
Implementing ‘Prevent’ in countering violent extremism in the UK: A left-realist critique

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Abstract

This article attempts to situate the UK ‘Prevent’ policy debate in the wider framework of the global Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) paradigm that emerged in late 2015. It is argued that the omission of a nuanced approach to the social, cultural, economic and political characteristics of the radicalised, there is a tendency to introduce blanket measures that inadvertently and indirectly lead to harm. Moreover, though ‘Prevent’ has been the outward-facing element of the UK government’s counter-extremism strategy since 2006, it conflates legitimate political resistance among young British Muslims as indications of violent extremism, providing credence to the argument that ‘Prevent’ is a form of social engineering ultimately mollifying resistance by re-affirming the status quo on domestic and foreign policy. In these circumstances, ‘Prevent’ can unintentionally add to *structural* and *cultural* Islamophobia, which are amplifiers of both Islamist and far right radicalisation. ‘Safeguarding’ vulnerable young people is imperative in this social policy domain but the language of inclusion in this is absent.

Key words

Countering Violent Extremism, far right, Islamophobia, ‘Prevent’, radicalisation

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Introduction

The events of 9/11 and subsequent occurrences of terrorism, political violence and violent extremism linked to Islamic radicalism across the world, especially during the rise and fall of Islamic State (2015–17), have created new challenges without obvious answers. Since the 2015 United Nations General Assembly, many governments have introduced the ‘Countering Violent Extremism’ (CVE) policy paradigm in an effort to ‘prevent’, disrupt and generate a counter-narrative to avert, intervene or build community resilience against instances of violent extremism. As the concept’s reach has grown, this policy, akin to ‘Prevent’ in the UK, aims to protect against ‘would-be terrorists’ based on various assumptions about the sociological, psychological or behavioural characteristics of the ‘radicalised’ (Coppock and McGovern, 2014). However, ‘Prevent’ is not without its critics in academia (Kundnani, 2014; Mastroe, 2016), the education sector (Bouattia, 2015) or among civil society groups (CAGE Advocacy, 2016). The UK government, led by the Home Office, remains steadfast in rolling out ‘Prevent’, introducing the Prevent Duty in 2015 to cover a whole host of public sector organisations, in particular in education and in health (Blackbourn and Walker, 2016). It is now law for these and other public sector bodies to ensure they tackle the threats of violent extremism, including reporting on visible differences in appearance among young people, regarded as indication of radicalisation in particular instances (HMSO, 2015). However, the policy limits opportunities for building trust and engagement. It also provides succour to far right movements which has escalated due to how the policy has prioritised Muslim groups. It also contributes to Islamophobia – both as a consequence *and* as a driver of hate, intolerance and violent extremism.

This article explores CVE in general and ‘Prevent’ in particular, discussing the sociological, political and cultural limits of the paradigm in the UK based on a left-realist *critical criminology* perspective. This theory originated in the 1970s, at a time of rapid economic transformation due to de-industrialisation, globalisation and technological change, with working-class and ethnic minority groups facing the brunt of decline (Young, 1999). These outcomes also affected hegemonic masculinity (Dekeseredy and Schwartz, 2010), through which male violence emerged as one consequence. The aim of this article is to gauge perspectives on ‘Prevent’ within the wider global CVE paradigm, and the repercussions raised for critical criminology research in this area. In deconstructing these rejoinders new ways of addressing violent extremism must concentrate energies on localised interventions and engagements, depoliticising both ‘Prevent’ and CVE concepts in the process. The problems are local, as are the solutions. Hence, it is vital that programmatic directives do not define the policy approach from above – but rather through the aspirations of communities in specific localities in the wider struggle against

radicalisation from below. British Muslim communities, moreover, need to take greater ownership of both the problem of *and* the solutions to violent extremism – not because Muslims and Islam are the purveyors of the malaise – but, rather, in the absence of UK government efforts to empower communities, these groups have only themselves to rely on. This is an uneasy task in the current climate of the general disconnect between British Muslims and the state.

