

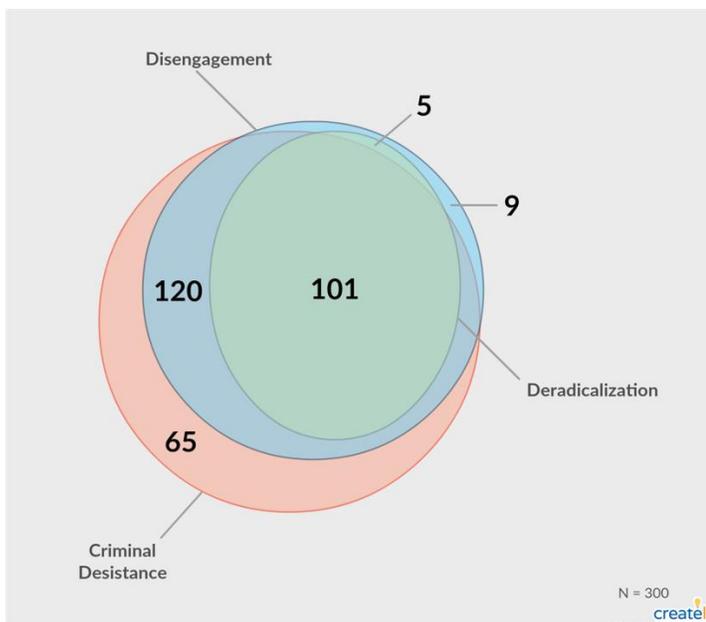
Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the United States—Desistance, Disengagement, and Deradicalization (PIRUS-D3)

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the United States—Desistance, Disengagement, and Deradicalization (PIRUS-D3) project supplements the PIRUS dataset with information on 300 United States extremists who desisted from criminal activity, disengaged from extremist groups or movements, and/or deradicalized after their participation in ideologically motivated illegal activities. PIRUS-D3 includes information on individuals from across the ideological spectrum and was collected using open-sources, including interview transcripts, biographies, court documents, and news reports. PIRUS-D3 contains information on a wide range of factors that act as barriers to extremist disengagement and criminal desistance, as well as the push/pull factors that help individuals leave extremist groups. These factors include changes in educational attainment or work performance, the development of positive personal relationships, participation in drug or alcohol rehabilitation programs or mental health counseling, and a number of measures that reflect individuals' disillusionment with their respective extremist groups and/or causes.

PROJECT FINDINGS—DISENGAGEMENT, DESISTANCE, AND DERADICALIZATION OUTCOMES

The PIRUS-D3 data reveal a significant amount of diversity among U.S. extremists in terms of exit outcomes:



