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SPECIAL SECTION: ASSESSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF COUNTER-RADICALISATION POLICIES IN NORTH-WESTERN EUROPE

Limits of tolerance under pressure: a case study of Dutch terrorist detention policy

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Policy-makers who are confronted with the potential spread of violent extremist ideologies among prison inmates are challenged to design sustainable prison regimes which are suitable to counter prison radicalisation whilst rehabilitating and reintegrating inmates into society. This article outlines a theoretical framework that explains how uncertainty and pressure in the policy-making context heightens the need for structure that induces a shift towards intolerance and stereotypic black-and-white thinking, which leads to the introduction of unbalanced, one-sided prison regimes. We argue that in the long run, these prison regimes are likely to be self-undermining and unsustainable because they undermine long-term security objectives and cause undesired side effects. These propositions are illustrated by an in-depth case study of the Dutch terrorist detention policy.

Keywords: violent extremist offenders; prison radicalisation; rehabilitation; sustainable security; need for order; stereotypes

Introduction

Prison authorities face a pressing challenge to achieve multiple, seemingly incompatible or even competing objectives. First, the prison attempts to prevent recidivism and habitual offending by rehabilitating inmates and changing their skills and attitudinal or cognitive characteristics. Second, prisons provide a secure environment where dangerous criminals are quarantined and isolated from society to protect the public from further crime. Third, imprisonment serves retribution purposes by taking away criminals' autonomy and punishing them for wrongdoing. Fourth, prisons have a deterrence objective and attempt to discourage people who are thinking of committing crimes from breaking the law (Robinson 1947).

For prisons that are confronted with inmates who have a terrorist or violent extremist background, an additional objective might become relevant: to prevent the spread of violent extremist belief systems among the inmate population. Especially since 9/11, radicalisation and recruitment among inmates in prisons in the West has gained increasing attention (Hannah *et al.* 2008, Brandon 2009). Several governments have expressed concerns that extremist (Islamist) ideologies flourish freely in their penitentiary systems and that prisons

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have become prime recruiting grounds for terrorist organisations such as al-Qaeda (see Hamm 2007, 2009).

The pursuit of sustainable public safety thus requires a delicate balancing act by policy-makers in which they optimise both short-term and long-term security objectives and create prison environments where (violent extremist) inmates can be securely detained while being prepared to return to society as law-abiding citizens. Have governments succeeded in implementing balanced, sustainable correctional approaches to dealing with violent extremist inmates?

In this article, we propose that this is not likely to be the case. We suggest that when confronted with potential radicalisation among prisoners, policy-makers have a tendency to prioritise short-term security objectives, such as countering prison radicalisation and isolating potentially dangerous offenders from society, over longer-term objectives, such as preventing recidivism and further crime. With rehabilitation and reintegration initiatives being the prison's most prominent instruments to achieve these longer-term objectives, failing to integrate these resocialisation measures into the detention regime increases the risk that prisons possibly increase potential threats to society when the inmates are set free. One of the main reasons for the short-term approach, we propose, is that high levels of uncertainty and sociopolitical pressure on the decision-making process (resulting from the perceived threat) cause cognitive biases that affect how policy-makers perceive and subsequently respond to the problem. Specifically, we argue that high levels of uncertainty induce a need for structure that triggers stereotyped and categorical ways of thinking. In turn, this shift in thinking translates into equally biased and stereotyped prison regimes that may ultimately prove self-defeating because they offer new reasons for radicalisation and fail to rehabilitate extremist inmates, thereby increasing the risk of post-release radicalisation and recidivism.

In order to test this proposition adequately, one needs to evaluate and compare different policies and establish whether those that were designed under high levels of pressure have indeed resulted in higher levels of recidivism and (post-release) radicalisation. Such a comprehensive approach is beyond the scope of this article. Here, our ambition is to outline a theoretical framework that explains how different policy environments can produce different intervention strategies and that allows us to generate testable hypotheses about the way in which external pressures on the decision-making process influence the design of the prison regime and its subsequent impact. In addition, we aim to illustrate our propositions through an in-depth analysis of decision-making in practice. To that end, we reconstruct and assess from a theoretical perspective the decision-making process underpinning the Dutch correctional approach (between 2005 and 2010) in dealing with terrorism-related offenders. Briefly summarised, this approach comes down to the following: in response to a perceived threat of prison radicalisation, the Dutch government deviated drastically from correctional traditions by creating a special high-security 'terrorism wing' in which terrorism offenders could be closely monitored while being segregated from the regular inmate population. However, in their ambition to develop a detention regime that would immediately provide optimal security, the policy-makers failed to oversee some potential negative side effects of their decisions and neglected to attend to longer-term security needs, such as preventing recidivism through rehabilitation and reintegration measures (Veldhuis *et al.* 2011).

Balancing priorities

How should policy-makers prioritise their correctional objectives to optimally protect the public from further crime? To a great extent, the difficulty lies in the notion that

policy-makers need to make decisions that do not only have consequences in one point in time but that must be enacted over time. What might be the best solution in the short run can be in direct conflict with what is the best solution in the long run. The challenge is to combine alternatives that produce positive results in the short run as well as the long run, rather than simply doing what has the most favourable immediate outcomes (Gray 1999).

In the prison setting, (inter)national security may be served best in the short run by placing violent extremist inmates under close surveillance in maximum security units, where their every behaviour can be monitored and individual autonomy can be drastically reduced. Such prison regimes could definitely erect barriers against criminal activity, the spread of radical ideologies and recruitment efforts, and would also correspond with the punitive and deterrent ambitions of the correctional system.

However, such circumstances would severely disturb rehabilitative efforts and may ultimately jeopardise national security by inducing experiences of exclusion, discrimination and stigmatisation, which are believed to be the key ingredients for violent radicalisation (Veldhuis and Staun 2009). In other words, whilst severely restrictive regimes might be seemingly beneficial for national security in the short run, they are likely to cause greater security concerns in the long run by compromising inmate reform and even providing fuel for further radicalisation and recidivism. Consequently, prioritising short-term security objectives (like preventing prison radicalisation and isolating violent extremists from society) over future-oriented objectives (like preventing recidivism and post-release radicalisation) is likely to produce a self-defeating system that eventually causes perverse effects and undermines its own ambitions.

