

**Counter-Productive Counter-Terrorism. How is the dysfunctional discourse of Prevent failing to restrain radicalisation?**

By: Lauren Powell<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract**

This paper explores why the Prevent strand of the UK Government's counter-terrorism strategy, CONTEST, is failing to achieve success in reducing radicalisation of young Muslims. By refusing to engage with extremists, and denying 'extreme' ideas a platform for expression, this paper will explain how the importance of cultural-linguistic epistemologies, and their role in extremism, has been overlooked. Rather than striving to understand how socio-political factors influence one's reading of religious doctrines or interpretation of ideology, Prevent understands ideology to be the core radicalising agent, used by influential figures who can exploit the grievances of the vulnerable. The problematic repercussions of this will be addressed throughout, highlighting the various, and extensive, criticisms that Prevent has faced from academics, practitioners and commentators – primarily that it is counter-productive. The importance of the post-9/11 neoconservative paradigm in underpinning Prevent will be explained, but a Neo-Weberian approach, as a better lens through which to understand radicalisation, will be proposed, to ultimately trump the simplistic, yet currently dominant, 'Conveyor Belt' theory. Based on this, recommendations are made for an improved Prevent, rooted in the notion that radicalisation, extremism, or terrorism cannot be prevented, without knowing the motives, the views, and the assumptions of the radicals, the extremists, and those vulnerable to engaging with them.

**Keywords:**

*Prevent; Deradicalisation; Extremism; Counter-Terrorism; Neo-Weberian Approach*

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## Introduction: Soul Searching

Kepel commented as early as 2004 (in Ranstorp 2010:3) that,

“The most important battle in the war for Muslim minds during the next decades will be fought not in Palestine or Iraq but in (the) communities of believers on the outskirts of London, Paris, and other European cities, where Islam is already a growing part of the West.”

It is interesting to note that this comment came prior to the 7/7 London bombings, the Charlie Hebdo attack, the November 2015 Paris attacks, the Brussels attack of March 2016, and the various attacks Germany has witnessed this year.

In light of these events, this paper strives to explore what it is that drives people to come under the influence of extremist ideologies, to be radicalised, and compare the reality of this situation to how it is interpreted and expressed in the UK government’s counter-terrorism strategy, CONTEST, specifically in the Prevent strand. The view presented in this paper is that radicalisation cannot be prevented without understanding what causes it, but the UK government is failing to adequately understand the grievances of those it deems vulnerable to radicalisation, and their approach is even perpetuating some of these core grievances. By focusing on ideology as the main problem, the main cause of radicalisation, the government is failing to contextualise extremists’ interpretations of religious doctrines, as well as real world events, which is undermining the success the government can hope to achieve under Prevent.

Given that the UK has provided more foreign fighters to ISIS than fragile-states such as Somalia, as well as other Western European and Nordic countries, including Austria, Italy, Norway and Denmark, it has been suggested, including by former MI5 chief, Baroness Manningham-Buller (HL Deb 2015, vol 758,col 752), that some assumptions held by the government regarding counter-terrorism should be called into question (Stern and Berger 2015:249; Neumann 2015). At present, as expressed by David Anderson QC (2016a:1), Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, “the lack of confidence” in Prevent “is undeniable.”

The Prevent strategy will be critiqued throughout this paper for its inadequate understanding of the wide-ranging and often deep-seated ‘causes’ of radicalisation. Githens-Mazer (2010b:999) has justifiably praised Ranstorp’s (2009) identification of radicalisation’s “multifaceted combination of push-pull factors involving a combination of socio-psychological factors, political grievance, religious motivation and discourse, identity politics and triggering mechanisms,” to which this paper only adds economic factors, since, although often overstated, they do play some role. Despite the need for a multifaceted response though, the battle to win hearts and minds has become a problematic “conflation and muddle of...a counter-subversion strategy, a ‘battle of ideas’ strategy and a surveillance and intelligence-gathering strategy” (Githens-Mazer and Lambert 2009, in Elshimi 2015a:206). This means an “intervention” under Prevent may come in the form of “mentoring, counselling, theological support, encouraging civic engagement, developing support networks<sup>2</sup> or providing mainstream services<sup>3</sup>” (HM Government 2015c:21). Scholars, such as Elshimi (2015b:115-116) and Gutkowski (2011, in Bishop 2014:240), therefore have come to understand the concept of de-radicalisation through Foucault’s “technologies of the self,” whereby individuals can “transform themselves” by performing certain “operations on their...thoughts, conduct, and the way of being.”

The analysis of Prevent throughout this paper will focus on its efforts to de-radicalise Muslims, given that the government considers Islamic extremism, Al Qa’ida ideology and ISIS,<sup>4</sup> to pose the biggest threat to UK security, making it the emphasis of Prevent (HM Government 2011:59, 62). Also, training materials and indicators for the strategy primarily focus on Islam, even though Prevent states that it does aim to tackle all extremist ideologies (Mohammed and Siddiqui 2013:9; Elshimi 2015b:121).

Following an examination of Prevent’s political and theoretical history, section one will explore problematic definitions and understandings, and innovatively ground the analysis of Prevent in academic epistemological debate. Section two will explore Prevent’s understanding that young Muslims with grievances are exploited by extremist ideology, but will ultimately dispute the government’s understanding that ideology is the main threat, arguing instead the case for wider socio-political factors. Section three will delve deeper into

<sup>2</sup> Family; peers.

<sup>3</sup> Education; employment; health; finance; housing.

<sup>4</sup> “Violent organisations in Syria and Iraq” (HM Government 2015c:3).

the concept of extremism, and how it is defined, exploring what this means both for young Muslims, but also more widely for the legitimacy of the concept. Section four will move towards evaluating Prevent on its own terms, looking at the extent to which the aims it lays out have been, or can be, met, which will include an in-depth look at the Channel programme as a key intervention. The conclusion will lay out recommendations for an improved Prevent strategy, grounded in the idea that the government should be engaging with a wider ideas-base than they are currently prepared to, which will aid an appreciation of the importance of lived experience in interpreting religious ideas and doctrines.

### **Tell me, Prevent, where do your origins lie?**

Initially conceptualised in 2003, following the 2001 9/11 terrorist attack on the US, Prevent is one of four strands of CONTEST,<sup>5</sup> although the Prevent element was “entirely undeveloped” at this time (Thomas, P. 2015a:170). CONTEST was updated in 2006, in response to the 7/7 attack of 2005, presenting Prevent as a “hearts and minds” approach to countering Islamic terrorism (O’Toole et al 2015:3; Khaleeli 2015), and further developed in 2011, to reflect the change from a Labour to a Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition government, aiming for more challenge to terrorist ideology in a transformation of approach towards counter-terrorism policing (HM Government 2011:61).<sup>6</sup> Now with an annual budget of approximately £40 million, Prevent moved from a focus on preventing violent extremism to preventing (non-violent) extremism, under David Cameron’s premiership, expected to continue under his

<sup>5</sup> The other strands of CONTEST are: Pursue, dealing with surveillance and detection; Prepare, dealing with civil emergency contingency planning; and Protect, which oversees domestic security (O’Toole et al 2015:3). The architect of this multi-dimensional strategy is considered to be Professor Sir David Omand (Huband 2010:139; Thomas, P. 2015b:40).

<sup>6</sup> The cost of programme through its development is a cause of contention. By 2011, almost £80 million had been spent on 1,000 schemes across 94 local authorities, according to Casciani (2014), although P. Thomas (2015b:39) cites the figure at £140 million, whereas Kundnani (2009:6) cites £140 million as the 2008/09 budget alone. Policy Exchange on the other hand cites the budget as £90 million for 2006-2009 (Maher and Frampton 2009:5). This exemplifies the lack of transparency and consequential discrepancies surrounding Prevent, encouraging criticism. Until 2008 though the strategy was only aimed at local authorities with a population of 5% or more Muslims, demonstrating the “painfully thin” evidence used for the strategy’s early development (Thomas, P. 2015b:39; Thomas, P. 2010, in Thomas, P. 2015b:44). This was also core to internal government struggles regarding whether Prevent should come under the remit of the Home Office, or the Department for Communities and Local Governance (DCLG) and Department for Education (DfE) (Tucker-Jones 2015).

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successor, Theresa May, and is at the centre of counter-terrorism efforts (Gardner 2015; Halliday and Dodd 2015).

The aims of Prevent, and therefore how it determines success, are to achieve:

- (1) A “reduction in support for terrorism of all kinds in (the UK) and in states overseas whose security most impacts (that of the UK),”
- (2) “More effective challenge to those extremists whose views are shared by terrorist organisations and used by terrorists to legitimise violence,” and
- (3) “More challenge to and isolation of extremists and terrorists operating on the internet.”<sup>7</sup>

(HM Government 2011:60)

The objectives of Prevent, and the approaches via which aims will be achieved, are to:

- (1) “Respond to the ideological challenge of terrorism and the threat we face from those who promote it,”
- (2) “*Prevent* people from being drawn into terrorism and ensure they are given appropriate advice and support,” and
- (3) “Work with a wide range of sectors<sup>8</sup> where there are risks of radicalisation which we need to address.”

(HM Government 2011:62)

The Prevent ‘Duty’, a sub-policy,<sup>9</sup> requires those who work to protect vulnerable people, or who are responsible for national security, to stage an intervention if they identify someone as vulnerable to radicalisation (HM Government 2015c:3). This intervention may include referral to the police-led multi-agency partnership for de-radicalisation, the Channel Programme.

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<sup>7</sup> Overseas work dealt with by FCO and DfID; not analysed in this paper due to lack of capacity to adequately address. Also a lack of capacity to adequately address issues around the internet; brief analysis in section four.

<sup>8</sup> Education; faith; health; internet; criminal justice.

<sup>9</sup> Related to objective (3) in particular.

This change of approach aims to stop the creation of an atmosphere that may be conducive to terrorism, where extremist views are popularised, even though it is not illegal to engage in ‘extremist’ activity (HM Government 2015c:3). It is related to this that critics, such as Miller and Sabir (2012), have branded Prevent a counter-insurgency strategy, framing their argument around why and how the strategy is unsuccessful. Government rhetoric, according to Kundnani (2015:8), “distorts public discourse, legitimises the erosion of civil rights and fosters social divisions.”<sup>10</sup>

### ***The Conveyor Belt of Radicalisation***

Prior to 9/11, Kundnani (2015:14; 2012:7) highlights Martha Crenshaw’s three levels of ‘The Causes of Terrorism’ as the most academic account of pathways into extremism, at a time when the term ‘radicalisation’ was not on the terrorism agenda. This framework included, firstly, individual motivation and system beliefs; secondly, decision-making and strategy within a terrorism movement; and finally, the wider political and social context with which terrorist movements interact (Crenshaw 1981, in Kundnani 2015:14). A key issue with contemporary theory that underpins Prevent is that it only considers the first of Crenshaw’s factors, significantly failing to address the deeper factors that lie within the wider context (Kundnani 2015:14).