First, the nature, extent and limit of ‘Prevent’ is discussed, in particular the state–community relations gaps that emerge and the implications raised for the delivery and effectiveness of the policy at a conceptual, theoretical and empirical level. It addresses the issues of politicisation, evoking the suggestion that the policy approach has the unintended impact of making worse the very problems it seeks to ameliorate – that is, radicalisation leading to violent extremism. Second, since its inception, ‘Prevent’ has attempted to counter violent extremism as part of a wider inward- and outward-looking approach known as CONTEST (counterterrorism strategy). However, in certain instances, ‘Prevent’ delivery is stigmatising British Muslims in an atmosphere of rising intolerance, bigotry and Islamophobia in the UK in recent periods, especially as the reality of a growing problem with far right radicalisation, extremism and violence becomes conspicuous. In this milieu, populism, anti-immigrant jingoism and hostility to internal ethnic differences are also becoming politically mainstream. Third, as ‘Prevent’ operates based on a predetermined, idealised notion of ‘the Muslim’ in efforts to counter violent extremism, it enhances the view that the state is only interested in a particular type of Muslim. In conclusion, while the UK government has detailed information and data on the activities of terrorists in the UK, the academy, civil society groups and activists are unable to glean a detailed understanding – it, therefore, leads to many missed opportunities to improve engagement and impact. Considerations for further research are highlighted at the end of this article.

The extent and limit of ‘Prevent’

From early 2015 to late 2017, Islamic State carried out numerous acts of violent extremism and terrorism across the world and in the West in particular (including three in four months in the UK in early 2017) (Vidino et al., 2017). Historically, ‘war on terror’ deradicalisation policy has concentrated on religion *and* ideology as both the cause of *and* solution to violent extremism. In the case of Muslim groups, the aim is to resolve problematic religiosity by replacing it with a moderate or a liberal Islam, in the process variously instrumentalising proxy actors drawn from Muslim communities. It includes those who have turned away from Islamic extremism or regressive Islamism, now embracing a postmodern renaissance as revived enlightened individuals. Key actors today include Sara Khan, Lead Commissioner for the

Commission for Countering Extremism, which reports to the Home Office. In the recent past, Ed Hussain and Maajid Nawaz have carried the torch for liberal ideals, principally in establishing The Quilliam Foundation in 2008, which was initially funded by the UK government to the tune of £1 million. The core of counterterrorism is to dismantle the mechanics involved in plots, but much of the ideological perspectives on the drivers and solutions to terrorism have fixated on Islam. Moreover, the reality is to securitise diversity, centring on deradicalisation based on the notion that individuals move from low-level to vociferous radicalisation and, eventually, to violence and extremism (Mythen et al., 2017). Radicalisers, in reality, mobilise young people attracted to unifying concepts, presented as empowering groups through a holistically conceptualised notion of collective identity that transcends national borders. By portraying their aims as addressing the wrongs that emerge from the post-war periods of migration and settlement of various Muslim minority groups hailing from lands once under colonial rule, radicalisers centre on racism, inequality, social division and the collapse of multiculturalism or respect for differences in society (Young, 2007). However, extremism is a symptom, not a cause of instabilities, insecurities and patterns of anomie experienced by various groups. Here, religiously inspired ideology is a convenient umbrella – a suitable instrument of mobilisation. It is not the first point of departure in determining radicalisation or violent extremism, especially in the diasporic context, although, given the limited approach taken by the UK government, Muslim-owned and led deradicalisation initiatives that do not use the language of CVE but offer routes to self-empowerment arguably provide greater assistance. For example, MEND (Muslim Engagement and Development) and CAGE both deliver research reports, policy briefings and special events aimed at improving knowledge of Islamophobia and radicalisation from a community perspective. In recent periods, these organisations have also provided guidance on ‘Prevent’ in an effort to build in engagement among Muslim communities (MEND, 2018; CAGE, 2018).