Policy-makers are thus challenged to design sustainable correctional systems that serve present needs without compromising future objectives. In practical terms, this means that they should try to optimise acute security measures to the extent that doing so does not stand in the way of rehabilitation and reintegration. Inevitably, this implies that repressive and punitive interventions need to be made subservient to rehabilitation and reintegration efforts, in the sense that they should be designed and implemented in a way that they serve, or at least do not undermine, the latter. Similarly, rehabilitation efforts need to be nested in a secure detention setting that is sensitive to the causes of radicalisation and recidivism and that is careful not to provide a breeding ground for extremist ideologies to flourish.

How have governments thus far dealt with the challenge of balancing priorities, and how have they approached correctional treatment of violent extremist offenders? A global scanning of existing literature on detention and rehabilitation of violent extremist offenders exposes two prominent developments.

First, we see an interesting shift in priorities and policy focal points in the years after 9/11. Immediately after the attack, political and public attention on terrorism accelerated and resulted in a rapidly expanding counterterrorism industry. In these first post-9/11 years, most countries seem to have adopted rather one-sided 'security-first' approaches to dealing with violent extremist inmates. Prison primarily focused on countering prison radicalisation and recruitment, often at the expense of rehabilitation and reintegration objectives (Neumann 2010). Terrorist offenders were often placed in strict regimes, sometimes in segregated detention units, and received different – less tolerant – treatments than other categories of offenders.

In recent years, the priorities have clearly shifted. Rehabilitation and reintegration of violent extremist offenders gained increasing public and political priority, resulting in an abundance of de-radicalisation and rehabilitation initiatives to emerge around the world. Countries such as Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Indonesia and Singapore are only a few of many examples where explicit efforts have been made to reform extremist offenders to reduce recidivism rates (Neumann 2010, El-Said 2011). In the light of the need to create balanced,

sustainable approaches, the increased focus on preventing recidivism is undoubtedly an improvement and reflects the realisation that longer-term security concerns cannot be tackled with short-term solutions.

Second, however, there are some interesting features to these recently emerged de-radicalisation and rehabilitation initiatives. To begin with, they often appear to be based on implicit but stereotypical beliefs and assumptions about the characteristics of the target population. For example, many of these initiatives involve segregating extremist inmates from the general prison population, which (at least partly) seems to rest on the assumption that these inmates pose an increased risk of influencing other inmates. In some individual cases this might be indeed true, but this does not necessarily legitimise the assumption that all extremist inmates have recruiting ambitions. Moreover, following the same logic reveals an obvious downside to standardised segregation policies: detaining extremists together might simultaneously increase the risk that they recruit or radicalise each other even further (Hannah *et al.* 2008).

In addition, these programmes often contain elements that run the risk of igniting a self-defeating cycle by imposing negative labels or stigmas on ex-offenders, which in turn can play an important role in causing recidivism (Chiricos *et al.* 2007). For example, policies that are explicitly presented as ‘de-radicalisation’ or ‘terrorist rehabilitation’ programmes inevitably draw attention of both the inmates and the broader public to an ‘extremism’ label. Considering that ex-detainees in general face substantial problems to regain a position in society (Clear *et al.* 2001, Austin and Hardyman 2004), an additional ‘extremist’ or ‘ex-terrorist’ stigma is likely to hinder the reintegration process even further, thereby increasing the chance of relapse into extremism or crime (Veldhuis *et al.* 2011).

To summarise, a remarkable discrepancy becomes visible between the need to balance short-term and longer-term priorities on the one hand, and the reality of mostly unbalanced, short-term focused policies on the other. Although the recent shift towards rehabilitative efforts is promising, there appear to be (often implicit) elements in these policies that may trigger counterproductive effects and, in the end, undermine the system. Why is this the case? Why do governments often find it difficult to manage their priorities in such a way that they can effectively pursue radicalisation both during and after imprisonment, and implement coherent policies that are balanced and sustainable in the long run? In the following section, we will discuss a theoretical approach that explains these outcomes by giving an account of how sociopolitical context characteristics influence the way in which decision-makers think, feel and act.

Limits of tolerance under pressure

In this section, we outline a theoretical framework that explains how a disrupted decision-making context can result in suboptimal prison policies. The line of argumentation follows four subsequent steps. First, we show that correctional policies to deal with violent extremism in prison are often developed and introduced in complex and chaotic conditions. Second, we apply existing socio-psychological frameworks to explain how such external pressures can influence and impair decision-makers’ thinking and behaviour. Third, we discuss the implications for policy design and suggest that policies that are designed under pressing conditions are likely to fail to balance priorities effectively, leading to one-sided, repressive prison regimes. Lastly, we elaborate on the possible outcomes of these prison regimes and argue that they are likely to prove unsustainable because they cause unintended side effects that ultimately undermine their own policy objectives.

Uncertainty and pressure in the decision-making context

In public administration, as well as social psychology, it is well understood that decision-making behaviour cannot be studied without taking into consideration the context in which decisions are being made (see, e.g. Farnham 2004). The characteristics of the decision-making context can strongly affect how actors process information, leading to very distinct ways of interpreting, analysing and responding to a specific situation. Like many counterterrorism policies, detention policies to deal with extremist prisoners are often developed in a context that is characterised by external pressures and uncertainty (see also Zsombok and Klein 1997).

In many cases, there is a (real or perceived) immediate security threat. Especially over the last decade, fears have been widely expressed that prisons have become breeding grounds for (Islamic) radicalisation. Prisons can be fertile grounds for extremist ideologies, since some inmates are believed to be susceptible to radicalisation and recruitment efforts by extremist movements (CIA 2002, Cuthbertson 2004, Rupp and Erickson 2006, Brandon 2009). The potential risk of terrorist attacks or violent outbursts means that the stakes are high and that there is a dire need to counter a possible threat immediately.

