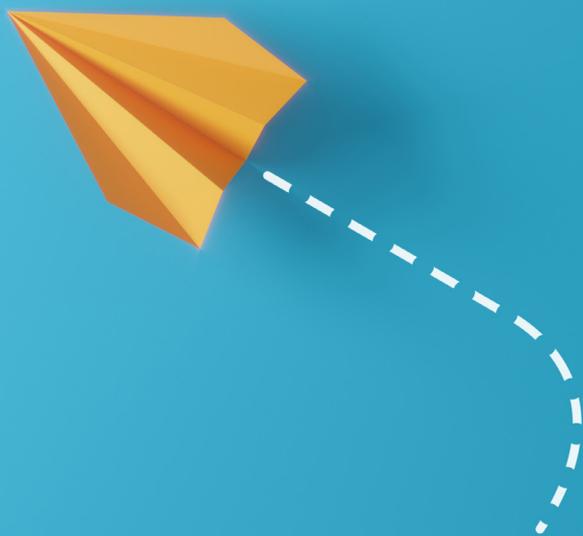


Constructing a 'new' Prevent Policy

**MOVING BEYOND THE
SECURITISATION OF
COMMUNITIES**



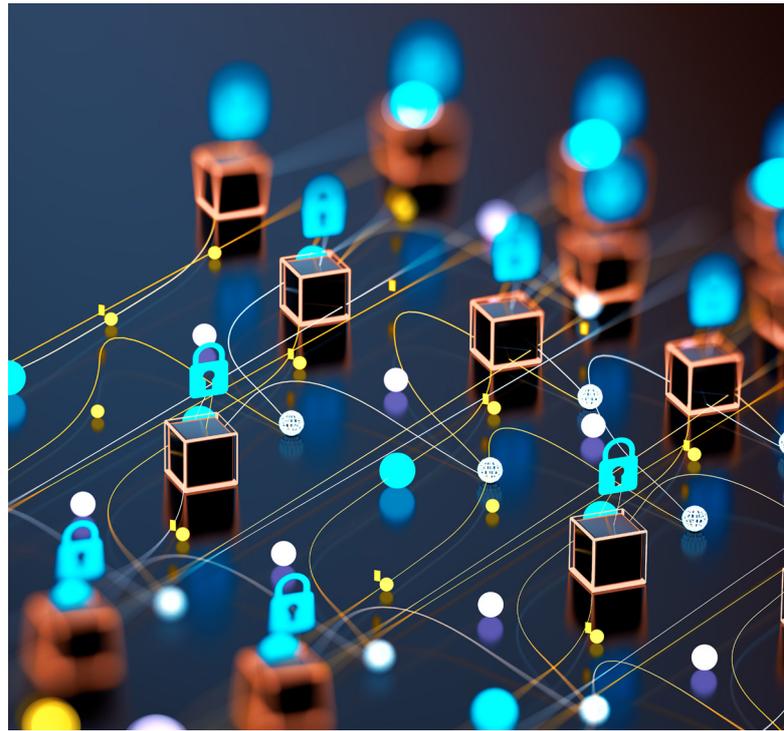
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Policy Recommendations

1. Make the Prevent database transparent and open

One of the core problems of the current Prevent policy is the perception of secrecy and opaqueness of the programme. For instance, areas that are given extra funding and scrutiny under Prevent are known as Prevent Priority Areas (PPAs), yet the rationale for such areas has not been publicly available since 2015. To bring trust to the process, the public must be able to view such information. There is a need to make the Prevent database publicly available to restore public trust, such as the available databases at START or the Lowy Institute (Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, 2020). Currently over 500 community organisations nationwide, including 350 mosques and imams representing British Muslims, are boycotting the government's review of Prevent in protest against the appointment of William Shawcross as its chair. Future governments would benefit from a more transparent Prevent programme to increase public trust in it since it presently is suffering from a credibility deficit.