The ‘Conveyor Belt’ theory is the foundation of Prevent, which points to ideology as the “main precursor to violent extremism,” failing to give adequate consideration to feelings of grievance or deprivation (Hussain 2016). This identification of a set cause however, holding “predictive power,” is key to the strategy’s execution, as it is through the mapping of “linear progression of an ‘at-risk’ subjectivity towards violence” that intervention can be legitimised (Heath-Kelly 2013, and de Goede and Simon 2013, in Martin 2015:191). Critically branded “misguided” (Shafi<sup>11</sup> 2015, in Travis 2015), and an “entirely disingenuous” representation of reality (Lambert and Githens-Mazer 2009), the ‘Conveyor Belt’ theory posits that extremist Islamic groups like Al Qa’ida or Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) have the ability to indoctrinate individuals with radical ideology, grooming them for recruitment by more violent

<sup>10</sup> Sections two and three further deal with this critique.

<sup>11</sup> Muslim Council of Britain’s (MCB) Secretary General.

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organisations (Baran 2005).<sup>12</sup> As such, it is argued they have benefitted from the freedom of speech in Western liberal democracies, where they could express messages that filled “people’s hearts and minds with hatred,” acting as a “vanguard for raising Muslim consciousness toward (violent) action” (Baran 2004; Husain 2007:275).

Given the nature of Prevent, the Home Office is considered a proponent of the theory (Kherbane 2015), despite the Coalition government being presented with research expressing the inaccuracy of the theory’s linearity, which misreads radicalisation as occurring via a step-by-step process (Gilligan 2010). Amin (2014), who is not aware of any “serious political commentator who argues for the correctness of the ‘Conveyor Belt’ theory,” suggests adopting a ‘funnel’ model instead, whereby “some people get more radicalised, while others flirt with some of these beliefs and then go back to being normal practicing Muslims.” While this model may be slightly more reflective of the radicalisation experience, it is still too simplistic to provide a serious understanding of the issue.<sup>13</sup>

These foundational assumptions of Prevent, have been considerably influenced by America’s neoconservatives, prominent in developing the ‘Conveyor Belt’ theory (Hasan 2011). Their paradigm assumes that “terrorists” fundamentally exude “moral intolerance and hatred for the West,” lacking “just cause” for their actions, which has provided justification for implementing controversial means of defeating them (Grovoqui 2007:237-238). Since finding initial influence in the UK under the New Labour leadership of Tony Blair, these interpretations have been reinforced by successive governments, particularly via the 2013 Prime Minister’s (PM) Task Force on Tackling Radicalisation and Extremism (Kundnani 2015:9, 11). British neoconservative think-tanks, including Policy Exchange, Centre for Social Cohesion (CSC), Henry Jackson Society (HJS), and Quilliam Foundation, appear to have provided significant guidance on Prevent’s development, specifically in framing the narrative that terrorism is caused by religious ideology, further demonstrated in Table A. This provides a, what some would consider worrying, and as such contested, evidence-base for terrorism prosecutions (Miller et al 2011:9, 52; Miller et al 2015; Bush 2015; Mohammad and Siddiqui 2013:26; Kundnani 2015:16-17).

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<sup>12</sup> Although HT have expressed active opposition to the extremely violent ISIS (Frances 2015).

<sup>13</sup> Even the term ‘radicalisation’ has been considered overly simplistic by some (Sedgwick 2014; Edwards and Gomis 2011:18).

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More nuanced understandings of radicalisation, that would fall more in line with Crenshaw perhaps, could include Sageman's (2004, 2007, 2008, in Christmann 2012:13) four-stage approach, which includes, in no particular order, experiencing a "sense of 'moral outrage'", likely following an attack on Muslims abroad, for example in Bosnia or Iraq, "a specific interpretation of the world," often where actions are seen to resonate with one's personal life, especially, as Reinares et al (2008:15) note, if individuals have been in direct contact with those fighting in conflict zones such as Afghanistan, as well as having networks through which to mobilise, for example internet forums. Ideology is not the only, or even the central, factor here. Gill's (2007, in Christmann 2012:14) pathway approach includes similar influencers as in Sageman's understanding, and it is noted that, when applied to suicide bombers for example, while they may experience different stages at different times, each serves to reinforce the others. While, as Christmann (2012:16) rightly suggests, the small sample size of Wiktorowicz's (2004, in Christmann 2012:15) study on the al-Muhajiroun pattern of radicalisation detracts from its ability to be applied as a universal understanding, its empirical grounding adds notable nuance to the argument that radicalisation involves much more than an influential ideology. It relies instead on an individual's worldview influencing and being influenced by their understanding of a religious framework, aided by a group whose public image seems to align with the individuals concerns or interests, which leads to socialisation into potentially dangerous circles (Wiktorowicz 2004, in Christmann 2012:15). It is important to note though that these individuals are not by any means homogeneous, and, as Reinares et al's (2008:11) research into the backgrounds of those behind the London and Madrid bombings notes, the origins and educational and cultural background of each individual differed greatly.

**Table A - Neoconservative influences on Prevent**

Kundnani (2012:13) has suggested research undertaken by these groups downplays the importance of political and socioeconomic factors, to satisfy the theology-based agenda of policymakers, hence concerns regarding the lack of independence of these bodies (Miller and Mills 2015; Ali 2015:139; Babu 2015, in Halliday and Dodd 2015).

Organisation	Policy Recommendation	Evidence of Influence
Policy Exchange (PE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Founding Chairman, Michael Gove, former Justice Secretary, in his 2006 book (released the same year as PE 1<sup>st</sup> Islamism report) stated ‘fundamentalist terror’ is facilitated by ‘sapping of confidence in Western values encouraged by the radical Left’ (Mills et al 2011:6); notion featured frequently in PE reports 2006-09</li> <li>• 2009 report heavily criticised government downplaying of link between non-violent and violent extremism</li> <li>• Also critical of engagement with any ‘extremist’ groups<sup>14</sup> (Maher &amp; Frampton 2009:5, 7, 8)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rejection of British values now defines extremism (HM Government 2011:62)</li> <li>• Non-violent extremism now tackled (HM Government 2015c:3, 5)</li> <li>• No longer work with extremist groups (HM Government 2011:60)</li> </ul>
Centre for Social Cohesion (CSC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Director Douglas Murry (2010), proposed “British values” be taught as counter-narrative, and ethnic / religious groups should receive integration ‘rewards’</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on: integration; ‘better’ counter-narrative (HM Government 2011:61, 64)</li> </ul>

<sup>14</sup> PE includes “organisations that oppose Armed Forces’ recruitment because they selectively oppose wars that the state...is currently fighting” (Maher and Frampton 2009:8); unrealistic perhaps considering over 1 million protested in London against Iraq War (Jeffery 2003).

<p><i>Quilliam Foundation<sup>15</sup></i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shares PE and CSC views on targeting non-violent extremism (<i>Githens-Mazer &amp; Lambert 2009; Mohammad &amp; Siddiqui 2013:26; Husain (2007:275, 279) criticised government for lack of challenge to groups like HT, claiming it would lead to another generation of radicalised young Muslims</i></li> <li>• No platforms for views that differ from mainstream “British values” (<i>HM Government 2015c:7</i>)</li> </ul>
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### ***Controversy over definitions***

Examined here are two of the most controversial neoconservative-influenced definitions in Prevent, impacting greatly on its work (Mohammad and Siddiqui 2013:9), and key to understanding criticisms of its approach.<sup>16</sup>

First of all, ‘extremism’ is understood as “the vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs,” as well as “calls for the death of members of our armed forced, whether in this country or overseas” (HM Government 2015c:21). The myriad of problems with this definition will be touched upon throughout, including problems with its brevity, as well as being inherently contradictory. It does not allow one to express beliefs outside of the mainstream, despite claiming to advocate individual liberty, respect and tolerance.

Another definition to highlight at this point is of “vulnerable to radicalisation.” ‘Vulnerability’ describes the “factors and characteristics associated with being susceptible to radicalisation,” while ‘radicalisation’ is “the process by which a person comes to support terrorism and extremist ideologies associated with terrorist groups” (HM Government 2015c:21). These twelve susceptibility factors include peer pressure, family tensions, lack of

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<sup>15</sup> Founded by disillusioned-former-extremist Ed Husain, which is thought to add legitimacy to Quilliam’s recommendations (Kundnani 2015:16-17; Miller and Sabir 2012:14). It will be interesting to see how the latest policy recommendation report from Quilliam impacts Prevent under the Conservative government, calling for a “new body within government between the hard-approach to counter-terrorism and the soft-approach of community cohesion that can act as the foundation for a clear, consistent, and comprehensive strategy for tackling extremism of all kinds” (Russell and Theodosiou 2015:4).

<sup>16</sup> Criticised for being poorly stated – too broad according to some and too narrow for others, and also for lacking legal-grounding (Maher 2011; Mohammad and Siddiqui 2013:8; Francis 2014; Richards 2011, in Ali 2015:140; Fraser 2015a).

self-esteem or identity, and personal or political grievances (HM Government 2015a:10). The government has also laid out thirteen “psychological hooks,” which encourage engagement with an extremist group or ideology, including being at a transitional time of life, relevant mental health issues, a desire for status, and a desire for excitement and adventure (HM Government 2015a:28).

While not usually applied to developed countries, these pull-factors may be seen to have grounding in the ‘youth bulge’ theory, popular in US policymaking since 9/11, which sees young people (aged 15-24 years), for whom there are a lack of opportunities due to the group being such a large demographic, as more likely than those outside the ‘bulge’ to be susceptible to indoctrination by political and religious extremists regarding “‘just’ violence” (Heinsohn 2003, in Schomaker 2013:117, 120; Hendrixson 2004:1-2, 12; Zakaria 2001, in Urdal 2006:608). This group may be more easily attracted to ideas because of their optimism in being able to change their situation, deemed unfair, meaning youth bulges provide good recruitment opportunities for extremists or terrorists (Urdal 2006:610, 624). The result of empirical studies on these issues and their relationship to terrorism are not consistent, but the theory has not always faced proper scrutiny (Schomaker 2013:120; Hendrixson 2004:3). Hendrixson (2004:16) argues that the ‘youth bulge’ theory “disrespects the younger generation, underestimates its potential, and leaves it devalued,” which, if true, serves to perpetuate factors the government understands to push people towards radicalisation.

