

Delegitimising Counter-Terrorism



The Activist Campaign to Demonise Prevent

**A report from Policy Exchange's Understanding
Islamism project**

Sir John Jenkins, Dr Damon L. Perry and Dr Paul Stott
Foreword by Rt Hon David Cameron

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Published by
Policy Exchange, 1 Old Queen Street, Westminster, London SW1H 9JA

www.policyexchange.org.uk

ISBN: 978-1-913459-99-4

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Foreword

Rt Hon David Cameron

Too often in politics we talk about the right economic, health, housing or education policy – and only at the end of our speech or manifesto do we talk about cohesion: the central question of how we can create the multi-ethnic, multi-faith, opportunity-based democracy that we want our country to be.

It is time to turn that around and make that cohesion question the central one we are trying to answer, and make all the other policies subservient to it.

In a country where everyone feels at home, there is no place for extremism. It sows division and hatred and threatens our very way of life.

I don't just mean violent extremism. No one becomes a terrorist from a standing start. The warped narratives are what draw people in and pave the way for many to support and even commit terrible acts. That is why in 2011 we broadened the Prevent strategy to cover non-violent as well as violent extremism.

Nor do I just mean Islamist extremism. Far-right and other types of extremism are equally deplorable and dangerous. That is why, also in 2011, we explicitly changed the Prevent strategy to deal with all forms of extremism.

Yet, as the Director-General of MI5 says, "Islamist extremist terrorism [is] still MI5's largest operational mission." It remains our greatest threat.

There has long been a view that factors like poverty explain or even excuse those who espouse the Islamist extremist narrative. Of course we must tackle poverty and all forms of exclusion, but the truth is that many who have gone on to commit appalling acts were from stable, well-off, well-integrated families.

One thing is clear: it is the narrative itself that warps young, vulnerable minds and spurs many to act. And that is what Prevent is designed to tackle. It is a vital tool to intervene when radicalisation might be taking place and to counter the poisonous narrative.

Yet, as we see in this seminal report, there is a concerted campaign to misrepresent and undermine Prevent. This comes from a small but vocal range of fringe groups, many of whom have extremist links themselves. The depth of that hostility to Prevent, and the extent of the grievance culture that is used to justify it, has intensified greatly in recent years.

The central allegation is that Prevent unfairly targets Muslims. Wrong. In 2020/21 46 per cent of referrals to Channel's de-radicalisation programme related to far-right extremism and just 22 per cent to Islamist extremism.

Of course people should be able to challenge policies and agitate for reform. But you get the feeling from reading this report that there is no form of Prevent that these groups would support.

Instead, the view seems to be that extremism should be dealt with by communities, rather than the authorities. That is deeply worrying. We are one country, with one legal system, which applies to and protects all of us. Any notion of separate systems threatens the very cohesion we need to foster.

I believe those who refuse to challenge the falsehoods surrounding Prevent are guilty of a form of “passive tolerance”, whereby society fails to interfere in minority communities for fear of appearing racist. Such passive tolerance is what allowed female genital mutilation and forced marriage to flourish in this country. We must not let it jeopardise our fight against extremism.

So just as we need to counter the Islamist extremist narrative, we also need to counter the anti-Prevent narrative. We need to show that delegitimising counter terrorism is, in essence, enabling terrorism. In 2015 we introduced a statutory obligation for those in specified authorities, such as schools and universities, to pay due regard to the need to prevent people being drawn into terrorism, including referring those at risk of radicalisation for appropriate support. Of course buy-in and consent are vital to that endeavour. But they’re impossible when you’re fighting against falsehoods like those surrounding this strategy.

Policy Exchange has long been a leading voice on these issues, helping to shape government policy. I commend its efforts in this report and more widely to challenge the disinformation and conspiracy theories that are so damaging to both counter-extremism and cohesion. The cause is urgent, and the forthcoming Prevent review by William Shawcross is welcome and timely. Unless we stand up for Prevent, the strategy will not survive.

Executive Summary

Anti-Prevent Campaigns

- Since the beginning of the Prevent strategy, there have been a number of inter-related, well-organised, and media-savvy campaigns that have sought to undermine Prevent and counter-extremism efforts. These campaigns have been led by or strongly featured Islamist groups, such as the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND), and CAGE, which has described Prevent as “fundamentally racist and Islamophobic”.¹ These campaigns have occurred under successive governments, spanning Labour, Coalition, and Conservative administrations.
- The end goal of these Islamist-led campaigns is the scrapping of Prevent and the counter-extremism programme. They effectively seek to eliminate from official analysis and policy the role of Islamist ideology in terrorism and harmful, extremist social practices. This is done, somewhat paradoxically, by drawing upon arguments in favour of freedom of expression.
- These campaigns have been active during 2021 and 2022 in opposing the current Independent Review of Prevent led by William Shawcross:
 - In February 2021, MEND organised the publication of a statement boycotting the Prevent Review, signed by MEND, CAGE, and 15 other groups, including Amnesty International and Liberty;²
 - The “People’s Review of Prevent” was launched in 2021 by a former CAGE operations manager as an alternative to the Independent Review of Prevent, to gather “evidence” from people who allegedly do not feel safe in speaking about Prevent. The campaign is supported by various advisory panels involving Muslim and non-Muslim academics, lawyers, and others;
 - The People’s Review of Prevent organised the publication of a statement entitled, “Boycott The Shawcross Review of Prevent” on March 17, 2021, signed by representatives of CAGE, the Cordoba Foundation, the Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS), Friends of Al-Aqsa, the Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC), MEND, the Muslim

1. “Shawcross’s appointment must lead to boycott of sham review”, CAGE website, January 26, 2021, <https://www.cage.ngo/shawcrosss-appointment-must-lead-to-boycott-of-sham-review>.

2. “Joint Public Statement: NGOs Condemn Appointment of William Shawcross and Announce Civil Society-led Review of Prevent”, MEND website, February 16, 2021, <https://www.mend.org.uk/joint-public-statement-ngos-condemn-appointment-of-william-shawcross-and-announce-civil-society-led-review-of-prevent/>.

Association of Britain, and others;³

- The People’s Review of Prevent published a report, “The People’s Review of Prevent”, On February 15, 2022. Co-authored by John Holmwood and Layla Aitlhadj, the report claimed that “Prevent is an abuse of fundamental human rights and protected equalities, especially involving discrimination on the grounds of race and ethnicity, and religion.”⁴
- University campuses have been a key arena in which anti-Prevent activism has been particularly vocal. Notable aspects of campus anti-Prevent activism include:
 - “Students not Suspects”, a campaign launched in 2015 on university campuses by FOSIS, the Black Students’ Campaign, the National Union of Students (NUS), and the University and College Union (UCU).⁵ At the time of its launch, the current secretary general of the MCB, Zara Mohammed, was a senior member of FOSIS;
 - The “Preventing Prevent Handbook” produced by the Black Students’ Campaign in 2015 as part of the “Students Not Suspects” campaign;⁶ and
 - Motions boycotting Prevent passed in students’ unions at numerous universities. These peaked in 2015 with the proposed Counter-Terrorism and Security Act, but numerous universities still have these boycotts in place, including Goldsmiths, SOAS, and UCL.
- Other notable elements of this campaign include:
 - “Together Against Prevent”, a campaign launched in 2015 by IHRC and Netpol, the Network for Police Monitoring;⁷
 - “The Impact of Prevent on Muslim Communities: A Briefing to the Labour Party on how British Muslim Communities are Affected by Counter-Extremism Policies”, a report prepared for the Labour Party in 2016 by the MCB;⁸
 - “Prevent: Why We Should Dissent”, a booklet produced in 2017 by MEND and the group Stand Up To Racism, an anti-racist organisation which shares many activists with the Socialist Workers Party.⁹ The resource was aimed at activists to encourage dissent from Prevent in workplaces, colleges and campuses; and
 - “Beyond PREVENT: A Real Alternative To Securitised Policies”, a report published by CAGE in January 2020.¹⁰ This is one of many publications against Prevent by CAGE, dating back to at least 2011, when the organisation was known as Cageprisoners, and published “Good Muslim Bad Muslim: A response to the revised Prevent strategy”.¹¹
 - On December 22, 2021, CAGE launched a new website, “Abolish Prevent”, which it described as “a comprehensive online resource with over 200 pieces of content, featuring know your right guides, reports and views from across the

3. “About the Boycott”, People’s Review of Prevent website, undated, <https://peoplesreviewofprevent.org/boycott/>.

4. John Holmwood and Layla Aitlhadj, “The People’s Review of Prevent”, People’s Review of Prevent website, February 15, 2022, p.136. Available at: <https://peoplesreviewofprevent.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/mainreportlatest.pdf>.

5. “About”, Students Not Suspects website, undated, <https://studentsnotsuspectsdotcom.wordpress.com/about-2/>.

6. NUS Black Students’ Campaign, “Preventing Prevent: an updated handbook”, National Union of Students, London, November 2017, p.80.

7. “Campaigners launch ‘Together Against Prevent’”, Netpol website, September 30, 2015, <https://netpol.org/2015/09/30/campaigners-launch-together-against-prevent/>.

8. Muslim Council of Britain, “MCB, The Impact of Prevent on Muslim Communities: A Briefing to the Labour Party on how British Muslim Communities are Affected by Counter-Extremism Policies”, February 2016, p.5. Available at: <http://archive.mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/MCB-CT-Briefing2.pdf>.

9. “Prevent: Why We Should Dissent’ – New Resource Launched By Stand Up To Racism and MEND”, Stand Up To Racism website, January 3, 2017, <http://www.standupforracism.org.uk/prevent-dissent-new-resource-launched-stand-racism-mend/>.

10. “Beyond PREVENT: A Real Alternative To Securitised Policies (Report)”, CAGE website, January 16, 2020, <https://www.cage.ngo/cage-beyond-prevent-report>.

11. Jahangir Mohammed and Adnam Siddiqui, “Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: A response to the revised Prevent strategy”, Cageprisoners, 2011. Available at: https://www.cage.ngo/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/CP_Good_Muslim_Bad_Muslim.pdf.

board that demonstrate the consensus rejecting PREVENT”.¹²

- In 2018, when the Home Office announced the creation of the Commission for Countering Extremism (CCE) and the appointment of Sara Khan, anti-Prevent activist groups, such as FOSIS and CAGE, denounced the CCE and made personal attacks on Khan. In January 2018, FOSIS expressed its “deep concern over the Government’s counter-extremism strategy following its announcement of Sara Khan as the new head of the Commission for Countering Extremism”.¹³ It added, “[Sara] Khan is a strong advocate for the Government’s toxic Prevent policy, which has unfairly targeted Muslims on many occasions.”¹⁴
- Anti-Prevent groups’ campaigns against Prevent have not explicitly discouraged Muslims from reporting concerns regarding suspected terrorism cases to the police. But some Islamist individuals in the UK have voiced dissenting or skeptical views regarding cooperation with the police over such cases. These include the views that:
 - reporting to the police may not be the best thing to do since it does not address the root causes of terrorism (Rizwana Hamid, Director of the Centre for Media Monitoring);
 - reporting to the police is spying and not helpful (Mohammed Kozbar, chairman of Finsbury Park Mosque);
 - possible terrorism cases are potentially better handled in the community (Maulana Shahid Raza OBE, president of the World Islamic Mission); or
 - reporting to the police is sinful (Uthman Lateef, a presenter on Islam Channel).

Anti-Prevent Themes and Challenges

- The anti-Prevent narrative is composed of several re-occurring themes or claims. These risk exacerbating Muslims’ distrust in and disengagement from national and local efforts to combat terrorism and extremism. Among these claims are the following:
 - Prevent disproportionately and unfairly targets Muslims, “securitising” them as a “suspect community”;
 - Prevent criminalises “conservative” Muslim beliefs by defining them as “extremist” and undermines the freedom of expression;
 - Prevent is a vehicle for the Government to spy on Muslims, with schools and teachers cast as spies;
 - Prevent officers can arbitrarily take away Muslim children;
 - Muslims working on Prevent are in some way disloyal or even “native informants”; and
 - Prevent in itself is racist and Islamophobic, so cannot be reformed.
- These claims, however, do not stand up to scrutiny. Prevent referrals of Muslims, including those through the Channel programme,

12. “CAGE launches comprehensive online resource evidencing why PREVENT must be abolished”, CAGE website, December 22, 2021, <https://www.cage.ngo/cage-launches-comprehensive-online-resource-evidencing-why-prevent-must-be-abolished>.

13. FOSIS, Press Release, Facebook, January 27, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/fosischannel/posts/1568596023177632>.

14. Ibid.

are actually low relative to the proportion of Islamist terrorism-related plots, arrests, and deaths. Mere conservative beliefs are not targeted by Prevent or defined as extremist; Prevent is concerned with extremist beliefs and views that may lead to terrorism or other social harms. The inability or refusal of anti-Prevent activists to distinguish between religious conservatism and extremism obfuscates this reality. Prevent officers have no power to take away children. The authority to remove children from parents lies with High Court judges who have done so in rare cases, often where there is a context of clear risk or abuse.

- However, the lack of a robust, concerted and sustained effort on the part of the Government to rebut these claims serves to undermine trust in the Government's authority to protect the public against Islamist terrorism and extremism. There can be no successful Prevent programme unless the Government defends it. The Home Office's Research, Information and Communications Unit (RICU) – which was established to analyse and counter extremist narratives – has not publicly engaged with socially divisive anti-Prevent narratives. The lack of an adequate response by the Government risks undermining community cohesion by strengthening the view among some Muslims that they are a community under siege.
- Indeed, the very absence of such a response, the failure by governments across the political spectrum to make a convincing public case for the value of Prevent and their failure to articulate why it is important to address the challenge of Islamist ideologies, leaves a major gap in public discourse about national security and community cohesion that others seek to fill.
- These are oversights that need to be addressed in order to mitigate the risks of exacerbating social segregation (a problem highlighted in Dame Louise Casey's 2016 report on integration); of losing mainstream Muslim support for counter-terrorism and counter-extremism efforts; and of being able properly and openly to examine, analyse and debate extremism and integration issues.

Policy Recommendations¹⁵

1. **The Government should adopt a three-pronged approach to extremism focusing, respectively, on analysis, rebuttal and due diligence: Firstly, establish a Centre for the Study of Extremism in Britain. This would produce detailed analyses of extremism, utilising models of best practice from this country and Europe. Secondly, connected to this, establish a dedicated communications unit to educate both government departments and the public on the problems of extremism as well as the merits of Prevent and the Government's counter-extremism work. It should have a clear priority to publicly combat**

15. For a fuller description of the policy recommendations, see the last section of this report.

disinformation about the Government’s counter-terrorism and counter-extremism strategies. And, thirdly, establish a due diligence unit, also connected to the research centre, to develop criteria for engagement with community organisations, as well as the monitoring of government partnerships accordingly. The Centre for the Study of Extremism and the two units would sit in the Home Office.

- The Government urgently needs to develop greater expertise on extremism, violent and non-violent, and the range of problems this presents across government departments – including counter-terrorism, education, social integration, charities, and prisons. A research centre established for this purpose is essential to improve understanding across government departments of the nature of and policy challenges arising from extremism, including Islamist extremism, and propose appropriate responses.
- A dedicated unit alongside the Centre for the Study of Extremism should be responsible for the effective communication within government and to the public of accurate and relevant information about Prevent and counter-extremism initiatives. Government officials at both national and local levels, and the media, currently have no go-to source for reliable, fact-based, and up-to-date information about Prevent or counter-extremism programmes. Having such a unit will help publicly tackle the false grievance narratives and conspiracy theories regarding these programmes disseminated by Islamists and their allies.
- A second unit should be established to conduct due diligence on government partners to ensure that the Government, and its agencies, are “choosing their friends wisely” (more on this below).
- The new centre, as well as the communications and due diligence units, will require dedicated staff, adequate funding, and strong political leadership. Ideally, they should be under the leadership of the Home Secretary. On questions of national security, ministers cannot delegate responsibility for defending government policy against those seeking to undermine it. They must take personal responsibility for the effort.

2. Develop criteria for engagement with community organisations at the national and local levels¹⁶

- To ensure the Government does not support any organisation that seeks to undermine its practical ability or legitimacy to conduct effective counter-terrorism and counter-extremism programmes, it should develop clear guidelines regarding which organisations it will partner with and which it will not. This should apply not just to funded projects, but any event at which the logo of

16. The need for clear engagement criteria was recognised in a 2009 Policy Exchange report, *Choosing Our Friends Wisely*, and the Commission for Countering Extremism’s 2019 report, *Challenging Hateful Extremism*. See: Shiraz Maher and Martyn Frampton, “Choosing our friends wisely: Criteria for engagement with Muslim groups”, Policy Exchange, London, March 2009. Available at: <https://policy-exchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/choosing-our-friends-wisely-mar-09.pdf>; and Commission for Countering Extremism, *Challenging Hateful Extremism*, October 2019. p.132. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/874101/200320_Challenging_Hateful_Extremism.pdf.

a government body appears, or could conceivably appear, on promotional material. These criteria should be based on a set of nationally applicable values. Sitting in the Home Office, a new due diligence unit would also certify government partners, conducting due diligence to ensure that organisations opposed to the country's values, are not selected as partners by the government or public bodies.

- Criteria for engagement will not only ensure that tax-payers' money is not being used to strengthen organisations with extremist connections; they will also help empower genuinely progressive forces, including those from within the Muslim community. The guidance should also make clear what kinds of engagement the criteria cover, such as ministerial attendance or endorsement, financial assistance, and official partnership and consultancy. National and local authorities' adherence to the criteria should be monitored by the due diligence unit.

3. Do not fund or partner with organisations that disseminate false narratives and conspiracy theories about Prevent, who campaign against counter-terrorism or counter-extremism efforts; promote religious sectarianism or blasphemy codes, and those that encourage non-cooperation with the police and security services

- One of the key criteria for engaging with community organisations should be that such organisations do not disseminate disinformation and false narratives, including conspiracy theories, about the Government's efforts to combat terrorism and extremism. Organisations that strategically disseminate claims that the Government criminalises Islamic thought and beliefs, for example, should be beyond the pale of governmental engagement. Similarly, those campaigning against a key element of our anti-terrorist strategy, such as Prevent. This is not to say they should be silenced; simply they should not be officially endorsed or publicly funded. Organisations that discourage people from cooperating with the police or security services in potential cases of radicalisation or terrorism should also not be partnered with or publicly funded.

Introduction

Islamist activists' opposition to the Government's counter-terrorism and counter-extremism strategies is overwhelmingly focused on discrediting and scrapping Prevent, the counter-radicalisation strand of the counter-terrorism strategy. This is driven by a shared view that Prevent – due to its inclusion of addressing the ideological component of terrorism – amounts to a systematic effort to criminalise Islamic beliefs, stigmatise Muslims as a “suspect community”,¹⁷ and “intervene into almost every part of Muslim public and private life, and into their minds and hearts as well”.¹⁸

Islamists have discouraged British Muslims from working with the authorities in the fields of policing, counter-terrorism and counter-extremism. In this they have been eagerly joined by sections of the Left, including Stand Up to Racism, who share an oppositional desire to promote boycotts of key governmental institutions and initiatives. Islamists and their allies have driven a consistent message home to the British public, painting the authorities as being untrustworthy, oppressive, and illiberal. A current mantra - or meme, as befitting for today's predominantly digital media – is that the Government is systemically racist and Islamophobic.

Those who have engaged with the authorities have been denigrated, and terms such as “ratting” have entered debates.¹⁹ Muslims who have worked with the authorities have been denigrated with other, more abusive terms. For example, Roshan M Salih, an editor of the media outlet 5Pillars, characterised anti-extremism campaigner Sara Khan as a “native informant”.²⁰ Imam Shakeel Begg of the Lewisham Islamic Centre has spoken more generally of “house Muslims”. *The Times* reported that:

*Undercover filming recorded the preacher Shakeel Begg insulting Muslims who support counterterrorism laws when he shared a platform with MEND at an event. Mr Begg, who was found by the High Court to be an extremist, used the term “house Muslims,” adapting one used for black slaves favoured by their masters in America. He also attacked the Prevent scheme.*²¹

In his response,²² Begg confirmed his opposition to Prevent, and did not challenge the claim that he used the phrase “house Muslims”.²³

In a 2019 report the counter-extremism practitioner Liam Duffy outlined cases where Muslims employed as Prevent practitioners had suffered intimidation, threats and even been forced to move home because of opposition from those angered by the nature of their employment. One individual was forced to change the mosque they had attended since childhood, following a campaign of rumour mongering, that included claims they were working for MI5. Another worked on Prevent in an area well way from his home, for security reasons.²⁴ This targeting of

17. See, for example, Islamic Human Rights Commission, “British Muslims – ‘The Suspect Community?’”, IHRC website, August 23, 2013, <https://www.ihrc.org.uk/publications/briefings/10686-british-muslims-the-suspect-community/>.
18. See, for example, CAGE, “CVE has always been about targeting Islam and so has PREVENT”, CAGE website, March 7, 2017, <https://www.cage.ngo/cve-has-always-been-about-targeting-islam-and-so-has-prevent>.
19. “How should we tackle extremism?”, BBC Newsnight, June 5, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZEUYNMDL_uw; see Anas Altikriti from 2:34.
20. Roshan M Salih/@RmSalih, Twitter post, January 25, 2018, <https://twitter.com/rmsalih/status/956517083306741761>.
21. Dominic Kennedy, “Racist slur” by Muslim group against tolerance tsar Sara Khan, *The Times*, March 26, 2018, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/edition/news/racist-slur-by-muslim-group-against-tolerance-tsar-sara-khan-0hf35kxpk>.
22. Lewisham Mosque/@LewishamMosque, Twitter post, March 26, 2018, <https://twitter.com/lewishamosque/status/978356316761657344>.
23. “Imam Shakeel responds to Dispatches: ‘I will continue to speak the truth to defend my community’”, Lewisham Islamic Centre website, March 22, 2018, <https://lewishamislamiccentre.com/2018/03/22/imam-shakeel-responds-to-dispatches-i-will-continue-to-speak-the-truth-to-defend-my-community/>.
24. Liam Duffy, “The No True Muslim Fallacy: How Muslims are intimidated and marginalised for supporting counter-extremism initiatives”, Civitas, 2019. Available at: <https://www.civitas.org.uk/content/files/thenotrueislamfallacy.pdf>.

individuals can have a noticeable effect on attitudes to counter-extremism policies in parts of the public sector. In 2019 the Government's former integration tsar, Dame Louise Casey, and Sir Mark Rowley, former head of counter terrorism policing, observed of the campaign against Prevent:

it is extraordinary that the charities, police officers, teachers and social workers are the front line of this fight against terrorism are undermined at every turn by a vocal minority of campaigners who claim to represent the communities most at risk and are emboldened by politicians who should know better.²⁵

This report sets out examples of the activists' call to boycott and refusal to engage with the Government on countering extremism, using their own words and statements. The current opposition to the independent review of Prevent, led by William Shawcross, is shown to be far from exceptional. Instead, it reflects a recognisable pattern in British activist politics: an alliance of Islamists and Leftists dedicated to undermining the Government's counter-terrorism and counter-extremism strategies, and, ultimately, their collapse. Policy Exchange previously analysed this alliance in Sir John Jenkins's report on *Islamism and the Left*, and it is a relationship which continues to be both influential and destructive.²⁶

At the inquest into the Fishmongers Hall terrorist attack – which followed Usman Khan's 2019 murder of Saskia Jones and Jack Merritt of the University of Cambridge project Learning Together – remarkable evidence was given by Ruth Armstrong, Learning Together's co-founder. When asked about receiving training on the Prevent duty, Armstrong declared herself "somewhat of a conscientious objector. As a school governor I also refused to take part in this".²⁷ She only completed the training course when it was made mandatory to do so.²⁸ This report does not suggest that such oppositional attitudes are supported by the majority of British Muslims. Indeed – if polling is accurate about the most criticised aspect of our counter-terrorism programme, the Prevent strategy – the opposite is the case. In 2020, a survey of British Muslims by CREST Advisory found that 55% had not even heard of Prevent.²⁹ This was despite the mobilisation of national campaigns opposing the programme involving organisations such as the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB), Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND), the Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC), the Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS), and CAGE. Demonstrating that the narrative regarding Prevent of the aforementioned activist groups does not broadly resonate with British Muslims, the authors of the CREST survey, Clements et al., found

levels of support for policing and counter-extremism work among British Muslims were similar to those of the population as a whole. These findings contradict common polarising narratives which claim either that British Muslims do not accept that Islamist extremism is a serious threat and are "in denial" or that argue Prevent is "toxic" to British Muslims and has "alienated" them.³⁰

25. Louise Casey and Mark Rowley, "Our efforts to stop extremism are 'undermined at every turn'", *The Sunday Times*, March 17, 2019, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/our-efforts-to-stop-extremism-are-undermined-at-every-turn-cwwrm3d3t>.

26. Sir John Jenkins, *Islamism and the Left: An Essay in Two Parts*, Policy Exchange, London, July 2021. Available at: <https://legacysite1.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/Islamism-and-the-Left.pdf>.

27. "Fishmongers' Hall Inquests Day 9", April 9, 2021, lines 12-13, para.112. Available at: <https://fishmongershallinquests.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/FHI-Day-9-23-April-2021.pdf>.

28. Peter Clarke, *Fishmongers Hall: A Preventable Tragedy*, Policy Exchange, London, May 2021, p.15. Available at: <https://legacysite1.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/Fishmongers%E2%80%99-Hall-A-Preventable-Tragedy.pdf>.

29. Jon Clements, Dan Forman, and Manon Roberts, *Listening to British Muslims: policing, extremism and Prevent*, CREST Advisory, March 2020. Available at: <https://www.crestadvisory.com/post/listening-to-british-muslims-policing-extremism-and-prevent>.

30. Ibid.

As the campaigner Akeela Ahmed wrote in the foreword of the survey, “the reality is that British Muslims are very worried about the threat of Islamist extremism.”³¹

Islamist-led campaigns to delegitimise the Government’s counter-terrorism and counter-extremism policies have occurred under successive governments, spanning Labour, Coalition, and Conservative administrations. This report, which mostly focuses on the ten-year period from 2011 to 2022, considers three areas in which these campaigns have been particularly active: calls to boycott the Prevent strategy; calls to reject working with the Commission for Countering Extremism; and opposition to cooperation with the police and security services. Examples of rejectionist activism are provided below. In the section that follows, several particularly concerning themes that recur in these Islamist-led campaigns are identified and challenged. Finally, after some concluding remarks, some policy recommendations are provided to begin to address the challenges these campaigns present.

31. Ibid., p.6.

Delegitimising Prevent: Organisations and Initiatives

What is Prevent?

Prevent is one of the four aspects of the United Kingdom's counter-terrorism strategy, known as Contest, and is one of 4Ps which categorise the work of the authorities – Prevent, Pursue, Protect and Prepare.³² Prevent aims to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism,³³ a process which involves “contesting the ideologies and narratives which underpin it”.³⁴ The academic Steven Greer has traced the origins of Prevent to 2002, a period where the 9/11 attacks concentrated minds on the need to tackle the appeal of jihadist ideology. Prevent was unveiled to the public in 2006, and implemented in two distinct phases – 2006 to 2011, and 2011 to the present.³⁵ The period from 2011 onwards saw a shift in emphasis whereby Prevent expanded to consider far-right extremism, contesting for example the rise of the English Defence League.³⁶ The importance of Prevent was further emphasised by the rise of the Islamic State group in Iraq and Syria, and the realisation, by 2014, of its appeal to a minority of young British Sunni Muslims.

Prevent guides counter-radicalisation work in a series of locations including local communities, and institutions such as schools, charities and the prison sector.³⁷ Greer estimates that over 2500 institutions have engaged with Prevent, and in the year 2015-16, 142 projects reached 42,000 participants.³⁸ Section 26 of the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015 places a duty upon public authorities to prevent people being drawn into terrorism, making institutional engagement with the Prevent strategy mandatory. Despite this legal requirement, negative responses to Prevent have not been limited to criticism of its implementation or calls for a review of certain aspects of the policy,³⁹ but also campaigns for a boycott of the programme, as well as demands directed at the Government to scrap it entirely.

Community and Activist Organisations

The following groups have been prominent in the debates surrounding Prevent, and some have at times been dogged in their opposition. They are listed in alphabetical order.

32. HM Government, *CONTEST: The United Kingdom's Strategy for Countering Terrorism*, Cm 9608, UK Government website, June 2018. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/716907/140618_CCS207_CCS0218929798-1_CONTEST_3.0_WEB.pdf.

33. *Ibid.*, p.8.

34. Steven Greer, *Tackling Terrorism in Britain: Threats, responses and challenges twenty years after 9/11* (Oxford: Routledge, 2021), p.112.

35. *Ibid.*, p.114.

36. Craig McCann, *The Prevent Strategy and Right-wing Extremism: A Case Study of the English Defence League*, (Oxford: Routledge, 2019).

37. Greer, *Tackling Terrorism in Britain*, p.115.

38. *Ibid.*, p.120

39. “MCB Welcomes the Refocusing of our Collective Responsibility in the Pursuit to Prevent Terrorism”, MCB website, August 11, 2009, captured on January 23, 2013, https://web.archive.org/web/20130123171624/http://mcb.org.uk/media/presstext.php?ann_id=363.

CAGE

CAGE describes itself as an “independent grassroots organisation” which campaigns “against discriminatory state policies”.⁴⁰ It has criticised Prevent since at least 2011, consistently arguing that the strategy should be abolished.⁴¹ As perhaps the most vocal critic of the Government’s counter-terrorism and counter-extremism strategies, CAGE has published numerous reports and organised regular talks on campuses seeking to undermine and delegitimise Prevent.⁴² It’s Research Director, Asim Qureshi, attracted media attention in 2015, when he described Mohammed Emwazi, the Islamic State executioner, as having been a “beautiful young man” and alleged that Emwazi’s harassment by the British authorities was the key factor in his radicalisation.⁴³ He was also revealed to have addressed a Hizb ut-Tahrir rally in London calling for Muslims “to support the jihad of our brothers and sisters in these countries when they are facing the oppression of the West”.⁴⁴

In a recent attack on Prevent, in January 2021, CAGE’s Managing Director, Muhammad Rabbani, described it as “fundamentally racist and Islamophobic”.⁴⁵ Commenting on the appointment of William Shawcross as the independent reviewer of Prevent, he stated “Shawcross is embedded in a network of Islamophobia having been a former director of the Islamophobic Henry Jackson Society”, adding that Shawcross had “targetted Muslim charities” whilst head of the Charity Commission, and had described Islam in Europe as “one of the greatest, most terrifying problems of our future”.⁴⁶ Rabbani continued, expressing CAGE’s non-negotiable position on Prevent:

*We objected to the “review” and insisted on our principled call to end Prevent, because there is no way to reform a fundamentally racist and Islamophobic policy. The appointment of Shawcross, following the shameless appointment of Lord Carlile previously, should lead all civil society actors to echo our call for ending Prevent and to robustly boycott this sham of a review.*⁴⁷

In February 2021, the campaign against the Prevent review continued with a joint letter signed by 17 organisations, including Islamist groups such as CAGE and MEND, with non-Muslim organisations including the Runnymede Trust, Amnesty and the Open Society Initiative.⁴⁸ In the media coverage of the letter, Rabbani was quoted as saying:

*We encourage campaigning groups and organisers to join the call for boycotting the review as well as redoubling opposition to the counter-extremism apparatus on the whole, including calling to end Prevent – which is now openly a means of criminalising dissent.*⁴⁹

In January 2020, CAGE re-invigorated and elaborated upon an “8 point plan” to replace Prevent in a 50-page report called *Beyond PREVENT: A Real Alternative To Securitised Policies*.⁵⁰ Coinciding with this report, CAGE organised and published a supporting letter signed by over 100 academics and activists. Signatories included several prominent Muslim activists, such as Anas Altikriti, the founder and CEO of the Cordoba Foundation and a

40. “About Us”, CAGE website, undated, <https://www.cage.ngo/cage-about-us>.

41. “Good Muslim Bad Muslim: A response to the revised PREVENT strategy”, CAGE website, July 1, 2011, <https://www.cage.ngo/good-muslim-bad-muslims>.

42. For examples of CAGE’s reports on Prevent, see “New case analysis shows toxic influence of Ofsted monitoring, government diktat and PREVENT in censoring Palestine Solidarity in schools”, CAGE website, July 14, 2021, <https://www.cage.ngo/new-case-analysis-shows-toxic-influence-of-ofsted-monitoring-government-diktat-and-prevent-in-censoring-palestine-solidarity-in-schools>; “CAGE Briefing: PREVENT and The Security industry exploiting Covid pandemic to build a Surveillance State”, CAGE website, May 14, 2020, <https://www.cage.ngo/cage-briefing-prevent-and-the-security-industry-exploiting-covid-pandemic-to-build-a-surveillance-state>; “Beyond PREVENT: A Real Alternative To Securitised Policies (Report)”, CAGE website, January 16, 2020, <https://www.cage.ngo/cage-beyond-prevent-report>; and “The PREVENT strategy: A cradle to grave police-state”, CAGE website, February 1, 2014, <https://www.cage.ngo/prevent-strategy-cradle-grave-police-state>.

43. Robert Mendick, “Jihadi John: Activist who praised Mohammed Emwazi as ‘beautiful’ caught on video backing jihad”, The Telegraph, February 27, 2015, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/11440808/Jihadi-John-Activist-who-praised-Mohammed-Emwazi-as-beautiful-caught-on-video-backing-jihad.html>. For the video, see “Asim Qureshi speaks at anti-American protest rally”, Daily Mail, May 4, 2015, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/video/news/video-1180712/Asim-Qureshi-speaks-anti-American-protest-rally.html>.

44. Ibid.

45. “Shawcross’s appointment must lead to boycott of sham review”, CAGE website, January 26, 2021, <https://www.cage.ngo/shawcross-appointment-must-lead-to-boycott-of-sham-review>.

46. Ibid. But as researcher Hannah Stuart has pointed out in Shawcross’s defence, his comments about Islam and Europe appear to have been taken out of context from a wider discussion about terrorism. She said, “The quote about Europe and Islam being attributed to William Shawcross is misleading. He was speaking in 2012 about his book *Justice and the Enemy*.” See Hannah Stuart/@HannahStuart, Twitter post, January 26, 2021, <https://twitter.com/HannahStuart/status/1354128753820119042>. A similar defence was made by Emma Webb, who provided the fuller context for Shawcross’s comments. See Emma Webb, The sliming of William Shawcross, Unherd, January 28, 2021, <https://unherd.com/thepost/the-sliming-of-william-shawcross/>.

47. Ibid.

48. Simon Hooper, “UK rights groups to boycott Prevent review over Shawcross appointment”, Middle East Eye, February 16, 2021, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/uk-rights-groups-boycott-prevent-review-over-shawcross-appointment>.

49. Ibid.

50. CAGE, “Beyond PREVENT: A Real Alternative To Securitised Policies”, January 2020. Available at: <https://www.cage.ngo/cage-beyond-prevent-report>.