2. Give equal priority to community cohesion and counter radicalisation

Policymakers and Prevent practitioners often recommend the Welsh model of Prevent, where its implementation has been developed alongside a close relationship with community cohesion. The

Welsh Assembly under Labour control stressed that ‘community cohesion’ is an active part of the policy, they insisted on funding local authority cohesion coordinators and genuinely educational preventative work (Cantle and Thomas, 2014). Future governments perhaps can benefit from this merging equally of Prevent and community cohesion. Although figures on successful Prevent referrals are not available in the UK, there are distinct differences in community perception of the policy in Wales and England. Together with the largest Muslim community organisation, the Muslim Council for Wales, the Welsh Government adopted new codes of conduct on Islamophobia and anti-black racism to ensure trust and confidence among the community. Further the Welsh Government’s ‘Getting on Together’, the community cohesion strategy for Wales, provides an understanding of community cohesion that is distinct and different to the agenda in England, in that it recognises the potential for deprivation and social exclusion to undermine community cohesion. Given that much of the scholarship on Prevent in the UK points to areas of deprivation as a key indicator for those vulnerable to radicalisation, the Welsh model is something that needs to be refocused and rolled out nationwide to desecuritize the policy from its overt criminalised mandate which has been in place since 2011.



“Reasserting this subject back into the national curriculum would send a clear signal of a move away from the securitisation of communities.”



3. Forge a new youth policy - citizenship studies and community spaces

Building on the need for greater prioritisation on community cohesion, the government should work towards a Prevent policy which is less police-led, but rather embedded in educational processes which build youth resilience against extremism. Areas which bolster this include a reversal of the Coalition government’s marginalisation of Citizenship Studies.

It would align Prevent’s policy towards a much more politicised educational approach, where critical dialogue about belief systems as well as about social and economic inequality between groups is emphasised (Davis, 2008, p. 98). Such an approach would deligitimise current critiques of Prevent which realistically note it’s overtly security focus on Muslim communities, providing instead an honest dialogue with Britain’s youth on ‘ecumenical’ and the universal value system of multicultural Britain. This needs to be central to a new Prevent policy as the current one’s emphasis on promoting ‘fundamental British values’ (Richardson & Bolloten, 2014), without defining what is ‘British’ about such values is highly problematic, even before Britain’s controversial past and present world role is considered (Davis, 2008, p. 159).

Lastly, to ensure that outside of the classroom the same citizenship focused approach is not lost, here is a need to make young people more involved in their communities, achieved through a compulsory national civic service for all. This is not about the armed services but rather a government run programme where young people would embark on a project to develop their skills, work with diverse ethnic groups and offer to support the community. Although the National Citizen Service programme has been expanding in recent years it currently has a participation rate of 16 and 17 year olds of just over 1% of that entire demographic. A future government would benefit from making the NCS more accessible across the nation but also more targeted, establishing cross community programmes rather than the current localised projects it presently has in place. The idea behind this would be to bolster the lessons learnt in citizenship studies classes in a practical way which supports local communities by bringing various ethnicities together.

Conclusion

Prevent was a policy that sought to deter domestic terrorism, but it has instead soiled community relations because of the shift away from community cohesion towards a securitisation of communities. It has disproportionately targeted Muslim communities, who have systematically been surveilled through the public sector (schools, universities, NHS) in an attempt to prevent pre-crime. Instead, as outlined, what is needed is a new policy which is based on a holistic understanding of security, addressing the broader and interconnected reasons for individuals becoming involved in terrorism. As shown here, a renewed policy focused on schools, youth services and community cohesion would greatly contribute to tackling this problem while reversing the severe negative impact of the previous Prevent policy.

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Method

This study employed a mixed method design including anonymous in-depth interviews with Prevent practitioners, surveys with participants from communities affected by the policy alongside informal conversations with national stakeholders and academic literature addressing the topic. Interviews were conducted in the context of the Independent Prevent Review due to take place in April 2022, but then cancelled. The review was boycotted by prominent national Muslim organisations such as the Muslim Council of Britain and the Islamic Society of Britain. Much of the criticism of the reviews has stemmed from empirical evidence demonstrating the targeting of Muslims disproportionately under Prevent enforcement. In this context various civil society groups have been advocating for a ‘new’ Prevent strategy to tackle the various challenges the policy has been criticised for, but were unwilling to have their identity shown in this study.

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