Since its inception, ‘Prevent’ has encountered various levels of criticism from actors arguing that its agenda is counterproductive and divisive (Archer, 2009). In 2011, the UK government reviewed CONTEST, first developed in 2003 in private but then publically in 2006 after the events of 7/7 (July 2005), and from which emerged the discourse of the ‘Prevent’ agenda. This reassessment considered countering ideology central in the battle against terrorism. In addition, the legal remit of ‘Prevent’ was expanded to emphasise its work alongside different agencies, including health, education and social services. A youth element also became a feature of the policy content (HMSO, 2011). In effect, the UK government widened its counterterrorism strategy to target not just terrorism but also ideology (Richards, 2011). Consequently, ‘Prevent’ re-emphasised the dominant notion that individuals are necessarily on a direct path towards violent extremism as the primary problematic, even

though the policy identified a significant conflation between social cohesion and counterterrorism. It led to charges of exclusivism, not inclusivism, and the fostering of existing divisions (Edwards, 2016). The review created two implications for policy. First, the importance of building resilience among communities confronted with radical Islamist extremist narratives. Second, the realisation of a specific policing, security and intelligence mandate to engage in overt and covert counterterrorism measures to establish counter-narrative schemes as part of the communication and information battle, and in the processing mitigating the nervousness among government and communities generated by this dissemination. While there are initiatives carried out by organisations such as ConnectJustice which suggest that anecdotally these initiatives make an impact, there is, however, limited independent evidence to assert that strategic communications have any effect on countering violent extremism at all. The latter also includes the significance of building community trust in policing authorities tasked with targeting areas of high Muslim minority populations and other measures associated with risks of radicalisation once connected with a 'Prevent' funding model that allocated budgets based on the residential concentration levels of British Muslims (Murray et al., 2015).

The toxicity of 'Prevent' is palpable (Awan, 2014). The 'at risk' versus 'risky' dichotomy blurs the ambiguous lines that give rise to the politicisation of radicalisation from above, the consequences of placing too great an emphasis on 'Muslimness' (Heath-Kelly, 2017) and the structural determinants of radicalisation from below (Lakhani, 2011; Martin, 2014). In a paradoxical development, the removal of ethnic inequalities from the mainstream discourse of diversity and difference sees ethnicity and religiosity granted specific weight within the counterterrorism domain (Lewis and Craig, 2014). Efforts to clarify the separation between social cohesion and counterterrorism add to confusion among politicians and civil servants, and eventually political and policy paralysis. It intensifies an atmosphere of alarmism towards British Muslims, fanning the flames of far right sentiment that are based on anti-immigration, anti-religion and anti-multiculturalism conceptualisations – a 'Muslim paranoia narrative', which is often the perspective taken by numerous governments when making counter-extremism, de-radicalisation or CVE policy development decisions (Aistrope, 2016). Policymakers maintain assumptions about Muslim communities in their countries and a hostile media and political discourse enhances these perspectives, deepening and widening the realities of Islamophobia in the process. It leads to levels of violence against British Muslims that spike after incidents of terrorism across the world (Hanes and Machin, 2014; Awan and Zempi, 2016), where Islamophobia is an increasingly accepted institutionalised norm (Warsi, 2017). In this charged and toxic atmosphere, relations between the state and British Muslim communities are restricted, reduced to a top-down system of design

and delivery that is understood by those affected by it as well those delivering it as ideological in design and implementation (Thomas, 2012).

The other main concern with 'Prevent' is the mentoring system known as Channel (Qureshi, 2015). It implements a one-to-one methodology that works with vulnerable young people to educate, motivate and inspire them away from paths towards violent extremism (Powers, 2015). The UK government argues that this system prevented a number of young people from joining the Islamic State as foreign fighters. However, it is unable to permit access to original files or even anonymised case material regarding particular individuals or groups. The Channel model is of interest to other counterterrorism agencies across the world, including in France and Germany, with Denmark promoting its unique mentoring approach, known as the 'Aarhus model' (Bertelsen, 2015). However, whether mentoring alone is the dominant enabler or if a particular mechanism associated with deradicalisation from Islamist extremism emerges due to Channel or other similar systems remains unclear.

The stigmatising effects of 'Prevent'

Dealing with terrorism and political violence requires introducing complex research questions in order to generate effective policy interventions. With so many disparaging voices against the UK government's counter-extremism approach, 'Prevent' endures immense discussion in a charged intellectual, policy and community space. Ongoing concerns relate to impact and effectiveness, but disagreements over the efficacy of the 'Prevent' policy agenda also remain. The dominant hegemonic discourse in government policy thinking is to centre on specific interventions regarding British Muslims, in the process alienating a body of people unable to engage in the political process. For groups without the ability to be the interlocutor that government encourages, it raises the prospect of 'policed multiculturalism' (Ragazzi, 2016) and forced assimilation. With a persistent gaze on terrorism and radicalism, British Muslims are hesitant about government attempts to engage with groups through this lens of countering violent extremism (Sabir, 2017). However, with different groups signalling their interests, the 'Prevent' discourse is the centrifugal force underpinning these counter-competing voices.

