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The Release and Community Supervision of Radicalised Offenders: Issues and Challenges that Can Influence Reintegration

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the challenges that correctional authorities encounter when dealing with the transition of offenders back into the community after the completion of terrorism-related sentences or after demonstrating extremist views or associations. It draws on research conducted in the Australian state of New South Wales that examined mechanisms to support radicalised offenders exiting custody and completing a community-based order (i.e., parole). Drawing on interviews (N = 55) conducted with correctional and other agency staff and terrorist inmates and parolees, the paper explores six issues: whether the radicalised cohort is unique in relation to supervision needs; engaging families; information sharing; assessing risk; the implications of the broader environment surrounding terrorism; and professional training and knowledge needs. Qualitative data indicate that radicalised offenders can have similar reintegration needs to mainstream offenders and that family assistance, while important, has some drawbacks. The application of intelligence in the supervision context is highlighted, as well as its limitations. Data illustrate the emerging practices and practical limitations of risk assessment. Results show how the broader social and political environment can influence supervision processes, with topics related to staff training canvassed. Broader lessons for policy and practice on the community supervision and reintegration of radicalised offenders are highlighted.

KEYWORDS

Terrorist prisoners; radicalised offenders; reintegration; community corrections; parole; community supervision

Introduction¹

The release and reintegration of convicted terrorists is a policy challenge confronting correctional authorities internationally.² Scholars have observed that this issue has been insufficiently studied.³ Policies and practices dealing with convicted terrorists are also of relevance to offenders who have radicalised to extremism while in prison, or prisoners identified as “at risk” of radicalisation. At some point, particular members of this cohort will be released onto a form of community supervision (i.e., probation, as in the UK, or parole, as in countries such as Australia). Understandably, correctional authorities and the wider community can be concerned about this possibility. Hence a better understanding about the community supervision of radicalised offenders is important. The aim of the current paper is to explore this issue and build on the small number of existing studies that have examined the reintegration of extremist prisoners. The paper sets out to explore

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“frontline” issues that correctional authorities encounter when dealing with the transition of offenders back into the community after the completion of terrorism-related sentences or after demonstrating extremist views or associations. For brevity, the term “radicalised offender” will be used in this paper to encompass this cohort. The paper draws on primary research conducted in the Australian state of New South Wales, which to date has the highest number of inmates serving a conviction for terrorism in Australia.

The paper is organised as follows. Relevant research is reviewed to situate this study in the existing literature. This will include examining current knowledge about how the community supervision of radicalised offenders has been managed and problems that can create barriers to their effective transition back into society. The study’s setting is then summarised in relation to the roles and responsibilities of Corrective Services New South Wales, which must deal with radicalised offenders and their community release in Australia’s most populous state. The project’s methodology is then set out, and limitations in the approach are highlighted. The results are divided into six themes: whether the radicalised cohort is unique in relation to supervision needs; engaging families; information sharing; assessing risks; professional training and knowledge needs; and implications of the broader environment surrounding terrorism. The paper ends by considering the implications of these findings for policy on the release and supervision of radicalised offenders.

This paper does not specifically set out to explore the process of de-radicalisation and disengagement, although findings do have relevance for offender reintegration, which is applicable to both processes. The paper predominantly focuses on the perspectives of frontline staff. While offenders were accessed as part of this research, understanding how correctional staff and external agency partners have dealt with this cohort, the challenges confronted, and their anticipated concerns and needs, is relevant to knowing “what works” and “what helps” in securing successful outcomes.⁴ As argued by Marsden,⁵ such professional perspectives can help draw attention to the tensions inherent in dealing with radicalised offenders.

The study’s main focus was on radicalised Muslim offenders, given that, at the time of conducting this research, they represented current experience with radicalised offenders in NSW prisons. This should not detract from the recognition that other forms of extremism are a problem in Australia.⁶ While the results highlight some key challenges and barriers to effective re-entry, it should not be interpreted from this that the situation in NSW is characterised by a lack of a coherent approach. It needs to be recognised that correctional authorities across Australia—and in many overseas jurisdictions—operate in a highly fluid and changing environment when it comes to responding to terrorism. Hence many radicalised offenders in NSW are being dealt with on a case-by-case basis to ensure responses are tailored to particular needs and risks. The primary aim here is not to make specific commentary about the positive or negative features of the NSW experience, but to highlight broader lessons for policy and practice.

Issues identified in the literature

The existing literature on the incarceration and community supervision of radicalised offenders has proposed a number of principles and approaches that should govern their release and supervision.⁷ Suggestions reflect similar modes of practice that are adopted with other types of offenders. For example, Dean⁸ states that the Risk, Need, Responsivity

(RNR) model⁹ used to deal with regular offenders is applicable to radicalised offenders. In other words, the intensity of community supervision should match the level of assessed risk¹⁰ and should target criminogenic needs, with the style and mode of supervision matched to an offender's learning style, abilities, and circumstances (i.e., responsivity). However, Marsden¹¹ questions the applicability of the RNR model to the reintegration of radicalised offenders, arguing that it ignores how the capacity (i.e., internal strengths) of an individual can best be developed through supervision practices that help them to desist from extremist behaviours.

These arguments raise the issue of how the radicalised offending cohort differs from mainstream offenders in relation to their supervision needs. Weggemans and de Graaf¹² report that, amongst probation staff they interviewed in the Netherlands, there was confidence that they had the capacity to deal with extremist detainees based on current approaches, but that staff also voiced concern about whether they had the ability to recognise and tackle extremist ideologies. In the Netherlands in 2012, a specialist unit was established to assist in the reintegration of offenders with a jihadist extremist background. However, even with such specialist units, particular challenges are not necessarily eliminated.¹³

These challenges include the need to reconnect offenders with their families, who can help in the process of reintegration.¹⁴ However, family members themselves may be struggling with the fact that they have had a son or daughter charged with a terrorist act and hence can face their own sense of stigma and social isolation.¹⁵ For these reasons, families in some cases may have limited capacity to assist in the process of reintegration.

