
Higher Education in an Era of Violent Extremism: Exploring Tensions Between National Security and Academic Freedom

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Abstract

Security, terrorism, and radicalization are related topics that are rarely discussed in the study of international education. To fill this gap, this study investigated how the higher education sector in the European Community, including Turkey, has engaged with numerous counter-radicalization strategies. Through a survey of 18 available policy documents and a focus on the UK's Prevent Strategy and the EU's Radicalization Awareness Network Guidance (RAN), along with a qualitative investigation of publicly available information from 24 universities, this study demonstrates that national security policies rarely provide recommendations to institutions of higher education for the prevention of radicalization leading to violent extremism. Findings point to the conclusion that universities are either unenthusiastic or resistant to complying with top-down, government issued directives for countering student radicalization. We recommend that communication methods between policy-makers and university administrators be reconsidered for the greater protection of students and their wider communities.

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Introduction

Recent terror attacks in Europe have drawn attention to the issue of violent extremism among youth populations. Although scholarly discussion has extensively addressed factors that may lure youth into radicalization (Schmidt 2013; Dalgaard-Nielsen 2008; McCauley & Moskalkenko 2008), one focal point of interaction less studied so far has been the higher education sector and the possible link between universities and violent extremism or terrorism

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(Gambetta & Hertog, 2017; Glees 2011). This discourse has been accelerated by the fact that in recent attacks, some terrorists were known to have advanced academic backgrounds, particularly in STEM fields and overwhelmingly in Engineering. In the Engineering fields alone, the authors cite that among known Islamist Radicals in the Muslim world and also among those based in the West, close to 50% had studied Engineering (Gambetta & Hertog, 2017).

The 2016 Brussels airport attack is one case in point. On 22 March of that year, the world watched as a coordinated attack was carried out by five young men acting on behalf of the terrorist group ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria). One of the assailants, Najim Laachraoui, had studied engineering at the Université Libre de Bruxelles, where he learned skills he likely utilized to develop the bombs that killed him and fifteen innocent bystanders (Rubin 2016). Unfortunately, the Brussels attack was not a limited incident. Student activity in terrorism was also evident years before the Brussels attack: in 2005, a key figure in the London bombings began his terror training shortly after leaving Leeds Metropolitan University (Glees, The Telegraph). More recently in the United States, hate crimes have increased on university campuses (Bauer-Wolf, 2019), with one study finding that 77% of respondents reporting that so-called ‘uncivil, hate, and bias incidents’ had occurred on their campus within the last two-years, an increase from previous reporting periods (Jones & Baker, 2018). In light of these and other incidents, the possibility that students may become radicalized while attending higher education institutions (HEIs) is cause for concern. There is no doubt that universities can become important places for radicalization, but that can have both positive and negative implications. Higher education institutions have traditionally served as catalysts for societal change voiced through forms of “radicalism” that have served as positive expressions of critical, free thinking. However, when they produce the opposite effect with lethal, violent extremists, those outcomes also need to be studied and understood.

Governments have responded to these challenges through counter-terrorism legislation as well as strategies designed to prevent radicalization, both of which have resulted in controversy. In particular, the United Kingdom’s (UK) Prevent strategy has become a widely

discussed initiative in light of its controversial legislation. Specific to the educational environment, the policy has provoked particular criticism in that more than one-third of all referrals made under Prevent between 2016-2017 involved students, and originated from persons associated with the educational sector.

Controversy associated with Prevent runs deep. In addition to encouraging educational staff to refer possible cases of radicalization, the policy has also been criticized for stigmatizing Muslims and infringing on civil liberties. In the academic environment, critics have claimed that Prevent has inhibited academic freedom to the point that higher education has become “securitised” (Durodié 2016). Bill Durodié defines the term “securitization” as “the possibility that state (and other) actors might transform specific problems into security-related concerns in the pursuit of their agendas” (2016, 23). Institutional push-back to Prevent has become particularly acute since the 2015 Counter-Terrorism and Security Act, which made implementation of the Prevent strategy a legal duty for higher education institutions (HEI) in the UK (Qurashi 2017; Thomas 2016).

In light of these tensions, a balance needs to be found that is compatible with both the responsibility of the national government to safeguard their populations, and the values of universities to maintain the tenets of academic freedom for their staff and students. Such a balance must permit an adequate governmental response to radicalization that is acceptable to both academic institutions and the general public. This paper examines the implementation of counter-extremism policy as related to the higher education sector in the UK and mainland Europe in order to identify and recommend possible compromises acceptable to both sides. We do this through a comparative focus of the UK’s Prevent legislation, and the European Union’s (EU) non-binding Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) as instruments through which to curtail the growth of violent extremism in HEI environments. Within this discussion we address competing tensions between government policy and institutional push back related to implementation and the impact of these measures on academic freedom.

Political Context

The topic of radicalization and higher education is particularly salient for several reasons. First, the UK government's Prevent Duty policy recently underwent a judicial review, the outcome of which may have escalated contention around this issue.² According to the Safe Campus Communities website, an article published on August 9, 2017 reported that the presiding judge ruled in 2017 to uphold the existing requirements for Prevent. This decision may increase the challenge related to productive conversation between HEIs and government policy makers on this subject.

