Preventing Violent Extremism: Perceptions of Policy from Grassroots and Communities

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Abstract: This article examines the implementation of the UK's 'Prevent Strategy' for countering terrorist risks and threats. Informed by qualitative data, it critically assesses the perception and reception 'on the ground' of Prevent Strategy policies amongst those individuals who are, in many ways, the focus of such interventions. It is found that there are a number of grievances held, though three are of particular concern and revolve around funding issues, confusion of the overarching aims of the strategy, and suspicions of intelligence gathering and spying within Muslim communities.

Following the high-profile terrorist attacks in New York in 2001 and London in 2005 (7/7), the UK government incorporated a programme of preventative activity into its counter-terrorism (CT) strategy. The rationale for the 'Prevent' programme was the perceived increased risk of 'home-grown' terrorism. Central to the approach adopted was enlisting and engaging local Muslim communities within CT strategies. This reflects a widely-held belief, as espoused by a number of commentators, that 'communities are the long-term solution to terrorism' (Briggs 2010, p.981). Informed by empirical evidence collected through extensive fieldwork within a number of UK Muslim communities, this article identifies that many local communities have serious concerns and grievances about police and government attempts to involve them in this work. These concerns revolve around three main issues: who receives funding; confusion regarding the aims of this preventative approach; and allegations about spying upon a 'suspect community'.

The 'Prevent Strategy' (commonly referred to as 'Prevent') sits within the wider cross-departmental 'Countering International Terrorism' strategy. Although Prevent has existed since 2003 and evolved through the

establishment of the 'Preventing Extremism Together Taskforce', the more notable development was in 2006 as a response to the incidents of 7/7. ==The aims of the strategy were to implement 'a community-led approach to tackling violent extremism' (HM Government 2009, p.13) by winning 'hearts and minds' and empowering local groups and local communities to 'stop people becoming terrorists or supporting violent extremism' (p.11).== The strategy is purportedly 'based on a better understanding of the causes of radicalisation (the process by which people become terrorists or lend support to violent extremism), and seeks to provide a coherent response' through five main objectives[1] which are supplemented by an additional two sub-objectives[2] (p.12). It is also of note that, at the time of writing, Prevent is being reviewed by the new coalition government.

The strategy is delivered by a number of different central government departments (Kundnani 2009) and a multi-layered police response involving a range of different forces and departments (Spalek *et al.* 2008; Innes and Thiel 2008). The funding allocated to Prevent has grown substantially from £6 million in 2006 to £140 million in 2008/09 (HM Government 2009). Within this, £51 million has been earmarked for Communities and Local Government (CLG)-based funding towards local authorities for their own projects (Kundnani 2009). Many of these local authority projects are in partnership with, and provide funding to, 'non-State actors' through various application procedures (Briggs 2010, p.971). Non-State actors are also funded directly through central government departments, such as the Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism (OSCT).

There has been a recent upsurge of criticism directed towards the British government in respect of Prevent, predominantly surrounding the implementation of the strategy (Kundnani 2009; Khan 2009; Bartlett and Birdwell 2010). There is, however, a lack of empirical research gauging 'grassroots' perceptions of the strategy. The partial exception being Kundnani (2009) and a report by the (CLG) Select Committee within the House of Commons (2010). Both of these analyses, although current and pertinent, are based upon the experiences of a relatively small sample of stakeholders.

Communities' concerns about Prevent (perceived or otherwise) have the strong potential to be counter-productive to the strategy. One possible pitfall is the creation of a 'suspect community' which can occur through the use or misuse of various CT strategies, responses and legislation. This very point was highlighted during the height of the Northern Ireland conflicts where Hillyard (1993) argued that Irish communities, especially within mainland UK, were treated as 'suspect' and were frequently being subject to fewer civil rights than were others, not only by parts of the State, but also by elements of the media and sections of the wider general public. These arguments have resurfaced with regards to the 'Al Qaeda inspired' threat. For example, Pantazis and Pemberton (2009) claim that Muslims are being labelled as the new 'suspect community'. However, others have dismissed such attributions (Greer 2010).