While specific risk assessment tools for radicalised offenders have been developed, such as the Extremism Risk Guidance 22 + (ERG 22 +)¹⁶ and Violent Extremist Risk Assessment Version 2 Revised (VERA 2R),¹⁷ their predictive value is still unclear, particularly given the lack of validation studies.¹⁸ Other important issues are the applicability of these tools across different jurisdictions and terrorist groups¹⁹ and their consistent application by practitioners, which are essential to their validity. It is unknown whether these tools can help to improve the accuracy of any current assessments of risk and needs that are already being conducted by authorities.

The importance of information exchange between agencies (e.g., between probation/parole and police intelligence units) has been highlighted in existing literature on the community supervision of extremist offenders.²⁰ However, such inter-agency cooperation is not always forthcoming. For example, when a radicalised offender is released on probation in the UK, there is a statutory requirement under Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPAs) for different agencies (i.e., police, probation, housing, social services, education, and health) to share information about an offender. However, research has shown there can be a reluctance to do so, particularly when it comes to police sharing intelligence with external agencies.²¹ Given the nature of intelligence, which can be speculative and highly sensitive, there may be some inherent tensions in its use within a supervision context. This will be explored below.

One important issue is training for professional staff responsible for working with radicalised offenders in custodial and community-based placements.²² Such training and guidance has included initiatives to enhance staff knowledge about violent extremism and their capacity to engage radicalised offenders. For example, in Australia the federal government has funded the roll-out of radicalisation awareness training for correctional staff (the Radicalisation and Extremism Awareness Program or REAP), which focuses on helping custodial and non-

custodial staff to identify behavioural indicators and risk factors for violent extremism among prison inmates and also parolees.²³ In the UK, Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (previously known as the National Offender Management Service) has developed guidance to assist probation staff to work with extremist offenders. This includes, for example, the Developing Dialogues toolkit, which provides probation staff with the knowledge, structure, and materials to engage in discussions with radicalised offenders about their extremist beliefs.²⁴

The supervision of radicalised offenders cannot be divorced from the broader political and social environment surrounding terrorism. Public expectations and politics shape institutional and social responses to terrorism, which means that policy decisions on how to respond to violent extremism will invariably have to satisfy a range of interests and priorities, some of which may not always be compatible (e.g., security and surveillance versus rehabilitation). How a radicalised offender is progressing on a community-based order—particularly one who has been charged with terrorism—will be of interest to many stakeholders (e.g., police, politicians, community supervision managers), which means that the offender may be subject to intense scrutiny. The effect of this is that the day-to-day task of supervising such offenders can become more challenging, particularly for those professional staff charged with such roles. Likewise, offenders can feel similar pressures, acutely mindful that they are regarded as “public enemy number one,” with each new terrorist-related event or arrest leading to the tightening of restrictions that they may be subject to.

The above review has highlighted a range of issues and challenges surrounding the release and community supervision of radicalised offenders. This relates to the types of supervision practices that should be adopted to facilitate reintegration, including engaging family members, assessing risk, information sharing, and staff training. Although it is not argued here that this is a comprehensive list of key challenges and issues, these are the topics that will be explored in the interview data.

Research setting and method

Corrective Services New South Wales (CSNSW) has responsibility for managing the adult prison and community corrections population in the Australian state of NSW. The average total adult prison population in NSW is around 13,000 across 36 facilities, with CSNSW managing over 19,500 offenders on various types of community-based orders.²⁵ Inmates charged for terrorism-related offences in NSW are classified as AA inmates.²⁶ At the time of writing, there were 35 AA inmates in the NSW prison system.²⁷ This count does not include inmates designated as having a national security interest (NSI) status, which can include prisoners who have not been charged with a terrorism offence but have been identified as presenting a national security risk, due to concerns about their links with known or suspected violent extremists.²⁸ Nor does it include inmates who have been identified through police and correctional intelligence as presenting a radicalisation risk due to their associates or behaviour in prison. NSW has the highest number of terrorist inmates compared to other Australian state and territories. As mentioned, NSW has around 35 terrorist inmates, Queensland has two, and Victoria has twenty.²⁹

The results reported here were derived from a study that examined mechanisms to support radicalised offenders exiting custody and/or completing a community-based order (i.e., parole) in NSW. The project aimed to investigate the support mechanisms (i.e., the types of support for transitioning offenders and their families), partnerships, and processes

relevant to the effective transition and reintegration of radicalised offenders. Not all of the results from this study are canvassed here. A factor that triggered this research was that some offenders serving a sentence for terrorism in NSW would soon reach their earliest possible release date and would become eligible for parole.³⁰ The project was one component of a broader review undertaken by CSNSW to examine if current approaches were adequate to deal with the release and supervision of radicalised offenders.

This research was based upon qualitative interviews. Contacts in CSNSW, the NSW Prison Chaplaincy, the NSW Ombudsman, state and federal police, state government, and community-based organisations and leaders provided assistance in the recruitment of interviewees. The interview sample included Community Corrections Officers (CCOs) responsible for supervising offenders in the community,³¹ other Corrective Services personnel (i.e., those working in custody), and external stakeholders and agencies (e.g., police, non-governmental organisations, and community leaders). The interviews with agency personnel occurred at an interviewee's nominated place of work. The selection of interviewees was not limited to respondents who had direct experience in, or responsibility for, responding to individuals who have radicalised to extremism. The majority of interviewees reported some form of experience in dealing with this cohort or in delivering

Table 1. Interview sample.

Role/position description	No. of interviewees
Community corrections personnel (includes supervising officers, office managers & Arabic Client Service Officers ¹)	28
State and federal police	4
Correctional Intelligence Group (CIG ²)	2
PRISM (Proactive Integrated Support Model ³) team	2
Psychologist located in the HRMCC ⁴	1
NGO/community organisation (3 organisations in total)	5
Imam	2
Inspectorate of Custodial Services ⁵	1
Prison chaplain (Muslim)	2
Offenders	7
Family member	1

1. Corrective Services New South Wales has a number of culturally specific client officers who engage offenders and family from specific communities. Arabic Client Service Officers assist Community Corrections Officers in the case management of offenders of Arabic-speaking backgrounds, help in the pre- and post-release planning, and assist in the identification of relevant services for offenders.

2. The Correctional Intelligence Group (CIG) gathers, coordinates, analyses, and disseminates intelligence throughout the custodial and community-based correctional system in NSW.