It is perhaps at this point that the term ‘ideology’ itself may be acknowledged as one to cause much of the confusion and poor decision making around preventing extremism in the UK. Ideology is understood and defined very differently by various groups and individuals. In defining Islamist extremism as an ideology, the government describes it as being based on a “distorted interpretation of Islam,” drawn from the teachings of those such as Sayyid Qutb, but goes further to include the idea that adhering to the extremist ideology also means believing that Western interventions in Muslim countries are seen as part of a war on Islam, as well as rejecting liberal democratic ideas (HM Government 2013:1-2). It is associated with violence, and, as the ‘Conveyor Belt’ theory stresses, extreme ideas will lead to violent actions. When aligned more to the idea of social movements however, particularly in the Western anti-war period of the 1960s and 1970s, the notion of ideology was often associated with exceptional mobilisation for the good, as people battled, violently and non-violently, for

freedom and its liberal democratic associates (Snow 2004:382). It has also been argued, in discussions around mobilisation, that grievances play an insignificant role since they are omnipresent and so do not act as a trigger (McCarthy and Zald 1977, in Snow 2004:382). Aligning these ideas to the framing process literature, as Snow (2004:386) has eloquently explained, added a further, and perhaps more useful dimension, to the understanding of ideology and how it may be used, or indeed, created, for the gain of one or another's agenda. This is something that may be relevant to this debate around the use of terminology, in that the government has defined the subject to be tackled, which reinforces its strategies to tackle it. But ultimately, "the adherence to an ideology that combines political and religious components to become an effective motivational factor is strengthened by the influence of other rational, emotional and identitarian variables" (Reinares et al 2008:14). That is to say that the wider context of an individual's life and experiences, their worldview, influences their interpretation of an ideology - something which the Neo-Weberian approach explains, but that Prevent does not acknowledge.

### ***Context is key***

This controversy around understanding is at the core of this paper's critique of Prevent. While Prevent acknowledges grievances are a factor in radicalisation, it fails to appreciate that these grievances influence interpretations of religion or ideology, and vice versa. Radicalisation is not caused by mere 'exploitation' by extremist ideology; it is about how people see the world because of how they have experienced the world. As Kundnani (2015:14, 25) highlights in his discussion around Crenshaw's theory on terrorism, there is a lack of contextualisation in contemporary thinking on radicalisation, and so he praises Gunning and Jackson's (2011:380) work for urging that any explanation that is ideational must "be meticulously contextualised, and the role of beliefs analysed rather than a priori assumed." The lack of holistic understanding or analysis that Prevent incorporates is undermining its potential for success. The "Euro-American secularist epistemologies," that cause laicism to be the cultural backdrop of British engagement with extremist ideology, means the government is perhaps falsely claiming to be objectively presenting extremism, or radicalisation – especially given the focus on Islam over other religions or ideologies – as the government struggles to comprehend or accept that "multiple modernities" may exist, in

which religion can play a key role in politics (Shakman-Hurd 2008:117-118; Thomas, S. M. 2005:21, 45). These epistemologies may be understood as Halliday's (2000:52) "hegemony" to control, what in this case is, Muslims. For Gramsci, "hegemony works by creating a cultural system that promotes consent and which serves to legitimate the position of the rulers" (Halliday 2000:61), which can clearly be linked to the "British value" of democracy. This is also largely in line with Foucault's ideas on governance, particularly if cultural hegemony is considered as that which makes the ways of the governors the ways of society, which further serves to reproduce those ways (Halliday 2000:61, 64).

These positivist ideas around secularism are deeply entrenched, dating back to the Treaty of Westphalia, and reinforced during the Enlightenment era, by philosophers including Weber, Durkheim, and Marx (Thomas, S. M. 2000:819; Gunning and Jackson 2011:375; Bellin 2008:316-317; Thomas, S. M. 2005:49). While these philosophers have some particularly interesting offerings on religion, for this paper it is more useful to take MacIntyre's (2000, in Thomas, S. M. 2005:216) lead and reject Enlightenment's assumptions on religion and rationality, turning instead to Lynch's Neo-Weberian approach. Lynch (2009:381) provides a theoretical understanding of "how religious adherents connect religious guidelines to moral action," incorporating the concepts of "common good" and "popular casuistry" into Weber's understanding of religious belief and economic, social, and political practice. In praising the approach, Sheikh (2012:377-378), in line with Gunning and Jackson's (2011:383) push for contextualisation, explains that in order to understand how religious doctrines are used and interpreted by different groups, one must look at the socio-political and economic contexts in which religious actors refer to ethnical constructs. An important focus in the study of radicalisation, and indeed of the imagery of a cosmic war that is part of the rhetoric of those wanting to draw young Muslims to Syria, should be "religious interpretations of social reality" (Sheikh 2012:379).

In line with postliberal theologian Lindbeck's "'cultural-linguistic' concept of religious doctrines" (Sheikh 2012:378), Lynch (2009:399) argues that "decisions about how to act ethically within a given religious tradition" are influenced by ideas about individual and common gain, which themselves are shaped by "intersubjective interpretations of religious rules and texts along with lived experience." It is not as simple as to say that "doctrines that justify religious terrorism legitimise large-scale violence" (Toft et al 2011:124-125) – a long-

standing idea grounded in much of the literature on religious terrorism in Western social science, which tends to express a causal relationship between religion and violence (Gunning and Jackson 2011:379). Philosophy's "linguistic turn," primarily through Constructivism, attributed to Wittgenstein's (1922, 1958, in Fierke 2007:311) influence, has contributed to a "new understanding of the relationship between language and reality" whereby interpretation is indispensable, as language is "embedded in social practice" (Rorty 1967, in Campbell 2007:209-210), "bound up in the world rather than a mirror of it" (Fierke 2007:173-174). This means religious doctrines can be interpreted differently by different people – an idea which Prevent does not seem to have engaged with. Scripture, as such, for Lindbeck (1984, in Gerrish 1988:92), functions "as the lens through which the world is viewed," in an "intratextual" theology, hence doctrines do not determine action (Lynch 2014:281). The government's understanding of terrorism is marred by its failure to try to understand how terrorists understand "their goals, values, and passions," which, while perhaps based on religious traditions, are interlinked with "identity, thought, and experience" (Thomas, S. M. 2005:89-90). The struggle that occurs between interpretation and action are constitutive, not discrete, and therefore not linear (Lynch 2014:283), which explains why the 'Conveyor Belt' theory is not complex enough to explain the radicalisation 'process'.

Lynch (2009:393) explains that, upon realising there is "evil and suffering in the world," religious doctrines can potentially "promote retreat from the world" and its injustices. This is critical for understanding some 'radical' or 'extreme' proponents of Islam, who encourage a withdrawal from Western norms or 'values,' such as democracy, on account of the West being the perpetrator of evil or suffering. However, not all groups or 'radicals' will read religious doctrines in this way, and this is a crucial point. What is considered a rational response is embedded in a particular community's concept of good (Thomas, S. M. 2005:90). As Esposito (1999:207) and Sedgwick (2010:481) note, misunderstanding that Islamic groups are very diverse and multi-issue has an impact on comprehending extremism. This has implications for identifying who is vulnerable to radicalisation, and has had a major effect on "dubious" counterterrorism policies, which ultimately calls for a "systematic critique" of "core claims" in the "'religious terrorism' model" (Gunning and Jackson 2011:370, 373-374). A Neo-Weberian analysis of the "current fascination with Islam in international politics" reveals that the use of homogenous terms 'Islam' or 'Muslim' is not reflective of the analysis

that should be being made, which is about the actions of particular groups to achieve certain aims, and what “repercussions” they have, undermining “non-analytical indictments of Islamists” such as “they hate our way of life” (Lynch 2009:402; Esposito and Mogahed 2007:35). The empirical support for religious terrorism is very inconsistent, but also the “inbuilt assumptions” of religious terrorism as a term “function to obscure ways in which religion, as a set of cultural-linguistic practices, could also be a ‘solution’ to terrorism” (Gunning and Jackson 2011:378, 382). As S. M. Thomas (2015:67) explains, using political theology to distinguish religious movements from secular ones ignores how “(secular) political philosophy...is itself a type of political theology,” thereby making it easier to “scapegoat” religious philosophies. The application of “religious” to extremism, or particularly terrorism, leaves questions unanswered, regarding how it can be distinguished from secular violence, and who has the legitimacy to do so (Gunning and Jackson 2011:370, 376).

Through the following sections, this paper will continue to highlight the importance of cultural-linguistic epistemology and contextualisation of interpretations, indeed the need to “(kick) the secularist habit” (Brooks 2003, in Thomas, S. M. 2005:7), while identifying where Prevent has failed to express an understanding of this importance, and what detrimental effects that has.

### **It's all in the ideology...Or is it?**

Prevent understands radicalisation to be “driven by ideology, by a number of people who set out to disseminate these ideologies, and by vulnerabilities in people which make them susceptible to a message of violence” (HM Government 2011:60). Those who set out to disseminate ideologies, “radicalisers,” intentionally “exploit grievances,” which, where Al Qa’ida-inspired terrorism is concerned, “include a perception of (UK) foreign policy, the experience of Islamophobia, and a broader view that the West is at war with Islam itself” (HM Government 2011:60). According to former PM David Cameron (2015, in Deardon 2015), “the root cause of the threat we face is the extremist ideology itself,” which is more resilient than the violent groups associated with it (HM Government 2011:62).

This focus on ideology however has been described as “dangerous and ill-informed” (Armstrong 2015, in Verkeik 2015). Ibrahim Mohamoud (2015, in Verkeik 2015), of advocacy group Cage,<sup>17</sup> has claimed, in line with work by Bjorgo and Horgan (2009, in Elshimi 2015a:210), that Prevent “has no peer-reviewed evidentiary basis showing a link between violence and ideology.” Ramzan (2015) on the other hand has said that “denying the role of ideology is absurd,” citing examples of young, middleclass Muslims, without apparent socio-economic concerns, who have fled to Syria to fight a violent jihad. The ideology is understood to be “based on a distorted interpretation of Islam, which betrays Islam’s peaceful principles, and draws on the teachings of the likes of Sayyid Qutb” (HM Government 2013:1-2). Successful radicalisation hinges on this narrative being attractive to and mobilising Muslims to participate in violence (Home Office 2009, in Githens-Mazer 2010a:48-49). The rhetoric that has been built throughout the development of Prevent therefore has expressed a need for a counter-narrative, which theologians and communities have a role in contributing to<sup>18</sup> (HM Government 2011:61). But, according to Murry (2010), the government was wrong to aim to tackle radicalisation by trying to create an Al Qa’ida counter-narrative, and that has contributed to Prevent’s failure, especially since this counter-narrative is essentially, poorly-defined, “British values” (Martin 2015:190, 196; Qureshi 2015:182). Moreover, heavy police involvement in something that theologians and communities are supposed to lead is blurring the lines between different strands of CONTEST, deepening the counter-productive nature of Prevent.

