CHANGING ONE'S BELIEFS?

AN ANALYSIS OF THE CONNECTION BETWEEN IDEOLOGY AND POLITICAL VIOLENCE WITHIN DUTCH DERADICALIZATION POLICY

MARTHE VAN ECKEVELD
5509378
Utrecht University

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Supervisor: Dr. Mario Fumerton

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The cover image portrays deradicalization, artist unknown (unknown, 2018).

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to research how the Dutch central government views the connection between ideology, more specific Islamic ideology, and political violence by analyzing Dutch deradicalization policy. How ideology is touched upon in these programs is examined through three confusions that exist within deradicalization research, introduced by Koehler. The first confusion is about the meaning of ideology, often swapping it with concepts such as ‘worldview,’ ‘system of beliefs,’ or equal it to ‘theology.’ The second confusion is about false positives and negatives regarding ideology, meaning that ‘being ideological’ is often equal to ‘being ideologically or theologically literate.’ The third confusion is about multiple intertwined concepts and terms that are entirely unintelligible without ideology, such as ‘grievances,’ ‘black and white thinking,’ and ‘collective norms.’ Two programs initiated by the NCTV have been analyzed through these confusions by applying textual analysis: team TER and Forsa. Furthermore, counterterrorism strategies published by the NCTV have been studied in the same manner.

The findings show that Koehler’s three confusions are least applicable to the 2011-2015 counterterrorism strategy, as ideology is given much credit and its functions are acknowledged. The confusions apply to most parts of the counterterrorism strategy from 2015-2020 and on team TER and Forsa’s descriptions and evaluations, as ideology is much less mentioned and not explained in-depth, as other factors are seen as sometimes more important within deradicalization. The findings thus show a pattern of deterioration over time when it comes to ideology within Dutch deradicalization policy and of the knowledge of Salafi jihadi narratives that could help to understand and counter that ideology.

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1. Introduction

Ever since the September 11 attacks on the Twin Towers in 2001, governments have been trying to cope with the perceived increased threat of terrorism. In the Netherlands, several measures were introduced against terrorism and crime in general. Still, it was not until the brutal murder of Theo van Gogh in 2004 that the debate around terrorism would dominate the news and would require radical counterterrorism measures (de Graaff & de Graaf, 2008, p. 183). Even though right-wing and left-wing extremism seem to dominate the news and political debate in recent times, the threat of Salafi jihadi-inspired acts of terrorism has not passed. According to the National Coordinator of Terrorism and Security (Nationaal Coördinator Terrorismebestrijding en Veiligheid, hereafter: NCTV), it is still regarded as the most important terrorist threat (Rijksoverheid, 2021). Therefore, it requires adequate countermeasures. Such measures can firstly be focused on terrorist acts themselves and can secondly have a preventive goal (de Graaff & de Graaf, 2008, p. 184).

A third type of measures that can be taken to avoid terrorist attacks is concerned with deradicalizing those who are already radicalized to decrease the threat of radicalized individuals conducting a terrorist attack or radicalizing others. Deradicalization is often referred to as a form of terrorism prevention. However, while prevention is aimed at individuals who might be at risk of radicalizing, deradicalization seeks to deradicalize those who are already radicalized. Deradicalization has however proven to be challenging to accomplish since it involves changing someone's ideology, something that requires a lot of effort and patience (Braddock & Horgan, 2010, p. 268).

Deradicalization is what this research will focus on, partly because ongoing debate exists within politics and the academic field about whether deradicalization can be accomplished, and if so, debate remains around the question of *how* it can be achieved. The *how* question is something that this research contributes to by asking the following research question: *How is the connection between Islamic ideology and political violence valued in Dutch deradicalization policy in the period from 2011 until now?*

The question asked is mainly concerned with the role of Islamic ideology within deradicalization policy, as jihadi violence is still seen as the biggest threat to Dutch society (AIVD, 2020, p. 6). The time period has been chosen because the first national counterterrorism strategy issued by the NCTV was published in 2011. From that moment on, the perceived threat stemming from returning foreign fighters that had traveled to Syria and Iraq increasingly

emerged, shaping Dutch deradicalization policy. In the following period, the European Commission released a revised strategy to combat violent extremist radicalization, with a much stronger focus on deradicalization policy (Council of the European Union, 2014). EU member states, the Netherlands included, were urged to create national disengagement and 'exit' programs, resulting in an increased interest in methods and programs in the Netherlands.

An aspect that will also be considered in this regard is the existence of a media environment where radical Islamist individuals can share their beliefs and discuss theological issues. It seems that policymakers are often unaware or unfamiliar with this media environment and the accompanying ideological narratives, for example when counter-radicalization campaigns are issued through mainstream and social media. Furthermore, it has been stated that European states – the Netherlands included – are often reluctant to become involved in religious matters and therefore find it hard to directly challenge extremist ideology (Rabasa, Pettyjohn, Ghez, & Boucek, 2010). Consequently, it would be helpful to inform how Dutch policy has incorporated ideology, particularly Islamic ideology, up until now. By doing so, conclusions can be drawn on whether the role of ideology might be regarded as sufficient or whether there needs to be more emphasis on Islamic ideology within deradicalization policy.

The practical relevance of this research is that it can inform policy concerned with deradicalization, which remains of importance since terrorism remains a serious physical threat to citizens' security and society. To eliminate or decrease the threat, more knowledge on deradicalization and Salafi jihadi ideology is necessary and helpful since it will inform the policymakers concerned with deradicalization. Furthermore, a bridge will be built between the two fields of deradicalization policy and deradicalization research.

While this research focuses on the ideological component within deradicalization programs, that does not mean that it argues for an in-depth understanding of Islamic ideology as the only approach to deradicalization. Literature has shown that disengagement and deradicalization are not just governed by changing ideas or shifting opinions (Schuurman & Bakker, 2015, p. 4). However, what is put up for debate is whether the understanding of the Salafi jihadi ideology - when referred to in deradicalization programs – brings added value or requires more in-depth knowledge of the ideology that Salafi jihadis regard as their own.

The research will be structured as followed: The current chapter will continue by providing an overview of the current theoretical debate, the analytical framework that will frame the analysis, the definitions that will be used, and the method. The second chapter will provide context about Dutch deradicalization policy from the period of 2011 onwards, giving an overview of the strategies of the NCTV and the programs they initiated: the TER-team and

Forsa. In the third chapter, the media environment of radicalized individuals will be explained, as well as narratives about grievances and a global enemy that play an essential role. The fourth chapter analyzes Dutch deradicalization programs through the analytical lens of Koehler's three confusions, which will be explained in Chapter 1.2, to conclude whether the connection between political violence and Islamic ideology is sufficiently acknowledged. The fifth and last chapter will contain concluding remarks, implications for policy and the academic debate, and possibilities for future research.

1.1 Literature review

There are two debates widely known within the field of deradicalization policy and research. The first debate revolves around whether to aim for deradicalization or disengagement, the first one being a change in beliefs and the second one being a behavior change. The second related debate concerns whether ideology should play an essential role within deradicalization or whether other factors are more important. These two debates will be explained in the following paragraphs.

1.1.1 Disengagement or deradicalization?

The first debate is about whether deradicalization is attainable or whether governments should pursue a less strenuous option: disengagement. To understand this debate, it is vital to understand the meaning of these two concepts since there is no conceptual clarity within existing research and policy. Authors, however, mostly agree that deradicalization entails a gradual change of one's system of beliefs (Braddock & Horgan, 2010; Van der Heide & Schuurman, 2018; Altier & Horgan, 2012; Rabasa, Pettyjohn, Ghez, & Boucek, 2010; Colaert, 2017). Some see deradicalization simply as the opposite of radicalization, which is ''the process of becoming less radical'' (Demant, Slootman, Buijs, & Tillie, 2008, p. 13).

A more elaborate definition, provided by Braddock, regards deradicalization as a ''psychological process through which an individual abandons his extremist ideology and is theoretically rendered a decreased threat for re-engaging in terrorism'' (Braddock, 2014, p. 60). The definition presented by Horgan, a well-known scholar, often referred to in the field of deradicalization and disengagement research, adds a social component to the process. He views deradicalization as ''the social and psychological process whereby an individual's commitment to, and involvement in, violent radicalization is reduced to the extent that they are no longer at risk of involvement and engagement in violent activity'' (Horgan, 2009, p. 153).

Horgan also offers a definition of disengagement, which he describes as ‘’the process whereby an individual experiences a change in role or function that is usually associated with a reduction of violent participation’’, with the important addition that ‘’it may not necessarily involve leaving the movement but is most frequently associated with significant temporary or permanent role change’’ (ibid, p. 152). This concept of ‘role change’ within disengagement is usually seen as the contrasting component compared to deradicalization since role change encompasses only a change in behavior and not necessarily a cognitive change. Disengagement sometimes occurs through intimidation through law enforcement, contrary to deradicalization, which is primarily voluntary (Speckhard, 2011, p. 1). All of the definitions mentioned involve individual disengagement or deradicalization, which will be the focus of this research.

The main difference between the two concepts is processual. Disengagement requires behavioral change without necessarily cognitive change, while deradicalization requires cognitive change, leading to behavioral change. In the latter process, disengagement as a second step follows deradicalization as a first step, while it can be said that the first step is skipped when aiming for disengagement. Therefore, a differentiation between the two concepts is essential to understand how the process is seen when one of the two concepts is mentioned in policy or academic literature. When talking about deradicalization, disengagement is a result, but when talking about disengagement, deradicalization is not necessarily a result or is at least not the aim. In terms of ideology, it is also essential to understand the processual difference between the two concepts since cognitive change involves ideological change and behavioral change does not. In this regard, Koehler states that disengagement means the ‘’deliberate exclusion of ideology from the program’’ (Koehler, 2017, p. 83).

Some authors suggest that deradicalization as a goal is not realistic because the profound and long-term attitudinal, ideological, and behavioral changes are difficult to achieve compared to disengagement (Speckhard, 2011, p. 2). Therefore, governments should try to accomplish disengagement as ‘the next best thing’ (Braddock & Horgan, 2010; Altier & Horgan, 2012; De Graaf, 2017; Horgan, 2008). Taylor and Horgan even suggest replacing ‘deradicalization’ with ‘risk-reduction’ (Taylor & Horgan, 2011, p. 176).

On the other hand, other authors suggest that deradicalization is possible and is worth aiming for since it is more of a promise for long-term success than disengagement (Winter & Muhanna-Matar, 2020; Rabasa, Pettyjohn, Ghez, & Boucek, 2010). The argument often put forth in this regard is that without a shift in ideological beliefs, those who have disengaged and are not deradicalized appear just as quickly to re-engage (Speckhard, 2011, p. 2). This points to

the core problem of deradicalization research: individuals can disengage while still being committed to their extremist or radical ideology (Koehler, 2017, p. 3).