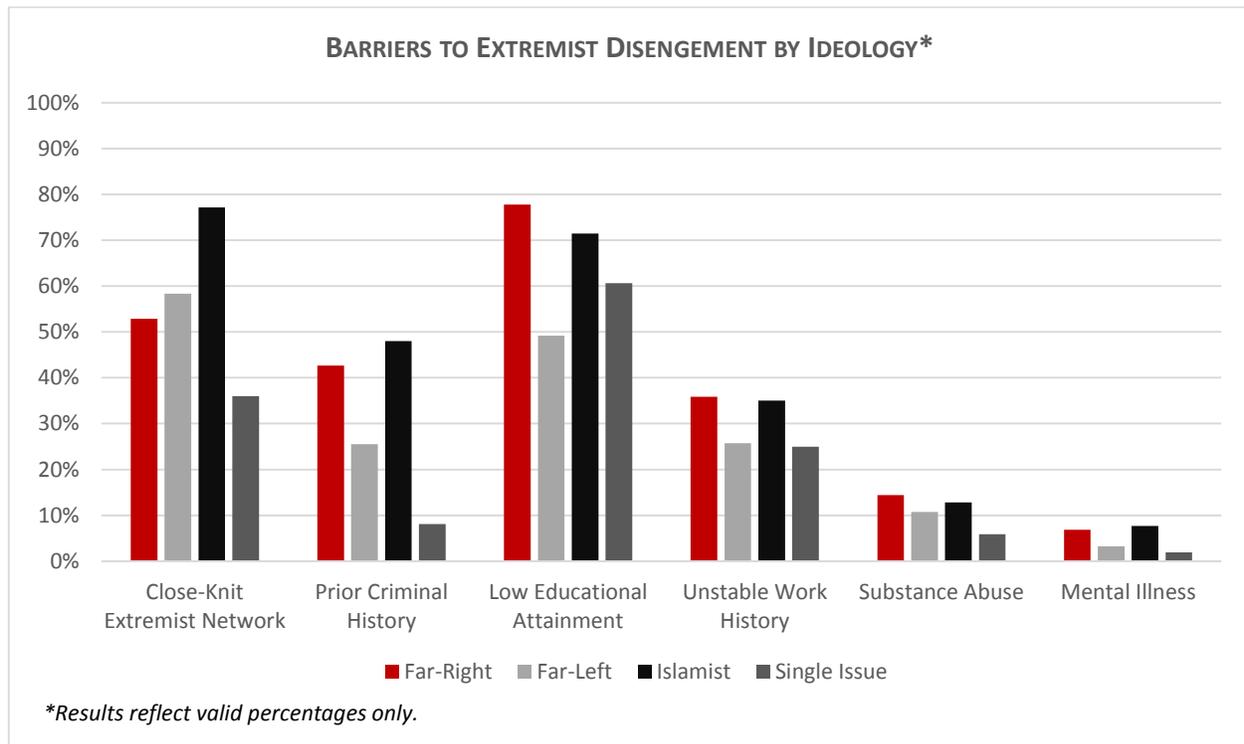
- Of the 300 individuals included in the sample, 120 (40%) eventually disengaged from extremist groups/movements and desisted from all forms of criminal activity for at least 5 years, but there was insufficient evidence available to determine if they had altered their underlying extremist beliefs.
- More than 100 individuals (33.7%) in PIRUS-D3 showed evidence of reaching all three exit outcomes (disengagement, desistance, and deradicalization).
- At the time of coding, 65 (21.7%) individuals had desisted from ideologically-motivated criminal activity for at least 5 years. However, evidence indicates that these individuals remained engaged with extremist groups and continued to promote extremist beliefs during this period.
- The rates of deradicalization were comparatively low across all ideological groups; however, this finding likely reflects the poor availability of information about changes in individuals' beliefs in open sources.

PROJECT FINDINGS—BARRIERS TO DISENGAGEMENT

Importantly, the PIRUS-D3 data include information on a number of barriers that may prevent individuals from disengaging from extremist groups or desisting from criminal activity. Strategies for rehabilitating and reintegrating extremist offenders should address the substantial challenges that offenders face as they reenter their communities.

- PIRUS-D3 shows that the average extremist faces multiple barriers to disengagement that can prolong or thwart their attempts to exit extremist groups or desist from crime. These include (1) being a member of a close-knit extremist group that includes a friend, family member, or romantic partner (56.7%), (2) having a non-ideological criminal history (35.9%), (3) having a poor educational background (60.6%) and/or (4) an unstable work history (31.1%), and (5) facing issues of substance abuse (17.7%) and mental illness (5%).