### ***Rebel Without A Cause***

A broader, and therefore better, understanding of radicalisation would look beyond ideology and give more attention to the fact young Muslims may feel as though they do not fit into British culture, that they are economically and socially marginalised, and disagree with foreign policy in the Middle East and elsewhere. While Prevent acknowledges grievances may have a part in radicalisation, these lived experiences are not taken seriously enough, since it has not been taken on board that they shape interpretation of religious doctrines, and

<sup>17</sup> Directly criticised by former PM Cameron (2015, in Deardon 2015), and co-founder of Inspire, Sara Khan (2015, in Preston 2015). Inspire tries to stop young girls especially travelling to Syria; work embodied in Khan’s (2015) open letter to all Muslim girls of the UK.

<sup>18</sup> An idea supported by Esposito (2011:390).

so have not been properly tackled. The government instead highlights its comfort zones of theology and psychology, often leaving radicals to be deemed “rebel(s) without a cause” (Sedgwick 2010:481; Kundnani 2012:6). David Cameron (2015) has said that, “it is a problem that so many see the West as an oppressor, and buy into the grievances, if not necessarily the violence,” somewhat in line with Juergensmeyer’s (2003:194) notion that terrorists buy into an “ideology that explains the source of their problems and gives them hope.” However, Prevent does not strive to really comprehend why this is the case, exemplified by the fact the strategy negates engagement with those it deems extremist. This, unfortunately, significantly hinders a comprehension of ideology through a Neo-Weberian lens.

Refraining from engaging with extremist groups was a key point of the 2011 Prevent that diverged from previous Labour strategies (HM Government 2011:60), part of Cameron’s “muscular liberalism” agenda (O’Toole et al 2015:10; Wintour 2011).<sup>19</sup> This paper deems the non-engagement approach problematic, agreeing with scholars such as Esposito (2011:379), and commentators such as Macleod (2016), who believe that extremist’s or potential extremist’s concerns must be identified and understood in order to combat terrorism. The need for good dialogue with extremists has also been expressed by David Anderson QC (2016b:24), Gunning and Jackson (2011:383), and Spalek and Lambert (2010:110), and is further supported by O’Toole et al’s (2015:10) research, highlighting the importance of working with “hardline” not just “cuddly” groups, if radicalisation is ever to be prevented.

Journalist, Todenhofe (2014, in Withnall 2014; 2015), is another proponent of this approach, hence why he travelled to Syria to spend time with ISIS members. Todenhofe (2015) found that Western members of ISIS had left their home countries because they felt discriminated against there, believe the Western wars in the Middle East are unfair and unjustified, and are told they are waging a historic war between good and evil. This is perhaps

<sup>19</sup> This is a reference to Cameron’s February 2011 speech at the Munich Security Conference. The move to “muscular liberalism” followed accusations of over-engagement and funding of extremists. Prevent had been deemed a “cash cow” for enterprising Muslim groups, who could receive funding for cohesion work, thereby undermining the success of Prevent, both in terms of securitising integration, and also creating resentment among those not able to access these communal projects, leading to a rise in ‘Islamophobia’ (Murry 2010; Brandon 2014; Stern and Berger 2015:248; Thomas, P. 2015b:42; Ramzan 2015; Hörnqvist and Flyghed 2012:330-331). Prevent itself reports that previous funds “inadvertently reached organisations that had extremist connections or held extremist views” (HM Government 2011:62), which it has been suggested included the Brixton-based Strategy to Reach, Empower and Educate programme for example (Martin 2015:197; Elshimi 2015a:208). The U-Turn on engagement is now having negative effects on an international scale however, as aid is being diverted away from Islamic charities engaged in crucial development and humanitarian work overseas, over fears that money is falling into the wrong hands (Wintour 2016).

the kind of rhetoric that a counter-narrative needs to be formed against, by theologians and communities, as it demonstrates the manipulation of religion. But by engaging with groups like ISIS, for the first time some of these fighters are being told they are important, that they have a purpose (Todenhofer 2015). Todenhofer has however faced some intense criticism for his journalistic approach, and for crossing the line between gaining an insight into ISIS and its members' motives, and marketing, glorifying even, the views of ISIS, for example by failing to apply perhaps necessary filters (Frankel 2014, in Taylor 2014; Bokhari 2015). It is precisely this idea though, that Todenhofer has tried to convey, albeit not entirely successfully, that the government should really be trying to tackle: giving everyone a sense of purpose in the UK. As Sageman (2013, in Hasan 2013) says, young people vulnerable to radicalisation need to feel that they have relevance within the "system." This relates to Juergensmeyer's (2003:191) notion of "symbolic empowerment," where young fighters search for the "fulfilment" they lack, in religious war – key for foreign fighters fleeing to Syria<sup>20</sup> (Mironova et al 2014). This may be understood as a contemporary conceptualisation of Durkheim's (2008:10) effervescence, embodying the "eminently social" nature of religion, especially since the goal is to build an Islamic State through jihad (Mironova et al 2014). As Sachedina (2001:121) has said though, "any jihad that leads to meaningless destruction of human life and ignores concerns for peace with justice is non-Koranic jihad,"<sup>21</sup> hence the need for theologians and religious scholars in building a counter-narrative.

<sup>20</sup> The result of spirituality crises for "Generation X" (Jensen 2009:223), and also for Millennials (Yingling 2015; Pew Research Center 2010). However, it is generally quite difficult to provide a specific demographic. A 2008 study by MI5's behavioural science unit found that "there is no easy way to identify those who become involved in terrorism in Britain" but found that that the majority are British nationals, largely in the UK legally (Travis 2008). Approximately 50% of these were born in the UK, and those that migrated in later life were more likely to have moved to the UK to study or for family or economic reasons, rather than to claim asylum from traumatic experiences or oppressive regimes, and became radicalised many years after arrival (Travis 2008). This adds rigour to the notion, as explored in section three, that more than a "British values" counter-narrative to extremist ideology is needed to prevent radicalisation, because it may be that British culture is not so universally attractive after all.

<sup>21</sup> In line with this, Saudi Arabia's top cleric, the grand mufti, Sheikh Abdulaziz Al al-Sheikh, has deemed ISIS and Al Qaeda "enemy number one of Islam" (Fraser 2014).

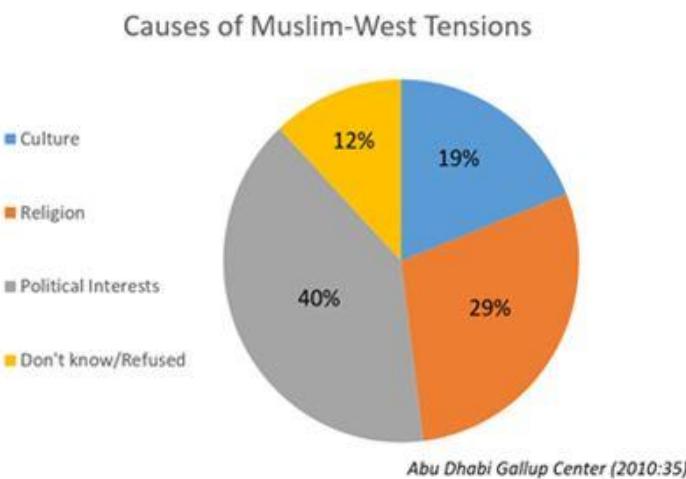
### ***Blame it on the politics***

There are claims from Fraser (2015b), who is supportive of Kundnani's work on Prevent, that at its core, Prevent fails to understand that radicalisation of young Muslims is all about politics, not Islamic theology as the government tends to focus on, emphasising the need to see radicalisation through Lynch's Neo-Weberian lens. This means the UK must face responsibility, and admit its role, historical and contemporary, in the horrors continuing to unfold in the Middle East (Fraser 2015b; Mohammed and Siddiqui 2013:6; Sageman 2013, in Hasan 2013; Edwards and Gomis 2011:14; Kilcullen 2016, in Dearden 2016). The 2013 Task Force "fails completely to address the foreign policy roots of extremist violence" (Bodi 2014:6), but "unresolved political problems" must be dealt with in order to tackle

radicalisation (Islam 2016, in Safi 2016; Sedgwick 2014; Pettinger 2016:92, 111), as highlighted in Figure 1.

Young British Muslims do not flee to Syria because of religion, Fraser (2015b) says, but rather "because they believe their tribe is under attack, that Bashar al-Assad is dropping chlorine gas, that the West invaded Iraq, because of torture and Guantánamo Bay." However,

**Figure 1**  
*A Gallup poll found that, in European countries, politics was considered the main cause of tension between the West and Muslims.*



Scott Appleby (2000:30) believes it is an error "to interpret acts of violence and terrorism committed in the name of religion as necessarily motivated by other concerns," and Hoffman (2006, in Gunning and Jackson 2011:371) goes as far to say that "the religious imperative...is the most important defining characteristic of terrorist activity today." Research by MI5 however has actually shown that religious identity "protects against violent radicalisation" (Travis 2008), and Olivier Roy, as highlighted by Kundnani (2015:23; 2012:21) argues that "the process of violent radicalisation has little to do with religious practice...Salafism does

not necessarily lead to violence.” Interpretation of religious practice, or Salafism, is tied up in an individual’s, or a group’s, worldview.

As such, it may be the case that the government is trying to shift responsibility for radicalisation onto religion, or those associated with religion, but a move towards such scapegoating will greatly reduce the ability of Prevent to tackle the problem (Buzan et al 1998 and Lausten and Waever 2000, in Thomas, S. M. 2014:320; Fraser 2008). While Prevent acknowledges the importance of Western foreign policy in grievances claimed by Islamic extremists, and their interpretation of such policy as a ‘war against Islam’ (HM Government 2011:60), it does not truly acknowledge that the West may actually have a role to play in these grievances (Mohammad and Siddiqui 2013:7), or that, due to poor communication on the part of the UK, and US, acts that followed President Bush’s declaration of ‘War on Terror’ became synonymous for many with ‘war on Islam’ (Spalek and Lambert 2010:107).<sup>22</sup> Foreign policy is considered more of a perceived rather than a real grievance. But as Esposito and Mogahed (2008, in Esposito 2011:368) found,<sup>23</sup> reactions to the “invasion of Iraq underscored the influence of foreign policy on Muslim attitudes towards the West.” The controversy of Iraq, and the ‘war on terror’ rhetoric, is very important for a whole generation of young Muslims who have grown up knowing only conflict, whether physical or verbal, between states and Islamic non-state actors (McDonald 2011:179). The provocative and confrontational language of the Prevent strategy has not helped to ease the tension this has created however, overlooking the importance of the role played by cultural-linguistic epistemology among these young Muslims, with a 2006 counter-terrorism document referring to an engagement in the “battle of ideas” (HM Government 2006:2), and more recently David Cameron (2015) labelled counter-extremism a century-defining “generational battle.”