51. Ibid., p.37. The government describes “fundamental British values” as “including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs”. It defines “extremism” as the “active opposition” to these values. See Home Office, Prevent Strategy, Cm 8092, 2011, p.34. Available at: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97976/prevent-strategy-review.pdf.
52. CAGE, “Beyond PREVENT: A Real Alternative To Securitized Policies”, p.36.
53. Abolish Prevent website, <https://www.abolishprevent.com/>.
54. “A timeline of CAGE’s role in the ‘Abolish Prevent Movement’”, Abolish Prevent website, undated, <https://www.abolishprevent.com/timeline>.
55. Gordon Rayner and Tom Whitehead, “Six universities face inquiry over Cage campus talks”, The Telegraph, January 6, 2016, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationnews/12085765/Six-universities-face-inquiry-over-Cage-campus-talks.html>.
56. “U.K. government and community groups struggle to stop Islamic radicalization spike”, PBS Newshour, January 27, 2015. <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/u-k-government-community-groups-struggle-stop-islamic-radicalization-spike/>.
57. Sophie Bush, “Ex-Guantanamo Detainee Blasts Government Prevent Strategy”, The SOAS Spirit, October 10, 2015, <http://soasspirit.co.uk/news/prevent-begg/>.
58. Bahmanpour has called on Israel’s destruction for many years, from at least 2004 and as recently as 2018. See “Al Quds Day in London – Hatred Takes Wing”, European Eye on Radicalization, June 18, 2018, <https://eeradicalization.com/al-quds-day-in-london-hatred-takes-wing/>, and “QUDS DAY 1424/2003”, Innovative Minds website, webpage captured November 13, 2004, <https://web.archive.org/web/20041113091524/http://www.inminds.co.uk/qudsday2003.html>.
59. Andrew Norfolk, “Iran ‘propaganda’ group IHRC gets £1.2m from taxpayer-backed charity”, The Times, October 10, 2019, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/iran-propaganda-group-ihrc-gets-1-2m-from-taxpayer-backed-charity-r2lh7jkc9>.
60. Arzu Merali, “To Liberate or not to liberate? Universalism, Islam and Human Rights (Part 1)”, in Crescent International, Volume 32, Number 13, October 1, 2003. Available at: <https://www.icit-digital.org/articles/to-liberate-or-not-to-liberate-universalism-islam-and-human-rights-part-1>.
61. “Panel contributions #StrikeTheEmpireBack (Malcolm X Movement)”, Malcolm X Movement channel, YouTube, November 23, 2014, <https://youtu.be/R3FB4spo7Ns?t=2730>.
62. Andrew Norfolk, “Iran ‘propaganda’ group IHRC gets £1.2m from taxpayer-backed charity”, The Times, October 10, 2019, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/iran-propaganda-group-ihrc-gets-1-2m-from-taxpayer-backed-charity-r2lh7jkc9>.
63. “Aims and Objectives”, IHRC website, undated, <https://www.ihrc.org.uk/about/aims-and-objectives/>.
64. “Preventing Violent Extremism; Response by the Islamic Human Rights Commission to UK Government Consultation”, IHRC website, October 19, 2009, <https://www.ihrc.org.uk/publications/briefings/9108-preventing-violent-extremism-response-by-the-islamic-human-rights-commission-to-uk-government-consultation-september-2009/>.
65. “EU Advocacy”, IHRC website, September 7, 2017, <https://www.ihrc.org.uk/activities/projects/11943-eu-advocacy/>.
66. “IHRC draws attention to United Kingdom and Northern Ireland’s PREVENT Programme”, IHRC website, October 11, 2017, <https://www.ihrc.org.uk/activities/ihrc-at-un/11963-ihrc-draws-attention-to-united-kingdom-and-northern-irelands-prevent-programme/>.

past president of the MAB, as well as Ismail Patel of Friends of Al Aqsa. The report argued for the scrapping of Prevent, and the removal of “fundamental British values” as the yardstick for measuring extremism.⁵¹ The report reveals CAGE’s main gripe with Prevent and the counter-extremism strategy, namely, the risk they allegedly pose of “criminalising a wide range of perfectly un-violent beliefs and political activity”.⁵²

This “8 point plan” also featured centrally in a new website launched by CAGE on December 22, 2021, called “Abolish Prevent”.⁵³ This website serves to collect all of CAGE’s reports on Prevent and consolidate its anti-Prevent campaign work into one platform. It also provides a timeline of its role in what it refers to as the “Abolish Prevent Movement”.⁵⁴

In 2016, *The Telegraph* reported that CAGE’s talks at university campuses included instructions for students to “sabotage” Prevent.⁵⁵ Moazzam Begg, CAGE’s Outreach Director, reportedly warned students about participating in Prevent, saying, “We need to call on and speak to our lecturers and teachers and ask them not to take part in this.” Six universities, the report said, were subsequently facing an inquiry by the Higher Education Funding Council for England, the official watchdog body for higher education.

Earlier, in 2015, Begg told PBS News, “The basic programs like Prevent, for example, Preventing Violent Extremism, as it was called in the beginning, wanted communities literally to spy on one another.”⁵⁶ Speaking to students and members of the public at University College London at an event coordinated by the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) “Decolonising Our Minds” society, Begg asserted, “We are subject to the whims of British government. Terrorism is a non-white concept as perceived and legislated for by government.”⁵⁷

The Islamic Human Rights Commission

The Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC), established in 1997, is a London-based advocacy organisation that campaigns against Islamophobia. It also organises the annual Al-Quds Parade in London, at which some speakers, such as the Iranian-born Mohammad Saeed Bahmanpour, have called for the annihilation of the state of Israel.⁵⁸ The group was founded by its chairman, Massoud Shadjareh, who has hailed Iran as “the only nation standing against oppression, against tyranny”,⁵⁹ and his wife Arzu Merali, who has rejected the Universal Declaration of Human Rights because of its Eurocentricity,⁶⁰ and identified “the West” and “the NATO countries” as the “enemy”.⁶¹ The IHRC has links to the Iranian regime. One of its directors is the Tehran-based secretary of Iran’s Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, a leading policymaking body.⁶²

The IHRC, which strives for “a new social and international order”,⁶³ has campaigned against Prevent since at least 2009.⁶⁴ The organisation has special consultative status at the UN and an EU Office in Brussels that coordinates advocacy activities with EU Institutions.⁶⁵ In 2017, the IHRC informed the UN’s Human Rights Council (UNHRC) that “Prevent has become an aggressive social engineering and spying exercise to transform attitudes in the community and gather intelligence on its members”.⁶⁶ It

also claimed, misleadingly, that Prevent requires “Muslims to promote ‘core British values’ which include foreign policy objectives”.⁶⁷ Prevent does not require Muslims to promote fundamental British values, unless, as teachers for example, they are required under the Prevent duty to do so. The promotion of these values does not include the promotion of the Government’s “foreign policy objectives”. Indeed, given that foreign policy may change depending on the shifting approach of the Government of the day, a Prevent strategy that is tied to foreign policy is simply not feasible.

The IHRC has said of the Government’s definition of extremism that it

*stretches the scope of extremist activity to draconian proportions, making it so wide that it is capable of ensnaring people who oppose government policies or hold conservative views such as disapproval of abortion, music or same-sex marriage.*⁶⁸

The IHRC’s lobbying in Geneva has potentially borne fruit. In May 2017, a report by the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, was strongly critical of Prevent.⁶⁹ The Home Office responded by stating that the report contained “a series of assertions that are simply not true”.⁷⁰

The report also included the claim by schoolboy Rahmaan Mohammadi that he had been referred to Prevent merely for wearing a Free Palestine badge.⁷¹ Despite the national media coverage that Mohammadi’s story attracted, his claim was denied by his school. And although the full details of the reasons for his referral to Prevent remain undisclosed as a matter of safeguarding confidentiality, it is clear that his social media posts, one of which seemed to celebrate a jihadist attack on Israel, were potential factors.⁷² Yet, in February 2021, IHRC chair Massoud Shadjareh repeated Mohammadi’s case as an example of how “Prevent views support for causes seen as ‘Muslim’ as ‘risk factors’ for terrorism.”⁷³

In 2015, IHRC co-launched a campaign against Prevent and the counter-extremism strategy, alongside Netpol, the Network for Police Monitoring. Entitled “Together Against Prevent”,⁷⁴ the campaign claimed that Prevent uses “draconian surveillance methods”, whilst “stigmatising and criminalising entire Muslim communities”. The press release for the launch stated:

*We view Prevent as a policy that is based on insufficient evidence to support the flawed assumption that ‘extremist’ ideology opposed to subjective ‘British values’ is the single most important cause of terrorism.*⁷⁵

It also described fundamental British values as merely “subjective,” dismissing as “flawed” the notion that “extremist” ideology is an important causal factor of terrorism in Britain. The IHRC produced a webpage of resources for the campaign to help empower people who have been approached by Prevent officers, to help them “fight back” and “challenge” them.⁷⁶

67. Under the Prevent duty, public institutions, such as schools, have a statutory obligation to promote “British values”. These include “democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs”. See Home Office, “Prevent Strategy”, Cm 8092, pp.34, 107-108.
68. “Muslims must resist calls to expand Prevent programme”, IHRC website, June 7, 2017, <https://www.ihrc.org.uk/news/comment/11896-muslims-must-resist-calls-to-expand-prevent-programme/>.
69. “Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association on his follow-up mission to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland”, A/HRC/35/28/Add.1, June 8, 2017, presented to Human Rights Council Thirty-fifth session, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G17/158/29/PDF/G1715829.pdf?OpenElement>.
70. George Greenwood, “UN says Prevent extremism policy is ‘inherently flawed’”, BBC News, June 16, 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-40286861>.
71. “Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association on his follow-up mission to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland”, para.9, p.4.
72. David Toube, “Did police really quiz this student over a ‘free Palestine’ badge?”, The Spectator, July 7, 2020, <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/was-this-student-really-visited-by-police-for-wearing-a-free-palestine-badge>.
73. “Why We Need to Get Beyond Regimes of Anti-terrorism, and Fast”, IHRC website, July 7, 2021, <https://www.ihrc.org.uk/publications/the-long-view/tlv-vol3-issue3/31340-why-we-need-to-get-beyond-regimes-of-anti-terrorism-and-fast/>.
74. “Campaigners launch ‘Together Against Prevent’”, Netpol website, September 30, 2015, <https://netpol.org/2015/09/30/campaigners-launch-together-against-prevent/>.
75. Ibid.
76. “The PREVENT Strategy: Campaign Resources”, IHRC website, June 21, 2015, <https://www.ihrc.org.uk/activities/projects/11472-the-prevent-strategy-campaign-resources/>.

The Muslim Council of Britain

The election of Zara Mohammed as the first female secretary general of the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) in January 2021,⁷⁷ was seen by some as an indication that the organisation was moving in a new direction, embracing liberal values. For example, in a Westminster Hall debate on Islamophobia Awareness Month, Conservative MP Steve Baker praised the MCB and – addressing the Minister of State at the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities – stated: “I ask her to engage with the MCB. I think it has some new leadership that I suspect she would very much approve of.”⁷⁸ Kirsten Oswald (SNP, East Renfshire) and Paul Blomfield (Labour, Sheffield Central) also offered praise.⁷⁹ Whilst it remains to be seen if this optimism is well-placed, in the area of counter-extremism, the MCB’s position remains consistent in opposing the elected government of the day. In a recent MCB-organised discussion of the War on Terror, for example, Zara Mohammed made highly contentious claims about the treatment of university Islamic societies:

*We’ve had this Prevent duty and, I agree, I think 7/7 was, especially for British Muslim students, that it was a complete lockdown in terms of speakers you could have, because I remember we weren’t allowed to host any speakers; people infiltrating the prayer room, looking at our literature ...*⁸⁰

Since its inception, the MCB has been consistently critical of the Government’s counter-terrorism strategy, for example by opposing the then Labour administration’s Terrorism Act 2000 on the grounds that it would erode civil liberties.⁸¹ The MCB’s opposition to counter-terrorism policies has been maintained under successive governments of every stripe. Whilst new faces may come and go in terms of the organisation’s Secretary General, little substantive change appears to come in terms of the political positions adopted. The section below details the MCB’s positions from 2001 to date.

In March 2001, the MCB opposed the proscription of 21 terrorist organisations. Those proscribed included Al-Qaeda and a succession of Sunni jihadist organisations from the Middle East and Pakistan, plus Tamil, Kurdish, Marxist and Sikh organisations. The MCB argued:

*The Home Secretary has failed to distinguish between legitimate resistance movements who fight against the illegal occupation of their own land and organisations like the IRA which have targeted mainland Britain.*⁸²

The same statement complained, “There is a feeling of double standards. The Muslim community totally abhors terrorism and there has never been an act of terrorism by Muslims in Britain.”

This opposition continued after July 7, 2005, when four British Islamists killed 52 civilians in suicide bombings targeting the London transport network. That year, in response to the Government’s “Preventing Extremism Together – Places of Worship” consultation, the MCB expressed concern “with the government’s strategy as well as solutions for addressing terrorism, particularly since terrorism is now being equated to

77. “Zara Mohammed Elected Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain”, MCB website, January 31, 2021, <https://mcb.org.uk/press-releases/zara-mohammed-elected-secretary-general-of-the-muslim-council-of-britain/>.

78. “Islamophobia Awareness Month”, Volume 704: debated on Wednesday 24 November 2021, Hansard, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2021-11-24/debates/DD26BF90-337B-4E89-8FC7-8D913BDE59CB/IslamophobiaAwarenessMonth>.

79. *Ibid.*

80. “9/11 and the ‘War on Terror’”, Muslim Council of Britain channel, YouTube, September 22, 2021, https://youtu.be/9KFgDAZd_HI?t=2386; see from 39:46.

81. MCB, “The Common Good”, Newsletter of the Muslim Council of Britain, Volume 2, Issue 1, February 2002, available at: <http://archive.mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Issue5.pdf>.

82. “MCB Says ‘Terrorist List’ is ill-conceived”, MCB website, March 2, 2001, <http://archive.mcb.org.uk/mcb-says-terrorist-list-is-ill-conceived/>.

‘Extremism’ and ‘Radicalisation’”.⁸³

Ahead of a vote on the Terrorism Bill in 2006, the MCB wrote to MPs to urge them to vote for the removal of the “glorification of terrorism” clause.⁸⁴ The MCB’s secretary general Sir Iqbal Sacranie opposed the legislation, claiming the laws were based on a number of false premises and “an unacceptably vague definition of terrorism”, which made them “a recipe for disaster as well as a huge blow to our freedoms”. He added that the attempt to criminalise non-violent organisations, groups and individuals “for supporting legitimate causes around the world and expressing political opinion will result in a loss of trust between the Muslim community and the Government”.⁸⁵

The MCB argued figures released by the Home Office in 2007 regarding arrests, charges and convictions under terrorism legislation substantiated fears that the legislation was being used “indiscriminately and disproportionately”.⁸⁶ The MCB asked for laws to be reviewed “so that arrests are only made for good reason” and called for a public investigation “into the glaring shortcomings in the veracity of our intelligence services”.⁸⁷ Furthermore, just as the Muslim community was duty-bound to articulate its revulsion for acts of terror, “the government has a responsibility to address the causes for such acts.”⁸⁸

After complaints that Muslims were being singled out by the Prevent strategy, the MCB welcomed Cohesion Minister Shahid Malik’s announcement in 2009 that in future Prevent “would not single out any one community and would cover extremism emanating from all quarters”. MCB secretary general Muhammad Abdul Bari took the opportunity to call on “all members of society to eschew criminality” and warned about the “rise of the Far Right”.⁸⁹

Any indication of an acceptance of government strategy was, however, short-lived. When Prevent was updated in 2011, a process reviewed by Lord Carlile,⁹⁰ the MCB described the revised strategy as “flawed” for allegedly stigmatising Muslims.⁹¹ The group described the Government’s announcement that it would no longer support groups that it deemed as extremist as “a continuation of a policy that relies on dispensing government patronage”. It accused the Government of engaging in “state-sponsored sectarianism by setting arbitrary measures on who is, and who isn’t an extremist”.⁹² It also asserted, “Criticising FOSIS, a major student umbrella organisation which has worked actively with civil society in combating radicalisation, is most disturbing.”⁹³

In January 2015, after the Government proposed the Counter-Terrorism and Security Bill – which received Royal Assent in February 2015 and put Prevent on a statutory footing – the MCB prepared a “Parliamentary Briefing”. The document asked, “Why build on a broken strategy?”⁹⁴ It also warned:

83. “Response to Places of Worship Consultation ‘Preventing Extremism Together’”, MCB website, November 2005, <http://archive.mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/response-Places-of-Worship-FINAL1.pdf>.
84. “MCB Urges MPs to vote for Lords’ Amendments to Terrorism Bill”, MCB website, February 14, 2006, https://web.archive.org/web/20130123173618/http://mcb.org.uk/media/presstext.php?ann_id=190.
85. “Muslim Community Opposes New Anti Terror Legislation and Urges Government to Exercise Maximum Restraint and Caution”, MCB website, April 13, 2006, https://web.archive.org/web/20130123173559/http://mcb.org.uk/media/presstext.php?ann_id=199.
86. “MCB Asks for Review of Terrorism Legislation and Renews its Call for Public Inquiry into Causes of Terrorism”, MCB website, March 3, 2007, <https://mcb.org.uk/press-releases/mcb-asks-for-review-of-terrorism-legislation-and-renews-its-call-for-public-inquiry-into-causes-of-terrorism/>.
87. Ibid.
88. Ibid.
89. “MCB Welcomes the Refocusing of our Collective Responsibility in the Pursuit to Prevent Terrorism”, MCB website, August 11, 2009, captured on January 23, 2013, https://web.archive.org/web/20130123171624/http://mcb.org.uk/media/presstext.php?ann_id=363.
90. Lord Carlile of Berriew Q.C., “Report to the Home Secretary of Independent Oversight of Prevent Review and Strategy”, May 2011, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97977/lord-carlile-report.pdf.
91. “Stigmatising Muslim civil society won’t avert terrorism – Prevent strategy still flawed”, MCB website, June 7, 2011, <http://archive.mcb.org.uk/stigmatising-muslim-civil-society-wont-avert-terrorism-prevent-strategy-still-flawed/>.
92. Ibid.
93. Ibid.
94. Miqdaad Versi, “Muslim Council of Britain Parliamentary Briefing on introducing ‘Prevent’ as a statutory duty for all public bodies”, January 18, 2015, MCB website, <https://www.mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/MCB-Briefing-on-introducing-Prevent-as-a-statutory-duty-for-all-public-bodies.pdf>.

There will be negative ramifications of placing the “Prevent” strategy on a statutory footing. These include the further alienation of the Muslim community, the loss of trust in the education system and the impact on the freedom of speech at universities.⁹⁵

In 2017, in partnership with the Association of Muslim Lawyers and other groups, the MCB hosted an event entitled, “Prevent: Safeguarding or Spying?” Echoing the ideas of other, more activist Muslim groups, the MCB alleged in the publicity for the event the existence of “growing voices that it is leading to ‘spying’ on Muslim and other communities rather than safeguarding”.⁹⁶ The theme of Prevent being a means for the Government to spy on Muslims also appeared in a report it produced in 2016 for the Labour Party. In *The Impact of Prevent on Muslim Communities*, the MCB alleged:

The latest Counter-Extremism strategy builds on the flawed Prevent approach ... It includes draconian and counter-productive provisions that curtail civil liberties, challenge Muslims’ participation in public life, continue to discriminate openly against Muslim communities and encourage spying on one another. What is more, the government continues to involve itself in theological discussions, most recently castigating Deobandi Sunni chaplains within prisons, setting itself on a concerning trajectory.⁹⁷

Interestingly, rather than call for an outright boycott, the report said, “A fundamental review of Prevent is essential.”⁹⁸ If the MCB envisaged a major reformulation of Prevent, rather than its abolition, did it potentially see a role for itself in the programme, either as providers of support, or as an “honest broker” between the Government and the Muslim community?

Earlier, in 2015, when the Government announced that it was developing a new counter-extremism strategy, the MCB’s secretary general, Shuja Shafi, voiced his concern that all Muslims risked being labelled “extremist”.⁹⁹ When the counter-extremism strategy was launched, Shafi stated that it was “based on [a] flawed analysis” and “fuzzy conceptions of British values”.

Most recently, in January 2021, the MCB denounced the appointment of William Shawcross to lead the independent review of Prevent, stating:

William Shawcross is singularly unfit to be a neutral and fair assessor of this government policy, which has been criticised for unfairly targeting British Muslims, given his frightening views about Islam and Muslims. It is ironic that a policy supposedly charged with preventing extremism is to be scrutinised by a person who holds hostile views on Islam and Muslims, who has links to people with extreme views on us, and who defends the worst excesses of the so-called ‘War on Terror’.

When he was appointed to chair the Charity Commission in the last decade, he is reported to have approached the role with the same hostile attitudes against Muslims and Muslim charities.¹⁰⁰

Two months later, in March 2021, after the MCB was criticised by some activists for not putting its name to a letter advocating the boycotting of

95. Ibid.

96. “Prevent: Safeguarding or Spying – Event”, MCB website, April 7, 2017, <https://mcb.org.uk/mcb-updates/prevent-safeguarding-or-spying/>.

97. Muslim Council of Britain, “MCB, The Impact of Prevent on Muslim Communities: A Briefing to the Labour Party on how British Muslim Communities are Affected by Counter-Extremism Policies”, February 2016, p.5. Available at: <http://archive.mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/MCB-CT-Briefing2.pdf>.

98. Ibid, p.4.

99. “Prime Minister’s Speech on Extremism: Muslim Council of Britain Makes Initial Response”, MCB website, July 20, 2015, www.mcb.org.uk/prime-ministers-speech-on-extremism-muslim-council-of-britain-makes-initial-response/.

100. “New ‘Independent’ Reviewer on Prevent Confirms Government Whitewash”, MCB website, January 28, 2021, <https://mcb.org.uk/press-releases/independent-review-prevent/>.

Prevent (more on this below). The MCB responded by issuing a statement, where it declined to endorse Prevent, and spoke of the “damage” it has caused:

The absence of the MCB’s name in the list of signatories to the boycott is not an endorsement of Mr Shawcross or his views, nor is it an endorsement of Prevent and the well-documented damage it has inflicted on Muslim communities.¹⁰¹

Its reluctance to explicitly join those groups calling for Prevent’s scrapping may have been an effort to avoid official perception of the group as an antagonistic and unreliable partner. The MCB has not enjoyed government favour since 2009, when its deputy secretary general, Daud Abdullah, signed the pro-Hamas Istanbul Declaration.¹⁰² The Declaration’s most contentious obligation instructed Muslims to attack foreign navies if they prevented arms for Hamas being smuggled into Gaza. Since it was signed shortly after prime minister Gordon Brown offered Royal Navy resources to stop arms-smuggling, Abdullah was accused of advocating attacks on the Royal Navy.¹⁰³ In 2018, the then Conservative home secretary, Sajid Javid, repeated the Government’s position of non-engagement with the MCB.¹⁰⁴

There have been hints that the MCB intended to run its own counter-radicalisation programme. Several times over a five-year period it has indicated the imminent publication of research on attitudes to counter-terrorism that it has conducted within Muslim communities as part of a project entitled the National Listening Exercise. In October 2016, *The Guardian* reported the MCB was planning to set up its own counter-terrorism scheme, consisting of a mosque-centred strategy, to stop people becoming terrorists, in a direct challenge to Prevent:

Critics, many of whom are in the Muslim community, say Prevent has at its heart an ideological purity test meaning western foreign policy can not be criticised, and the government is only prepared to work with those who do not challenge it. Instead of trying to liberalise British Islam, the new scheme will focus solely on a message that violence can never be used. A source familiar with the plans said: “If we can get these voices more heard, they are anti-government and therefore more credible in saying do not turn to violence.”¹⁰⁵

The following day, the MCB announced that in 2017 it hoped to publish the findings from “a grassroots national conversation” it was organising “on the problem of terrorism and how this affects British Muslims”.¹⁰⁶ It stated:

Reflecting the wishes of a cross-section of British Muslim society, our affiliates have directed the MCB to explore a grass-roots led response to the challenge of terrorism.

The Muslim Council of Britain accordingly began a nationwide exercise to engage communities and build a response that we can all buy into. Thus far, consultative events have been held in Scotland, the Midlands and at a national conference in London. The MCB leadership has also met with a range of

101. “MCB position on Counter-Terrorism policy and PREVENT”, MCB website, March 17, 2021, <https://mcb.org.uk/community/mcb-position-on-counter-terrorism-policy-and-prevent/>.

102. Jamie Doward, “British Muslim leader urged to quit over Gaza”, *The Guardian*, March 8, 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/mar/08/daud-abdullah-gaza-middle-east>.

103. Ibid.

104. Greg Heffer, “Sajid Javid in Muslim Council of Britain spat over Islamophobia claims”, *Sky News*, June 3, 2018, <https://news.sky.com/story/sajid-javid-in-muslim-council-of-britain-spat-over-islamophobia-claims-11393750>.

105. Vikram Dodd, “Muslim Council of Britain to set up alternative counter-terror scheme”, *The Guardian*, October 19, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/oct/19/muslim-council-britain-set-up-alternative-counter-terror-scheme>.

106. “The Threat of Terrorism: How Should British Muslims Respond? – A Progress Report”, MCB website, October 20, 2016, <https://mcb.org.uk/press-releases/the-threat-of-terrorism-how-should-british-muslims-respond-a-progress-report/>.

stakeholders from activists, academics and practitioners, as well as ordinary Muslims up and down the country.¹⁰⁷

However, several days later, and in contrast to earlier reports, the MCB's secretary general, Harun Khan, denied the organisation was planning to set up an "alternative Prevent" programme. Khan clarified:

There is no secret plan by MCB to create an alternative to Prevent or rebrand it. We will continue with this listening exercise over the coming months and present the findings in 2017. The government may choose to listen or not but everyone can play a part by using the information provided by MCB to lobby their local MPs to put pressure on them to oppose this discriminatory strategy.¹⁰⁸

Khan's denial may have been at least partially prompted by pushback from Islamist campaigning groups. CAGE, for example, said it opposed any attempt to resurrect or re-brand Prevent or put it in the hands of Muslim organisations.¹⁰⁹ Despite earlier indications, the National Listening Exercise failed to release a public report in 2017. Since then, there have been several further public references to this project:

- The MCB website declared a national listening exercise for 2018-19, a project funded by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust.¹¹⁰
- The MCB created a Twitter account, "MCB National Listening Exercise 2018-19", which was last updated in February 2019.¹¹¹
- A National Listening Exercise event was held in London in March 2018.¹¹²
- In November 2018, the MCB sought to recruit interns, at £15 for an eight-hour day, for the project.¹¹³
- The MCB's national listening exercise survey was advertised on the website of Birmingham Central Mosque in February 2019.¹¹⁴
- A report launch in Manchester was announced in February 2020¹¹⁵ and again in April 2020.¹¹⁶

In March 2021, the MCB stated:

The MCB is currently finalising a considered community approach to counter-terrorism and Prevent. This will be one based on evidence and informed by the work of our National Listening Exercise (NLE). The outputs from this wide-ranging consultation of Muslim communities will include an evidence-based series of recommendations and will be published soon.¹¹⁷

But at the time of publication, in April 2022, there is still no National Listening Exercise report available on the MCB website.¹¹⁸ More than five years on from the MCB's initial foray into the field of counter-radicalisation, the organisation is still to publicly report on its findings, although in the meantime it has expounded considerable effort in criticising government policy.

107. Ibid.

108. "MCB denies proposing an alternative to Prevent", 5Pillars website, October 23, 2016, <https://5pillarsuk.com/2016/10/23/mcb-denies-proposing-an-alternative-to-prevent/>.

109. "CAGE opposes MCB's 'Prevent alternative' plans", 5Pillars website, October 22, 2016, <https://5pillarsuk.com/2016/10/22/cage-opposes-mcbs-prevent-alternative-plans/>.

110. "National Listening Exercise", MCB website, undated, <https://mcb.org.uk/project/nle/>.

111. MCB National Listening Exercise 2018-19, Twitter account page, <https://twitter.com/mcbnle>.

112. "Counter Terrorism National Listening Exercise - London Event", MCB website, March 22, 2018, <https://mcb.org.uk/general/counter-terrorism-national-listening-exercise-london-event/>.

113. "National Listening Exercise Work Placement", job vacancy announcement, MCB website, November 2018, <https://mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/NLE-Work-Placement-JD.pdf>.

114. "Counter-Terrorism? Everyone's got a view. We want to hear yours", Birmingham Central Mosque website, February 21, 2019, <https://centralmosque.org.uk/news/counter-terrorism/>.

115. "National Listening Exercise (NLE) Report Launch", All Events website, undated, (event scheduled for February 27 2020), <https://allevants.in/manchester/national-listening-exercise-nle-report-launch/1000089255586863>.

116. "National Listening Exercise (NLE) Report Launch", Eventbrite website, undated (event scheduled for April 9, 2020), <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/national-listening-exercise-nle-report-launch-tickets-89255586863>.

117. "MCB position on Counter-Terrorism policy and PREVENT", MCB website, March 17, 2021, <https://mcb.org.uk/community/mcb-position-on-counter-terrorism-policy-and-prevent/>.

118. "Reports - Publications on the experience of British Muslims", MCB website, undated, <https://mcb.org.uk/reports/>.

Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND)

MEND was founded in 2008 as iEngage by the multi-millionaire businessman Sufyan Ismail¹¹⁹ and re-branded itself as MEND in 2014. It describes itself as a “not-for-profit company that helps to empower and encourage British Muslims within local communities to be more actively involved in British media and politics”.¹²⁰ Described by *The Times* as “a hardline Islamic lobbying group”,¹²¹ MEND is one of the most vocal opponents of Prevent, but is considered to be a viable partner by some police forces and Police and Crime Commissioners at the local level. In March 2020, for example, MEND organised the community hustings for the Lancashire Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) elections.¹²² The group claims, “Over 20 Police Constabularies across the United Kingdom have worked with MEND to tackle Islamophobia and many participate in Islamophobia awareness month run by MEND.”¹²³

MEND co-founded the Islamophobia Awareness Month (IAM) campaign in 2012.¹²⁴ Alongside MEND – which campaigns to abolish the Prevent strategy – a listed partner of IAM is the National Health Service (NHS),¹²⁵ which has a legal obligation to assist with the delivery of Prevent. Other partners include Network Rail, the Scouts Association, and the Church of Scotland,

In 2017, MEND joined with the group Stand Up To Racism to produce a 28-page pamphlet entitled, *Prevent: Why We Should Dissent*.¹²⁶ Stand up to Racism is an anti-racist organisation which shares many activists with the Socialist Workers Party. The press release for this “new resource” designed for “workplaces, colleges and campuses”, accused the Government of racism and Islamophobia. It stated

*Here in the UK, newspapers and the media regularly publish stories that demonise Muslims and paint them as the enemy within. The UK government’s Prevent agenda is part of this trend.*¹²⁷

Azad Ali, then the head of community development of MEND and now CAGE’s Community Relations Director, wrote a section of the pamphlet. He declared:

*Muslim parents live in fear of their children being singled out for ‘de-radicalisation’ programmes just because they give legitimate voice to burgeoning political interests and causes.*¹²⁸

In January 2010, Ali lost a libel case against *The Mail on Sunday*, which had reported that he had been suspended from his job as a Treasury civil servant as a result of comments he had made on his blog. Ali had quoted, apparently approvingly, a statement advocating the killing of British troops in Iraq by Huthaifa Azzam. Ali claimed that the newspaper imputed that he “is a hardline Islamic extremist who supports the killing of British and American soldiers in Iraq by fellow Muslims as justified”. His claim was rejected.¹²⁹ The judge said that Ali “was indeed ... taking the position that the killing of American and British troops in Iraq ... would be justified” by his interpretation of *jihad*, adding that the libel claim had about it an

119. “Sufyan Ismail – Founder”, MEND website, undated, <https://www.mend.org.uk/sufyanismail/>.

120. “MEND’s Aims and Objectives”, MEND website, undated, <https://www.mend.org.uk/about-mend/aims-and-objectives/>.

121. Dominic Kennedy, “Sufyan Ismail: Islamic hardliner invited to address civil servants”, *The Times*, November 23 2020, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/sufyan-ismail-islamic-hardliner-invited-to-address-civil-servants-hr7rcpf36>.

122. “Lancashire Police and Crime Commissioner Question Time”, undated (event schedule March 27, 2020), MEND website, <https://www.mend.org.uk/event/question-time/>.

123. “MEND’s Achievements”, MEND website, undated, <https://www.mend.org.uk/about-mend/mends-achievements/>.

124. “What is Islamophobia?”, Islamophobia Awareness Month website, undated, <https://www.islamophobia-awareness.org/what-is-iam/>.

125. “Our Partners”, Islamophobia Awareness Month website, undated, <https://www.islamophobia-awareness.org/partners/>.

126. “Prevent: Why We Should Dissent” – New Resource Launched By Stand Up To Racism and MEND”, Stand Up To Racism website, January 3, 2017, <http://www.standuptoracism.org.uk/prevent-dissent-new-resource-launched-stand-racism-mend/>.

127. Ibid.

128. “Prevent: Why We Should Dissent”, Stand Up To Racism and MEND pamphlet, 2017, p.5.

129. Andrew Gilligan “Islamist hardliners lose another libel action”, Andrew Gilligan’s blog, January 27, 2010, <https://andrewgilliganblog.wordpress.com/2010/01/27/islamist-hardliners-lose-another-libel-action/>.

“absence of reality”.¹³⁰

Ali, representing MEND, and Moazzam Begg, representing CAGE, were speakers at a Stand Up To Racism event in Sheffield in February 2017 entitled *Prevent: Why We Should Dissent*.¹³¹ The event was organised in advance of demonstrations co-organised with the TUC in London, Glasgow and Cardiff in March 2017, as part of international action on UN anti-racism day. Speaking alongside MEND and CAGE representatives at this event was the Labour councillor for Rotherham, Taiba Yasseen.¹³²

MEND published a “Muslim Manifesto” for the 2017 general election, which called on politicians to commit to “repealing the current statutory Prevent duty, and replacing this with a more effective, evidence based and non-discriminatory counter-terrorism strategy by engaging with Muslim communities”.¹³³

In August 2019, Lord Carlile, who had provided independent oversight of a previous review of Prevent in 2011, was asked by the Government to lead a new review of the strategy. This was opposed by MEND and others, who saw Carlile as a supporter of Prevent.¹³⁴ MEND later attacked Carlile’s initial work, on the grounds that he had reportedly ruled out repealing Prevent. The organisation went on to declare the need to abolish Prevent and to review all counter-terrorism legislation. Despite objecting to Carlile’s appointment, MEND appeared to express support for an independent review. It stated:

*MEND is of the firm belief that PREVENT should be repealed and further calls on policymakers to commit to independently reviewing all counter-terrorism legislation enacted since 2000 with a view to curbing the encroachment of counter-terrorism policies on civil liberties. We are currently monitoring the situation and working with other organisations to ensure that an independent review of PREVENT is fit for purpose.*¹³⁵

Its 2019 general election manifesto stated, “MEND is of the firm belief that the PREVENT duty should be repealed.”¹³⁶

In December 2019, in response to the Government’s call for evidence for an independent review of Prevent, MEND’s CEO, Shazad Amin, wrote, “Since its inception, PREVENT has served to marginalise Muslim communities and place them within a pre-criminalised space as a suspect community.”¹³⁷ Amin expressed MEND’s desire for the review to be a steppingstone to the scrapping of Prevent. He stated:

*Although MEND welcomes this Independent Review as the first step in scrapping the PREVENT strategy, we feel it necessary to raise concerns that there are signs that this review may not be truly independent nor wide enough in its scope to examine all of the factors that may lead someone to be drawn into acts of politically motivated violence, including the role of foreign policy in such a trajectory.*¹³⁸

MEND’s evidence also argued that Prevent was negatively affecting Muslim children. It claimed:

130. “Ali vs Associated Newspapers Ltd”, Casemine website, January 2010. <https://www.casemine.com/judgement/uk/5a8ff72b60d03e7f57ea90f7>.

131. “Prevent: Why We Should Dissent”, Evensi website, undated (event scheduled for February 7, 2017), <https://www.evensi.uk/prevent-why-we-should-dissent-central-united-reformed-church/197679017>.

132. Ibid.

133. “MEND Muslim Manifesto 2017”, MEND website, May 2017, pp.7, 39. Available at: https://www.mend.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/MEND-Muslim-Manifesto-2017_FINAL_lowres-1.pdf.

134. Mark Townsend and Aroob Raja, “Appointment of ‘biased’ Carlile to Prevent review ‘shatters its credibility’”, The Guardian, August 18, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/aug/18/appointment-of-biased-lord-to-review-prevent-strategy-breaches-guidelines-rights-groups-claim>.

135. MEND, “An ‘Independent’(?) Review of PREVENT”, MEND website, October 3, 2019, <https://www.mend.org.uk/independent-review-prevent/>.

136. “MEND Policy Pledges 2019”, MEND website, November 11, 2019, p.30. Available at: https://www.mend.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/MEND-Policy-Pledges-2019_Final_11.11.19.pdf.

137. “Evidence Submitted to the Independent Review of PREVENT: A Submission from Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND)”, MEND website, December 2019, p.5. Available at: <https://www.mend.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/PREVENT-Submission-MEND.pdf>.