When implementing a CT strategy based around ethnic minority communities it can be argued that there needs to be strong trust instilled

within them towards the State, not only to effectively mobilise them to counter the threat from within, but also to voluntarily and confidently provide intelligence to the relevant authorities. Therefore, communities' perceptions of the police and government are imperative in implementing a strategy such as Prevent. This is especially important when considering the recurring claims, particularly in the UK, of institutionalised racism within the police force and ethnic minority communities perceiving a disproportionate use of policing and legislative powers (Bowling, Parmar and Phillips 2008; Bowling and Foster 2002). Bowling, Parmar and Phillips (2008) argue that in recent years the police have moved towards a 'military model' which, in turn, 'contributes to the criminalisation of marginalised communities and undermines not only the "confidence and trust" in the police, but also the legitimacy of the state itself' (p.24). In fact, post events such as the 2001 Bradford and Oldham riots and the 7/7 attacks in London, some have suggested that Muslim men, in particular, are viewed as the new 'folk devils' and 'enemy within' (Bowling, Parmar and Phillips 2008, p.3; Hudson 2007, p.163).

A crucial aspect of Prevent is that it is not merely a police-led activity, but a multi-layered and multi-agency strategy. In this respect, Prevent can be seen as part of a wider movement in policing to extend policing activities across a number of agencies (see, for example, Crawford 1997; Johnston and Shearing 2003). The police appear to be the face of delivery and little empirical research investigates whether communities perceive failures to stem from the police, or are part of a broader issue.

The next section of the article describes the research design and methodology for the study. This is followed by empirical data-led explorations of the three key grievances held by Muslim communities with regards to Prevent, mentioned previously. The article concludes with a discussion of the implications of these findings.

Methodology

Empirical data informing the analysis reported herein were gathered by the author over a nine-month period between October 2009 and June 2010, with a small number of interviews conducted in mid-2008. In total, 56 respondents in various locations throughout the UK were interviewed using an in-depth semi-structured interview method. Several respondents were interviewed on multiple occasions. The interviewees included: one government minister; two high-level civil servants; three local government employees; one high-ranking police officer; two academics; and four researchers. In addition, interviews were conducted with imams and religious leaders, prominent representatives of various Muslim communities, community members, and a small number with those who were former members or supporters of groups considered to be of an extreme nature. Although data from all interviews were used to inform the analysis, it is data collected from these interviews that are the particular focus of the current article.

TABLE 1
Interviewee Numbers and Locations

Location	Interviewee type	
	Informed informants	Community members
London	14	2
Midlands	8	–
North East England	3	–
North West England	3	–
West of England	2	10
Other	1	–

In terms of accessing these groups, two types of respondents were sampled: 'informed informants' and 'community members'. *Table 1* outlines the number of interviews completed within these two subgroups, together with their geographic locations. It should be noted that all of these interviews were conducted with male respondents. This was for a number of reasons. Most notably, this tends to reflect the apparent limited numbers of female 'informed informants' working within this particular area and, second, the cultural difficulties surrounding certain Muslim women talking in private with unfamiliar men.

The 'informed informants' comprised individuals and groups working at the 'grassroots' level within particular local Muslim communities. These respondents were purposively sampled on the basis of having first-hand experience and regular contact with those that mainstream society would deem to hold extreme viewpoints/ideologies, be somewhat susceptible to them, or have been implicated under one of the various terrorism acts' (TACT) sections. Thus, these individuals and groups conduct 'de-radicalisation' and 'counter-radicalisation' work at the grassroots level. There was a concerted effort to avoid interviewing those considered to be the 'usual suspects' who are readily available for comment, though may not have much hands-on experience with those who are susceptible to radicalisation, or have been radicalised (Briggs, Fieschi and Lownsbrough 2006). The rationale was that responses from a small group of 'informed informants' may be more accurate and insightful than responses provided by a larger group of less well-informed informants (Campbell 1955). A 'snowball sampling strategy' was implemented in order to attain interviews within this particular group of respondents and was utilised for a number of reasons. The primary motive was due to the significantly limited numbers of potential interviewees available, with many being dispersed across much of the UK. Initially, access to respondents was sought from previous contacts, within one particular grassroots organisation in London, acquired from the author's previous employment within a prominent think-tank. This group was perceived to offer a good starting point for the snowballing process on the basis that it appeared to be mentioned favourably in a number of government and academic circles.[3]