The dominant negative discourse on religion in society, in particular towards Muslim communities in the West, has a profound effect on stigmatising communities (Citizens UK, 2017). First, it creates the impression that Muslim communities are homogenous, powerless and unable to organise themselves against violent extremism. It takes away their agency and narrows the lens through which state–community relations take shape. As governments in Western Europe and North America only wish to talk to their Muslim communities about terrorism and radicalisation, it disengages groups encountering

various internal ethnic, sectarian and cultural divisions. It also raises suspicions that governments are only interested in a variety of liberal Islam, which is pro-integration; one based on values and nurturing identities, rather than appreciating the structural realities affecting all marginalised communities. Second, the narratives of exclusion and victimisation are powerful within the wider context of Muslim communities in the process of integrating into majority society. Much evidence supports claims of exclusion and disadvantage, but it is ignored or relegated to the bottom of the pecking order of social policy priorities. This discourse on the 'left behind' also concerns the aspirations of former white working-class communities suffering downward social mobility (Beider, 2015; Dorling, 2015), a well-documented issue in current research on social inequalities (Franz, 2015; Zelin, 2015). Many Muslim groups who came to the West, especially to Western Europe as part of a post-war migration process, now as third and fourth generations, continue to experience instances of economic and cultural alienation. Dominant state actors are concerned about various cultural questions within communities concerning such issues as the treatment of women, female genital mutilation or grooming of vulnerable young women. It distances a body of people looking to the state for answers to structural struggles that they suffer as communities within neighbourhoods. Certainly, analysis of social media from Islamic State challenges the assumption that religious narratives encourage vulnerable young people to turn to violent Islamist radicalisation to generate answers to their worldly exertions. Less than 10% of Islamic State output referred to religion alone (Schuurman et al., 2016). Rather, the likes of Islamic State concentrated on grievances, which are rooted in the experience of Muslims in the West (and in the East). With relative ease, it permits radicalisers to converge on the injustices of racism and exclusion as well as vilification in the media, political marginalisation and cultural isolation. The present approach to 'Prevent'/CVE, especially in the UK and in other parts of Western Europe, runs the risk of reproducing the very outcomes it wishes to counter.

In understanding the drivers of violent extremism among Muslim communities, and of former white working-class communities who turn to far right extremism, the symbiotic effects of culture and structure, in addition to the psychological dimensions, generate a systematic understanding of relations between the individual, communities and politics (Abbas, 2017). Differences of opinion emerge between state actors and wider communities, resulting in politicisation and polarisation, not always prevention or protection. In the midst of discernible identity claims based on a sense of belonging and the need for participation, there are acute issues facing British Muslim groups in the current period. British Muslims look to the state to respond to the problems facing groups; however, the state is not returning the interest. It indicates institutionalised Islamophobia or anti-Muslim sentiment, which have surfaced as problematic outcomes of the failed 'war on terror' and the

global 'war on terror' culture that ensues. Moreover, terrorism has not abated. From August 2014 to December 2017, when Islamic State declared itself as the caliphate, over 50 acts of terrorism were carried out across the world, with Western Europe and North America on the receiving end of many of these attacks. No single profile identifies the archetypical terrorist. Rather, perpetrators are from diverse backgrounds, many of whom with numerous social, economic and cultural apprehensions over their existence as Western Muslims. The unmistakable profile is that all of the British assailants implicated in acts of violent extremism, radicalisation or terrorism are products of British society (O'Donnell, 2016). Meanwhile, policymakers struggle to profile the potential violent extremist. As governments endeavour to promote the notion that vulnerable young people are at risk of radicalisation, and then subsequently commits acts of violent extremism, it stigmatises an entire group, and disregards instances of political resistance, turning it into pre-violence extremist criminal thought, which is policed and securitised, in the process silencing legitimate dissent or criticism.