However, policy-makers are faced with a profound lack of information about the nature and degree of the threat. To date, disturbingly little is known about the degree to which radicalisation occurs among inmates in the West and about how frequently terrorist movements (successfully) target prisoners for recruitment (Rappaport *et al.* in press). Many questions remain unanswered: where does the threat come from and how serious is it? How does one recognise radicalisation and recruitment among the prison population? Are extremist inmates indeed recruiting fellow prisoners, and what are their motivations and actions? Are they planning and coordinating terrorist attacks outside prison, and if so, when and where do they intend to strike? The answer to these questions, however alarming, is often that we simply do not know (Rappaport *et al.* in press).

Adding to the pressure is the notion that, especially when it comes to counterterrorism or counterextremism instruments, policy-makers are generally closely followed by political and public audiences. Perceived threats to national security can prompt a public outcry for strong and decisive governmental reactions, even when these reactions do not necessarily contribute to reducing the threat (Downes-Le Guin and Hoffman 1993). Policy-makers can feel that they are being pushed towards a particular course of action that they might find difficult to ignore (or convenient to exploit) (Kingdon 1984). These and additional external pressures, such as conflicting objectives, group dynamics and ill-structured tasks and responsibilities, create uncertainty (Zsombok and Klein 1997). However, despite these uncertainties, policy-makers must still decide whether and how to respond, and they usually have to do so under considerable time pressure and political and public scrutiny (Kebbell *et al.* 2010).

The need for structure and stereotypic modes of thinking

Under circumstances of high pressure and uncertainty, decision-makers cannot afford to engage in time-consuming, extensive analysis of the problem and available policy alternatives, but may be forced to rely on faster, more intuitive heuristic-based decision-making methods (Kebbell *et al.* 2010). When people face an overload of information or when information is highly complex or ambiguous, they are not able to scrutinise all the information available to them. It is well known that such complex, pressing situations cause deficiencies in the way people process information. Janis and Mann (1977) posit that when people need to make decisions under time pressure, they do so in a hasty, disorganised fashion and

fail to completely evaluate all the information available to them. Similarly, Keinan (1987) showed that individuals who were exposed to stress considered and scanned alternatives in a different, less systematic fashion than people who were not under stress.

A valuable framework to explain the psychological mechanisms at play in the context–decision-making interaction is offered by the ‘need for structure’, a cognitive construct articulated by Kruglanski (1980) as a desire for clear, certain or unambiguous knowledge. On the one hand, the need for structure is a personal factor in that individuals differ in their motivation for structure and predictability [Personal Need for Structure (PNS); Neuberg and Newsom 1993, Webster and Kruglanski 1994]. On the other hand, research has shown that high need for structure can be situationally activated under acute circumstances such as time pressure to reach a decision (Kruglanski and Freund 1983, Freund *et al.* 1985, Jamieson and Zanna 1989).

A heightened need for structure causes a freezing effect on a wide variety of cognitive tasks, making people more rigid and less likely to gather new knowledge or validate the correctness of current knowledge, resulting in a tendency to implement heuristics and simple strategies (Jamieson and Zanna 1989). Indeed, research by, among others, Van Hiel and Mervielde (2003) showed that under heightened need for closure, a construct resembling need for structure, people have a tendency to rely on simple cognitive structures. High levels of uncertainty and pressure increase the need for predictability and structure but also trigger the need to have an answer on short notice, as opposed to enduring more ambiguity. The need for structure causes a desire for decisive action and motivates people to achieve a simple solution.

One particular manifestation of this tendency to implement simple cognitive structures is the use of stereotypes or pre-existing beliefs about individuals or groups. In complex situations, stereotypes can assist in creating order and making the world comprehensible by dividing the world into clusters and categories (Kunda *et al.* 2002, Kunda and Spencer 2003). Stereotypes can play an important role when need for structure is heightened. Recent work by Wichman (2012) revealed that for people who had a high desirability for control, predictability and order, being exposed to a threat of uncertainty increased the stereotyping of an ethnic out-group. This study showed that PNS amplified the effect of uncertainty on stereotyping. Individuals who were high in need for structure showed a greater tendency to stereotype than individuals low in need for structure.

These cognitive biases occur largely unconsciously and are ‘normal’. Inevitably, policymakers are not the only ones who are pushed into automatic, ineffective cognitive response modes when faced with uncertainty. Especially dramatic and heavily publicised events such as terrorist threats also reach and affect other groups such as politicians, counterterrorism experts, the media and the public. They too experience the confusion, anxiety and ambiguity that might result from the possibility that prisons have become prolific recruiting grounds for violent extremist movements. They too, consequently, are likely to experience a shift towards intolerant, stereotyped lines of reasoning and an increased desire for structure and an immediate solution. It is not surprising that perceived crisis situations often catalyse public pressure on the government to take action (see also Downes-Le Guin and Hoffman 1993), nor that crisis situations often allow radical policy decisions that would normally be unthinkable, to be implemented rapidly and with little challenge (Boin and ‘t Hart 2003). In the face of danger, public and political audiences are likely to support – or at least understand – a decisive and strong government stance.

The simple cognitive structures that are sought are also likely to induce a preference for simple forms of governance driven by punishment and reward systems. Such an approach to governing behaviour can also be observed in other kinds of organisations, when the

focus is on short-term results. Such forms of governance are likely to lead to internal contradictions and self-defeating adjustments because the governance instruments disregard and thereby also often antagonise the moral and ideologically based motivations that drive the members of the organisation (Lindenberg in press).

Unbalanced policies

How do these – subconscious – psychological mechanisms influence the decision-making processes among policy-makers responsible for designing correctional interventions against violent extremism? Under conditions of high uncertainty and pressure, for example, when prison radicalisation gains acute political priority after a foiled terrorist plot that appeared to have been hatched in prison, the decision-making process can be expected to have a few distinct characteristics.