138. Ibid.

The concerns surrounding PREVENT have a high potential to severely impact the way in which children perceive and interact with their education; whether that be through asking questions and participating in debates, engaging in extra-curricular activities and responsibilities, involving themselves in activism and critical thinking, having the confidence to engage in public speaking, or having the motivation to achieve their potential.¹³⁹

Lord Carlile stepped down as the independent reviewer of Prevent on December 20, 2019. The Government gave no reason on its website for this decision.¹⁴⁰ In January 2021, when it was announced that William Shawcross would replace Lord Carlile to lead the Independent Review of Prevent, MEND further caveated its support of a review. It said:

MEND originally supported the principle of an Independent Review of PREVENT as we believed it was an avenue for genuine democratic change. However, these hopes were first questioned with the appointment of Lord Carlile, who was removed after a judicial review was launched by Rights Watch UK. The second appointment of someone who is also wholly and unquestionably unsuitable to lead such an important review forces us to further question whether the Government is serious about having an independent review and whether we can engage with this process.¹⁴¹

MEND decided, “We will thus not engage with the review until Shawcross is removed and commitments are made to restore our confidence.”¹⁴² Shortly after, in February 2021, MEND joined CAGE and 15 other groups in signing a statement boycotting the Prevent Review (mentioned above), although only a handful were Muslim organisations. The statement read:

We, the undersigned groups, cannot be complicit in a process that serves only to rubber stamp a fundamentally flawed strategy. We therefore announce a collective boycott of the Prevent review. In lieu of participating in the government’s review, civil society groups will conduct a parallel review that properly considers the harms of Prevent, including documenting discrimination and rights violations caused by it.¹⁴³

The statement also said that although many of its signatories were prepared to provide evidence for a “properly independent review”, the appointment of Shawcross, “given his well-known record and previous statements on Islam”, undermines the good faith and credibility of the Government to conduct such a review.¹⁴⁴

MEND representatives lent their names to another similar statement entitled, “Boycott The Shawcross Review of Prevent”, published on March 17, 2021, on the website of the “Peoples Review of Prevent” (more on which later in this report).¹⁴⁵ This project is designed “as a reference for the public and policy makers”, and has since brought together activists, academics and figures from the legal profession, although the precise nature of MEND’s involvement in this exercise is unclear.¹⁴⁶

By July 2021, MEND was explicit in its demand for Prevent to be abolished. Citing alleged mistakes in referrals, it argued that the policy “does significant damage to young people in what should be a safe,

139.Ibid., p.26

140.Letter to the HASC confirming appointment of the Independent Reviewer of Prevent - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

141.“MEND Statement: Appointment of William Shawcross to lead the Independent Review of PREVENT”, MEND website, January 27, 2021, <https://www.mend.org.uk/mend-statement-appointment-of-william-shawcross-to-lead-the-independent-review-of-prevent/>.

142.Ibid.

143.“Joint Public Statement: NGOs Condemn Appointment of William Shawcross and Announce Civil Society-led Review of Prevent”, MEND website, February 16, 2021, <https://www.mend.org.uk/joint-public-statement-ngos-condemn-appointment-of-william-shawcross-and-announce-civil-society-led-review-of-prevent/>.

144.Shawcross’s comments about Islam and Europe appear to have been taken out of context, however, from a wider discussion about terrorism and what he referred to as “frighteningly large numbers of the young men” in Europe “turning to radical Islamism”. See Emma Webb, “The slinging of William Shawcross”, Unherd, January 28, 2021, <https://unherd.com/the-post/the-sliming-of-william-shawcross/>.

145.“About the Boycott”, People’s Review of Prevent website, undated, <https://peoplesreviewofprevent.org/boycott/>.

146.“About”, People’s Review of Prevent website, undated, <https://peoplesreviewofprevent.org/about/>.

educational environment” and described it as “inherently racist and Islamophobic”.¹⁴⁷

Prevent Watch and the People’s Review of Prevent

Prevent Watch describes itself as “a community led initiative which supports people impacted by Prevent”, and campaigns for the abolition of Prevent.¹⁴⁸ It is directed by Layla Aitlhadj,¹⁴⁹ a former operations manager for CAGE.¹⁵⁰ Prevent Watch’s website claims “the Muslim community has become the target suspect community.”¹⁵¹ It states:

*Prevent is based on a flawed understanding of “radicalization” and is focused on ideology rather than other factors, such as domestic and foreign policy grievances, which research, including statements by former Deputy Director General of MI5, shows play a greater role in politically motivated violence but which the Government continues to ignore.*¹⁵²

It can also be noted here that few, if any voices in the counter-extremism field would propagate the view that far-right extremism is unrelated to the ideologies followed by far-right activists. The Nazism in neo-Nazism matters. It is impossible to discuss extremism or terrorism without reference to ideology. As Nusrat Ghani MP has written in the context of the appointment of William Shawcross to lead a Prevent review “ideology matters. It shapes the worldview of the would-be terrorist and structures their actions. It is the decisive ingredient.”¹⁵³

Yet Prevent Watch seem to expect a scenario where the beliefs of Islamist extremists are off limits, whilst expressing no discomfort that the beliefs of neo-Nazis and fascists may be, correctly, challenged.

In a column on the 5Pillars website in March 2021, Aitlhadj argued that attempts to repackage or reform Prevent are doomed to failure. In her view:

*Prevent was designed to target Muslims, and this, combined with its pre-crime basis, means that it has been, and will always remain, inherently Islamophobic. This remains the case irrespective of how many other communities are pulled into Prevent’s dragnet to dilute the Prevent referral figures.*¹⁵⁴

Aitlhadj listed reports by a succession of United Nations special rapporteurs to back up her conclusion that “The ‘epidemic’ that is Prevent must be abolished.”¹⁵⁵

In March 2021, Prevent Watch published a statement in favour of boycotting William Shawcross’s independent review of Prevent.¹⁵⁶ The signatories included representatives from various Islamist community and activist organisations: Asim Qureshi and Azad Ali for CAGE; Azhar Qayyum for MEND; Massoud Shadjareh for the IHRC; Anas Altikriti for the Cordoba Foundation; and Mohammed Kozbar for the Finsbury Park Mosque. The statement was also signed by representatives of MCB affiliated groups, such as FOSIS, the Muslim Association of Britain, and the Muslim Council of Scotland, although the MCB itself did not sign it. Salma Yaqoob was a signatory for the Stop the War Coalition, but, curiously, the group

147. “Time for PREVENT to be Scrapped”, MEND website, July 13 2021, <https://www.mend.org.uk/time-for-prevent-to-be-scrapped/>.

148. “About”, Prevent Watch website, undated, <https://www.preventwatch.org/about/>.

149. Also known as Layla Hadj.

150. Layla Aitlhadj, LinkedIn profile page, <https://uk.linkedin.com/in/layla-aitlhadj-phd-7a66b546>.

151. “About”, Prevent Watch website, undated, <https://www.preventwatch.org/about/>.

152. “What is Wrong with Prevent?”, Prevent Watch website, August 1, 2018, <https://www.preventwatch.org/faq-items/what-is-wrong-with-prevent/>.

153. Nusrat Ghani, “Commentary: William Shawcross must put fight against non-violent extremist ideology at the heart of what Prevent does”, Policy Exchange, January 26, 2021, <https://policyexchange.org.uk/commentary-william-shawcross-must-put-fight-against-non-violent-extremist-ideology-at-the-heart-of-what-prevent-does/>.

154. Dr Layla Aitlhadj, “The ‘epidemic’ that is Prevent must be abolished”, 5Pillars website, March 9, 2021, <https://5pillarsuk.com/2021/03/09/the-epidemic-that-is-prevent-must-be-abolished/>.

155. Ibid.

156. “Call to Boycott the Shawcross Review of Prevent”, Prevent Watch website, March 18, 2021, <https://www.preventwatch.org/call-to-boycott-the-shawcross-review-of-prevent/>.

was recorded under the heading “National Muslim Organisations”.¹⁵⁷

Within three months of this statement, however, Aitlhadj appeared to have second thoughts about boycotting the Prevent review. She wrote:

*Those of us considering or adopting a principled stance against the recent Shawcross review of Prevent, however, have been faced with dilemmas. We cannot lend our name and therefore grant legitimacy to a sham process, which will only further harm our community. At the same time, the government is continuing with the review, leaving some of us wondering if an outright boycott was the right thing to do.*¹⁵⁸

Aitlhadj went on to announce the launch of the “People’s Review of Prevent”, which aims to “ensure that a broader range of targeted individuals and groups are heard as an alternative process to the Government’s review”.¹⁵⁹ The project’s dedicated website lists 15 different groups as supporters: Big Brother Watch, Child Rights International Network, Runnymede, the MCB, MEND, Muslim Lawyers Action Group, the health professionals group MEDACT, the Muslim media sites 5Pillars and Islam21C, Luton Council of Mosques, Lewisham Islamic Centre, Finsbury Park Mosque, Prevent Digest, NETPOL and Open Rights Group.¹⁶⁰

Aitlhadj is co-chair of this project alongside John Holmwood, professor emeritus at the School of Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Nottingham. For all their noise, it is important not to overestimate the size of the core organisation behind this “people’s review”. Prevent Watch’s YouTube channel, for example, has just 139 subscribers. Its video issuing a “call for evidence” concerning Prevent, uploaded on September 16, 2021, had less than 50 views by mid-March 2022.¹⁶¹ This raises questions about the scale and scope of the research conducted of a project Prevent Watch is central to, and whether it developed any base outside of the activist circles in which the concept was developed. Some of the organisations listed above as supporting the People’s Review of Prevent, such as Luton Council of Mosques, potentially contain many thousands of Muslims. How many have heard of Prevent Watch, and its People’s Review of Prevent?

Holmwood, who served as an “expert witness” for the defence of the teachers at the heart of the Birmingham Trojan Horse controversy,¹⁶² dedicated a book on the matter to Tahir Alam, who was banned by the Department for Education from managing independent schools or governing maintained schools in 2015. The DfE banned Alam on the basis that he had been involved in activities aimed at “undermining fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs”.¹⁶³

The People’s Review of Prevent called for submissions of “evidence” by September 30, 2021, “from all those who have experienced Prevent but who do not feel safe to speak about it, and those who have conscientiously objected to the Shawcross review”.¹⁶⁴ These informed a report it published on February 15, 2022, grandiosely entitled, “The People’s Review of Prevent”.

Co-authored by Holmwood and Aitlhadj, the report claims that

157. *Ibid.*

158. Dr Layla Aitlhadj, “People’s Review of Prevent launches independent platform as Shawcross review begins”, Islam21C website, June 29, 2021, <https://www.islam21c.com/opinion/peoples-review-of-prevent-launches-independent-platform-as-shawcross-review-begins/>.

159. “Welcome”, People’s Review of Prevent website, undated but captured on June 29m, 2022, <https://web.archive.org/web/20210629115929/https://peoplesreviewofprevent.org/>.

160. The supporters list is currently at the bottom of this web page: “REPORT LAUNCH: 15TH FEBRUARY 2022”, <https://peoplesreviewofprevent.org/>.

161. “The People’s Review of Prevent - Call for Evidence”, PREVENT Watch YouTube, 16 September 16, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s2KsRDjAX-JA&t=3s>.

162. On the Trojan Horse controversy, see Peter Clarke, “Report into allegations concerning Birmingham schools arising from the ‘Trojan Horse’ letter”, HC 576, London, House of Commons, 2014. Available at: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/340526/HC_576_accessible_-_pdf.

163. “Direction: Tahir Alam barred from managing independent schools”, UK Government website, September 9, 2015, www.gov.uk/government/publications/direction-tahir-alam-barrd-from-managing-independent-schools. In November 2016, Alam was reportedly teaching in informal classes. Alam’s ban was upheld in a tribunal in December 2017. See Andrew Gilligan and Sian Griffiths, “Trojan Horse plotters dodge teaching ban”, *The Sunday Times*, November 27, 2016, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/trojan-horse-plotters-dodge-teaching-ban-lwkrqc3bd>, and “Trojan Horse’ school ruling hush”, *BBC*, January 2, 2018, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-birmingham-42540543>.

164. “Evidence”, People’s Review of Prevent website, undated, <https://peoplesreviewofprevent.org/evidence/>.

“Prevent discriminates against Muslims”¹⁶⁵ and that “Prevent is an abuse of fundamental human rights and protected equalities, especially involving discrimination on the grounds of race and ethnicity, and religion.”¹⁶⁶ It also claims that “Prevent relies on profiling through Prevent Priority Areas which target Muslim communities and poor communities disproportionately.”¹⁶⁷ The report does not entertain the possibility that the high number of Muslim referrals ought not correlate to the relatively small Muslim population within Britain but, instead, to the relatively high proportion of terror attacks in Britain conducted by Islamists compared with those conducted by any other group. In the 15 years between 7/7 and July 2020, jihadists were responsible for 90% of the deaths in the United Kingdom from terrorism.¹⁶⁸ In 2021, the head of MI5, Ken McCallum reported that 31 “late stage” terror plots had been thwarted since 2017. These were described as “largely Islamic extremist plots.”¹⁶⁹ The so-called “pre-criminal” concerns of Prevent are not “based on fear”,¹⁷⁰ as the report claims, but the facts, borne out in statistics, regarding the perpetrators of the vast majority of terrorist plots or attacks in Britain. The report raises some important questions concerning data protection. But in concluding that Prevent – rather than the police’s data retention policy – is an “abuse” of human rights, it overlooks the possibility that improvements in the treatment of personal data can improve the programme.

The report also makes the following claims, which it refers to as “conclusions”:

- **Prevent is discriminatory in the way in which it approaches far-right terrorism differently from that of Islamist terrorism in the guidance, training and application. Far right extremism is seen as a problem of individuals rather than communities ...**¹⁷¹

Yet, the report does not provide any documentary or empirical comparison between the way far-right and Islamist terrorism are treated in Prevent guidance, training and application. It does not refer to any official documentation or present any fact-based comparison of the implementation of Prevent as it relates to these two kinds of violent extremism. It offers no evidence to justify the sweeping generalisation that Prevent sees Islamist violent extremism as a community problem and far-right violent extremism as an individual one. Instead, the report relies upon a critique of some of the views expressed by the interim Head of the Commission for Countering Extremism, Robin Simcox – the interpretation of which is contestable – and the unsubstantiated claim that “the government” has “normalis[ed] ... clash-of-civilisation narratives about immigration and the failure of Muslims to assimilate”.¹⁷²

The report repeats the claim made by many other anti-Prevent activists that “the government” – without specifying whether this refers to the current Conservative administration, a succession of particular administrations, certain official executive bodies, the parliamentary system itself, or something else – is “Islamophobic”.¹⁷³ “[T]hey”, accuses the

165. Holmwood and Aitthadi, “The People’s Review of Prevent”, People’s Review of Prevent website, February 15, 2022, p.26.

166. *Ibid.*, p.131.

167. *Ibid.*, p.82.

168. Greer, *Tackling Terrorism in Britain*, p.200.

169. Lauren Turner, MI5: 31 late-stage terror plots foiled in four years in UK, BBC News, September 10, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-58512901>.

170. *Ibid.*, p.101.

171. *Ibid.*, p.38.

172. *Ibid.*, pp.36-38.

173. *Ibid.*, p.38

report, refer to a “culture war” and in doing so are “extremist” by their own definition of being hostile to an “out-group”.¹⁷⁴

- **Prevent undermines free expression by defining as ‘extremist’ views and actions which are a normal part of a healthy and functioning democracy ...**¹⁷⁵

Holmwood and Aitlhadj do not, however, provide any data to support this claim. Their report does not specify or quantify what views or actions Prevent has allegedly defined as “extremist” or how it has allegedly undermined their free expression.

They cite the report of a research project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Economic and Social Research Council by a team of seven researchers led by Matthew Guest.¹⁷⁶ The project involved surveying over 2,000 students and conducting focus groups on six campuses. Guest *et al.*’s report asserts, “Prevent appears to have the effect of discouraging free speech within universities.”¹⁷⁷ They write that Islam stands out as a topic of discussion that students feel relatively less free to talk about: 7.8% did not feel free to talk about Islam, whereas less than 5% felt unable to talk about other topics, such as the UK government, religion in general or sexuality. Two-thirds of students, however, felt “entirely free” or “free in most contexts” to talk about Islam. It is not clear from the report if the respondents were asked if their willingness to talk about Islam was connected to Prevent, so it is unclear how Guest *et al.* concluded that Prevent has had “the effect of discouraging free speech within universities” or how widespread they found this effect.

Curiously, Holmwood and Aitlhadj omit to mention what Guest *et al.* describe as a “striking finding”:

*[G]iven the high profile and impassioned campaigns against Prevent within some universities, it is remarkable that less than 10% of those respondents familiar with Prevent unequivocally condemn this government strategy. ... Muslim students are more likely to condemn Prevent than Christians or those of no religion, but the figure is still very low (less than 15%). Moreover, Muslims are slightly more likely than those of no religion to see Prevent as essential to the security of universities (25% compared with 24.6%), although Christian students are much more likely to support Prevent than the other two categories (35.4%).*¹⁷⁸

Holmwood and Aitlhadj also omit to say that Guest *et al.* do not advocate the scrapping of Prevent. They state:

*[W]e recommend that Prevent, if deployed within universities, be done so openly, critically and with sensitivity to local circumstances. It is our contention that this would enrich interfaith dialogue, university education, and social cohesion in campus contexts.*¹⁷⁹

Furthermore, Holmwood and Aitlhadj ignore a body of research that contradicts their contention regarding Prevent’s impact on the freedom

174.Ibid.

175.Ibid., p.52.

176.Ibid., p.49.

177.Mathew Guest, Alison Scott-Baumann, Sariya Cheruvallil, Shuruq Naguib, Aisha Phoenix, Yenn Lee and Tarek Al-Baghal, “Islam and Muslims on UK University Campuses: Perceptions and challenges”, 3.6, p.6. Available at: <https://www.soas.ac.uk/representingislamincampus/publications/file148310.pdf>.

178.Ibid., p.45.

179.Ibid., p.6.

of expression. This includes a 2017 study by academics from several universities on the implementation of the Prevent duty in further education.¹⁸⁰ Its authors reported, “We found relatively little support among respondents for the idea that the duty has led to a ‘chilling effect’ on conversations with students in the classroom and beyond”.¹⁸¹ This may have been, they wrote, because “staff who were concerned about this possible side-effect of the duty took pre-emptive action to minimise the risk of such effects emerging”, such as “reinvigorating debating clubs, or promoting more discussion of Prevent-related issues in the classroom”. Some of those interviewed stated that “students not only continued to engage in discussions in the classroom and in other learning environments as they had done prior to the introduction of the duty”, but had been involved in “more open discussions on issues around extremism”.¹⁸²

Another poll, conducted by ICM in 2019 for the Home Office, similarly undermines the claim that Prevent is having a detrimental impact on the freedom of expression in education. Almost 3,000 adults aged 16+ in England and Wales, including students, teachers, and healthcare professionals, Muslim and non-Muslim, were surveyed. All were familiar with Prevent. Only 12% of students agreed with the statement “Prevent has negatively impacted my ability to talk freely in classes/lectures” and only 11% agreed with the statement “Prevent has negatively impacted my fellow students’ ability to talk freely in classes/lectures”; 57% and 53% disagreed with these statements respectively.¹⁸³ Teachers were slightly more negative about Prevent, with 23% agreeing with the statement “Prevent has negatively affected freedom of speech in the classroom” and 53% disagreeing with it.¹⁸⁴

- **Prevent undermines the proper safeguarding obligations of social workers, teachers and health professionals ... by bring[ing] children and young people under an extraordinarily extensive net of surveillance. This includes the creation in England of a national curriculum in ‘fundamental British values’ determined by national security interests ...**¹⁸⁵

Holmwood and Aitlhadj’s report, however, fails to justify the claim that an “extraordinarily extensive net of surveillance” exists in Britain. Whilst it provides seven anecdotes to try to justify this claim, these are too small in number to validate this conclusion. It is also difficult to verify the veracity of these stories without much more information from a variety of sources. One of these anecdotes describes a case where a boy tells a teacher that his father has “guns and bombs in his shed”, which was followed up on by the police after the school called 999, since the safeguarding lead at the school could not make contact with the Prevent team.¹⁸⁶ The implication was that this should not have been followed up on. The mother of the boy apparently complained that the referral would not have happened if the boy was not from a Muslim family, although there is nothing to support this view in the account provided.

180. Joel Busher, Tufyal Choudhury, Paul Thomas, and Gareth Harris, “What the Prevent duty means for schools and colleges in England: An analysis of educationalists’ experiences”, London: Aziz Foundation, 2017, p.7. Report available at https://pure.coven-try.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/11090509/Busher_Choudhury_Thomas_Harris_What_the_Prevent_duty_means_for_schools_and_colleges.pdf.

181. *Ibid.*, p.6.

182. Holmwood and Aitlhadj, “The People’s Review of Prevent”, People’s Review of Prevent website, February 15, 2022, p.50.

183. ICM Unlimited, “Prevent: Public Knowledge and Interactions: A research report from ICM summarising key findings”, UK Government website, August 2019, p.19. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/930110/Annex_B_-_Prevent_Survey_findings_report_1.pdf.

184. *Ibid.*

185. Holmwood and Aitlhadj, “The People’s Review of Prevent”, p.98.

186. *Ibid.*, p.66.

The report does not present any quantitative data or argument to demonstrate the allegedly “extensive” nature of what it characterises as an intrusive “surveillance” programme. That the promotion within the classroom of liberal and democratic values, including “mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs”,¹⁸⁷ is indicative of an “extensive net of surveillance” – or is evidence of an illiberal intrusion of people’s lives – simply does not follow. This is a misleading and alarmist description of what is effectively the introduction of radicalisation as an additional consideration in child safeguarding, and the promotion of values in schools that include the acceptance of and respect for the diversity of thought. Rather than suggest ways in which public professionals may be supported to safeguard against extremism in Britain, the report simply urges for the abandonment of their role in doing so.

Holmwood and Aitlhadj’s People’s Review of Prevent report also claims that “Prevent ‘expertise’ is being shared with oppressive regimes, including those who terrorise their Muslim populations and is part of a broader drift towards authoritarianism and efforts to reduce long-established human rights principles.”¹⁸⁸ The only example to support this serious generalisation, however, is one workshop provided in China for Chinese officials by the Royal United Services Institute and the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office in March 2016 entitled, “Countering the root causes of violent extremism undermining growth and stability in China’s Xinjiang Region by sharing UK best practice”.¹⁸⁹ Without knowing the content of this training, it is difficult to assess the extent to which it aligned with Chinese official thinking on countering violent extremism. It is also unclear how well the Chinese received the training. It cannot be assumed that one training session five years ago¹⁹⁰ has had any impact or influence over the policies of a government that, whilst open to ideas from Western countries, has a strongly independent understanding of and approach to the security threats it perceives. In any case, the implied claim that the sharing of British expertise in countering violent extremism with Chinese counterparts may have contributed to China’s inhumane treatment of its Uighur population – or is somehow indicative of a “drift towards authoritarianism” in Britain – is simply not supported by any argument or facts provided in the report.

5Pillars, another supporter of the report, published an article in December 2021 by Prevent Watch’s head of research, Alim Islam, which made similar unsubstantiated claims.¹⁹¹ The article drew a comparison between Prevent and the Chinese authorities’ mass detention of Uighurs – the latter of which has been condemned as “truly harrowing” by the Foreign Secretary.¹⁹² It stated, “China’s counter-extremism policies to those in the UK ... only differ in degree and scale”.¹⁹³ Implying that Prevent may lead to the mass incarceration of Britain’s Muslims, the title of the article read, “We need to look at China to understand the terrible danger of Prevent”, whilst the main photo was of a walled off building with barbed wire and Chinese flags. Such views are not unique within British Islamism. In March 2021 Roshan Salih of 5Pillars stated: “What

187.Home Office, *Prevent Strategy*, Cm 8092, June 2011, pp.34, 107-108. Available at : www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97976/prevent-strategy-review.pdf.

188.Ibid.

189.Ibid., p.130.

190.“Countering the root causes of violent extremism undermining growth and stability in China’s Xinjiang Region by sharing UK best practice”, IATI activity identifier GB-GOV-3-PAP-CNF-002340, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) website, <https://devtracker.fcdo.gov.uk/projects/GB-GOV-3-PAP-CNF-002340/summary>.

191.Alim Islam, “We need to look at China to understand the terrible danger of Prevent”, 5Pillars, December 21, 2021, <https://5pillarsuk.com/2021/12/21/we-need-to-look-at-china-to-understand-the-danger-of-prevent/>.

192.Oral statement to Parliament: “Human rights violations in Xinjiang and the government’s response: Foreign Secretary’s statement”, UK Government website, January 12, 2021, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/foreign-secretary-on-the-situation-in-xinjiang-and-the-governments-response>.

193.Alim Islam, “We need to look at China to understand the terrible danger of Prevent”, 5Pillars, December 21, 2021, <https://5pillarsuk.com/2021/12/21/we-need-to-look-at-china-to-understand-the-danger-of-prevent/>.

the Chinese are doing is basically Prevent on steroids. Perhaps this is what awaits us in 20 odd years - re-education camps.”¹⁹⁴

Holmwood and Aitlhadj conclude their report with an appeal to scrap Prevent altogether. They provide no alternative approach for challenging the allure of violent extremist ideas or separatist, supremacist values. They state:

The conclusion we reach is a necessary one: Prevent must be withdrawn, for the sake of our children and young people and for the sake of our democracy. Its purpose is “ideological” and its withdrawal would have no detrimental consequence for national security. In fact, its withdrawal will make it more likely that vitally important conversations will take place about the urgent need to challenge injustice and create a fair society for all.

We call on the government to withdraw its Prevent strategy on the grounds that it is ineffective, disproportionate and discriminatory.

*We call on practitioners caught up in Prevent, community groups, trades unions and professional associations, and civil society groups to demand that Prevent be withdrawn.*¹⁹⁵

This conclusion, however, is not only unsupported by their preceding arguments, it is also unsupported by the public, as demonstrated by the poll data. The aforementioned ICM poll from 2019 found that:

*On the whole, most people hold a positive view towards Prevent. Almost three in five (58%) of the general public said that their overall opinion or impression was favourable, four times the proportion who described it as unfavourable (8%).*¹⁹⁶

Significantly, the poll found favourability to Prevent identical at 58% when the sample was limited to British Muslims. Almost twice as many Muslims view Prevent unfavourably at 15%, which shows there are still issues to address, but the figure is still relatively low. The higher proportion of Muslim negativity to Prevent is perhaps unsurprising given that Muslims in Britain are consistently told by some of the most vocal activist Muslim groups that Prevent is an inherently Islamophobic strategy – Islamists, who comprise a fraction of British Muslims, are at the forefront of this campaign to delegitimise Prevent. Another poll, mentioned previously in the Introduction, corroborated these findings. The 2020 survey of British Muslims by CREST Advisory found “levels of support for policing and counter-extremism work among British Muslims were similar to those of the population as a whole”.¹⁹⁷

194. Roshan M Salih/@fahadansari, Twitter post, March 31, 2021, <https://twitter.com/RmSalih/status/1377258062596161537>.

195. Holmwood and Aitlhadj, “The People’s Review of Prevent”, p.135.

196. ICM Unlimited, “Prevent: Public Knowledge and Interactions: A research report from ICM summarising key findings”, p.10.

197. Jon Clements, Dan Forman, and Manon Roberts, *Listening to British Muslims: policing, extremism and Prevent*, CREST Advisory, March 2020. Available at: <https://www.crestadvisory.com/post/listening-to-british-muslims-policing-extremism-and-prevent>.

The Islamist support base of the People’s Review of Prevent

Many of the organisations involved in the People’s Review of Prevent – in addition to other campaigns to completely scrap Prevent – are Islamist or have Islamist connections. This is perhaps unsurprising, since Islamists typically view Prevent as a challenge to what they see as normative Islamic

values and their authority to determine the development of Islam in Britain. Some of them have a record of disseminating Muslim victimhood narratives, which carry the long-term risk of undermining not just counter-radicalisation and counter-extremism policy, but the legitimacy of the political and legal system in Britain. What is at stake for them is not simply justice within the framework of Britain's political and legal systems, but the authority to shape the cultural foundations upon which this framework rests, and the ability to bring about a complete social transformation – ultimately towards an alternative world order. As such, these groups are not reliable partners for an objective review of Prevent.

The People's Review of Prevent report includes written endorsements by Raghad Altikriti, the chairwoman of the Muslim Association of Britain; Azfar Shafi, CAGE's Head of Research; and Ahammed Hussain, a director at Muslim Public Affairs Committee UK.¹⁹⁸ The webpage for the report's launch includes additional endorsements, including one by Zara Mohammed, the MCB's secretary general. Listed supporters of the report include MEND, the Muslim Lawyers Action Group, the Finsbury Park Mosque, and the media outlet, 5Pillars.¹⁹⁹

The Muslim Association of Britain's first female chair, Raghad Altikriti, is the sister of Anas Altikriti, the founder and Director of the Cordoba Foundation, referred to by former Prime Minister David Cameron as a front for the Muslim Brotherhood.²⁰⁰ Islamic activism runs in their family. Their father was a Muslim Brotherhood leader in Iraq before coming to Britain in the 1970s. Anas Altikriti also founded the MAB, alongside several other Brotherhood-associated individuals. These include Kemal El-Helbawy, the former spokesman for the Muslim Brotherhood in Britain; Azzam Tamimi, a former activist in the Brotherhood's political party in Jordan; and Mohammed Sawalha, reported to be a member of the political bureau of Hamas, the Palestinian wing of the Muslim Brotherhood.²⁰¹ The Muslim Brotherhood seeks a total transformation of social and political structures according to Islamic principles, and has no geographical bounds. This aspiration was expressed by Anas Altikriti at the time of the Arab Spring in 2011; he called for a comprehensive social transformation that concerns spirituality, education, finance, politics, and "every single part of life".²⁰²

On the same page as Raghad Altikriti's endorsement of the People's Review of Prevent report, is one by Azfar Shafi, CAGE's head of research. Shafi has expressed the view that cooperating with the police on suspected cases of terrorism amounts to spying, which he sees as a problem. In February 2020, he criticised the "whole society approach" to countering extremism, which he described as a shift of "the responsibility of surveillance and security ... [from] the exclusive remit of government agencies ... [to] the public, private and civil sector and into the heart of society".²⁰³ He stated, "there is a real need to grapple with what this 'whole society approach' actually entails, and the dangers of accepting as any kind of commonsense [sic] the idea that spying is a civic duty".²⁰⁴

If this is not enough cause for concern about CAGE's association with

198. Holmwood and Aitlhadj, "The People's Review of Prevent", pp.iv-v.

199. "Report Launch: 15th February 2022"; People's Review of Prevent, undated, <https://peoplesreviewof-prevent.org/>.

200. "David Cameron: Speech to the Community Security Trust", Conservative website, March 4, 2008. <http://conservative-speeches.sayit.mysociety.org/speech/599684>.

201. David Brown, "Finsbury mosque leader Mohammed Sawalha part of Hamas politburo", The Times, November 7, 2017. www.thetimes.co.uk/article/finsbury-mosque-leader-mohammed-sawal-ha-part-of-hamas-politburo-Ocdn3gs80.

202. "Anas Altikriti - A New Dawn", FOSIS Channel, YouTube, September 8, 2011. www.youtube.com/watch?v=YYBCy60x3qw. See also Damon L. Perry, *The Global Muslim Brotherhood in Britain: Non-Violent Islamist Extremism and the Battle of Ideas*, London: Routledge, 2019, p.117.

203. Azfar Shafi, "Prevent and Countering Violent Extremism usher in 'whole society' surveillance", Open Democracy, February 12, 2020. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/prevent-and-cve-usher-in-whole-society-surveillance>.

204. Ibid., emphasis in original.

the People’s Review of Prevent project, consider the troubling ideological orientations of two of Shafi’s colleagues. CAGE’s Community Relations Director, Azad Ali, as mentioned earlier in this report, lost a libel case in 2010 against *The Mail on Sunday*, which described him as “a hardline Islamic extremist who supports the killing of British and American soldiers in Iraq by fellow Muslims as justified”.²⁰⁵ In the same year, Ali was filmed by an undercover reporter from Channel 4’s *Dispatches* stating, “Democracy, if it means that, you know, at the expense of not implementing the *shari’a*, of course no one agrees with that”.²⁰⁶

CAGE’s Research Director, Asim Qureshi, as mentioned earlier in this report, was recorded in 2006 advocating for British Muslims “to support the *jihād*” in Chechnya, Iraq, Palestine, Kashmir, and Afghanistan against “the oppression of the West”.²⁰⁷ In 2015, Qureshi refused to answer the question as to whether he agreed or disagreed with Haitham al-Haddad’s support for female genital mutilation and the *hudud* punishment in Islamic law of death by stoning for adultery.²⁰⁸ This contributed to Amnesty International UK abandoning its partnership with CAGE. Amnesty issued a statement saying:

*[T]he refusal of a Cage spokesperson to condemn violence such as FGM and stoning – themselves examples of torture and degrading treatment that we are campaigning for an end to – is of huge concern to Amnesty and has made any future platform sharing with Cage impossible.*²⁰⁹

Ahmed Hussain, another activist whose endorsement appears in Holmwood and Aitlhadj’s report, directs the Muslim Public Affairs Committee (MPAC) UK. In an interview with ITV, a South African broadcaster, in June 2021, Hussain claimed that Prevent is “specifically tailored for targeting Muslims”.²¹⁰ This is simply not true, however. Prevent is not “tailored” for any specific group of people. Muslims – Islamists, or suspected Islamists, to be precise – comprise a proportion of those referred to Prevent simply because violent Islamism presents the greatest terrorism threat in Britain.

Hussain added that Prevent “targets Muslims with normal Muslim concerns”. The only example he gave was the cause of the Palestinians, then he added, anything that “shakes the status quo” is “immediately shut down”. Hussain claimed that Prevent compels teachers or health workers to report Muslims who talk about Palestine – or “Israel’s true nature” – to the authorities. This is, however, untrue. The Prevent duty requires public professionals to report concerns of potential radicalisation, not the expression of pro-Palestinian views, unless such views are extremist. The expression of pro-Palestinian views are commonplace in the mainstream media, workplaces and in university campuses across the country. A few months prior to Hussain’s interview with ITV, in March 2021, there were at least 20 university-organised pro-Palestinian events as part of “Israeli Apartheid Week 2021”.²¹¹

Hussain also said that the then Education Secretary, Gavin Williamson, sent “a letter to schools saying, this ‘antisemitism’” – which he put in

205. “Ali vs Associated Newspapers Ltd”, Casemine website, January 2010, <https://www.casemine.com/judgement/uk/5a8ff72b60d03e7f57ea90f7>.

206. “Britain’s Islamic republic’: full transcript of Channel 4 Dispatches programme on Lutfur Rahman, the IFE and Tower Hamlets”, Andrew Gilligan blog, October 22, 2010, <https://andrewgilliganblog.wordpress.com/2010/10/22/britains-islamic-republic-full-transcript-of-channel-4-dispatches-programme-on-lutfur-rahman-the-ife-and-tower-hamlets-the-full-transcript/>.

207. “Asim Qureshi speaks at anti-American protest rally”, *The Daily Mail*, May 4, 2015, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/video/news/video-1180712/Asim-Qureshi-speaks-anti-American-protest-rally.html>.

208. Rosa Prince, “Cage director Asim Qureshi refuses to condemn stoning of adulterous women”, *The Telegraph*, March 6, 2015 (captured on April 11, 2019), <https://web.archive.org/web/20190411155651/https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/islamic-state/11453846/Cage-director-Asim-Qureshi-refuses-to-condemn-stoning-of-adulterous-women.html>. See also Tom McTague, “Jihadi John apologist who said killer was a ‘beautiful man’ sparks new outrage after refusing to condemn stoning of women”, *Mail Online*, March 6, 2015, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2982765/Muslim-rights-leader-praised-beautiful-Jihadi-John-sparks-outrage-refusing-condemn-stoning-women.html>.

209. “Amnesty International responds to questions about Cage”, Amnesty International UK website, March 12, 2015 (captured on March 15, 2015) <https://web.archive.org/web/20150315214116/https://www.amnesty.org.uk/amnesty-international-responds-questions-about-cage#VQX8JJPP0eU>.

210. “THE DAILY FACTOR 24 June 2021 DISCUSSING WITH AHAMMED HUSSAIN FROM THE MPACUK ON THE ARREST OF MICHA”, *itvnetworks*, YouTube, June 25, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O5DbjX5vj5k>.