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The second subgroup was initially intended to include members within two distinct local Muslim communities who, unlike the first group, were not, to the author's knowledge, directly exposed to those with extremist beliefs. As the term 'community' incorporates a number of wide-ranging affiliations, the respondents were all chosen from three distinct ones: religious (that is, all respondents were Muslim); geographic (that is, all respondents lived within the same specified geographic region); and all worshipped at the same mosque. As part of a multiple, or comparative case-study approach, two locations were selected and a 'single-stage probability' technique was introduced in order to attain respondents. It became evidently clear, however, that potential respondents showed little interest in the study due to both a lack of trust towards the researcher and an unwillingness to discuss sensitive issues around the topic of terrorism; a difficulty experienced by other researchers (see, for example, Githens-Mazer *et al*. 2010, p.18; Shibli 2010). Therefore, two further locations were selected, in London and the West of England, based on existing networks with the potential to snowball. Once again the difficulties mentioned above resurfaced in London, which reflects the limited number of interviewees within this area. Interviews were eventually conducted in the West of England following lengthy negotiations with certain key 'gatekeepers' who, against the initial recommendations of certain worshippers and parts of mosque management, risked much to facilitate the sessions.

All interviews were voice-recorded using two separate Dictaphones. Transcriptions of all interviews were produced by the author using 'Express Scribe', which enabled a familiarisation and understanding of the responses (Fielding 1996). The empirical data were analysed using a combination of both 'thematic' and 'comparative' analyses. The qualitative software package used for this analysis was NVivo 8.

Perceptions of Prevent

'. . . they [the government] are calling it preventing violent extremism, but behind it is something else which can be of harm to the Muslims'. This is something which is engraved into the minds of the Muslims, the majority of Muslims in the UK . . . (Interview 001)

This quotation comes from a prominent 'informed informant' in London. Discussing feedback received from local Muslim communities, he argued that the 'majority' perception of the strategy was somewhat negative, and that there were deep concerns with its implementation. From analysis of the empirical data collected, these concerns were found to gravitate around a number of different grievances. However, three issues were of particular prominence: funding issues; community confusion; and intelligence gathering and spying.

Funding Issues

Looking across the interviews there was a clear pattern evident, in that many of those spoken to thought that the money invested through the

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Prevent Strategy was being 'wasted'. In particular, they tended to highlight the funds allocated to local authorities, some of which was used to create and fund partnerships with non-State actors. There was a widespread perception that many of the funded projects were far removed from the overarching aims of Prevent (that is, preventing violent extremism (PVE)), and were more concerned with general community cohesion type work (discussed in depth below). There was a distinct fear that projects of this nature misdirected effort and resources away from those who pose, or potentially pose, a threat to national security.

For example, one informed informant from London who was part of a prominent grassroots organisation and had met Germaine Lindsay, one of the 7/7 bombers, on a number of occasions argued:

. . . you wouldn't get Germaine Lindsay going to a community day . . . so these people who are wanting to be helped, they are not the activities they are into. (Interview 022)

These sentiments were supported by a young white convert from the West of England who claimed to have once been a 'romancer' of extreme ideologies. He stated that Prevent, in its current form, would not have made an impact on his extreme beliefs because:

. . . I even wanted to go to jihad to that point and if someone said to me 'you know we've got this really good government organised Prevent thing . . .'; that is no way gonna bring me away from extremism . . . (Interview 015)

This notion of the 'misuse' of funding by largely irrelevant projects was due, according to the data, to a number of reasons. One of these revolved around the perception that there was a lack of knowledge and confidence within local authorities on how to allocate funding for projects run by non-State actors. Further to this, the local authorities were accused of funding groups with whom they already had established networks, regardless of whether these organisations had the capacity, knowledge or experience to achieve the aims of Prevent. There was a feeling that local authorities were opting to fund projects which seemed to be the safest, easiest and most risk-averse. This view was articulated by a researcher in London who stated:

. . . local government don't feel nervous about doing that kind of stuff . . . [which] therefore allows local officials to do the stuff that's easiest to do rather than stuff that's gonna have the most impact . . . (Interview 030)

This concern seems to predominantly link to the local authorities' lack of previous experience with this particular agenda. In addition, the data suggested a disconnect between local and central government with a lack of specified guidance from central to local. As one senior local authority employee from London argued: 'One of the big challenges we've had is that, [it] is the large element of just making it up as you go along . . .' (Interview 020). Further to this, there were complaints that central government failed to assist in tailoring specific approaches with local authorities. The same employee continued: 'the stuff that comes down centrally is

a one size fits all expectation' (Interview 020). It must be noted, however, that this concern has, apparently, been recognised by certain local authorities and central government, at least from the data collected by this research. As one former assistant chief executive from a local authority in London explained: 'I think they are trying to rectify that significantly, in the last 12 months they have set up guidance on funding decisions . . .' (Interview 034); whether or not this guidance is enough to alleviate these particular concerns is yet to be seen.