3. The Proactive Integrated Support Model (PRISM) is a pilot intervention delivered by Corrective Services New South Wales that is aimed at prison inmates who have a conviction for terrorism or have been identified as at risk of radicalisation. PRISM is delivered by a team of allied health staff and a Religious Support Officer who work with other stakeholders and professionals identified for involvement in a radicalised offender's case assessment and intervention plan. An in-depth assessment of PRISM will not be offered here. (See Adrian Cherney, "Evaluating interventions to disengage extremist offenders: a study of the proactive integrated support model (PRISM)", *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, (2018) DOI: 10.1080/19434472.2018.1495661.

4. HRMCC refers to the High Risk Management Correctional Central, in Goulburn NSW, where many AA classified inmates are incarcerated – see Paul Maley "To the Supermax", *The Weekend Australian Magazine*, (April, 1-2, 2017).

5. The Inspector of Custodial Services independently scrutinises adult and juvenile detention centres in NSW; see <http://www.custodialinspector.justice.nsw.gov.au/>. In 2018 the Inspectorate completed a review on radicalisation in the NSW prison system see: Inspector of Custodial Services, *The Management of Radicalised Inmates in NSW*, NSW Inspector of Custodial Services, NSW Department of Justice, 2018.

programs to at-risk populations, such as radicalised youth in the community (approximately 90% of the total sample had relevant experience with adults and youth). Offenders on parole and in custody, including family members, were also interviewed, given the need to capture their perspectives and views. A total of seven offenders were interviewed face to face. This comprised three offenders on parole, two of whom had been flagged as at risk of radicalisation due to their associations, and four inmates serving a period of incarceration for a terrorist-related offence. Parolees were interviewed at the community corrections office to which they reported and interviews with inmates occurred in a non-monitored secure room at the correctional centre in which they were currently housed.³² In addition, a family member of an inmate serving a sentence for terrorism was interviewed. The interviews occurred between March and August 2017. In total there were 55 respondents. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the interview sample.

Not all of these interviews are drawn on here and it is acknowledged there are gaps in the interview sample. This includes the low representation of offenders and family members. Recruiting radicalised offenders and family members was logistically challenging, with some individuals who were approached declining to be interviewed. The results reported below are very much skewed towards the views of professional staff, such as Community Corrections Officers (CCOs) who are charged with the responsibility of supervising offenders who are released on a community-based order.³³

Interviews varied in length from forty-five minutes to two hours. Interviews were audio recorded with the consent of the interviewees. Some interviewees did decline to have their interviews recorded (e.g., one parolee). Recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim with any identifying information removed. Interviews with inmates were not recorded, with written notes taken instead. The interview schedule was tailored depending on the respondent. For example, interviews with CCOs were focused on discussing any experience with supervising radicalised offenders, issues that arose, and any support or training required. If CCOs had no direct experience with radicalised offenders, their approaches to supervision were still discussed, with a focus on discussing any concerns they had about supervising such an offender and any assistance they would like. Interviews with other agency respondents and correctional staff focused on key characteristics associated with the extremist cohort in NSW; issues around assessing risk; engaging radicalised offenders and family members; the components of any interventions targeting the cohort; and service provider involvement in offender reintegration. Interviews with parolees and inmates canvassed coping skills adopted during their incarceration; family relationships; transitioning out of custody; offending behaviour, religious beliefs, and commitments and plans for the future.

Firstly, written summaries of the full interview transcripts were completed by a research assistant to capture the main topics canvassed across each interviewee. These summaries varied from 1000 to up to 4000 words in length and were checked by the author to ensure they captured enough detail covered by the applicable interview schedule. These summaries helped to identify themes and informed the development of the coding scheme. Data were coded thematically using the qualitative data analysis software package NVivo. This involved the process of thematic coding with each transcribed interview systematically coded into a range of broad categories and then divided into subcategories. A number of strategies were employed to enhance the validity and reliability of the coding and hence the resulting analysis. Coding was completed by a research assistant and the author to increase consistency, which

involved a process of achieving consensus when it came to the inclusion and application of particular codes. Every effort was made to verify particular examples, topics, or issues across two or more interviewees so as to cross-check their validity. This though was not always possible because due to their operational experience or particular situational/organisational context, some interviewees had intimate knowledge of certain topics or cases that other interviewees lacked.

Study findings

Are radicalised offenders unique?

Interviews with individuals working in the custodial and community corrections context who had experience in engaging radicalised offenders provided detailed descriptions of their current approaches. These staff described their approach to working with these individuals as being based on developing a trusting, open, and transparent relationship, which they emphasised as not differing greatly from that used with other offenders they case manage. When it came to CCOs, the development of rapport was described as enabling communication to be open and ensuring CCOs are able to gather information that is relevant to successful supervision. One CCO with experience in supervising the radicalised offender cohort described this process as follows:

I find that once they feel that they are comfortable and that connection is there, then they tend to open up a lot more. That's the same with every other client that we have. So it's all about your approach as an officer, making them feel comfortable and using those motivational interviewing techniques, et cetera, just to connect with them so they can then open up. A lot of the issues is that acknowledgement and that connection and that identity. So I feel just like any other offender, once you are able to work with them then they tend to open up a lot more. (011)

Furthermore, establishing a good relationship with an offender was judged as important in influencing the capacity of community corrections staff to also develop a good relationship with the offender's family members, which was regarded as having broader benefits in supporting the offender throughout their parole period. The issue of family engagement is canvassed in the next section.