211. “List of IAW 2021 Events”, Palestine Solidarity Campaign, March 8, 2021, <https://www.palestine-campaign.org/list-of-iaw-2021-events/>.

air quotes – “this criticism of Israel, must be clamped down”.²¹² He was referring to a letter that was sent to schools after renewed violence between Israel and Palestinians in Gaza in the spring of 2021, but this was not an accurate description of what Williamson wrote, or of his concerns. Williamson’s letter referred to “the concerning increase in antisemitic incidents in some schools, including the expression of antisemitic views and bullying towards Jewish students and teachers”.²¹³ Hussain’s air-quoting of the term “antisemitism” demonstrated an attitude dismissive of these incidents. Anti-Prevent groups also deplored the Education Secretary’s letter to schools, which reminded schools of their duty to be politically impartial. For example, a joint protest letter was signed by MEND, CAGE, and other groups who have actively campaigned against Prevent, mischaracterising Williamson’s letter as “silenc[ing] Palestine solidarity campaigning” and “control[ling] how schools discuss Palestine” – as if political activism, rather than impartial learning, is in any case appropriate in school classrooms.²¹⁴

MPACUK has previously faced accusations of supporting antisemitism. The 2006 Report of the All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Antisemitism noted that:

... MPACUK has been criticised for publishing material on its website promoting the idea of a worldwide Zionist conspiracy, including the reproduction of articles originally published on neo-Nazi and Holocaust Denial websites, and is currently banned from university campuses under the NUS’s ‘No Platform’ policy [for antisemitism]. MPACUK are known to have removed an offensive posting from their website on one occasion, after complaints were made, but thereafter continued to publish similar material.²¹⁵

Zara Mohammed, the secretary general of the MCB, whose endorsement of the People’s Review of Prevent report appears on the project’s website, has been lauded by politicians across the party divide. Ruth Jones (Labour, Newport West) has described her as “the excellent, new and young secretary general of the Muslim Council of Britain” and Kirsten Oswald (SNP, East Renfrewshire) has described her as “somebody who will deliver change”.²¹⁶ It is not clear, however, that the change sought by Zara Mohammed in the area of counter-radicalisation or counter-extremism is itself laudable. The MCB’s position on these matters has not changed with her leadership: the MCB is apparently continuing with what it calls a “community approach to counter-terrorism and Prevent” – its long overdue National Listening Exercise (mentioned elsewhere in this report). The MCB continues to push the grievance narrative that Muslims are excluded from British society, evident in Zara Mohammed’s interview with the Scottish current affairs website Holyrood, in which she said:

There are also things like you can’t progress because of your Muslim name, heritage, ethnicity. Muslims are part of marginalised communities and there are a whole range of bills that are targeting minority communities.²¹⁷

Another organisation supporting the People’s Review of Prevent, MEND,

212.Ibid.

213.@GavinWilliamson, “Antisemitic incidents within schools”, letter to schools, Twitter post, May 28, 2021, <https://twitter.com/gavinwilliamson/status/1398374786871537664>.

214.“Joint Statement on Censorship of Palestine Campaigning in Schools”, MEND website, June 4, 2021, <https://www.mend.org.uk/mend-joint-statement-on-censorship-of-palestine-campaigning-in-schools/>. Williamson subsequently issued guidance for schools in February 2022, which reminded them of their “legal duties on political impartiality that have been in place for many years”. The guidance stated: “You can discuss political issues with pupils, and their interest and engagement in these should be encouraged. However, you should not promote partisan political views to them, or encourage them to participate in specific political activity, including protests.” See “What you need to know about political impartiality in schools”, Department for Education, February 17, 2022, p.4. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1050134/6.7731_DfE_Political_Impartiality_Guidance_Pamphlet_WEB_004.pdf.

215.“Report of the All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Antisemitism”, September 2006, para 140, p.29. Captured on August 22, 2013 at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20130822190807/http://www.antisemitism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/All-Party-Parliamentary-Inquiry-into-Antisemitism-REPORT.pdf>.

216.“Islamophobia Awareness Month”, Volume 704: debated on Wednesday 24 November 2021, Hansard.

217.Margaret Taylor, “The change-maker: An interview with Zara Mohammed”, Holyrood, March 15, 2022, <https://www.holyrood.com/inside-politics/view.the-changemaker-an-interview-with-zara-mohammed>.

218. Trevor Phillips, John Jenkins and Martyn Frampton, "On Islamophobia: The Problem of Definition", London: Policy Exchange, 2019. Available at: <https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/On-Islamophobia.pdf>
219. Ibid., pp.43, 81.
220. Ibid., p.73.
221. Tom Wilson, "Mend: 'Islamists Masquerading as Civil Libertarians'", Henry Jackson Society, October 2017. Available at: <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/HJS-Mend-Report-2.pdf>.
222. Ibid., pp.31-32. See also Usama Hasan, David Toube, and Muna Khan, "Mainstreaming Islamism: Islamist Institutions and Civil Society Organisations", Commission for Countering Extremism, September 2019, pp.7, 22-23, 52. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/836965/mainstreaming-islamism-islamist-institutions-and-civil-society-organisations.pdf.
223. See Damon L. Perry, "The Islamic Movement in Britain", International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, September 28, 2020, pp.29-30. Available at: <https://icsr.info/2020/09/28/the-islamic-movement-in-britain/>.
224. "British Islamic Scholar Sheikh Haitham Al-Haddad on Killing of George Floyd: Democracy Isn't Working", MEMRI TV Videos, June 9, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aDAX5yE2Zk>.
225. Ibid.
226. "MEND Islamophobia awareness exhibition guide", MEND, December 2014, p.2. Available at: <https://www.mend.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/IAM-Exhibition-Brochure-MEND.pdf>.
227. "Décret du 2 décembre 2020 portant dissolution d'un groupement de fait [decree of December 2, 2020 dissolving a de facto group]", NOR : INT-D2033449D, December 3, 2020, <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000042602019>. CCIF appealed the court's decision but this was rejected on September 24, 2021; see: https://www.dalloz-actualite.fr/sites/dalloz-actualite.fr/files/resources/2021/10/ce_24_septembre_2021_ccif_449215.pdf.
228. "ELM Winter Family Programme 2020 – Live", East London Mosque & London Muslim Centre, YouTube, December 26, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y5mTlyWEMJs>.
229. Holmwood and Aithadji, "The People's Review of Prevent", p.80.
230. Robert Lambert, *Countering Al-Qaeda in London: Police and Muslims in Partnership*, London: Hurst, 2011, p.144.
231. David Brown, "Hamis leader quits Finsbury Park mosque board after watchdog inquiry", *The Times*, January 11, 2019, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/hamis-leader-mohammed-sawalha-quits-finsbury-park-mosque-board-after-watchdog-inquiry-wj5qvdzmc>.
232. David Brown, "Finsbury mosque leader Mohammed Sawalha part of Hamas politburo", *The Times*, November 7, 2017, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/finsbury-mosque-leader-mohammed-sawalha-part-of-hamas-politburo-0cdn3gs80>.
233. Abdul Wahid, "Muslims should be confident in discussing the Khilafah in today's Britain", 5Pillars, March 2, 2017, <https://5pillarsuk.com/2017/03/02/muslims-should-be-confident-in-discussing-the-khilafah-in-todays-britain/>. The revival of the caliphate is a recurring theme on 5Pillars, exemplified by recent interviews with Yasir Qadhi and Ovamir Anjum; see "Dr @Yasir Qadhi | Controversies, Critics and Establishing Khilafah | BB #62", 5Pillars, YouTube, June 20, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Md5pmhpthRw>, and "Dr Ovamir Anjum | Is A Caliphate Viable in Today's World? | BB #57", 5Pillars, YouTube, April 16, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FJ0paJlqxrk>.
234. Damon L. Perry, "Editor of prominent UK Muslim news site appears to support the death penalty for local Afghans who worked with British and Americans", Policy Exchange, December 6, 2021, <https://policyexchange.org.uk/editor-of-prominent-uk-muslim-news-site-appears-to-support-the-death-penalty-for-local-afghans-who-worked-with-british-and-americans/>.

has a record of promoting a "victimhood mentality" amongst Muslims, as documented in a Policy Exchange report on Islamophobia by Sir Trevor Phillips, Sir John Jenkins and Martyn Frampton.²¹⁸ They noted MEND's public pronouncement comparing Muslims' current predicament in Britain with the conditions that allowed the Holocaust to happen.²¹⁹ Their report also provided evidence that MEND is "misrepresenting the figures for Islamophobic hate crime" to support its victimhood narrative.²²⁰

Furthermore, as documented in a comprehensive study of the group from 2017, MEND and its previous incarnation, iEngage, "has a record of hosting speakers ... who endorse an interpretation of Islam that is not simply conservative but also at times illiberal and hostile to Western values".²²¹ Such speakers include Haitham al-Haddad,²²² a former judge at the London Islamic Sharia Council, whose statements on homosexuality, "female circumcision", adultery and other topics ought to raise serious concerns about any organisation partnering with him.²²³ More recently, after the killing of George Floyd in 2020, he said that "democracy is not really working" and advocated a "merge between democracy and Islam".²²⁴ He said, "any power that exists - whether it is political power, financial power, economical [sic] power, et cetera - it has to surrender and submit to the superpower, who is Allah".²²⁵

MEND regards as "colleagues"²²⁶ the Collective Against Islamophobia in France (CCIF), which was banned by the French government in September 2021 for stirring up hatred.²²⁷ The judge in the case said that the CCIF has "close ties with proponents of radical Islamism inviting people to evade certain laws of the Republic". In December 2020, a representative from MEND appeared with CCIF's Director, Marwan Muhammad, in a televised discussion hosted by the East London Mosque.²²⁸

The People's Review of Prevent report wrongly claims that MEND, along with the MCB, has been labelled as an "extremist" group because of its "opposition to the government's policies".²²⁹ This is a mischaracterisation of why MEND has been accused of supporting extremists. It has nothing to do with opposing the Government's policies, but everything to do with the group's support of Islamist extremist speakers or groups and with its misleading and inflammatory language regarding Islamophobia.

The Finsbury Park Mosque, another of the report's named supporters, has been connected to the Muslim Brotherhood due to its takeover from Abu Hamza by prominent members of the Muslim Welfare House and the Muslim Association of Britain, two organisations long associated with the Brotherhood. As the former founder of the Metropolitan Police's Muslim Contact Unit, Robert Lambert, wrote in 2011, "the mosque had effectively passed into the hands of the Ikhwan [the Muslim Brotherhood]".²³⁰ In 2017, *The Times* reported that a trustee of the mosque, Mohammed Sawalha, was, as mentioned above, a member of Hamas' political wing. In 2019, Sawalha resigned as a trustee of Finsbury Park Mosque. In respective quotes given to *The Times*, the Charity Commission stated it had begun an inquiry into Mohammed Sawalha, but had not reached a conclusion

before he resigned. The mosque stated that he had long been proposing to resign due to his work commitments.²³¹ Hamas has since been proscribed in Britain in its entirety.²³²

5Pillars, another listed supporter of the People’s Review of Prevent report, claims to be the “Largest regulated Muslim news site in Europe, Australia and the Americas”. It provides a platform for Hizb ut-Tahrir Britain, an organisation whose goal is an alternative world order based on *shari’a*, Islam’s ethical and legal code. Abdul Wahid, the chairman of the organisation, is a regular contributor to 5Pillars. In 2017, Wahid wrote an article lauding the caliphate – the Islamic imperial state – as a necessary alternative to the current international order for both Muslims and non-Muslims.²³³ The editor of 5Pillars, Roshan Salih, has publicly expressed his support for *shari’a* law, including *hudud* punishments (which include amputation of the hands for theft and death for apostasy), caveating this with reference to the allegedly high standards of proof for their implementation.²³⁴ He has also said that Afghans who worked with British or American forces in Afghanistan are “collaborators” who “committed treachery to one degree or another and sold their nation down the river to foreigners”.²³⁵ Treason is punishable by death according to the *shari’a*, which Salih has described as “the most perfect law which will ever exist”.²³⁶

The Muslim Lawyers Action Group (MLAG), a listed supporter of the People’s Review of Prevent report, says it is “committed to developing an eco-system of [Muslim] lawyers who are committed to promoting equality, justice and the respect for human rights”. True to its self-description as an “action group”, MLAG organised a fund-raising five-mile charity walk for its members in Hyde Park in February 2022, as part of Muslim Hands’ “Gaza Winter Walk 2022”.²³⁷ Muslim Hands is a charity established in 1993 and was listed in the early 2000s as a member of the Union of Good (UG).²³⁸ Also known as the 101 Days Campaign, UG is a coalition of international charities set up by the spiritual leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, Yusuf Al-Qaradawi; it was designated by the US Treasury in 2008,²³⁹ and is alleged to have funded Hamas.²⁴⁰ Muslim Hands was proscribed by Israel in 2008 for its alleged links with Hamas.²⁴¹ The charity has denied it was ever a member of UG.²⁴²

The People’s Review of Prevent has a number of advisory panels, including a community advisory panel, upon which sits the president of the Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS), Ijlal Khalid, and a legal advisory panel, upon which sits Sultana Tafadar.²⁴³ Tafadar was appointed Queen’s Counsel on March 21, 2022. She is said to be the second hijab-wearing barrister to become a QC after Shaheed Fatima, but the first criminal barrister to wear the hijab to receive the appointment.²⁴⁴ She is described on the project’s website as a human rights barrister, and is a founder of MLAG.²⁴⁵ She used to work for the Khomeinist Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC) as a researcher.²⁴⁶ In 2002, she authored a report for IHRC entitled, “The Hidden Victims” of September 11: Prisoners of UK Law”, which argued that anti-terrorist and other legislation was being unfairly used to target Muslims in the War on Terror.²⁴⁷ One of

235. Roshan Muhammed Salih, “Kabul’s dirty little secret – the hordes of Afghan collaborators”, 5Pillars, November 25, 2021, <https://5pillars-uk.com/2021/11/25/kabuls-dirty-little-secret-the-hordes-of-afghan-collaborators/>.
236. Damon L. Perry, “Editor of prominent UK Muslim news site appears to support the death penalty for local Afghans who worked with British and Americans”, Policy Exchange, December 6, 2021, <https://policyexchange.org.uk/editor-of-prominent-uk-muslim-news-site-appears-to-support-the-death-penalty-for-local-afghans-who-worked-with-british-and-americans/>.
237. “MLAG walks for Gaza”, MLAG website, undated (event listing for February 26, 2022), <https://www.mlag.legal/event-details/mlag-walks-for-gaza>.
238. Muslim Hands, along with several other British charities, was listed as a UG member on the campaign’s website hosted by Interpal between August 11, 2001 and February 28, 2003. See “Implementing Organisations”, “Organisations participating in the 101 Days Campaign to date”, 101 Days Campaign website, captured at August 11, 2001, <http://web.archive.org/web/20010811052333/http://www.interpal.org:80/web/organisations.htm>; and “Implementing Organisations”, “Organisations participating in the 101 Days Campaign to date”, 101 Days Campaign website, captured at February 28, 2003, <http://web.archive.org/web/20030228025858/http://www.interpal.org/web/organisations.htm>. The actual length of time of its listing on this website is uncertain, however, due to the unavailability of the site at earlier and later dates as stored on the Internet Archive. But Muslim Hands was also listed on the Interpal hosted site for donations as late as April 29, 2003 (see “International Donations”, 101 Days Campaign website, captured at April 29, 2003, <http://web.archive.org/web/20030429154542/http://www.interpal.org:80/web/european.htm>).
239. U.S. Department of the Treasury, “Treasury Designates the Union of Good”, Press Centre, U.S. Department of the Treasury website, November 12, 2008, <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/pages/hp1267.aspx>.
240. Steve Merley, “The Union of Good: INTERPAL and the U.K. Member Organizations”, NEFA Foundation, March 23, 2009. Available at: <https://www.globalmbwatch.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/27722268-The-Union-of-Good-Interpal-and-the-UK-Member-Organizations-NEFA-Foundation.pdf>.
241. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Defense Minister signs order banning Hamas-affiliated charitable organizations”, Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, July 7, 2008, <https://mfa.gov.il/mfa/pressroom/2008/pages/defense%20minister%20signs%20order%20banning%20hamas-affiliated%20charitable%20organizations%207-jul-2008.aspx>.
242. Alex Delmar-Morgan and Peter Osborne, “A very British witch hunt: The truth behind the Muslim charities extremism scandal”, Middle East Eye, May 4, 2017, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/big-story/very-british-witch-hunt-truth-behind-muslim-charities-extremism-scandal>.
243. “About”, People’s Review of Prevent website, undated, <https://peoplesreviewofprevent.org/about/>.
244. Rebecca Speare-Cole, “Hijab-wearing criminal barrister calls QC appointment ‘surreal’”, The Independent, March 22, 2022, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/representation-palace-of-westminster-bar-luton-bangladeshi-b2040759.html>.
245. “Sisters Are Doin’ It For Themselves”, event listing, MLAG website, March 8, 2021, <https://www.mlag.legal/event-details/sisters-are-doin-it-for-themselves>.
246. “UK EVENT: ‘9/11 – The Hidden Victims’”, IHRC website, September 1, 2002, <https://www.ihr.org.uk/activities/alerts-archives/8942-uk-event-9-11-the-hidden-victims/>.
247. “The Hidden Victims of September 11: Prisoners of UK Law”, IHRC website, September 2002. Available at: https://www.ihr.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/7546_report02sep06ANTI-TERRORISMLAWONEYEARON_FINAL.pdf. Tafadar is named as the author on IHRC’s website at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20110303133243/http://www.ihr.org.uk/show.php?id=384>. She is also named as the author at Innovative Minds’ website promoting the launch event for the report at: <http://www.inminds.com/sep11-hidden-victims.htm>.

the “hidden victims” in her report was Sheikh Faisal (aka Abdullah el-Faisal / Trevor William Forrest).²⁴⁸ Less than six months after Tafadar’s report, he was found guilty of three charges of soliciting murder by an Old Bailey jury.²⁴⁹ Faisal had incited young Muslims “to kill non-believers, Americans, Hindus and Jews”.²⁵⁰ He had also proclaimed, “There are two religions in the world today – the right one and the wrong one. Islam versus the rest of the world.”

University Campuses

FOSIS and Students Not Suspects

Universities are a fertile environment for activist politics and thus it is no surprise that Muslim activist groups and individuals have campaigned vigorously within academia for the scrapping of Prevent and the counter-extremism strategy. FOSIS has played a key role in the “Preventing Prevent” campaign alongside CAGE on university campuses. FOSIS has called for the “complete abolition” of Prevent, describing it as a “failed strategy” that is “divisive, toxic and discriminatory”.²⁵¹ In 2015, Ibrahim Ali, its then vice president of student affairs praised the work of CAGE and declared that “Prevent in itself is a racist agenda; it’s an Islamophobic agenda”.²⁵²

FOSIS was a founding partner, along with the National Union of Students (NUS), the NUS Black Students’ Campaign, and the University and College Union (UCU), of a national campaign dedicated to scrapping Prevent entitled “Students not Suspects”.²⁵³ In September 2015, the campaign produced a model motion to boycott Prevent.²⁵⁴ It also produced a range of activist resources, including a downloadable “pledge sign” for students to print, photograph themselves holding, and share on social media. The sign stated “I pledge not to comply with Prevent.”²⁵⁵

In 2015, FOSIS assisted the NUS in producing the “Preventing Prevent Handbook”, which declared, “Islamophobia is built in to Prevent.”²⁵⁶ This handbook purported to explain how Prevent operates. But it also argued against its legitimacy and provided resources for students on its side in a “battle” against the strategy. The target of this campaign, the manual stated, is the legal underpinnings of Prevent. The manual listed FOSIS, CAGE, MEND, and the IHRC as key contacts in the Preventing Prevent campaign.²⁵⁷ The manual recommended IHRC and CAGE as organisations that students can “turn to” if they have been affected by Prevent.²⁵⁸

It was during this period that Zara Mohammed, the current secretary general of the MCB, held senior positions in FOSIS. She served as its chair in Scotland from 2014 to 2015, its vice president of Islamic societies from 2015 to 2016, and its president from 2016 to 2017.²⁵⁹ Mohammed was prominent in the FOSIS-supported Students Not Suspects campaign against Prevent.²⁶⁰ Mohammed represented FOSIS as a member of the MCB’s national council between 2018 and 2020, whilst serving as the MCB’s assistant secretary general.²⁶¹

In the period that Mohammed, FOSIS and Students Not Suspects were campaigning against Prevent, the danger of radicalised students

248. “The Hidden Victims of September 11: Prisoners of UK Law”, IHRC website, September 2002., p.7.

249. “Cleric guilty of spreading hate”, BBC News, February 24, 2003, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/england/2782987.stm.

250. Ibid.

251. “Independent Review of the Prevent Policy”, FOSIS website, January 22, 2019, <https://www.fosis.org.uk/press-releases/independent-review-prevent-policy/>.

252. Hannah Stuart, “Understanding Cage: A Public Information Dossier”, Henry Jackson Society, London, April, 2015, p.22. Available at: <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Understanding-CAGE.pdf>.

253. “About”, Students Not Suspects website, undated, <https://studentsnotsuspectsdotcom.wordpress.com/about-2/>.

254. “Model Motion – Boycott Prevent”, NUS Connect website, September 5, 2015, <https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/model-motion-boycott-prevent>.

255. “Students Not Suspects Campaign Guide”, NUS document, available at: <https://cupdf.com/document/students-not-suspects-campaign-guide.html>.

256. NUS Black Students’ Campaign, “Preventing Prevent: an updated handbook”, National Union of Students, London, November 2017, p.80.

257. Ibid., p.93.

258. Ibid., p.95.

259. Zara Mohammed, LinkedIn profile page, <https://www.linkedin.com/in/zaramohammed1/>.

260. See, for example, FOSIS/@fosischannel, Twitter post, February 28, 2017, <https://twitter.com/fosischannel/status/836643882708402177>.

261. Muslim Council of Britain, “MCB Impact Report 2018-19”, July 2019, p.29. Available at: https://mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/MCB-Impact-Report-2018-19_Final.pdf.

turning to terrorism was exemplified by the convictions in April 2016 of west London students Tarik Hassane and Suhaib Majeed, who were both given life sentences for planning a drive-by shooting targeting the police or military, inspired by their support for the Islamic State.²⁶² Majeed, a physics undergraduate at Kings College London, was chairman of the university Islamic Society at the time.²⁶³ When Tarik Hassane was arrested, a #JusticeForTarik campaign began on social media, protesting his innocence. This was joined by activist groups. Fahad Ansari of CAGE condemned the “rancid smell of BS”²⁶⁴ and CAGE used their own Twitter feed to compare the case to the riots in Ferguson, USA, following the shooting of a black man, Michael Brown, by the police.²⁶⁵ The convictions of Hassane and Majeed brought no retraction from CAGE, even though Hassane pleaded guilty.²⁶⁶

More recently, in January 2019, FOSIS’s Facebook page stated, “The Prevent policy is Islamophobic, simplistic and is not credible within the Muslim community”.²⁶⁷ No reference was provided to Muslim polling data or any other reliable source on Muslims’ views on the strategy. In the same month, FOSIS’s vice president of student affairs, Akiquil Hoque, described Prevent as “divisive, toxic and discriminatory on campuses, particularly for Islamic societies”.²⁶⁸ He also claimed that the strategy “has led to the development of irrational fear among Muslim students, preventing them from engaging in political activism on a student and community level”. Yet, Muslim students are involved in student politics and campus debates. Just four months later, in April 2019 the hijab-wearing Zamzam Ibrahim was elected President of the National Union of Students.²⁶⁹ Ibrahim had previously served as President of the University of Salford Students Union, and followed in the footsteps of another British Muslim woman, Malia Bouattia, who led the NUS from 2016-17.²⁷⁰ Ibrahim subsequently went on to become the Vice President of the European Students Union.²⁷¹ The incoming NUS president is Shaima Dallai,²⁷² meaning that since 2016, three out of the five NUS Presidents elected, have been Muslim. Not bad going for a minority who, according to FOSIS, are prevented from engaging in student politics.

However flawed, Akilqul Hoque’s words echoed the discourse of numerous Islamist organisations and activists, as well as their mainstream allies, that Prevent is having a “chilling effect” on the freedom of speech at British university campuses. Despite this alleged backdrop, Students Not Suspects appeared to lose momentum in late 2017, at least in terms of its online presence. Since this time, its Facebook page²⁷³ and website²⁷⁴ have been inactive and its Twitter feed dormant since March 2018.²⁷⁵

Student Union boycotts of Prevent

The Prevent duty came into effect for higher and further educational institutions in September 2015.²⁷⁶ It refers to organisations, rather than individuals. In that year, numerous university students’ unions passed motions proposing non-cooperation with Prevent. These were phrased in various ways, including “non-engagement” or “non-compliance”

262. “R-v-Hassane, Majeed, Hamlett and Cuffy, Central Criminal Court Sentencing Remarks of Mr Justice Wilkie”, April 22, 2016, Judiciary of England and Wales, <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/r-v-hassane-sentencing.pdf>. See also “Two British students given life sentences for ‘drive-by’ plot”, BBC News, April 22, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-36115697>.

263. Cahal Milmo, “Two UK students convicted of Isis-inspired plot to carry out drive-by shootings in London”, The Independent, March 23, 2016, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/two-uk-students-convicted-isis-inspired-plot-carry-out-drive-shootings-london-a6948646.html>.

264. Fahad Ansari (Activist Lawyer)/@fahadansari, Twitter post, October 9, 2014, <https://twitter.com/fahadansari/status/520257590887219201>.

265. CAGE/@UK_CAGE, Twitter post, October 9, 2014, https://twitter.com/UK_CAGE/status/520296623092797440.

266. Press Association, “Two British students jailed for plotting Isis-style drive-by shootings”, The Guardian, April 22, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/apr/22/british-students-jailed-plotting-isis-style-drive-by-shootings-tarik-hassane-suhaib-majeed>.

267. FOSIS, Press Release, Facebook, January 21, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/fosischannel/posts/2020977841272779>.

268. FOSIS, Press Release, Facebook, January 22, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/fosischannel/posts/2022374467799783>.

269. NUS press release, “Zamzam Ibrahim has been elected as President of the National Union of Students at national conference 2019”, NUS website, April 9, 2019, <https://www.nus.org.uk/articles/zamzam-ibrahim-elected-as-nus-president-ddc4>.

270. Alexandra Topping and Sarah Marsh, “Divisive NUS president Malia Bouattia defeated in election”, The Guardian, April 26, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2017/apr/26/malia-bouattia-shakira-martin-nus-national-union-of-students-president-election>.

271. “Zamzam Ibrahim”, European Cultural Foundation website, undated, <https://culturalfoundation.eu/stories/zamzam-ibrahim/>.

272. Shaima Dallai, 28 March 2022, Shaima Dallai on Twitter: “Thank you so much for electing and trusting me to be your next NUS National President! I am so excited to start this journey and mobilise with you all for a grassroots movement to fight for a free & liberated education we all deserve. Time to choose students not profit!”, <https://t.co/13Fix-2O5hF> / Twitter

273. Students Not Suspects Facebook community home page, <https://www.facebook.com/StudentsNotSuspects>.

274. Students Not Suspects website, <https://studentsnotsuspectsdotcom.wordpress.com/>.

275. StudentsNotSuspects/@StudentsNotSus Twitter home page, <https://twitter.com/StudentsNotSus>.

276. “Prevent duty guidance”, Home Office, UK Government website, March 12, 2015 (updated April 1, 2021), <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prevent-duty-guidance>.

277. "Students not suspects motion 2015", Bristol Students' Union website, July 27, 2016, <https://www.bristolstu.org.uk/resources/students-not-suspects-motion-2015>. See also, Epigram, Issue number 291, October 19, 2015, p.6, https://issuu.com/epigrampaper/docs/epigram_291.1.
278. Student Assembly Meeting Agenda, Union of Brunel Students, November 3, 2016, p.3. Available at: <https://brunelstudents.com/pageassets/representation/studentassembly/Student-Assembly-Agenda-Thursday-3rd-of-Novemberupdate.pdf>.
279. Cardiff University Students' Union Policy Book, April 2015, pp.43-44. Available at: [https://www.cardiff-students.com/pageassets/about-cusu/governance/policy/POLICYBOOKAPRIL2015\(1\).pdf](https://www.cardiff-students.com/pageassets/about-cusu/governance/policy/POLICYBOOKAPRIL2015(1).pdf).
280. "Prevent Policy", Durham Students' Union, March 12, 2015. Available at: https://nusdigital.s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/document/documents/27447/f9eace7a391c0bedc0b319c1e2512fd7/Prevent_Policy.pdf. See also: Durham SU/@durhamSU, Twitter post, February 19, 2015, <https://twitter.com/durhamSU/status/568495131625689089>.
281. "EHSU Preventing Prevent – Students Not Suspects", Edge Hill Students' Union website, March 30, 2016, <https://www.edgehillstu.org.uk/articles/ehsu-preventing-prevent-students-not-suspects>.
282. "Policy passed in 2015/16", Goldsmiths Students' Union website, undated, <https://www.goldsmithsu.org/democracy/studentassembly/policy/>.
283. Heriot-Watt University Student Union, Facebook community group post, August 26, 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/HWUUnion/posts/1008042469248608>.
284. "Students not Suspects' Motion", KCL Students' Union website, January 29, 2015, <https://www.kclsu.org/referenda/motion/6/20/>. See also: Ayo/@AyoBMEStudents, Twitter post, January 29, 2015, <https://twitter.com/AyoBMEStudents/status/560910390981558272>.
285. "LUSU Motion: Students Not Suspects", LUSU Policy (31/1415), undated, https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/nusdigital/document/documents/29892/32b9c3b9098255ecfddee54bc973d598e/2015_02_19_Motion-on-Students-Not-Suspects.pdf.
286. "Students not Suspects Non Compliance with Prevent Counter Terrorism and Security Bill - Renewal Date: 2022/23", University of Leicester Students' Union Policy Folder June 2021, University of Leicester Students' Union website, p.20. Available at: <https://www.leicesterunion.com/pageassets/voice/democracy/council/unionpolicy/University-of-Leicester-Policy-June-2021.pdf>.
287. "#StudentsNotSuspects- Preventing the Prevent Agenda", Leeds Beckett Students' Union, December 2015, <https://nusdigital.s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/document/documents/23722/031e29fbee5e8d178f600b133dcab5b/StudentsNotSuspectsPreventingThePreventAgenda.pdf>.
288. "SOAS Students' Union General Meeting", SOAS Students' Union website, January 29, 2015, <https://soasunion.org/pageassets/yourunion/governance/2014-15/UGM-29-Jan-2015.pdf>.
289. "Strath Union Standing Policies", Strathclyde Students' Union website, November 29, 2019, pp.59-60. Available at: [https://www.strathunion.com/pageassets/about/constitution/Standing-Policy-Updated-9.3.2020\(1\).pdf](https://www.strathunion.com/pageassets/about/constitution/Standing-Policy-Updated-9.3.2020(1).pdf).
290. "064 Prevent and The Counter Terrorism and Security Act Students Not Suspects", Warwick Students Union website. Available from: <https://www.warwickstu.com/resources/49501/064-Prevent-and-The-Counter-Terrorism-and-Security-Act-Students-Not-Suspects/>.
291. Queen Mary Students' Union/@QMSU, Twitter post, April 27, 2016, <https://twitter.com/QMSU/status/725273972963692544>.
292. "University of Salford Students' Union Minutes", February 23, 2016, https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/nusdigital/document/documents/25796/505726de44301e91823455418ed547dd/Feb_16minutes.pdf.
293. "Union Policy UP1632, Motion: Opposing Prevent and Defending students' rights to organise on campus Prevent", UCLU website, June 6, 2017, <https://www7.studentsunionucl.org/sites/uclu.org/files/policies/up1632.pdf>.

with Prevent. Some motions explicitly endorsed the Students Not Suspects campaign, which sought to abolish Prevent. Most simply spoke of boycotting the programme. In 2015, 14 students' unions from the following universities passed motions: the University of Bristol;²⁷⁷ Brunel University London;²⁷⁸ Cardiff University;²⁷⁹ Durham University;²⁸⁰ Edge Hill University;²⁸¹ Goldsmiths, University of London;²⁸² Heriot-Watt University;²⁸³ King's College London;²⁸⁴ Lancaster University;²⁸⁵ the University of Leicester;²⁸⁶ Leeds Beckett University;²⁸⁷ SOAS, University of London;²⁸⁸ the University of Strathclyde;²⁸⁹ and the University of Warwick.²⁹⁰ Others followed in 2016, including Queen Mary University of London;²⁹¹ and the University of Salford.²⁹² University College London Union passed a motion opposing Prevent in 2017.²⁹³ The passing of the motion at the University of Salford occurred at the time Manchester Arena bomber Salman Abedi was attending the institution, bringing the students union subsequent negative publicity.²⁹⁴ An examination of the minutes of the Student Senate where that decision was taken reveals 10 students voted in favour, one against, with two abstentions – a reminder that student politics often revolve around very small numbers of activists.²⁹⁵

Even though universities have a legal duty to implement Prevent, which includes referring students perceived to be at risk of radicalisation to the Channel programme, the student unions of these universities opted to refuse to cooperate with their universities' administrations in the implementation of this duty. The student newspaper at SOAS described one example of non-cooperation at SOAS in an article from September 2015, which stated:

The Students' Union have decided to withdraw from SOAS' working group discussing how to implement Prevent duties, criticising it as an "Islamophobic programme which poses a fundamental threat to academic freedom' through which nothing can be achieved".²⁹⁶

A month later, the SOAS student newspaper interviewed Moazzam Begg, CAGE's Outreach Director, who had spoken to students at an event organised by the university's "Decolonising Our Minds" society. The article revealed that at least one member of staff had expressed a private refusal to implement the Prevent duty:

Universities have been asked to report on students "at risk of extremism." One SOAS tutor, whose name will not be given, said they would not 'inform' on any student or actively implement Prevent. It is not known how many tutors are dissenting, and what, if any, disciplinary measures could be taken against those demonstrating similar, critical behaviour.²⁹⁷

Neither the name nor the department of the tutor was revealed, and it is unclear if other lecturers at SOAS, or other universities, also expressed their refusal to report a student whom they deem to be at risk of radicalisation.

The motions boycotting Prevent typically have a two-year period after which they elapse. It is unclear if all of the boycotts mentioned above are still in place. Some have elapsed, and some were renewed at least once.

However, it seems that at least ten student union boycotts are currently still in place. These include those of the University for the Creative Arts,²⁹⁸ Goldsmiths, University of London;²⁹⁹ Heriot-Watt University;³⁰⁰ Jesus College, University of Cambridge;³⁰¹ Leeds Beckett University;³⁰² the University of Leicester;³⁰³ SOAS, University of London;³⁰⁴ Sheffield Hallam University;³⁰⁵ the University of Strathclyde;³⁰⁶ and University College London Union.³⁰⁷ The overall Preventing Prevent campaign, despite relative inactivity of specific strands of it, such as Students Not Suspects, appears not to have petered out.

It is unclear whether any of the student unions boycotting Prevent would refuse to support concerns raised about a student who had expressed support for far-right violence on campus. No student union explicitly has stated that its boycott of Prevent only applies in cases of suspected Islamist extremists, but this seems to be the assumption behind the boycotts, given the consistent claims that Prevent is anti-Muslim and Islamophobic. It is a misguided assumption, as the recent rise in far-right referrals demonstrates, even though the threat from Islamists remains the most serious one.

Community groups

Waltham Forest Council of Mosques

In December 2015, the co-ordinating body for 11 mosques in the London Borough of Waltham Forest - Waltham Forest Council of Mosques (WFCOM) - announced that it was going to boycott Prevent, on the grounds that it is “racist” and “overtly targets members of the Muslim faith”.³⁰⁸ WFCOM is an affiliated member of the MCB.³⁰⁹ The WFCOM statement was triggered by a motion at a meeting of Waltham Forest council endorsing the need for Prevent and an associated programme, BRIT (Building Resilience through Integration and Trust), which was designed to identify signs of radicalisation in primary school children.

The Labour-led council, under WFCOM’s pressure, withdrew a statement linking the need for the Brit programme in schools with a stabbing at Leytonstone Tube Station, which had been described by the police as a terrorist incident.³¹⁰ But WFCOM still insisted it wanted nothing to do with Prevent. Irfan Akhtar, a member of WFCOM, stated:

Prevent is a toxic brand. We are fighting the implementation of Prevent and will not let it into the mosques. We want to work closely with all teachers on safeguarding of children of all faiths and none. We think that Waltham Forest is a testing ground for Prevent programmes and this is a wake-up call that we are not just going to accept Prevent in our community.³¹¹

Although media reports suggested WFCOM represented some 70,000 Muslims,³¹² it is unclear how many were consulted by the organisation. As well as Prevent, WFCOM possessed broader concerns about government counter-extremism policy. WFCOM’s chair, Suleman Ahmed, was later a signatory, alongside Harun Khan, secretary general of MCB, to

294. Harry Walker, “Manchester bombing: Students at Abedi’s university ‘tried to BLOCK Prevent scheme’”, *The Express*, May 25, 2017, <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/809029/manchester-bombing-salman-abedi-salford-university-prevent-anti-terror-scheme>.