However, some blame lies with the various Muslim groups and organisations that are applying for Prevent funding with either no previous experience on the issue, or little or no intention to use the funds for PVE work. Just under a quarter of those interviewed raised concerns about 'bogus Muslim groups'[4] who have apparently applied for funding as they believe they can 'tick the correct boxes'. These groups may well have been active in some form within their local communities, but the interviewees felt that they lacked credibility on many occasions with this particular agenda and in a sense refocused their organisational aims in order to qualify for the funding. On the face of it, this is not an issue, as many organisations constantly change their overarching aims in order to keep up to date with changing trends. However, individuals were concerned that organisations were doing so primarily to receive Prevent funding, when they simply did not possess the experience they claimed within de-radicalisation and counter-radicalisation work. Further to this, there was a general perception that these groups were not using the funding to achieve what the respondents perceived to be the aims of Prevent. One informed informant from the North East felt that these Muslim organisations have:

. . . come up from under the woodwork for the money. They don't know how to deal with it, they've never done it before in the past . . . (Interview 010)

In fact, the respondents generally agreed that problems with funding cannot be blamed solely on the government as certain Muslim groups are simply leading them to believe that they know how to achieve the set aims. As one grassroots worker from London explained, these groups 'write a damn good bloody bid . . . but this is not the fault of the OSCT or the Home Office, 'cos they're being led to believe that they know what they're talking about . . .' (Interview 019). Therefore, the general consensus amongst these particular respondents was that this issue is a 'two-sided coin' and they felt that the focus needed to be placed with both elements, as another informed informant from London summed up: it works 'both ways as well, the Muslim community hasn't helped themselves in regards to this and the government hasn't helped them by how they have marketed it' (Interview 004). Thus, it appeared that there was a general concern that the government wasn't stringent enough with its assessments for allocating funding.

Subsequent to the issues raised above, about a fifth of the respondents felt that the government was 'throwing money at the issue' in order to be seen as actively attempting to reduce the threat. Although this may not be the case, it was a representative concern within the data and was accentu-

ated by the economic crisis. The Muslim respondents, answering as British citizens rather than Muslims, felt, as taxpayers, that the funds were being misused, which would not help to alleviate the issue. A community representative from the Midlands noted: 'I do not believe simply throwing money at the problem solves the problem' (Interview 041). This was also reflected by certain community members, as one individual commented:

they're throwing money at a problem thinking the money will get rid of the problem . . . how is that going to prevent those kids from becoming terrorists the next day? (Interview 050)

Regardless of whether the funds are being used directly for PVE work as expected by the vast majority of respondents, the money is still being used to develop elements of Muslim communities. However, most of the community members interviewed were anxious that if this money is being used for non-PVE work then it subsequently causes confusion with the overall aims of the strategy, not only within the eyes of Muslim communities, but also with wider society.

Community Confusion

The 'incorrect' funding of projects through Prevent has led, according to the majority of respondents, to a distinct lack of clarity surrounding its overarching aims. The strategy outlines that it aims to support both de-radicalisation and counter-radicalisation work, though respondents felt as though certain projects, including those considered to be long term, did not reflect this. The interviewees found it difficult to see any obvious correlations between the commissioned projects of which they were personally aware and the end goal of PVE. This was primarily attributed to the perceived blurring of lines between broader community cohesion type projects and what they understood to be CT work; something paralleled by the Select Committee findings (House of Commons 2010, p.52).

