



An Independent
Review of PREVENT
A Position Paper from
Muslim Engagement
and Development
1st February 2019

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As a result of the amendments to the Counter-Terror and Border Security Bill proposed by the House of Lords, the Government has conceded to an independent review of the PREVENT strategy. The review follows from sustained criticism of the strategy put forward by experts from across society, including three [special rapporteurs to the UN](#), the Joint Committee on Human Rights, the NEU (formerly known as the [NUT](#)), the [NUS](#), the former [Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation](#), [Rights Watch UK](#), the [Open Society Justice Initiative](#), the [Joint Committee for Human Rights](#), and more than 140 academics, politicians and experts in [one instance alone](#).

This position paper offers a brief (but by no means exhaustive) analysis of some of the problems inherent within the PREVENT strategy that must be examined within the independent review process.

Lack of evidentiary basis

The research underpinning PREVENT's ERG22+ risk factors has been repeatedly criticised for its reliance upon undisclosed research conducted with a small and unrepresentative sample of convicted terrorists in prison, the conclusions of which have been problematically extrapolated as being applicable to the wider population and the evidence for which is not available for public scrutiny. Even the original authors of the research have questioned the validity and reliability of its use within the strategy.

Lack of viable definitions

At present, the Government has no clear working definition of extremism, non-violent extremism, British Values nor radicalisation. With hundreds of thousands of WRAP-trained staff attempting to identify "radicalisation" with a view to tackling "extremism", this lack of objective understanding causes confusion in PREVENT's application and has resulted in the exclusion of Muslim voices and events. Furthermore, the lack of definitions leaves the public in a position to determine risk based upon personal understandings, stereotypes, and bias.

Inadequate training

PREVENT delivery officers often receive only 45-60mins of training to identify signs of radicalisation. Equally worrying is the fact that there appears to be no formative examination nor on-going assessment for PREVENT officers. The lack of an evidentiary basis combined with poor training and a lack of definitions has led to a situation where, everyday normative practices of the Islamic faith (for example, wearing the hijab) or taking an interest in politics (criticising foreign policy) can be seen as a sign of being drawn to political violence.

Heavy focus on ideology

PREVENT's heavy focus on ideology minimises consideration of other factors, such as foreign policy. Yet experts and academics agree that such factors are pivotal in an individual potentially becoming drawn to political violence.

Unacceptable levels of collateral damage

There have been numerous cases where individuals have been referred to PREVENT who did not pose a risk of being drawn to political violence. In 2016/17, of the 6,093 individuals

referred, 3,704 (61%) were referred for concerns related to “Islamist extremism” and 968 (16%) were referred for concerns related to “right wing extremism”. However, only 5% of those referred went on to receive CHANNEL support for de-radicalisation – meaning that the remaining 95% were eventually not considered to be at risk.

Targeting Muslims as a suspect community

Numerous critics have condemned the PREVENT strategy as being inherently discriminatory. Beyond issues of equality and social justice, such a discriminatory application may also prove to be counterproductive. Indeed, MI5 has concluded that “experiences of inequality, marginalisation, or victimisation, particularly racial or religious attacks, both physical and verbal” play a direct role in the radicalisation of individuals.

Conflicts with safeguarding

PREVENT being embedded within safeguarding creates grey areas and confusion in how to approach safeguarding needs. As concluded by the civil rights campaigners, Liberty, “while everyone in society has moral and ethical obligations to report suspected criminality, requiring teachers and others in sensitive positions of trust to report those with dissenting views risks undermining professional obligations of confidentiality, sowing mistrust and pushing those with grievances further underground.”

MEND is of the firm belief that the PREVENT duty should be repealed and welcomes this independent review of PREVENT as an important first step in tackling the detrimental impact of ill-conceived counter-terror strategies that hinder Muslims’ abilities to fully enjoy their social, civic, religious, political, and economic rights.

Whilst the Independent Reviewer and their team have yet to be announced, it is imperative that they are truly independent, credible and will be afforded access to any data or materials in the true spirit of openness and transparency. The review must engage with all stakeholders, including grassroots Muslim organisations. Furthermore, the terms of reference for such a review also needs to include examination of all possible causes of terrorism, including the role of foreign policy.

How MEND can assist parliamentarians

- Providing briefings, information, analysis, and expertise on the impact of PREVENT on communities.
- Arranging opportunities for MPs to engage with their local Muslim communities.
- Conducting research within Muslim communities.
- Connecting MPs to local stakeholders.

If MEND can be of any assistance to your work, please feel free to contact info@mend.org.uk