295. “University of Salford Students’ Union Minutes”, February 23, 2016, https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/nusdigital/document/documents/25796/505726de44301e91823455418ed547dd/Feb_16minutes.pdf.

296. “Students’ Union Refuses to Comply With SOAS Prevent Working Group”, *The SOAS Spirit*, September 23, 2015, <http://soasspirit.co.uk/news/su-prevent/>.

297. Sophie Bush, “Ex-Guantanamo Detainee Blasts Government Prevent Strategy”, *The SOAS Spirit*.

298. “Boycott Prevent Policy”, University for the Creative Arts Students’ Union website, undated, <https://ucasu.com/union/how-were-run/ucasu-policies/boycott-prevent-policy/>.

299. “Policy”, Goldsmiths Students’ Union website, undated, <https://www.goldsmithssu.org/democracy/studentassembly/policy/>.

300. Heriot-Watt University Students’ Union, Facebook community group post, August 26, 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/HWUUnion/posts/1008042469248608>. This is still active: “Anti-Prevent Policy”, “Union Policies”, Heriot-Watt Students’ Union website, <https://www.hwunion.com/intranet/union-policies/>.

301. Imran Mulla, “Why the Jesus College Student Union is boycotting Prevent”, *Varsity*, February 23 2021, <https://www.varsity.co.uk/opinion/20846>. See also: “JCSU Executive Committee-elect Meeting”, January 11, 2021, https://drive.google.com/file/d/1X-elOutfSXFEA_1PH7So4VnrlQEhEn4OOQ/view.

302. “#StudentsNotSuspects- Preventing the Prevent Agenda Policy”, Ideas and Stances, Leeds Beckett Students’ Union website, <https://www.leedsbeckettssu.co.uk/main-menu/your-voice/have-your-say/su-ideas-stances/ideas-stances>.

303. “Students not Suspects Non Compliance with Prevent Counter Terrorism and Security Bill - Renewal Date: 2022/23”, “University of Leicester Students’ Union Policy Folder June 2021”, University of Leicester Students’ Union website, p.20.

304. “Preventing Prevent”, “Campaigns”, SOAS Students’ Union website, undated, <https://soasunion.org/get-involved/campaigns/>.

305. “Policy Document”, Sheffield Hallam University Students’ Union website, December 3, 2019. Available from: <https://www.hallamstudentsunion.com/page-assets/representation/democracy/currentpolicies/Preventing-Prevent.docx>.

306. “Preventing Prevent”, “Strath Union Standing Policies”, University of Strathclyde Students’ Union website, March 25, 2021, p.48. Available at: <https://www.strathunion.com/pageassets/about/constitution/StrathUnion-Policy-Updated-25.3.2021.pdf> <https://www.strathunion.com/pageassets/about/constitution/StrathUnion-Policy-Updated-25.3.2021.pdf>.

307. “Non-engagement with UCL Prevent agenda and its leads”, University College London Union website, June 11, 2020, <https://www7.studentsunionucl.org/policy/up1919/non-engagement-with-ucl-prevent-agenda-and-its-leads>.

308. Waltham Forest Council of Mosques, Statement, Prevent Watch website, December 17, 2015, <https://www.preventwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/BRIT-WFCOM-Statement.pdf>.

309. Muslim Council of Britain, Annual Report 2017, p.30. Available at: <https://mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Annual-Report-2017.pdf>.

310. Diane Taylor, “Society of mosques to boycott ‘racist’ anti-terror Prevent programme”, *The Guardian*, December 17, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/17/society-of-mosques-to-boycott-anti-terror-prevent-programme>.

311. *Ibid.*

312. *Ibid.*

a letter demanding the reversal of the decision to appoint Sara Khan as Commissioner for the then newly created Commission for Countering Extremism (more of which subsequently).³¹³ Ahmed is also the head of MEND's Waltham Forest branch.³¹⁴

Following on from this statement, in February 2016, WFCOM held an event with Stand Up To Racism “to discuss the nature of Prevent and the thought-policing BRIT (Building Resilience through Integration & Trust) programme”.³¹⁵ The promotional webpage for the event stated, “Young children are being identified as potential terrorists and being placed on de-radicalisation programmes without the knowledge of parents.”³¹⁶

WFCOM has continued to stress its opposition to Prevent. The organisation held an Eid Charity dinner on August 15, 2019, sponsored by Interpal, Meraj Pharmacy and Prestons Accountants. According to the event's press release, those attending included the Mayor of Waltham Forest; two representatives of Barts Health NHS Trust; a police officer wounded in the course of his duties; Harun Khan, the secretary general of the MCB; and the controversial imam Shakeel Begg of Lewisham Islamic Centre (see Introduction). On the WFCOM website, the press release is followed by a testimonial from an unnamed trustee of Lewisham Islamic Centre. The trustee stated of the proceedings and the work of WFCOM:

*they were not afraid to discuss those works that they had undertaken in support of the Muslim cause such as the raising of funds for the Muslims of #Syria; the successful campaign they led against Veolia in the council as part of their boycott campaign against Israel; their work in campaigning against the Islamophobic #PREVENT policy; the recent work regarding Relationship & Sex Education (#RSE) in Schools.*³¹⁷

He added:

*This was a gathering where Muslims were unapologetically Muslim, engaging on our terms without the all too familiar ones where the local civil representatives praise the organisation for being a moderate voice etc.*³¹⁸

At the time of writing, the WFCOM website lists seven ways in which it serves the Muslim community, under the heading “see our work”. The items listed are Covid 19 support, relief work, madrassah support, interfaith work, call to prayer (*adhaan*), mosque support, and Prevent. However, it is apparent that for WFCOM, serving the community in the latter sense does not mean supporting Prevent, or even proposing alternatives. On March 18, 2021, WFCOM posted a statement on its website condemning Prevent and the Shawcross Independent Review, declaring that 550 organisations opposed it, and calling for the policy to be scrapped. Links were provided to articles from *The Guardian*, the MCB, and CAGE. WFCOM added: “Contrary to manufactured government reports, the Muslim community and its leadership resoundingly reject the PREVENT policy and the Shawcross review.”³¹⁹

A prominent member of WFCOM is the Noor ul Islam Trust based on High Road, Leyton. In the trust's 2017 accounts, it describes itself as

313. Letter to Rt Hon Amber Rudd MP, MEND website, undated (but uploaded January 2018), <https://mend.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Signatories-to-Sara-Khan-letter.doc>.

314. “Open letter to Home Secretary calling for removal of Sara Khan as counter-extremism tsar”, MEND website, January 30, 2018, <https://www.mend.org.uk/open-letter-home-secretary-calling-removal-sara-khan-counter-extremism-tsar/>. In this list of signatories, Ahmed is listed as the chair of MEND Waltham Forest, whereas on the list of signatories on a downloadable Word document also on MEND's website (previous footnote), he is listed as the chair of WFCOM.

315. “Discussion On Prevent & BRIT”, WFCOM website, undated, <https://wfc.com.org/events/counter-extremism-prevent-policy/>.

316. *Ibid.*

317. “Eid Charity Community Dinner 2019”, Waltham Forest Council of Mosques website, August 15, 2019, <https://wfc.com.org/2019/08/15/eid-charity-community-dinner/>.

318. *Ibid.*

319. “WFCOM Anti-Prevent Signatory (550+ Org Coalition)”, Waltham Forest Council of Mosques website, March 18, 2021, <https://wfc.com.org/2021/03/18/anti-prevent-signatory-550-org-coalition/>.

a founding member of WFCOM, and claims to play a “crucial part in its operation”.³²⁰ Noor ul Islam runs a pre-school and a primary school and has received substantial public funding – for example £232,710 in 2017 and £220,348 in 2016 from the London Borough of Waltham Forest.³²¹ Eligible for Gift Aid, its most recent accounts show it accordingly received £87,139 from taxpayers under that scheme. Noor ul Islam had 88 staff members and received £239,676 in grants from the London Borough of Waltham Forest, in the year to 31 December 2019.³²²

London Borough of Newham imams

In the same month as the WFCOM intervention, in December 2015, a group of imams in the London Borough of Newham, backed by MEND, reportedly denounced Prevent as “spying on young people”.³²³ They signed a statement that called on the council “to urgently discuss the issues raised by the implementation of Prevent with imams and faith leaders; community representatives and organisations; teachers’ unions and parents”.³²⁴ Demonstrating that a grievance perspective underlay this demand to involve imams and community leaders in discussions of the issues surrounding Prevent – not in discussions of its implementation – the statement added:

“Prevent” almost exclusively targets young Muslims for the views they hold on religion or issues such as government foreign policy. Schools and teachers are cast in the role of spies on our young people. This is leading to increasing division and to a breakdown of trust in schools and colleges.³²⁵

The signatories to the statement were headed by Malia Bouattia, then the head of NUS Black Students; Gargi Bhattacharyya, Vice-Chair UCU branch at the University of East London; and Tahir Talati, Chair of MEND in Newham. Under these names, those of 19 Imams were listed, but all signatories were referred to as acting in a “personal capacity”.

320. “Report of the Trustees and Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31 December 2017 for Waltham Forest Noor ul Islam”, p.8.

321. *Ibid.*, p.22.

322. “Report of the Trustees and Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31 December 2019 for Waltham Forest Noor ul Islam”, pp.28, 33. Available at: Waltham Forest Noor Ul Islam (Charity number: 1171380), Charity Commission website, <https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search/-/charity-details/5070136/accounts-and-annual-returns>.

323. Randeep Ramesh, “Prevent programme ‘spying on our young people’, say east London imams”, *The Guardian*, December 6, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/dec/06/east-london-muslims-prevent-strategy>.

324. “Newham Statement on Prevent”, Stand Up To Racism website, undated (but uploaded December 2015), <http://www.standuptoracism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Newham-Statement-on-Prevent-15.pdf>.

325. *Ibid.*

Far-right opposition to Prevent: Benjamin Raymond

This report focuses primarily on Islamist and far-left opposition to Prevent, a coming together of two distinct political traditions that, if contradictory, is increasingly familiar. Less understood, and discussed for the first time in this publication, is the interest a leading figure on the far-right, Benjamin Raymond, has shown in Islamist positions against Prevent.

Raymond co-founded the neo-Nazi organisation National Action whilst a student in 2013. In November 2021, he was convicted of membership of a proscribed terrorist organisation, and two counts of possessing terrorism material, and was jailed for 8 years.³²⁶ That conviction saw Raymond's Twitter feed disappear from the Internet, but an archived series of his tweets is available utilising the Wayback Machine. It makes for fascinating reading.

Raymond describes himself as “BA | Radicalisation Expert | Far-Right Extremism Expert | CTU/Prevent Critic | Academic Whistleblower | Author | Designer | Pacifist |.”³²⁷

Whilst there is clearly an element of humour in this Twitter handle, Raymond's opposition to Prevent continued in a more studious fashion in his tweets. On April 6, 2021, Raymond retweeted CAGE, with the words:

Although from an Islamic perspective, this article in the Journal of the British Sociological Association explores the full spectrum nature of the counter terrorism community, the actors and ideology behind it and their ability to enforce social engineering through the state.³²⁸

CAGE's tweet was actually promoting an article by the academic Narzanin Massoumi (who is not an Islamist) and Raymond went on to republish extracts from her work which denounced “neo-Conservative” think tanks, including Policy Exchange.³²⁹ Similarly to some of the Islamist organisations cited in this report, Ben Raymond also felt the need to use social media to criticise Sara Khan and the Commission for Countering Extremism, describing it as “subjective”.³³⁰

In 2020, Raymond drew the attention of his Twitter followers to the work of Salman Butt of the Islam21C website, and a podcast Butt was hosting on Prevent, featuring two academics critical of the scheme, and a representative of the CCE, whose reference was followed by an emoji of someone laughing.³³¹ That month, Raymond tweeted “#endprevent”.³³² He also retweeted a complaint from CAGE criticising counter-terrorism legislation,³³³ and posted a tweet from another user whose account is also suspended, which said:

I was Prevent and ACT trained and it was the biggest and most simplistic snitch programme since the STASI- designed to instil fear, and encourage every jobsworth in Christendom to make value judgements and reports. I then did a Cert. in Terrorism Studies and learnt the truth.³³⁴

That a prominent individual on the far-right appears to have found common cause with Islamists in opposing counter-extremism policies, provides an interesting snapshot of our contemporary political environment. Whether this trend would have continued, had Raymond avoided prison, is unknown.

326. Lizzie Dearden, “Ben Raymond: Co-founder of National Action neo-Nazi terrorist group jailed”, The Independent, December 3, 2021, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/national-action-ben-raymond-sentence-b1969233.html>.

327. See Benjamin Raymond/@braymo89 Twitter profile, webpage captured on November 30, 2021, at <https://web.archive.org/web/20211130194646/https://twitter.com/braymo89>.

328. Benjamin Raymond/@braymo89, Twitter post, April 6, 2021, captured on November 30, 2021, at <https://web.archive.org/web/20211130195137/https://twitter.com/braymo89/status/1379437092191621120>.

329. Benjamin Raymond/@braymo89, Twitter post, April 6, 2021, captured on November 30, 2021, at <https://web.archive.org/web/20211130195003/https://twitter.com/braymo89/status/1379446224995164167>.

330. Benjamin Raymond/@braymo89, Twitter post, March 16, 2021, captured on November 30, 2021, at <https://web.archive.org/web/20211130195001/https://twitter.com/braymo89/status/1371612181138186242>.

331. Benjamin Raymond/@braymo89, Twitter post, January 24, 2020, captured on January 28, 2020, at <https://web.archive.org/web/20200128095922/https://twitter.com/braymo89>.

332. Benjamin Raymond/@braymo89, Twitter post, January 23, 2020, captured on January 28, 2020, at <https://web.archive.org/web/20200128095922/https://twitter.com/braymo89>.

333. Benjamin Raymond/@braymo89, Twitter post, January 21, 2020, captured on January 28, 2020, at <https://web.archive.org/web/20200128095922/https://twitter.com/braymo89>.

334. Benjamin Raymond/@braymo89, Twitter post, January 22, 2020, captured on January 28, 2020, at <https://web.archive.org/web/20200128095922/https://twitter.com/braymo89>.

Opposition to the Commission for Countering Extremism

In January 2018, the Home Office announced the appointment of Sara Khan, a Muslim woman with experience of campaigning for women's rights, as the Lead Commissioner of the newly formed Commission for Countering Extremism (CCE). Sara Khan had previously led a counter-extremism NGO entitled called Inspire. This organisation was heavily criticised by activists for its support for Prevent, with Inspire stating that its staff had been called "Government stooge, native informant, apostates" by what it described as the "Islamist led anti Prevent lobby".³³⁵

The CCE was established as an independent organisation to "identify and challenge extremism in all its forms and provide the Government with advice on the policies needed to tackle it".³³⁶ Khan's appointment was greeted with an outcry of dismay and disdain from some prominent Islamist organisations. The MCB's secretary general, Harun Khan, expressed his "grave concerns" at the appointment. The MCB's formal statement continued:

*The fight against terrorism requires equal partnership between all parties, including Muslim communities. This appointment risks sending a clear and alarming message that the government has no intention of doing so. Sadly it will be seen as a move to placate those small sections of society who see Muslims as foreign, alien, rather than as equal citizens in this country.*³³⁷

The MCB was joined by other Muslim groups who viewed Khan's support for Prevent as intolerable. In January 2018, MEND published an article headed, "Remove Sara Khan as head of 'Commission for Countering Extremism'".³³⁸ It criticised Khan's appointment, referring to her "[l]ack of experience or expertise in terrorism, radicalisation or related disciplines", and a conflict of interest, stating her organisation, Inspire, had previously sought Prevent funding. MEND made no reference to the £850,000 received by MCB affiliates through various Prevent streams, as reported in September 2009.³³⁹

In the same month, FOSIS published a press release which stated its "deep concern over the government's counter-extremism strategy following its announcement of Sara Khan as the new head of the Commission for Countering Extremism".³⁴⁰ It added:

[Sara] Khan is a strong advocate for the government's toxic Prevent policy, which has unfairly targeted Muslims on many occasions. Khan lacks a track

335. Inspire/@wewillinspire, Twitter post, June 3, 2017, <https://twitter.com/wewillinspire/status/870954541373587456?t=FjIXTXi1WAh7D-J7ZFzflPg&s=19>.

336. "Guidance - Charter for the Commission for Countering Extremism", March 15, 2018 (updated November 8, 2021), UK Government website, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/charter-for-the-commission-for-countering-extremism/charter-for-the-commission-for-countering-extremism>.

337. "Commission for Countering Extremism: Muslim Council of Britain Urges Caution", MCB website, January 25, 2018, <https://mcb.org.uk/press-releases/commission-for-countering-extremism-muslim-council-of-britain-urges-caution/>.

338. "Remove Sara Khan as head of 'Commission for Countering Extremism'", MEND website, January 29, 2018, <https://www.mend.org.uk/whats-new/action-alerts/remove-sara-khan-as-head-of-commission-for-countering-extremism/>.

339. See "Council Spending Uncovered II, No.5: THE PREVENT STRATEGY", Taxpayers' Alliance website, September 8, 2009, p.1. Captured on November 22, 2009 at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20091122133924/http://www.taxpayersalliance.com/prevent.pdf>.

340. FOSIS, Press Release, Facebook, January 27, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/fosischannel/posts/1568596023177632>.

record of transparency and experience in building bridges between relevant communities showing a clear inadequacy for the position. This appointment indicates that the government's counter-extremism strategy will continue to be divisive.³⁴¹

The statement quoted FOSIS vice president Saffa Mir (see above) as saying:

The appointment of Sara Khan is deeply worrying, and the creation of this Commission further illustrates the government only engaging with the Muslim community through the sole lens of countering extremism.

It also declared:

[I]f current counter terrorism legislation continues to be applied, many more Muslims and other minority groups members will be victims of Islamophobic profiling and false accusation of being a terrorist due to their religion.

Also in January 2018, MEND co-ordinated a joint letter sent to the then Home Secretary Amber Rudd. The letter was published on MEND's website, and called for Rudd to remove Sara Khan from the position of counter-extremism commissioner. Signed by Shazad Amin, the CEO of MEND, Harun Khan the secretary general of the MCB and officials from CAGE, FOSIS, the MAB, and iERA, the statement reiterated the argument that Sara Khan lacked credibility within the Muslim community, as well as practical or academic experience. It also declared their concern "that Muslim communities will refuse to liaise with [Sara] Khan, thereby defeating the purpose of her appointment to the role".³⁴²

In March 2018, Layla Hadj (also known as Aitlhadj), then the Managing Director of CAGE and later the Director of Prevent Watch, echoed the claim that Sara Khan was not "credible" within the Muslim community and described her as a "pawn".³⁴³ She said that she thought of the CCE when she was putting out her bins. She added:

[T]here is a need for collective disengagement from the commission. This act of resistance, this disobedience, will provide the catalyst to consign these zombie ideas to the dustbin.³⁴⁴

In November 2018, when the CCE began its work by issuing a call for evidence, CAGE immediately campaigned for a boycott.³⁴⁵ Asim Qureshi, CAGE's Research Director stated:

The CCE is an endeavour to institutionalise structurally Islamophobic policies. Furthermore the "expert group" put together by the CCE commissioner Sara Khan is nearly entirely made of individuals who have been embedded within programmes that securitise Muslims. They have been involved in circles that perpetuate such policies and are all the more reason communities should boycott the CCE.

This was followed by the publication of a report, *CCE Exposed*, which insisted that the organisation was driven by Islamophobia.³⁴⁶ The report sought to discredit individuals working for the commission, including its expert group. The composition of this group, alleged the report, reflected

341. Ibid.

342. "Open letter to Home Secretary calling for removal of Sara Khan as counter-extremism tsar", MEND website, January 30, 2018.

343. Layla Hadj, "The Commission for Countering Extremism is a spectacular PR failure", Middle East Eye, March 2, 2018, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/commission-countering-extremism-spectacular-pr-failure>.

344. Ibid.

345. "CAGE calls for boycott of Sara Khan's extremism consultation study", 5Pillars website, November 30, 2018, <https://5pillarsuk.com/2018/11/30/cage-calls-for-boycott-of-sara-khans-extremism-consultation-study/>.

346. "CAGE releases detailed report exposing how CCE is driven by Islamophobia", CAGE website, January 7, 2019, <https://www.cage.ngo/cage-releases-detailed-report-exposing-how-cce-is-driven-by-islamophobia>.

the “undercurrent” of the CCE’s Islamophobia, even though some of the CCE’s expert group have been critical of Prevent.³⁴⁷ After linking the CCE with Prevent and counter-extremism, the report stated, “To this end we reiterate our position of a complete boycott of the CCE, starting with its evidence drive.”³⁴⁸

347. CAGE, “CCE Exposed: The Islamophobia Industry Policing Thoughts and Beliefs”, 2019, p.26. Available at: <https://www.cage.ngo/product/cce-exposed-report-pdf>. The report acknowledges that one of CCE’s expert group, Jamie Bartlett, has voiced critical concern’s about Prevent’s “mission creep”. Nonetheless, it criticises him for failing to understand the “fundamental nature of Prevent”, as a political project intentionally designed to create a securitised, closed society. See pp.39-41.

348. Ibid., p.64.

The Police and Security Services

Given the deadly nature of terrorist attacks committed in Britain this century, any refusal by activists to work with the police and security services belies an irresponsible disregard for public safety. In the case of a planned terrorist attack there is also the risk of failing to fulfil a legal obligation. Section 38B (1) and (2) of the Terrorism Act 2000 applies:

where a person has information which he knows or believes might be of material assistance —

(a) in preventing the commission by another person of an act of terrorism, or
(b) in securing the apprehension, prosecution or conviction of another person, in the United Kingdom, for an offence involving the commission, preparation or instigation of an act of terrorism.

(2) The person commits an offence if he does not disclose the information as soon as reasonably practicable in accordance with subsection 3

It is therefore a criminal offence not to inform the police if you know someone is preparing an act of terrorism, with a potential sentence of up to ten years in prison.³⁴⁹

This legal requirement is different to the “Prevent duty” in the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 which requires specified public organisations (for example, schools, hospitals and universities) to prevent people being drawn into terrorism, with a focus on safeguarding and prevention. Whereas Section 38B (1) and (2) of the Terrorism Act 2000 is about preventing individuals preparing or committing acts of terrorism, the Prevent duty is about preventing people from radicalising, i.e., from adopting an ideological perspective that sees terrorism as justified and even desirable.

The dangers of not reporting to the police can be exemplified by the case of Irfan Naseer, Irfan Khalid and Ashik Ali, the leaders of a terrorist cell in Birmingham. In 2013, they were jailed for a plot to detonate eight rucksack bombs in suicide attacks.³⁵⁰ Their group had been under surveillance by MI5 and the police as they raised money for their plot by posing as charity collectors, travelled to and from Pakistan, and experimented with explosives. Naseer was reportedly reprimanded by community leaders after he sent four young men to Pakistan for terrorist training. But according to *The Times*, “to the dismay of the authorities, nothing was said to the police”.³⁵¹ Their acquaintances were aware of their violent inclinations.³⁵²

The individuals and groups which follow in this section are listed in alphabetical order.

349. Terrorism Act 2000 Section 38B, UK Government website, undated, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/11/section/38B>.

350. “Terror plot: Jail terms for Birmingham bomb plotters”, BBC News, April 26, 2013, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-22290927>.

351. Sean O’Neill, “City with history as a hotbed for Islamists”, *The Times*, March 24, 2017, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/city-with-history-as-a-hotbed-for-islamists-9f53jvm26?region=global>.

352. Dominic Casciani, “The joker who wanted to be a bomber”, BBC News, February 21, 2013, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-21414518>.

The Centre for Media Monitoring (CfMM)

Rizwana Hamid is the Director of the Centre for Media Monitoring (CfMM), which identifies itself as a Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) project.³⁵³ The CfMM states that its “vision is both to highlight negative trends in the media as well as promote good practice”.³⁵⁴

In February 2021, Ms Hamid joined Afzal Khan MP, Moazzam Begg of CAGE, and Hamda Mohammed of the MAB in an online discussion hosted by the Islam Channel about the appointment of William Shawcross to lead the Prevent review.³⁵⁵ Rizwana Hamid was billed on screen as the Director of the “MCB Centre for Media Monitoring”. During the discussion, Hamid was asked what she would do if there was reason to be concerned about someone’s views. She answered:

*I really think as an individual or as an organisation I’d have two different responses to that. But the question is not what you do with those people. Because you’re looking at the end result. And, if you’re asking me, if you can clearly see that somebody’s going to do something, do you inform [sic.] them to the police or whatever? But that requires a level of trust from the community to work with the government and the police, and I don’t think there is that level of trust to do that.*³⁵⁶

So, a spokesperson for an MCB project indicates that her response in a professional capacity when faced with someone who held views that were a “cause for concern” would differ from her response in a personal capacity. She seemed to indicate that there is not the required level of trust in the police and government for Muslims to report to the police a person about to carry out a terrorist attack. She continued:

*The Muslim Council of Britain’s done a national listening exercise, whereby they’ve gone up and down the country speaking to communities, different organisations within the Muslim communities to look at their response to the counter-terrorism policies, but also the impact that it’s had on communities. Now, the impact that it’s had as a result of criminalising whole communities, as a result of the actions of individuals has meant that the trust isn’t there to work alongside government and police, in terms of informing on [sic] whoever it is, whether it’s a member of the family, or it may be somebody in the community.*³⁵⁷

She then went on to compare the question of reporting a person of concern to the police to the question of what a mother would do in response to finding a knife belonging to her son in the home. She described a moral conundrum, a choice between either talking to the son about the “root causes” of carrying a knife or handing him over to the police, where he’s likely to be “criminalised without looking at the root causes”. It is not unfair to interpret Hamid as expressing the view that the “end result” of an act of terrorism, i.e., dead civilians, is not as important as addressing its alleged “root causes” – in other words, the reasons for such acts. She then indicated that reporting people of concern to the police would not stop terrorism, since the root causes would remain unaddressed:

353. “About Us”, Centre for Media Monitoring website, undated, <https://cfmm.org.uk/about-us/>.

354. “Rizwana Hamid – Director”, Centre for Media Monitoring website, undated, <https://cfmm.org.uk/team-rizwana-hamid/>.

355. “Muslims on William Shawcross’ appointment to lead Prevent review”, Islam Channel, YouTube, February 5, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N6xTH5Nxe0I&ab_channel=IslamChannel. See from 42:00.

356. Ibid.

357. Ibid.

I think until society as a whole looks at the socio-economic influences of what leads some young people — who are part and parcel of this society — to go down a route of taking up violent means in terms of tackling various problems, we're not — the kind of reporting of people may resolve part of it but it won't stop the next person doing it.³⁵⁸

Muhbeen Hussain and British Muslim Youth

Muhbeen Hussain is the founder of British Muslim Youth (BMJ),³⁵⁹ an organisation he has represented since February 2011. According to his LinkedIn page, Hussain has also worked as a parliamentary research assistant at Westminster.³⁶⁰ The most recent parliamentary Register of Interests of Members' Secretaries and Research Assistants, published in March 2022, names the Bradford West Labour MP, Naz Shah, as Hussain's sponsor.³⁶¹ The register states that he is also the Communication and Engagement Officer for the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on British Muslims.³⁶² The register published in September 2020, which also lists his sponsor as Naz Shah, states that Hussain is the Communication and Engagement Officer for the Aziz Foundation.³⁶³ At this time, the Aziz Foundation was the sole secretariat of the APPG on British Muslims.³⁶⁴

In October 2015, the editor of *The Star* newspaper in south Yorkshire wrote that BMJ had issued “an incendiary declaration” in telling Rotherham Muslims not to communicate with the South Yorkshire Police. The editor added that the “defiant manifesto of anti-police rhetoric was a veiled incitement to vigilantism” and that he was “incensed” by the “tone, language and the seeming belief that this organisation was above the law – thinking it could speak for all Rotherham Muslims”. Moreover, he said, any Muslim organisation that breached this pact of silence towards the police force risked being ostracised.³⁶⁵

BMJ had complained following the publication of the report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham, by Alexis Jay. It argued:

South Yorkshire Police have piggybacked on this hostile environment towards the Muslim community by deflecting the attention of their own failures by scapegoating us. They have peddled a pernicious lie that historically they failed to act [on] allegations of CSE [Child Sexual Exploitation], because they were afraid of being branded racist.³⁶⁶

BMJ declared the boycott would continue “until and unless South Yorkshire Police can treat our community with respect and fairness”, and “listen to our concerns and treat us as equal partners pursuing shared goals”.³⁶⁷ The Rotherham Muslim Community Forum Alliance (RMCFA) also joined the boycott.³⁶⁸ The advocacy group CAGE elevated this act of local defiance to the national stage by commenting, “British Muslim community vote to boycott South Yorkshire Police over ‘lies’ and ‘demonization’”, and linking to an article on the BMJ website.³⁶⁹

The boycott ended within days, with a set of proposals drawn up with Rotherham MP Sarah Champion and Police and Crime Commissioner,

358. Ibid.

359. “A Call for a Shift in Government Policy”, British Muslim Youth website, captured on October 22, 2015, <https://web.archive.org/web/20151022110447/http://www.britishmuslimyouth.org.uk/>.

360. Muhbeen Hussain, LinkedIn profile page, <https://www.linkedin.com/in/muhbeen-hussain-54b046b9/>.

361. “Register of Interests of Members' Secretaries and Research Assistants”, Parliament website, March 4, 2022, p.28. Available at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmsecret/220304/register.pdf>.

362. Ibid.

363. “Register of Interests of Members' Secretaries and Research Assistants”, Parliament website, September 3, 2020 (captured on September 22, 2020), <https://web.archive.org/web/20200922134555/https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmsecret/staff-03.htm>.

364. “Secretariat”, APPG on British Muslims website, captured on November 5, 2018, <https://web.archive.org/web/20181105051930/https://appgbritishmuslims.org/staff/>.

365. “EDITOR'S COMMENT: Muslim group's fleeting 'boycott' has done untold damage to Rotherham”, *The Star*, October 28, 2015, captured on December 3, 2018, <https://web.archive.org/web/20181203193033/https://www.thestar.co.uk/news/editor-s-comment-muslim-group-s-fleeting-boycott-has-done-untold-damage-to-rotherham-1-7541010>. See also James Mitchinson, “EDITOR'S OPINION: Rotherham Muslim group refuses to co-operate with South Yorkshire Police”, October 27, 2015, captured on October 28, 2015, <https://web.archive.org/web/20151028131859/http://www.thestar.co.uk/news/local/editor-s-opinion-rotherham-muslim-group-refuses-to-co-operate-with-south-yorkshire-police-1-7537998>.

366. “Statement from British Muslim Youth”, International Report Bigotry and Fascism website, October 26, 2015, <http://irbf.org.uk/statement-from-british-muslim-youth/>.

367. “South Yorkshire Police Boycotted by the Muslim Community of Rotherham”, British Muslim Youth website, October 26, 2015, captured on October 28, 2015, <https://web.archive.org/web/20151028232620/http://www.britishmuslimyouth.org.uk/south-yorkshire-police-boycott-ed-by-the-muslim-community-of-rotherham>.

368. “Police seek talks following Rotherham Muslim boycott”, BBC News, October 27, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-south-yorkshire-34637505>.

369. CAGE/@UK_CAGE, Twitter post, October 26, 2015, https://twitter.com/UK_CAGE/status/658644137328160768.

Alan Billings. Muhbeen Hussain released a statement saying the boycott had been successful “in facilitating the correct dialogue needed to hear the concerns of many ordinary law-abiding Muslims living within Rotherham and silently enduring hate crimes”.³⁷⁰ New community representative arrangements followed. An Independent Advisory Panel for Minority Communities was set up, with Hussain as one of the members.³⁷¹ The BMY’s brief boycott of the police appeared to have ended in a walkover for the activists.

Uthman Lateef

Uthman Lateef is a preacher, presenter on Islam Channel, and a writer who publishes on the website Islam21C. In 2014, in an article warning of hate preachers speaking at British universities, gay rights campaigner Peter Tatchell wrote, “Uthman Lateef has stirred hostility towards non-Muslims and gay people, and denounced democracy and social integration. He has repeatedly referred to non-Muslims using the insulting word ‘kuffars’.”³⁷² Tatchell also expressed concern that Lateef has “condemned secular Islam, [and] attempts to reconcile Islam with democracy”.³⁷³

A paper published by the Commission for Countering Extremism in 2019 observed that Lateef has expressed opposition to Muslims assisting the police and security services. He has described such assistance as spying, which amounts to the “major sin” of “apostasy”. Warning his audience that they, as Muslims, may be approached by the secret services to spy on other Muslims, he stated:

*We need to know the Islamic position about doing that [spying]. The major sin involved, that could also become disbelief and apostasy. In informing the authorities about the Muslims, when the Muslims are involved in khayr³⁷⁴ and goodness and everything else, that the kuffar will still use for their own ends against the Muslims. And so we do not weaken the ummah by strengthening the kuffar. And that is exactly what spying is. You are a tool for the strengthening of their nation and the weakening of your own one.*³⁷⁵

He then said to his audience that if they see something that they think is impermissible or wrong – *haram* – they have a job to instruct and teach, but not to report to the security services, “not to go to the authorities to do that job for you”.³⁷⁶

In 2013, Lateef spoke at an event supported by iEngage, the predecessor of MEND.³⁷⁷ He has also been a speaker at events hosted by university Islamic societies and the East London Mosque.³⁷⁸

Maulana Muhammad Shahid Raza Naeemi, OBE

Maulana Shahid Raza, who was awarded an OBE in 2008, has multiple roles in Islamic institutions in Britain, with influence to match. He is the imam of Leicester Central Mosque; the president of the World Islamic Mission, European Region; the executive secretary of the Muslim Law (Shariah) Council UK; a founding trustee of the British Muslim Forum; and a trustee of the London Fatwa Council.³⁷⁹ In 2009, he was a founding member

370. Nadine Osman, “Muslim group lifts boycott of police over ‘scapegoating’ post Rotherham child sex exploitation scandal”, The Muslim News, November 27, 2015, <https://muslimnews.co.uk/newspaper/islamophobia/muslim-group-lifts-boycott-of-police-over-scapegoating-post-rotherham-child-sex-exploitation-scandal/>.

371. “IAP for Minority Communities”, Office of the South Yorkshire Police and Crime Commissioner website, undated, captured on April 5, 2016, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160405094543/http://www.southyorkshire-pcc.gov.uk/Transparency/IAPforMinorityCommunities.aspx>.

372. Peter Tatchell, “Islamist extremists shouldn’t be allowed to preach hate at British universities”, The Spectator, April 29, 2014, <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/islamist-extremists-shouldn-t-be-allowed-to-preach-hate-at-british-universities>.

373. Ibid.

374. *Khayr* in Arabic means doing good, behaving virtuously, and disinterested charity.

375. Usama Hasan, David Toube, and Muna Khan, “Mainstreaming Islamism: Islamist Institutions and Civil Society Organisations”, Commission for Countering Extremism, UK Government website, September 2019, pp.10, 52. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/836965/mainstreaming-islamism-islamist-institutions-and-civil-society-organisations.pdf. For the video of Lateef making this statement, see “Spying on Muslims”, Kalamullah, undated, 31:53-32:36. Available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20120501103805/http://kalamullah.com/spying.html>.

376. “Spying on Muslims”, 32:36, *ibid*.

377. See Hasan, Toube, and Khan, “Mainstreaming Islamism: Islamist Institutions and Civil Society Organisations”, pp.10, 52.

378. “The Moderation and Tolerance of Uthman Lateef”, Harry’s Place, March 8, 2010, <http://hurryupharry.net/2010/03/08/the-moderation-and-tolerance-of-uthman-lateef/>.

379. “Imams”, Islamic Centre website, undated, https://www.islamiccentre.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=113&Itemid=85.

and elected chairman of the Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board (MINAB) UK,³⁸⁰ which was funded by the British government from 2006 until 2014.³⁸¹ In 2016, he was awarded an Honorary Degree (Doctor of Laws) by the University of Leicester.³⁸²

In 2011, Raza was asked by a local paper: “If a Muslim suspects a fellow Muslim of being involved in terrorist activities, should they tell the authorities or simply try to dissuade them from such activity?” Raza responded:

*I would leave it to the judgement of that particular individual who discovers such a person involved in terrorism or extremism to see whether the level of activity is so dangerous that it should be reported or whether it's less dangerous and should be handled within the community.*³⁸³

The issue of Muslims resolving their own matters “within the community” without involving the police is one that has also arisen in the debate over shari’a councils. Cases, for example, of domestic violence - despite lying outside the remit of such councils - have reportedly been settled in councils between Muslim husbands and wives. The result is the failure of these cases to reach the civil courts where they ought to be settled.³⁸⁴ The underlying issue at stake is a culture of lawfulness, one that is shared by all British citizens regardless of their religion or lack of.

