Title: 'PREVENT Policing in Practice – The Need for Evidenced-based Research'

Abstract

This article examines the PREVENT agenda, part of the UK government's counter-terrorism strategy, CONTEST. Informed by semi-structured interviews conducted with a Special Branch PREVENT team, as well as individuals drawn from various security disciplines, this article highlights several practical barriers to realising collaborative counter-radicalisation. This is important given the third objective of PREVENT: to work with a wide range of institutions where there are risks of radicalisation. This article departs from analyses that have examined PREVENT in the context of suspect profiling; rather, the focus is on illuminating the implementation, (re)configuration and performance of PREVENT policing. The article concludes by advocating the necessity for evidence-based research - this proffers pragmatic implications for the governance of counter-terrorism.

Introduction

In 2017, the UK witnessed five successful domestic terrorist attacks over the course of six months; subsequently, critical understandings of counter-terrorism have reached a conjuncture. Pragmatically, Jeremy Corbyn's innocuous pronouncement that counter-terrorism is not working [i] (Mason and Stewart, 2017) draws renewed attention to the effectiveness of counter-radicalisation in the UK. Counter-radicalisation, that is, inhibiting the spread and influence of radicalisation and/or extremism is a core objective of the PREVENT programme defined as 'a multi-disciplinary, cross departmental strand of the government's CONTEST[ii] strategy intended to provide a holistic response to the full spectrum of terrorist risks and threats' (Innes et al., 2011: 11). Whilst PREVENT has been at the forefront of criticism since its implementation in 2006, the need to rethink the radicalisation agenda - as well as the entire

PREVENT strategy – has gained traction (see Pilkington, 2017; Open Society Foundation Justice Initiative, 2016).

This article, whilst not as severe in its critique, argues for the need to move beyond reactions to policing and PREVENT as a policy frame (see also Innes et al., 2017) and towards evidence-based research which evaluates *how* PREVENT is actualised, (re)configured and performed. Accordingly, the article purposively distances itself from analyses that examine PREVENT at community level in the context of efficacious suspect profiling; rather, the article focuses on PREVENT policing and collaborative counter-radicalisation, specifically, the third objective of PREVENT: 'to work with a wide range of institutions where there are risks of radicalisation' (HM Government, 2011b: 7; HM Government, 2012: 21). This is important for two reasons: first, whilst it is acknowledged that 'PREVENT is not a police programme' (HM Government, 2011a: 9), police authority members demonstrate high involvement in PREVENT. With few exceptions however, research has been slow to document the voices of PREVENT police officers at local level (see Innes et al., 2011, 2017; Lamb, 2012; Thomas et al., 2017). This relative invisibility is compounded by an almost entire omission of empirical studies which capture the experiences of police practitioners operating in a Special Branch capacity, particularly those working in constabularies defined by government funding structure as 'non-priority'.[iii]

Second, the revision of PREVENT in 2011 (as well as the implementation of the Counter-terrorism and Security Act [2015]), underpins (statutorily for specified authorities) the necessity of multi-institutional counter-radicalisation. However, as this article demonstrates, operationalising PREVENT as dispersed and multi-layered brings with it sites of resistance, dogmatism and fracture. This article therefore lends support to Fussey (2013: 356) who questions the extent to which 'ambitions for control are realised and the degree of coherency within coalitions of (counter-terrorism) practice'.

Methods, Data, and Structure

The data informing the analyses are derived from 21 qualitative (in-depth) semi-structured interviews with a PREVENT Police Team (PREVENT team hereafter) operating in a Special Branch capacity, as well as individuals drawn from security disciplines in an area defined by government funding structure as "non-priority". Interviews took place between 2013–2014,

as part of the author's Ph. D research; thus, the research is a secondary analyses of existing data (see Dresser 2015). The intensive data was generated from the PREVENT team through undertaking repeated interviews. The PREVENT team comprised of: a PREVENT Sergeant; a PREVENT (Police) Lead; a PREVENT Police Officer; and a Channel Officer. Subsequent interviews were conducted with a number of individuals that had extensive knowledge of PREVENT at local level, including: a PREVENT Sergeant from a neighbouring police force; neighbourhood police officers; a Youth Offending Team Case Manager; a Supported Housing Officer; a Local Housing Officer; a Community Safety Officer; a Community Engagement Officer; and a Channel Intervention Provider. The data derived from the aforementioned participants – considered an extended sample - was used to challenge or support the intensive data generated from the PREVENT team.