Interview data indicate that, overall, radicalised offenders do not necessarily have unique needs when compared to other types of offenders. It was emphasised by a range of interviewees working in the custodial and non-custodial environment, as well as police interviewees, that some of the criminogenic factors exhibited by radicalised offenders are similar to "mainstream" offenders. That is, radicalised offenders can exhibit criminogenic needs around social isolation, anti-social associates, limited education, drugs, alcohol, mental health, or poor family support. This is in contrast to some international studies which have found differences between mainstream and radicalised offenders,³⁴ however there can still exist some overlap particularly for radicalised offenders who are not strongly ideologically motivated.³⁵

A CCO responsible for supervising a parolee charged with a terrorist offence observed that the main focus of the initial case management plan revolved around the offender's mental health needs and offering support for the offender's family. This CCO observed that, like many offenders, this parolee faced some initial challenges when adjusting to his return to the community. It also took him some time to become familiar with the specific

conditions of his parole, given that it included strict conditions (e.g., reporting any addresses he visited) and monitoring requirements (e.g., for him to be electronically monitored via an anklet). Also, a primary focus for this parolee was to establish ongoing employment and reconnect with his children. Over time, as these needs were met, the focus of his supervision shifted towards religious supports, such as connecting him with a mosque and with an Imam who had been vetted as preaching a moderate and inclusive form of Islam. For one parolee that was interviewed, the needs addressed within his supervision plan were engaging in work and rebuilding a strong relationship with his wife; he showed little interest in receiving any religious support or mentoring, which he stated were not necessary because, due to work, he now rarely attended a mosque and prayed irregularly.

The above findings draw attention to the question of how unique radicalised offenders are in relation to their reintegration needs. The answer can hinge on whether one thinks ideological motivations are paramount in creating a risk for re-offending or violent extremist behaviours. They are still an important consideration in relation to addressing criminogenic needs and also the types of interventions provided (e.g., religious mentoring). However, as highlighted by the two cases described above, tackling such ideological motivations may not always be central to reintegration. The important point is that the strength of these motivations can vary across offenders; hence, the types of supports and needs addressed within a community supervision context will also vary. If one accepts the premise that there is no clear terrorist profile, with there being variation in relation to the social background and motivation underpinning individual extremists,³⁶ then the risks and needs addressed through forms of community supervision will vary, because no two offenders are alike.³⁷ This is the reason that CSNSW was taking a case-by-case approach. CCOs did voice some uncertainty about how best to tackle and challenge the ideological beliefs of radicalised offenders and the grievances they expressed,³⁸ recognising that they may not be best placed to do so, particularly when it came to comprehending and engaging with different perspectives within Islam. Koehler³⁹ has argued that there is uncertainty and controversy in Western countries surrounding attempts by authorities to “re-educate” radicalised offenders. For the CCOs that were interviewed (over 50%), tackling ideological beliefs and grievances required the development of rapport—as emphasised above—and that, once this was established, more contentious issues around ideological motivations could be broached. One CCO described how she used a recent terrorist event—the shooting of NSW police employee Curtis Cheng on October 2, 2015 by a radicalised Muslim youth⁴⁰—to subtly probe the beliefs of a radicalised offender about the killing of another person in defence of Islam, stating:

Basically I ask open-ended questions. What’s okay? What do you think about—I can give a particular example? A particular incident, for example there was an issue that happened here in Parramatta at the police headquarters,⁴¹ just ask him in your normal interview what do you think happened there, what was going on, what do you think? Was it wrong? How do you think it’s impacted everyone else? Gathering his views in that way. (014)

Some CCOs were more hesitant about probing such beliefs, although they recognised that within the Risk, Need, Responsivity model—which underpinned their supervision practices—tackling the motivations for offending was a key component and canvassing ideological beliefs was sometimes necessary. One community corrections manager

described this issue in the following way, when informing staff about how best to supervise a radicalised offender on parole:

The message to staff was, look, you need to manage and supervise those offenders based on the risks, needs, risk responsivity principle, look at the particular offence [which may not be related to terrorism] and then manage them according to their needs. Don't try to go and challenge them in terms of their beliefs. It's easier said than done because the needs principle is also based on attitude, beliefs and then as much as you want to steer away from that topic it always has to come back to that topic. (013)

Engaging families

The transition of prisoners into the community requires other social institutions to play a key role. That is, third parties such as families offer social (pro-social/non-extremist networks) and economic (source of work) support, as well as resources (e.g., accommodation and transport) that can influence the process of reintegration. Insights into the issue of family engagement were derived from a number of sources. Interviewees who worked with offenders in the community or in custody or who were located in law enforcement had experience in engaging with family members of radicalised offenders, and provided substantial insights to various dimensions of this experience. It should be noted that the issue of family engagement was not simply canvassed in the context of the radicalised cohort, but was also discussed in relation to the engagement of family members of Muslim offenders more generally, given current experience with the radicalised cohort in the NSW prison system.

Respondents described how family engagement was important to a wide range of supervision outcomes. This included allowing CCOs to better case-manage a parolee; for example, gathering information from family members on whether the offender had been in contact with any anti-social associates or was visiting places (e.g., particular mosques) that may influence their beliefs. Other benefits of engaging with family members related to helping offenders overcome feelings of disenfranchisement and linking them with employment. All three parolees who were interviewed recalled how they had secured ongoing work through members of their extended family. This is not an unusual result for ex-prisoners generally.⁴² Interviewees did observe that, for Muslim offenders, effective engagement of family members can be important given religious values within Islam and amongst Middle-eastern cultures generally. For example, a Muslim chaplain made the following observation:

You need to work closely with their families as well. You need to use their families to drive them. Family needs to be used more because with a lot of these guys family's a big thing for them ... Yeah, especially with the Arab boys. The mother in Islam is considered a very, very high thing ... you want to fix them up, get their mum onto them ... If their mum says please [do] this, or their wife—if they have a good relationship with their wife, the wife can have a lot of influence over them. (036)

However, barriers to family engagement were identified. This included a mistrust towards authorities such as CSNSW and misperceptions about the community corrections role—that it is simply about monitoring and punishing parolees rather than providing support. In such a context, the need to work on developing strong relationships with family members to gain their trust was emphasised as important, and until this was achieved

there was little likelihood of effective engagement with family members. One CCO stated the importance of “letting them [family members] know that we are here to help them and we’re not just an authoritative figure that’s going to throw them [the parolee] back in jail” (005). Language barriers were identified as a challenge when engaging family members, some of whom did not speak English as their first language.

Like many relatives of ex-prisoners, family members of radicalised offenders can find it difficult to adjust to the return of a son or husband after a period of incarceration. The three parolees that were interviewed made this observation. They reported that their wives, and other family members and relatives with whom they were residing, experienced anxiety about their return to the family home and were uncertain about how best to engage them and help in their reintegration.