First, the heightened need for structure resulting from the threat of uncertainty can be expected to decrease the motivation to invest in extensive analyses of the problem or the available policy alternatives. The policy-makers are likely to rely on more intuitive heuristics about what might be likely to work, and will be less motivated to critically evaluate whether these solutions are indeed the most appropriate in the given context. ‘Better safe than sorry’ may seem a suitable response when national security appears to be at stake and the whole nation is scrutinising governmental action.

Second, the heightened need for structure induces a shift towards stereotyping, which influences how policy-makers perceive and interpret the problem and policy alternatives. It follows that problem definitions can be expected to be based on stereotypic assumptions about the individuals involved, in this case the inmate population, as well as about how other stakeholders such as politicians and the public might respond. For example, existing beliefs about inmates (‘all extremist inmates have ambitions to recruit other inmates’, ‘violent extremists are often Muslims’ and ‘regular inmates are susceptible to being influenced or recruited by extremists’) or about expected responses by others (e.g. ‘the public will demand decisive and strong responses to the threat of prison radicalisation’) can colour the decision-making process and are likely to be reflected in the resulting policy responses.

Third, the need for structure induces an ineffective increase in the motivation to achieve closure and arrive at a solution immediately to prevent further confrontation with ambiguity. Accordingly, the prediction follows that under high levels of uncertainty the desire for closure will push policy-makers towards simple, short-term-oriented strategies that can be expected to produce immediately visible and recognisable results, rather than policies that are intended to produce diffused or long-term effects. Simply put, under conditions of uncertainty and pressure, a common response will be to do ‘first things first’ and focus attention on what seems immediately important (see, e.g. Tversky 1981, Gray 1999).

In summary, a chaotic and ill-structured policy context that results from a perceived threat is likely to steer decision-makers towards a particular course of thinking, which can be characterised as risk-averse, simple-minded and short-term-oriented. Uncertainty is likely to induce a way of intolerant, defensive black-and-white thinking that leaves little room for nuance or variation. The decision-makers may feel that their every movement is being followed and that they have to come up immediately with a safe and decisive solution, which will need to be acceptable by politicians and the public and with a minimal probability of failure.

How do these cognitive processes reflect on the policy decisions that are made? In other words, on the basis of the foregoing theoretical notions, can we now derive hypotheses

concerning the characteristics of the resulting prison regimes? Indeed, a number of distinct features are likely to emerge.

First, the short-term orientation will come back in the overprioritisation of short-term objectives at the expense of longer-term objectives. That is, it will result in prison regimes designed to address the seemingly most pressing issue, namely preventing radicalised inmates from proselytising other inmates (Brandon 2009, Neumann 2010), instead of looking ahead and investing in rehabilitative efforts that prevent violent extremism in the longer run. In order to gain maximum control over the situation, the implemented regimes are likely to be restrictive, punitive and focused on isolating violent extremist inmates from the regular inmate population so as to prevent direct social influence.

Second, we can expect these regimes to be characterised by standardised procedures that target groups of inmates rather than individuals and that are based on perceived characteristics of groups instead of individual assessments. When it is unclear as to which particular inmates are at risk of radicalising or being recruited, the easiest way to try to optimise the success rate of an intervention is to increase the scale at which it is implemented. As a result, in the absence of complete information about the degree of the threat of prison radicalisation, it can be expected that policy-makers respond by expanding the target group to increase the likelihood that the intervention is effective. For example, it has often been suggested that inmates who might be susceptible to radicalisation should be denied access to literature that contains radical or extremist content (Wilner 2010). The obvious question then becomes: how to identify those inmates who are indeed at risk of radicalisation; how to impose limitations on their – and only their – reading materials; and which readings should be denied and which should be allowed? Regardless of their effectiveness, individualising such policies carries a substantial risk of radical inmates slipping through the maze, when the procedure fails to identify individuals who should have been targeted. In an attempt to prevent such incidents and increase the likelihood of success, the authorities might be tempted to implement restrictions on the entire prison population by banning large amounts of ‘potentially dangerous’ literature from the prison library (see, e.g. Goodstein 2007).

Third, such standardised, group-based policies can be expected to be (implicitly) based on and reflect pre-existing, stereotypical beliefs about the characteristics of the target group. For example, it may be that policies that are meant to target violent extremist inmates are disproportionately focused on Muslim inmates or, vice versa, that behavioural changes among Muslim inmates are – unconsciously – more readily interpreted by staff as cues of radicalisation than would similar changes among other types of inmates.

In summary, ill-structured and chaotic situations may encourage a shift towards intolerant, narrow-minded reactions of policy-makers and public audiences. At the policy level, this narrowed focus is likely to be reflected in standardised policies that are disproportionately focused on short-term objectives (at the expense of long-term objectives), are group-based (rather than individualised) and repressive (rather than constructive). The result is that prison regimes are implemented that may be seemingly effective in the short run, but which leave uncertain consequences for the future – simply because the future is not taken into account in the decision-making process.

Expected outcomes

The next question that arises is what outcomes the resulting prison regimes can be expected to produce. How do the features of these regimes relate to existing knowledge about the causes of (post-release) radicalisation and recidivism? Are such policies – in theory –

suitable to contribute to sustainable security? In this section, we further extend our theoretical framework to the perspective of the inmates subjected to these regimes. Specifically, we argue that for them too, the need to create order (in response to an incomprehensible, ill-structured situation) causes a shift towards stereotyped and dogmatic thinking, which in turn increases the likelihood of radicalisation. Moreover, disproportionately repressive regimes, which are not legitimised or substantiated by individual risk assessments and do not invest in resocialisation, can be expected to give yet another boost to the radicalisation potential both during and after imprisonment.