Former PM Cameron (2015, in Deardon 2015), and Quilliam’s Husain (2007:277), have also said that the “grievance justification,” whereby radicalisation or terrorism is attributed to emotions around “historic injustices and recent wars,” must be “challenged,”

<sup>22</sup> While the US and UK cannot always be spoken of synonymously, the critique on communications from ex-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mike Mullen, seems as apt for UK foreign policy as it does for US. Mullen (2009, in Shanker 2009) believes there must be more concern over what actions communicate, rather than how to communicate actions. Communication problems are actually policy and execution problems, argues Mullen (2009, in Shanker 2009), as difficulty arises when values or promises are not lived up to, discrediting the reputation of the US (or UK, as it may be). That this is a problem is heavily supported by Esposito and Mogahed’s (2007:28) research.

<sup>23</sup> Commendable poll of one billion Muslims worldwide.

primarily because 9/11 happened prior to the Iraq War. But this notion is clearly overlooking the argument regarding the “disease of Westoxification” (Esposito 1999:13; Bruce 2003:87), which Muslim populations worldwide have had to endure.<sup>24</sup> Prevent’s failure to allow space “to express strongly worded criticisms of foreign policies” is problematic (Kundnani 2015:28-29), as those who wish to express such opinions are viewed as extremists, not citizens exercising their rights to freedom of speech. This is both a problem for civil liberty, contradicting the notion of British values, as well as meaning a lack of contextualisation of grievances which undermines a good understanding of radicalisation.

### ***Identity Crises***

The application of a cultural-linguistic approach to grievances would provide a “richer, narrative conception” (Thomas, S. M. 2005:89) of grievances around identity, felt by young people forced to succumb to Western or British norms, and how these lead to violence, and the importance of making this link, can be further comprehended by applying the New Wars theory (Kaldor 2013:2). Gunning and Jackson (2011:378) claim that “religious terrorist(s)” often conform “to the logic of asymmetric rather than cosmic warfare,” as acknowledged by Kaldor (2013:6). These “globalisation era” wars are fought in the name of identity, as a consequence of the loss of meaning (Kaldor 2013:2; Laïdi 1998:6; Esposito and Mogahed 2007:27). This is pertinent for young (and old) Muslims in Britain, who feel pressure for example to frequent the local public house in the evenings with peers, despite often believing it is morally wrong to consume alcohol (Commission for Racial Equality 2006:27; Pew Research Center 2013b:76). Discrimination around this topic is particularly an issue in working-class communities in the UK, rather than among the middle-class, but has even led to Islamophobic-accusations that the increasing Muslim population in the UK is to

<sup>24</sup> The “disease of Westoxification,” to varying extents, has been blamed by some for family breakdowns and increasing promiscuity, among other things associated with ‘modern’ secular society (Esposito 1999:13; Esposito and Mogahed 2007:38). This has had such an effect that where Muslims are a minority, they can be expected to seek “a degree of regional autonomy that permits them to live as if they were in a Muslim state” (Bruce 2003:188), which, according to Bellin (2008:336) is demonstrated in the way Muslim groups have used the decentralised UK education system to pass decisions that would not necessarily be accepted nationally. This links to Kepel’s (2004:193) point that political, economic and social criticisms in the name of Islam is a direct challenge to the nature of Western modernity exported worldwide, or to what Rancière (2009:95) has identified as a challenge to oligarchic democracies.

blame for closures of public houses (Worrall 2015).<sup>25</sup> Despite data showing a causal relationship between rising numbers of Muslims in the UK and pub closures being non-existent (Worrall 2015), it does not stop Muslims feeling persecuted in their own communities.<sup>26</sup> Islamic ideology then has the potential to “superficially” quench the “thirst for identification” and acceptance among Muslims (Laïdi 1998:5), offering “a sense of...fraternity and cultural values that offset the psychological dislocation and cultural threat” of an environment which does not seem to accommodate norms outside of the secular or vaguely-Protestant liberal democratic mainstream (Esposito 1999:14). The reasons behind why Muslims feel they have a conflictual relationship with the state (Toft et al 2011:135) are not adequately explored by Prevent,<sup>27</sup> due to a lack of contextualisation, which is the result of the non-engagement approach.

### ***Money worries***

Poverty and unemployment are often the grievances cited by those who argue that ideology is not at the heart of radicalisation. But a multifaceted path to radicalisation exists, and so we need to look beyond economics for why, as S. M. Thomas (2015:71) has highlighted, terrorists claim victimhood as a justification for violence, a notion heavily supported by Esposito and Mogahed’s research (2007:31). Nevertheless, economics should not be overlooked completely. While Mottram’s (2007:50) analysis found that people from the UK drawn into terrorism are not generally disadvantaged in terms of education or employment, research by Briggs and Birdwell (2009, in Ali 2015:141) found that “Muslims are the most disadvantaged faith group in the British labour market,” given that unemployment is three times more likely than for the majority Christian group, and “almost one-third of Muslims of working age have no qualifications, the highest proportion for any faith group.” This is in line with Juergensmeyer’s (2003:195) argument that often extremist movements are about “relative deprivation” rather than “extreme poverty.”

<sup>25</sup> Detailed accounts of online and off-line anti-Muslim attacks in *Tell MAMA* study (Awan and Zempi 2015).

<sup>26</sup> Including Muslim students who fear being blamed for alcohol limits on campus (Davis 2012).

<sup>27</sup> Prevent in itself may be considered an ironically counter-productive title. Given that the PM’s Task Force (2013:1-2) notes there are difficulties, regarding identity, of being a young Muslim in Britain today, the negative connotations of the term ‘prevent’ is an inherently counter-productive title for a strategy that has a focus on aiming to reconcile these difficulties. A successful strategy should distance itself from this title (Thomas, P. 2015b:50), and move towards something more positive and encouraging.

Khattab (2016, in Cole 2016) believes though that Islamophobia plays a big role here, causing Muslims to fall into “the lowest stratum within the country’s racial or ethno-cultural system.” Nawaz (2009) has said however that while Muslims generally come from “less-affluent areas of the UK,” it has nothing to do with their faith, but with “other socioeconomic factors” which white working-class people are also facing. This notion is in line with Sageman’s (2004 and 2008, in Kundnani 2012:14) rejection of the primacy of economic, and even political, grievances, because these “affect millions of people, whereas only a small number become terrorists.” Sageman (in Kundnani 2012:14) rejects a focus on religious ideology on similar grounds though, arguing instead for analysis on how “terrorists interpret the structural conditions with which they are confronted and how they attempt to forge a common struggle in response.” This interpretation is supported by Wiktorowicz (2005, in Kundnani 2012:17), Bhavani et al (2005, in Abbas 2012:356), as well as Jayaweera and Choudhary (2008, in Abbas 2012:356), and reinforces the importance of Lynch’s Neo-Weberian approach.

### Cohesion and Contradictions.

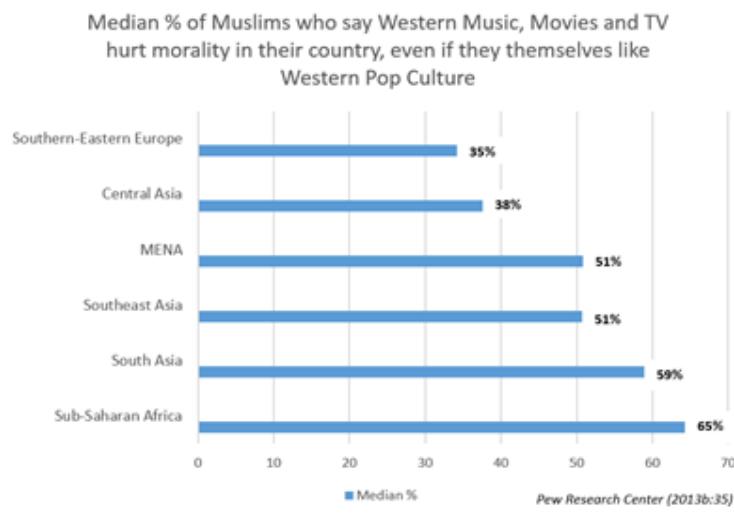
Prevent states there is evidence<sup>28</sup> to suggest that an association exists “between support for terrorist violence and a rejection of a society where ethnic and faith groups mix easily and trust one another – a society which is cohesive and integrated” (HM Government 2011:61). Regarding the tick-list of items that may make someone “vulnerable to radicalisation,” Prevent adds here that “communities who do not (or in some cases feel they cannot) participate in civic society are more likely” to be susceptible, and as such, “a stronger sense of belonging and citizenship makes communities more resilient to terrorist ideology” (HM Government 2011:61; 2013:4).

In stating that marginalised people often come to support terrorism, there is an inherent assumption made by the government that integration, or social cohesion, can be a means of discouraging radicalisation. However, what the government has failed to consider is the attractiveness of British culture, or British values, that they aim to integrate the marginalised into, briefly touched on in the previous section, and complimented by Figure 2.

<sup>28</sup> Unfortunately, unreferenced.

**Figure 2**

*This Pew survey of Muslims demonstrates Western culture is not as universally attractive as it may be advertised.*



When former PM Cameron (2015) said that, “Islamist extremists don’t just threaten our security, they jeopardise...our successful multi-racial, multi-faith democracy,” he is making a presumption of ‘success’ which perhaps he should not, given that so many minority groups have long expressed extensive grievances (Commission for Racial

Equality 2006:27).<sup>29</sup> A secular, liberal, individualist society is not always what everyone wants, indeed it is very different to some community-focused Asian cultures (Diokno 2000:74), although Laïdi (1998:147) contends the incompatibility of communitarianism with a market-oriented UK. Nevertheless, as counter-terrorism policymakers and practitioners seek out the “parentage” and try to retrace the “genealogy” (Kepel 2004:11) of the movements they are trying to diminish, they may need to look in the mirror of radicalisation at their own reflections.

### ***British Values***

Critics believe the specific theory of change that assumes not adhering to “British values” can lead to terrorism (Kundnani 2015:37) is worrying, even “absurd” (Faris 2015, in Preston 2015), given how vague the term is.<sup>30</sup> The overly-simplistic understanding of ‘extreme,’ and focusing on the importance of ideas rather than wider socio-political factors, as recommended by Lynch, has led to claims by the MCB and Ramadhan Foundation that Prevent is encouraging a McCarthyist society, and its failure to engage properly with the

<sup>29</sup> “Westoxification” is part of this wider problem.

<sup>30</sup> See section one. Also ambiguous considering how ‘values’ have changed overtime to outlaw slavery, decriminalise same-sex relationships – or even introduce ‘democracy’ (Fraser 2015c).

Muslim community is further marginalising this group (Travis 2015).<sup>31</sup> Kundnani (2012:16) and Mohammad and Siddiqui (2013:7-8), have also noted how the ideological battle against radical Islamism has become the new anti-communism, with ‘moderates’ deemed the 21<sup>st</sup> century version of the 1950s’ non-communist Left. S. M. Thomas (2005:48) has referenced Almond’s question from as far back as 1950, “why were people attracted to communism” as the older model of today’s question, “(why are people) attracted to religious extremism,” and this mindset, these questions, are prominent today among academics and practitioners alike.<sup>32</sup> As such, Bodi (2014:12) has expressed concerns that the strategy gives legitimacy to “witch-hunts” directed at Muslim-led organisations, which perpetuates “vulnerability” to radicalisation, as people turn to alternative processes following exclusion from the mainstream (Sedgwick 2010:491).