The ability of offenders to reconnect with their families can be exacerbated by internal family dynamics and the inability of some families to offer a stable and supportive environment. For example, a CCO provided a description of one radicalised offender he had supervised who had a brother in prison due to terrorist-related offences and who had also attracted the attention of police due to his own risk of radicalisation. The interviewee described how this parolee struggled with aspects of his reintegration, particularly around his sense of identity. This was described as being exacerbated by the lack of appropriate family support, with the offender’s experience of identity conflict being compounded by differences between traditional family expectations (i.e., to finish school and find a wife) and those of his current partner and his friends (who were persons of interest to the police due to their extremism). As a result, he was “torn into what lifestyle he wanted to fit in” (014). His family lacked the ability to help him find a pathway through these conflicting social pressures.

Interviewees stated that one could not assume the family environment is the optimal context for an offender to return to after serving a term of imprisonment for a terrorist-related offence. It was observed that while the family can be a positive influence on an offender, the converse can be true in that it can be the source of an individual’s radicalisation.⁴³ This was recognised as having significant implications for the supervision and case management of an offender, and indeed for disengagement from violent extremism, where the aim is to draw the offender out of an environment that has a negative sphere of influence.

Information sharing

The sharing of information on known or suspected terrorists (i.e., intelligence), as well as on those being supervised in the community, is, understandably, a highly sensitive issue for police and security services. The problem is that an inability or reluctance to share such information can inhibit the achievement of certain supervision outcomes. For example, CCOs emphasised that the use of intelligence, whether sourced from their own Correctional Intelligence Group or from police, is important to adequately assessing particular risks. This included when considering whether to conduct home visits or identifying any dynamic risk factors (e.g., criminal/extremist associations or attending problematic mosques that are propagating an extremist view) that may need to be taken into account in a parolee’s case management plan or any directives given to a parolee. When discussing the importance of intelligence sharing for supervision outcomes, one CCO used the following example:

Say for instance there are particular areas of worship that we have been advised of where we should be careful of because it's been in the media, we know that it's been classified as a troubled place. I'll give you one example, XXXX [name removed] mosque has been in the media in the past because of fear of radicalisation. So we would then often say to our offenders, our parolees, where is it that you go to on a Friday, for instance, for your Friday prayer, for your worship? Then they will tell us we go to XXXX [name removed] mosque or we go here, or we go there and we would always say to them look, it is known to us as a service that this particular place of worship is problematic, so we are now giving you a direction not to go to this particular place ... But in saying that, I think it's important that if we, in this particular area especially because there's quite a lot of places of worship, not all of them are official mosques, there's what they call (masjids) which are a lot more smaller, or prayer houses. If we were completely aware of who these people are, who were the Sheikhs that were running the sermons, then we would be a lot more comfortable. (011)

It should be acknowledged that there are inherent organisational contingencies and national security considerations influencing the free flow of information about known or suspected extremists. As stated by three interviewees, police intelligence on radicalised offenders can have national security implications and, without the necessary security clearance, it can be difficult for police to share relevant information with community corrections personnel. The level of local intelligence sharing was judged as being often dependent on the quality of personal relationships between police and community corrections officers in a given location. There were varying views relating specifically to police sharing of intelligence with community corrections staff, with opinions expressed that it was not as open as it could be. For example, one community corrections manager stated the following in relation to state and federal police sharing intelligence with community corrections:

Everyone's got a list but the exchange of the names on the list, that's not going to happen easily, and that's not going to be something—but you know what's the community expectation. It will not only be shared but we'll all be on the same page. (034)

There was a recognition across a range of interviewees that there were limits to how intelligence on radicalised offenders can be used in the community supervision context, given that, by its very nature, intelligence can be highly speculative and hence needs to be backed up by other appropriate sources of evidence. Likewise, police intelligence provided to CCOs cannot always be easily actioned. For example, one CCO recalled an example of a radicalised offender he was supervising, about whom there was police intelligence that he was engaging with “persons of interest” who were known extremists. However, the interviewee recalled that he was restricted in the extent to which he was able to action such information and issue what is called a non-association order—which requires the parolee to avoid associating with particular individuals—because any disclosure of this information could potentially jeopardise covert police operations—which police were concerned about—by making the parolee suspicious that his associates were under police surveillance.

While some intelligence held by different agencies can certainly assist in guiding aspects of supervision planning, the key question is: what type of information is most relevant? It is understandable that police, who have built intelligence holdings around particular persons of interest, can be hesitant to disclose such information due to concerns about the risk it may pose to active investigations or to the inadvertent disclosure of investigative methodologies if used by agencies such as community corrections. However, disclosure does not necessarily mean full disclosure, and can simply extend to assisting decision-

making on the relevance of particular static (family history) and dynamic (who an offender may be associating with) risk factors and how to tackle such factors in parolee case-management plans and supervision arrangements.

Assessing risk

As mentioned in the literature review, tailored risk assessment tools for radicalised offenders have been developed (e.g., VERA 2R; ERG 22 +). Results from interviews with CCOs highlighted the need for such tailored tools; however, as already argued, there are a range of issues relating to their validity and application in the field.

The link between risk assessment and case management was constantly highlighted by interviewees, in that it will determine the level of monitoring and regularity of reporting to a community corrections office. However, some CCOs observed that, in their experience, there was sometimes a mismatch between supervision levels based on the assessed risk level according to the actuarial tool they used (i.e., the LSI-R)⁴⁴ and the existence of radicalised views and behaviours. For example, one CCO described the case of a female parolee whose offence was drug-related and was assessed as low-risk according to the LSI-R, yet openly showed signs of radicalisation due to the associations she was keeping, with police also raising concerns about her behaviour. It should be emphasised that an LSI-R score is only one factor taken into account by CSNSW when case managing an offender in the community. However, in this case, it proved difficult to determine how to address the concerns raised given that, by all other indicators using the LSI-R tool, the offender was tracking well, with some of her criminogenic needs having been addressed. The CCO recalled:

On paper, or looking at her life, she had reintegrated quite well back into the community compared to what she [as a recent Muslim convert] was doing before. She was married. So when I got her she'd had the babies, went out to the home, nice home, financially okay, was no longer using drugs. So talking about reintegration she reintegrated well into the community. It's only the information that we have through intelligence that is saying that something else is happening here [that she was associating with groups in Sydney who were radicalising]. But it's difficult to address that. (005)

The weaknesses in current risk-assessment tools was highlighted by a number of CCOs who had experience in supervising radicalised offenders, with many stating that they are typically assessed as low risk. This was often the result of them having no previous criminal history, having committed a non-violent “traditional” criminal offence (drug use or theft) or having had criminogenic needs addressed. It must be recalled that not all radicalised offenders have committed terrorist-related offences. Furthermore, as pointed out by one interviewee, even for individuals on parole who have been charged with a terrorist offence, the level of risk using the LSI-R can be low and levels of monitoring (e.g., weekly reporting) and supervision (e.g., the types of interventions adopted) should “technically” reflect this assessment. It was emphasised that office managers can override such protocols when necessary. Decisions to override such assessments can be the result of intelligence, which is not accounted for in LSI-R ratings. This means that some radicalised parolees are managed as high risk (e.g., they report on a weekly basis), yet their rating for risk of reoffending can be low.