The need for structure is likely to play a similarly important role in shaping the prisoners' responses to the detention situation they are facing. On the one hand, the prisoners who are placed in severely restrictive regimes are confronted with a clear and very orderly daily routine. They are unlocked from their cells at regular hours and (if allowed) participate in pre-scheduled activities. On the other hand, the prison experience is likely to be chaotic and unstructured. Especially in the United States, prisons are often overcrowded, understaffed and under-resourced (Haney 2006). To many, prison life can be a stressful and disheartening experience. On entering the prison system, inmates are deprived of control and isolated from friends and family in a hostile environment that is often dominated by aggression and (violent) gangs. Experiences of exclusion, psychological stress and concerns about personal security increase the desire (if not the need) to form associations and groups (Brandon 2009). For their own protection, inmates quickly need to understand and adapt to the prevailing culture in prison. They need to create order and predictability in a novel and complex set of norms and rules.

Such environments are fertile grounds for extremist interpretations of religions and ideologies, because the desire to achieve order induces a tendency towards narrow-minded, stereotyped thinking, which might make inmates open to dogmatic belief systems. As discussed earlier, situationally induced need for structure can elevate the need for closure, which leads to closed-mindedness and a tendency towards conservative ideologies (Kruglanski *et al.* 1993, Webster and Kruglanski 1994, Kossowka and Van Hiel 2003). Not surprisingly, it is not uncommon for prisoners to experience religious conversion during detention. Inmates often seek to cope with prison life by seeking religious or spiritual direction that helps them establish a sense of control in their lives and offers moral guidelines for how to deal with the ordeals of imprisonment (Clear and Sumter 2002). It is this openness to ideological guidance, combined with personal vulnerability and insecurity, which is believed to make prison inmates an easy target population for terrorist organisations that aim to recruit new members into their cohorts (Hannah *et al.* 2008, Brandon 2009).

The goal to create order can be particularly salient for inmates who are under severely restrictive regimes. It is necessary that inmates in high-security facilities, or those who are subjected to additional limitations, are able to legitimise and make sense of the regime to which they are exposed. If such restrictions are applied on the basis of an individual risk assessment, the rationale underlying the implementation of these restrictions is comprehensible. However, when restrictive measures are implemented on the basis of group membership and target entire categories of inmates (e.g. Muslims or offenders related to extremist or terrorist crimes), they are likely to be met with antagonism by the respective groups. Such measures open the door to accusations of discrimination and repressive government policy. Not only can such interventions feed frustrations and anger, thereby contributing to radicalisation, they can also legitimise resentment and hate against the state (Veldhuis *et al.* 2011). At a minimum, such punitive regimes allow extremist inmates to maintain and nurture their radical ideologies, if not to radicalise further and recruit fellow inmates.

In order to reduce the influence of extremist thoughts in prison, especially among extremist offenders in strict regimes, great efforts are required on the side of the prison authorities to resocialise and rehabilitate the inmates. Failure to do so is likely to contribute to an environment that is particularly conducive to radicalisation. First, it provides already radicalised inmates with a fertile ground to nurture their extremist beliefs and coerce fellow inmates to adopt similar views. Second, neglecting to invest in rehabilitation of terrorists implies a missed opportunity to promote reform and encourage extremist prisoners to de-radicalise and leave their radical views behind (Neumann 2010). It is well known that ex-offenders generally face difficulties adapting to life in the mainstream society after being released from prison. If (both extremist and ‘regular’) inmates are inadequately geared with the skills that help them reintegrate into society, the risk of recidivism increases substantially (Chiricos *et al.* 2007).

The resulting situation is an ironic deadlock. On the one hand, in response to the threat of prison radicalisation, both policy-makers and public audiences are pushed into the direction of stereotypical, short-term thinking that translates into restrictive, punitive prison regimes. On the other, these punitive regimes allow for rigid and dogmatic belief systems to flourish among the inmates, leading to an increased risk of radicalisation during detention and recidivism upon release.

To curb these tendencies, governments need to invest in designing sustainable, future-oriented policies that aim to prevent the spread of radicalisation in a way that does not undermine rehabilitative objectives. However, due to external pressures on the decision-making process, it is exactly this balancing act that proves to be very difficult. With most of the attention being directed towards restrictive regimes that provide immediate security, provisions for resocialisation and rehabilitation are likely to take a back seat and receive little priority. In other words, the need for structure in response to a perceived threat may narrow the limits of tolerance on the side of the government and public as well as on the side of the prisoners, in a way that might ultimately turn into an inherently self-undermining and unsustainable system.

Case study: the Dutch terrorism wing

In this section, we apply our theoretical framework to explain the decision-making process underlying the introduction of a high-security terrorism section in the Dutch penitentiary system. By isolating terrorism offenders from the regular prison population in a segregated wing with a strict regime, the authorities aimed to closely monitor them and prevent them from proselytising fellow inmates.

In reconstructing the process of policy development, we rely on extensive evaluation research conducted by the authors, as commissioned by the Dutch Ministry of Justice. For the relevant research, an analysis of the available policy documentation has been complemented with in-depth interviews with relevant stakeholders, policy-makers and inmates (Veldhuis *et al.* 2011). The sections below are chronologically structured according to the different phases of the policy development process.

Agenda setting

In 2004, Dutch film-maker Theo van Gogh was assassinated by Mohammed Bouyeri, a young Dutch Muslim of Moroccan descent. Mohammed Bouyeri turned out to be a central figure in a network of young, radicalised Muslims that would quickly be referred to as the ‘Hofstadgroup’. In the weeks following the assassination, several arrests were made.

Including Bouyeri, a total of 14 people were arrested on suspicion of having connection with the murder. Nine of them were later convicted for membership of a terrorist organisation, although the actual size of the network was believed to be much larger (Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service [AIVD] 2005). The arrests instilled in the public the shocking realisation that radical ideologies, similar to those preached by terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda, had set foot on European soil and apparently resonated among elements of the Dutch Muslim community.