The PREVENT team were accessed on the basis of purposive sampling, whereas the extended sample adhered to snowball sampling, with a PREVENT (Police) Lead acting as Gatekeeper. Most interviews lasted around 1-hour, though some were considerably longer. Interviews were audio-recorded by Dictaphone with the handling of interview data adhering to the 1998 Data Protection Act. Data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase model of thematic analysis (see Braun and Clarke, 2006); as part of the process, individual participants, as well as the case study location were anonymised entirely.

Caution is anticipated regarding the sample size; however, the number of Special Branch officers working in constabularies considered non-priority is naturally fewer than priority-defined areas. Given the current dearth of research that has explored PREVENT from the insights of police practitioners (see Innes et al., 2011; Lamb, 2012), the case study site was driven by theory and policy relevance. Related to this, the data does not demonstrate validity in the positivist sense where the findings generate a blanket understanding that can be applied nationally, but considers the multiplicity of individual realities each with their own inherent validity (Ussher 1999). It is therefore more useful to interpret the data as *credible* rather than internally valid (Guba and Lincoln 1994). With this in mind, readers are encouraged to interpret the findings as '*exploratory* in ways that further analytical possibilities are opened up' (Dresser, 2015: 129, *emphasis in original*; see also Yin, 2009). What the data do afford is unique insight into the operations and performance of PREVENT at local level with greater applicability for police forces that share similar characteristics; thus, the research findings should be

interpreted as *instrumental* (Yin, 2009) in that they facilitate knowledge of PREVENT policing from the experiences of officers tasked with counter-radicalisation.

The article begins by outlining the policy development of PREVENT: from its initial iteration in 2006, to the revised PREVENT objectives as part of the Coalition government review in 2011. The article illuminates how counter-radicalisation is conceptualised, operationalised and (re)configured; more specifically, the purpose is to chronologically document the evolution of PREVENT in ways that pragmatically implicate collaborative counter-radicalisation. Following this contextual review, the article reflects upon the practical obstacles PREVENT police officers face whilst governing in a mutating, non-criminal space - that is, a security arena where individuals have not yet committed a crime but are deemed vulnerable to extremism. Whilst the data does not discredit the sanguinity of PREVENT as a 'whole society response', the research findings challenge the extent to which counter-radicalisation responsibilities are passively accepted, as well as resisted. The article concludes by positing the necessity for evidence-based research that examines *how* PREVENT is enacted and performed across (and within) institutional and professional settings.

PREVENT(ing) Radicalisation in the UK: Policy Development

Since 2006 the PREVENT strategy – as part of CONTEST – has been a central component of counter-radicalisation in the UK. In a pragmatic sense the conceptual underpinning of PREVENT is anticipatory and temporally pre-emptive given that it governs in a non-criminal space. This is explicit in the PREVENT strategy which states: 'They (programmes to support vulnerable people) should *pre*-empt and not facilitate law enforcement activity' (HM Government, 2011a: 8, 63). Accordingly, forestalling radicalisation and/or extremism foregrounds 'pre-thoughts' (Weber, 2007: 115) since PREVENT works with individuals that have not yet committed a crime but are deemed vulnerable or 'at risk' of radicalisation and/or extremism; as such, it is a security space which precedes acts of terrorist violence by months, if not years.