Second, attacks by individuals and groups in the name of Islamic extremism have become more frequent with the rise of ISIS and other terrorist groups that profess radical ideologies. Since 2015, major urban centers within the EU have more frequently become the target of mass attacks, despite extensive government prevention policy. In the UK alone, London and Manchester were targeted by violent Islamic extremists multiple times in 2017. This led the public to demand an adequate policy response from its government. Third, study of this issue is timely and important because associations made between HEIs and terrorism have led to securitization of the higher education environment. Counter-terrorism policy, media discourse, government policy, and extremism on campuses have collectively played a hand in intensifying securitization discourse, which has placed academic institutions under suspicion and resulted in a perceived reduction of academic freedom. As this paper seeks to convey, universities have a particular role to play in combating extremism, but concurrently also face the challenge of balancing their duty to prevent terrorism with the values of autonomy and free speech, which is inherent to academic freedom. Our research fuses two critically important intersecting realities in today's geopolitical climate: the perception that extremism and terrorism are on the rise, and the fear that university students may be uniquely susceptible to radicalization.

² Since the research for this article was conducted, a UK court of appeals ruled in March of 2019 that Prevent's updated duty guidelines on inviting controversial speakers violates free speech. See <https://amp.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/mar/08/uks-prevent-guidance-to-universities-unlawful-court-rules>

Positioned within broader research addressing securitization and education, this study was driven by the following research question: How can an acceptable balance be achieved between upholding government policy that prevents violent extremism on the one hand, and protecting academic freedoms critical to university learning environments on the other hand? The decision to provide a comparative focus to this paper through the legally binding Prevent strategy and non-binding RAN instrument was made after an extensive review of EU and member state policies to prevent radicalization at HEIs. Several factors support the choice of the UK's Prevent strategy as the legislative point of reference: 1) in contrast to other policies, the strategy highlights specific methods for countering radicalization at the university level; 2) in spite of extensive strategies to prevent radicalization in the UK, the nation is still challenged by violent Islamic extremist terrorism; and 3) numerous would-be terrorists and violent extremists have attended British universities. The choice of the EU's RAN provides the contrast of a non-binding network initiative that was designed to enhance independent member state policies. In light of these parameters, its application within the HEI environment highlights an alternative approach for comparison.

The underlying assumption guiding the direction of this paper is that academic freedom lies at the heart of democratic societies. However, within this context this paper brings to the forefront two main points that warrant further critical analysis. The first point relates to the concept of academic freedom. Although universities put great emphasis on the value of freedom of expression, they are not exempt from a need to be aware that cognitive radicalization can quickly evolve into violent radicalization and terrorism. Second, although universities are centers of academic freedom within democratic societies, this freedom cannot gravitate toward appeasement of extremism in the name of academic freedom. The boundaries between cognitive and behavioral radicalization as well as those of appeasement versus action merit further critical consideration. This conversation is important and timely, especially given the fact that the HEI environment, through its encouragement of free thinking, is committed to the betterment of civil society. Within this construct, although there is a difference between someone having radical thoughts and acting violently on those thoughts,

universities must also recognize the need to stand up to any type of ideological thinking that can encourage violent behavior.

Methodology

In order to establish our comparative focus, we began our analysis by reviewing 18 EU-wide, country-specific public safety policy documents, in order to discern whether and how they addressed radicalization at the tertiary level. Finding a clear lack of attention in these documents to counter-radicalization strategies directly pertaining to higher education, and only eight which even discussed the education sector in any capacity, we turned our analysis to documents that provide specific methods for countering radicalization at universities, thus choosing the UK's Prevent strategy and the EU's Radicalisation Awareness Network. We then also looked at the activities of a selection of 18 institutions working to comply with radicalization prevention measures in five countries: three universities in England, three in Scotland, and three each in France, Germany, Turkey, and Greece. The selection of countries was based on their ranking in the Global Terrorism Index, where rank is determined according to the impact of terrorism in that country (Institute for Economics & Peace 2015); and its refugee assistance policies, which are a source of concern to citizens who relate refugees with the threat of terrorist infiltration (Byman 2015). The selection of HEIs in the UK was based on publicly available auditing materials provided to the Higher Education Funding Council of England (HEFCE) in line with reporting requirements per the Prevent strategy (mandatory for public institutions in England and recommended for those in Ireland). HEIs, both public and private, included in the RAN analysis were selected based on rank (the three highest ranked institutions in each of the four identified countries), with the understanding that highly-ranked institutions tend to provide more information on institutional websites in English, the language of the researchers for this piece, and their tendency towards better funding, which may positively impact an institution's ability to implement and advertise programming for students relevant to the RAN policy.

The methods employed by these institutions were measured against indicators in the UK's Prevent strategy and the EU's RAN documents. In order to determine whether and how HEIs employ the methods suggested by the two policy documents, we searched the HEI websites for selected phrases used in the policies themselves, such as 'extremism,' 'violence,' and 'radicalization'. We established our comparative focus by contrasting stakeholder responses to the Prevent strategy with responses to the RAN guidance, and identified policy implications based on our observations. Drawing from observations made through this comparative focus as well as scholarly contributions on the subject, we conclude with recommendations toward achieving a balance between adherence to governmental oversight and respect for academic freedom.