Immediately, terrorism and radicalisation gained top political and public priority. In 2002, the General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD) had warned that the West would experience an increasing threat in the coming years, which would emanate from 'home-grown' terrorists (Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service [AIVD] 2002). Indeed, in 2005 the AIVD established that radical young Muslims born and raised in the West regarded Europe as a frontline for jihad and that this threat could possibly result in new terrorist attacks on European and Dutch targets (Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service [AIVD] 2006). The prevailing uncertainty about how the terrorist threat would evolve focused all eyes on the government. The legal cases against the members of the Hofstadgroup had kept both media and politicians occupied for months, and Members of Parliament started asking critical questions about the national counterterrorism strategy, and about how the government intended to combat the threat of radicalisation among young Muslims (*Tweede Kamer II* 2004–2005).

On several occasions, the Minister of Justice emphasised the significance of the threat and stressed the importance of effective counter-radicalisation and counterterrorism policy (*Tweede Kamer II* 2005–2006). It was clear that immediate action was needed on the side of the government to combat the threat of radicalisation and terrorism. In an interview, a representative of the Dutch prison system, the Netherlands Agency of Correctional Institutions (DJI), reflected on this episode by saying that 'there were times when we were only working on terrorism and left everything else to wait' (Veldhuis *et al.* 2011).

The capture of the Hofstadgroup did not stop public fear of radicalisation and terrorism. Rather, they raised new concerns about the spread of extremist Islamist ideologies among prison inmates. In the Netherlands, approximately 20% of adults and 26% of the juvenile inmate population describe themselves as Muslim (Spruit *et al.* 2003, Demant *et al.* 2006). The arrests introduced a seemingly new population of radicalised inmates into the Dutch prison system. Thus far, the prison authorities had had little experience with inmates who were ideologically inspired and explicitly challenged the authority of the state.¹ Interviews with responsible policy-makers at the time revealed that the presence of radicalised Muslims among the ordinary inmate population caused a lot of uncertainty about how these inmates would behave during detention; whether they would try to spread their radical views among other inmates; or whether their confinement would trigger angry responses from supporting communities on the outside (Veldhuis *et al.* 2011).

As the AIVD warned that terrorist organisations were targeting inmates for recruitment (Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service [AIVD] 2005), and pieces of evidence surfaced that some of the members of the Hofstadgroup had indeed gained influential status among fellow inmates, an increased sense of urgency was attributed to the issue (Veldhuis *et al.* 2011).

The government was confronted with a seemingly novel challenge to combat recruitment efforts and prevent the spread of extremist ideologies through the prison system. However, how serious the threat of prison radicalisation was or how it should be countered was uncertain. The policy-makers felt that time pressure was high and did not allow them to gather and consider all available information or to thoroughly examine all possible

policy alternatives. To add to the complexity, the policy-makers felt that the stakes were high and that they needed to make sound decisions on the basis of incomplete or confusing information and within a short time frame, so that potential consequences were difficult to evaluate (Veldhuis *et al.* 2011)

Interviews revealed that the general sense among policy-makers was that the government was under pressure to take immediate action to prevent violent extremist ideologies from spreading through the prison system. In the summer of 2005, a task force for the detention of terrorists was established, which consisted of representatives of a number of governmental agencies. Among others, the Ministry of Justice, the National Coordinator for Counterterrorism (NCTb), the AIVD and the Netherlands Agency of Correctional Institutions (DJI) were represented. The committee's main task was to develop a policy strategy on how to combat the spreading of radicalisation in prison. According to the interviewed representatives of the task force, it was obvious at the time that such a policy would have to be implemented on short notice (Veldhuis *et al.* 2011). In the context of public anxiety concerning the threat of radical Islam and the fear that prisons had become fertile grounds for extremists, a strong need was expressed for an immediate intervention that would counter the augmentation of extremist ideologies in penitentiary facilities.

Scanning of policy alternatives

As is not uncommon in the domain of counterterrorism, the policy-makers had to develop a suitable policy strategy under deep uncertainty and public scrutiny. We would expect that under such circumstances, the need to create order and coherence would induce them to be biased towards policies that contribute immediately to the most prominent goal and combat the spread of extremist views in prison. According to the relevant actors involved, the decision-makers took two alternatives into consideration in the decision-making process: first, to treat terrorists as ordinary inmates and disperse them across different prisons, and second, to treat terrorists as a special category of inmates and segregate them in a strict regime.

The first policy alternative would rely on existing procedures and integrate terrorism offenders among the regular inmate population. Accordingly, individual risk assessments would be conducted to determine the security needs of each prisoner and allocate them to a suitable prison regime. If deemed necessary, existing policies would make it possible to transfer terrorists with increased security demands to the (regular) high-risk section (*Extra Beveiligde Inrichting*, EBI) of the penitentiary in Vught, or to disperse them across multiple institutions. According to the policy-makers, the advantage of this policy strategy is that it prevents violent extremists from organising themselves and making collective efforts to prepare or coordinate terrorist activities. However, although it was the cheapest and least drastic alternative, the policy-makers feared that dispersing terrorists across the penitentiary system would not contribute sufficiently to countering radicalisation and recruitment efforts (Veldhuis *et al.* 2011).

The second alternative the policy-makers considered denoted a drastic deviation from existing policy by concentrating terrorism offenders in special high-security facilities. According to the decision-makers, a segregation strategy brings the advantage that terrorism offenders have no contact with other categories of inmates and that their internal and external communication be strictly monitored (see also Hannah *et al.* 2008). At the same time, however, interviews revealed that the decision-makers were well aware that concentrating terrorists in one prison wing carries a number of disadvantages. Most prominently,

they assumed that detaining terrorists together increases the risk of further radicalisation and (the coordination or planning of) terrorist attacks (see also Neumann 2010).

Notably, the policy-makers argued that the decision-making process occurred under intense time pressure. They did not feel they had time to conduct extensive research into the advantages and disadvantages of both policy alternatives. Moreover, in the interviews they argued that prison radicalisation posed a new and unprecedented threat to the Dutch prison system. The perceived novelty of the threat caused uncertainties about whether existing policy routines were feasible to deal with the threat. Their most central concern was to counter the risk of recruitment and radicalisation of ordinary inmates. According to the interviewed actors, this objective outweighed all other concerns in the decision-making process. They considered that the perceived risk of *not* acting against the threat outweighed the potential side effects of segregating terrorists from other inmates (Neumann 2010). As a result, the decision-makers opted for the policy alternative that would immediately contribute to countering recruitment and radicalisation, and decided to implement a special terrorism wing in the high-security prison in Vught.