The notion that there is a link between violent extremism and a rejection of British values has been influenced by the arguments of, for example, Quilliam’s Husain (2007:271),<sup>33</sup> but this notion counters Prevent’s legitimacy – particularly around the idea of British values. On the one hand these values incorporate “mutual respect and tolerance,” yet Prevent sets out that no platform can be given to anyone voicing an opinion pro-something-different-to-the-mainstream (HM Government 2015c:7, 21). A Foucauldian lens sees the government trying to align “practices of the self” with government’s practices (Dean 1997, in O’tolle et al 2015:5) which will only serve to perpetuate radicalisation, as youth become disillusioned with the ‘policing’ approach. It must be remembered, as S. M. Thomas (2000:841) has noted, “there is a close relationship between religious freedom and political freedom, and religious toleration often has been the beginning of political toleration, civil society, and democracy,” demonstrating the importance of not marginalising religion, especially a particular religion, if the kind of society the UK government claims to desire is to be realised. Kundnani (2015:27), supported by Anderson (2015:58-59) and Mohammad and Siddiqui (2013:5), is also critical of

<sup>31</sup> The Labour government requested the establishment of the Muslim Council of Britain in 1997, to make it easier to govern Muslim groups (Ali 2015:149). “Serious epistemic and institutional challenge” followed, “when discussing the nature of the Muslim communities’ problems,” as governments over the past 19 years have failed to comprehend the communities’ diversity (Ali 2015:149; Dathan 2015). This has been part of what Ali (2015:140) has described as efforts to establish a ‘Muslim community’ of Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Somali descendants, in order to determine this “the site of radicalisation in need of governmental reform,” drawing on Foucault’s (2007) work on governmentality. This links back to the idea in the introduction of “predictive power” being key to strategy implementation.

<sup>32</sup> For example, Hoffman and Kilcullen, in Packer (2006), and Laïdi (1998:5).

<sup>33</sup> See Table A.

this move towards what has been considered a form of censorship, noting that the liberal values of Britain should mean “governments not deciding that certain ideas are too dangerous for citizens to express.” Again, the contradictory nature of this approach may be considered part of the wider socio-political factors that influence certain interpretations of religious doctrines, which may motivate violence. Mohammad and Siddiqui (2013:50) believe that the theory and operation of Prevent “violates individual liberty,” providing the state with “unrestricted intrusive powers.” As such, Ali (2015:144), drawing on Foucault, has demonstrated how these intrusive powers are “part of a wider logic of governing,” whereby liberal ideas are “complicit in...illiberal practices.” The government seems to be willing to compromise on all its core values to pursue this contradictory agenda (Hussain 2016), despite David Cameron (2015, in Deardon 2015) claiming that these “liberal values” are the “strongest weapon” the UK has against the threat of extremism and terrorism. Even the mere thought of Prevent, and its leaning towards an introduction of “thought policing,” based on the ‘Conveyor Belt’ theory, should “send a shiver down the spine of any liberty loving individual,” according to Ahmed (2015).

Martin (2015:203), Miller et al (2015), Elshimi (2015a:216), and Mohammad and Siddiqui (2013:7), have expressed concern that Prevent serves to de-politicise dissent, recording it instead as vulnerability or a future violent threat. Prevent as such is encouraging self-censorship, and stunting dialogue between families, friends, and communities (Bowcott 2016; Price 2016) – dialogue which is crucial if “illegitimate political violence” is to be diminished (Kundnani 2009:6). Steinem (2016, in Clark 2016), Chakrabarti (2016:32), Bartlett and Birdwell (2010:4), Kundnani (2015:7), Sageman (2013, in Hasan 2013), and Neumann (2015, in Khaleeli 2015) are among those advocating a counter-narrative which involves discussion, and equal time for all voices, rather than trying to silence, and further provoke, those which could be dangerous. As Cavanagh (2011) concludes in his critique of Prevent, “it could have unhappy consequences for freedom of speech and thought,” which is even more prevalent now, following the release of the Prevent Duty. Despite the fact the Prevent Duty claims it is not aiming to stop the debate of controversial issues (HM Government 2015b:5), institutions subject to the Duty, including universities and schools, must try to ‘prevent’ opposition to British values, and so should not provide a platform for anyone who offers ideas for a system that does not correlate with democracy for example,

hence why Prevent has been met with particular backlash from academia (University of Bath Students' Union 2015; MacDonald 2016, in Adams 2016a; Durodie 2016:25).<sup>34</sup> Critics have said the Duty expects school teachers to be "the eyes and the ears of the state," reporting children for having views in support of a free Palestine for example (Hooper 2015),<sup>35</sup> and this contradiction between the freedom of British values and the condemning of 'inappropriate' views is counter-productive, particularly, as Gunning and Jackson (2011:382) highlight, "securitising religious practices, banning particular websites, preachers and texts and profiling individuals on religious grounds," serve to create an atmosphere of suspicion that undermines Prevent.<sup>36</sup> In a recent report by Quilliam though, there appears to be a move away from neoconservative traditions, as the government is urged to adopt Quilliam's "human-rights based definition and approach to extremism" (Russell and Theodosiou 2015:4). This may be a good start for reconciling Prevent, as not only will it hopefully move away from contradictory definitions, but if properly taken on board, should serve to look at the wider factors of human rights, beyond freedom of speech, and, as advocated thus far, deeper contextualisation can only help understand the problem of radicalisation.

### *Community Spirit*

In order to achieve a British 'society' in which everyone adheres to these "British values," Prevent is dependent "on a successful integration strategy," but, crucially, this will not deliver Prevent objectives, and neither is Prevent a community integration strategy (HM Government 2011:59, 61). The aim here is not to securitise community cohesion, the idea behind which is inevitably influenced by the Copenhagen School's Securitization theory, and particularly the idea of a speech act, whereby something that was not a security issue is made

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<sup>34</sup> HJS's Sutton (2015a:8) poses however that much university backlash, particularly from students, is influenced by 'extremists' which Prevent aims to protect people from.

<sup>35</sup> Kenny (2015, in Hooper 2015), of the National Union of Teachers (NUT), has said police have advised teachers to "keep an eye" on children who attend demonstrations against Gaza bombings, or who believe the West is at war with Islam. Kundnani (2009:7) argues that "to turn public services into instruments of surveillance only serves to alienate young people from institutional settings that would otherwise be well-placed to give them a sense of trust and belonging." At the NUT annual conference of March 2016, teachers voted overwhelmingly to reject Prevent, a motion moved by Kenny and carried by NUT Secretary General (Adams 2016b). Quilliam and HJS have argued more training for teachers is what is really needed though (Russell and Theodosiou 2015:5; Sutton 2015b).

<sup>36</sup> Also expressed by Combes (2013).

into one by the words of politicians – a causal relationship between “saying” and “doing” (Sheikh 2012:383). The Copenhagen School however consider Western foreign policy to have “securitised” religion, by intersubjectively creating “religious violence” as a “social fact” that needs to be dealt with in extraordinary ways, legitimating “controversial” counter-terrorism practices (Buzan et al 1998, and Lausten and Waever 2000, in Thomas, S. M. 2014:320). Despite recognising the importance of not securitising integration, the government has not been entirely successful in stopping an overlap of anti-radicalisation and social cohesion efforts, as respondents in O’Toole et al’s (2015:4, 15) study on the matter expressed, concurring with findings by Husband and Alam (2011) and P. Thomas (2012), as well as ICSR (2009) and ACPO (2009, in Thomas, P. 2015b:45).<sup>37</sup> P. Thomas (2015a:169, 177) argues Prevent is undermined by significant securitisation of “the national and local state’s relationships with British Muslim communities.” Some argue social cohesion will be further jeopardised if the government continues to target violent and non-violent ‘extremists’ alike, as it is both “morally reprehensible” and “hugely counter-productive” to treat “law-abiding Muslim citizens as a subversive threat” (Githens-Mazer and Lambert 2009).

Ultimately, in aiming to understand the roots of extremism and radicalisation, Prevent’s poor definitions and failure to consider the importance of cultural-linguistic epistemology, the result of and perpetual justification for not engaging with extremists, means it is actually widening “the schism between the ‘Muslim’ us and the British ‘other’” (Hoque 2015 in Gardner 2015). While Prevent has produced “some positive results” (Thomas, P. 2015a:169), overall its approach has exacerbated community cohesion problems that it was in part meant to fix.

### **Channelling Success?**

The Channel programme is a key counter-narrative initiative of the government’s, constituting a “multi-agency approach to identify and provide support to individuals,” based on specific needs, “who are at risk of being drawn into terrorism” (HM Government 2015a:3, 5). Channel is deemed “appropriate” for anyone who may be vulnerable to becoming involved in any kind

<sup>37</sup> Also, individuals and communities targeted based on “Muslim-ness” is counterproductive to cohesion and acceptance (Iacopini et al 2011, in Thomas, P. 2015b:46; Tembo 2014:81).

of terrorism, aiming to address vulnerabilities that can be exploited by radicalisers, but, crucially, all involvement is voluntary (HM Government 2015a:5, 6). The government claims to have “worked with 50 different faith groups and...over 250 Mosques” through Channel (Tucker-Jones 2015), leading supporters to praise the “grassroots” approach (Combes 2013). Initially piloted in 2007, in Lambeth, South London, and in Northwest England’s Preston, Channel was rolled out across England and Wales in April 2012, and aims to “protect vulnerable people” by identifying those at risk, assessing that risk, and developing a subsequent support plan for individuals (HM Government 2015a:5; Griffith-Dickson et al 2014:31).

Critics have argued however that Channel is not proportionate or realistic as too many people are being referred who do not require the specific ‘anti-radicalisation’ help that it offers, such as a three year old child (Khaleeli 2015; Geigner 2015; Bolton 2015). In interviews conducted by Elshimi (2015a:212), de-radicalisation practitioners gave 28 different ways of referring to what de-radicalisation is or means, demonstrating a lack of clarity. Moreover, Channel “widens the definition of suspicion beyond criminality to much vaguer notions” (Kundnani 2015:15), causing increased feelings of suspicion-induced marginalisation among Muslim communities, sometimes deeming Channel “anti-Islamic,” thereby further causing them to be ‘vulnerable’ to those groups who may seemingly offer greater acceptance (Miller and Sabir 2012:12; Mohammad and Siddiqui 2013:13; MCB 2015; Price 2016). This representation of Muslims as “risky” and “at risk” (Heath-Kelly 2012, in Blackbourn et al 2012:7), perhaps perfectly exemplified by the case of Umm Ahmed (Qureshi 2015), is confusing and, as such, counterproductive.