Theoretical Framework

Numerous theoretical frameworks and scholarly contributions provide a context to support the call for a new policy approach to the perceived challenge of preventing radicalization at HEIs. These recognize both national security interests and the need to preserve the tenets of academic freedom. The theoretical frameworks we consider below shed light on how national policy and institutional operations have arrived at their respective positions and present themselves within the higher education environment.

Radicalization is a complex phenomenon that involves the interplay of multiple factors. In simple terms, it is defined as the process that leads individuals towards increasingly extreme ideologies, agendas, and actions through the interplay of "push factors," such as feelings of discrimination and inequality, and "pull factors," such as a sense of belonging and purpose (Ranstorp 2016). It may therefore affect the way a person thinks and behaves. Peter Neumann (2013) distinguishes between two distinct entities: cognitive and behavioral radicalization. Some experts see radicalization as a process that affects individuals in a vulnerable emotional position, while others align it with rational choice theory (Dalgaard-

Nielsen 2008), in which radicalization is a conscious, rational choice that comes with perceived benefits.

With regard to the conversation on academic freedom and with it the exercise of radical thought and speech, HEIs have defended this freedom as an integral right within the university's safe space and legal parameters. In contrast, the government has taken the position that the promotion of radical ideas on campuses may be a possible precursor to terrorism and can therefore be indicative of a potential danger to society. This position is compounded by governmental concerns that recruiters may find a complicit audience on campuses. According to resource mobilization theory, organizations operate in multiple environments to recruit new members (Dalgaard- Nielsen 2008), in this case targeting an HEI to attract new recruits. In line with the government's position, HEIs offer ideal settings for both the recruitment and mobilization of new members to an extremist organization. Indeed, the Prevent strategy was implemented to address these concerns (Author 2 2015; European Union 2016a; HM Government 2011; Maher 2013).

The challenges presented by radicalization emphasize tensions between thought and action and in this case are specifically relevant to freedom of speech within an HEI. Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko (2017) draw a clear line between thought and action with their definitions of activism and radicalism. Activists participate in "legal, nonviolent actions," while radicals are "engaged in illegal action *for the cause*" (italics added). In contrast, they define terrorists as those who "engaged in illegal action that targets civilians" (2017, 212). In this context, HEIs see themselves as defending a legal right to freedom of speech, while the government positions itself as protecting the public through targeted policy initiatives.

Another prominent model of radicalization as proposed by Alex Schmid (2013) focuses on the roles of those who recruit and radicalize students. In his work, Schmid highlights three conduits through which individuals are drawn to radicalization, and recruiters can actively do their work. At the micro level, a person's individual, social, and environmental situation may drive them to radicalize; at the macro level, one's grievances

associated with larger political issues and foreign policy positions may become accentuated; and at the meso level, the importance of one's social milieu takes on an even greater importance in the radicalization process. Within this analysis, the university is a socially dynamic, diverse milieu that presents an attractive setting for a recruiter looking for suitable targets.

Marc Sageman's work on social networking (2004) supports the notion that university settings are dynamic social environments where large numbers of people associate and form groups to share ideas, experiences and build networks. Within this model, social networks may offer a vehicle through which radical ideas can flow to network members and beyond. As these social networks are part of university life, they have also at times been used to facilitate the spread of radicalism. In that sense, HEIs may offer recruiters an easy vehicle for finding vulnerable new network members. These possible connections between radicalization phenomena and HEIs help largely to explain the government's decision to target HEIs in its Prevent strategy implementation.

Returning to the attributes of the radicalized, most college students in the EU are in their late teens or early twenties (Eurostat 2014). Many well-known theories agree that youth in this age group experience significant shifts in their identities and relationships (Baxter Magolda 2005; Erikson 1968, 1994; Kegan 1994; Sanford 1966; Tinto 1987). Considering trends relevant to Islamic extremist groups, Muslims are the fastest growing religious group in the world, with the youngest median population (approximately 24 years) compared with other religions (Lipka 2017). In light of this population increase, the need to protect the Muslim population from any possible targeting may then take on even greater importance. These demographic data, however, can and have been easily manipulated and taken out of context by those who harbour an anti-Muslim agenda. It is in no way the intention of this research to support such agendas, but rather to expose them and to point out the contradictions we see between government anti-radicalization strategies and the goals of protecting the rights of any population being victimized. The growth of Muslim populations in an increasingly fractured socio-political environment makes the need to find a balance between safety and

freedom even more pressing. Because many of the Muslim youth in European cities are second- or third-generation immigrants, they may face particular challenges, and may by necessity compensate by adopting Western practices in public settings but returning to traditional cultural practices within the family unit. This conflict of identity may leave them vulnerable and, according to government policymakers, open the door for recruiters to take advantage of these circumstances within HEI settings (Author 2 2015; European Union 2016a; HM Government 2011; Maher 2013).

Furthermore, youth who have had negative social experiences with their peers, such as prejudice, isolation, and inequality, are also susceptible to embracing would-be comrades who can provide them with a clear-cut identity, approval, and the kind of hierarchical authority structure that exists in some Islamic extremist organizations, such as ISIS. Vincent Tinto's (1987) theory of student departure from higher study suggests that negative social interactions and experiences, such as perceptions of being treated unfairly, serve to isolate college students from their academic and social communities and can lead them to withdraw.