1.1.2 Ideology and terrorism

The second debate is a logical continuation of the first debate because whether to focus on deradicalization or disengagement means whether or not to include an ideological component (Hansen, Koehler, Gielen, & Van der Heide, 2021, p. 18). The 'ideological step' has been skipped in the process of disengagement. Therefore, whether an author chooses to use the concept of deradicalization or disengagement usually shows whether they see a role for ideology in the process.

The larger debate around this issue is about whether a connection exists between ideology and political violence. This debate is relevant for the current research since it makes a difference whether academics and policymakers concerned with deradicalization and disengagement programs consider ideology important enough to include. It can change the contents and outcomes whether they do because many related aspects such as effect assessments, program evaluations, and program success are directly influenced by the role of ideology, because whether a program is deemed 'successful' or 'effective' depends on what is seen as success: a role change or an ideological change. Ideology also influences the overall design of disengagement or deradicalization initiatives (Koehler, 2017, p. 83).

Research from the last couple of years seems to indicate that ideology does not matter within terrorism. Many prominent scholars in the field have argued that ideology, or in this case religion, does not play a considerable role in motivating the radicalization process and the actions of terrorists (Pape, 2005; Roy, 2008; Stern, 2010; Aly & Striegher, 2012; Mink, 2015). This trend is identified by Koehler when he states that many scholars widely share the assumption that ideological beliefs are secondary in radicalization and terrorism and, consequently, in deradicalization (Hansen, Koehler, Gielen, & Van der Heide, 2021). Dawson and Koehler state that existing social, psychological, and educational aspects are often regarded as much more important and are given too much emphasis (Dawson, 2019; Hansen, Koehler, Gielen, & Van der Heide, 2021). According to Dawson (2018), the reluctance of associating terrorism with ideology stems from multiple ideas, such as a fear of stigmatizing all Muslims, or from the notion that ideology is only a narrative and nothing more, and thus a form of propaganda (Dawson, 2018; Roy, 2008). Furthermore, Islamist terrorists are often seen as not that religious due to a lack of Arabic or *Qur'ānic* knowledge, whereas religious leaders are

often equal to being highly ideological due to their use of sacred texts (Ginges, Hansen, & Norenzayan, 2009; Taylor A. , 2015).

When looking at the Netherlands, the controversial David Kenning, a self-proclaimed counter-radicalization expert, is known for dismissing the role of ideology within radicalization and deradicalization. He is often referred to by other experts and influenced Dutch deradicalization policy in Amsterdam and within the NCTV (Kouwenhoven, 2021). According to Kenning, it is not the radical ideology on jihadist blogs that produces radicalization and terrorism, but the 'Western' media that produces an industry of fear when reacting to terrorist attacks, thereby feeding the polarization wanted by Islamists (Blokker, 2017). Kenning mentions that police actions in response to a terrorist attack can increase support for extremist ideas, especially when, for example, innocents are killed. For Muslim extremists, this means attention for a marginal matter, thereby ensuring the continuation of their existence (ibid).

Looking at some more recent research, however, ideology does seem to matter. It is stated that, especially within deradicalization research, there is a much higher risk of recidivism if radical beliefs remain (Boyle, Altier, & Horgan, 2021; Speckhard, 2011). It is also stated that effective deradicalization programs should include an ideological component and that the emotional and social elements of ideology are slowly being recognized in the field of terrorism and deradicalization (Holbrook & Horgan, 2019; Rabasa, Pettyjohn, Ghez, & Boucek, 2010).

Furthermore, it is mentioned that it almost seems like an anti-ideological bias exists within terrorism research, which is why a critical rethinking is necessary on whether the ideological issue has been pushed away too much (Dawson, 2018). Therefore, van den Bos and de Graaf argue that specific religious beliefs should be taken seriously as a prime motivator within radicalization and terrorism and should receive more attention within research (Van den Bos & De Graaf, 2020). According to Koehler (2017), one encounters various theoretical and practical problems when ideology is not included, such as treating individuals who see themselves as ideological. He also states that the reason for not including ideology in research can be attributed to a shallow understanding of the concept of 'ideology' among researchers and that they often 'swap' it with terms like 'worldview,' 'system of beliefs,' 'frames explaining the world,' and so on (Hansen, Koehler, Gielen, & Van der Heide, 2021).

In contrast to the 'Western' tendency to dismiss ideology, there is an over-emphasis on treating actors as 'rational' and 'calculating,' making their calculations based on specific incentives and behaving according to rational expectations. Several studies show that research terrorism from a rational choice perspective, portraying terrorist actors as carefully outweighing the costs against the benefits (Pape, 2003; Caplan, 2006; Kydd & Walter, 2006; Libicki, Chalk,

& Sisson, 2007). Usually, the reason for viewing terrorists as rational actors is that it would make their actions predictable, and thus, terrorism-preventive measures can more easily be established (Davis & Cragin, 2009, p. 170).

To summarize, two interlinked debates exist that both come down to the role ideology does or does not play in radicalization and terrorism, and therefore should or should not play within processes of deradicalization. Strictly speaking, deradicalization means including ideology, and disengagement means deliberately excluding ideology. However, in a later stage of this research, it will become apparent that the two terms are often mixed up within Dutch deradicalization policy and programs.

1.2 Analytical framework

1.2.1 Ideology, religion, and the Salafi jihadi movement

Ideology matters when it comes to deradicalization. Due to much current debate about the concept 'ideology', the analytical framework will be partly a presentation of my ideas of how it can be used, and partly based on three confusions within deradicalization research, presented by Koehler (Koehler, 2017; Hansen, Koehler, Gielen, & Van der Heide, 2021).

As has been stated, choosing to research deradicalization policy and programs means choosing to include ideology as an essential aspect because the difference between choosing to focus on disengagement or deradicalization *is* choosing to focus on ideology or not as a factor. The analytical framework deepens ideology by using three problems Koehler describes as confusions within deradicalization research (Hansen, Koehler, Gielen, & Van der Heide, 2021). These three confusions will be used to view and review Dutch deradicalization policy. They will be explained in further detail in the following paragraphs, after presenting ideology as a concept and how Salafi jihadism can be viewed as part of that category. The explanation of ideology and its functions will be based on Koehler's ideas, as his work is also used to form the analytical framework.

It is in the first place necessary to define 'ideology' to be able to know whether Islam and, more specifically, Salafi jihadis can be regarded within this larger category. Several definitions have been suggested, and the concept is often seen as too 'untidy' to work with (Koehler, 2017, p. 86). Since this research focuses on the Salafi jihadi movement and thus regards the step to jihadi violence as a potential step resulting from the ideology, a definition should reference the step to action. The definition of ideology that takes this step into account is presented within Social Movement Theory (SMT) by Snow, where ideology is understood as

a ‘’cover term for a relatively stable and coherent set of values, beliefs, and goals associated with a movement or a broader, encompassing social entity, and is assumed to provide the rationale for defending or challenging various social arrangements and conditions’’ (Snow, 2004, p. 396). When applying this definition to the Salafi jihadi movement, their Salafi jihadi ideology would provide the rationale, or justification, for terrorist acts.

Furthermore, ideology can have several functions. Koehler mentions that a significant function of ideology is that it strives to disprove meanings given to central political concepts and instead assign a single meaning to those concepts (Koehler, 2017, p. 74). This process starts by defining specific religious or political problems, also acknowledged by Moghadam as the function of ‘raising awareness’ (Moghadam, 2008, p. 1). Among Salafi jihadis, this might be the suffering of Muslims worldwide or the portrayal of Muslims negatively within ‘Western’ politics and media. The individual is then integrated into a ‘contrast society’ connected to the mainstream society, intertwining ideological concepts with the (political) concepts, beliefs, and values of the individual (Koehler, 2017, p. 75).

The following function of ideology is to rewrite, restructure and redefine these values, concepts, and beliefs, which in the case of a violent radical ideology means trying to establish a monopoly for their ideology while at the same time increasing the urgency to act, something that Koehler describes as a process of ‘de-pluralization’ (ibid). He sees this as the core dynamic or function of radicalization. When ‘de-pluralization’ has taken place, the values, beliefs, and (political) concepts have changed according to the ideological ones (ibid). This function is divided by Moghadam in (1) construction of a group identity that highlights the common characteristics of adherents of the ideology, and (2) a programmatic function of ideology that means prescribing a specific program as a remedy and urging to act according to that program (Moghadam, 2008, p. 1). In the case of Salafi jihadis, this might mean seeing violent jihad as a solution and as a duty and destroying the Western morals and establishing a caliphate as a vision.

Following from these functions, the next step to terrorism within a violent radical ideology is explained by Koehler as crossing the individual point between ‘’the believed inherent inequality of human beings, the decreasing number of alternative concepts (…) in combination with an increasing urgency of the main problem,’’ at which point violence is the only solution left, with the disclaimer that this process is highly individual and that the role of ideology varies with different member types (2017, p. 76).

When looking at all these steps leading to terrorism within a violent extremist ideology, it can be said that Salafi jihadism follows the same path and can thus be regarded as a violent

extremist ideology. Islam itself can be seen as a religious ideology, a differentiation that is important in order not to classify Islam under the same category as the Salafi jihad, or vice versa.

By presenting 'de-pluralization' of individual values, (political) concepts, and beliefs as a core function of radicalization within a violent extremist ideology, Koehler has also laid a foundation for a theory of deradicalization which he refers to as a process of 're-pluralization' (2017, p. 89). Within this process, deradicalization intervention tools need to suggest or 're-pluralize' the urgency to act and the available alternative options for radicalized individuals to reverse the 'de-pluralization' phase of radicalization (ibid). This shows how much influence it has on the deradicalization process how ideology is understood.

Now that it has been established that Salafi jihadism can be regarded as a violent extremist ideology, it is essential to look at the relationship with religion. According to Moghadam, the Salafi jihad can be viewed as a *religious* ideology, because, unlike secular ideologies, it invokes religion in the following ways: (1) It uses religious terms to describe itself and its enemies, (2) the strategy and mission are described as being religious, for example using 'martyrdom operations' instead of suicide, and (3) references from the *Qur'ān* are often used to justify violent acts, even though the references are drawn selectively, sometimes without context (Moghadam, 2008, pp. 2-3). The Salafi jihadi movement can thus be regarded as a violent extremist religious ideology, which means that those individuals targeted by Dutch deradicalization programs focused on in this research will be regarded as part of that category. Further explanation of the Salafi jihadi movement will be given under 'key concepts.'