380. “Officers”, Muslim Law (Shariah) Council UK website, undated, <http://www.shariahcouncil.org/executive-secretary/>.

381. Laura Pitel, “Ministers lose vital link to mosques as pressure alienates Muslim group”, The Times, August 26, 2014, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/ministers-lose-vital-link-to-mosques-as-pressure-alienates-muslim-group-kwsbl93hxn8>

382. “Mohammad Shahid Raza - Honorary Degree - University of Leicester”, University of Leicester, YouTube, January 23, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jwGwiohySFw&ab_channel=UniversityofLeicester.

383. “Muslim scholar Sheikh Allama Moalana Shahid Raza Naeemi OBE answers your questions - Part 2”, The Dewsbury Reporter, January 1, 2011, captured on March 4, 2017, <http://web.archive.org/web/20170304125351/https://www.dewsburyreporter.co.uk/news/muslim-scholar-sheikh-allama-moalana-shahid-raza-naeemi-obe-answers-your-questions-part-2-1-2893056>.

384. Senay Boztas, “Sharia courts in Britain lock women into ‘marital captivity’, study says”, The Independent, December 4, 2015, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/sharia-courts-britain-lock-women-marital-captivity-study-says-a6761141.html>. For more on shari’a councils by the academic cited here, see Machteld Zee, *Choosing Sharia?: Multiculturalism, Islamic Fundamentalism and Sharia Councils*, Utrecht, Netherlands: Eleven International Publishing, 2016. For additional reports on women’s issues in shari’a councils, see Elham Manea, *Women and Shari’a Law: The Impact of Legal Pluralism in the UK*, London: I. B. Taurus, 2016, and Caroline Cox, “A parallel world: confronting the abuse of many Muslim women in Britain today”, London: Bow Group, 2015, available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20150521005223/https://bowgroup.org/sites/bowgroup.uat.pleasetest.co.uk/files/Bow%20Group%20Report%20-%20A%20Parallel%20World%20-%20Confronting%20the%20abuse%20of%20many%20Muslim%20women%20in%20Britain%20today%2024%2003%2015.pdf>.

Delegitimising Prevent: Key Themes

There are a number of themes that consistently appear in the campaigns of anti-Prevent activists that are of particular concern. These are broad brush claims about Prevent that risk exacerbating Muslims' distrust in and disengagement from national and local efforts to combat terrorism and extremism. These themes are that:

1. Prevent disproportionately and unfairly targets Muslims, "securitising" them as a "suspect community"
2. Prevent criminalises "conservative" Muslim beliefs by defining them as "extremist" and undermines freedom of expression
3. Prevent is a vehicle for the government to spy on Muslims, with teachers and other public servants cast as spies
4. Prevent officers can arbitrarily take away Muslim children
5. Muslims working on Prevent are in some way disloyal or even "native informants"
6. Prevent in itself is racist and Islamophobic, so cannot be reformed

These themes interweave to form a narrative that not only serves to undermine trust in authority to protect the public against Islamist terrorism and extremism. It also serves to undermine community cohesion by strengthening the view amongst some Muslims that they are a community under siege. Groups like CAGE and MEND, in perpetuating the notion of a community and religion under attack, effectively seek to become the spokespeople for all Muslims. It is in their interests to perpetuate a narrative of grievance amongst Muslims, even in the face of evidence that demonstrates that their narrative is wrong, since it enhances their symbolic power to speak on behalf of an allegedly oppressed people and, ultimately, a new social and political order.

The concern is that this narrative of grievance may appeal to many, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, including those who are neither Islamists nor activists. This narrative may especially appeal to those who have no alternative sources on the relevant facts. The Government, including the Home Office's Research, Information and Communications Unit (RICU), has so far failed to provide a convincing case in the public domain for the importance of Prevent, or any kind of strategy addressing the allure of Islamist ideas and values that may lead some to commit acts of violence or lead relatively segregated lives. Regardless of how best such a strategy

might work, or how Prevent might be re-designed, it is important that the themes that comprise this narrative of grievance are addressed in turn.

1. Prevent disproportionately and unfairly targets Muslims, “securitising” them as a “suspect community”

One of the most damaging and erroneous ideas spread by anti-Prevent activists is that Prevent disproportionately “targets” Muslims. This is the basis for the claim that Prevent is inherently Islamophobic.

The argument is basically that Muslims comprise the majority of Prevent referrals, despite them making up only a fraction of Britain’s population, and that this reflects institutional or systemic bigotry. This argument was expressed in a journal article in 2018 by Fahid Qurashi, a lecturer at the University of Salford, who noted that “between April 2012 and April 2015 at least 69% of the [Prevent] referrals involved Muslims”, despite the Muslim population being only 5%.³⁸⁵ This allegedly disproportionate focus on Muslims, Qurashi asserted, demonstrates Islamophobia.

In February 2019, CAGE Research Director Asim Qureshi argued along the same lines. He acknowledged the increasing number of referrals relating to far-right extremism, but dismissed it as evidence of non-bias. For Qureshi, even an approximate equivalence in referrals relating to Islamist and far-right extremism was evidence of Islamophobia, since – as the reasoning goes – Muslims are a much smaller proportion of the population than white people.³⁸⁶ But there is no reason why Muslim referrals should be proportionately equivalent to the proportion of the UK’s population that is Muslim. The correct benchmark should simply be the extent to which Islamists present a security threat compared with others.

Kundnani’s aforementioned report, *Spooked! How not to prevent violent extremism*, claimed “Prevent is discriminatory in its sole focus on Muslims”.³⁸⁷ Although it was written in 2009, this report is still viewed by anti-Prevent activists as a key source in their campaign. But this argument can no longer be made. In recent years, the balance of Prevent referrals has shifted significantly. Muslims now comprise a minority of Prevent referrals. The most recent Home Office data from 2020/2021 shows 4,915 referrals. Just over a half (2,544; 51%) of these referrals were related to what is termed “mixed or unclear” ideologies, and a quarter (1,229; 25%) of them were related to “Extreme Right-Wing” ideologies.³⁸⁸ Referrals of Muslims related to Islamist extremism accounted for just over one-fifth (1,064; 22%). Compared with 2019/2020 data, these latest figures demonstrate a slight but continuing shift away from Islamist referrals towards those of far-right extremists.³⁸⁹

Prevent referrals may be assessed by a multi-agency “Channel panel” and, if appropriate, referred on to Channel’s safeguarding programme that supports the most vulnerable, high-risk Prevent referrals. The most recent figures show that in 2020/21, 1,333 cases were referred to the panel and 688 of those were adopted into the programme to receive

385. Fahid Qurashi, “The Prevent strategy and the UK ‘war on terror’: embedding infrastructures of surveillance in Muslim communities”, in *Palgrave Communications*, Volume 4, Number 17, February 13, 2018, p.4.

386. Asim Qureshi, “Prevent’s work on far right extremism does not make it worth saving”, *Middle East Eye*, February 18, 2019, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/prevents-work-far-right-extremism-does-not-make-it-worth-saving>.

387. Kundnani, “Spooked!”, p.23.

388. Home Office, “Individuals referred to and supported through the Prevent Programme, England and Wales, April 2020 to March 2021”, UK Government website, November 18, 2021, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/individuals-referred-to-and-supported-through-the-prevent-programme-april-2020-to-march-2021/individuals-referred-to-and-supported-through-the-prevent-programme-england-and-wales-april-2020-to-march-2021>.

389. Home Office, “Individuals referred to and supported through the Prevent Programme, April 2019 to March 2020”, UK Government website, November 26, 2020, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/individuals-referred-to-and-supported-through-the-prevent-programme-april-2019-to-march-2020/individuals-referred-to-and-supported-through-the-prevent-programme-april-2019-to-march-2020>.

support. Of these, 46% (317) were related to far-right extremism, 30% (205) to unclear ideologies, and just 22% (154) to Islamist extremism. So, according to the latest data, there are fewer referrals relating to Islamism than those relating to far-right extremism, and this discrepancy is even more pronounced in cases taken up into the Channel programme, where there has been a greater take up of far-right extremist cases than Islamist extremist ones. The Home Office report for 2020/2021 notes that “the number of referrals adopted as a Channel case for Islamist radicalisation concerns decreased by 26% compared with the previous year.”³⁹⁰ It adds that adopted Channel cases for Islamist radicalisation concerns have decreased by 41% since 2016.

Furthermore, referrals relating to Islamist radicalisation concerns were less likely to be adopted as a Channel case (154 of 337; 46%) than those with concerns relating to far-right radicalisation (317 of 557; 57%). The reasons for the difference in take-up rates are not straightforward. But the fact that Muslim referrals have a lower take up rate into Channel may be interpreted as evidence that Muslims who present no serious security risk are being initially referred with prejudice.

Writing in a personal capacity, Miqdaad Versi, Assistant Secretary General of the MCB, suggested this in November 2017, apparently in relation to the Channel referral figures for 2015/16. He said:

*A significantly smaller proportion of those referred for “Islamist” extremism are actually acted upon (16% are discussed at an early intervention multi-agency programme – a Channel panel; 5% receive Channel support), compared to “extreme rightwing” extremism (25% and 13% respectively), suggesting an over-referral for “Islamist” extremism.*³⁹¹

In September 2018, apparently regarding the same figures for 2015/16, MEND claimed that Muslims are being “falsely implicated” by being referred to Prevent. MEND stated: “Muslims have been falsely implicated as being at risk of radicalisation. Indeed, recent figures suggest that 95% of individuals referred to PREVENT are not judged as in need of Channel support.”³⁹² In January 2020, CAGE referred to the same (by then outdated) figures, stating:

*95% of PREVENT referrals are false positives on the programme’s own terms, requiring no further intervention – proof that the policy is ineffective and toxic, and does not need a mere ‘review’ or ‘improvement’.*³⁹³

But MEND and CAGE’s claim that 95% of Muslim Prevent referrals were “false positives” or falsely implicated Muslims is incorrect. The 95% that did not go on to receive support from Channel were not “implicated” at all; they were not rightly or wrongly linked to any crime, as this phrasing suggests. They simply did not end up participating in Channel. The same applies to the 86% of Muslim referrals from 2020/21 that did not receive support from Channel. There can be a variety of reasons for this. Many of those referred to Prevent who do not proceed to receive help via Channel are “signposted to other services”.³⁹⁴ Channel is for the most serious cases,

390. Home Office, “Individuals referred to and supported through the Prevent Programme, England and Wales, April 2020 to March 2021”.

391. Miqdaad Versi, “The latest Prevent figures show why the strategy needs an independent review”, The Guardian, November 10, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/nov/10/prevent-strategy-statistics-independent-review-home-office-muslims>. Versi was referring to the total number of referrals for 2015-16 (7,631), the number of Channel referrals

392. “MEND Rebuttal to Dispatches presented by John Ware, 26th March 2018”, MEND website, March 26, 2018, p.2. Available at: <https://www.mend.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/MEND-rebuttal-to-Dispatches-26.03.18.pdf>.

393. “Beyond PREVENT: A Real Alternative To Securitised Policies (Report)”, CAGE website, January 16, 2020, <https://www.cage.ngo/cage-beyond-prevent-report>.

394. Home Office, “Individuals referred to and supported through the Prevent Programme, England and Wales, April 2020 to March 2021”.

but it is not the only route for tackling radicalisation-related safeguarding concerns. There can still be genuine such concerns about those referrals that don't require Channel's support.

Moreover, given that participation in Channel is voluntary, the factors affecting referrals' choices to participate or not have to be factored into any analysis. Given the constant portrayal of Prevent by Islamist and other activists as an Islamophobic project, it does not seem too surprising that more Muslims would opt not to participate than non-Muslims, including far-right extremists. Curiously, some Islamist groups, such as CAGE, have argued that Prevent is coercive, but this seems strikingly at odds with the low participation rates of Muslims in Channel when compared to those of non-Muslims.³⁹⁵

A case can be made from the most recent Home Office data for 2020/2021, mentioned above, that Muslims are being disproportionately referred to Prevent, but not in the way anti-Prevent activists claim. This is because Islamist extremism remains the biggest concern of the intelligence and security services. In the report setting out his oversight of the 2011 Prevent review, Lord Carlile stated:

*Although there is serious work to be done in relation to Northern Ireland-related terrorism and extreme right-wing terrorism, the bulk of current activity is in relation to Islamist extremism as well as terrorism.*³⁹⁶

A decade later, the biggest terrorist threat still emanates from Islamist, not far-right, extremism. This is borne out in terms of the number of foiled terror plots,³⁹⁷ counter-terrorism investigations,³⁹⁸ people in custody for terrorism-connected offences,³⁹⁹ and number of people killed in terrorist attacks in the UK.⁴⁰⁰ There is no evidence that any terrorist campaign in Britain has been motivated by what the system of Prevent referrals categorises as “mixed or unclear” ideology, despite this group now being the second largest segment in the dataset.

On March 18, 2022, Matt Jukes, the National Lead for Counter Terrorism Policing, told the media that in the 12 months to December 31, 2021, there were 186 counter-terrorism related arrests, 50% of which were related to suspected Islamist terrorism, and 41% of which related to suspected extreme right wing terrorism.⁴⁰¹ He said that since the start of 2017 there have been 11 Islamist extremist attacks and 18 late-stage terror plots linked to Islamist extremism, compared with 12 plots related to right-wing extremism.⁴⁰²

On September 10, 2021, the Director General of Britain's domestic security service, MI5, Ken McCallum, noted that most of the foiled 31 “late-stage” plots to attack the UK over the past four years were Islamist.⁴⁰³ In October 2020, McCallum said that “by volume ... our largest threat” is “Islamist extremist terrorism”.⁴⁰⁴ He noted that 27 plots had been foiled, 8 of which were related to right wing extremists, the remaining 19 presumably related to Islamists. In October 2019, the Metropolitan Police informed the public that the majority of the 24 terrorist plots foiled between April 2017 to October 2019 – i.e., 16 plots – involved Islamists.⁴⁰⁵

395. CAGE has claimed, “despite PREVENT being described as ‘voluntary’, coercion is often applied to those who do not immediately acquiesce with the programme”. See CAGE, “Beyond PREVENT: A Real Alternative To Securitized Policies”, p.28.

396. Lord Carlile, “Report to the Home Secretary of Independent Oversight of Prevent Review and Strategy”, HM Government, 2011, para.10, p.4. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97977/lord-carlile-report.pdf.

397. Gareth Davies and Dominic Nicholls, “MI5 foiled 31 ‘late-stage’ terror attack plots against the UK in past four years and six during pandemic”, The Telegraph, September 10, 2021, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2021/09/10/mi5-foiled-31-late-stage-terror-attack-plots-against-uk-past/>.

398. “Home Affairs Committee Oral evidence: Counter-terrorism”, HC 750, House of Commons website, October 24, 2018, Q.54-55, <http://data.parliament.uk/wriAsstenevidence/committeeevidence/svc/evidencedocument/home-affairs-committee/counterterrorism/oral/92097.pdf>.

399. Home Office, “Operation of police powers under the Terrorism Act 2000 and subsequent legislation: Arrests, outcomes, and stop and search, Great Britain, quarterly update to June 2021”, UK Government website, September 9, 2021, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/operation-of-police-powers-under-the-terrorism-act-2000-quarterly-update-to-june-2021/operation-of-police-powers-under-the-terrorism-act-2000-and-subsequent-legislation-arrests-outcomes-and-stop-and-search-great-britain-quarterly-u>.

400. See Appendix A in: Greer, *Tackling Terrorism in Britain*, pp.199-200.

401. Chiara Giordano, “Terrorism: Children with extreme right-wing ideologies ‘getting substantially younger’ as 19 arrested”, The Independent, March 18, 2022, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/terrorism-right-wing-children-arrests-b2038024.html>.

402. Ibid.

403. Davies and Nicholls, “MI5 foiled 31 ‘late-stage’ terror attack plots against the UK in past four years and six during pandemic”.

404. “Director General Ken McCallum makes first public address”, Security Service website, October 14, 2020, <https://www.mi5.gov.uk/news/director-general-ken-mccallum-makes-first-public-address>.

405. Ed Riley, “British police have foiled 24 terror plots since ISIS-inspired Westminster attack in March 2017, Scotland Yard chief Cressida Dick says”, MailOnline, October 22, 2019, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-759943/British-police-foiled-24-terror-plots-April-2017.html>.

In his speech on March 18, 2022, Matt Jukes, the National Lead for Counter Terrorism Policing, said there were currently about 800 live counterterrorism investigations in the UK, with about 80% of these linked to Islamist extremism, “which remains the predominant ideological threat”.⁴⁰⁶ This has remained consistent for at least the last three years. In October 2018, Jukes’ predecessor, Neil Basu, told the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee that 80% of the counter-terrorism investigations in the UK were connected to the “Islamist Jihadist threat”.⁴⁰⁷

According to the latest Home Office figures, as at December 31, 2021, there were 229 persons in custody for terrorism-connected offences in Britain, and “the vast majority (67%) were categorised as holding Islamist-extremist views. A further 23% were categorised as holding Extreme Right-Wing ideologies and 10% were categorised as holding Other ideologies”.⁴⁰⁸ Six months earlier, at June 30, 2021, there were 220 people in custody for terrorism-connected offences, with a slightly higher proportion - 70% – categorised as holding Islamist-extremist views, and 22% categorised as holding Extreme Right-Wing ideologies.⁴⁰⁹ On December 31, 2019, 77% of those in custody on terrorism-related offences were categorised as having Islamist-extremist views.⁴¹⁰ Nine months earlier, on March 31, 2019, the figure was slightly higher, at 79%.⁴¹¹

Of the fatal terrorist attacks in the UK from 2005 to 2020, 90% of the 115 deaths were the responsibility of violent Islamist extremists.⁴¹²

The data, as shown above, irrefutably demonstrates that Muslims are not being disproportionately or unfairly “targeted” by Prevent. If anything, Muslim individuals who may present a security risk are being under-represented in referrals, given that Islamist terrorism is by far the greatest security threat. It would be reasonable to expect the proportion of Muslim Prevent referrals to be approximately equivalent to the proportion of terrorism-related arrests, investigations, and plots that involve Islamists. But this is not the case. As noted above, Muslim referrals to Prevent are shrinking. They only account for less than a quarter of all referrals to both Prevent and Channel, less than half of the Channel referrals relating to far-right extremism. Yet, the Islamist terror threat remains the strongest, accounting for the vast majority of the aforementioned threat indicators. Anti-Prevent activists’ failure to acknowledge this is a curious omission.

It is an equally curious omission on the part of successive governments to have failed to challenge the narrative of anti-Prevent activists that Muslims are being unfairly and disproportionately “targeted”. The Government’s failure to publicly refer to its own statistics to demonstrate that Muslim Prevent referrals are in fact lower than we would expect, given the predominance of the Islamist terror threat, requires some explanation.

Prevent practitioner Sean Arbuthnot of the Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right offers the view that Muslims may be under-referred to Prevent due to a fear held by possible referrers of being labelled Islamophobic or bigoted. He writes that he has “experienced people who were reluctant to report potential Islamist extremism for fear that they would be perceived as racist or culturally insensitive and, to be blunt, they

406. Chiara Giordano, “Terrorism: Children with extreme right-wing ideologies ‘getting substantially younger’ as 19 arrested”, *The Independent*, March 18, 2022.

407. “Home Affairs Committee Oral evidence: Counter-terrorism”, HC 750, Q.54-55.

408. Home Office, “Operation of police powers under the Terrorism Act 2000 and subsequent legislation: Arrests, outcomes, and stop and search, Great Britain, quarterly update to December 2021”, UK Government website, March 10, 2022, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/operation-of-police-powers-under-the-terrorism-act-2000-quarterly-update-to-december-2021/operation-of-police-powers-under-the-terrorism-act-2000-and-subsequent-legislation-arrests-outcomes-and-stop-and-search-great-britain-quarterly-u>.

409. Home Office, “Operation of police powers under the Terrorism Act 2000 and subsequent legislation: Arrests, outcomes, and stop and search, Great Britain, quarterly update to June 2021”.

410. Home Office, “Operation of police powers under the Terrorism Act 2000 and subsequent legislation: Arrests, outcomes, and stop and search Great Britain, year ending December 2019”, March 5, 2020, p.17. Available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/869780/police-powers-terrorism-dec2019-hosb0720.pdf.

411. Grahame Allen and Esme Kirk-Wade, “Terrorism in Great Britain: the statistics”, House of Commons Library Briefing Paper, Number CBP7613, March 26, 2020, p.22. Available at: <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7613/CBP-7613.pdf>.

412. See Appendix A in: Greer, *Tackling Terrorism in Britain*, pp.199-200.

felt more comfortable confronting or challenging the radical right”.⁴¹³ The notion that fears of being labelled Islamophobic are hampering counter-extremism efforts is not new. In December 2016, Dame Louise Casey, in her review into integration, acknowledged:

*Too many public institutions, national and local, state and non-state, have gone so far to accommodate diversity and freedom of expression that they have ignored or even condoned regressive, divisive and harmful cultural and religious practices, for fear of being branded racist or Islamophobic.*⁴¹⁴

Asim Qureshi dismissed Arbuthnot’s suggestion that Muslims are being under-referred, and claimed it belied “a disturbing underlying Islamophobia”. In the face of the facts, he added, “Muslims are more likely to be referred over ‘extremism’ due to the pathologising of Muslim beliefs and behaviours, which is the undercurrent of Prevent.”⁴¹⁵ But it is not Muslim beliefs and behaviours that are the cause of Muslim referrals – which do not even reflect the extent of the Islamist threat – it is, rather, security concerns about individuals who happen to be Muslim. Prevent in no way disproportionately and unfairly targets Muslims.

Nonetheless, anti-Prevent activists persist in claiming that Prevent “targets” Muslims as a “suspect community” and that Muslims are “securitised” by Prevent. The notion of Muslims as a “suspect community” was articulated in a journal article in 2009 by Christina Pantazis and Simon Pemberton, who claimed that “recent political discourse and legislative measures have identified Muslims as the ‘new’ suspect community”.⁴¹⁶ This instigated an academic debate, with Steven Greer’s subsequent criticism of the notion in 2010, on the grounds of conceptual, empirical, and evidential flaws. These included, amongst other things,

*the over-inclusive and indeterminate definition of the term ‘suspect community’; the failure to recognize that Muslims do not constitute a single national community in the United Kingdom in any real sense; [and] the lack of precision about what constitutes ‘official suspicion’ ...*⁴¹⁷

Greer also noted “that statements from government spokespeople have repeatedly exempted the vast majority of Muslims from involvement in, or support for, terrorism”.⁴¹⁸ Nonetheless, numerous academic articles on the topic were subsequently published and the phrase became adopted in activist circles. A decade after Pantazis and Pemberton’s article, the same claim regarding a “suspect community” was still being made. In December 2019, Shazad Amin, the CEO of MEND, claimed, “Since its inception, PREVENT has served to marginalise Muslim communities and place them within a pre-criminalised space as a suspect community.”⁴¹⁹ More recently, in June 2021, during an online event on Prevent in schools organised by MEND, CAGE’s Azad Ali similarly claimed that Prevent is “premised against the Muslim community to create a suspect community; to look at the Muslim community and engage with them through the lens of security and policing”.⁴²⁰ CAGE describes its aspiration to be “a resistance movement of the suspect community, by the suspect community, and for the

413. Sean Arbuthnot, “What do the latest Prevent statistics tell us about the radical right in the UK?”, Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right website, January 10, 2019, <http://www.radicalrightanalysis.com/2019/01/10/what-do-the-latest-prevent-statistics-tell-us-about-the-radical-right-in-the-uk/>.

414. Louise Casey, “The Casey Review: A Review into Opportunity and Integration”, Department for Communities and Local Government, p.16, n.1.67. Available at: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/575973/The_Casey_Review_Report.pdf.

415. Asim Qureshi, “Prevent’s work on far right extremism does not make it worth saving”, Middle East Eye, February 18, 2019, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/prevents-work-far-right-extremism-does-not-make-it-worth-saving>.

416. Christina Pantazis and Simon Pemberton, “From the ‘Old’ to the ‘New’ Suspect Community: Examining the Impacts of Recent UK Counter-Terrorist Legislation”, *The British Journal of Criminology*, Vol.49, No.5 (September 2009), pp.646-666.

417. Steven Greer, “Anti-Terrorist Laws and the United Kingdom’s ‘Suspect Muslim Community’: A Reply to Pantazis and Pemberton”, *The British Journal of Criminology*, Vol.50, No.6 (November 2010), p.1187.

418. Ibid.

419. “Evidence Submitted to the Independent Review of PREVENT: A Submission from Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND)”, MEND website, December 2019, p.5. Available at: <https://www.mend.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/PREVENT-Submission-MEND.pdf>.

420. “Time for PREVENT to be Scrapped”, MEND website, July 13 2021. See also, “PREVENT in schools workshop”, MEND - Muslim Engagement & Development, Facebook, June 30, 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/mendcommunity/videos/240157597914834/>. As of March 2022, the video recording of the discussion had less than 500 views.

suspect community”.⁴²¹ Prevent Watch – the Director of which, Layla Aitlhadj, co-authored the recent People’s Review of Prevent report – also uses this trope, claiming “the Muslim community has become the target suspect community.”⁴²²

2. Prevent criminalises “conservative” Muslim beliefs by defining them as “extremist” and undermines freedom of expression

The claim that Prevent and, more broadly, the Government’s counter-extremism approach stigmatises or even criminalises Muslim beliefs has been expressed consistently for years by numerous Islamist organisations and individuals. Such beliefs have often been referred to as merely “conservative” – as opposed to extremist – as if they lie within the bounds of acceptability in modern Britain.

In 2015, after the publication of the Government’s counter-extremism strategy, the MCB warned the strategy would fail if it continued “to conflate conservative views with violent extremism without any evidence base”.⁴²³ But the Government was not just concerned about non-violent ideas’ potential to lead some to violence. It’s concern for non-violent extremism included the unequal treatment of women in *shari’a* councils and extremists gaining positions on school governing bodies, as well as the unequal treatment and segregation of boys and girls in schools. “Women’s rights are eroded,” wrote Home Secretary Theresa May in the strategy’s Foreword, “intolerance and bigotry become normalised, minorities are targeted and communities become separated from the mainstream.”⁴²⁴ Nonetheless, the MCB and other anti-Prevent campaigners have continued to reject such concerns as cases of extremism, preferring to highlight the allegedly conservative nature of the associated behaviours and ideas.

Islamist anti-Prevent campaigners are reluctant to acknowledge or tackle extremism in mosques. On the Government’s plans to close mosques hosting extremist speakers, the MCB questioned the Government’s authority to classify any mosque as “extremist” and implied the Government was leading a witch hunt.⁴²⁵ The MCB stated,

*we understand that the Counter-Extremism Strategy will single out and “close mosques where extremist meetings have taken place”. Do such mosques really exist and by whose definition are they deemed to be extremist?*⁴²⁶

The MCB appears to have forgotten the case of Finsbury Park Mosque, which closed following a police raid in 2003 when the institution was under the control of Abu Hamza and his supporters.⁴²⁷ In 2006, Abu Hamza was convicted of six charges of soliciting murder and two charges of inciting racial hatred in speeches and sermons, delivered at Finsbury Park Mosque and other locations.⁴²⁸ The mosque eventually reopened under new leadership, unconnected to Hamza, and is an affiliate of the MCB.

Some mosques, including the MCB-affiliate, the East London Mosque (ELM), have a documented history of hosting extremist preachers.

421. Asim Qureshi, “Fight the power: how CAGE resists from within a ‘suspect community’”, Palgrave Communications volume 3, Article number: 17090, September 1, 2017, p.2. Available at: <https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201790.pdf>.

422. “About”, Prevent Watch website, undated, <https://www.preventwatch.org/about/>.

423. MCB, “One Nation Counter-Extremism Strategy/risks further undermining fight against terrorism”, MCB website, October 19, 2015, <https://mcb.org.uk/press-releases/one-nation-counter-extremism-strategy-risks-fight-against-terror-ism-191015/>.

424. HM Government, *Counter-Extremism Strategy*, p.7

425. MCB, “One Nation Counter-Extremism Strategy/risks further undermining fight against terrorism”.

426. *Ibid.*

427. “Anti-terror police raid”, BBC News, January 20, 2003, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/england/2675223.stm.

428. “Hamza jailed for seven years”, The Guardian, February 7, 2006, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/feb/07/terrorism.uk>.

In January 2009, ELM allowed a video-lecture to be delivered by the Yemeni-American cleric, Anwar al-Awlaki, who later came to be known as Al-Qaeda's chief English speaking ideologue.⁴²⁹ More recently, in 2020, ELM twice hosted Marwan Muhammad,⁴³⁰ the Director of the charity Collective Against Islamophobia in France (CCIF), which was banned by the French government in September 2021 on the grounds that it had stirred up hatred.⁴³¹ The judge stated that Marwan Muhammad, "publicly made statements tending to relativise, even legitimise, the attacks against the Jewish Museum in Brussels in 2014 and against the newspaper Charlie Hebdo in 2015".⁴³² In his second appearance at the mosque, in December 2020, the former CCIF Director was joined by representatives of MEND and CAGE.⁴³³

The allegation that merely conservative views are criminalised has also been made in the education sector. Peter Clarke's report on the 2014 Trojan Horse affair in Birmingham, in which he documented a failure to protect children from exposure to extremist ideas, was rejected by the MCB. The umbrella group accused Clarke of "conflating conservative Muslim practices to a supposed ideology and agenda to 'Islamise' secular schools".⁴³⁴ Yet, Clarke noted, there was a "coordinated agenda to impose ... segregationist attitudes and practices".⁴³⁵ He added:

*Rejecting not only the secular and other religions but also other strands of Islamic belief, it goes beyond the kind of social conservatism practised in some faith schools which may be consistent with universal human rights and respectful of other communities.*⁴³⁶

In 2016, in its report to Labour on Prevent, the MCB stated:

*Conservative religious and cultural practices (and more recently political beliefs) are classed as "non-violent extremism" and the first step in a "conveyor belt" towards violent terrorism, without any evidence underpinning this theory of radicalisation.*⁴³⁷

However, it failed to identify specific examples of such practices and defend them as merely conservative rather than extremist. This is a common feature of anti-Prevent activists' claims about the alleged criminalisation of Islamic ideas or practices: They are typically not accompanied by an articulation of the distinction between Islamic conservatism and Islamist extremism.

The failure to acknowledge this difference – in fact, the obfuscation of it – is what allows such activists to shield extremist ideas and practices whilst appearing to defend the freedom of expression and conscience. Thus, concern about the unlawful discrimination against women in shari'a councils and about the unlawful segregation of boys and girls in Muslim schools, such as in the case of Al-Hijrah School in Birmingham, is scorned. And what is perceived as under attack are deemed to be merely conservative or normative Islamic values.⁴³⁸ In the latter case, where a Muslim secondary school was confirmed in 2017 by the Court of Appeal to have unlawfully segregated boys and girls⁴³⁹ – and was found by

429. Imam Sheikh Dr Usama Hasan, David Toube, Muna Khan, "Mainstreaming Islamism: Islamist Institutions and Civil Society Organisations," Commission for Countering Extremism, September 2019, pp.5, 32. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/836965/mainstreaming-islamism-islamist-institutions-and-civil-society-organisations.pdf.

430. "East London Mosque hosted Anti-Islamophobia event for Islamophobia Awareness Month", East London Mosque website, November 26, 2020, <https://www.eastlondonmosque.org.uk/news/global-islamophobia-nov2020>.

431. "Décret du 2 décembre 2020 portant dissolution d'un groupement de fait [decree of December 2, 2020 dissolving a de facto group]", NOR : INT-D2033449D, December 3, 2020, <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/orf/id/JORFTEXT000042602019>.

432. Cécile Chambraud, "Le Conseil d'Etat valide la dissolution du CCIF et de BarakaCity", Le Monde, September 25, 2021, https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2021/09/25/le-conseil-d-etat-valide-la-dissolution-du-ccif-et-de-barakacity_6095981_3224.html.

433. "ELM Winter Family Programme 2020 - Live", East London Mosque & London Muslim Centre, YouTube, December 26, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y5mTlyWEMJs>.

434. MCB, "The Muslim Council of Britain responds to Peter Clarke's 'Trojan Horse' letter report", MCB website, July 23, 2014, <https://mcb.org.uk/press-releases/the-muslim-council-of-britain-responds-to-peter-clarkes-trojan-horse-letter-report/>.

435. Peter Clarke, "Report into allegations concerning Birmingham schools arising from the 'Trojan Horse' letter", HC 576, House of Commons, 2014, paras.5.1, p.48. Available at: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/340526/HC_576_accessible.pdf.

436. Ibid., para.5.2, p.48, emphasis added.

437. MCB, "The Impact of Prevent on Muslim Communities", p.4

438. See, for example, CAGE, "CCE Exposed: The Islamophobia Industry Policing Thoughts and Beliefs", 2019; "PRESS RELEASE - UK: Shariah court review is hostile and discriminatory", IHRC website, May 26, 2016, <https://www.ihr.org.uk/activities/press-releases/11688-press-release-uk-shariah-court-review-is-hostile-and-discriminatory/>; and "MEND'S MEDIA INFORMATION SHEETS", MEND website, undated (but uploaded January 2021), <https://www.mend.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/MENDS-Media-Info-Sheets.pdf>.

439. Court of Appeal judgment ([2017] EWCA Civ 1787), <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/interim-executive-board-of-al-hijrah-school-for-joinder-20171107.pdf>.

Ofsted to have kept literature in its library that condoned violence against women⁴⁴⁰ – CAGE lambasted the decision, claiming it amounted to an attack on Islam that was influenced by “pro-Prevent” organisations.⁴⁴¹ This is either obfuscation of extremism or a re-definition of conservatism. In any case, it may be argued, what such activists want to conserve are beliefs and values that do not belong in modern Britain, regardless of their allegedly traditional origins. They are beliefs and values that not all Muslims in Britain share, but which resonate for some of the most vocal and organised campaigners against Prevent.

A salient example of the difference between a conservative and extremist position that anti-Prevent activists fail to make can be seen regarding homosexuality. Opposition to equal marriage rights for same-sex partners may be considered as a “conservative” point of view shared by Muslim, Christian, Jewish, and non-religious people alike. It is a view held, for example, by CAGE’s Azad Ali. In 2013, whilst speaking to a Muslim audience he lamented the lack of courage of Muslims to complain to their MPs about same-sex marriage.⁴⁴² Some conservative Christians and adherents of other religions hold the same views.

But there are beliefs, attitudes and values relating to homosexuality expressed by some anti-Prevent groups and individuals that go beyond mere conservatism. This is exemplified by advocacy of the idea that homosexual acts ought to be punished by lashings or death – even if “only” in an Islamic state. This is a particularly concerning extremist position – regardless of whether its vocal advocacy is unlawful – on the basis that it contravenes the fundamental values that underpin British society, including universal human rights and equality before the law. It is reasonable to say that this is a position that, whilst not directly advocating the hatred or harm of homosexuals, advocates a moral and legal framework in which such hatred and harm may become normalised. Two books recommended as “useful publications” by the MCB in its 2007 guidance for schools express this position.⁴⁴³ It is also expressed in a book written by MCB founding member Abdul Wahid Hamid.⁴⁴⁴

Anti-Prevent activist groups, such as CAGE, bemoan the Government’s concern with non-violent but extremist ideas and practices, either exaggerating the Government’s association of non-violent extremism to violence, or obfuscating the difference between conservatism and extremism. Islamist anti-Prevent campaigners simply reject the Government’s notion of extremism. More than this, they seem not to acknowledge the Government’s authority to pronounce on normative values, whether Islamic or not. Asim Qureshi has made it clear that he sees CAGE’s refusal to use the language of the state as a form of resistance to its alleged systemic Islamophobia, racism, and oppression.⁴⁴⁵

Linked to the claim that Prevent “criminalises” what are simply “conservative” Muslim beliefs is the claim that Prevent undermines the freedom of expression. By allegedly labelling normative Islamic thought, as well as criticism of the Government’s domestic and foreign policy, as “extremist”, Prevent is supposedly producing a “chilling effect”

440. Al-Hijrah School Ofsted report, October 20, 2017, pp.1, 3. Available at: <https://files.api.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/2731875>.