Psychologist Nevitt Sanford (1966) theorized that students' personal development is affected by the presence of three conditions in their college environment: readiness, challenge, and support. Those who experience equal amounts of challenge and support exhibit successful development, while those who face challenges but have little support may regress or attempt to escape their environment altogether. If college students experience too many challenges they perceive as insurmountable and concurrently receive too little support, they may become more likely to join movements, including violent, extremist and terrorist groups, that give them the sense of support and fellowship they seek (Author 2 2016; Bakker 2006; Silke 2008).

Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen has researched how an individual in a vulnerable emotional position may be receptive to "framing" radical messaging. Framing theory, as introduced by sociologist Erving Goffman, suggests that a person will frame issues to fit a personal situation. Dalgaard-Nielsen states that "frame alignment" is marked by "the emergence of congruence between an individual's and an organization's interests, values and beliefs" (2008,

6). This “schemata of interpretation” (Dalgaard-Nielsen 2008, 6) then enables an individual to justify decisions within a particular frame.

By conceiving of radicalization as a process and considering how individuals become involved in that process, these theoretical frameworks might be argued to tacitly support the government’s decision to implement the Prevent strategy at HEIs. In contrast, however, academic institutions see the apparent policy of pinpointing HEIs as target locations contributing in problematic ways to the securitization of education. Their position is that academic freedom at HEIs is not directly linked to radicalization, and that no causal relationship has been established. They argue that relatively few students who have attended HEIs have participated in terrorism, and relatively few violent extremist terrorists have attended universities. Advocates of this position also point to the fact that while some may show an interest in radicalization, few in fact go on to become radicalized.

McCauley and Moskalkenko’s (2008) pyramid theory supports these observations. Just as a pyramid has a wide base and a narrow apex, so too will the number of people who are mildly interested in radicalization be largest at the bottom of the pyramid, but as the pyramid narrows, fewer and fewer become radicalized. The apex corresponds to the fewest who actually become both radicalized and active in terrorism. This theory highlights the fact that although government policy toward universities affects everyone, only few students may become actively radicalized and endanger others as violent extremists.

In summary, theoretical models demonstrate how factors that may drive radicalization can be associated with the HEI environment. The existence of these associations suggests that a government needs a certain amount of freedom to implement problem-specific policies at universities. However, the fact that radicalization occurs relatively infrequently, as illustrated through the pyramid model, also leads us to advocate that HEIs and governments must seek common ground on policy implementation that impacts the university environment and beyond.

Findings

Policy Responses from EU Organizations and Member States

With these observations and theories in mind, we decided to first assess whether and how regional- and country-level policies engage with the possibility of radicalization on college campuses. In our initial survey of 18 publicly available policy responses to national security issues and goals from EU regional- and country-level policies, we found only eight policies that discussed education in general, although two of these did not offer any practical suggestions. The remaining six offered counter-radicalization strategies for schools, although higher education was not specifically addressed, despite the vulnerability of university-age youth as targets for radicalization, only two documents specifically addressed radicalization and higher education: the UK's Prevent strategy and the EU's RAN document.

Prevent Strategy

The Prevent strategy recognizes that terrorists who pose a threat to the UK are actively radicalizing and recruiting to their cause. It asserts that radicalization is driven by a violence-supporting ideology, by propagandists located both in the UK and overseas who support that ideology, and by personal vulnerabilities that make certain individuals susceptible to an extremist message. The main purpose of the strategy is to prevent citizens from joining and/or supporting terrorism. To that end, the Prevent strategy includes three main objectives: 1) disrupt the promotion of violent, extremist ideologies; 2) prevent vulnerable people from joining violent, extremist movements through supportive programs and actions; and 3) work with key sectors, including education, faith, and charities.

The Revised Prevent Duty Guidance (2015) includes two HEI-specific documents, one for Scotland (2015) and one for England and Wales (2015). Both stipulate country-specific duties for HEIs to prevent radicalization on college campuses.

HEFCE, which is the principal regulator and funder of HEIs in the UK, oversees compliance with Prevent duties according to a timeline that requires annual reports from each associated

HEI. Institutions that do not demonstrate compliance in their annual report must work with HEFCE to address concern areas. If non-compliance continues, HEFCE can report its concerns to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, which may in turn be referred to the Home Office. After all options are exhausted, the Home Secretary reserves the authority to issue directions to the HEI carrying the weight of a court order (Higher Education Funding Council for England, n.d.).

Required Duties

HEIs in Scotland are not required to provide evidence of adherence to the Prevent policy (Prevent Duty Guidance for Higher Education Institutions in Scotland, 2015). However, those within England are required to demonstrate they have policies and procedures in place that align with Prevent obligations. Regarding the Prevent duty on External Speakers and Events, HEIs must show evidence of policy and practices for event management and assessing risks associated with events. The University of Birmingham, for example, carries out periodic audits of its external events and speakers by cross-checking a random sample of speaker/event requests against its existing procedures. This audit, which the University of Birmingham included in its annual report to HEFCE in December 2016, ensures that it is mitigating risk in the External Speakers and Events Prevent category. According to HEFCE, “Prevent Practice Case Studies,” these actions are also in-line with the Prevent requirement that HEIs assess where and how their students may be at risk for radicalization within the Risk Assessment duty.