A rather nebulous term, 'radicalisation' is by no means as solid and clear as many seem to take for granted (Kundnani, 2012). In Home Office policy radicalisation is defined as the 'processes whereby certain experiences and events in a person's life cause them to become radicalised, to the extent of turning to violence to resolve perceived grievances' (HM Government, 2006:

1, 9; see also HM Government, 2011a). Of note, the Home Office (2006) definition of radicalisation is different to that stated in CONTEST II, defined as: '... the process by which people come to support violent extremism and, in some cases, join terrorist groups' (HM Government, 2009b: 40).[iv] PREVENT also challenges extremist (non-violent) ideas that are part of the terrorist ideology whilst remaining committed to protecting freedom of speech (HM Government, 2011a: 6; see also HM Government, 2013). Further, promoting British values is embedded within the definition of 'extremism', defined as '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' (HM Government, 2013: 2). It is also worth noting that the definition of extremism has been expanded to include 'calls for the death of members of our armed forces, whether in this country or overseas' (HM Government, 2013: 2) – a development likely influenced by the murder of Fusilier Lee Rigby in Woolwich, London, in 2013.

Thomas (2014) refers to two key phases in the evolution of PREVENT. PREVENT 1 (2006-2010) entailed a commitment to Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE hereafter) via the diffusion of formal responsibilities towards local authorities. The Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG hereafter) for example, committed significant financial resources to the PVE strategy in order to increase community resilience and in turn, tackle extremism and radicalisation at local level. This included: the Preventing Violent Extremism Pathfinder Fund; the Challenge and Innovation Fund; and the Community Leadership Fund. Moreover, the initial pathfinder year of 2007/8 (see DCLG, 2007a and b) made £6m available to 70 priority local authorities, specifically those having a Muslim population density of 5% or more to build on their existing work to engage with communities, and forge partnerships with police, community and faith groups (Dresser, 2015).

The devolution of governance towards 'civil society' groups is supported by "National Indicator 35" (NI35) which local authorities have to select as one of their core priorities (HM Government, 2011b: 28). NI35 requires local authorities to have: 'understanding of, and engagement with, Muslim communities'; 'knowledge and understanding of the drivers and causes of violent extremism and the PREVENT objectives'; 'development of a risk-based preventing violent extremism action plan, in support of delivery of the PREVENT objectives'; and 'to demonstrate

effective oversight, delivery and evaluation of projects and actions' (Association of Chief Police Authorities, 2009: 35).

It is during this phase of inception that, paradoxically, counter-radicalisation became framed in terms of a PVE/community cohesion dichotomy. In an operational sense, the PREVENT strategy struggled to delicately balance 'hard' and 'soft' power mechanics intertwined in counter-terrorism leading commentators to conceptualise PREVENT as a political shibboleth (Kundnani, 2009); hence, the ensuing battle to win the 'hearts and minds' of a disconcerting public. However, irrespective of the broader criticisms levelled at PREVENT, PREVENT 1 provided a new inward focus to British counter-terrorism strategy.

In 2011 PREVENT was revised under the Coalition government having undergone parliamentary review. PREVENT now pivots around three main types of activity: *counter-radicalisation*: 'inhibiting the spread and influence of extremist ideas both generally and in specific cases'; *de-radicalisation*: 'involving acts to reduce the influence of extremist ideas where they have gained traction'; and *community cohesion building:* 'focused upon increasing the resilience of communities so that they are less likely to be influenced by extremist views' (Innes et al., 2011: 6). Importantly, PREVENT 2 separates much more clearly counter-radicalisation involving policing capacity, from general communities' policy (Cabinet Office, 2010: 42; see also House of Commons, 2010) with the DCLG now solely focused on community cohesion (HM Government, 2011a).

The 2011 revision also (re)aligned the central objectives of PREVENT to: respond to the *ideological* challenge of terrorism and aspects of *all* types of extremism; prevent individuals being drawn into terrorism and ensuring individuals receive appropriate advice and support; and to work with a wide range of institutions where there are risks of radicalisation (HM Government (2011a: 7; HM Government, 2012: 21). In regard to the latter, the PREVENT strategy makes clear: '[PREVENT] must be a cross-government and cross-community programme to meet its objectives (HM Government, 2011a: 100). Moreover, reframing challenging ideologies as a 'collective responsibility' (HM Government, 2011a: 44) coincides with the government's drive for 'overt', collaborative counter-terrorism capacity; what is termed the 'rich picture' approach (Gregory, 2010: 94; see also Innes et al., 2011: 16). However, unlike the previous phase of PREVENT, PREVENT 2 has witnessed a fusing of inter-

agency partnerships which has drawn a whole host of new actors, organisations and institutions into a non-criminal, counter-terrorism space. This new counter-terrorism architecture includes: The Department for Education (DfE hereafter); The National Health Service (NHS hereafter); and the private security industry, to name but a few.