Contemporary radicalisations are the reality of global issues with local reach. Radicalisers know that their recruitment strategies fill a vacuum, as local leaders are unable to address the concerns of the disaffected young, where much of radicalisation also reflects on youth rebellion. Broad policy measures concentrate on a narrow range of activities, adding to distrust and disproportionality. It yields negative consequences due to a heavy-handed, universally directed approach that casts the net far too wide (Thomas, 2014). With increasing numbers of young Muslim teenagers vulnerable to extremism, it is notable that all were born since the onset of the global 'war on terror'.

Putting the cart before the horse

The UK 2011 'Prevent' review attempted to create distance between cohesion and counterterrorism, but this separation was unsuccessful due to political distancing by the government, merged with an element of apathy, as the emphasis was on deep cuts to public services and institutions in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crash. It would be too simplistic, however, to reduce the essential dilemma of CVE to one of a conflation between cohesion and counterterrorism – as cohesion is not without its obstacles. Emerging as policy approach and a political discourse after the Northern Disturbances in 2001, 'community cohesion' was flawed and unpopular due to its insistence on bridging social capital as an antidote to profound patterns of social inequality and economic polarisation. It was not that groups who rose up did not share the same social, educational, occupational or cultural spaces, or an outlook on accepting and valuing differences in society. The reality in 2001 reflected failed multicultural, integration and social mobility policy, which

resulted in a process of cultural withdrawal. A lack of cohesion is the outcome of wider processes in society, not the cause of factors perceived as the foundations of radicalism and later terrorism.

Education is an essential vehicle for change, but education now also faces increasing securitisation. In the process, it stigmatises existing isolated individuals, especially in schools and in higher education settings (Abbas, 2018; Durodie, 2016; McGovern, 2017; Qurashi, 2017). Prisons are another area of critical research, as they are networking and learning opportunities, as well as spaces targeted by certain radicalisers. Overcrowding and pre-trial detention spaces are also crucial issues. Those coming out of prisons face various implications for their education and employment training. Beyond the UK, the remedy is not a counter-insurgency strategy, but the broader stability of the Middle East in general. In these spaces, a consensus is emerging, but gaps remain in understanding the subtleties of CVE and whether they have any impact at all. This omission includes intervention and rehabilitation – i.e. detection, recruitment, assessment and evaluation, all involving many layers and levers, including schools, counter-narratives and the pre-criminal space. The concentration on the broad rather than the narrow is the foremost predicament where the broad refers to wider public-orientated elements and the narrow refers to ideology. Ideology is the tipping point. It takes in young people and it is through debunking ideology that they return to normalcy. However, it is separate from religiosity (Dawson and Amarasingam, 2016).

Counterterrorism is the notion of an overarching framework that seeks to create a set of policies and interventions that deal with terrorism through active counter-narratives, as well as operational matters of security, policing and intelligence. Counter-extremism is the notion of building community resilience and capability to defend and counteract problematic characteristics affecting threats to national security. Young individuals in the process of donning a hijab or showing attitudinal changes regarding specific norms and values, once regarded as an acceptable reality of multiculturalism in the recent past, now face objectification. The lack of public engagement about 'Prevent' by the UK government creates disengagement on the part of the public with respect to the state. For Muslim communities who shoulder acute trials regarding their visibility and their negative representation in media and politics, in particular women (Chakraborti and Zempi, 2012), additional fears arise. In turn, voices who have little or no opposition from government or mainstream media fill the anti-'Prevent' vacuum.

In the UK, elites divert awareness of Muslim groups within the context of the failings of globalisation. British Muslim groups and other new immigrant groups are a convenient scapegoat, as shown by the outcomes in the run up to and since the Brexit referendum of June 2016. The wider context is neoliberal capitalism, where the motivations for crimes relating to radicalisation and terrorism are the options taken by individuals facing alienation,

disenfranchisement and exclusion, where ideology acts as an accessible umbrella. Muslim groups rebel against global capitalism, racism and Islamophobia, which leads to a 'moral panic' that raises existing levels of Islamophobia but also affects aspects of the law, policing and securitisation. The media demonises certain groups, which benefits people in positions of authority in support of the hegemonic discourse. It encourages the formation of subcultures as marginalised Muslim men face a crisis of masculinity, and then respond to their discontent by straining to re-establish their self-conceptualisation. The net outcome is a self-fulfilling prophecy, ultimately conforming to the label attached to Muslim men – as well as Muslim women encountering radicalisation based on specific claims relating to Islamic femininity (Zakaria, 2015).