Although one of the five main work streams of the Prevent Strategy aims to increase the resilience of local communities to violent extremism (HM Government 2009), the confusion seemed to stem from the involvement of certain central government departments such as the CLG, who the respondents felt should have no affiliations with work based around a CT nature. As one grassroots worker working within a youth project in North East England explained:

. . . the council have been doing it all wrong because their main focus is on community cohesion . . . it's not dealing with the issues. (Interview 010)

In fact, this argument was not only raised by the informed informants and community members, but across the board of interviewees throughout the research. As one researcher from London argued: '. . . I think it's a big problem having CLG and OSCT muddled together delivering this programme and funding it' (Interview 002).

Another explanation of this confusion with the overall aims of the Prevent Strategy was due to the terminology being used. Terms such as

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'terrorism', 'radicalisation' and 'violent extremism' were being used under the Prevent banner, when, in reality, many projects had very little, if any, meaningful connections with these issues. The respondents believed that this has led to certain projects, which are, of course, geared towards Muslims, coming under scrutiny from wider society and automatically assuming connotations with terrorism. As one grassroots community worker from London argued:

. . . when the government gives money to other community organisations to open up the youth centre . . . nobody bats an eyelid . . . [but] if the money came from Prevent and the youth centre is geared for Muslims then all of a sudden it has different connotations. (Interview 004)

However, the interviewees did not object to the terminology where they felt it was detached from broader community cohesion type projects. The same applied with the Prevent label, as long as it was concentrated on immediate and targeted CT work. Otherwise they felt that there was a great risk that the strategy, in conjunction with various other CT legislation, such as 'stop and search'[5] and 'detention without charge'[6] (both currently under review by the new coalition government), would position Muslim communities to be further viewed as 'suspect communities'.

Though it must be noted that the data suggested that a number of the respondents viewed 'stop and search' as a failure of government policy rather than placing the sole emphasis on the police and their implementation, with certain individuals perceiving that the police agreed with their concerns. As one prominent community representative from the Midlands explained: 'many Chief Constables up and down the country [are] saying it's a blunt instrument, it's doing more harm than good' (Interview 041). As a result, he felt as though such interventions were further alienating Muslim youth and serving to construct them as a *de facto* 'suspect community'. He continued:

. . . a young generation of people who are now growing up . . . with this siege mentality they're walking around thinking 'the world is against us', they are frightened to take their rightful place as a British citizen, as a subject of this country to contribute positively because they are always looking over their shoulder. (Interview 041)

This is especially important when considering that, according to the 2001 census, under-16-year-olds make up over a third of the Muslim population in the UK. In fact, the majority view of the interviewees was that Muslim communities were being criminalised as a whole for the actions of a small minority, with whom they have no affiliations except that they happen to share the same religion. This fear was accentuated substantially when considering the widespread accusations from practitioners, researchers, academics and elements of the media of intelligence gathering and spying within Muslim communities (Kundnani 2009; House of Commons 2010; Bartlett and Birdwell 2010; Casciani 2010). It must be noted that there appears to be some confusion between project monitoring and community mapping, and intelligence gathering and surveillance (House of Commons

2010). However, 'the allegations of spying retain widespread credibility within certain sections of the Muslim community' (House of Commons 2010, p.3)

Intelligence Gathering and Spying

The data strongly indicated that respondents felt that an element of Prevent was being used as an intelligence gathering or spying tool by the State. Further to this, they feared that these 'clandestine' methods when coupled with other CT legislation, such as 'detention without charge', could potentially seriously disrupt the lives of individuals who were later released without charge. These accusations have recently gathered much momentum and there are a number of relevant publicly-available sources of information regarding this (Kundnani 2009; House of Commons 2010). Although this study's empirical data reflected a number of similar findings to those of Kundnani (2009) and the Select Committee (House of Commons 2010), for example, discussing these would simply be repeating previous arguments. Therefore, this section will discuss how these allegations have been extended to Muslim communities and informed informants themselves, and how this subsequently affects both their perceptions of Prevent and relationship with the State.

The data suggested that parts of Muslim communities were looking inward at one another with suspicion, causing an element of distrust and apprehension. This has also been raised as a potential concern within certain research (see, for example, Khan 2009). One prominent community representative from the Midlands reflected this and argued:

. . . this issue of spying has caused a lot of tension within Muslim communities . . . anybody could be a spy now in the mosque, yeah, so everyone is viewing the other with suspicion. (Interview 037)

This suspicion has inevitably extended to the informed informants themselves, with certain community members accusing them of being 'puppets of the government' and 'toeing the government agenda' (Interview 001). As a result of this, around half of the grassroots respondents interviewed admitted that they either regretted receiving Prevent funding in the first instance, have subsequently refused it, or have attempted to conceal acceptance from their communities. As one informed informant from the North West quipped: 'I wouldn't tell anybody I am funded through Prevent!' (Interview 008).