In sum, the above has shown that Salafi jihadism can be regarded as a violent extremist ideology because it follows the three functions of such an ideology: (1) defining specific political or religious problems that are intertwined with one's values, beliefs, and concepts, (2) restructuring and redefining these values, beliefs, and concepts according to those of the ideology (de-pluralization), and (3) the step to terrorism due to a lack of alternative concepts, an increased urgency, and the believed inherent inequality of human beings.

1.2.2 The analytical framework: Koehler's three confusions

As for the ideological lens used to research Dutch deradicalization policy, Koehler (2021) mentions several confusions among deradicalization researchers that will be addressed to explain how Dutch deradicalization programs will be analyzed. These confusions will help to clarify whether references to ideology in such programs will be regarded as sufficient or not

in Chapter 4. They also form the groundwork for the analytical framework of Islamic ideology, as they provide a new way of looking at ideology and Salafi jihadism as an ideology.

The first confusion within the academic field of deradicalization is the term ‘ideology’ (Koehler, 2017, p. 65; Hansen, Koehler, Gielen, & Van der Heide, 2021). Often, ideology is seen as a worldview, system of beliefs, frames explaining the world, or equal to ‘theology’ by terrorism researchers and policymakers (ibid). These explanations or definitions of ideology lack substance and do not allow for much detailed analysis of a particular ideology. They also do not tell us much about the functions of an ideology. This might then also be the case within the actual policy and programs regarding deradicalization. How ideology and the process of becoming a violent ideological individual could be viewed instead has already been established earlier in this chapter and will therefore not be explained in further depth.

The second confusion within the academic field is the confusion of false positives and negatives regarding ‘ideology,’ which means that ‘being ideological’ is widely wrongly equal to ‘being ideologically literate or knowledgeable’ (Koehler, 2017, p. 77). This means that a lack of theoretical knowledge regarding theology or ideology is equated to ‘not being ideologically convinced.’ In contrast, high levels of knowledge and intellectual reflection are interpreted as ‘being highly ideological.’ Koehler mentions in this regard that ideology is much more about beliefs, action frames, and emotions attached to the goals of a group in a particular environment. (Hansen, Koehler, Gielen, & Van der Heide, 2021).

Koehler's third and last confusion revolves around the multiple intertwined concepts and terms that are entirely unintelligible without ideology. These concepts are for example ‘grievances,’ ‘relative deprivation,’ ‘in-group/out-group bias,’ ‘black and white thinking,’ and ‘collective norms’ (ibid). Ideology precisely tells radicalized individuals everything about those grievances, frameworks, and how to understand the world. Therefore, it is contradictory to use any of these concepts without acknowledging a valid role for ideology.

The three existing confusions presented above will form the analytical framework through which Dutch deradicalization policy will be reviewed. These confusions have not been applied to deradicalization policy before. Therefore, it can provide new insights into ideology and political violence in the Dutch context and in general. The aim of using an Islamic ideological approach is not to address the question of religious authenticity – meaning which version of Islam is the correct version – but rather to establish why Islamic ideology makes sense as a factor and should be considered within deradicalization, and what elements of Islam could be used to deradicalize.

1.2.3 Key concepts

For this study, it is necessary to clarify concepts used and the associated definitions. Two essential concepts, deradicalization and disengagement, have already been explained in depth. Therefore, only the chosen definitions that will be used are presented. Furthermore, concepts will be presented closely related to deradicalization or often incorrectly used instead, as well as concepts relevant to the following chapters.

Deradicalization: ''Deradicalization (…) can be seen as a process of 're-pluralization' brought about by external events, intervention (with tools such as mentoring, for example), or individual changes in commitment through reflection and shifted priorities'' (Koehler, 2017, p. 89). This definition has been chosen because it fits the analytical frame and explanation of ideology used for the analytical chapter in this research. As Koehler states, 're-pluralization' means giving alternative options to political concepts, individual core values, or other realignments of ideological components, which in itself is a recommendation for deradicalization policy.

Disengagement: this is seen as ''the process whereby an individual experiences a change in role or function that is usually associated with a reduction of violent participation,'' with the important addition that ''it may not necessarily involve leaving the movement but is most frequently associated with significant temporary or permanent role change'' (Horgan, 2009, p. 152).

Radicalization: this will be regarded as an individual or collective process through which activities, deemed by others as in violation of important social norms, are supported or engaged in, such as terrorism (Kruglanski, et al., 2014, p. 69). In the process, normal practices of dialogue, compromise, and tolerance between groups and political actors are abandoned (Schmid, 2013, p. 19).

Risk reduction programs: programs that attempt ''to reduce the risk of re-engagement in terrorism (recidivism),'' rather than ''attempt ideological change'' (Taylor & Horgan, 2011, pp. 176, 185).

Narratives: ''strategically constructed storylines that are projected and nurtured through (online) strategic communications activities by state and non-state actors in attempts to shape how target audiences feel about or understand events or issues, and ultimately, guide their behavior in a manner that is conducive to their aims and goals'' (van Eerten, Doosje, Konijn, de Graaf, & de Goede, 2017, p. 7). On the other hand, *counter-narratives* are ''strategically constructed storylines that are projected and nurtured through strategic communication (or

messaging) activities to undermine the appeal of extremist narratives of violent extremist groups'' (ibid).

Countering Violent Extremism (CVE): ''an approach intended to preclude individuals from engaging in, or materially supporting, ideologically motivated violence'' which also entails ''non-coercive attempts to reduce involvement in terrorism'' (Harris-Horgan, Barelle, & Zammit, 2015, p. 6). Deradicalization is often included within the CVE category, which can be seen as an 'umbrella category'' for preventive initiatives (Koehler & Fiebig, 2019, p. 45).

Salafi jihadism: According to Sageman, Salafi jihadis are global Islamist fighters, part of the Islamic revivalist social movement (Sageman, 2004, pp. 62-63). Their goal is referred to as *salafiyyah,* meaning restoring authentic Islam. According to the movement, there has been a political and cultural decline of Islam. Therefore, Islam has to be defended through a 'revival,' which can be accomplished through an Islamist state in accordance with *Shari'a*, transcending national boundaries (Sageman, 2008, p. 36). The strategy of achieving such a state is violent jihad, through which hypocritical local leaders and, more globally, 'Western' powers are wiped out (ibid). [1] Since the *Qur'ān* mentions little about how the community of 'authentic Islam' was organized, *Ḥadīth* and *Sunna,* the words and deeds of Muhammad and his companions, are mostly consulted (ibid). Salafi jihadis view their understanding of Islam as the only one, thereby rejecting traditional imams and various traditional religious interpretations. Those who do not belong to the global Islamist terrorist movement are not true Muslims in their eyes, due to their state of *jāhiliyya,* meaning a state of ignorance and unbelief (ibid, p. 39).

1.3 Method

1.3.1 Research strategy

The present research is a qualitative research project in which the method used is case study research. The case is deradicalization policy in the Netherlands as a real-time phenomenon studied within its context. The research question asked at the beginning of this chapter fits the explanatory character of the research since it tries to explain how Dutch deradicalization policy works and why, which can be referred to as a 'mechanical research puzzle' (Mason, 2018, p. 12). In sum, the present research is an example of a qualitative case study research project.

The ontological and epistemological stances of the research project fit together and align with the research question asked. The ontological stance is of an individual nature as it explains

[1] A distinction can be made between the ''greater jihad,'' meaning to nonviolently strive for a good Muslim life according to God's will, and the ''lesser jihad,'' which is the violent struggle for Islam (Sageman, 2004, p. 1). The latter is meant here.

the attitudes, beliefs, and views of ideology as seen by policymakers. Deradicalization programs are seen as the outcome of an individual's actions, influenced by other individuals who, for example, engage in jihadi violence. The processes of radicalization and deradicalization are also highly individual, varying from person to person. This is substantiated by almost every definition of deradicalization because of the inclusion of the word 'individual,' or in the case of the definition presented in Chapter 1.2.2, 'individual changes in commitment.' The epistemological stance of this research is explanatory, as briefly mentioned before, since it is trying to *explain* how the Dutch government values the role of ideology within the effort of combating radicalization.

1.3.2 Research design

To conduct this research, a variety of primarily textual sources were used, also as a means to cross-check information. The data collection technique used has been textual analysis of Dutch deradicalization programs, evaluations, and policies. Through textual analysis, attention has been paid to specific concepts within these documents, such as 'deradicalization,' 'disengagement,' 'ideology,' 'religion,' or concepts that point to ideology such as 'grievances' and 'worldview.' Furthermore, explanations of such concepts have been compared to each other to see whether consensus exists and whether the meaning of concepts is fully understood, or whether there is a lack of understanding. This has also been done to analyze whether certain concepts such as 'deradicalization' and 'grievances' are associated with an ideology or not at all.

The sources used for textual analysis have been all sorts of relevant documents that were available and accessible. These included non-academic secondary sources, often regarded as a 'grey' source of information because they are not officially part of the academic literature. However, these publications are essential to this research for cross-checking with academic sources and providing necessary information about the content and development of deradicalization policy in the Netherlands. They are primarily governmental evaluations of the perceived threat stemming from terrorism at a certain moment in time, descriptive accounts of existing programs, and evaluations of the success of existing programs.

The second source of information has been many academic sources concerned with ideology in itself, Islamic ideology, radicalization, deradicalization and disengagement, and the debate about political violence and ideology. These sources form the basis of my analytical frame, and they provide clarification of important concepts within the field of deradicalization and an overview of the existing theoretical debates.

The third source of information has been news articles and press reports, which have provided valuable insights about specific program characteristics and participants. However, they were treated with caution and were not widely used due to the subjectivity and selectivity of such sources.

A fourth and last source of information has been a small amount of primary data collected through expert interviews when they were expected to provide relevant additional information or endorse specific written sources. The experts were one imam who is engaged in deradicalization processes due to prison work and some people who are or were practitioners within deradicalization programs.

The sampling method used has been a literature snowball method, or chain referral sampling, which means that the search has been conducted based on a few relevant documents within the field of Dutch deradicalization. This method seemed fit since research on deradicalization is still rather limited, especially when compared to research on radicalization or terrorism. Therefore, there is a good chance that most of the important literature can be found based on snowballing from a small number of documents. The documents chosen were the National Counterterrorism Strategy 2011-2015 and 2016-2020 since they are primary evidence of the Dutch approach and explain the actual programs (NCTV, 2011; NCTV, 2016). These documents led to evaluations of the approach, the deradicalization programs in practice, and other governmental sources on deradicalization. Additionally, the Handbook of deradicalization and disengagement was used to find relevant academic sources about theoretical debates and essential concepts, as it is a new source recently updated (Hansen & Lid, 2020).