Within the Prevent Partnership duty, HEIs must demonstrate having internal mechanisms in place for sharing Prevent-related information; designating a Prevent point of contact; and connecting senior leadership actively with Prevent partners. The University of Wolverhampton, for example, coordinates its compliance within this category through its designated Prevent Working Group, which is made up of staff, a student officer, and the Chief Executive of the student union. On a bi-monthly basis, the group meets and provides a report

to the university's Safeguarding Committee, which also works for community stakeholders to ensure that Prevent is complied with across various channels.

Within the Prevent policy, universities must have a plan in place for mitigating these risks, also known as an Action Plan. St. Chad's College, Durham, for example, chose to address the former External Speakers and Events duty with an action plan that includes requiring event organizers to submit a formal request to the college's commercial team, after which a final decision is made by the principal based on an assessment of risk. Also complying with Staff Training requirements within the Prevent policy, St. Chad's College conducted a training for staff regarding its action plan to ensure that they understood their responsibilities, how to use the plan, and how to determine whether their requests are approved or denied by the principal.

Furthermore, HEIs need to demonstrate sufficient pastoral support and policies for use of religious spaces. This duty is labelled Welfare and Pastoral Care/Chaplaincy Support. The University of Nottingham, for example, placed welfare officers within each of its academic schools to flag and escalate concerns of radicalization. Similarly, the Guildhall School of Music and Drama outlines welfare policies and processes within its Student Affairs department, wherein weekly meetings are held about students of concern.

HEIs must also have Information Technology (IT) policies in place for individuals who are working with sensitive material, such as extremism-related information. The University of Sunderland introduced web 'blocking' across its networks to block access to extremist-related materials, except in cases when staff and students demonstrate the need to access restricted content for research and go through the required authorization process. This process includes maintaining a decision log and regular reviews by IT professionals.

Finally, within Prevent's guidelines, HEIs must have clear policies and expectations of student unions/societies and their associated events (Student Unions and Societies) and a mechanism for internal and external governing bodies to investigate compliance with these guidelines (Monitoring and Enforcement). In the first duty, for example, Leeds College of Art's Prevent lead, a member of the College's senior management team, regularly meets with

the student union president to facilitate information-sharing and communication regarding prevention procedures and practices. In the second duty, and as previously discussed, all universities must submit annual reports about their Prevent duty compliance activities.

Responses to Prevent

In spite of a legal duty to implement prevention strategy, the degree to which experts at these institutions concur on a clear association between radicalization and education clearly varies. Some academic institutions recognize the potential for violence and have expressed their concerns about student susceptibility to violent radicalization (Adam 2010; Barrett et al. 2010; Brandon 2011; Brown and Saeed 2015; Glees 2011; Harrison 2011; Jaschick 2015; Winn 2015). Some have also focused on cases of violent, Islamic extremism at universities, such as the attempted attack on a trans-Atlantic airplane by Farouk Abdulmutallab, an engineering student at University College London (UCL) and president of UCL's Islamic society (Adam 2010). Professor of Security and Intelligence Studies at University of Buckingham, Anthony Glees (2011), suggested that Abdulmutallab was the fourth president of a university Islamic society that was associated with terrorism, a trend he urges higher education (HE) administrators not to ignore.

In contrast, others at HEIs are concerned that the link between higher education and terrorism may indeed exist, but that protection of free speech must be just as great a concern to administrators as campus safety (Jaschik 2015). Referencing the history of St. Andrews University and the burning of faculty members at the stake for controversial views during the Reformation, principal and vice chancellor Louise Richardson argued that “Radical ideas belong in universities” (Jaschik 2015). Trends in the literature clearly point to the conclusion that policy makers at both EU and national levels must engage with this plethora of views, concerns, and positions in terms of addressing possible links between radicalization and higher education.

HEFCE asserts that HEI interview respondents overwhelmingly support HEFCE’s role in prevention through its relevant policy and monitoring efforts. However, reactions from

senior leadership, faculty, staff, and students as reported in the media and other public sources reveal a distinctly more negative impression. Many are concerned that the Prevent duties for HEIs threaten the autonomy of universities and freedom of speech. They argue that universities need to be a place where objectionable views can also have a forum, even if they may only be appealing to a small minority (Merrick 2016; Sabir 2016; UCU Left 2015; Yezza 2015). However, Steven Greer, Professor of Human Rights at the University of Bristol Law School, argues that some of these critics go too far. He references the University and College Union's (UCU) "Boycott Prevent" campaign, a group of 110,000 personnel in UK higher education who assert that Prevent racially profiles, legitimizes Islamophobia, and jeopardizes learning environments, turning educators into informants. Greer argues instead that institutions should comply with Prevent and while the policy may "present challenges to human rights, cosmopolitan community cohesion and public confidence in law enforcement particularly with respect to 'non-violent extremism,'" its duties are also "not criminal/punitive by nature but framed in terms of safeguarding vulnerable adults by providing appropriate procedures." According to Rizwaan Sabir, a lecturer in criminology at Liverpool John Moores University, "Repressing a particular idea or viewpoint does not eradicate it. Instead, it drives it off radar, into spaces that are largely ungoverned and impenetrable to everybody except the intelligence services. These spaces serve as echo chambers, in which views and ideas are reinforced and strengthened, not challenged or questioned" (*Times Higher Education*, January 14, 2016). The effect of this magnifies the disharmony between national security concerns and academic freedom.