In addition to this, the grassroots workers felt that receiving Prevent funding not only amplified grievances within their local communities, but also feared that it could prove counter-productive towards their work and the PVE agenda. Several interviewees were concerned, due to the perceived negative connotations associated with the strategy, that their 'credibility' would be damaged, which would consequently distance them from the youth whom they were aiming to support. As one informed informant from the North East explained:

. . . our credibility is more important than money . . . So, it might make our work counter-productive, so it might push people further into radicalisation . . . (Interview 010)

However, this was not the complete view of the Prevent Strategy and its sub-initiatives. Although in a very small minority, there were certain grassroots groups who believed that many elements of the strategy were crucial to their work which enabled them to provide a stronger support structure for susceptible individuals. As one informed informant, part of a widely respected[7] frontline grassroots organisation from London, explained: 'it allowed us to give a support network stronger than the recruiters would give . . .' (Interview 019).

Although there were concerns of inward tensions from both community members and informed informants, the strong sentiments displayed towards the State with regard to intelligence gathering and spying cannot be ignored. However, it appeared that many of the informed informants were still maintaining strong ties with certain elements of the police. In fact, during an interview with a religious leader from a mosque in the West of England it was clear that they had grievances with the strategy, though maintained a close relationship with their local community police officer. This was particularly interesting considering the concerns they held about Special Branch officers. The religious leader claimed that a Special Branch officer had bluntly stated, in a private conversation with individuals from the mosque's management, that Special Branch would conduct covert operations within the area if required. The interesting point here is that the police were not viewed as a monolithic institution from the grassroots, with fine-grain distinctions between Special Branch and community officers being made.

Further to this, the respondent stated that this particular community officer regularly frequented the mosque, knew worshippers by first names, and genuinely strove to alleviate any *general* issues that they had. Describing him as 'very genuine about his ways, totally understanding' the interviewee asserted that the officer would be their 'first port of call in terms of anything we suspect as suspicious' (Interview 027). This becomes increasingly imperative when considering that this particular respondent's mosque is one of a very small number of TACT arrests within the UK, directly due to intelligence voluntarily passed from its worshippers to the relevant authorities.

There were, of course, concerns regarding police activities both generally and specifically towards Prevent. Further to this, certain community representatives indicated that there is not an overwhelming trust of the police within their communities, with some real grievances being held by certain members. Though, it appears that the police are working hard in various areas to alleviate these perceptions, for example by attending various mosques after Friday prayers and reiterating their support for the community. As one imam from the Midlands explained: 'the police, they are coming here, even at our annual conferences we are trying to invite police in their uniforms . . . and [the] result was very, very positive' (Interview 024). Thus, there appeared to be clear attempts being made

by community representatives, informed informants and the police, to change the communities' perceptions of the police.

The communities' view of the police appeared to be somewhat varied. In fact, one community member from the West of England claimed: 'it's a kind of indifference . . . It's not like a huge love of the police, nor a huge hate of the police . . . in terms of the community officers we will say hello, we are friendly with them . . .' (Interview 042), once again highlighting the distinction between different officers. Further to this, the respondents seemed to understand and accept, to a certain extent, that the police have a role to play, with their main concerns appearing to lie with the policy itself. As one informed informant from the North West argued:

. . . people recognise, to an extent, that the police do have job to do . . . the problem with Prevent is not just focused on the Police, but is more do with government, more national than local. (Interviewee 039: email to author, 6 October 2010)

Thus, an extremely interesting point to emerge from the data was that the informed informants and community members were able to distinguish between the implementation of the strategy by the police, and the over-arching policy itself.

Discussion

Prior to discussing the article's findings, the Muslim communities' aware-ness of the Prevent Strategy should be briefly mentioned. The data gath-ered throughout the research found contrasting opinions. The simple answer is, as with many other government policies and strategies, that certain people are aware whilst others are not, with varying degrees in the middle. Vitally, however, Muslim communities appear to be becoming increasingly aware of the strategy due to the exchange of information within communities and the recent upsurge of media coverage from both 'Western' and 'Muslim World' news outlets. In addition to this, some commentators claim that Muslims make up one of the most politically-aware faith groups in the UK (Sardar 2006).