The sampling method has been chosen because it was possible to find a lot of literature in a relatively short amount of time to establish important keywords and authors. When no new concepts or new information was found during the snowballing method, the sample was regarded as sufficient to analyze. Next to the snowball method, purposive sampling in the form of criterion sampling has been conducted regarding concepts such as Islam and Salafi jihadism due to knowledge in that field. It made little sense to apply the snowball method when important concepts were already known. For interview sampling, though a small number of interviews were conducted only when deemed a relevant addition, the sample has been individuals who worked in the field of Dutch deradicalization. Collective deradicalization and disengagement, as researched by Ashour (2009), have not been included in the sample. This type of deradicalization has mostly been studied among militant Islamist movements in the Middle East, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, because those are the areas that these movements

originated from. Also, Dutch deradicalization programs themselves often take an individualized approach, which will be explained further in Chapter 2.

1.3.3 Data analysis

The data was analyzed using thematic analysis, more specifically coding, to understand the data found through the snowballing method. The coding has been done manually and in an inductive manner, which means starting from the literature and let it speak for itself to be as unbiased as possible. Codes were established based on smaller literature samples, and this process has been repeated multiple times. When codes did not match or seemed missing, new codes were added. After important concepts had been established, a hierarchical scheme was made to categorize the literature and identify which themes relate to one another.

Using coding, it has been possible to distinguish between three main parts of the research: theoretical debate, analytical framework, and the context of the Dutch deradicalization case study. These three parts led to the establishment of multiple other codes under one of those three categories. Furthermore, coding the data made it possible to see how concepts relate to each other, such as how news coverage on terrorism can establish or reinforce certain Salafi jihadi narratives, leading to the establishment or reinforcement of a Salafi jihadi media environment. [2] The hierarchical scheme has furthermore been helpful to structure the research and find out in which order certain events should be explained. Figure 1 shows the scheme used to categorize the sources.

1.3.4 Limitations and opportunities

As is the case during almost any research project, this project has its limitations and opportunities. When it comes to the snowballing sampling technique, it sometimes receives critique on the representativeness of samples (Parker, Scott, & Geddes, 2019, p. 4). However, since the method is applied to textual sources about a topic on which relatively little has been written, the chances are slim that the literature found does not represent the field.

Simultaneously, this benefit also holds a disadvantageous side. Because of the slimness of the field of deradicalization research, it is hampered by a lack of solid empirical research and thorough evaluations (Colaert, 2017, p. 113). This might be the case due to difficulties in the success measurement of deradicalization programs (Van der Heide & Schuurman, 2018, p.

[2] This specific chain of events will be explained further in Chapter 3 and is used here solely as an example of how coding can uncover such a chain of events.

213). Another reason might be that radicalized individuals are often not willing to be research participants.

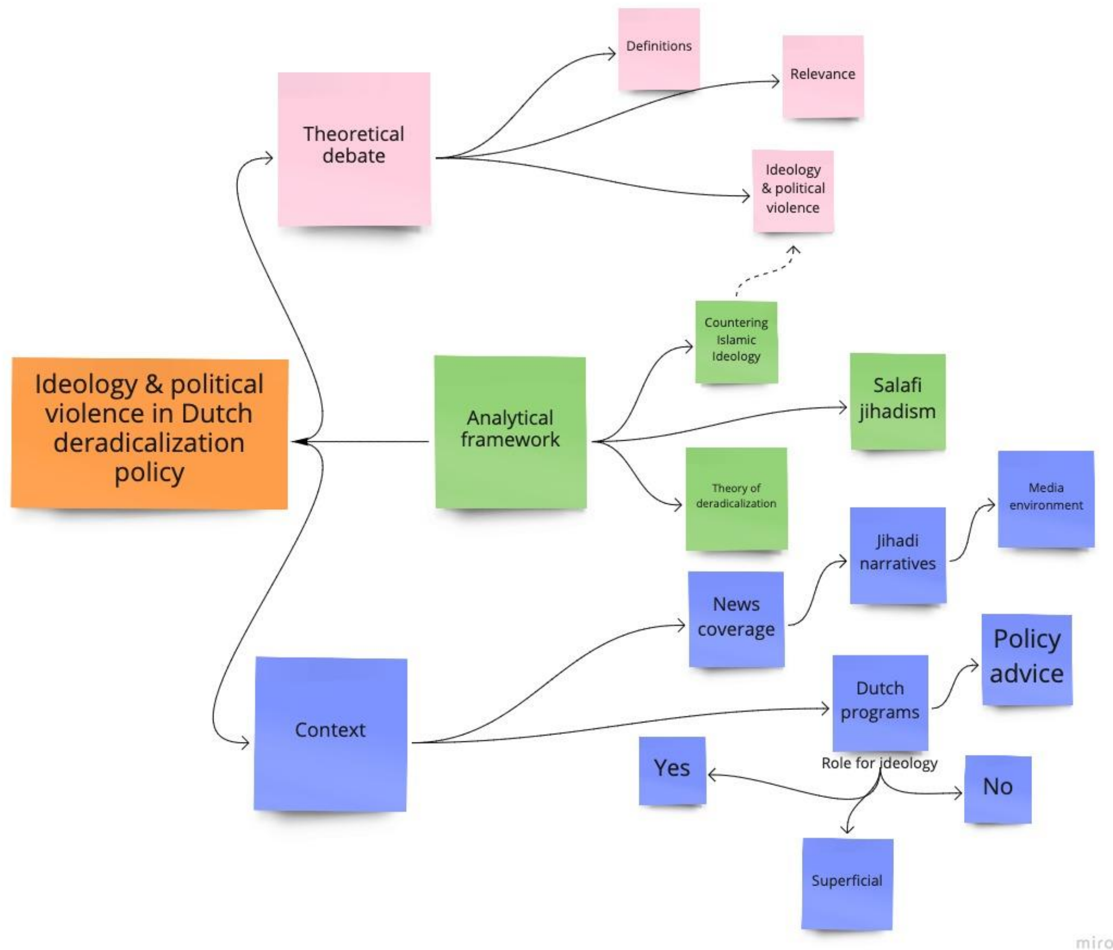

Figure 1: Coding scheme

Furthermore, it is hard to access forums on which people discuss the Salafi jihadi ideology because these are often found on the Dark Web. Thus, including those would raise ethical questions (Park, Beck, Fletche, Lam, & Tsang, 2016). These websites often also change their IP address every other month for their members to stay anonymous.

In terms of concepts and definitions, the interchangeable use of specific terminology in governmental documents and deradicalization programs complicates this research. For example, some sources mention counter-radicalization, some deradicalization, some disengagement, some Countering Violent Extremism (hereafter: CVE), and some use different concepts within the same source. It is often done without explaining what a definition means or why it is used. Therefore, it might be hard to establish whether the individuals behind a source deliberately use one concept because they know what it means or that they use, for instance, deradicalization when they mean disengagement. It also seems that deradicalization is used for

any effort regarding CVE measures. Thus, a thorough analysis of the content of these sources is necessary to establish what is meant by a particular concept.

It has to be taken into account that the landscape of deradicalization research and policy is rapidly changing, with one program starting, and another one disappearing after a short amount of time. [3] This could be the case due to the failure of a program, a lack of funding, a perceived decrease of the threat, or changing political priorities. Therefore, the situation presented in this research might be different in the next few years or even in the next few months. This, however, will not make a difference for the conclusions drawn from this research since those will be based on previous years.

[3] See for example the NRC-article on an anti-jihad campaign by the NCTV that was discontinued before it was launched (Kouwenhoven, 2021).

2. The Dutch CVE-approach

To create an overview of the Dutch approach, it is relevant to state how the Dutch government defines deradicalization. In general, the government does not use the concept often. The NCTV does not introduce any definition of the concept; they only define 'radicalization.' The Dutch intelligence service (Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst, hereafter: AIVD) does offer a description, stemming from the year 2010: ''We refer to the renunciation of radical ideas by the term deradicalization. Deradicalization thus refers to a cognitive change, meaning a change in values, attitudes, and opinions'' (AIVD, 2010).

This research focuses on how the central Dutch government views deradicalization. Therefore, the NCTV will be discussed, as they are central government engaged in the establishment of deradicalization policy and a few programs. Even though the Dutch government outsources the establishment and content of local deradicalization programs to municipalities, these municipality programs will not be analyzed in-depth since they do not fully reflect the central government's view on deradicalization as they have the freedom to determine the contents of their programs (Ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid, 2014, p. 25).

Two programs initiated by the NCTV will be explained, as they do reflect the Dutch central governmental view. These programs reflect the typologies of deradicalization programs that often exist, which are on the one hand ''governmental and active programs,'' that are usually prison-based and have automatic access to clients, and on the other hand ''public-private partnerships'' that combine governmental and non-governmental actors (Colaert, 2017, p. 75). Municipalities will be mentioned, however, solely to support the explanation of the Dutch approach. The chapter will end with an overview of some general limitations of the Dutch approach. They can explain how the government seems to value the connection between Islam and terrorism, which will be discussed in Chapter 4.

2.1 The Dutch approach: An overview

Ever since returning foreign fighters, especially with the defeat of the Caliphate in Iraq and Syria, there has been political and societal debate about what to do with them. Returning foreign terrorist fighters (hereafter: FTFs) were and are seen as a threat to the Dutch society, of which the Netherlands had over 60 in 2020 (Gielen, 2020, p. 211). The majority of the Dutch government was and still favors prosecuting them on the territory where the crimes were committed, and this discussion is ongoing (Blok, 2020).

Another option is to make or voluntarily let them participate in so-called 'exit' programs aimed at deradicalization, disengagement, reintegration, and rehabilitation (Gielen, 2020, p. 214). In the Netherlands, there are two trajectories to deradicalize extremists, initiated by the government: (1) The TER (Terrorism, Extremism, and Radicalization) team, a compulsory counseling process within the probation service that has been set up for detainees with an extremist background, and (2) a voluntary 'exit' program called Forsa. Both will be discussed below, as will the NCTV counterterrorism strategies.

2.1.1 The TER-team

From 2011 onwards, the first initiation of a CVE-program was team TER in 2012 – a reintegration program of the Dutch Probation Service (Reclassering Nederland, RN), funded by the NCTV (Gielen, 2020, p. 215; Reclassering Nederland, 2021). Team TER proliferated, which was caused by the perceived increased threat posed by terrorism between the years 2012-2018 (Van der Heide & Schuurman, 2018, p. 207). The team exists of 20 specialized probation officers trained in communicating with individuals who adhere to extremist ideas (Reclassering Nederland, 2021).