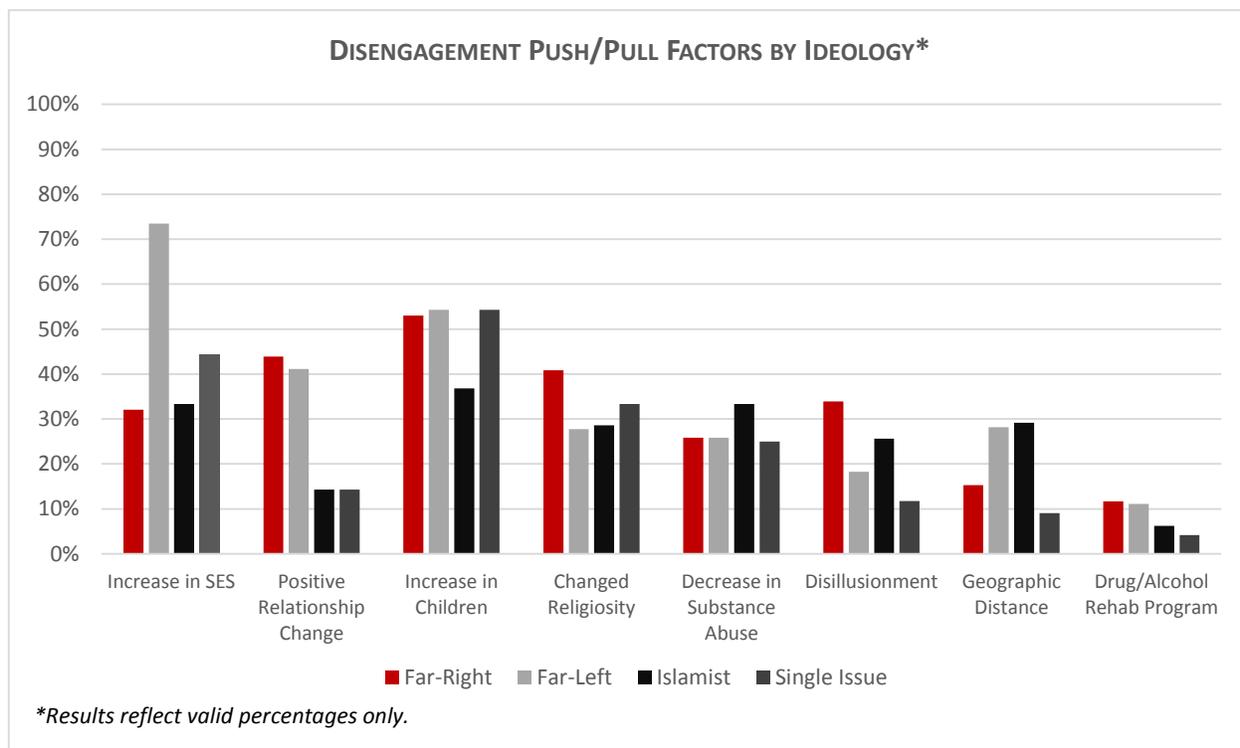
- Some exit barriers were disproportionately present within particular ideological milieus. For example, nearly 80% of the far-right extremists in our sample struggled with issues of social mobility, including limited educational attainment and poor work performance.
- Islamist extremists in our sample had the highest rates (77.1%) of membership in close-knit extremist cliques.
- Although far-left extremists had relatively low barrier rates compared to extremists from other ideologies, over half (58.3%) were members of extremist groups that included a close friend, family member, or romantic partner.
- In part due to these barriers, the average length of disengagement varied considerably for the individuals in PIRUS-D3, with 32.7% disengaging within one year of their arrest for an extremist crime, 14.5% disengaging between 1 and 3 years, 27% disengaging between 4 and 10 years, and 25.8% taking 10 or more years to disengage.



