Deradicalization of Former Members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam

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The LTTE

• Designated a terrorist organization by 32 countries
• Waged a secessionist campaign to create an independent Tamil State
• Militia; high-profile assassinations; perfected the suicide belt
• More than 11,500 surrendered to Sri Lankan military after defeat in 2009
• Government effort to rehabilitate surrendered
Program effectiveness?

• Evidence that similar environments (prisons) breed radicalization
  – Abu Musab al-Zarqawi
  – Prison staff in Spain (Trujillo et al., 2009)
  – Prisoners in Philippines (Kruglanski et al., 2014)

• Quantitative assessments of deradicalization programs are very rare
The Sample

• 397 former LTTE members detained in 16 different rehabilitation centers in Northern Sri Lanka

• Selected from a larger dataset because..
  – Resided at the same facility for study’s duration
  – Agreed to complete questionnaires at all time points

• This subset did not differ from the larger dataset on Time 1 responses
Rehabilitation Centers

- Intervention components
  - Educational
  - Spiritual
  - Vocational
  - Cultural/family
  - Psychological/creativity
  - Sport/extra-curricular

Minimal Treatment

Comprehensive Treatment
The Analyses

• Attitudes assessed **three** times @ 6 month intervals
  – Time 1 = 7.29 months detained ($SD = 1.41$)
  – Time 2 @ 6 months
  – Time 3 @ 12 months

• Do attitudes change across time?
• Do the rehabilitation programs have differing effects on attitudes?
Support for the LTTE

- 7 items—i.e., The way of the LTTE is the only way to get peace for the Tamil people

Cond. × Time interaction
\( F(4, 788) = 2.54, p = .039, \eta^2 = .01 \)
Support for Tamil Independence

- 7 items—i.e., True Tamils should adhere strictly to achieving a separate state

**Cond. × Time interaction**

\[ F(4, 788) = 3.45, \ p = .008, \ \eta^2 = .02 \]

- **Treatment:** Significant decline
- **Minimal:** Marginal (\( p = .081 \)) increase
Support for Armed Struggle

- If a group asks Tamils to join in an armed fight for a separate state, to what extent would you support/oppose this call for an armed struggle?

- **Treatment**: increase ($p = .018$)
- **Minimal**: no change ($p = .127$)

**Condition × Time interaction**

$F(4, 788) = 4.86, p < .001, \eta^2 = .02$

- Significant decreases
Need for Cognitive Closure
(Weberster & Kruglanski, 1994)

• 14 items—i.e., In case of uncertainty, I prefer to make an immediate decision, whatever it may be

Time main effect
$F(2, 393) = 197.93, p < .001, \eta^2 = .50$
Collective Narcissism
(de Zavala, Cichocka, Eidelson, & Jayawickreme, 2009)

- 5 items – i.e., I will never be satisfied until the Tamils get the recognition they deserve.

Significant decreases

**Minimal**: no change

**Treatment**: Significant decrease

Condition × Time interaction

\[ F(4, 788) = 5.18, p < .001, \eta^2 = .03 \]
Treatment Perception

• 4 items—i.e., The rehabilitation program has helped me

Significant decreases

Significant increases

Overall increases from T1 to T3

Condition × Time interaction
F(4, 788) = 7.49, p < .001, η² = .04
Discussion

• Comprehensive rehab appears to be more effective
  – At Time 3 lowest on collective narcissism, support for LTTE, support for Tamil Independence

• All beneficiaries showed...
  – Decreased support for the LTTE and armed struggle
  – Increased positivity toward the rehabilitation program
  – Decreased need for cognition and collective narcissism
    • Important in the radicalization process
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