441. “Outlawing gender segregation: How PREVENT and Ofsted are about conditioning our children, neo-con style”, CAGE website, October 29, 2017, <https://www.cage.ngo/outlawing-gender-segregation-how-prevent-and-ofsted-are-about-conditioning-our-children-neo-con-style>.

442. “Lewisham Islamic Centre - The Challenges of Islamophobia in the UK by Azad Ali”, Lewisham Islamic Centre, YouTube, February 7, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FqJwuNR9eUU&feature=youtu.be&t=1468>.

443. See Ibrahim Hewitt, *What Does Islam Say?* 4th ed. (London: Muslim Educational Trust, 2004), pp.25-7, and Ghulam Sarwar, *Sex Education: The Muslim Perspective* (London: Muslim Educational Trust, 2004), pp.26-27. Both books were listed amongst a small selection of useful resources in MCB, *Meeting the Needs of Muslim Pupils in State Schools: Information and Guidance for Schools*, p.65. This is no longer available on the MCB’s website, but can be accessed here: <https://web.archive.org/web/20170110213349/http://www.religionlaw.co.uk/MCBschoolsreport07.pdf>. The press release for the guidance, however, is still on MCB’s website: “MCB launches ‘Towards Greater Understanding- Meeting the Needs of Muslim Pupils in State Schools’”, MCB website, February 20, 2007, <https://mcb.org.uk/press-releases/mcb-launches-towards-greater-understanding-meeting-the-needs-of-muslim-pupils-in-state-schools/>.

444. Abdul Wahid Hamid, *Islam: The Natural Way* (London: Muslim Educational and Literary Services, 1989), p.88.

445. Asim Qureshi, “Fight the power: how CAGE resists from within a ‘suspect community’”, p.3.

particularly amongst young people, including students. As an op-ed claimed in the Middle East Eye:

*Prevent has encouraged young people, especially Muslim children, to censor themselves from any open participation in the classroom. It has left them avoiding discussing personal beliefs, as they fear becoming a target.*⁴⁴⁶

According to Sadek Hamid, “[t]he over-referral of Muslim young people is silencing dissent”.⁴⁴⁷

But several recent studies cast doubt on the notion that Prevent is systemically undermining the freedom of expression. A 2017 study by four academics from the University of Coventry, the University of Durham, and Huddersfield University on the interpretation and implementation of the Prevent duty in further education drew upon in-depth interviews with educationalists, Prevent practitioners and Muslim civil society groups, as well as a national survey of teachers. Its authors “found relatively little support among respondents for the idea that the duty has led to a ‘chilling effect’ on conversations with students in the classroom and beyond”.⁴⁴⁸ This may have been, they wrote, because “staff who were concerned about this possible side-effect of the duty took pre-emptive action to minimise the risk of such effects emerging”, such as “reinvigorating debating clubs, or promoting more discussion of Prevent-related issues in the classroom”. Some of those interviewed stated that “students not only continued to engage in discussions in the classroom and in other learning environments as they had done prior to the introduction of the duty”, but had been involved in “more open discussions on issues around extremism”.⁴⁴⁹ This was supported by the survey data:

*By far the largest proportion of respondents (56%) expressed the view that the Prevent duty had not resulted in any change in the levels of trust between students and staff, and only marginally more expressed the view that it had led to there being less trust (15%) than more trust (11%) between staff and students. ... Even more strikingly, we found considerable support (41% of respondents) for the view that Prevent duty had led to more open discussions around such topics as extremism, intolerance and inequality. ... Just over 1 in 10 respondents stated that the duty had resulted in less open discussions (12%) on such topics, with 32% stating that it had not made a difference.*⁴⁵⁰

The claim that Prevent is having a “chilling effect” regarding the discussion of issues relating to politics and extremism was similarly undermined by a more recent poll, conducted by ICM in 2019. ICM surveyed almost 3,000 adults aged 16 and over in England and Wales, including students, teachers, and healthcare professionals. All were familiar with Prevent. It found:

Over half of the student and teacher samples (53% and 57% respectively) felt that Prevent has not negatively impacted freedom of speech. Only one in five or fewer explicitly agreed (students 12%, teacher, 23%).

Of the student sample, 57% of students disagreed with the statement

446. Siema Iqbal, Heena Khaled, Amanda Morris, and Farah Anwar-Bawany, “British Muslims’ fear of Prevent is based on facts not perceptions”, Middle East Eye, August 2, 2018, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/british-muslims-fear-prevent-based-facts-not-perceptions>.

447. Sadek Hamid, “What Prevent referral figures don’t say: The impact on Muslim young people”, The Middle East Eye, November 12, 2017, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/what-prevent-referral-figures-dont-say-impact-muslim-young-people>.

448. Joel Busher, Tufyal Choudhury, Paul Thomas, and Gareth Harris, “What the Prevent duty means for schools and colleges in England: An analysis of educationalists’ experiences”, p.6.

449. Ibid., p.50.

450. Ibid., pp.50-51, emphasis added.

“Prevent has negatively impacted my ability to talk freely in classes/lectures” and 53% disagreed with the statement “Prevent has negatively impacted my fellow students’ ability to talk freely in classes/lectures”. Just 12% and 11% agreed with these statements respectively.⁴⁵¹ Teachers were slightly more negative about Prevent, with 53% disagreeing with the statement “Prevent has negatively affected freedom of speech in the classroom” and 23% agreeing with it.⁴⁵²

3. Prevent is a vehicle for the Government to spy on Muslims, with teachers and other public servants cast as spies

Islamist activist groups, as well as other civil rights organisations, have long claimed that Prevent is an institutional vehicle for government authorities to spy on Muslims. This claim gained national prominence in October 2009 in an article in *The Guardian* by Vikram Dodd, which stated that Prevent “is being used to gather intelligence about innocent people who are not suspected of involvement in terrorism”.⁴⁵³ It added that it had seen documents showing that “[t]he information the authorities are trying to find out includes political and religious views, information on mental health, sexual activity and associates, and other sensitive information”. But the article provided no indication of which authorities were involved or how they were purportedly gathering intelligence on Muslims as Muslims. It did not say what these documents were, who authored them, or what information they contained.

Similar claims were made by Arun Kundnani in a research paper published in the same year by the Institute of Race Relations (IRR).⁴⁵⁴ Kundnani claimed that

*a major objective of the Prevent programme” is “the fostering of much closer relationships between the counter-terrorist policing system and providers of non-policing local services precisely to facilitate ... flows of information on individuals whose opinions are considered extreme and on the local Muslim population in general.*⁴⁵⁵

These allegations were acknowledged in a Communities and Local Government (CLG) Committee report published by the House of Commons in March 2010, which publicised the findings of an inquiry into the delivery of Prevent projects.⁴⁵⁶ The report noted that Kundnani’s claims were “based on the experiences of a small sample of stakeholders”.⁴⁵⁷ It also cited Charles Farr, the then Director of the Office for Security and Counter Terrorism, who informed the inquiry that “[t]he allegations about spying ... are completely unfounded”.⁴⁵⁸ Farr added, “For the avoidance of doubt, surveillance is not part of the Prevent programme and intelligence gathering is not a feature of the Prevent programme”.⁴⁵⁹ He also said that the *Guardian* article and Kundnani’s report had created a “a mythical construct of Prevent which does not exist and is not part of the strategy” and as a result had encouraged the disengagement of many local community organisations from the programme.⁴⁶⁰

451. ICM Unlimited, “Prevent: Public Knowledge and Interactions: A research report from ICM summarising key findings”, UK Government website, August 2019, p.19.

452. Ibid.

453. Vikram Dodd, “Government anti-terrorism strategy ‘spies’ on innocent”, *The Guardian*, October 16, 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2009/oct/16/anti-terrorism-strategy-spies-innocents>.

454. Arun Kundnani, “Spooked! How not to prevent violent extremism”, Institute of Race Relations, 2009. Available at: <https://irr.org.uk/app/uploads/2016/12/spooked.pdf>.

455. Ibid., p.28.

456. Communities and Local Government Committee, “Preventing Violent Extremism”, Sixth Report of Session 2009–10, HC 65, House of Commons, March 30, 2010. Available at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmselect/cmcom-loc/65/65.pdf>.

457. Ibid., para.24, p.12. The evidence Kundnani cited was based upon 32 interviews with Prevent programme workers in local authorities, and others including voluntary sector and community workers. See Kundnani, “Spooked!”, p.8.

458. Ibid. para.26, p.13.

459. Ibid. para.31, p.15.

460. Ibid. para.26, p.13.

The 2011 revised Prevent strategy also acknowledged the claims made in *The Guardian* and in Kundnani's report. It responded, "We can find no evidence to support these claims. Prevent must not be used as a means for covert spying on people or communities. Trust in Prevent must be improved".⁴⁶¹

In 2015, Mohammed Kozbar, a prominent figure within British Islamist circles and currently the chairman of Finsbury Park Mosque⁴⁶² told PBS News:

To tell the Muslim community that you have to spy on your children, to tell them that when you see something wrong or you think that there is something wrong, you have to report it and all of this, this is not helpful. We want, as British people, to be safe and to be secure, but we want to do it the right way.⁴⁶³

Kozbar previously served as Vice President of the Muslim Association of Britain,⁴⁶⁴ and was on the MCB's National Council from 2018-2020.⁴⁶⁵ He sits on the Police Islington Advisory Group and the Crown Prosecution Service London Scrutiny and Involvement Panel in Hate Crimes.⁴⁶⁶

In 2016, the MCB prepared a report for the Labour Party entitled, "The Impact of Prevent on Muslim Communities: A Briefing to the Labour Party on how British Muslim Communities are Affected by Counter-Extremism Policies". One of the concerns listed about the counter-extremism strategy, which the MCB claimed "builds on the flawed Prevent approach", was "[e]ncouragement to spy on one another".⁴⁶⁷ Rather than provide any evidence that spying was being encouraged or performed, the report referred to the "Extremism Community Trigger", a proposal in the 2015 Counter-Terrorism Strategy that a "new legal duty will ensure that the police and local authorities fully review any complaints about extremism".⁴⁶⁸ The Extremism Community Trigger, described by MEND as a "moral panic button",⁴⁶⁹ was, however, dropped by the Government over concerns it "could have been used maliciously by groups against each other".⁴⁷⁰

The MCB report also stated,

as highlighted in the Home Office's own risk assessment, there is a danger of damaging already strained community relations by giving "greater prominence to criticism that the programme is there to spy on individuals receiving support, or that it targets Muslims".⁴⁷¹

But this omitted important context and was therefore misleading. The Home Office document that the MCB referred to was not an assessment of Prevent but, rather, a consideration of the benefits and risks of putting the Channel programme onto a statutory footing.⁴⁷² It did not mention the danger of damaging community relations, but it did acknowledge the risk that making Channel statutory might feed the criticism of Prevent as a spying operation. This in no way accepted that such criticism was warranted.

An article on the 5Pillars website in January 2017 stated, "Prevent is widely considered to be a monitoring and spying exercise which targets

461. Home Office, *Prevent Strategy*, para.35.5, p.6.

462. Mohammed Kozbar/@KozbarM, Twitter profile page, <https://twitter.com/kozbarM>.

463. "U.K. government and community groups struggle to stop Islamic radicalization spike", PBS News, January 27, 2015, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/europe-edge-2>.

464. See, for example, Mohammed Kozbar, "Young Muslims and British policy", Finsbury Park Mosque website, April 14, 2015, <https://finsburyparkmosque.org/new/2015/04/14/young-muslims-and-british-policy/>.

465. "Governance", MCB website, captured on September 20, 2018, <https://web.archive.org/web/20180920135247/http://www.mcb.org.uk/about-mcb/leadership/>.

466. "Meet The Board", Islington Faiths Forum website, undated, https://www.islingtonfaithsforum.org.uk/?page_id=752.

467. MCB, "The Impact of Prevent on Muslim Communities - A Briefing to the Labour Party on how British Muslim Communities are Affected by Counter-Extremism Policies", December 2016, pp.5, 14. Available at: <http://archive.mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/MCB-CT-Briefing2.pdf>.

468. HM Government, *Counter-Extremism Strategy*, Cm 9148, October 2015, p.35. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/470088/51859_Cm9148_Accessible.pdf.

469. "mend review of Counter Extremism Strategy", MEND website, October 19, 2015, <https://www.mend.org.uk/MEND-review-of-counter-extremism-strategy/>.

470. Commission for Countering Extremism, *Challenging Hateful Extremism*, p.101.

471. MCB, "The Impact of Prevent on Muslim Communities", p.11.

472. Home Office, "Impact Assessment, Counter-Terrorism and Security Bill - Support for people vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism", IA No: HO0143, UK Government website, November 25, 2014, p.3. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/379850/Channel_IA_MASTER_COPY.pdf.

the Muslim community.”⁴⁷³ More recently, in February 2020, 5Pillars published an article stating that Prevent Watch, a group that campaigns against Prevent, had discovered that two schools, including a sixth form college in Birmingham, had provided Prevent “training” to students.⁴⁷⁴ The alarmist headline read, “Muslim school kids ‘taught to spy on each other’”.

A student reportedly told 5Pillars that his year group had been trained to recognise the “signs of radicalisation and extremism”. No evidence was provided to demonstrate that explicit instructions were given to students to monitor other students’ behaviour. There was no indication that the objective of the lesson was anything more than building safeguarding awareness. But the student who spoke to 5Pillars clearly held prejudiced views about Prevent, stating, “I felt uncomfortable because I do know that Prevent is a racist policy.”⁴⁷⁵ A relative of students at the school reportedly claimed, “It’s effectively getting the pupils to spy on each other.” The article did not challenge these points of view. It also quoted Prevent Watch as saying, “This is a dangerous precedent that has no grounding in legislation. We urge more parents to come forward and challenge teachers and schools in this behaviour.” Yet, the claim that safeguarding awareness lessons in the area of extremism and radicalisation is “dangerous” lacks any evidential basis. And the notion that such lessons require legislation is factually incorrect.

Some anti-Prevent activists claim that the programme co-opts teachers and other public servants to spy on its behalf because the Prevent duty, which came into force in 2015, legally obliges certain public institutions, such as schools, universities, and prisons to pay “due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism”.⁴⁷⁶ The local implementation of the Prevent duty involves the use by local authorities of Counter-Terrorism Local Profiles (CTLPs). These documents outline “the threat and vulnerability from terrorism related activity within a specific area”, so each CTLP will vary due to differences in local situations.⁴⁷⁷ They are produced by local Prevent boards – comprised of police and local authority Prevent leads, including representatives from community groups. In September 2017, CAGE published an article that claimed CTLPs effectively subordinate safeguarding to security-oriented intelligence gathering. It said:

*The CTLP makes it clear that PREVENT draws public sector workers into becoming intelligence gathering agents. ... The entire exercise of co-opting public-sector workers to perform a policing role for which they are ill equipped marks the erosion of the spirit of public service and a move towards a Soviet style policing bureaucracy. It is also a complete abuse of due process and a dire threat to civil society.*⁴⁷⁸

The recent People’s Review of Prevent report similarly claims that Prevent has brought “children and young people under an extraordinarily extensive net of surveillance”.⁴⁷⁹ It states that this includes the promotion of “fundamental British values” in the national curriculum.

473. “EXPOSED: The Muslim organisations that get Prevent funding”, 5Pillars website, January 3, 2017, <https://5pillarsuk.com/2017/01/03/exposed-the-muslim-organisations-that-get-prevent-funding/>.

474. “Muslim school kids ‘taught to spy on each other’”, 5Pillars website, February 27, 2020, <https://5pillarsuk.com/2020/02/27/muslim-school-kids-taught-to-spy-on-each-other/>.

475. Ibid.

476. “Revised Prevent duty guidance: for England and Wales”, UK Government website, April 1, 2021, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prevent-duty-guidance/revised-prevent-duty-guidance-for-england-and-wales>.

477. Home Office, “Counter-Terrorism Local Profiles: An Updated Guide”, UK Government website, September 2012, p.7. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/118203/counter-terrorism-local-profiles.pdf.

478. “PREVENT is about Policing Dissent not Safeguarding”, September 7, 2017, CAGE website, <https://www.cage.ngo/prevent-is-about-policing-dissent-not-safeguarding>.

479. Holmwood and Aithadi, “The People’s Review of Prevent”, p.98.

4. Prevent officers can arbitrarily take away Muslim children

One of the most emotive aspects of the anti-Prevent narrative is that Prevent officers can take away children from Muslim families on an arbitrary basis. In January 2015, CAGE warned that the then proposed Crime and Security Bill would present a danger to Muslim families, since it would allow the authorities to take away their children without consent in cases where children were deemed to be at risk from radicalisation and extremism. CAGE stated:

Ultimately, the CTS Bill is presented as a consent-based system where those over the age of 18 must have their consent taken before any plan can be implemented to support them, and for those under 18, then the consent of their parents. However, the devil is in the detail, and where the consent is not gained, then the panels established to review each individual case of risk, will be able to consider models within the health and social services.

In other words, the threat of having your children taken away, should you not provide consent, will be used as a form of coercion, so the very idea of a consent-based approach will be completely neutralised.⁴⁸⁰

More recently, in 2018, CAGE published a report, *Separating Families: How PREVENT Seeks the Removal of Children*, which claimed:

PREVENT is facilitating the removal of children, and the attempted removal of children in the family courts of the United Kingdom. This is being done using an unreliable and highly subjective method of measuring “extremism” and “radicalisation”, themselves subjective terms that have not been adequately defined.⁴⁸¹

The report’s author, Asim Qureshi, conceded that there are genuine cases where the safeguarding of children is important, but alleged that there are also cases – highlighted in his report – where “Muslim parents are being threatened with removal of their children or are having their children removed, based on ideological reasons rather than abuse”.⁴⁸² Yet, the evidence of such threats presented was notably thin, consisting of a small number of anecdotes presented from one point of view. The report did not attempt to view the bigger picture of all the cases where judges have decided to place children in care – and where they have not.

Moreover, the evidence in Qureshi’s report actually undermines his argument. In one of the cases that it refers to as exemplifying “aggressive PREVENT-based state intervention in the family”, concerns of abuse were a key factor in placing children in care.⁴⁸³ In the 2016 case of *Leicester City Council v T*, the court’s findings state that the mother intended to take her children to “a war zone in Syria controlled by Islamic State” and settle there. The local authority sought, and obtained a judgement that:

480. “Taking away our children: the Counter-Terrorism and Security Bill 2014”, CAGE website, January 5, 2015, <https://www.cage.ngo/taking-away-our-children-counter-terrorism-and-security-bill-2014>.

481. CAGE, “Separating Families – How PREVENT Seeks the Removal of Children”, 2018. Available at: <https://www.cage.ngo/product/separating-families-how-prevent-seeks-the-removal-of-children-report>.

482. *Ibid.*, p.11.

483. *Ibid.*, p.26.

[T]he intention to cross into Syria was driven by [religious] ideology and placed the children at risk of suffering significant harm and probable radicalisation, including the real possibility of the children being drawn into the war, and being placed at risk of death.

Furthermore, as the judge recognised, the parents' abusive relationship placed the children "at risk of ongoing exposure to domestic abuse and a risk of emotional harm".⁴⁸⁴ This is a fairly common feature of such cases, as was shown in the first report to collate and analyse "radicalisation cases in the family courts"⁴⁸⁵ in the UK. The report, written by researcher Nikita Malik, looked at 20 cases and found that "67% percent of the families had a history of domestic abuse or criminal activity".⁴⁸⁶ So, contrary to Qureshi's claims, abuse is a factor in decisions to place children in care where there are concerns about radicalisation and extremism. In presenting *Leicester City Council v T* as an example of state coercion, is CAGE effectively arguing that it is acceptable for parents to take children to live under a terrorist regime in a war zone? Furthermore, 52% percent of the families Malik examined "had backgrounds rooted in extremism, in which family members held convictions related to terrorism or had been members of extremist groups".⁴⁸⁷ But only 16% of these cases involved the children being removed from their parents and being placed in care, usually with their grandparents.⁴⁸⁸

As Malik noted, there are problems with the system of safeguarding for children in cases involving radicalisation.⁴⁸⁹ Clear guidance on the threshold of proof required for the courts to intervene and take a child into care is yet to be established. And there is the problem of a lack of legal definitions for radicalisation and extremism that, whilst offering judges some flexibility in handling cases, have not always helped ensure consistent outcomes.

But despite this, the claim that Prevent is arbitrarily taking away children from Muslim families – or "seeking" to take them away – is simply not borne out by the facts. A very small number of children appear to have been put into care in the UK due to radicalisation concerns.⁴⁹⁰ And these decisions have been made not by Prevent officers or police, but by high court judges who have taken all safeguarding factors into consideration. Reviewing the cases, Martin Downs, a practising barrister with experience in the Court of Protection, observed that

*local authorities have been discerning about the cases they bring before the courts and the judges have adopted a rigorous human rights based analysis of the applications that have reached them.*⁴⁹¹

This view was conferred by Fatima Ahdash, a PhD candidate in law at LSE, who wrote, "the courts' approach towards removal has rightly been cautious".⁴⁹² Consistent with Malik's findings, she noted that "permanent removal has only been sanctioned in very few cases where the harms and risks involved were obvious", and that the family courts prefer, where possible, less drastic measures, including electronic tagging or care orders that allow for the ongoing support of children.⁴⁹³

484. *Leicester City Council v T* [2016] EWFC 20, https://www.familylaw.co.uk/news_and_comment/leices-ter-city-council-v-t-2016-ewfc-20.

485. This phrase is derived from guidance for the Family Division and Family Court issued by Sir James Munby, President of the Family Division, on October 8, 2015, available at: <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/pfd-guidance-radicalisation-cases.pdf>.

486. Nikita Malik, "Radicalising Our Children: An Analysis of Family Court Cases of British Children at risk of Radicalisation, 2013-2018", Henry Jackson Society, February 2019, p.53. Available at: <https://henry-jacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/HJS-Radicalising-Our-Children-Report-NEW-web.pdf>.

487. *Ibid.*, p. 51.

488. *Ibid.*, p. 58.

489. *Ibid.*, pp. 5, 19.

490. In the Colin Cramphorn lecture hosted by Policy Exchange in February 2018, Sir Mark Rowley, the former head of counter-terrorism policing, said around 100 children had been taken into care due to radicalisation concerns since the start of the conflict in Syria. There is no up-to-date official data on how many children have been taken into care due to radicalisation concerns, so it is difficult to give a reliable figure. See "The Colin Cramphorn Memorial Lecture by Mark Rowley", Policy Exchange, February 26, 2018, <https://policyexchange.org.uk/pxevents/the-colin-cramphorn-memorial-lecture-by-mark-rowley/>.

491. Martin Downs, "Police Anti-terrorism 'Lead' calls for children to be protected from terrorist parents on a par with paedophilia", UK Human Rights Blog, March 1, 2018, <https://ukhumanrightsblog.com/2018/03/01/police-anti-terrorism-lead-calls-for-children-to-be-protected-from-terrorist-parents-on-a-par-with-paedophilia/>.

492. Fatima Ahdash, "Should the law facilitate the removal of the children of terrorists and extremists from their care?", LSE website, March 9, 2018, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/should-the-law-facilitate-the-removal-of-the-children-of-convicted-terrorists/>.

493. *Ibid.*

The problem for Qureshi and CAGE is not that children are being taken away arbitrarily. It is that the safeguarding of children is an arena in which CAGE and likeminded activist groups see a need and opportunity to contest the Government's notion of extremism and, more fundamentally, normative social values. Underlying their apparent concern for child safety is their deeper concern regarding the authority to determine what counts as extremist, since this is what affects the legitimacy of views and values stemming from their understanding of Islam, which clash in places with those of a liberal and democratic culture.

CAGE's activism in this area is presented in the language of human rights, but upon close inspection it is evident that what's at stake is the very notion of human rights. Are the human rights of Islamic State-supporting mothers who wish to take their children into a dangerous environment to supersede the human rights of children to be protected from such danger? Qureshi complains that "the perception that the state is out to break Muslim families" is the result of the Government's "narrative" of "radicalised" victims and "radicalisers".⁴⁹⁴ This perception, however, is far more likely to be generated by the work of CAGE, as exemplified by Qureshi's report. This was the concern of Nazir Afzal, the Muslim former Chief Crown Prosecutor for North-West England, who said CAGE's claims amounted to "scaremongering, pure and simple".⁴⁹⁵ Security Minister, Ben Wallace, described the report as "the usual Prevent bashing" using "twisted facts and disinformation to sow division [in] our communities for their own purposes".⁴⁹⁶

5. Muslims working on Prevent are in some way disloyal or even "native informants"

Some anti-Prevent campaigners have described Muslims who assist with the implementation of Prevent or receive Prevent funding in disparaging terms that questions their loyalty as Muslims. This is connected to the perception that Prevent is an exercise in spying for the Government and the belief that Muslims are best to deal with potential cases of radicalisation within their own community, rather than inform the police.

In 2017, Mak Chishty, then the Police Commander for North London, warned that some Muslims were being deterred from opposing extremism by others who saw assisting the police with spying. He said:

The majority of the Muslim communities speak to the police. But there's a minority who . . . deter people in the communities wanting to talk to the police because of issues relating to alleged spying. But I just want to say that, as a seasoned cop of 30 years, such allegations are completely false.⁴⁹⁷

In the Commission for Countering Extremism's 2019 report, *Challenging Hateful Extremism*, the Lead Commissioner for Countering Extremism Sara Khan noted the repeated use of slurs, such as "native informants" and "Uncle Toms", used by CAGE and MEND for Muslim activists with whom they disagree, including those that cooperate with the authorities

494. CAGE, "Separating Families", p.27.

495. Jaber Mohamed, "CAGE's Lies Over New Anti-Terror Laws: Terrorism Apologists Accused of Scaremongering after Warning Muslims Police Will Take Their Children Away", Mail on Sunday, April 11, 2015, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3035188/Cage-s-lies-new-anti-terror-laws-Terrorism-apologists-accused-scaremongering-warning-Muslims-police-children-away.html>.

496. Steve Bird, "Cage asked to remove video over claims woman's delivery room was 'raided' after giving birth", The Telegraph, September 29, 2018, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/09/29/cage-asked-remove-video-claims-raided-giving-birth/>.

497. Richard Kerbaj, "Top Met officer urges fellow Muslims to join battle against 'silent killer' of extremism", The Times, April 2, 2017, <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/edition/news/top-met-officer-urges-fellow-muslims-to-join-battle-against-silent-killer-of-extremism-f952mwzq>.

in counter-terrorism and counter-extremism work.⁴⁹⁸ Examples included CAGE's statement that Faith Matters – an organisation established by Muslim Fiyaz Mughal to build bridges between different faith communities – “represents the native informant industry”;⁴⁹⁹ its labelling of the chair of the Islam and Liberty network a “native informant” after he rejected the APPG on British Muslims' definition of Islamophobia as “fundamentally flawed”;⁵⁰⁰ and its description of the then Home Secretary, Sajid Javid, a “Poor uncle Tom” and a “punkawallaha”.⁵⁰¹ In 2017, in an open letter on the appointment of Amber Rudd MP as Home Secretary, MEND CEO Ismail urged Rudd to “Deal with legitimate Muslim organisations, not government stooges”.⁵⁰² He bemoaned the Government's refusal to engage with MEND, the MCB, and FOSIS (the Federation of Islamic Student Societies), three organisations that have played key roles in the anti-Prevent campaign.

Khan herself has come under attack for her work as Counter-Extremism Commissioner. In January 2018, Roshan M Salih, an editor of 5Pillars, for example, described her as a “native informant”.⁵⁰³ In a Dispatches documentary broadcast in March 2018, entitled “Who speaks for the Muslim community?”, a MEND staff member was shown referring to Sara Khan as an “Oreo”.⁵⁰⁴ MEND published a written rebuttal to the documentary, in which it said that the staff member “accepts that the wording she used was wrong”, but then repeated “concerns” about Prevent and the Commissioner.⁵⁰⁵ A day later, as if the written rebuttal was not enough, in a video addressing the Dispatches programme, MEND CEO Shazad Amin questioned whether it was racist, since the staff member is a BAME. Appearing to justify his member of staff's use of the term “Oreo”, he said “She was making a political point about Sara Khan's support for the highly discriminatory Prevent programme”.

In her report, *Challenging Hateful Extremism*, Sara Khan also acknowledged that some Muslim civil society groups were reluctant to publicise their participation in counter-extremism initiatives or their acceptance of Prevent funding due to a fear of the abuse they may encounter.⁵⁰⁶

Imam and preacher Shakeel Begg of the Lewisham Islamic Centre has referred to Muslims who support Prevent as “house Muslims” and “collaborators”. In 2016, Begg brought a libel case against the BBC for alleging he was an extremist. He lost the case. The judge concluded the case with the following statement:

He [i.e., Begg] accuses a manifestly moderate scholar, Sheikh Tawfiq Chowdhury, of “signing a deal with the devil” and betraying “his covenant with Allah” for giving a perfectly sensible (and, many would say, praiseworthy) speech to the counter-terrorism police about how to use moderate Islamic scholars to prevent terrorism. The Claimant [i.e., Begg], however, characterises the UK counter-terrorism authorities as “the devil”, “brutal, cunning and oppressive” and “the enemies of Islam” and displays a deep antagonism to them and an implacable objection to any Muslim co-operating with them. His “Advice” is redolent of the Manichean ‘Us’ versus ‘Them’ worldview in which the West

498. Commission for Countering Extremism, *Challenging Hateful Extremism*, p.41.

499. CAGE/@UK_CAGE, Twitter post, September 3, 2017, https://twitter.com/UK_CAGE/status/904369173274513413.

500. CAGE/@UK_CAGE, Twitter post, May 16, 2019, https://twitter.com/UK_CAGE/status/1129110317416558592.

501. CAGE/@UK_CAGE, Twitter post, October 20, 2018, https://twitter.com/UK_CAGE/status/1053706236020121600. “Punkawallah” is a Hindi and Urdu term for a servant or slave operating a handheld fan, which was used in the Indian sub-continent during British Colonial times.

502. Sufyan Ismail, “Dear Amber Rudd: Here are 10 ways you can give Muslims the full protection they deserve”, Middle East Eye, June 28, 2017, <https://www.middleeye.net/opinion/dear-amber-rudd-here-are-10-ways-you-can-give-muslims-full-protection-they-deserve>.

503. Roshan M Salih/@RmSalih, Twitter post, January 25, 2018, <https://twitter.com/rmsalih/status/956517083306741761>.

504. Dominic Kennedy, “Racist slur’ by Muslim group against tolerance tsar Sara Khan”, The Times, March 26, 2018, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/racist-slur-by-muslim-group-against-tolerance-tsar-sara-khan-0hf35kxpk>.

505. “MEND Rebuttal to Dispatches presented by John Ware, 26th March 2018”, MEND website, March 26, 2018, p.3. Available at: <https://www.mend.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/MEND-rebuttal-to-Dispatches-26.03.18.pdf>.

506. Commission for Countering Extremism, *Challenging Hateful Extremism*, pp.97, 98.

and its counterterrorism agencies are regarded a priori as the enemies of Islam and any Muslims who assist them are to be regarded as collaborators and ‘bad Muslims’ who have broken their covenant with Allah. **His speech would act as strong active discouragement to any Muslim thinking of co-operating with or reporting concerns to the UK counterterrorism authorities.**⁵⁰⁷

In November 2018, The Times reported that Begg was secretly recorded by Channel 4’s Dispatches programme disparaging Muslims who cooperate with Prevent:

Undercover filming recorded the preacher Shakeel Begg insulting Muslims who support counterterrorism laws when he shared a platform with MEND at an event. Mr Begg, who was found by the High Court to be an extremist, used the term “house Muslims,” adapting one used for black slaves favoured by their masters in America. He also attacked the Prevent scheme.⁵⁰⁸

In his response to the programme, Begg reiterated his opposition to Prevent, and did not deny the claim that he used the phrase “house Muslims”.⁵⁰⁹

Fiyaz Mughal, the founder of Faith Matters and Tell Mama, has warned of the dangers of such language for social cohesion in Britain. He has said:

Using Uncle Tom and Native Informant slurs are actually saying that those of us who collaborate with government are working for some colonial regime which provides no rights and recompense to, in this case, Muslims communities. What they are saying is that Government and state structures are essentially an enemy, thereby perpetuating a “Them and Us” narrative.⁵¹⁰

6. Prevent in itself is racist and Islamophobic, so cannot be reformed

According to anti-Prevent campaigners, the alleged discriminatory treatment of Muslims as a “suspect community” and the alleged “criminalisation” of normative Muslim beliefs renders Prevent inherently racist and “Islamophobic”. For this reason, the argument goes, it cannot be reformed and has to be scrapped entirely instead. As the Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC) put it in 2015:

Although PREVENT is presented as a colourblind programme, its origins and implementation show that it is invariably targeted at the Muslim community, being used as a pretext for mass surveillance and social conditioning. For these reasons IHRC is opposed in principle to the whole PREVENT programme.⁵¹¹

In the same year, FOSIS’s Vice President of Student Affairs, Ibrahim Ali declared that “Prevent in itself is a racist agenda; it’s an Islamophobic agenda”.⁵¹² FOSIS assisted the National Union of Students’ (NUS) Black Students’ Campaign in the production of the Preventing Prevent Handbook; the revised version published in 2017 states, “Islamophobia is built in to Prevent”.⁵¹³ The student body helped lead “Students not Suspects”,⁵¹⁴ a national campaign dedicated to scrapping Prevent. Although this appears to have been abandoned, numerous student unions have Prevent boycotts in place, as this report has detailed.

507. Begg v BBC [2016], EWHC 2688 (QB), para. 188, p.44, emphasis added. <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/shakeel-begg-v-bbc-judgment-final-20161028.pdf>.

508. Dominic Kennedy, “Racist slur” by Muslim group against tolerance tsar Sara Khan, The Times, March 26, 2018, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/edition/news/racist-slur-by-muslim-group-against-tolerance-tsar-sara-khan-0hf35kxpk>.

509. “Imam Shakeel responds to Dispatches: ‘I will continue to speak the truth to defend my community’”, Lewisham Islamic Centre website, March 22, 2018, <https://lewishamislamiccentre.com/2018/03/22/imam-shakeel-responds-to-dispatches-i-will-continue-to-speak-the-truth-to-defend-my-community/>; Lewisham Mosque/@LewishamMosque, Twitter post, March 26, 2018, <https://twitter.com/lewishammosque/status/978356316761657344>.

510. Liam Duffy, “The No True Muslim Fallacy: How Muslims are intimidated and marginalised for supporting counter-extremism initiatives”, p.42.

511. “Press release – UK: IHRC invites public to report PREVENT programme experiences”, IHRC website, August 3, 2015, <https://www.ihrc.org.uk/press-release-uk-ihrc-invites-public-to-report-prevent-programme-experiences/>.

512. Hannah Stuart, “Understanding Cage: A Public Information Dossier”, Henry Jackson Society, London, April, 2015, p.22.

513. NUS Black Students’ Campaign, “Preventing Prevent: an updated handbook”, National Union of Students, London, November 2017, p.80.

514. “About”, Students Not Suspects website, undated, <https://studentsnotsuspectsdotcom.wordpress.com/about-2/>.