As can be expected on the basis of our theoretical framework, the policy behind the terrorism wing was characterised by high levels of standardisation and a ‘security-first’ approach. First, the policy contained unambiguous, clear-cut procedures that aimed to increase transparency and controllability and did not account for consideration of individual cases. For instance, such lucidity is reflected in the selection criteria, which were largely objectified. Detainees would be automatically allocated to the terrorism wing if they were (a) suspected of a terrorist crime, (b) convicted of a terrorist crime or when they (c) displayed radicalising or recruiting behaviour before or during imprisonment. The selection of detainees for the terrorism wing was not based on individual risk assessments but on standardised criteria (i.e. the type of crime), and for inmates who were allocated under criteria (a) or (b), no periodic assessments would be carried out to examine the necessity of their stay in the facility. In principle, detainees who were transferred to the terrorism wing were intended to remain there until the end of their sentence, without the possibility of being allocated to a regular, more lenient regime (Veldhuis *et al.* 2011).

Second, it is clear that short-term security concerns gained top priority at the expense of overarching or longer-term concerns. Extensive security measures have been implemented to manage and restrict (the behaviour of) the detainees involved in order to tackle a (real or perceived) acute threat of radicalisation in prison. However, no instruments have been applied to rehabilitate or reintegrate the inmates, with the result that little is done to prevent recidivism or radicalisation after inmates are released from the terrorism wing (Veldhuis *et al.* 2011). When asked, the responsible actors state that rehabilitation and resocialisation efforts had little to no priority in the development process. As stated, their primary concern was to develop an intervention that would immediately counter the possible threat of recruitment. Concerns about how the inmates would have to be reintegrated into the mainstream society, or whether the terrorism wing could possibly release greater risks than it would be fit to solve, played no role in the decision process (Veldhuis *et al.* 2011).

Overall, the Dutch authorities responded to the perceived threat of radicalisation in prison in a way that facilitated optimal control and aimed to cover most of the foreseeable risks in the short run. However, as mentioned before, policies that produce the most favourable immediate outcomes might not always be the best overall solution. Even though their introduction may be understandable, policies that are ‘better safe than sorry’ are not always safer in the long run. Drastic, repressive counter-radicalisation interventions such as special detention facilities with strict regimes for terrorism offenders can trigger defensive and antagonising socio-psychological processes, among both inmates and their

communities, ultimately leading to more instead of less radicalisation. In the case of the Dutch terrorism wing, this specific intervention might very well contribute to countering recruitment efforts in the short run (by segregating terrorists from the mainstream inmate population) but produce greater security concerns in the longer run (through the strict regime and lack of resocialisation).

Conclusion and discussion

In this article, we have proposed that contextual pressures on the development of counter-radicalisation policies in prison may narrow the limits of tolerance that are required to design policies that are sustainable and goal-oriented in the long run. Specifically, we posit the premise that such contextual pressures create stress and uncertainty in the decision-making domain, which can increase the salience in both policy-makers and public audiences of the goal to create order and predictability. In order to achieve this goal, people experience a move towards stereotyped and short-term thinking, which can ultimately result in policies that are unbalanced and fail to prioritise different objectives in a sustainable, integrated way. That is, rather than being designed to pursue rehabilitation whilst detaining violent extremist inmates in a secure context that is suitable to counter the spread of radicalisations, the resulting policies are likely to focus disproportionately on countering prison radicalisation whilst neglecting substantial rehabilitation initiatives. The resulting prison regimes tend to be restrictive and run the risk of being (perceived as) discriminatory and stigmatising.

Although such restrictive policies might produce immediate satisfactory results when it comes to preventing recruitment in prison, we argue that they simultaneously contribute to a breeding ground for further radicalisation. Not only can these regimes contribute to feelings of frustration and marginalisation, both believed to be the key ingredients in radicalisation, they also fail to tackle post-release radicalisation and recidivism. The overall outcome is that such short-term-oriented policies, which are created in the context of a perceived threat, may backfire by increasing rather than countering the overall risk of radicalisation.

Fortunately, policies are not static. They are dynamic systems that evolve over time and that are gradually adjusted to the specific circumstances in which they are introduced (Pawson and Tilley 1997). That the same holds for our thinking about the threat of prison radicalisation reflects vividly in the increased attention recently directed towards constructive, forward-looking rehabilitation initiatives. However promising this recent change may be, policy architects must be aware of the unconscious processes that influence how they think, feel and behave in the process of formulating policy responses. These cognitive processes are subconscious and hence they feel natural and make sense to the individual when they occur. Their negative, ineffective implications, like underlying stereotyping, may be hard to recognise and may latently remain to influence future policy design, including the development of rehabilitation and de-radicalisation initiatives.

Of course, our study contains a few limitations and we want to emphasise that rather than hard evidence, our findings should be taken as educated suggestions that require in-depth empirical exploration. Most prominently, our study consists of a single case study in which only one decision-making situation has been described. Although the Dutch case does provide insight into how sociopolitical pressures in the policy-making domain can influence overall policy outcomes, we have not been able to test our propositions in more detail. In order to obtain empirical evidence for the role that the need for order plays in

shaping detention policies for terrorists, it is essential to compare the Dutch case with other European countries.