The Home Office (2015, in Verkeik 2015) has hit back at criticisms, particularly around referral, stating that, without any other of the twenty-two indicators that make up the guidance on a referral to Channel, the “outward expression of faith” does not constitute a referral. Given the broad-ranging and generic nature of the other indicators<sup>38</sup> however, it is likely very easy to pair this factor with several others, in order to constitute a referral. Figures cited by Mohammad and Siddiqui (2013:13) believe that this has been the case, as “of the 2653 referrals (between 2006 and 2013) only 587 were actually assessed, meaning 78% of referrals did not need any assessment,” suggesting Channel “lacks clarity” and is “far too

<sup>38</sup> Refer back to section one.

widely applied.” These figures are on the rise however, in light of the recent wave of attacks across Europe, leading the government to encourage a greater crackdown on any potential threats in the UK, particularly through the Prevent Duty. In 2015, 3,955 were reported to Channel, a vast increase from the 1,681 reported in 2014, according to figures from the National Police Chiefs Council (Halliday 2016). A significant proportion of these referrals were children. In the West Midlands for example, 468 of the 788 referrals were aged 19 or under, with 68 of those aged nine or under, often referred by education or youth leaders who have been almost forced into an environment of fear, meaning hyper-awareness often leads to misinterpretations of a child’s behaviour (Halliday 2016). Nationally, of the 3,955 referrals in 2015, 415 were under the age of ten, and 1,424 were aged between 11 and 15 (Halliday 2016).

Channel is “under-researched and understudied” (El-Said 2015, in InfoWars 2015), lacking “independent and rigorous assessment,” with a worryingly “flimsy” evidence-base (Elshimi 2015b:111-112) for the programme’s ability to deradicalise. This hugely undermines the programme’s legitimacy, as well as opportunity for success – both of which may be in a better position if Prevent appreciated the importance of contextualisation, rather than focusing on ideology as the root cause of radicalisation. Hirschfield et al (2012:8) highlight that “systematic data analysis” in literature on radicalisation or de-radicalisation is scarce, as is empirical data, which means a lack of reliable evidence on what prevention programmes are likely to be effective. Moreover, in interviews conducted by Hirschfield et al (2012:10), mixed opinions were expressed regarding whether projects were actually reaching those at greatest risk of violent extremism.

### ***Reducing support?***

To return to the aims the government hopes to achieve through programmes like Channel, as set out in section one, the first is to reduce “support for terrorism of all kinds” in the UK (HM Government 2011:60). The government cites the success of “prevention and support programmes” like Channel, suggesting they would continue to be successful after the 1000+ people who had engaged with these interventions up until 2011 had not “reverted to terrorist related activity (HM Government 2011:60, 65), and indeed since then, MI5’s Andrew Parker (2013, in Laville 2013) has revealed thirty-four terrorist plots targeted at the UK,

mostly by UK citizens, were stopped between 2005 and 2013. However, this actually appears to suggest that the government and supporting services have demonstrated good use of intelligence and crime prevention, rather than actually *reduced support* for terrorism, as intended. Rather than stopping radicalisation as such, the government has focused on stopping violent attacks, which, while of paramount importance, is the aim of other strands of CONTEST, not Prevent (Kundnani 2015:37). According to Brandon (2014) and Tucker-Jones (2015) greater emphasis on policing demonstrates that the UK has given up trying to stop jihadists from being created. Tembo (2014:130-131) on the other hand does not agree that all is lost, arguing that a re-direction of investment from other CONTEST strands into Prevent is both vital and realistic, since in the long run, a successful Prevent will render the other strands unnecessary. This is perhaps the idea behind the move to target extremism rather than only violent extremism, but the government is not approaching this in the right way. Limiting human rights will not stop terrorism. Addressing wider socio-political grievances on the other hand may change potentially dangerous interpretations of religious doctrines. Conducting sentencing that is considered highly unjustified however, such as in the case of Umm Ahmed, who was arrested and sentenced for possession of terrorist material - the magazine *Inspire*, which she had been reading in an attempt to better understand the criminal case her brother was involved in concerning a terrorism charge (Qureshi 2015:185) - will only serve to enhance these grievances.

### ***Providing the mood music<sup>39</sup>***

This links to the second success criteria, that of ensuring “more effective challenge to those extremists whose views are shared by terrorist organisations and used by terrorists to legitimise violence” (HM Government 2011:60). The Prevent Duty is key to this, but by limiting the ideas that can be given a platform, an “effective challenge” to these views is not provided – censorship is not a means by which to stop ideas legitimising violence, and does not provide a good balance between civil liberties and national security.<sup>40</sup> A well-researched, intelligent and convincing, positive counter argument is what needs to be delivered in the face of these ideas. Perhaps some inspiration can be taken from the Danish ‘Aarhus Model’, a de-

<sup>39</sup> Taken from Husain, in Githens-Mazer and Lambert (2009).

<sup>40</sup> Which the government aims to do (HM Government 2011:67).

radicalisation programme focusing on talking through ideas and beliefs, and learning how to articulate and defend them in an intelligent manner (Mansel 2015).<sup>41</sup> Participants of the scheme have described how they view their position within the “system” more favourably after talking through their ‘radical’ ideas and the wider implications of them (Mansel 2015) – unknowingly advocating a Neo-Weberian lens through which to view radicalisation. McDonald (2011:186) has praised interventions by Muslim youth workers in the UK regarding discussions of identity, but there has only really been local success thus far, rather than national (Carlile 2016:2). Hans Bonte, Belgian mayor and creator of the ‘Vilvoorde method’ of de-radicalisation, believes it is important to focus on local successes though, in order to tackle the global problem (Marsden, W. 2015; Bonte 2015, in Cendrowicz 2015). As such, Prevent would do well to encourage discussion, rather than use “disciplinary technology,” whereby subjects, through surveillance, go through a process of “normalising judgement” (Foucault 1991, in Elshimi 2015b:120). This is particularly true for cases that have been blown out of proportion, such as Umm Ahmed’s, where the stated threat is much greater than the likely threat, and there is a misunderstanding of motive, or even action, because of what can be seen as cultural ignorance on the part of the government and supporting services, be they the police or Channel officers (Qureshi 2015:186, 189). Not only does this have negative repercussions for the person involved in the deradicalisation interventions, but it also serves to deepen the inability of the government to appreciate that action and belief is dependent on worldview, and offering a fellow prisoner some dates to eat during Ramadan does not necessarily equate to building an association with another terrorist, as it was noted by intervention officers that Ahmed did (Qureshi 2015:189).

### ***Intruding on Internet Imams***

The final aim of Prevent is to ensure “more challenge to and isolation of extremists and terrorists operating on the internet” (HM Government 2011:60), in light of it being “widely assumed<sup>42</sup> that the internet plays a particular role as a tool of radicalisation” (Behr et

<sup>41</sup> Model’s concept deemed successful by Liht and Savage’s (2013:44-45) research, which highlights importance of discussing exploitable grievances as well as religious beliefs, inspired by Isaiah Berlin’s work on human values.

<sup>42</sup> Aly (2010), Awan (2007), Friedland (2009), O’ Rourke (2007), and Tucker (2010) – all in Behr et al (2013:xi); (HM Government 2006:10); Brandon (2008); Juergensmeyer (2003:197).

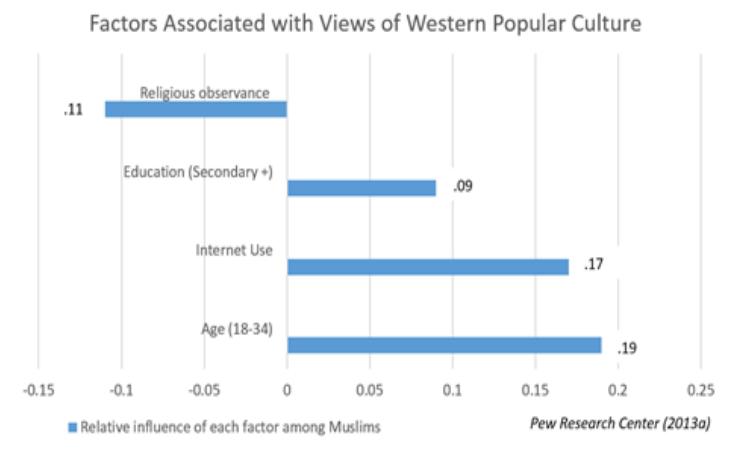
al 2013: xi). While the PM's Task Force boasted that "over 18,000 items of online terrorist propaganda" had been removed (HM Government 2013:1), which escalated to 75,000 in the following two years (Tucker-Jones 2015), the mishaps the government has been involved in regarding online material cannot be disregarded, particularly the detention of Rizwaan Sabir for possessing Al Qa'ida material for his masters research – downloaded from a US government website (Curtis and Hodgson 2008).

However, Behr et al (2013:xi) found that the internet creates more opportunities to become radicalised, and acts as an echo chamber for extremist ideas, but it does *not* accelerate the process of radicalisation, allow the process to occur without human interaction, or increase opportunities for self-radicalisation.<sup>43</sup> If the internet is a mere "echo chamber," reducing material available online will not be enough to tackle radicalisation or indeed violent acts,<sup>44</sup> highlighting the importance of providing an intellectual challenge, and even perhaps giving more attention to the

internet as a force for 'integration,' supported by Figure 3.

**Figure 3**

Pew found internet use made Muslims' perceptions of Western culture more favourable; perhaps more focus should be on outputting positive messages online, rather than simply reducing negative content.



<sup>43</sup> The result of "good research" (Francis 2014).

<sup>44</sup> Anderson (2016b:27) has urged for more work to be done in collaboration with social media companies including Facebook and Twitter in order to seriously combat this issue. Decker (2014:196) has criticised Bjorgo's (2013) Strategies for Preventing Terrorism for failing to address this, arguing that "developing a coherent policy to address the role of internet chat rooms, terror web sites and other forms of online terror activity should be a high priority." Sara Khan (2015, in Preston 2015) is also a proponent for internet reform, to tackle the "pyramid approach" (Marsden, W. 2015) to recruitment. Atran (2010, in Kundnani 2015:22) has said however that Internet Imams, such as Anwar al-Awlaki, do not 'radicalise', they are merely "attractors" for those who have already decided to take this certain path, although in terms of ISIS propaganda, such figures may "catalyse the Islamist extremist's passage from tacit supporter to active member" (Winter 2015:6).