It is during PREVENT 2 that policing operations were reconfigured from covert, clandestine, threat-centric models, to more innovative, overt methods of counter-radicalisation (see Innes et al., 2011). An overt policing capacity which reflects the genealogy of neighbourhood policing is also centrally embedded as a key pillar *of* PREVENT (HM Government, 2011a; *emphasis added*). It is now accepted that PREVENT policing pivots around three main activities: community engagement and community intelligence generation; identifying and mounting disruptions against presenting risks; and community impact management (Innes et al., 2011: 3). Innes et al., further break down these activities into two distinct sets of actions: 'general community level interventions designed to inhibit and decay existing and potential social support for violent extremist ideologies'; and a 'more specific targeted focus upon preventing the radicalisation of individuals and small groups' (2011: 16).

In order to fully comprehend the above trajectories, it is important to explore the second PREVENT objective: *protecting vulnerable individuals* (see HM Government, 2011b). The revised PREVENT strategy uses the words 'vulnerable, vulnerability or vulnerabilities a total of 75 times' (Richards, 2012: 23). In this context, the subject of radicalisation becomes the individual who is 'vulnerable to radicalisation', 'vulnerable to recruitment', and 'vulnerable to violent extremist messaging' (HM Government, 2011b: 83). This critical discursive shift is also ubiquitously conceptualised through particular dispositions or patterns of behaviour that serve as a proxy 'indicator' of risk (Kundnani, 2012). Thus, counter/de- radicalisation policy has foregrounded radicalisation as a linear progression of subjectivity towards violence (see Heath-Kelly, 2012; de Goede and Simon, 2013; Martin, 2014; HM Government, 2012b and c); subsequently, positivistic ontology has become particularly apposite to preventative security (see Martin, 2014). As Health-Kelly observes, preventing radicalisation is a 'cohesive project of risk knowledge which is deployed to render terrorism pre-emptively governable' (2012: 2).

One final important development entails the mutation of radicalisation risk towards ideological abuse which pre-figures terrorism. Over the last few years PREVENT has been re-framed in

terms of 'safeguarding' vulnerable individuals. To put it differently, counter-terrorism within a non-criminal space has been reconfigured towards PREVENT(ion) *through* safeguarding (Dresser, 2015; see also Heath-Kelly, 2017; Busher et al., 2017); a reconfiguration further entrenched through the introduction of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act in 2015. As revised PREVENT duty guidance outlines: ''safeguarding' is the process of protecting vulnerable people, whether from crime, other forms of abuse or from being drawn into terrorist-related activity' (HM Government, 2016: 21).

With notable exceptions research has been slow to document this discursive shift. Heath-Kelly's (2017) recent work contextualises the role of the NHS as a key sector for the suppression of 'pre-criminal' trajectories (see also NHS England, 2015). Drawing upon a novel reading of Foucault's *biopolitics*, Heath-Kelly (2017) posits a PREVENT(ive) shift from linear profiling to algorithmic modalities, whereby the entire population has become regimented into big data ontologies (Heath-Kelly, 2017). Furthermore, PREVENT duties within the sphere of safeguarding has exponentially enlarged the surveillance gaze (an 'autoimmune moment' in Heath-Kelly's terms) to the point where suspicious and non-suspicious bodies have arguably collapsed (see Heath-Kelly, 2017). As Heath-Kelly makes clear: 'the biopolitical constitution of population around an immunological boundary between self and other has collapsed, whereby all bodies are securitised and surveilled' (2017: 40).