In that vein, research into the development of terrorist detention policy would benefit considerably from experimental research. Due to the nature of our study we are incapable of drawing generalisable conclusions about the causal mechanisms underlying the creation of such policies. Other studies, such as those conducted by Wichman (2012), have delivered convincing evidence that disordered contexts induce stereotyping and discrimination. However, experimental examination of the effect of disorganised and ill-structured decision-making contexts on the intensity and nature of relevant policy decisions in the domain of terrorist detention is essential. Such research should be complemented with cross-national research in order to draw accurate conclusions about the precise dimensions of the proposed mechanism and the effect of institutional and social differences across countries. Nevertheless, we would be inclined to believe that the Dutch case is exemplary for a general trend in the way in which Western countries have approached the design of policies for dealing with violent extremism in prisons. Despite the lack of information about the magnitude of the threat, it is clear that most countries in Europe have increased security standards for terrorist offenders and have responded with a strong 'security-first' approach in which rehabilitation has clearly taken a back seat (Neumann 2010).

If the proposed influence of a disordered policy environment on unbalanced, self-undermining correctional policies is indeed the case, it would have profound policy implications. Most prominently, such an effect would not only hold for correctional strategies, but would be generalisable to several other domains, especially those that are concerned with public safety and the war on drugs (see, e.g. Katyal 1997). Interventions that are designed in the face of collective threats, such as terrorist threats, armed conflicts, natural disasters and other potential societal traumas, are likely to suffer from the same problems as described in this article. For example, enhanced security measures at airports, especially profiling techniques that single out individuals for additional security checks on the basis of general characteristics (such as bearded men with orthodox Islamic appearances), might seem to the point but are very likely to trigger experiences of humiliation and discrimination and thereby antagonism. The side-effects of overly standardised and repressive, controlling measures might thus ultimately undermine their potential effectiveness.

Hence, a coherent and fruitful counterterrorism strategy requires that in addition to implementing acute security measures, authorities closely scrutinise their own behavioural and thought patterns and invest in training of decision-makers and other relevant stakeholders (such as politicians and media) to channel their socio-psychological processes and respond appropriately to confusing, threatening and pressing situations. Policy-makers need to be aware that their way of thinking is strongly affected by the contextual circumstances under which they do their job and that stressful or disorganised situations can result in a narrow-minded, less tolerant approach towards target populations and other societal groups. The awareness that such circumstances can affect decision-making in a way that may lead to suboptimal policy outcomes is a first step to preventing such outcomes.

The question that inevitably remains is how detention and rehabilitation policies for violent extremists should be shaped and introduced. How does one rehabilitate an extremist offender? To answer this question, although crucially important, is not within the scope of this study. Nevertheless, the line of reasoning applied in this article does offer some general direction.

It all revolves around goals and their hierarchy (Lindenberg in press). Effective pursuit of long-term goals should also lead to the realisation of short-term goals. Even

though security is important, it should thus be treated as a problem in the context of rehabilitation, and not the other way around. In this way, security issues are approached obliquely (Kay 2010, Birkinshaw 2012), and thereby they do not lead to policies that are self-defeating with regard to longer-term goals. The objective of correctional policies should not only be to detain inmates now, but above all to prevent further criminal activity when the inmates are released. In turn, this implies that rehabilitation programmes need to be designed in such a way that they allow for measures to counter recruitment efforts, *to the extent that doing so does not undermine the longer-term resocialisation objective.*

Furthermore, the prison context needs to be comprehensible and structured and interventions should be purposeful and follow logically from a context assessment. To prevent individual inmates from going into a state of heightened need for order that can lead to increased narrow ideological and antagonistic orientation, it is important that the prison context makes sense and is understandable to them. Thus, a necessary requirement for effective rehabilitation is a safe and well-operated custodial setting (International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) – The Hague 2011). Undue restrictiveness, problems with overcrowding, understaffing, gang violence and humiliating or discriminatory behaviour by prison staff can create pressing, stressful situations that can not only push vulnerable inmates into the arms of charismatic extremist leaders, but can in themselves provide a breeding ground for resentment and radicalisation.

In practical terms, this means that prison authorities are well advised to implement prison regimes that do not disproportionately emphasise repressive intentions, and to be sensitive to preventing experiences of humiliation and discrimination that might fuel radicalisation processes. It is well known from psychological research that the sense of being deprived of power and surrendered to the control of others reduces willingness to cooperate and increases motivation to protest (Goodstein *et al.* 1984, Frey and Jegen 2001). Prison regimes that emphasise the intention to control and manipulate inmate behaviour can be expected to trigger strong reluctant responses among the inmates and are not very likely to persuade radicalised, extremist inmates to change their minds and leave their violent ideologies behind.

How can policy-makers then assess whether their policies have been successful and whether unintended side effects might occur that disturb sustainable success? Here, policy evaluations have proven to be an important element in the policy chain, and evaluation mechanisms should be integrated into the policy design from the outset (Veldhuis 2012). Hence, it is essential that policy objectives be explicitly and unambiguously articulated. Policy goals have to be clearly defined and integrated into longer-term perspectives, and multiple indicators have to be developed to measure the effectiveness of interventions in order to prevent the undesirable focus by all involved on what is easiest to measure (Veldhuis 2012).

In all, policy-makers might be challenged to refrain from acting by their primary intuitions or beliefs about what would be the best solution to a given (real or perceived) security problem. By no means does this mean that prison regimes should be particularly lenient or that inmates cannot be subjected to restrictive measures. Rather, it means that repressive measures should be in accordance with rehabilitative aims. For example, additional restrictions or disciplinary measures should be tailored to the specific individual context rather than being implemented on a standardised, indiscriminate basis to a whole category of inmates. Most likely, national security can benefit optimally from a balanced approach in which policies to counter prison radicalisation are designed such that they contribute to, rather than undermine rehabilitation and reintegration.

Note

1. In fact, the Dutch prison system had been confronted with politically motivated inmates before. During the 1970s and 1980s, Moluccan separatists had carried out a series of terrorist attacks to gain public and political attention for the plight of the Moluccas. In the course of a few years, a number of arrests were made. However, interviews with the policy-makers involved in the establishment of the contemporary terrorism wing revealed that they did not consider the historical parallel with the Moluccan inmates relevant for the current threat, due to large ideological and social differences between the different groups of inmates.

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