PROJECT FINDINGS—PUSH/PULL FACTORS

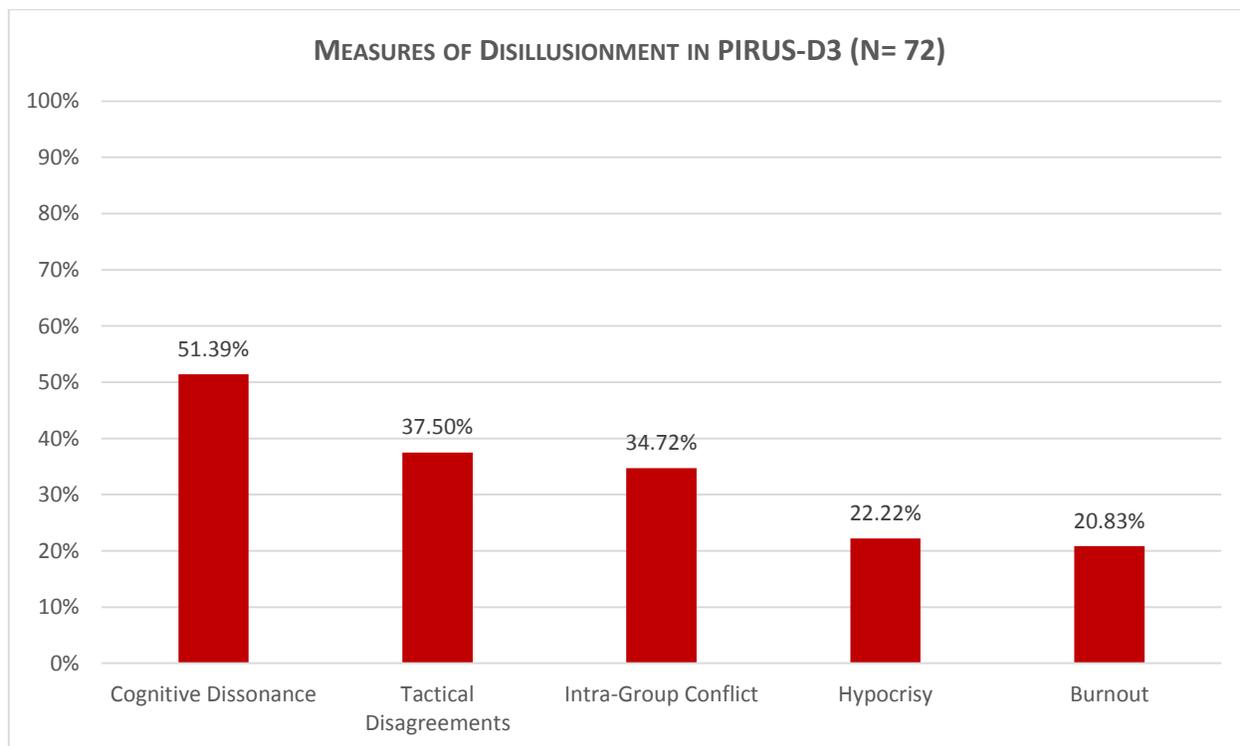
PIRUS-D3 includes information on a wide-range of push/pull factors that can act as mechanisms of extremist disengagement and/or criminal desistance.

- Positive advancements in socioeconomic standing and the birth of children after radicalization were present in the exit processes of approximately 50% of the extremists in our sample.
- Over 35% of our sample cited changed religiosity (i.e., an increase in, decrease in, or reinterpretation of religious beliefs/participation) as important to their disengagement from extremism.
- A similar number (36.1%) ended relationships with extremists and/or began new relationships with non-extremists as part of their disengagement processes.
- Approximately a quarter of our sample (25.9%) cited a decrease in substance use and/or disillusionment with their extremist groups (24.0%) as important factors contributing to their exit.
- A similar number (24.52%) of individuals noted that their disengagement from extremism required that they physically separate themselves from their extremist social networks by leaving their cities or states of residence.
- Some push/pull factors were more common in particular ideological groups. For example, the development of positive personal relationships with non-radicals and/or the termination of personal relationships with radicals was present in the exit processes for a large number of far-right and far-left extremists (43.9% and 41.1% respectively) but was less common for Islamist extremists (14.3%).
- Similarly, disillusionment with an extremist group or cause was cited by many far-right and Islamist extremists as a reason for disengagement (25.6% and 33.9%) but was less commonly cited by far-left extremists (18.3%).