Currently, in custodial and non-custodial environments in NSW, the VERA 2R is being adopted as the preferred risk assessment tool to be used with radicalised offenders. At the time of

completing this research, training in the VERA 2R was occurring with a number of selected staff, but the tool had not been delivered in the community corrections context. While testing the predictive validity of extremist risk assessment tools like VERA is important, their use does not eliminate some of the broader challenges relating to their practical application. While tools like the LSI-R were not designed with extremist cohorts in mind, risk assessment is not a precise science. For example, CCOs expressed some concern—given the recognised limitations and margins of error inherent in actuarial risk assessment—that they could mistakenly interpret certain views or behaviours as an indicator of an individual radicalising to violent extremism. Conversely, they could fail to recognise particular indicators of extremism, which would then not be accounted for in a risk assessment. Interviewees with experience in assessing levels of risk among radicalised offenders in custodial placements observed that tools like VERA 2R, while helpful, do not necessarily guard against such professional misinterpretations or errors. In the community-based context, where offenders are subject to less overt surveillance and different uncontrollable and unpredictable extraneous influences from other third parties, such challenges and limitations in risk assessment become even more pronounced.

Training and knowledge needs

The effective supervision and reintegration of a radicalised offender is going to be partly determined by the training and guidance provided to staff. The need for further training was emphasised by many interviewees. CCOs, in particular, stated that training on cultural and religious norms associated with Islam and different Muslim groups would be useful. Such cultural and religious training was judged as important given the dominance of Muslims amongst the cohort of extremist offenders in NSW. Enhancing CCO understanding of Islam was emphasised as being particularly useful, in that improved religious awareness would assist CCOs to engage offenders in a more meaningful way, particularly around their religious beliefs, and help them challenge any problematic attitudes offenders may possess. Such religious and cultural awareness was also judged to be helpful in ensuring that particular views and behaviours exhibited by Muslim offenders, or Islamic iconography displayed in the home and observed when conducting home visits, were not misinterpreted as signs of radicalisation or the possession of extremist beliefs. One interviewee summed up his uncertainty about making such assessments by recalling:

So I would go out sometimes with a supervising officer and there'd be calligraphy. This is very typical across the board of you know—and it might have a prayer, some of them might say [welcome], some of them might say peace and blessings to those who enter my home. One officer said do you think that this is a—I should see this as a terrorist thing? So it's not understanding that well ... that's just a decoration in the house. It's not necessarily anything to worry about. (008)

Closely aligned with requests for further training to enhance understanding about Islam were requests for training on radicalisation. At the time of completing this research, such training was being rolled out by CSNSW. The point was made during interviews that training should create understanding and not alarm or overload staff, and should emphasise that radicalisation is not limited to Muslim offenders, nor that all Muslim offenders are radicalised.

Interviewees suggested a range of ideas for the delivery of training. A mix of online and face-to-face training was emphasised. Face-to-face training was seen as particularly

important because it was considered to offer the opportunity for staff to engage more deeply on the topic. CCOs suggested that inviting local Imams and Muslim organisations to talk to staff about their roles would be informative, and could also help forge closer working relationships with these stakeholders. Interviewees suggested that case studies on the supervision of extremist offenders would be helpful. One suggestion was to base these case studies on actual extremist offenders under the supervision of CSNSW. It was recommended that these case studies should involve examples on a variety of issues, including the management of a terrorist parolee, information sharing, interagency partnerships, development of case management plans, application of risk-assessment tools, details on criminogenic needs, and examples of family and community engagement.

Impact of the broader environment

Many of the technical/programmatic issues raised above are invariably going to be influenced by the broader political environment given policy responses to terrorism garner significant political and public attention. In Australia, a number of high-profile cases of extremist-motivated acts have provoked immediate political reactions that have triggered policy responses aimed at curtailing the release of radicalised offenders. For example, following a siege in 2017 in Melbourne by a parolee with an extremist background, there was a push by the federal government for state governments to legislate a presumption against parole for offenders with extremist links or associations.⁴⁵

Those agency professionals who were interviewed consistently declared that they operated within a highly charged environment, which significantly shapes policy responses to violent extremism. It needs to be acknowledged that this climate can be strongly influenced by community expectations surrounding government responses to terrorism, and that safety and security will be the primary concern of correctional authorities. The consensus among interviewees was that the primary political focus was on mitigating risk and reducing opportunities for release.⁴⁶ In the opinion of one interviewee, the assumption amongst politicians and members of the public was that offenders convicted of terrorism would remain in custody indefinitely. However, CCOs stated that a focus on risk mitigation means other objectives of community release, such as the known benefits of a period of community supervision, can be lost, with a community corrections manager observing:

Our two goals are reducing reoffending and promoting community safety or ensuring community safety and I think that's often lost, in terms of what we're always trying to do is contain risk, manage risk as best we can, acquit risk, but what can be lost in that [is] ... what are needs of this offender, is it informed by, what are his particular needs. (030)

Respondents acknowledged that the influence of the broader social (including community expectations) and political environment on how to deal with radicalised offenders was beyond the influence of units like community corrections to control. However, interviewees identified practical consequences resulting from this broader dynamic. For example, it can make engagement of the extremist cohort difficult, with the political and media attention paid to extremism and terrorism making offenders wary of attempts to engage them. Respondents who worked in the custodial and non-custodial environment made this observation. This dynamic was also judged by CCOs as having the potential to create anxiety on the part of a parolee, which can make reintegration more difficult. The consequence is that, in the opinion

of some CCOs, the level of scrutiny surrounding radicalised offenders on parole can potentially set them up for failure, with media and political reactions to the release of radicalised offenders making failure even more likely. Among CCOs, there was general agreement that the social and political environment surrounding terrorism places a high degree of pressure on officers. This was voiced by both those with direct experience of supervising radicalised offenders and those without. There were also concerns raised that it can generate risk aversion on the part of CCOs. That is, CCOs may be reluctant to decrease the frequency of reporting, due to apprehension that they will be held directly responsible if the offender subsequently commits an act of extremism, even if there is good reason to reduce their supervision level (e.g., assessment tools indicate supervision should be reduced, with an offender demonstrating a sustained commitment to behaviours that address their criminogenic needs).