The approach taken within team TER focuses on behavioral change of individuals who have come into contact with the law. Members of the team state that the personal approach is a precondition for countering recidivism, which is why the program focuses on building an individual relationship with clients (Van der Heide & Schuurman, 2018, p. 213). It is mainly concerned with probation work, supplemented with specific measures and knowledge about the characteristics of radicalization (background, ideology, religion), with the overall goal of countering recidivism (Reclassering Nederland, 2021).

The TER website does not mention deradicalization, only disengagement. In the evaluation of the program, deradicalization is mentioned, but it is seen as hard or even impossible to reach, which is why the approach differs per person (Van der Heide & Schuurman, 2018, p. 212). The team does acknowledge that (Islamic) religion plays an integral part because the client regards the committed offense as justified by that religion. Therefore, the approach focuses on starting the conversation about ideology, sowing doubt about central aspects of their worldview, and stimulating the client's critical thinking skills (ibid). The majority of team TER nevertheless indicated that ideology is too often an underexposed aspect in the approach taken because there is no structured approach in that area. Currently, it depends on the individual employees whether and to what extent the ideology or ideas of a client are discussed (Van der Heide & Schuurman, 2018, p. 217). The conversation about ideology is

started with some clients, but ideology is not necessarily addressed in terms of content. This is seen as a limitation because even for clients who are not very ideologically grounded, their identity is determined by their ideology, which also gives meaning to their actions. All respondents emphasized how difficult it is to encourage someone to change their ideas and that this is not always possible. As a result, some workers do not see this as an end but prefer to focus on disengagement instead (ibid).

After 2012, the rise in homegrown terrorism and returning FTFs due to the conflict in Syria made the Dutch government raise its threat level, which was lowered before, and a new national CVE action plan was introduced in 2014 (Ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid, 2014). This plan reintroduced the previously used 'local approach,' which entails that the responsibility for setting up local CVE-programs was attributed to municipalities (ibid, p. 25). The action plan focuses on a combination of (1) individual case management – as is done within the TER-team - meaning limiting the risks posed by jihadists, and (2) preventive measures such as preventing radicalized individuals from traveling, and signaling and countering social tensions as they are regarded a breeding ground for the process (Gielen, 2015; Ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid, 2014).

2.1.2 Forsa

One of the steps to be taken according to the 2014 action plan is the initiation of an exit facility and an independent family support center by the NCTV (Ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid, 2014, p. 8). This facility was launched in October 2015 and has changed its name over time to 'Forsa.' It is part of the national support center for extremism ('Landelijk Steunpunt Extremisme,' hereafter: LSE), but to keep the minister out of the wind and not to deter possible dropouts and their families, the NCTV chose to place the trajectory at Fier, an organization in Friesland (Sterkenburg & Segaar, 2018).

Forsa offers individual counseling to people who have extremist convictions, are (or have been) involved in extremist networks, or who are suspected or have been convicted of extremist offenses (Landelijk Steunpunt Extremisme, 2021). The target group includes individuals who have traveled to the conflict zone and have returned, persons who were on their way to the conflict zone but were stopped, and persons who intended to use violence in the Netherlands, or who are in contact with or active in an extremist network (AEF, 2018, p. 9). Based on conversations and requests for help, a tailor-made program is set up, including components such as resilience, processing trauma, critical reflection, philosophical questions, (re)building a social network, relationships with family, and social participation (Landelijk

Steunpunt Extremisme, 2021). Unlike the TER program, Forsa takes place within a voluntary framework (AEF, 2018, p. 9).

The evaluation of the program done in 2018 provides further information about the content of Forsa, particularly its content concerned with ideology (AEF, 2018). However, a discrepancy exists in the use of concepts. Forsa's official objective is ''strengthening protective factors for renunciation of extremist violence and/or disengagement from an extremist network. The aim is to achieve critical reflection, from a voluntary framework, in order to achieve intrinsic motivation to leave violent extremism'' (AEF, 2018, p. 21). Thus, Forsa itself only refers to disengagement as their aim. In the evaluation of Forsa, however, 'deradicalization' is almost solely used, and 'disengagement' is only used when Forsa itself is cited. It is not clear why this discrepancy exists, so it is essential to keep in mind that the evaluators of Forsa and Forsa itself might have a different understanding of disengagement and deradicalization, which in turn might point to an overall lack of knowledge on the meaning of the concepts.

When it comes to the 'ideological guidance' mentioned, both Forsa and the evaluation do not provide an in-depth explanation of how theological guidance is given. One of the recommendations resulting from the evaluation is that highly specialized knowledge of the subject matter, such as theological/ideological knowledge, is required and a multidisciplinary team that reinforces each other in that knowledge (ibid, p. 48).

2.1.3 The NCTV: National counterterrorism strategies

Next to the specific programs initiated by the Dutch government (NCTV), general counterterrorism strategy reports have also been published, always regarding the next five years, whereafter a new strategy has been published. These strategy reports give an overview of the entire approach taken by the Dutch government. The NCTV published two of these strategies: one on the period from 2011-2015 and one on the period from 2016-2020. The NCTV also published the 'report integrated approach to terrorism' in 2019, which elaborates on the deployment under the 2016-2020 strategy.

The national counterterrorism strategy 2011-2015 has as its fundamental principle that terrorist crimes should be prevented and combated, regardless of the ideological background with which they are committed (NCTV, 2011, p. 22). It mentions right-wing, left-wing, and other non-religious threats as 'potential,' but it regards the jihadi threat as the main threat (ibid, p. 25). The approach taken is a 'broad approach,' focusing on preventive as well as repressive policy. It consists of five pillars: Acquisition, prevention, defending, preparing, and prosecution. Deradicalization is mentioned under the second and fifth pillar, as is the use of

former radicals in the process because of their authority, but the latter is more of a recommendation (ibid, p. 75). It is also stated that often, other factors are more critical in one's radicalization process and that further research is necessary to know whether to aim for disengagement or deradicalization (ibid).

The national counterterrorism strategy 2016-2020 also focuses on the broad approach of preventive and repressive measures, supplemented with aftercare, and on the five pillars mentioned before (NCTV, 2016, pp. 3-4). Jihadi terrorism is still seen as the biggest threat, but other ideologies are mentioned more often. The approach taken is described as a network and person-oriented approach (ibid, p. 8). Radicalization is seen as always stemming from multiple factors, such as age, education level, gender, religion, ethnicity, and geographic location (ibid, p. 13). Deradicalization is again regarded as a component of the fifth pillar of prosecution, but its (potential) content is described in less detail than in the previous strategy report. Deradicalization is mentioned as an *option* for preparing ex-suspects and ex-convicts to return to society (ibid, p. 21).

The 'report integrated approach to terrorism' provides an overview of the Dutch approach as a commentary to the 2016-2020 strategy report. More attention seems to be regarded to preventive measures in this report, and deradicalization is mentioned as follows: ''Finally, investments have been made in counseling for reintegration and deradicalization of (ex-)prisoners (NCTV, 2019, p. 20). Disengagement is mentioned much more, following the 2016-2020 approach.

2.2 Limitations of the Dutch approach

To fully understand how the Dutch government values ideology within deradicalization, it is vital to be aware of the difficulties and limitations of the Dutch approach. This knowledge might help to explain why deradicalization programs evolved the way they did, which in turn is valuable knowledge to understand why they have or do not have specific content.

The first limitation is the temporary nature of the perceived threat. Dutch national and local CVE-programs ended in 2012 because the threat of terrorism and violent extremism was considered minor at that time (NCTV, 2012). This has had consequences for Dutch deradicalization policy, as evaluating its effectiveness was no longer seen as a priority due to the decreased threat, which increased again within a year. This issue has been raised by experts as well, stating that the motto is that 'something has to be done' when the threat all of a sudden seems urgent (Gielen, 2018). Consequently, the field of research on Salafism and

deradicalization was initially driven by the urgency that security and intelligence services felt (Berger, Kahmann, El-Baroudi, & Hamdi, 2018, p. 26). Therefore, there has been selective attention towards security measures, while social interventions were forgotten (Noordegraaf, Douglas, Bos, & Klem, 2016, p. 8)

Another consequence of the temporary nature has been that no one took the time to reflect on what has been done and whether that was working, resulting in a lack of much-needed evaluations (ibid). Evaluations thus far have shown that the aims of most interventions are formulated far too broadly: preventing and countering radicalization (ibid). The evaluation of the national counterterrorism strategy from 2011-2015 concludes with the same issue: That joint purposefulness and legitimacy first declined after 2011 and was restored after the threat became visible again. The robustness of the intervention capacity fluctuates along with the first decreasing and then increasing recognition of the threat of terrorism and the associated political attention (Noordegraaf, Douglas, Bos, & Klem, 2016, p. 12). Thus, the changing nature of perceived danger and risk influences the performance of evaluations.

The second limitation is that of success measurement, which relates to the first limitation since a lack of thorough and sufficient evaluations means that there is also a lack of information on the effectiveness of deradicalization programs. Even though success has been defined by different programs on paper (i.e., countering recidivism), in practice, it often remains unclear what success entails, as well as according to which indicators it can be measured (Schuurman & Bakker, 2015, p. 14). Therefore, knowledge on deradicalization programs remains limited. When programs claim to be successful, there is reason to stay skeptical (Rabasa, Pettyjohn, Ghez, & Boucek, 2010, p. xvi).

When it comes to team TER, success has not been clarified clearly as well. Success only required that ‘’clients make it through their designated period of parole or probation without reoffending’’ (Van der Heide & Schuurman, 2018, p. 213). Besides that, no indicators or metrics were used to provide quantifiable data on effectiveness (ibid). In sum, it becomes clear that the efficacy of deradicalization programs in the Netherlands is hard, or even impossible, to assess empirically.

3. ‘The Virtual Caliphate’: The media environment of Salafi jihadis

As has been touched upon briefly in the introduction, Salafi jihadis often use their media environment. Examples of this environment are different discussion forums, news websites, chat groups, and even video games, which Chan refers to as ‘the virtual caliphate’ (Chan, 2019, p. 78). This topic is essential to reflect on because a lack of knowledge on how Salafi jihadis communicate can have significant consequences for the impact of deradicalization policy, and deradicalization projects might end up in the wrong place. Countering the message of Salafi jihadism requires an understanding of the themes of that message and why they resonate with some Muslims (Gregg, 2010, p. 306). Another possible consequence of a lack of knowledge might even be further radicalization, explained in the following paragraphs.

Closely related to the media environment issue are the narratives that belong to the Salafi jihadi community because they contribute to knowledge about Salafi jihadi ideology. Knowing and understanding those narratives can help to determine when someone is ‘ideological’ without jumping to conclusions on an individual having ‘ideological knowledge’ or not. This chapter will explain regular media’s portrayal of ‘terrorists,’ which results in the origination of specific narratives, to explain how these narratives impact regular media and authorities' (un)recognition.