Furthermore, some believe that the underlying assumption that universities are breeding grounds for radicalization is an unfounded myth and the idea of extremist ideology leading to terrorism is a fundamentally flawed notion (Grove 2015; Yezza 2015). These critics claim that Prevent is ambiguously suggesting an ideology-to-terrorism correlation, which in their view renders the policy questionable at best and dangerous at worst (Grove 2015). Fahid Qurashi supports the position that Prevent has increased the correlation between educational environments and terrorism: "the prescriptive nature of the Prevent duty meant

there was already a relatively detailed template of counter-terrorism provided by the government which institutions were legally mandated to implement” (2017, 201). The inherent associations between Prevent and counter-terrorism may have therefore accentuated the connection of violent Islamic extremism to HEIs, and contributed to a possible securitization of the educational space.

Lynn Davies’ work also suggests a global trend whereby education is drawn into use as a counter-terrorism tool. Specific to the Prevent strategy, she remarks that while the policy describes schools as “safe spaces,” its Duty Guidance securitizes the academic environment (2016, 19). Richard Jones of the University of Edinburgh’s School of Law has questioned in the Global Justice Blog, “whether there is any evidence that UK higher education is experiencing a significant problem with radicalization, with Prevent therefore aiming to solve a problem that does not exist.”

Scholars in the field of securitization and education concur that the UK government’s Prevent strategy limits academic freedom and increases securitization and targeting of minority students. Durodié argues that “to impose restrictions on free speech and to monitor presumed perpetrators- undermines the very role of the University, which ought to be where robust engagement with unpalatable ideas is most expected” (2016, 27). This position is also reflected in the work of Mayssoun Sukarieh and Stuart Tannock, who criticize the creation of an environment in which educators are expected to identify and report students suspected of extremist views (2015).

However, the government’s position must also be reflected in this discussion. The Prevent strategy was implemented as a reactive policy designed to reassure a wary public that the government was being responsive to the threat of terrorism. Its goal was to complement the overall Counter-Terrorism strategy and address the core problem of radicalization at its different points. In particular, the Prevent Duty was imposed after the nation became alarmed at extensive ISIS propaganda, a series of beheadings, martyrdom and the departure of vulnerable youth to the Syrian civil war. While the policy was situated within the parameters of the nation’s Counter-Terrorism Act and its broader intent was to clamp down on a

perceived source of vulnerability (Durodié 2016), some have vehemently argued that the implementation of Prevent has in fact caused more apprehension than comfort, particularly when perceived to target certain groups over others.

Some also fear the strategy legitimizes racism and encourages Islamophobia (UCU Left 2015; Yezza 2015). UCU Left (2015), a sub-group of the University and College Union (UCU), claimed, “the Prevent Agenda will force our members to spy on our learners, is discriminatory towards Muslims, and legitimizes Islamophobia and xenophobia, encouraging racist views to be publicized and normalized within society.” Beginning even one step earlier with research on secondary schools, Dudenhoefer (2018) critiqued the potential of Prevent to alienate British Muslims in school safe spaces before they even get into higher education.

Despite these complaints, however, HEIs in the UK must exhibit compliance with the duties required of them and annual reports created by each HEI must show a concentrated effort to engage with the Prevent strategy, lest they face lawful action from the government (Higher Education Funding Council for England, n.d.). Stemming from personal experience at his own University, Qurashi (2017) suggests that universities have little incentive to try and alter the implementation of the Prevent duty as compliance is easier than questioning its measures.

While supportive of the position that Prevent has contributed to the securitization of education, scholars also acknowledge the influence of other factors, such as the effect of media discourse in this development. The highly publicized participation of British university attendee Mohammed Emwazi in the ISIS organization is one such example. Also known as executioner Jihadi John, media images of gruesome acts performed by this former university student sent shock waves through a nervous British public, linking the threat of terror to universities. Media discourse reflected in headlines such as the Daily Mail’s “40 UK universities are now breeding grounds for terror as hard line groups peddle hate on campus” (Slack 2011) spread fear surrounding safety on campuses.

The discussion around Prevent demonstrates that it spans a broad spectrum of issues surrounding national security, race, religion, the intellectual pursuit of higher education, and

the ethics of a mandatory implementation mechanism. The tension related to debate on these issues may also be magnified by a reluctance to pursue open, constructive discussion in today's academic environment (Durodié 2016; McGlynn and McDaid 2016). Durodié suggests that the attitude of non-dissent from popular opinion exhibited in today's student culture may compound the effect of this negative dynamic, especially in discussions on sensitive issues such as violent extremism.

Radicalisation Awareness Network Strategy

In contrast to the legal duty and guidance inherent to the UK Prevent strategy, the Radicalisation Awareness Network or RAN, established by the European Commission in 2011, provides information to EU Member States on a non-binding, voluntary basis. The strategy offers member states access to a network of practices, initiatives, and insight on prevention and disengagement from Islamic and right-wing radicalization but there is no legal enforcement mechanism. The multi-agency approach recommended to address crises involves input from a wide circle of experts from academia, government, churches, law enforcement, healthcare, and community-based organizations. Working Groups also provide expert insight on a spectrum of related issues.

The RAN focuses on the following principle themes: First-line practitioner training; exit strategy design and implementation; community engagement and empowerment; youth educational initiatives; family support mechanisms; counter-narrative development; multi-agency approaches; and prison intervention strategies (RAN Document, 2017).