Offenders that were interviewed in the custodial and community corrections context expressed some level of despondency and powerlessness over how they were assessed, with the feeling that decisions about their classification, release, and supervision conditions were often determined by “politics.” One terrorist inmate perceived that prisoners serving sentences for terrorism are treated like “political pawns,” and observed that various changes in the security classification of terrorist offenders in NSW were always accompanied by a tightening of various rules and security arrangements that they and any visitors, such as family members, are subjected to. A parolee recalled how his reporting conditions and security classification suddenly changed—despite his compliance with his parole conditions—following a terrorism-related incident in Melbourne.⁴⁷ It needs to be acknowledged there can be many reasons why the security classification and management of radicalised offenders can change, sometimes resulting from new intelligence or from a desire for a more consistent approach. However, the outcome is that engagement of the radicalised cohort can become more challenging, because over time they can begin to disengage from a process that they regard as unfair and which they see as failing to take account of their reintegration needs.

Discussion and conclusion

The results provide insight into some of the practical issues that are confronted when radicalised offenders are released into the community. Some of the issues canvassed in this paper may not be new to particular overseas jurisdictions, given their history of dealing with terrorism (e.g., agencies in the UK). The research from which this study was derived looked at a range of issues, many of which are not canvassed in this paper due to space limitations. These include assessing existing policies and procedures; engagement with community-based services; the interface between community corrections and external interventions to counter violent extremism; the connection between the experience of incarceration and reintegration; programs and practices to promote disengagement; and ways of overcoming particular barriers and challenges.

CSNSW has not been immune from public criticism in relation to its response to terrorist offenders and whether it is adequately prepared for their release into the community.⁴⁸ It should be acknowledged that the interview data reflects an inherently subjective and personal experience based on a small sample size, which can raise questions about its accuracy. However, the accounts provided by interviewees reflect their grounded perspectives and provide practical lessons for authorities on how to best facilitate the effective transition and reintegration of radicalised offenders. Given that research on the

post-release of radicalised offenders has been lacking, this paper provides additional and new insights into some of the factors that influence successful reintegration. So, what might be some of the broader lessons from this study?

Firstly, many of the challenges surrounding the transition and release of radicalised offenders into the community are not dissimilar to those associated with other high-risk inmates. The cohort has criminogenic needs that are characteristic of many offenders released from custody. They encounter similar barriers to their reintegration and, like many ex-prisoners, can rely heavily on their family for support, such as in securing work. However, families may not always have the capacity to assist or be best placed to do so. Hence engaging with family members pre and post release is important. While the ideological drivers underpinning the views of radicalised offenders are important and need to be moderated through appropriate interventions and community supports, addressing standard criminogenic needs can be just as important in generating successful reintegration. While the availability of actuarial tools is important to supervision outcomes, they should not be seen as a panacea, given inherent limitations in risk assessment and the basis upon which staff are processing and synthesising information to inform these judgements. Effective risk reduction will also be determined by the ways in which professional staff engage with radicalised offenders and their family members, and by the needs that are addressed through case management plans. Training in this regard is important and should accord with the preferences of staff, which will influence the degree to which it is applied in practice. Interviews with staff have highlighted some of these training needs and preferences, particularly the need for face-to-face training and case studies to guide decision-making and post-release planning.

This study found that the sharing and application of police intelligence in the community supervision context has inherent limitations and tensions. However, there is a strong argument that police need to be educated about the role of community supervision and the powers of community corrections staff, and how intelligence can be used to better inform their decision-making and potentially aid in reintegration. Finally, correctional authorities charged with the community supervision of radicalised offenders have to try and balance the tension between the goals of mitigating risk, through ensuring that there are the necessary monitoring conditions in place, and rehabilitating the offender, which involves a reduction over time of these conditions so an offender can demonstrate an independent capacity to reintegrate. The data highlights that finding a balance between these goals is a difficult task when it comes to radicalised offenders. Knowing what helps in achieving this balance will assist in ensuring the release, supervision, and reintegration of radicalised offenders is better facilitated. This paper has gone some way in helping to highlight how this can occur.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes on contributor

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Notes

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5. Marsden (see note 3).
6. See <https://andrewzammit.org/2016/11/01/far-right-violent-extremism-in-australia-whats-new/> (accessed March 8, 2018).
7. For example, this includes Dean (see note 2); Marsden (see note 3); Weggemans and de Graaf (see note 3); Schuurman and Bakker (see note 3); United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime, *Handbook on the Management of Violent Extremist Prisoners and the Prevention of Radicalization to Violence in Prisons*, Criminal Justice Handbook Series (New York: United Nations, 2016); Radicalisation Awareness Network, *Dealing with Radicalisation in a Prison and Probation Context RAN P&P – Practitioners Working Paper*, Radicalisation Awareness Network (European Union, no date of publication); Christopher Jones, "Managing Extremist Offenders: The TACT-ics of Policing Thought?," *Probation Journal* 62, no. 2 (2015): 172-80.
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9. See Donald A. Andrews, James Bonta, and Robert D. Hoge, "Classification for Effective Rehabilitation: Rediscovering Psychology," *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 17, no. 1 (1990): 19-52; Donald A. Andrews, James Bonta, and Stephen Wormith, "The Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) Model: Does Adding the Good Lives Model Contribute to Effective Crime Prevention?," *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 38, no. 7 (2011): 735-55.
10. That is intensive levels of community supervision for higher risk offenders and minimal supervision for low-risk offenders.
11. Marsden (see note 3).