PREVENT Policing in Practice

The preceding section provided a contextual review of PREVENT in ways that highlight collaborative counter-terrorism. This section reflects upon the data distilled from the interviews in order to crystallise directions for future research. From a pragmatic perspective, the various actors that now constitute multi-institutional counter-radicalisation have arguably no more unity than the fact that government policy and legislation have stitched them together. The data indicates that far from a harmonious counter-terrorism methodology, governance in a non-criminal space is, to an extent, performed in teeth-gnashing fashion (Dresser, 2015; see also O'Toole et al., 2015; Fussey, 2013). For example, 'vulnerability' – a term which arguably now governs PREVENT - is understood, conceptualised and defined differently by numerous organisations and institutions (Dresser, 2015). Whilst reframing the PREVENT strategy around "safeguarding" vulnerable individuals enables diverse authorities to

'forge workable (though fragile) alignments among themselves' (Li, 2007: 269), the research findings suggest that the same axis threatens collaborative counter-terrorism (Dresser, 2015). Therefore, simply assuming that various organisations and institutions work towards the same goal (irrespective of legislative change) fails to appreciate definitional inconsistency and dichotomous working practice(s). As the following interview dialogue demonstrates:

> If you have someone brought into custody under the Mental Health Act and we would say, "Look, this individual has real problems, they need some help". And then they get assessed by a psychiatrist who might say, "No, they're alright". But that's not possible because we know of that person's vulnerabilities" (as cited in Dresser, 2015: 213).

> The issue with vulnerability for me is [...] the definition of vulnerability varies. So, I'll give you a practical example in terms of someone with mental health issues – Health will view that person in terms of: is it physical or mental vulnerability? My definition of vulnerability would probably not fit either of them (as cited in Dresser, 2015: 177).

It is also important to reflect upon the terminology used by PREVENT officers. Embedded throughout officers' accounts was a requirement to "sell" the PREVENT agenda to institutional partners through a "sales pitch" approach. Achieving what PREVENT officers referred to as the "buy-in" of partners can be understood as 'institutionalising logics of prevention resulting in counter-radicalisation engagement via multi-agency partnership collaboration' (Dresser, 2015: 156). Importantly, far from being passively accepted, PREVENT was relationally framed in terms of struggle, challenge, and, ominously, luck (Dresser, 2015). In this regard it is worth acknowledging that the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act (2015) has placed a legal duty on various specified authorities to demonstrate 'due regard' of the PREVENT agenda. This does not confer new functions upon institutions; rather, counter-radicalisation has been reconfigured as an 'an addition to existing safeguarding responsibilities' (Busher, et al., 2017: 9; see HM Government, 2015, 2016). In the context of educational settings however, initially the broader message was fervently against what Durodie (2015) alludes to as the securitisation of education; in March 2016, for example, the National Union of Teachers (NUT) voted overwhelming to reject the PREVENT strategy as part of Ofsted inspection, stating that it created suspicion within the classroom (Adams, 2016). Conversely, Busher et al., (2017) found widespread acceptance of PREVENT as an agenda, as well as high levels of confidence implementing the PREVENT duty within schools and colleges. This latter finding is particularly

surprising given the historical depth attached to safeguarding within educational settings - as measured against the evolution of ideological abuse which prefigures terrorism. Nevertheless, whether educationalists' confidence transpires into "effective" counter-radicalisation or simply demonstrates a culture of compliance (McGovern, 2016) requires evidence-based enquiry.