3.1 Mainstream news coverage and the consequences for Salafi jihadi narratives

Van Eerten et al. define narratives as ‘’strategically constructed storylines that are projected and nurtured through (online) strategic communications activities by state and non-state actors in attempts to shape how target audiences feel about or understand events or issues, and ultimately, guide their behavior in a manner that is conducive to their aims and goals’’ (van Eerten, Doosje, Konijn, de Graaf, & de Goede, 2017, p. 7). They also state that to counter extremist narratives often fed by an ideology, one needs to develop an in-depth understanding of those narratives (ibid). This chapter is trying to contribute to that understanding.

The core of the Salafi jihadi narrative exists of three elements, the first one being the ‘basic’ grievance, which is a Muslim world in chaos caused by non-Muslims. These can be local dictators backed up by the Americans, Christians, and Zionists, but can also be Muslims who adhere to the ‘wrong’ Islam (ibid, p. 17). The second element is the vision for a better world, which entails restoring the Caliphate under Sharia to replace the local corrupt governance structures (ibid, pp. 17-18). The third and last element is violence as a means of

change from the grievance-based society to the ideal society (ibid, p. 18). These narratives can be related to the overarching narrative of victimhood and grievances as experienced by all Muslims. The narrative entails that ‘’there is a fundamental division between Muslims and non-Muslims, and that Muslims are suffering because of non-Muslims’’ (Sedgwick, 2012, p. 362). This division is religious, not rational, which is why the decision to be killed in terrorist attacks requires religious justification (Hoffman, 2017, p. 91).

The narratives presented can be provided or strengthened by ‘Western’ mainstream media (Sedgwick, 2012, p. 363). There is sufficient evidence that mainstream news coverage of Muslims is often characterized by ‘negative stereotypes,’ such as a lack of differentiation between Muslims and Salafi jihadi terrorists. Furthermore, the media rejects Islamism (Baugut & Neumann, 2020a, p. 69). Therefore, violent jihadis are trying to maintain a positive self-image by stating that they are immune to influence from mainstream media and that it does affect the out-group’s perception of them (ibid).

Non-violent Muslims might react the same way to stereotyping news coverage. During an interview with Imam Ziylan from the Ulu Camii mosque in Utrecht, he was asked how the Utrecht tram attack on the 18th of March in 2019 was talked about within his community. [4] He stated that the news coverage of the attack caused much disappointment among them, especially among young Muslims. According to Ziylan, they feel like they are lumped together by the mainstream media and feel like they are being scapegoated. Colaert et al. suggest that especially young ‘Western’ Muslims feel stigmatized and alienated by political and media discourses about terrorism (Colaert, 2017, p. 130). Sometimes, this can cause the reaction that a person becomes more engaged with their faith, leading to further radicalization.

The process of stigmatization and victim-blaming leading to further radicalization is also underlined by scientific research. Baugut and Neumann state that while some individuals may not have experienced discrimination or stigmatization themselves, hearing and reading about it from news media may enhance the emotional impact it has on them (Baugut & Neumann, 2020b, p. 1453). Furthermore, they state that news reports suggesting that all Muslims are terrorists, or at least have a propensity for it, could lead individuals who were to some extent already radicalized closer to violence (ibid). Other mainstream media coverage that

[4] Personal communication with Osman Celil Ziylan on June 16, 2021, in Utrecht. Osman Celil Ziylan is one of two Imams of the Ulu Camii Mosque in Utrecht and has knowledge on and experience with processes of deradicalization, because of his work in a Rotterdam prison where, among others, radicalized Salafi jihadis are imprisoned. He has studied Islamic theology at the Islamic University of Applied Sciences in Rotterdam and is board member of that same university. He is often seen in the media where he talks about Islam-related topics (Eysden, 2019; Pisters, 2020; NPO1, 2021).

can have the same effect is depicting Muslim war victims, war zones in Muslim countries, and, most importantly, news coverage of terrorist attacks that focus on individual perpetrators (ibid, pp. 1453-1454). This type of coverage personalizes the use of violence, which can cause people to view perpetrators as 'idols' whose deed evokes imitation (ibid).

The opposite is also noticeable. Baugut and Neumann mention in this regard that ''media reports that clearly differentiated between terrorism and Islam could halt radicalization or even contribute to deradicalization'' (ibid, p. 1453). Their data shows that a former Salafi jihadi has reinforced this statement. He noted that differentiation between Islamism and Islam within media coverage could target the narrative of a global enemy of Islam. This narrative has been explained before because it shows that this 'global enemy' is not against Islam in its entirety but against those who use force (ibid, p. 1448). This could be a reason for radical leaders to instruct avoidance of mainstream news media, something that has been reinforced by interviewed Jihadi prisoners (ibid, pp. 1448-1449). Awareness of how mainstream media can affect the radicalization process is thus crucial for understanding the use of violence, but on the other hand, also for understanding how media might help processes of deradicalization.

3.2 The Salafi Jihadi media environment

An additional problem and direct consequence of the presented narratives and which role mainstream media can play in establishing or reinforcing those is a rejection of that media and authorities. This means that Salafi jihadis turn to their private circles, through which a 'parallel society' is created (Soetenhorst, 2020). Studies have found that internet forums are a means of communication for sharing Islamist ideas and commenting on terrorist attacks (Torres-Soriano, 2013; Park, Beck, Fletche, Lam, & Tsang, 2016). These websites often show anti-Western propaganda to discredit mainstream media (Baugut & Neumann, 2020b, p. 1453). Imam Ziylan confirmed the use of these forums based on his experience in working with radicalized individuals in a Rotterdam prison. During the interview, he stated that many of the people who were arrested because of radicalization in the Netherlands are not members of a mosque or rarely visit one. They live in their own withdrawn internet bubble where they are isolated from the world and are therefore no longer inhibited by their environment.

A consequence of the 'internet bubble' of radicalized individuals is that they do not hear other opinions published by the mainstream media. They do not see that Muslims, and even clerics, also disapprove of violence conducted by Muslims, often substantiated with religious arguments (Wilson Center, 2014; van Es, 2018). They also do not see that non-Muslims

condemn violence against Muslims, a message that could nuance their vision of 'the evil West' and even help the deradicalization process. As became clear from an NRC-article, the NCTV wanted to launch a social media campaign aimed at spreading positive messages and thus countering Islamic State propaganda, with the help of David Kenning (Kouwenhoven, 2021). Launching such campaigns will unlikely reach the target group due to the 'soft' approach of publishing positive messages and the platforms on which they wanted to post the message. Also, it has been shown that those individuals who are already radicalized and identify with an extremist ideology are less likely to be persuaded by such a 'counter-narrative' campaign (van Eerten, Doosje, Konijn, de Graaf, & de Goede, 2017, p. 7)

Considering all of the above, the question can be asked whether deradicalization through mainstream and social media has a point. The problem probably lies in a lack of differentiation between preventive and deradicalizing measures. Deradicalization mainly occurs during a stage in which an individual has already been radicalized. Preventing radicalization, however, mostly takes place among people who are at the start or not that far in the process of radicalization and are thus not yet fully separated from the mainstream media. Therefore, efforts through mainstream or social media should primarily be focused on preventing individuals from (further) radicalizing, while deradicalization efforts should be undertaken through deradicalization programs, including individual contact. Measures should be aimed at where an individual is in the process of radicalization, applying the right concepts for that phase in the process – deradicalization or preventing radicalization.

3.3 The issue of authority

Next to the rejection of the mainstream media and its content, 'Western' authorities are often rejected by Salafi jihadis. They are part of the 'Western enemy' and are therefore not considered trustworthy. Thought is needed on where a counter-radicalization message comes from. According to van Eerten et al., two primary dimensions compose how a source is believed by the recipient: trustworthiness and expertise (ibid, p. 67). When a message aimed at Salafi jihadis originates directly from the government, it will likely be rejected. It comes from a rejected government that is also not considered to have expertise or knowledge on Islam.

As suggested by academic research, an alternative may be to select partners within the Muslim community or even former ideologues or deradicalized former extremists, such as former Salafi jihadis who played a significant role in their previous organizations, therefore having greater credibility (Rabasa, Pettyjohn, Ghez, & Boucek, 2010, p. 36; Colaert, 2017, p.

130; Van Eerten, Doosje, Konijn, de Graaf, & de Goede, 2017, p. 69). An argument on behalf of this statement is that it is essential that deradicalization occurs from within a group or an individual, and that 'Western' governments do not take on the role of 'experts' regarding Salafi jihadi ideology, as they are not experts (van Eerten, Doosje, Konijn, de Graaf, & de Goede, 2017, p. 67). Authorities such as Salafi clerics or former Salafi jihadis could be well-positioned compared to a government, as they have religious or ideological authority and credibility to bring a deradicalization message (ibid, p. 28).

Using clerics has been already done within Middle Eastern and Asian deradicalization programs, such as in the Saudi Arabian, Egyptian, and Indonesian programs. In these programs, respectful ideological discussion successfully challenged radicalized individuals in instances where their view did not coincide with authentic teachings of Islam (Speckhard, 2011, p. 5). The cleric or former militant jihadist must not be considered *takfīr*, meaning a non-believer or infidel (ibid). It seems that these programs are less reluctant to become involved with religious matters than 'Western' governments. Since they have proven successful, Dutch deradicalization programs could benefit from becoming less reluctant to use Islamic clerics or former jihadist militants.

4. Analysis

The second chapter has stated whether or not deradicalization and ideology have been mentioned in the programs discussed. This chapter will first go back to those programs to conclude on whether they sufficiently include Islamic according to the confusions mentioned by Koehler, being (1) the meaning of the term 'ideology,' (2) false positives and negatives that explain when someone is regarded 'ideological' or not, and (3) the use of multiple intertwined concepts that are unintelligible without ideology.

After that, it will be discussed how Dutch deradicalization programs could benefit from using Islamic ideology. Often, Islamic ideology is not explicitly mentioned in deradicalization programs, but religion is, by which Islam is meant most of the time as Islam is regarded as a religion which the religious target audience often adheres to. Ideology is also mentioned; however, sometimes including other ideologies such as right-wing extremism as well. When searching for Islamic ideology in the Dutch programs, the words 'ideology' in general and 'religion' or 'Islam' more specifically were looked for, as well as 'deradicalization' and 'disengagement.' For clarity, the three confusions as explained in Chapter 1.2.2 will be mentioned in the analysis of the TER-team and will after that not be mentioned in depth anymore to prevent excessive repetition.