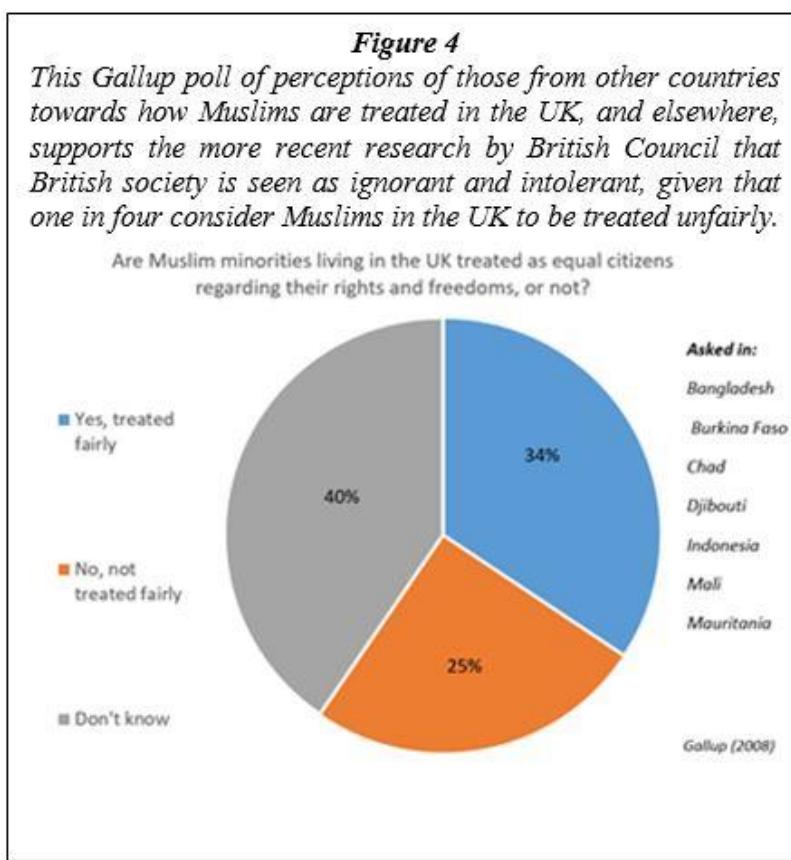
### ***Increasing rigour***

Despite the aims that have been set out, as Christmann (2012, in Powers 2013:19-20) has rightly said, it is “exceedingly difficult to gauge the real success of Prevent,” as there are very few tools “to measure one’s vulnerability to becoming involved in extremism and the effect certain programmes may have at reversing such processes.” More rigour must be introduced into Prevent success criteria, especially the effectiveness of Channel-like initiatives (Christmann 2012, in Powers 2013:19-20; Hirschfield et al 2012:12), and Prevent must also be held more accountable on issues of transparency (Ganesh 2016:9; Khan 2016:6; Kundnani 2009:6). A lack of transparency, according to David Anderson QC (2016a:3), “encourages rumour and mistrust to spread and to fester.” Openness around funding is a particular issue (Mohammad and Siddiqui 2013:23), exemplified by the fact Prevent money was used to fund ‘Project Champion’ which placed secret CCTV cameras in Muslim areas of Birmingham (Tucker-Jones 2015; BBC News 2011; McDonald 2011:180; Lewis 2010).<sup>45</sup> In light of the need for the government to be able to “defend its policy more robustly” (Ramzan 2015) then, David Anderson QC (2016a) has pushed for an independent review of Prevent as a whole, the case for which Miller and Massoumi (2015) say “has never been stronger.”

While little has yet to be officially released on the matter, the government are planning to introduce a new deradicalisation scheme to build on Channel, which it deems largely successful, aimed at those “further down the path to radicalisation” (HM Government 2016:16). This scheme will offer support that is more intensive, and, where the law allows, mandatory (HM Government 2016:16), targeted perhaps towards those returning to the UK from Syria, or those who have not yet left the UK but support terrorist ideologies (Ross 2016). Considering the lack of Channel’s success however, laid out above, many are sceptical of the success this new programme will bring, and there is considerable concern around further opaqueness and other human rights issues, particularly as this had been introduced without any consultation or discussion (Hooper 2016). While intentions may be good, with basic definitions still struggling for clarity, and, as has been argued, policymakers still struggling with understanding that interpretations are not universal but in fact very subjective, at present the success of the new scheme is doubtful.

<sup>45</sup> Covert activity is not under Prevent’s remit.

**Conclusion: What now? Better remedies for prevention.**



This paper supports the proposal for an independent review of Prevent, out of which should really come new success criteria to more effectively evaluate Prevent. The strategy, and decision-making around it, should be more evidence-based, which perhaps means more funding for the Research Information and Communications Unit (RICU) of the Home Office's Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism (OSCT). In the meantime, some suggested improvements for

Prevent are laid out in the following paragraphs, highlighting the appreciation required for wider socio-political factors.

Prevent cannot be successful without engaging with extremists or radicals, and those “vulnerable” to their ideas. What the government should really be doing is investigating what these groups are saying is wrong with British society, why and how they are being marginalised or what their grievances are, and why they do not want to be integrated, or have failed to be so. A British Council (2014) study found “ignorance of other cultures,” “too nationalistic,” and “intolerance towards people from other cultures” were among the top five worst features of British culture, according to people from other countries, supported by Gallup research in Figure 4. At present, the continuation of Prevent rhetoric has potential to facilitate “a policy exchange of fears and beliefs across governance domains and entrench further a ‘politics of unease’ about Muslims in British society” (O’Toole et al 2015:15).

Rather than feeling victimised, like a constant suspect, or marginalised because of certain beliefs, everyone must feel relevant to and valued in the system, with the freedom and opportunities to feel fulfilled politically, socially, economically and spiritually, in a diverse yet inclusive mainstream, so long as their cultural norms and desires do not harm others.<sup>46</sup> In the words of President Obama (2015, in Marsden, W. 2015), governments must “assure every person has equal opportunity, a place in society and a future.”

Kundnani (2015:7), P. Thomas (2015a:170, 183) and Chapman (2016) go as far as to say that the government should end Prevent, to, in Kundnani’s words, “avoid nurturing a new generation of antagonised and disenfranchised citizens.” If the current programme is to be improved, Kundnani (2015:39) recommends the government publicly acknowledges that “British identity is continually reshaped” by all residents, and that foreign policy influences the context of terrorism, and, crucially, “enable spaces for wide-ranging discussions of religious ideology, identity and foreign policy, particularly among young people who feel excluded from mainstream politics.” Edwards and Gomis (2011:20) believe the fundamental goal to improve Prevent is to move away from the “‘them versus us’ approach,” to stop the trend of “alienation and isolation.”<sup>47</sup> As such, a clear distinction must be made between violent and non-violent extremists (Edwards and Gomis 2011:20), as well as removing the sense that Prevent is about intelligence gathering, in order to gain more trust from Muslim communities, in line with observations by Whewell (2013). Along with Ramadhan Foundation’s Mohammad Shafiq (2015, in Travis 2015), Edwards and Gomis (2011:20), highlight the importance of engaging the Muslim community through the formation of an improved strategy.

#### *A textbook example of how to alienate just about everybody<sup>48</sup>*

What also needs questioning is whether what is deemed as extremist is fair or realistic. As Lambert and Githens-Mazer (2009) have suggested, in line with think-tank Demos, the government needs to recognise the diversity of mainstream voices, because some it would

<sup>46</sup> In line with liberal principles (Fiss 2003:180).

<sup>47</sup> Identification of an “in-group” and “out-group” within UK exemplifies salience of this issue (MacDonald and Hunter 2013:136-137).

<sup>48</sup> Taken from Murry (2010).

label extremist, in the grand scheme of things, are actually rather moderate.<sup>49</sup> By engaging with a broader range of individuals who follow the teachings of Islam, perhaps more research could be done on concepts, and whether radicalisation is a really function of Islam, Islamism, Salafi-Jihadism, neo-Salafism, or something else entirely (Githens-Mazer 2010b:999). The latter may be the wider context through which young Muslims read Islam, Islamism etc., hence the need to appreciate Lynch's Neo-Weberian emphasis on cultural-linguistic epistemology. Careful steps must obviously be taken when engaging with a wider range of stakeholders, especially former extremists. This is a line that more are now advocating though, to use former extremists in deradicalisation schemes. Johnson (2009:30-31), along with El-Said (2015), suggests learning from successes around deradicalisation in Egypt particularly, as well as Yemen, stating, "if former Islamists cannot tackle the skewed religious and historical narratives then there is little hope for others to achieve this." Aslam et al (2016) have also highlighted some successes in this area in South-East Asian countries. S. V. Marsden (2015) has further acknowledged the use of former extremists in deradicalisation, but has importantly noted that, in terms of aiding reintegration during the deradicalisation process, consideration must be taken of the community into which an individual is being integrated back into, the significance of which perhaps former extremists would have greater practical appreciation of. Former member of Al-Muhajiroun, Adam Deen, is now an expert on deradicalisation strategies, and has placed emphasis on halting the normalisation of planning terrorist attacks for example, and needing a counter narrative that would make individuals rethink the religious narrative being pushed by groups like ISIS (Euronews 2016).

Such a strategy cannot be dictatorial however. Mohammad and Siddiqui (2013:54) are in agreement with Kundnani (2015:7) that "Prevent-style policies" are dangerously counter-productive, and believe that "instead of talking about foreign policy radicalising Muslims in the future we may well be talking about domestic policy radicalising Muslims." In order to "stay safe", a "less confrontational approach" must be taken, through reform of "thoughts, attitudes, and policing" (Hasan 2011; Kherbane 2015). Policymakers would do well to adhere to Hirschfield et al's (2012:12) push for Prevent-style projects to give young people "the ability to think independently and equip them with the cognitive tools needed to reflect

<sup>49</sup> The praise Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn received for his work, as MP, to oust extremists at Finsbury Park mosque (Githens-Mazer and Lambert 2009) suggests the approach could have been very different had there been more Left leadership since 9/11.

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critically upon extremist narratives and where necessary, challenge them directly.” Prevent should be more about educating and building resilient and articulate individuals with the ability to debate and discuss in a respectful, inquisitive and intelligent manner. This is a concept the ICSR and Club de Madrid, as part of a “global policy dialogue,” have urged world leaders to agree on and implement (ICSR 2015).

Everyone, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, must feel valued in their society, as though their opinions are respected, and that their grievances are both correctly understood and addressed, or at least discussed in a serious manner. While not writing specifically about Prevent, and indeed about the US rather than the UK, Esposito (2011:393) convincingly argues that,

“Looking to the future, a new paradigm is needed, one that sees beyond the smokescreen created by neoconservative and anti-immigrant ideologues, by Islamophobic experts and political commentators, and by autocratic rulers stressing the threat of global terrorism to repress any and all domestic opposition.”

Rather than, as this paradigm emphasises, focussing on ideas, ideology, and the radicalising nature of religious doctrines, a new paradigm would be a more effective lens through which to view, and make policies on, radicalisation, if it took on board the importance of lived experience in interpreting scriptures, appreciating the linguistic turn of philosophy that realised language is interwoven with worldviews.

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