12. Weggemans and de Graaf (see note 3); United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (see note 7).
13. For an evaluation of these specialist units see Schuurman and Bakker (see note 3).
14. Weggemans and de Graaf (see note 3).
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23. Parliament of Australia, *Advisory Report on the Criminal Code Amendment (High Risk Terrorist Offenders) Bill, 2016, 4 Operation and Oversight* – section 4.34, https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Intelligence_and_Security/HRTOBill/Report-HTML/section?id=committees%2Freportjnt%2F024017%2F24118 (accessed March 19, 2018).
24. National Offender Management Service, Intervention Services, *Developing Dialogue, Summary and Overview*, National Offender Management Service, UK (no date).
25. See <http://www.correctiveservices.justice.nsw.gov.au/>.
26. Classification AA refers to the category of inmates who, in the opinion of the NSW Corrections Commissioner, represent a special risk to national security (for example, because of a perceived risk that they may engage in, or incite other persons to engage in, terrorist activities) and should at all times be confined in special facilities within a secure physical barrier that includes towers or electronic surveillance equipment (See *Corrective Services NSW Offender Classification & Case Management Policy & Procedures Manual* 12.3 Category AA and Category 5 Inmates, V 1.5 March 2015, pg 4).
27. This is specifically as of January 4, 2018 which includes sentenced and un-sentenced offenders.
28. The total number of NSI classified inmates in the NSW prison system cannot be provided due to the national security status of such information.
29. Nino Bucci and Rachel Olding, "Terror in Our Midst: How NSW and Victoria Have Jailed Convicted Terrorists," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, September 22, 2017 (accessed January 19, 2018), <http://www.smh.com.au/national/states-of-imprisonment-how-nsw-and-victoria-have-handled-convicted-terrorists-20170921-gylvz5.html>.
30. The only publicly available information on this issue can be found at: https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Intelligence_and_Security/HRTOBill/Submissions, see Attorney Generals Department, Criminal Code Amendment (High Risk Terrorist Offenders) Bill 2016. Attorney-General's Department submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security.
31. Particular Community Correction offices located in areas that serviced ethnically diverse populations with a high number of Muslim and/or Arabic-speaking clients were selected, so the research was more likely to capture CCOs that had experience in supervising paroles from these backgrounds. These specific locations cannot be identified for confidentiality reasons.
32. Interviews with offenders were typically facilitated through an independent third party.
33. For more detail of the different options available in NSW see <http://www.correctiveservices.justice.nsw.gov.au/Pages/CorrectiveServices/Community%20Corrections/community.aspx>.

34. See Yvonne Styls and Steve Michel, *Examining the Needs and Motivations of Canada's Federally Radicalised Offenders* (Corrective Service of Canada, March 2014).
35. Ibid. Thanks to one of the reviewers for drawing my attention to the nuances of the above study.
36. John Horgan, "From Profiles to Pathways and Roots to Routes: Perspectives from Psychology on Radicalization into Terrorism," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 618, no. 1 (2008): 80–94; Monica Lloyd, "Learning from Casework and the Literature," *Prison Service Journal* 203 (September 2012): 23–30.
37. Christopher Dean, "Intervening Effectively with Terrorist Offenders," *Prison Service Journal* 203 (September 2012): 30–35.
38. For example, this can include grievances about foreign policy and that the war on terror is a war against Islam (see Lloyd note 36).
39. Daniel Koehler, *Understanding Deradicalization: Methods, Tools and Programs for Countering Violent Extremism* (New York: Routledge, 2017).
40. For information on this incident see *Parramatta shooting*, The Guardian, Australian edition: <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/parramatta-shooting> (accessed March 13, 2018).
41. The killing of Curtis Cheng occurred outside the Parramatta police headquarters.
42. Adrian Cherney and Robin Fitzgerald, "Finding and Keeping a Job: The Value and Meaning of Employment for Parolees," *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 60, no. 1 (2016): 21–37.
43. See also Shandon Harris-Hogan, "The Importance of Family: The Key to Understanding the Evolution of Jihadism in Australia," *Security Challenges* 10, no. 1 (2014): 31–49.
44. The Level of Service Inventory – revised is an actuarial assessment tool designed to identify an offender's risks and needs in relation to reoffending. It seeks to classify an offender's risk of reoffending and identify particular criminogenic needs. It is linked to the RNR model. It has been statistically validated in a range of international studies, e.g., see Ian Watkins, *The Utility of Level of Service Inventory – Revised (LSI-R) Assessment within NSW Correctional Environments*, Research Bulletin No 29, Corrective Services NSW, Corporate Research, Evaluation and Statistics (January 2011); Donald A. Andrews and James Bonta, *The Level of Service Inventory-Revised* (Toronto, Canada: Multi-Health Systems, 2000).
45. This relates to the case of Yacqub Khayre, who was shot dead by police in Brighton, Melbourne, after killing a member of the public, taking a person hostage, and wounding police. Khayre was on parole at the time for offences unrelated to terrorism. Khayre had a history of known extremism, having been acquitted of his role in the 2009 plot to attack the Holsworthy Army Barracks in NSW. His case led to national calls for the introduction of laws legislating a presumption against parole for offenders with extremist links; see Paul Karp, "Presumption Will Be against Bail and Parole for Those with Terrorist Links, COAG Agrees," *The Guardian*, Australian Edition, Friday, June 9, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/jun/09/presumption-against-bail-parole-terrorist-links#img-1> (accessed March 29, 2018).
46. This includes the introduction of legislation creating a presumption against parole and the High Risk Terrorism Offenders legislation, which allows for the continued detention of offenders who have completed their sentence for terrorism (see https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/bd/bd1617a/17bd048). As to whether such preventative legislation is simply about limiting opportunities of release or about managing ongoing risk is a point of contention.
47. This relates to the Brighton siege in Melbourne that involved a parolee with extremist links (see endnote 45).
48. For example, see: Bucci and Olding (see note 29); Rachel Olding, "Pressure Cooker: Parole System Struggles with National Security and Reforming Extremists," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, September 23, 2017.

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