4.1 The TER-team

The first confusion of the analytical framework is about the meaning and functions of ideology, where ideology is often reduced to concepts such as 'worldview' or 'system of beliefs.' Team TER's website mentions ideology as a feature of radicalization (Reclassering Nederland, 2021). One of the functions of particularly a violent extremist ideology is radicalization, as stated in Chapter 1.2.1. Thus, it seems that ideology is seen as having functions, pointing to a broader understanding of ideology than solely an individual's 'worldview.' However, since the website does not provide much information on the content of the program and how ideology and its functions are addressed, the evaluation of team TER has to be taken into account as it provides more in-depth information.

In the evaluation, 'worldview' is mentioned in the context of sowing doubts about central aspects of a client's worldview. Thus, ideology is reduced to an individual's worldview. These statements in the evaluation are based on interviews with TER-team workers and thus reflect how ideology is viewed by them instead of by the evaluators. 'Worldview' is mentioned

a total of nine times, all in sentences that indicate changing that worldview as part of the deradicalization process (Van der Heide & Schuurman, 2018, pp. 198, 200, 201, 211, 212, 217). However, reducing ideology to a 'worldview' has little to no analytical value and can be considered superficial. Therefore, it seems that team TER does have a superficial understanding of 'ideology,' which is reinforced with the information that in practice, TER-team members have stated not to address ideology in terms of content, or sometimes not to address it at all. The first confusion of Koehler can therefore be applied to team TER.

The second confusion about false positives and negatives concerning ideology, where 'being ideological' is often equal to 'being ideologically knowledgeable,' is harder to apply to team TER. It is closely linked to the first confusion because confusion on the meaning of ideology can lead to false positives and negatives, and false positives and negatives in turn point to an insufficient understanding of ideology. Both the TER website and the evaluation of the program do not give any information on when someone is considered 'ideological.' The evaluation does mention once that individuals appeared to be characterized more by their criminal or psychological backgrounds, instead of by their ideological convictions, as part of a post-2015 trend (ibid, p. 217). It is not clear whether that is the case because an individual is not considered 'ideological' unless he or she has sufficient ideological knowledge or whether less attention is being paid to ideology after 2015 in general.

The third confusion is about using multiple intertwined concepts and terms that are completely unintelligible without the ideology, as ideology tells us everything about those concepts. These concepts are for example 'grievances,' 'relative deprivation,' 'in-group/out-group bias,' 'black and white thinking,' 'collective norms,' and concepts related to 'identity.' Again, the TER website does not mention any of these concepts as it does not provide much information on the content of the program in general. The evaluation does mention such concepts when stating that an important aspect of the work of team TER is ''opening up client's otherwise black and white worldview to the possibility of 'grey tones''' (van der Heide & Schuurman, 2018, p. 217). A reference to ideology and religion is made here, as they mention that individuals view their deeds as justified by an extremist ideology. Using 'black and white worldview' and 'grey tones' as references to ideology is problematic on another level, as it points to the ability to teach radicalized individuals a more 'moderate' version of their 'worldview.' This would probably not work as an ideology is not just a worldview, as we have seen in the explanation of the second confusion, and the meaning of a 'grey tone' version is not explained.

Furthermore, the evaluation mentions 'addressing grievances' while talking about disengagement processes, which would indicate not taking ideology into account (van der Heide & Schuurman, 2018, p. 199). However, when grievances such as a Muslim world under attack are addressed, it is almost impossible to do so without referencing Salafi jihadi ideology, as these grievances originate from that ideology. Therefore, mentioning it while talking about disengagement during which ideology is usually not addressed implies that all grievances, also those specific to Salafi jihadis, can be addressed without ideology. This is problematic, as it has been shown that ideology and grievances are almost impossible to separate in the case of Salafi jihadism.

To conclude on team TER, it can be said that empirical evidence has shown that at least the third and first confusions are present. Even though ideology is often mentioned, the understanding of the concept is probably not sufficient within team TER, which complicates addressing it adequately within deradicalization efforts.

4.2 Forsa

When reviewing Forsa, there is less available information to analyze compared to team TER. Forsa's website contains little information on the program, and the people working at the program were unavailable for an interview. The only available document providing more in-depth information has been the evaluation of Forsa. When applying the first confusion of a misunderstanding of ideology on the available information, the website does not indicate how ideology is understood. The only concepts that might reference addressing ideology are 'critical reflection' and 'philosophical questions' as *possible* program components (Landelijk Steunpunt Extremisme, 2021). How this is to be implemented does not become clear from the website.

The evaluation of Forsa contains more information about the program. Even though the concept 'ideology' is mentioned often, a definition is not given. The concept 'worldview' has been mentioned in the same paragraph as ideology and seems to act alternately of 'ideology' when it is stated under 'theological reflection' that it is important to question the central aspects of the worldview, to be able to alter it (AEF, 2018, p. 62). However, these sentences cite the evaluation of team TER conducted by van der Heide et al.; thus, it is more a matter of copying problematic concepts than introducing Forsa's views on ideology. 'Ideology' seems to be mixed up with 'worldview' again, indicating a superficial understanding or a lack of knowledge on 'ideology,' especially since Forsa's ideas do not seem to be present.

Another problematic aspect of the evaluation that points to a lack of understanding of when ideology comes into play is the definition of 'deradicalization' that is used. It is seen as a process in which ''with the help of person-oriented interventions, people can be prevented from committing terrorist violence'' (ibid, p. 60). Nothing about a cognitive change or addressing ideology is mentioned, which indicates that it is not rightly understood what deradicalization entails. Therefore, when deradicalization as a concept is used in the evaluation, disengagement could just as easily be meant based on this given definition.

When applying the second confusion to the Forsa evaluation, both the website and the evaluation do not mention anything about when an individual is considered 'ideological.' This might be due to a lack of knowledge about the religious or ideological radical ideas behind radicalization, as mentioned in the evaluation (ibid, p. 53). A lack of knowledge on Salafi jihadi ideology and its narratives would complicate defining what it means to be a Salafi jihadi, and thus what it means to be ideological within that movement. It is mentioned that Forsa makes use of theological specialists to address ideology, which might not always have the right effect because an individual might not have much in-depth knowledge on Islamic scriptures but can be regarded as ideological due to political values, ideas, concepts, and future visions. More expertise with and understanding of the Salafi jihadi ideology is necessary to fully deploy the individualized approach Forsa aims for, as 'being ideological' might mean something different per individual.

The third confusion about the multiple intertwined concepts mentioned without reference to ideology is harder to address. Concepts are used, but they are often cited from other sources, complicating establishing a conclusion on how Forsa reviews the connection between those concepts and ideology. Concepts mentioned are 'out-group,' 'black and white thinking,' and 'culture and identity' (ibid, pp. 62-64). An 'out-group threat' is mentioned as an essential motivator to stay active within a radical group, as it is seen as a threat against one's 'culture and identity' (ibid, p. 63-64). It seems that 'culture and identity' are used instead of 'ideology,' and further reference to ideology is not made. The part on 'black and white thinking' is again cited from the evaluation of team TER, which does not give any information on how Forsa sees these concepts and their connection with ideology (ibid, p. 62).

In sum, due to a lack of the views of Forsa's team members, but instead references to the opinions of TER-team members and of the evaluators of that program, it is difficult to analyze how Forsa values the role of ideology within their program. Concepts such as 'ideology' and 'theological reflection' are often mentioned but without much substance on the meaning or implementation in practice. The lack of substance and potential lack of

understanding ‘ideology’ is reflected in Koehler's first confusion. The second and third confusions are not being addressed unless as a citation from another source. Forsa does not seem to be able to give much openness about their approach, specifically regarding the role of ideology.

4.3 The NCTV: National counterterrorism strategies

When reviewing all of the NCTV documents mentioned in Chapter 2.1.3, it became clear that only the two counterterrorism strategies of 2011-2015 and 2016-2020 were fit to be analyzed through Koehler’s three confusions. The ‘integral approach terrorism’ and the evaluations did not provide enough information to be interpreted or add crucial new information to the two strategies. Therefore, only the two strategies will be analyzed here, also because they are direct central governmental sources and provide enough information.

Reviewing the national NCTV counterterrorism strategies through the first of Koehler’s confusions about how ideology is understood shows that this understanding has changed over the years. The 2011-2015 strategy acknowledges that an extreme ideology can have the functions of offering individuals meaning in life and help lower the barrier to using violence (NCTV, 2011, p. 32). The strategy points to a summarized version of the three functions of an ideology mentioned in Chapter 1.2.1 by stating that ideology can include terrorist processes of ideology formation, ideology reinforcement, and ideological indoctrination (ibid, p. 46). Therefore, ideology is seen as being able to have several functions and is not superficially understood. Furthermore, it regards radical Islam as an ideology, which has been shown to be the case in Chapter 1.2.1 (ibid, p. 39).

The 2016-2020 counterterrorism strategy offers a different picture when reviewed through the first confusion. Ideology is, first of all, mentioned much less, and second of all, the concept is not explained, nor is there attention for its functions. The view on ideology can be drawn from one comment on it, stating that ‘’the boundary between ideological and other motives is blurring. Motifs intertwine or exist side by side: a search for identity, justice, meaning or a desire for sensation’’ (NCTV, 2016, p. 27). Therefore, it seems as if ideology as an essential factor has been pushed aside compared to the 2011-2015 strategy, probably resulting in a more superficial understanding of the concept. The first confusion does not seem to apply to the first counterterrorism strategy but does apply to the second strategy.

Conclusions on the second confusion about when someone is seen as ‘ideological’ follow the same lines as those on the first confusion. As has been stated before, knowing the

narratives belonging to an ideology, in this case, Salafi jihadism, can help to determine what 'being ideological' means for an individual. The 2011-2015 strategy does not go into the content of narratives but does acknowledge an international battle belonging to an international jihadi narrative (NCTV, 2011, p. 43). The international or global character of the jihadi narratives has been demonstrated in Chapters 1.2.3 and 3.1. Furthermore, the strategy states that to understand radicalization processes, it is vital to understand the ideology and the narratives belonging to that ideology (ibid, p. 71).

The 2016-2020 strategy mentions narratives only once, in the context of halting the spread of violent extremist narratives (NCTV, 2016, p. 14). No connection is made to specifically jihadi narratives, nor is it stated that understanding narratives is important. Since the 2016-2020 strategy does not mention anything substantial on ideology, the information on narratives is the only information that points to the second confusion. Based on that information within both strategies, the conclusion can be made that again, the second confusion seems less of an issue in the 2011-2015 strategy and becomes more evident in the 2015-2020 strategy due to a lack of information on ideology in general, and narratives in particular.