PROJECT FINDINGS—DISILLUSIONMENT

Disillusionment with an extremist group or movement is one of the most commonly cited reasons for individuals leaving extremist groups and/or deradicalizing. While disillusionment was cited by approximately a quarter of the individuals in PIRUS-D3 as important to their exit processes, these individuals noted several sources of their dissatisfaction with their affiliated groups or movements. Moreover, while a sense of disillusionment was an important reason why these individuals left extremist groups, in many cases disillusionment did not produce a corresponding change in their underlying extremist beliefs.



- Approximately 52% of the individuals in PIRUS-D3 who cited disillusionment as a reason for leaving extremist groups referenced a feeling of cognitive dissonance that arose when (1) the beliefs promoted by their ideology did not conform to the real-world experiences they were having with members of out-groups, especially ethnic and religious minorities, and/or (2) their experiences with violence were less glamorous and more traumatic than is typically depicted in extremist narratives.
- Just over 37% of the sample of disillusioned individuals cited internal disagreements over tactical decisions, such as target selection and choice of weapons, as a source of their frustrations with their affiliated extremist groups/movements. In some cases, however, individuals were unhappy that their groups' leaders were not adopting violent tactics, which prompted them to form their own violent splinter groups.
- A similar number (34%) noted internal struggles for leadership as the reason for their disillusionment.
- Nearly a quarter (22.2%) of the disillusioned sample referenced feeling that the leadership of their groups were hypocritical in their decisions and behaviors. Most often these feelings arose when leaders restricted group members from participating in activities (e.g., drug and alcohol use) in which they openly engaged.
- Finally, 20% of the sample described feeling “burned out” by years of involvement in extremist groups as a source of their disillusionment.
- Disillusionment often failed to produce a corresponding change in the underlying extremist beliefs of the individuals in PIRUS-D3. At the time of coding, more than 25% of the disillusioned sample continued to publicly promote extremist views after leaving their respective extremist groups.

IMPLICATIONS

The PIRUS-D3 project suggests several implications for criminal justice professionals and programs designed to rehabilitate extremist offenders:

- PIRUS-D3 data suggest that the risk of recidivism among U.S. extremists is potentially high. More than 49% (149 out of 300) of the extremists in PIRUS-D3 reoffended after their first known instance of ideologically motivated crime. Of these individuals, 18% transitioned to non-ideological crimes after committing at least one ideologically motivated offense.
- Exit pathways are rarely quick or linear. Instead, individuals often experience periods of re-engagement with extremist groups and/or continued criminal activity before achieving a final desistance, disengagement, or deradicalization outcome.
- U.S. extremists commonly encounter several hurdles to successful disengagement or community reintegration after incarceration. Socioeconomic advancements, such as stable jobs or educational opportunities, are often not available to individuals convicted of extremist crimes. Furthermore, individuals are often embedded in extremist groups that include family members, romantic partners, or close friends, making disengagement particularly challenging.
- Policies and programs that aim to assist individuals in disengaging and achieving their reintegration goals should be cognizant of these challenges and capable of providing the support services that are necessary to keep individuals on an exit trajectory. These services include, but are not limited to, job and educational assistance, monitoring of social affiliations, drug and alcohol rehabilitation, and mental health counseling.
- While the individuals in PIRUS-D3 cited a wide range of mechanisms as important to their exit processes, the causal relationship between “push” and “pull” factors and extremist disengagement is complex. For example, some individuals cited the birth of children as important to their disengagement because it reinforced their growing disillusionment with extremism. In other cases, individuals noted that having children acted as the trigger that caused them to initially question their extremist affiliations. Still in other cases, individuals reported that the birth of children had the opposite effect—reinforcing their extremist commitments rather than challenging them. Thus, PIRUS-D3 suggests that “push” and “pull” factors should not be viewed as inherently useful for extremist disengagement or equally applicable to all cases.

PROJECT TEAM

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