Specific to the spread of violent extremism in the educational arena, the RAN Collection of Approaches and Practices (2017) offers an overview of best practices available to both policy-makers and educators, which may then be adapted as needed. Suggestions for prevention and awareness in the academic environment include the need for particular focus on education about prejudices, democracy, and diversity; education about digital citizenship/literacy and critical thinking; and the use of specific educational initiatives to open up discussion on radicalization and violent extremism. Additional recommendations advocate

sharing testimony from victims of terrorism, and using publications specifically targeted to address intolerance as tools to create awareness among student populations. Interactive exhibitions reflecting themes of diversity, citizenship, and human rights, the use of workshops, and peer mediation programs are also highlighted as prevention mechanisms.

The document identifies specific pre-conditions at the school and educator-levels to assist policy-makers and educators to counter radicalization both locally and nationally. It also recommends that HEIs and other educational programmes develop a clear vision of how to address radicalization, with adequate training and support systems in place for educators. The RAN Collection urges the use of educational methods that focus on the development of critical thinking skills as a way to enable students to analyze and consider different messages and perspectives.

Responses to the Radicalisation Awareness Network

Across the 12 continental universities we surveyed in Greece, Turkey, Germany, and France, there were virtually no responses to, nor acknowledgments of, the RAN policy. This result is in sharp contrast to the high number of cases in which Prevent strategy was recognized at UK HEIs. In many ways, RAN is the polar opposite of Prevent. Prevent is a directive and some university funding is tied into compliance as required by law; RAN is used on a voluntary basis only (*RAN Collection of Approaches and Practices 2017*). This is a non-binding network and a research tool that offers suggested implementation measures useful for the prevention of radicalization. It does not require engagement, but rather encourages its use through guidance and direction. Universities follow RAN recommendations on a voluntary basis.

In spite of RAN's prevention initiatives implemented either in the form of non-binding recommendations or as enforceable legislation, its lack of standardized evaluation capacity to measure the effectiveness of its programs remains a notable deficit. The lack of concrete measurement mechanisms may hinder the ability to achieve long-term success and measurable results. Francesco Ragazzi, a lecturer at the University of Leyden, has suggested

that the RAN is “relaying the commission's messages without questioning the concepts and measuring results” (Maurice 2016). Ragazzi's work also considers how anti-terrorism strategies impact Muslim communities in Europe. His concern is that the RAN and other social policies project an anti-terrorist logic overly focused on Muslim populations, which as a result encourages suspicion of the entire Muslim community. This suggests the need to encourage measurable prevention goals in HE policies that emphasize community engagement rather than anti-radicalization fear mongering.

Discussion

In contrast to the UK mandatory implementation mechanism, the RAN is designed to offer recommendations, which member states can use within the framework of their own policy initiatives. Available RAN resources include a collection of best practices, expert guidance, and a broad range of soft power initiatives, without mandatory compliance demands. Specific to the theme of youth and education, initiatives are designed to promote awareness and acceptance of cultural diversity in educational institutions, and to advance the opportunities for youth in community, educational and employment environments. They also include increased training of teachers and other experts in the field to adequately support prevention initiatives. Soft power tools therefore promote tolerance, encourage opportunity and complement policy making by the member states. In particular, these initiatives do not target specific groups but encourage a broader awareness and educational focus on issues such as democracy, opportunities for youth advancement, and the importance of cultural inclusion (*RAN Collection of Approaches and Practices* 2017). This approach promotes a constructive, educational environment that enhances member state policy with regard to the challenge of radicalization. However, as with much of the debate, scholars differ in their opinion as to whether a balance is achievable.

The opinions of Fahid Qurashi (2017) and Paul Thomas (2016) illustrate this difference. Each offers a contrasting perspective on the application of Prevent in HEIs in the

UK. Qurashi firmly argues that there is little hope of achieving a balance in light of the fact that the Prevent strategy is embedded within a broader counter-terrorism strategy, and because educational institutions are more likely to comply than resist mandatory guidance. Thomas, on the other hand, argues in favor of striving for balance. His position is that a more balanced approach by government and university is attainable and can also achieve positive long-term results if it is constructed through an inclusionary policy that is based on Western notions of democracy and human rights. Lodged within the framework of open academic discussion, this approach will also move both universities and governments toward a more balanced approach and so encourage the development of a foundation for constructive discussion that inherently rejects extremist ideology. He argues that, “Only through citizenship education with a human rights framework at its core, will young people be equipped with the individual and peer group resilience to examine and reject ideologies that promote hatred and violence” (2016, 184). Thomas also identifies the need for inclusion of “political and citizenship education for young people that directly address the challenge of extremist ideologies, and which reinforce process, standards, and embodies values of equal, democratic citizenship” (172).

Like Thomas, Lynn Davies (2016) is an advocate of policies that promote inclusion and an appreciation of different cultures. Both support the implementation and advancement of the concept of active citizenship at universities to achieve a more balanced approach in the protection of students from extremism. Davies’ recommendation is also based on the idea that human rights belong in conversations on extremism in educational environments. Instead of Prevent, which according to some has increased social tension and emphasized ethnic differences (Thomas 2016; Qurashi 2017), Davies calls for a more balanced approach to addressing radicalization at HEIs that integrates people of different backgrounds, ideas and religious cultures to reduce boundaries and promote an appreciation of diversity. Mona Wille (2017) also argues for a Prevent strategy that encourages free and open discussion in controlled classroom settings to air and discuss extremist views. By restricting this forum, Prevent may actually be encouraging young students to radicalize as a reaction to government policy.