As with other countries confronting the threats of violent extremism from groups of a radical Islamist or far right character, the oft-complex but perennial question is how to achieve the balance between individual freedom and national security. Effort is required to decouple the idea that radicalisation is always a security risk or that it will necessarily lead to violence or terrorism. The net result is a 'disconnected citizenship' that alienates religious and ethnic minority groups facing the toxic penalties of an enduring gaze upon them (Jarvis and Lister, 2012). In reality, polarisation poses a greater threat than radicalisation, pitching indigenous minority and majority groups against each other. It results in ideological, cultural and political conflict rather than violent extremism or terrorism (Lub, 2013). The family is also crucial, although it is necessary to ensure that interest on this aspect does not promote the 'suspect community' paradigm (Spalek, 2016).

The 'Prevent' data published by the UK government on 9 November 2017 showed that the referrals from suspected Muslim extremists made up more than two-thirds of all referrals (Home Office, 2017). However, Muslim referrals to 'Prevent' are 41 more times likely than far right groups, given their population proportions. Far right individuals are six times more likely to get Channel support in London compared with Islamist individuals, yet Islamists make up 72% of all referrals in London compared with 2% for far right groups. Carrying out a 2×2 chi-squared test, this result is significant at $p < 0.01$. Therefore, there is clearly a view that the risks of radicalisation are more likely to be found within British Muslim communities and hence the need to ensure their greater scrutiny even though, evidently, far right extremism is on the rise. In reality, far right groups are increasingly committing acts of terrorism relative to their violent Islamist counterparts (Institute of Economics and Peace, 2017). The impact of the dysfunctionality of the 'Prevent' programme leads to a breakdown in trust, limiting the opportunities for engagement. In effect, the power of the state to define the problem *and* the solution is a forced means of policy development, which becomes an issue of political control and social engineering rather than a social policy seeking to alleviate a problem grasped in collective terms.

One immediate challenge is to determine the effectiveness or otherwise of 'Prevent' (Mirahmadi, 2016), which can help to establish the extent and limit of 'Prevent' in various settings, especially when it veers into matters of social cohesion (Aziz, 2014). A systematic independent evaluation of 'Prevent' policies across the UK can help to engender generalisable understandings that improve knowledge but also the ability to deliver effective policy, a process that is being taken on by the Commission for Countering Extremism, although this is currently still in its infancy. Other research questions on 'Prevent' concern social and political contextualisation, measurement and evaluation, and the implications of wider counterterrorism policy. One type of violent extremism should not be a political or policy priority over other kinds, given the range, extent and impact of within-group violent extremism. Questions also remain as to whether British citizens are safer due to 'Prevent'. If the risk of violent extremism remains, does it mean that the policy has thus far been unable to deliver on its promise at all? It is disconcerting that these questions remain unanswered in view of the effects it has on British Muslim–state relations and especially as 'Prevent' is the brand that the UK exports to the wider CVE world as a flagship model.

Concluding thoughts - dismantling the 'Prevent' logic

The reality of Muslim communities is differentiation, not sameness. Uneven anxieties exist in cosmopolitan centres and the rest of the country – divided, as they are, into north and south as much as they are rich and poor. The apprehension facing British Muslim groups is a reality of social class, education, ethnicity, migration history, and social and cultural capital mobilised since arrival and settlement. In parts of London, Muslim visibility is associated with cultural integration, while in the Midlands and in areas of the north, Muslim geographical prominence resonates with notions of cultural isolation. In the south, Muslims are expressing themselves through film, art, music, food and fashion, working alongside cosmopolitan groups due to their relatively privileged socio-economic status (Janmohamed, 2017). Elsewhere in the country, such differences are not as pronounced, if they are observable at all. However, low education results in low employment, causing patterns of social immobility, with groups trapped in the same areas in which the pioneer generations migrated and settled. It reproduces accusations of self-segregation and self-ghettoisation in the Midlands and the north. In the realm of politics, greater organisation and participation is found in London compared to a greater reliance on a pre-migration system of patrilineal clan kinship networks (*biraderi*) to bolster political mobilisation, which habitually ends in up a cul-de-sac due to the limited nature of its design and operationalisation

in the diasporic context (Akhtar, 2013). All the main political parties take advantage of the biraderi structures, particularly with Pakistani communities in the Midlands and in the north.

