

## *Amnesty offered to VEO members can lead to desertions and weakening of the group.*

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97

### General Description of the Literature:

Amnesties might lead to the weakening of VEOs through defection and thus loss of resources for the group (Ross and Gurr 1989). Granovetter (1978) argues that participation in collective action depends on how many other people are participating. Each person, however, has their own threshold that must be crossed to move towards involvement in a VEO. Amnesty may decrease the number of people willing to remain in the VEO as there is less safety in fewer numbers (Sederberg 1995). These amnesty programs may have “cascade effects” as small changes in these thresholds can lead to large changes in collective action (Kuran 1991). Most of the arguments about amnesty come from criminologists/sociologists while collective behavior models come from sociologists and economists.

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### Detailed Analyses

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**Summary of Relevant Empirical Evidence:** Della Porta (1992), through a comparison of different periods of Italian responses to terrorism, argues that amnesty and repentance laws are most effective at weakening a group. Limited quantitative evidence suggests that amnesty programs within a single country have not been effective at weakening a VEO (Ozdogan and Ozdogan 2007). Other case evidence from Saudi Arabia suggests that amnesty programs can reduce future violence (Slim 2004). Both pieces of empirical evidence are flawed. The Saudi amnesty program is based on official Saudi reporting rather than a scholarly investigation and the study of Turkey analyzes a single program over a short time period to investigate the effects of the amnesty. All of the other evidence associated with effectiveness or lack thereof is anecdotal. Crenshsaw (1991) cites the decline of the Red Brigades as partially due to a law that provided freedom or reduced sentences in exchange for informing. Jones and Libicki (2008) cite examples of government accommodation spurring defections from groups thus lead to weakening group capabilities.

**Empirical Support Score: 3 = Multiple qualitative and/or quantitative studies with mixed results (i.e. some in favor, some against the hypothesis), but more positive than negative findings**

**Applicability to Influencing VEOs:** The studies are directly in the context of VEOs; however, application may depend on group type. Pluchinsky (2008) claims that religiosity may also explain how receptive individuals/groups are to amnesty/reform. Where amnesty might work for Italian communists, it may not work for Global Jihadists.

**Applicability Score:** Direct

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