the most important literature and concepts will be discussed to build the necessary knowledge for placing the practical aspects of deradicalization into their most effective setting. Looking at one of the most important and controversial terms behind deradicalization—ideology—this chapter discusses the differentiation between disengagement and deradicalization: the ideological or cognitive change of a person or group. When deradicalization of terrorists is discussed, it is almost impossible to avoid discussing the role of ideology itself. What does ‘ideology’ mean and why is it so important in radicalization or deradicalization processes? Introducing the most important scholarly research relevant for practical deradicalization, this chapter shows the core elements of ideology (problem definition, solution, and future vision) and how they are interwoven with behavior and, more specifically, radicalization. It is also a common misunderstanding that (ideological) deradicalization must include in-depth theological or political debates with the participants in order to convince them of their erroneous understanding of the political or religious framework in question. In fact, it is possible to work with an individual’s or group’s ideology on the level of that ideology’s practical manifestation and without necessarily going into abstract lengthy theoretical debates.

Chapter 4 discusses the specific effects of deradicalization programs in counter-terrorism, such as interrupting group hierarchies, causing internal rifts, as well as learning about recruitment and radicalization processes. Although a ‘securitization’ of deradicalization needs to be prevented, as some essential benefits of these initiatives are rooted in their ability to use ‘soft measures’ and work in the pre-criminal space. However, every deradicalization program by definition is situated at the boundary between risk prevention and intervention and their clientele at least theoretically consists of either active violent extremists or those deemed to be on the pathway to terrorism. Hence, policy makers and program designers need to be aware what specific impacts deradicalization-oriented methods can have on terrorist or extremist milieus. These impacts may not always be beneficial, as is shown. Some extremist groups, for example, might use deradicalization programs to relieve themselves of members without value for the group and a constant rate of turnover might increase the group’s capabilities in recruitment. Nevertheless, a detailed discussion of how deradicalization programs work in relation to counter-terrorism is necessary to plan, execute, and adequately set expectations for the initiative.

Chapter 5 suggests a typology of deradicalization programs with examples from practical experiences around the world. Bringing together the three most important characteristics to understand the practical implications of these programs (i.e., state versus non-state actor, active versus passive approach, the role of ideology), it is shown that a wide range of potential constellations for
building and running such programs exist. However, it is necessary to understand the strengths and weaknesses of these programs in regard to their potential effects.

Chapter 6 focuses on a very recent and a highly specialized type of deradicalization program: family counseling programs. Especially relevant in Europe, these programs aim to work with the social and affective environment of potentially highly radicalized individuals and to induce a deradicalization process. These programs are methodological hybrids, as they can work both in early prevention and later stage intervention. This chapter discusses the most relevant aspects of these family counseling programs and introduces some models for deradicalization-oriented family counseling—for example, in Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands, or at an international level.

Chapter 7 discusses the terms “effectiveness” and “success” in regard to deradicalization programs. What constitutes success for such a program and how can it be conceptualized and measured? What kind of effects do these programs want to yield exactly and why? To know precisely what to expect from deradicalization programs, it is essential to build and maintain such an initiative with sustainable outcomes. Ideological or cognitive change is but one effect that could be a priority of these deradicalization and disengagement programs (DDPs), and this chapter shows how the various outcomes match the different types shown in Chapter 5. It is also discussed how program staff can be adequately trained and how the structural integrity of deradicalization programs can be assessed based on experiences in other fields such as criminology.

Chapter 8 discusses the inherent moral problems of DDPs. Even the attempt to change a person’s political or religious opinions is highly controversial in many Western countries and has led to a very sceptical or cautious approach towards deradicalization and CVE. However, most societies recognize that there is a level of danger or destructiveness within a radicalization process before illegal activity occurs. In consequence, to ignore the ideological component in bringing terrorists back to a peaceful life creates other risks as well, such as helping convinced radicals to undermine a particular society. Whatever standpoint is taken in this regard, the question of the moral legitimacy of deradicalization needs to be discussed in depth.

Chapter 9 lists and explains the most important practical methods used by DDPs around the world and how they can be integrated into planning, building, and maintaining a deradicalization program. Global cultural and political differences have shaped the character of the practical tools used. Nevertheless, there is much to learn from different approaches and a comparison shows that a core set of tools are used in practically every deradicalization program, such as mentoring, vocational training, psychological counseling, or educational methods.

Chapter 10 provides an introduction into the global deradicalization and CVE landscape. Showcasing different programs, as well as the state of the national debates and legislation in these fields, the chapter will provide an
opportunity to recognize national similarities as well as differences regarding deradicalization. Discussing those countries which have the most extensive experiences or have recently started with CVE, the chapter proceeds on a continent-based list of countries.

Finally, Chapter 11 collects the lessons learned from the present study, shows future directions for researchers and policy makers, as well as discusses some of the most useful resources regarding the deradicalization field.

This guidebook is a unique and complex work aiming to help practitioners and researchers to understand the field of deradicalization better and to make their work easier. It contains toolkits and advanced theoretical concepts valuable for working in the field. These concepts and methods have been used and tested by the author in various practical settings, both as a case manager and counselor. Although CVE and deradicalization are still very controversial in many countries, trying to bring back individuals and groups from a path of violence not only protects our societies, but strengthens them in terms of their core values and identities. In this way, deradicalization—as an additional tool to fight violence and extremism—helps to safeguard communities, families, and societies. Fears regarding deradicalization are oftentimes based on a lack of conceptual clarity, solid training, structural integrity, and transparency. While these tools are not ‘silver bullets’ against terrorism nor infallible, they still carry significant potential for increasing resilience against terrorism and improving security. It is the goal of this book to make that potential visible and accessible to those academics, practitioners, and policy makers who see a need for it.

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1 Introduction


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11 Conclusion and lessons learned