The third confusion about multiple intertwined concepts mentioned without reference to ideology again applies to the 2016-2020 counterterrorism strategy. The 2011-2015 strategy does mention concepts that should be connected to ideology, such as 'identity' and 'grievances' (NCTV, 2011, pp. 30, 73). 'Identity' is mentioned in the context of 'individual religious identity,' showing that ideology and, more specifically, religious ideology tells us something about one's identity (ibid, p. 30). 'Grievances' are mentioned in the context of the government being aware of the grievances of certain groups and are not directly linked with ideology. Still, as ideology is seen as a significant factor throughout the entire strategy, this is not problematic (ibid, p. 73). The third confusion is not fully applicable to the 2011-2015 strategy, as the concepts are often connected with or seen in the light of an ideology.

The 2016-2020 strategy mentions 'identity', 'justice,' and 'meaning,' as quoted during the second confusion discussion within the NCTV documents above (NCTV, 2016, p. 27). However, they are mentioned as alternatives for an ideological motive for radicalization. This indicates that ideology does not tell us anything about the meaning of an individual's identity, understanding of justice, and efforts to give meaning to life. When looking at the Salafi jihadi ideology as discussed in Chapter 1.2.3 and Chapter 3, one's identity is constructed around the idea of being a Muslim under attack, one's understanding of justice is using violence to defend the Muslim community, through which one can simultaneously give meaning to one's life because of participation in the battle, ultimately leading to a utopian society. This shows that

these concepts tell us very little without acknowledging Salafi jihadi ideology's role in constructing those concepts. Therefore, the third confusion applies to the 2016-2020 strategy.

To conclude on the NCTV counterterrorism strategies, there seems to be an ongoing trend throughout the application of all three of Koehler's confusions: The NCTV first did value ideology and did acknowledge its functions and the importance and meaning it gives to certain concepts, which has faded in more recent years as has been demonstrated by the data from the 2016-2020 strategy. Deradicalization, ideology, and concepts related to ideology have been addressed much more often and in more depth in the 2011-2015 strategy. Thus, the tentative conclusion can be drawn that the understanding of ideology in general, of what it means to be ideological, and of concepts related to ideology has deteriorated over the years. The data from team TER and Forsa, which falls within the same period as the 2016-2020 strategy, supports the claim that ideology is not sufficiently understood or given meaning in more recent years, as Koehler's confusions have proven to apply to both of those programs.

The deterioration could have something to do with a decrease in the perceived threat of terrorism. As shown in Chapter 2.2, an issue with the Dutch approach is that it fluctuates along the lines of the perceived threat of terrorism. On the other hand, it might also have something to do with an overall decrease in attention paid to ideology. However, this is all still up for debate. Further research might provide more insights into the reason behind the decline of in-depth knowledge on ideology or the use of ideology within deradicalization policy in general.

4.4 Application of Islamic ideology for future deradicalization

Because of a lack of in-depth information in almost every governmental source and program description, it is not possible at this point to review how jihadi narratives are addressed content-wise, even when it is stated that they are. It is, however, possible to make some claims on how the Salafi jihadi ideology could be beneficial within deradicalization by using Islamic ideological arguments.

In terms of content to address, it is necessary to realize that the central problem is not the entire Salafi jihadi ideology but the part that encourages terrorism (Sedgwick, 2012, p. 369). Therefore, not all elements of the religious ideology need to be addressed because they are not equally important in leading to the use of violence (ibid, p. 371). The component that does encourage terrorism and violence is the means of change to reach the ideal society, being the third component within Koehler's and Sedgwick's ideological radicalization processes (Koehler, 2017; Sedgwick, 2012). The counterargument that can be given to address this

component should be based on Salafi jihadi narratives. On the use of violence, it can be said that it is against Islamic scriptures to fight if defeat is inevitable, meaning to fight a losing battle in which the enemy is an overwhelming one (Sedgwick, 2012, p. 370; Speckhard, 2011, p. 13). This is also common sense, so the argument has both rational and religious force. Shabir Ally, a famous Canadian imam, adds that from an Islamic perspective, the use of force is the last resort when Muslims are being fought against and when all other measures such as diplomatic measures and conversations have been tried (Ally, 2019). Furthermore, the involvement in brutality against fellow Muslims who are also being targeted by terrorist attacks could be an un-Islamic and un-Quranic argument within deradicalization policy, since terrorists are then portrayed as people who do not live up to Islamic standards (van Eerten, Doosje, Konijn, de Graaf, & de Goede, 2017, p. 53)

In terms of method, it is crucial to create awareness through which the radicalized individual him or herself concludes that something is done wrong. During the interview, Imam Ziylan mentioned that faith could be divided into two parts: faith-based on imitating what has been done by family members for generations without putting much thought or critical questioning into why things are done a certain way, or faith-based on one's consciousness, activating one's own critical thinking skills and reflection, through which the faith can be made personal. According to imam Ziylan, the crucial step for deradicalization is the step from faith based on imitation to faith based on philosophical awareness of one's own beliefs. He mentioned that such room for thought could be provided by asking a radicalized individual critical theological questions. Imam Ziylan mentions an example of such questions along the lines of who a person thinks he or she is to take a knife and stand in God's place by passing judgment that only belongs to God himself. The most important thing is not to point the finger at someone for following the 'wrong' version of Islam while demonstrating what the 'right' or 'moderate' version should be, but instead creating inner reflection within these radicalized individuals themselves.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

In research and the political field, there has been an ongoing discussion on whether and to what extent religious ideology plays a part in the processes of radicalization and deradicalization of Salafi jihadis. By applying three often existing confusions within deradicalization research and policy – as presented by Koehler – Dutch deradicalization policy, programs, and program evaluations have been reviewed, all initiated by the NCTV as establisher of deradicalization policy. These three confusions are (1) a superficial understanding of ideology, often replacing the concept with other concepts such as 'worldview' or 'system of beliefs,' that tell little about the functions of an ideology, (2) maintaining false positives and negatives on when someone can be considered 'ideological,' meaning that 'being ideological' is often seen as equal to 'being ideologically or theologically knowledgeable,' and (3) the use of multiple intertwined concepts without referencing to ideology, while those concepts tell us little without ideology.

Furthermore, attention has been given to the existence of a media environment in which Salafi jihadis often find themselves, sharing their religious narratives and their rejection of the mainstream media and 'Western' authorities. Awareness of this environment and the impact of mainstream media has proven to be essential within deradicalization since it might further radicalization or cause deradicalization projects to end up in the wrong place. Knowledge of the Salafi jihadi narratives is critical for understanding what 'being ideological' means within the Salafi Jihadi ideology.

This research has aimed to establish which side Dutch policymakers take within the debate about ideology and political violence by asking the following question: *How is the connection between Islamic ideology and political violence valued in Dutch deradicalization policy in the period from 2011 until now?* In conclusion and answer to the research question, the findings that resulted from applying the three confusions on documents about the TER-team, Forsa, and on national counterterrorism strategies issued by the NCTV have shown that (1) the understanding of ideology, (2) views on when someone can be considered 'ideological,' and (3) the usage of concepts related to ideology without a reference to it have all deteriorated over the years. In the counterterrorism strategy from 2011-2015, the connection between Islamic ideology and political violence seemed to be valued; many references to ideology in the deradicalization process and its functions were made. However, the counterterrorism strategy from 2016-2020 and the documents about team TER and Forsa have shown that in more recent years, the connection between Islamic ideology and political violence seems to be

more and more neglected, as an ideology is often superficially touched upon when talking about processes of deradicalization. This can be seen as a pattern of deterioration of the understanding of ideology. These claims are consistent with a trend that could be identified within terrorism research, referred to as ‘’the curious erasure of religion from the study of religious terrorism’’ (Dawson, 2018, p. 141).

Regarding the theoretical debate, these outcomes imply that how ideology or religious ideology is often seen has to be broadened. It is necessary to distinguish between ‘being ideological’ and ‘being ideological literate or knowledgeable’ to fully grasp what ideology means and entails. This differentiation is crucial since people who adhere to a religious ideology and commit actions because of that adherence might otherwise be regarded as ‘not ideological’ due to a potential lack of religious knowledge. Moreover, this research has shown that the three confusions mentioned by Koehler, often existing within deradicalization research, can be applied to a case study by applying it to Dutch deradicalization policy. No other research projects were found that used these confusions in the same manner.

Regarding policy, the current research has several recommendations. First, a unified definition of deradicalization is necessary to make sure when to use it and when to use disengagement instead. Using deradicalization means inherently regarding ideology as important, a choice that has consequences for the program's content. This recommendation implies that better substantive knowledge of ideology and Islam is needed, which has also been raised within several evaluations of deradicalization programs. Intake and assessment tools have to be established according to the broader explanation of ideology as followed within this research to ensure that radical individuals are placed in the correct category. An ideology such as Salafi jihadism is also subject to changes over time, which requires continuous reflection and evaluation of that knowledge.

This ties into another often-mentioned recommendation that has to do with success measurement. When structural, thorough evaluations of programs are not conducted, it is hard to establish what will work and what will not. This ensures that deradicalization programs remain a gambling game. Therefore, evaluations need to incorporate more specific content on, for instance, how theological dialogue and reflection are brought about. To be sure whether specific religious counterarguments work, program success needs to be measured. These counterarguments should not be provided through governmental sources or other sources regarded as non-authoritative by Salafi jihadis. As stated in Chapter 3.3, former Salafi jihadis should be seriously considered since they have a greater chance of being seen as a trustworthy

authority and a reliable source due to their (former) adherence to the same religious ideology. Thus, the program might have a greater chance of success.

Further research on Dutch deradicalization policy is necessary to substantiate the claim that practice often differs from theory regarding whether deradicalization is aimed for. The current study focuses on deradicalization policy, which means mostly looking at governmental documents and sources. In addition to the findings presented above, an understanding is necessary of the practitioner's reality, which can be conducted by doing research based on interviews with practitioners in the field. By doing so, a comprehensive picture can be created that takes into account both policy and practice.

Additionally, to fully grasp the reality in which radicalized Muslims find themselves to realize where they need to be pulled from, research into radical forums and websites that are often hard to access might be of valuable importance. It can provide further insights into the narratives that circulate, leading to a better understanding of tackling those narratives.

Within the field of deradicalization research and policy both, a lot is still up for debate. It is a field that requires in-depth structural evaluations, unified definitions, and clarity on the meaning of ideology. However, aiming for deradicalization instead of disengagement can enhance the chances of long-term success due to a change in ideological beliefs. A parallel can be drawn with getting rid of a phobia. There is a possibility to simply avoid a situation in which the phobia is challenged, thereby addressing the phobia solely based on behavior. However, if the core of the phobia is not addressed, the phobia will never be changed entirely. Deep down, the fear persists, as radical thoughts do when the aim is disengagement. Success in the long run, therefore, means focusing on the underlying beliefs, the religious ideologically grounded forces that shape an individual's reality.

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