More recently, in January 2021, CAGE's Managing Director, Muhammad Rabbani, described Prevent as "fundamentally racist and Islamophobic".⁵¹⁵ And in July 2021, MEND declared that Prevent is "inherently racist and Islamophobic, both in its construction and articulation".⁵¹⁶ The most recent campaign to call for Prevent to be abolished, the People's Review of Prevent, makes the same charge. In its report of February 2022, co-authors John Holmwood and Layla Aitlhadi claim "Prevent is Islamophobic; there is no problem of integration of British Muslim communities and no basis for regarding them and their families with suspicion." This misunderstands the basis for the relatively high proportion of Muslim referrals, which are not related to integration concerns, but to the high proportion of terrorism-related attacks, foiled plots, arrests and convictions involving Islamists. But this claim of Islamophobia is repeated on the "endorsements" page of the report by Ahammed Hussain, the Director of the Muslim Public Affairs Committee UK, who said that "the Prevent strategy legitimises Islamophobic paranoia and must be scrapped",⁵¹⁷ and Raghad Alitikriti, the Chairwoman of the Muslim Association of Britain, who wrote that the report "demonstrates, beyond any doubt, that Prevent is inherently Islamophobic".⁵¹⁸

For CAGE and some other activist groups, the Islamophobic nature of Prevent is not merely about the legal duty of certain public bodies, in carrying out their functions, to pay "due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism",⁵¹⁹ or the allegedly disproportionate number of Muslim referrals. It is, more fundamentally, about its alleged assault on Islam. CAGE's Research Director, Asim Qureshi, expressed this when he declared of Prevent, "It's always been a social engineering programme to legitimise the government sponsored version of Islam only".⁵²⁰

In response to Prime Minister David Cameron's speech in July 2015, in which he identified Islamist extremism as an ideology to be confronted,⁵²¹ the IHRC claimed, "It is becoming increasingly clear that official anti-terror discourse is being driven by an extreme right-wing ideology rooted in the desire to control and shape British Islam."⁵²² In June 2017, the IHRC was far more detailed and scathing in its accusations, asserting that Prevent is a part of a "neo-colonial agenda":

*Prevent rests on racist and Islamophobic assumptions. It conceives of Islam as innately violent, casting all Muslims as potential terrorist sympathisers or suspects and in doing so contributes in no small way to the legitimisation of institutional discrimination against them. It perpetuates the notion that Muslims are in need of value modification and differential legal standards, thereby exacerbating the demonisation of Muslims in the public psyche. It ensnares innocent Muslims for displaying conservative views or practices and in doing so alienates innocent, law-abiding people. It also seeks to steer the community away from its own faith-based precepts and values to some vaguely defined liberal high ground, revealing itself as part of a wider neo-colonial socialising agenda.*⁵²³

For Islamist activists, Prevent needs to be abolished because it constitutes an attack on Islam as "a complete way of life" and a source of individual and collective identity.⁵²⁴ The scrapping of Prevent thus concerns far more than

515. "Shawcross's appointment must lead to boycott of sham review", CAGE website, January 26, 2021, <https://www.cage.ngo/shawcrosss-appointment-must-lead-to-boycott-of-sham-review>.

516. "Time for PREVENT to be Scrapped", MEND website, July 13 2021.

517. Holmwood and Aitlhadi, "The People's Review of Prevent", p.v.

518. Ibid.

519. "Prevent duty guidance", Home Office, UK Government website, March 12, 2015 (updated April 1, 2021).

520. See Karen Jayes, "The PREVENT Policy: a politically motivated programme", CAGE website, August 5, 2014, <https://www.cage.ngo/prevent-policy-politically-motivated-programme/>.

521. "Extremism: PM speech", UK Government website, July 20, 2015, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/extremism-pm-speech>. In this speech, Cameron said that "this extremist ideology is not true Islam". He also said that "[t]here are so many strong, positive Muslim voices that are being drowned out" and that part of the solution to battling Islamist extremism is "[e]mpowering those moderate and reforming voices who speak for the vast majority of Muslims that want to reclaim their religion".

522. "The politics of extremism", IHRC website, July 27, 2015, <https://www.ihrc.org.uk/the-politics-of-extremism/>.

523. "Muslims must resist calls to expand 'Prevent' programme", IHRC website, June 7, 2017, <https://www.ihrc.org.uk/muslims-must-resist-calls-to-expand-prevent-programme/>.

524. Ibrahim Hewitt, "Crusade against British Muslims in education", Aljazeera, May 12, 2014, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2014/5/12/crusade-against-british-muslims-in-education/>.

counter-radicalisation or counter-extremism. It concerns normative social values and the authority to determine them. CAGE has made it quite clear that it sees the stakes involved in the scrapping of Prevent as nothing less than a political and social transformation:

*PREVENT cannot be isolated from the political context from which it emerged. ... Ending PREVENT is what makes the fight for broader political transformation possible, by allowing the public to reclaim the political sphere as a worthwhile terrain of struggle. In short, PREVENT must be abolished for society to flourish.*⁵²⁵

Layla Aitlhadj, the Director of Prevent Watch, has described Prevent as an “epidemic” that “must be abolished”.⁵²⁶ She adds that even if Prevent was abolished, legislation would still remain in place to perpetuate the treatment of Muslims as a suspect community:

*[E]ven if Prevent as an extra-legal policy were to be scrapped in its entirety, we are left with vague legislation in its wake, injected with imagination and uncertainty to regulate thought. It will increase the perpetuation of what UN Special Rapporteur, Ahmed Shaheed has rightly called an “epidemic”: the “institutional suspicion of Muslims.”*⁵²⁷

Thus, some of the most prominent anti-Prevent campaigners believe Prevent is unreformable, not only because of its allegedly inherent Islamophobia, but because it is most fundamentally an ideological programme that extends deep into British social and political life.

In CAGE’s words, Prevent “is the tip of the iceberg”, whilst a set of “ideological assumptions” upon which Prevent and counter-extremism is based “often remain submerged below the surface”.⁵²⁸ These assumptions are allegedly that i) “Extremism – as a set of beliefs or ideology that deviate from a prescribed norm - is a thing ...”; ii) “Extremism precedes and can predict terrorism/political violence”; and iii) “The state is the only arbiter of safety - meaning it must exercise its power to intervene into the realm of ‘extremist’ ideologies”.⁵²⁹ CAGE does not elaborate on how or where these assumptions allegedly operate “below the surface”, and they do not, in fact, form the conceptual or practical basis for the operation of Prevent.⁵³⁰ In any case, CAGE’s position is clear in seeing Prevent as fundamentally ideological, asserting that Prevent “demands an ideological surrender on our part”.⁵³¹ Similarly, in the People’s Review of Prevent report, Aitlhadj and Holmwood claim that Prevent’s “purpose is ‘ideological’”.⁵³² They state that “Prevent has itself become an ideological project of the government as part of a populist right-wing electoral strategy with no constraint upon its exercise.”⁵³³

This is a curious position for campaigners who typically claim that Islamist terrorism is not ideologically driven: whilst violent Islamist extremism is a product of grievances – socioeconomic and geopolitical, for example – the Government’s effort to combat such extremism is fundamentally ideological.

525. CAGE, “Beyond PREVENT: A Real Alternative To Securitized Policies”, p.32.

526. Dr Layla Aitlhadj, “The ‘epidemic’ that is Prevent must be abolished”, 5Pillars website, March 9, 2021.

527. Ibid.

528. CAGE, “Beyond PREVENT: A Real Alternative To Securitized Policies”, p.18.

529. Ibid.

530. Extremism is a contestable concept, and the normative values against which extremism may be assessed are indeed a matter for discussion – “fundamental British values” as articulated by the Government may not be the best expression of these – but to claim that there is no “mainstream ideological norm” or set of values to protect in the United Kingdom is not only empirically wrong – these values are observable, for example, in the country’s rich literary and legal history – it also suggests a surrender to a nihilistic vacuum of values. Prevent does not assume that any form of extremism can predict terrorism and does not rely upon a crude linear causal model of radicalisation, but it does recognise that certain ideological positions are associated with violent Islamist extremists; it is right, therefore, to try to combat the allure of such positions. The state is the primary arbiter of the safety and security of its people, which doesn’t mean individuals, families, and civil society groups cannot take some responsibility for these things. And the extent to which the British Government has overextended itself in the development of anti-terrorism legislation, for example, is publicly discussed and contested through political and legal means. Prevent does not rely upon the state as the “only arbiter of safety”.

531. CAGE, “Beyond PREVENT: A Real Alternative To Securitized Policies”, p.27.

532. Holmwood and Aitlhadj, “The People’s Review of Prevent”, pp.15.

533. Ibid., p.135.

Conclusion

It would be inaccurate to say that there is a single concerted campaign amongst Islamists and their allies to undermine and ultimately scrap Prevent. There are, in fact, numerous but overlapping campaigns and activist voices. Some feed the mainstream media and thus target a national audience, such as the alliance of CAGE and Amnesty with CAGE's 8-Point Plan, or the IHRC and Netpol's Together Against Prevent campaign. Some, such as FOSIS and the NUS's Students Not Suspects campaign, target a sub-section of the general population, in this case, university students. Some target Muslims nationally, most notably the MCB's alternative "community approach to counter-terrorism and Prevent", which targets the MCB's affiliates across the country. And others, such as the Boycott Prevent campaign of the Waltham Forest Council of Mosques, target Muslims in local communities. Most, if not all, regardless of their target audience, geographical scope, or coalition partners, involve Islamist organisations. Collectively, they do not compromise a mass movement, but the resonance of the same messaging throughout various sectors of society, especially whilst it goes unchallenged, is a serious concern.

The accumulative detrimental effect of these campaigns is difficult to measure precisely. But it is not too difficult to imagine that, as a result of being repeatedly told they are victims of Prevent as an "Islamophobic" social engineering project, some or perhaps many Muslims have come to resent the Government and the agencies responsible for preventing terrorism and challenging extremism. In the face of these campaigns, the Government – with whom rests ultimate responsibility for public safety and security – faces a challenge to its legitimacy and authority, regardless of the strategic approach it takes to countering terrorism and extremism.

Whatever the outcome and reaction to the forthcoming Independent Review of Prevent by William Shawcross, counter-terrorism and counter-extremism strategies of some kind will still be needed, and it is almost certain that such strategies, however articulated, will continue to be attacked by Islamist and other activist groups. This is because it is likely – and entirely appropriate – that counter-terrorism and counter-extremism efforts will continue to seek to address the contributory factors of terrorism and extremism upstream in ideology, beliefs and values. Asim Qureshi of CAGE has made clear that "the heart of the issue" for him is not that the Prevent policy is "bad practice". It is, rather, that it is "a bad solution to an ever [sic] worse diagnosis".⁵³⁴ This point of view seems to be shared by other Islamist activist groups, who have consistently sought to underplay the role of ideology in Islamist radicalisation and non-violent extremism.

534. Asim Qureshi, "Fight the power: how CAGE resists from within a 'suspect community'", p.9.

There are significant dangers with actively encouraging people not to cooperate with the police and the authorities responsible for counter-terrorism. In a liberal democracy, activists have the right to protest and express their views on matters of policy. But there is a difference between protest within the scope of the law, and encouragement not to engage with a statutory duty or the “pursue” aspect of counter-terrorism. Worse still, any failure to inform the police or security services about a potential or actual planned act of terrorism is a criminal offence. Even though most anti-Prevent activism lies within the law, it helps create attitudes of hostility and non-cooperation, with potentially deadly consequences.

This was recognised by Mak Chishty, a Metropolitan Police commander who led its community outreach programme until his retirement in 2017. Chishty confirmed that some Muslims were being deterred from opposing extremism by a minority who equated assisting the police with spying.⁵³⁵ The intimidation of Muslims working within Prevent, and the bandying around of terms such as “native informants”, adds a particularly unpleasant element to this backdrop.⁵³⁶ It is high time that ministers spoke up for those at the coalface working in the field of anti-extremism. The Government appears reluctant to articulate or amplify loudly enough the potential detrimental effects on Muslim co-operation with the police and security services that stem from Islamist-led narratives. Ministers, politicians and local officials who dare to criticise the potentially damaging impact of Islamist activism on Muslims’ perceptions of the police or Prevent risk being shouted down or labelled “Islamophobic”.

Chishty’s intervention exemplified this response. He was denounced in a letter published by *The Sunday Times* with 114 signatories, including Zara Mohammed, then head of FOSIS, now the Secretary General of the MCB.⁵³⁷ Other signatories included Harun Khan, the Secretary General of the MCB; Omer El-Hamdoon, the President of the Muslim Association of Britain; Ismet Rawat, President of the Association of Muslim Lawyers; Shazad Amin, the Chief Executive of MEND; and Moazzam Begg of CAGE. The letter took particular issue with Chishty’s suggestion that there ought to be a regulatory body set up by Muslims to ensure sermons in mosques and lessons in Islamic schools do not spread extremist ideas and values.

Responding to the challenges

One of the key challenges for counter-terrorism and counter-extremism efforts in the UK is the dissemination of the idea that such efforts, particularly Prevent, are inherently and unreformably “Islamophobic”. The Government has failed to effectively push back on the narratives that support this idea.

There are key messages which the Government has failed to convey to the public and to Muslim communities in particular. These include the identification of the problems that these programmes are designed to tackle. The authorities need to be clear in distinguishing between conservative and extremist ideas and behaviours. They also need to include the facts regarding the implementation of Prevent and counter-extremism

535. Richard Kerbaj, “Top Met officer urges fellow Muslims to join battle against ‘silent killer’ of extremism”, *The Times*, April 2, 2017, <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/edition/news/top-met-officer-urges-fellow-muslims-to-join-battle-against-silent-killer-of-extremism-f952mwzvg>.

536. See Liam Duffy, “The No True Muslim Fallacy: How Muslims are intimidated and marginalised for supporting counter-extremism initiatives”, Civitas, 2019. Available at: <https://www.civitas.org.uk/content/files/thenotrueislamfallacy.pdf>.

537. “Muslim police chief challenged”, *Letters to the Editor*, *The Sunday Times*, June 25, 2017, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/letters-to-the-editor-nk6jpf962>.

programmes on the ground, for example with the process of referrals, and these programmes' success stories. At worst it looks as if the authorities are not even attempting to make the case for Prevent. In the absence of proper leadership, it is left to individual officials to step forward and do so. This "poverty of aspiration" ironically mirrors the approach of many of Prevent's opponents: Whilst anti-Prevent activists refuse to see any problems relating to extremism, those in authority – some of whom understand there are problems – appear reluctant to demonstrate that such problems exist and need tackling. They are also reluctant to discuss what they are doing to address these problems and highlight success stories. It is as if, somehow, confidence and transparency will make things worse.

This is not to say that there are no significant improvements to be made in both the collation of information about these programmes and the use of this information for their improvement. But it is quite clear that there is a major communications deficit in this area, especially in the face of numerous, overlapping campaigns that spread disinformation. It is for this reason that we propose a dedicated communications unit alongside a new research centre focused on all forms of extremism, including Islamist extremism. Whilst tailored to address the challenges present here in the United Kingdom, this may look to adopt elements of best practice from other European countries, where several initiatives exist that appear to possess a greater degree of focus and transparency. In fact, the existing UK approach, when considered to that of comparable liberal democracies and their much broader focus, set out in the following section, is anomalous.

A second challenge is the official acceptance of antagonistic anti-Prevent partners on the part of local government authorities, including the police and politicians. Such partnering gives credibility to groups that seek not to improve the way in which counter-radicalisation and counter-extremism work is conducted, but to abolish it completely or dilute it into meaninglessness. Such groups, which disseminate disinformation and conspiracy theories about the motivations, methods and impacts of Prevent and counter-extremism work should be beyond the pale of official engagement. No official body or person in a political office should embrace bad-faith actors. To guide governmental authorities and politicians, clear engagement criteria would assist enormously, which specify objective measures to ascertain whether an organisation may be partnered with.

Policy Recommendations

Prevent is a tiny programme in terms of total Government expenditure – but thanks to years of concerted anti-Prevent campaigns described within this report, it has perhaps become the most controversial government policy which a majority of people have never heard of. Prevent is thus at the heart of an almighty ideological tug of war between the state and its Islamist critics: William Shawcross’s forthcoming Independent Review is the latest round in this struggle. Whatever Shawcross concludes, the review risks being critically undermined unless there is a dramatically improved plan to speak up for the policy. As presently constituted, Prevent risks dying the death of a thousand cuts. If this new Independent Review is to enjoy any traction, the Government needs to start preparing now – not just for the launch but for the potential implementation of a reformed, better focused Prevent throughout central government and the wider public sector. Considering how one-sided the debate has been, with critics of Prevent making much of the running for so long, it is remarkable how much support Prevent still enjoys with the wider public. It must now be somebody’s job to address these past failings, and they must have a structure which allows them to operate effectively.

The Government has not tackled anti-Prevent campaigns successfully, primarily because it has not tackled the broader issue of non-violent extremism well. The two failings cannot be separated. Too often Prevent work seems far removed from detailed direct ministerial control: at times, political oversight and accountability of each programme (even at the centre) seems far too light. The ministers directly responsible for Prevent defend it dutifully when the programme is criticised, notably in Parliament.⁵³⁸ But there is far too little in the way of a wider counter campaign invested with energy and panache comparable to that shown by Prevent’s Islamist critics. For example, no minister has yet taken on anti-Prevent activists with the brio shown by Michael Heseltine when he challenged CND in the 1980s⁵³⁹ – with supporting civil society groups backing up the NATO nuclear deterrence posture. Ministers need to take a far more direct role in Prevent – not merely in publicly defending the programme more energetically against the tropes described in previous chapters. They need to mobilise their departments and organise them better to ensure the whole system of government advocates for Prevent as part of our counter-extremism and counter-terrorism strategies.

If ministers are to push back, they need the intellectual apparatus to do so. This leads to three policy proposals below, each of which seeks to redress a deficit of many years standing.

538. See Brandon Lewis, “Prevent Programme, Volume 670”, Hansard, January 22, 2020, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2020-01-22/debates/950168C6-AFDD-4416-9BED-FB-30038DC7BE/PreventProgramme#contribution-EBA1206A-32EC-4F17-8CF2-98440A67CB7F> and Ben Riley-Smith, “Exclusive: Lockdown may have sent would-be terrorists on ‘dark journey’ to radicalisation, warns Damian Hinds”, *The Telegraph*, December 26, 2021, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2021/12/26/exclusive-lockdown-may-have-sent-would-be-terrorists-dark-journey/>.

539. For a typical example, see “Cruise Missiles, HC Deb 14 November 1983 vol 48”, Hansard, https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1983/nov/14/cruise-missiles#S6CV0048P0_19831114_HOC_241.

1. The new Prevent should be desecuritized by removing it from the Homeland Security Group and placing it as a separate unit under direct control of the Home Secretary, in order to focus more on “upstream” forms of extremism. In support of this, a three-pronged approach is proposed focusing, respectively, on analysis, rebuttal and due diligence: Firstly, a consolidated Centre for the Study of Extremism within government dedicated to the research and diagnosis of Islamist and other forms of extremism. Secondly, a separate communications unit dedicated to publicly combatting disinformation about the Government’s counter-terrorism and counter-extremism strategies. Thirdly, a due diligence unit, which develops and monitors criteria for engagement with community organisations.

In failing to publicly analyse and address non-violent extremism, the British state’s approach could be argued not to be the norm in Europe. The United Kingdom has its own distinct extremism-related issues, policy challenges, and a legal framework for combatting extremism and terrorism which differs from certain European partners. Nonetheless, there are several examples of good practice from across Europe that this country might learn from. We believe a broad analysis is required to best understand and address non-violent extremism. In the UK the security services tend to be more candid about violent extremism – the bits of the glacier above the surface – than non-violent extremism – the chunks of ice beneath which constitute the bulk of the iceberg. Whilst no example is exhaustive, there are currently approaches being taken in Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, Austria and Denmark which offer examples of what a different strategy may include.

The Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz (BfV) – the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution – is the German domestic intelligence service, and a partner organisation of our domestic security service, MI5. It is currently divided into various departments, each focused on a different threat area, including “Islamism and Islamist terrorism”, “left wing extremism”, and “right wing extremism”.⁵⁴⁰ Each department has an information gathering unit and an analytical unit, and produces regular reports on threats relevant to its research area. Whilst most reports are shared exclusively with the Federal Government and the governments of the individual German states, as well as the police authorities, the BfV also publishes some publicly, most notably an annual report on “The Protection of the Constitution”.⁵⁴¹ The BfV does not, however, have a public communications function to combat disinformation harmful to the state.

In January 2022, Sweden launched a new governmental agency aimed at defending itself against disinformation, propaganda, and “psychological

540. “The protection of the constitution”, Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz website, undated, https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/DE/home/home_node.html.

541. “Analysis and reporting”, Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz website, undated, https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/EN/about-us/mission-and-working-methods/analysis-and-reporting/analysis-and-reporting_article.html.

warfare”: the Swedish Psychological Defence Agency, which is housed in the Ministry of Justice. The Swedish agency describes its mission as identifying, analysing and countering “foreign malign information influence activities and other disinformation directed at Sweden or at Swedish interests”; it does so by “producing reports and analysis relating to certain situations, threat actors, and societal vulnerabilities as well as proposing relevant countermeasures”.⁵⁴² It also seeks to build community resilience to harmful influence campaigns through funding research and training. Although focused primarily on foreign state actors, such as China, Russia and Iran, it is also interested in Islamism in Sweden and its connections abroad, including funding sources.

In the Netherlands, the General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD) conducts the traditional functions of an intelligence agency in terms of countering the influence of hostile foreign powers. It also works against far-left and far-right extremism, and what it describes as “Islamic fundamentalism”. Its 2020 annual report contains a cogent justification of its work: “The AIVD investigates radical Islamist movements that could constitute a threat to the democratic legal order in the Netherlands.”⁵⁴³ In its 2020 annual report, referring to what it describes as Wahabbi-Salafist inciters, the AIVD states “This could provide others with a breeding ground for radicalisation towards a violent Jihadist ideology.”⁵⁴⁴

Austria’s Dokumentationsstelle Politischer Islam (Documentation Centre for Political Islam) was established in July 2020 to analyse “religiously motivated political extremism, specifically the phenomenon of political Islam, associated networks as well as formal and informal structures”.⁵⁴⁵ The centre, which reports to the Minister for Integration, publishes research into Islamist groups and movements in Austria and Europe, including diagnoses of non-violent Islamists’ “methods and dangers to democracy and rule of law”.

The Danish Immigration Service maintains a public list of religious preachers who are banned from entering the country for reasons of public order.⁵⁴⁶ The website of the Danish Immigration Service states: “The law is a result of a political agreement about initiatives relating to religious preachers, who seek to undermine Danish laws and values, and support a parallel conception of the law.”⁵⁴⁷ It should be noted that five of those on the Danes’ web listing are British preachers, banned from entering the country for reasons the Service claims, of public order.

None of the above organisations provide an exact template for this country. But it is important to recognise that there are plenty of European precedents for doing things differently, where the challenge posed by non-violent extremism receives both public analysis and potentially a public response. Here we believe that sunlight may prove to be the best antidote.

There is already a unit within the Home Office designed to combat violent extremist narratives, the Research, Information and Communications Unit (RICU).

RICU is not widely known. Information about it in the public domain is limited and often dated. Located in a counter-terrorism structure that

542. “About Us”, Swedish Psychological Defence Agency website, February 28, 2022, <https://www.mpf.se/en/about-us/>.

543. “Tasks and areas of interest”, AIVD website, undated, <https://english.aivd.nl/about-aivd/tasks-and-areas-of-interest>.

544. “AIVD Annual report 2020: growing breeding ground for extremism”, AIVD website, June 4, 2021, <https://english.aivd.nl/latest/news/2021/04/05/aivd-annual-report-2020>.

545. “About Us”, Dokumentationsstelle Politischer Islam website, undated, <https://www.dokumentationsstelle.at/en/aboutus/>.

546. “Religious preachers with entry ban”, Danish Immigration Service website, March 16, 2022, <https://www.nyidanmark.dk/en-GB/Words-and-concepts/US/Religious-workers/Religious-preachers-with-entry-ban>.

547. “National sanction list”, Danish Immigration Service website, February 15, 2022, <https://www.nyidanmark.dk/en-GB/Words-and-concepts/US/Religious-workers/National-sanction-list/>.

appears opaque, RICU was established in June 2007 as an interdepartmental body staffed by the Home Office, the Department for Communities and Local Government, and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Its purpose, as described in a RICU report published in March 2010, was:

*To ensure that the UK Government communicates effectively to reduce the risk of terrorism, by advising CONTEST [Counter-Terrorism Strategy] partners on their counter-terrorism-related communications; using communications to expose the weakness of violent extremist ideologies and brands; and using communications to support credible alternatives to violent extremism.*⁵⁴⁸

The former Director-General of the Office for Security and Counter Terrorism, the late Charles Farr, described RICU's purpose as twofold:

*It is responsible for advising the rest of government ... about how they may wish to characterise the threat we face and describe the response that we are making and, secondly, ... for challenging the propaganda which comes to us from al-Qaeda and associated groups ... usually from the incessant 4,500 websites that are in one way or another associated with radical Islamist terrorist organisations around the world.*⁵⁴⁹

RICU reportedly works discreetly via various online platforms and through a number of contractors to tackle extremist propaganda.⁵⁵⁰ Much of its work combatting the ideological narratives of violent extremism is conducted in the digital space. This work should continue.

However, as currently run, RICU has a number of limitations making it too often ineffective for countering non-violent Islamist extremism. Whilst it has challenged non-violent extremism from the far-right, RICU is insufficiently focused on combatting the full range of threats and challenges posed by Islamist extremism, particularly non-violent Islamism. The inadequate pushback against anti-Prevent narratives is a key part of that failure to address non-violent extremism - again, we meet the "poverty of low expectations".

Due to its current focus on violent Islamic extremism, RICU's analytical work is concentrated on the narratives and language of violent extremists, not on those of non-violent Islamists and their allies. But the most effective campaigns against Prevent and the Government's counter-terrorism efforts are driven by non-violent Islamist groups that do not fall within RICU's remit. These campaigns take place in the public domain where RICU is rarely, if ever, visible.

It is now time to capture anew the DNA of non-violent extremism. RICU has offered too little in the way of sustained effective pushback to the persistent grievance narrative that is being disseminated by non-violent Islamists and their sympathisers, who seek to undermine or influence government policy in a range of areas, including against counter-terrorism and counter-extremism initiatives. RICU has not publicly demonstrated an understanding of the detrimental impacts of non-violent extremists' narratives on government policy or local communities, and it has too rarely challenged these narratives or proposed policy solutions to meet the

548. RICU, "Credible Voices: Exploring perceptions of trust and credibility in Muslim communities", Home Office, March 2010, unnumbered page before contents page.

549. "Home Affairs Committee - Minutes of Evidence, Project CONTEST: The Government's Counter-Terrorism Strategy, Examination of Witnesses (Questions 125-139)", February 26, 2009, Q.128. Available at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmhaff/212/09022602.htm>.

550. Ian Cobain, Alice Ross, Rob Evans and Mona Mahmood, "Inside Ricu, the shadowy propaganda unit inspired by the cold war", The Guardian, May 2, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/may/02/inside-ricu-the-shadowy-propaganda-unit-inspired-by-the-cold-war>.

detrimental effects of such narratives. In this vacuum Prevent's opponents have thrived for too long.

i) Diagnosis: the Centre for the Study of Extremism

Policy Exchange believes the Government urgently needs to develop greater expertise on all forms of extremism, violent and non-violent, including Islamist extremism. This will not only assist with the development of more effective policies to tackle the range of problems presented by violent and non-violent extremism. It will also assist the Government to develop a more robust, consistent, and effective response to disinformation campaigns and influence operations that work against its counter-extremism and counter-terrorism efforts.

To support a renewed cross-government effort, including ministers, it is necessary to establish a consolidated research centre dedicated to developing in-house expertise in extremism, diagnosing extremism-related policy challenges, and formulating options for policy solutions.

The core function of the Centre for the Study of Extremism in the United Kingdom would be to improve understanding across the government departments of the nature of different forms of extremism – violent and non-violent – and the policy challenges arising from it. It must be somebody's job within the Government to understand the nature of the challenge and disseminate that understanding across departments.

Acting under ministerial oversight of the Home Secretary alongside a reformed RICU, the purpose of the Centre for the Study of Extremism would be to examine and analyse the impact of extremism across various policy areas, including security, education, immigration and integration, charities, and prisons. Given the cross-cutting nature of the challenge and the fragmented response to date, it would develop a body of expertise and policy capability across departmental boundaries. Its work would be dedicated to collection, dissemination and facilitating rebuttal, on the basis that you can conduct the latter effectively only if the former approaches have been conducted properly. This has never been done before.

ii) Rebuttal: a communications unit

A dedicated unit would be tasked with the effective communication both within government – and publicly – of accurate and relevant information about Prevent and other counter-extremism initiatives. This would serve to speedily rebut false narratives and conspiracy theories about Prevent and counter-terrorism policies, dispassionately explain the underlying issues, and provide a credible account of both success and failure. On Prevent, Islamists have too often had the field to themselves. And Government officials at both national and local levels, and the media, currently have no adequate go-to source for reliable, up-to-date information about Prevent or counter-extremism programmes. Having a dedicated such unit will inter alia help tackle false grievance narratives regarding these efforts disseminated by Islamists and their allies.

This communications unit would need to be proactive, not merely an

information repository, and in order to perform the task of combatting misleading narratives effectively, the unit will need to develop fact-based knowledge about Prevent and counter-extremism work, thus playing a supportive role in the monitoring and evaluation of this work. It will also need to monitor and document Islamist and other extremist narratives, conspiracy theories, and contentious intra-Islamic disputes regarding sectarianism and blasphemy.

Furthermore, it will require dedicated staff, adequate funding, and strong political leadership to ensure it is sufficiently resourced, strategically driven, and results oriented. Ministerial control must also mean ministerial accountability, with a proper degree of transparency. Prevent has not always had enough of this, allowing conspiracy theories to thrive. We should not be shy of defending our own values in public, indeed the failure to do this has allowed a discourse around “securitisation” to develop.

iii) Due diligence: a unit for partnership accountability

In addition, a new due diligence unit, focused on clarity and consistency, would conduct the certification of partners for government departments, including RICU, conducting due diligence to ensure that government, and its agencies, are “choosing their friends wisely.” This would apply not just to funded projects, but any event at which the logo of a government body appears, or could conceivably appear, on promotional material. Groups campaigning against Prevent and counter-terrorism policies would be denied partnerships in other areas. This would be tied to an equally important process of constant evaluation, to ensure organisations do not “go bad” over a period of time and are not targeted by entryists. On matters of national security, including violent and non-violent extremism, ministers should not avoid responsibility for defending government policy against those seeking to undermine it. They and their officials must take personal charge of the effort, demonstrating accountability.

Distinct from RICU

The Centre for the Study of Extremism, directly accountable to the Home Secretary, would be different from the old RICU in several important ways:

Firstly, it would have a public presence, collating and publishing relevant statistical and other data. It would publish an annual report, after fashions of various EU countries, and regular analyses of Islamist and other extremist organisations in the country, including an overview cataloguing the impacts and influence of these organisations and their campaigns in the UK. The annual report on far-right extremism by the organisation Hope not Hate, is a potential model here.⁵⁵¹

Secondly, it would operate as a research-led centre dedicated to the study of all forms of extremism. As such, it would be expected to draw upon a range of experts and research data. This is particularly important for ministers in an era where so much academic research, even that conducted at long established universities, is dedicated not to analysing problems such as Islamist extremism, but critiquing government responses to it.

551. See for example, “State of HATE 2022: On The March Again”, Hope Not Hate website, March 9, 2022, <https://hopenothate.org.uk/2022/03/09/state-of-hate-2022-on-the-march-again/>.

Thirdly, the communications unit would include a focus on non-violent extremism and its key narratives, such as those that seek to distort the facts about the Government's efforts to combat non-violent extremism.

2. Develop criteria for engagement with community organisations at the national and local levels

In *Choosing Our Friends Wisely*, published in 2009 by Policy Exchange, Shiraz Maher and Martyn Frampton suggested that the Government devise a set of criteria for its engagement with Muslim organisations.⁵⁵² Explaining their motivation, as relevant today as it was twelve years ago, Maher and Frampton wrote:

Non-violent extremists have ... become well dug in as partners of national and local government and the police. Some of the Government's chosen collaborators in 'addressing grievances' of angry young Muslims are themselves at the forefront of stoking those grievances against British foreign policy; western social values; and alleged state-sanctioned 'Islamophobia'.⁵⁵³

The aim of such criteria, as the authors explained, would be to “send a clear message about what the British public space stands for. They [would] allow government to create a values-led narrative about the kind of behaviour it expects from its official partners. But they have wider implications too”.⁵⁵⁴ Criteria for engagement, they stated, would “also seek to empower genuinely progressive forces from within the Muslim community by excluding from official patronage those whose views are inconsistent with liberal democratic social values”.

The 2011 Prevent strategy states that:

In future, neither Prevent funding nor support will be given to organisations that hold extremist views or support terrorist-related activity of any kind, in this country or overseas. This applies irrespective of the source of the funding: central Government, local government or policing.⁵⁵⁵

This was reaffirmed by Lord Carlile in the oversight he provided to the 2011 review of Prevent, where he added: “Choosing friends wisely is an important consideration for all involved in Prevent.”⁵⁵⁶ This is even more so in the era of the statutory Prevent duty. The need for clear engagement criteria was also recognised in the Commission for Countering Extremism's 2019 report, *Challenging Hateful Extremism*. It urged:

As part of building a more effective partnership, Government should clearly set out who Government will and will not engage with, why, and the actions required by those who are not going to be engaged. Government should provide guidance to other public bodies to give clarity about when to engage, when to challenge, and when to de-platform.⁵⁵⁷

There is a lack of clear and authoritative guidance for governmental bodies to determine with whom they can partner or fund. It is possible an arrangement which advances certain Islamist organisations may not sit

552. Shiraz Maher and Martyn Frampton, “Choosing our friends wisely: Criteria for engagement with Muslim groups”, Policy Exchange, London, March 2009. Available at: <https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/choosing-our-friends-wisely-mar-09.pdf>.

553. *Ibid.*, p.5.

554. *Ibid.*, p.74.

555. HM Government, *Prevent Strategy*, UK Government website, Cm 8092, 2011, para.6.64, p.35. Available at: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97976/prevent-strategy-review.pdf.

556. Lord Carlile, “Report to the Home Secretary of Independent Oversight of Prevent Review and Strategy”, HM Government, 2011, para. 21, p.6. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97977/lord-carlile-report.pdf.

557. Commission for Countering Extremism, *Challenging Hateful Extremism*, October 2019, p.132. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/874101/200320_Challenging_Hateful_Extremism.pdf.

well with the position of women or sexual minorities, for example. The guidance should also make clear what kinds of engagement the criteria cover. Three kinds worthy of consideration were identified in Maher and Frampton's report, namely, ministerial attendance or endorsement, financial assistance and official partnership and consultancy. It could also be a function of the new centre to monitor national and local authorities' adherence to the criteria for engagement with community organisations, operating a system of certification.

3. Do not fund or partner with organisations that encourage non-cooperation with the police and security services, campaign against counter-extremism policies, promote religious sectarianism or blasphemy codes, or those that disseminate false narratives and conspiracy theories about Prevent or counter-extremism efforts

One of the key criteria in this era for engaging with community organisations should be that such organisations do not discourage people from cooperating with the police or security services in potential cases of radicalisation or terrorism, and do not disseminate false narratives or conspiracy theories about the Government's efforts to combat terrorism and extremism. Nor can the government be expected to tip-toe around sensitivities governing intra-Islamic theological disputes or issues concerning accusations of blasphemy.

To be clear, reasoned criticism of government policy should be welcome, and freedom of expression is protected by law. But any organisation promoting non-cooperation with the police and security services regarding potential or actual acts of terrorism should disqualify them from official engagement or support. The same should apply to those campaigning against Prevent, and those spreading disinformation about the Government's counter-terrorism and counter-extremism programmes. Such activities serve to undermine the state's legitimacy and authority to protect both our citizens from physical harm and uphold the fundamental values that underpin our society. They tilt the balance within communities adversely. National and local government authorities should refrain from funding or partnering with any organisation involved in such activities.

This is not a question of denying rights to such organisations. It is not a process of securitisation, but the exact opposite. To function properly, liberal democratic values require relentless due diligence. There is no automatic right for any organisation or individual to receive government funding or partnership. Such support is a matter of discretion and judgement, of aligning resources in the most effective way possible to meet the challenge of Islamist extremism, both violent and non-violent. And no government or political structure has an obligation to support those who oppose its policies or seek to undermine, deny or destroy its authority, legitimacy or foundational principles. Why should a government bolster its ideological rivals?

MEND is a case in point. Nationally, MEND resolutely opposes Prevent,

and actively encourages its boycott and termination. It disseminates a narrative that through Prevent and counter-extremism measures, the Government is engaged in an “Islamophobic” witch-hunt of Muslims, outlawing free speech and merely “conservative” Islamic beliefs and practices, when this is simply untrue. But MEND is frequently accepted as a partner at the local level by police services, the NHS, and regional Police and Crime Commissioners. Such engagement by local official authorities only gives credibility to a group and narrative that seeks to undermine the Government’s efforts to counter terrorism and extremism.

Joined-up government requires better than this. The due diligence unit would be taxed with ensuring a consistent approach across all government departments, tackling these anomalies. It should no longer be possible for certain activist groups, such as MEND, to run with the fox and hunt with the hounds.



£10.00
ISBN: 978-1-913459-99-4

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