Glees (2015) advocates making knowledge on the practice and ethics of the information-gathering process more accessible to students. This can be done by including relevant courses in the curriculum that focus on themes of ethics of intelligence gathering, and promoting an understanding of the role of intelligence processes within a democratic framework. Through these learning opportunities, Glees suggests that students become more fully aware of processes and limitations involved in data collection and implementation of intelligence strategies. This may then result in a broader awareness of the role of intelligence in national security, increased understanding of government and academic positions on this issue (2015), and ultimately serve to lessen the tensions that surround Prevent.

Conclusion

This study has sought to identify ideas for the development of a new approach to addressing the issue of radicalization at HEIs by recognizing three important and critically interrelated dimensions. First, radicalization in and of itself does not inherently need to be violent. Second, radicalization is not a clear-cut, linear process (Abbas 2012), and youth susceptibility may involve different factors such as age, educational attainment, and socio-economic conditions. Third, despite the controversy surrounding governmental incursion into academic freedoms via Prevent or the RAN, McCauley and Moskalenko's assurance that radicalized students committing acts of violence are the narrowest tip of the pyramid, not the widest base.

When violent radicalization turns to terrorism, we recognize any government's responsibility to reassure a shaken public after an attack. In doing so, however, government may react with overly punitive policies that in the long term cause more harm than good (Bakker 2015; Thomas 2016). The government's intention through reactive policy implementation is to clamp down on terrorists and to thereby show the public that it can still preserve law and order. The problem critics of these policies point out is that security-based responses to terror incidents too often focus on certain segments of the population (such as

Muslims or university students) and thereby aggravate an already difficult situation, as we have seen through Prevent implementation at HEIs in the UK (Thomas 2016).

Our study recognizes the sensitive positions of both government and HEIs in this effort. In doing so, we argue that HEIs must address radicalization as a preemptive measure but must also be willing to follow certain guidelines they may perceive as being restrictive at times. These guidelines may draw on the existing UK government Prevent strategy, the international non-binding RAN guidelines, or even their own, self-determined measures. Our observations suggest that HEIs in the UK indeed exhibited more active compliance with the Prevent strategy, but also had strong, negative reactions to its highly prescriptive standards for counter-radicalization. On the other hand, the non-binding RAN policy document in the European member states found few HEIs responding purposefully. In addressing both public and private HEIs, we also recognize the potential creeping of counter-radicalization legislation into the public and private sectors beyond the higher education space. If a government required a private HEI to enact counter-radicalization strategies, it may also require other private entities to do so as well which begs two broader, ethical questions: should a government involve itself in the activities of private entities, and does the threat of radicalization and the potential of violence arising from that radicalization merit that interference?

Our study, therefore, offers three conclusions. First, security policies and counter-radicalization strategies need to address the challenge of radicalization on university campuses. Second, these policies, must, however, have clear and measurable objectives and not simply be a set of loose recommendations. Third, policies should not be so stringent and linked to funding that their tactics infringe upon the basic autonomy of HEIs to the point of rendering their compliance unproductive at best, or antagonistic at worst.

Moving Forward

Moving forward, higher education scholars need to continue to investigate best practices with regard to how HEIs engage with their communities, governments, and student populations when government policy reacts to violent extremism, but also not go so far as to stifle dynamic, open academic discussion. Policy makers, on the other hand, must also acknowledge that practices that compromise the role of faculty and limit the right of freedom of speech, such as restricting the choice of external speakers, will only further inflame heated policy debates and build mistrust toward government.

In response to the search to identify a possible balance between national security interests and academic freedom, we make the following suggestion: A successful approach will more fully recognize the sensitivity needed to address the issue of violent radicalization within a university setting. To achieve this, increased compromise between governments and higher education institutions is needed, and could take the following form: Universities might limit their choice of controversial outside speakers, especially when they abuse the university setting as a platform for their own agenda. In exchange, government strategy must offer more support for other academic freedoms within the higher education environment. Within this structure, students are further encouraged to position sensitive issues within a human rights, democratically-based framework (Thomas 2016). This measure also requires the cooperation of universities to encourage more learning opportunities on politically sensitive issues that directly address the problem of radicalization, such as the role of Islamic extremism in radicalization today. It also requires the engagement of faculty to consciously position human rights and democratic processes at the center of discussion topics while concurrently promoting respect for non-Western cultures and practices.

This balanced approach can be seen as a middle point between a non-binding RAN scenario, which makes policy recommendations and simultaneously encourages the promotion of soft power tools, and a legally binding government mandate such as the Prevent strategy. To be successful, it requires the commitment of government policy makers, students

and faculty alike, and may in the long-term benefit all parties involved. There is little doubt that educational initiatives, when they are done correctly, can make a critical and positive difference (Hussain, 2018). This joint engagement may increase the resilience of vulnerable youth to the pull of extremism by creating a generation of young individuals unafraid to tackle difficult issues, and educated to position viewpoints within a human-rights based framework. Over time, this measured approach promises to have the combined effect of decreasing societal tension around government prevention policy while simultaneously increasing support for the its effort to prevent violent extremism.

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