Further to this, the difficulty and complexity of conceiving and deliv-ering a relatively new, and in some respects groundbreaking, strategy such as Prevent should not be forgotten. Although the overwhelming majority of respondents within this study did offer negative views of the strategy, this may not necessarily be the complete picture. There will, of course, be some good examples of how the strategy has been implemented and perceived to be achieving the end goal of PVE. Though, importantly, when some of the outlined concerns start becoming recurring themes there needs to be an immediate and direct response to them.

However, the empirical data have demonstrated that the overwhelm-ing majority of informed informants and community members inter-viewed have a number of different grievances with Prevent. The respondents, who were mostly discussing the government's implementa-tion of the strategy and partnerships with non-State actors, identified

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three key issues. First, the research showed there to be distinct concerns with Prevent funding, especially with non-State actors. This procedure is an extremely complex task as determining which organisations to fund, whilst considering the often varying perceptions of them has proven to be difficult. For example, there are those, such as the former head of the Muslim Contact Unit (MCU), Dr Robert Lambert, who believe that certain Salafi groups in South London are at the forefront of PVE work (Githens-Mazer and Lambert 2010), whilst other organisations such as the Quilliam Foundation, as intimated in a recently-leaked document, consider them to be part of the problem. Further to this, one non-State actor's views of another may differ across the spectrum, and be due to a number of non-PVE-relevant factors such as cultural and religious differences, although they may both have the potential to conduct positive PVE work. There are important considerations regarding selection procedures, such as validating authenticity and an ability to deliver results. This complexity inevitably stems from the strategy's lack, in its current guise, to provide measurements and guidelines, especially for local authorities, to gauge successes and failures.

These grievances surrounding funding inevitably led to general confusion regarding overarching aims of the strategy. There were concerns that projects revolved more around a community cohesion nature rather than PVE, which inevitably led to a feeling that Muslim communities were being further viewed as the new 'suspect communities'. Although there are potentially distinct differences, as argued by Greer (2010), between the 'suspect community' described by Hillyard (1993), and the 'new' discussed by Pantazis and Pemberton (2009), there may be some similarities. It is important to consider that 'suspect communities' are not simply just formed by the actions of the State, but also how those communities are treated by wider society and represented within the media. One simply has to look at the increase of hate crime in the UK towards Muslims and the creation of organisations such as the English Defence League. In addition to this, research has shown that during the period 2000 to 2008, 'terrorism' or the 'War on Terror' accounted for 36% of national print media stories regarding Muslims in the UK and 'By contrast only 2% of stories contained the proposition that Muslims supported dominant moral values' (Moore, Mason and Lewis 2008).

However, it is not as simple as targeting and funding CT work to specific areas across the country, as they could potentially be labelled by the media and others as incubators of terrorism. In addition to this, targeted CT, if not implemented correctly, may raise further grievances with communities who feel that they are being singled out. What is clear though, is that criminalising whole communities, or the perception of this, has the potential to be counter-productive in terms of CT work, and could potentially make individuals more 'vulnerable to radicalisation' through this 'frustration and alienation' (House of Commons 2010, p.11). Also, integrating community cohesion type projects with CT appears to be counter-productive within both agendas (see, for example, Spalek and Lambert 2008).

Finally, the data indicated that the respondents felt that an aspect of Prevent was being used as a wide-ranging intelligence gathering or spying tool, with concerns that Muslim communities were not only looking at the State with suspicion, but also at their own communities. There was a distinct fear that individuals could have their lives seriously disrupted, which is somewhat accentuated when considering the widely-publicised 'horror stories' regarding the misuse of 'detention without charge' legislation (see, for example, Yezza 2008; Curtis and Hodgson 2008). Covert intelligence gathering is, of course, an integral aspect of the CT effort, and this was understood by the majority of respondents. However, the grievances predominantly arose from interviewees perceiving that an element of the strategy, that is, empowering non-State actors to counter extremism, was being misused in order to satisfy other underlying motives, that is, covertly gathering intelligence. This method, perceived or otherwise, of clandestine intelligence gathering has the potential to alienate communities and become 'a disincentive for that public to volunteer intelligence' (Innes and Thiel 2008), and lends further strength to the notion of 'suspect communities'.