Since 2010, the UK government has shut out the Muslim Council of Britain, the largest and most influential British Muslim umbrella group. It suggests British Muslim communities have to organise themselves in response to Islamophobia and radicalisation from below. In this self-organisation, British Muslims are required to take the lead in tackling both Islamophobia and radicalisation, not because they are specific Muslim problems, but rather that the state is incapable or unwilling to address the precise issues, especially as current undertakings by the UK government to enhance existing counterterrorism legislation have led to accusations of a 'pre-crime' agenda (Altermark and Nilsson, 2018). Much involves behind-the-scenes operations to pursue would-be terrorists, but the pressure to produce tangible deliverables leads to extensive politicisation of radicalisation, fuelling existing misunderstandings, and in the process granting licence to gross generalisations. It raises the prospect of 'repoliticising counter-radicalisation' as a means of active citizenship from below but '[w]hile there is resistance, change and transformation are possible' (Croft, 2012: 232). Effective intervention needs to be sensitive to the background of every individual to understand when best to introduce it. It also means the depoliticisation of 'Prevent', especially when the approach conflates activism with extremism (Lowe, 2017).

A left-realist critical criminological perspective suggests room for deradicalisation programmes, but it needs to be community owned and led, which means that the present top-down system of selection and processing of individuals for referrals needs to be democratic, open and transparent. British Muslims are under pressure because of the limitations to government domestic and foreign policy, but 'Prevent' has the consequence of widening divisions and creating additional mistrust. With a London-centric groupthink and the lack of any social science appreciation of communities in their settings, the status quo is preserved. The foremost impediment with the top-down 'Prevent' policy is that it is devoid of any real input from the Muslim communities affected by it – that is, apart from predetermined interlocutors straddling both communities. The other issue with 'Prevent' is the assumption that Islamist terrorism is akin to religious (mis)interpretation. It is a useful ruse on the part of commentators and policymakers, as it takes attention away from the wider workings of society, including aspects of institutional, structural and cultural racism, which derives from as well as leads to Islamophobia. Terrorism is about the impact of the deed as a message of defiance of the voiceless; those left behind by the democratic process, those most pushed down by the workings of society, and those objectified as having the least to offer the rest of humanity.

The decline in public services since austerity was introduced in 2010 has plagued Britain. It has led the UK government to pay attention to a particular reading of the *problem* and the *solution*, taking matters back to a time when the general perspective on Islam and Muslims, specifically in the aftermath of the events of 9/11 and 7/7, was negatively converged on religion, culture and identity. The emergence of reactionary and dogmatic policies and programmes, demonising and vilifying a community of communities, shifts understanding away from specific checks on liberal democracies in the current era, projecting these concerns onto some of the most exposed and vulnerable groups in society. It is also necessary to see the perpetrators of acts of terrorism as victims – for reasons to do with the workings of society in general terms and because of the ways in which minority identities are shaped in a space where differences are challenged. A sense of persecution of a global faith community at the hands of supra-national interests in different parts of the world blights the judgements of young people with chequered personal histories and troubled lives. A spotlight only on vulnerabilities does not avoid the stigmatisation directed at entire communities. It allows practitioners and policymakers to downgrade the holistic dynamics foremost in understanding and limiting violent extremism. It also prohibits different sections of British society from coalescing around themes that embrace the human condition as a collective, thus avoiding the deleterious consequences of an ‘us’ and ‘them’ mentality.

A left-realist criminological perspective can help to appreciate the nature of community perspectives on violence – from radicalisation to extremism to terrorism – but there remains a dearth of knowledge-building this area. Research in this area is needed in at least three different strands that require consideration. First, the importance of evaluating ‘Prevent’ externally from government is necessary in the light of the significance of this policy for state–community relations. Second, the nature of these state–community relations need to be better understood considering the fissures that exist in the current period and the lack of any detailed assessment of them. Finally, there is a specific need to listen closely to the perspectives of British Muslims. In particular, what groups regard as specific and important to help improve relations, thereby generating the confidence of communities while appreciating their capacity needs, in the process ensuring that government and policymakers are better able to bridge these vital communication and engagement openings.

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