Whether or not these grievances are substantiated, it is important to consider the negative implications that they could have with the strategy's implementation. This does not necessarily have to regard the Prevent Strategy *per se*, but are more general considerations for effectively engaging communities within CT work. This is especially significant when considering that those on the ground may be one of the most important resources for ensuring that strategies such as Prevent fulfil their potential. In many cases, these individuals are the contact point between the State and its policies, and those they are aiming to support. Individuals working at the grassroots level have gradually, over a number of years, established relationships built upon trust and confidence with those who may be susceptible to extremist narratives. Thus, they may hold, tacitly or otherwise, a wealth of knowledge that can be shared. Further to this, as well as working on the PVE agenda, many of these grassroots individuals and groups cover other aspects of community issues, or have relationships with various other non-PVE grassroots organisations. Thus, there also needs to be a consideration of how strategies such as this affect wider longer-term governance engagement.

The data did suggest, however, that a number of informed informants were working closely with elements of the police, and have built relationships based on trust and transparency. This can be attributed to a number of reasons. Prominent among these is the establishment of departments such as the MCU, within Scotland Yard, which has had much success in building bridges with various Muslim communities in London. In addition to this, there is the establishment of police community support officers (PCSOs) who build relationships with local communities based on a range of general issues. Although there are widespread concerns regarding PCSOs' abilities to reduce crime (Tibbetts 2008), they build trust and relationships between communities and the police.

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There have been numerous studies discussing the negative impact on discourse and practice as a result of 'hard' policing tactics (see, for example, Spalek *et al*. 2008). In addition to this, the normal assumptions when implementing a strategy such as Prevent would presume, due to concerns such as intelligence gathering or spying, that initial blame would be placed on those perceived to be tasked with implementing it, that is, the police. Though, when cutting across the themes of the article it was notable that the respondents were making distinct references to perceived policy implementation flaws, and grievances with government partnerships with non-State actors, rather than policing practices *per se*. This could, in part, be due to the mature nature of the majority of respondents, that is, the informed informants. They may reflect a more sophisticated sample and have a greater in-depth understanding of this issue as compared with the average community member. However, this consensus about the police was also reflected within certain elements of the community members' sample.

This, importantly, indicates that respondents across the board appeared able to untangle the policy from police duties, such as 'stop and search'. Although there were strong grievances held in some places with certain police practices, Prevent related or otherwise, the interviewees were able to determine that these differed by force and department, rather than blaming the institution as a whole. Thus, the respondents seemed to understand and respect that the police have a role to play. In fact, a recent report (Innes *et al*. 2011) by the Universities' Police Science Institute based at Cardiff University analysed a number of relevant policing indicators within the British Crime Survey during the implementation period of the Prevent Strategy. Innes *et al*. (2011, p.7) importantly found that 'community perceptions of the police have been remarkably stable, and largely positive' and concluded that: 'Prevent policing does not appear to be causing widespread damage to police and Muslim community relations'. Thus, the data suggested that the overarching perception of the strategy is that it is a multi-agency partnership where the police are simply one component of this. Therefore, it appears that if the police were taken out of the equation altogether people would still hold similar grievances with Prevent, with initial and dominant concerns lying at the policy level.

Notes

1 (i) To challenge the ideology behind violent extremism and support mainstream voices. (ii) Disrupt those who promote violent extremism and support the places where they operate. (iii) Support individuals who are vulnerable to recruitment, or have already been recruited by violent extremists. (iv) Increase the resilience of communities to violent extremism. (v) To address the grievances which ideologues are exploiting (HM Government 2009, p.12).
2 (i) Develop supporting intelligence, analysis, and information. (ii) Improve our strategic communications (HM Government 2009, p.12).
3 In keeping with the commitment to maintain anonymity for research participants, only limited details can be provided about the status of this organisation.
4 Certain groups were mentioned off the record to the researcher.
5 Section 44 of the Terrorism Act 2000.
6 Section 41 of the Terrorism Act 2000.

7 Ascertained from informal conversations between the author and certain high-level civil servants, researchers and academics.

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