Added to this dynamic are further residual ambiguities. Research has found high staff turnover within institutions and organisations has a particularly damaging effect upon multi-agency counter-radicalisation (Dresser, 2015). Unsurprisingly, PREVENT officers stressed that relationships (with institutional partners) take a significant degree of time to cement; thus, frequent turnover of staff within partner institutions meant trust cycles having to be entirely rebuilt (Dresser, 2015). This led to the objectives of the PREVENT strategy "falling off partners' priority radar", subsequently resulting in the erosion of intelligence bridges (Dresser, 2015). This issue was even more pertinent to a Special Branch team working in a non-priority PREVENT area. Following the revision of PREVENT in 2011 (though not exclusively a result of), financial resources for statutory partnerships on a full-time basis were significantly fettered at the case study site; this increased the importance accorded to trust building measures (Dresser, 2015). A PREVENT officer said:

> The thing about PREVENT, PREVENT is about relationships and they take time to build up. And for me, as much as you know, turnover of staff, you've got to be mindful with this, especially, in probably, our sort of area where we have no statutory partners who are full-time on this because we're not a funded area, so we're relying on partners' goodwill as well to identify somebody or a number of people to engage on this agenda (as cited in Dresser, 2015: 166).

Whilst political discourse posits a *multi-agency* counter-terrorism approach - that is, 'the coming together of various agencies to address a problem' (Crawford, 1998: 119), the empirical reality of PREVENT was realised as 'inter-agency': involving 'some degree of fusion and melding of relations between agencies' (Crawford,1998: 119). The findings also challenge the converse notion that counter-terrorism operates as a centralised governmental apparatus where power is practiced as an antithesis of freedom and agency; rather, PREVENT operates as an assemblage of actors in a governance space that is fraught with tension, ambiguity and complexity. It is therefore unsurprising that officers' accounts highlight the hard work required

to draw complex 'social and material formations' that consist of 'heterogeneous elements' together ... and 'sustain these connections in the face of increasing tension' (Li, 2007: 264).

With notable exceptions it is only recently that we are starting to see the emergence of discourse which documents practical obstacles associated with this security terrain. Adding support to the research findings, Sir Mark Rowley, the then Metropolitan Police Assistant Commissioner for Specialist Operations and Head of National Counter-Terrorism Policing acknowledged a lack of trust between the NHS and the police in the context of intelligence generation and partnership work - a key PREVENT objective. He said: 'We have to work together, and it requires a bit more trust and collaboration between us' (Knapton, 2017: 1). It is also worth noting that under section 26 of the Counter Terrorism and Security Act (2015), the NHS is statutorily obliged to demonstrate due regard 'to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism' (HM Government, 2016: 2).

The recent discursive shift towards contextualising PREVENT as 'safeguarding' should also be at the forefront of evidence-based enquiry. A PREVENT Sergeant informatively summed up this epistemic shift:

> I think we still absolutely use terms like radicalisation, grooming, brainwashing and all the terms that have been used before, but safeguarding is the term that they think best sums up what we do. But, also, it's language that other partners know and understand; and we often start talks with [...] "This is about extremism and terrorism", which [...] ultimately it is. But, to get the buy-in of all the range of frontline services that we give talks to, the safeguarding is the bit that people instantly think, "Argh, I get it". PREVENT is such a meaningless word; in fact, most people think it's about crime prevention, sort of [...] the people who fit alarms and stuff [...] So we've moved away from that because it's not helpful, whereas safeguarding is a word that is used daily by your absolute key partners and people get that (as cited in Dresser, 2015: 170).

Whilst participants reflected positively on the practical benefits of (re)configuring PREVENT as 'safeguarding', the extent to which this allows radicalisation to be 'detected more efficiently' (Heath-Kelly, 2016: 37) or simply induces a 'culture of reporting' (Heath-Kelly, 2017: 39) warrants evaluation. Evidence-based endeavours should also be centred around the evacuation of pre-fixed logic(s) in preference of capricious and vague risk construction (see

Heath-Kelly, 2017; Dresser, 2019). Both lines of enquiry have implications for the effective governance of counter-terrorism.

Finally, it is unsurprising that Sir Mark Rowley's comments situate multi-institutional counter-terrorism as an ongoing learning activity. He said: 'this is new and dynamic and we are going to have to learn together' (as cited in Knapton, 2017: 1); Rowley adds: 'we are still learning the best way to deal with it. With such a new and changing field it is not surprising that we haven't got 20 years of peer reviews and published research' (as cited in Knapton, 2017: 1). These seemingly novel observations are not new; as I have argued elsewhere (see Dresser, 2015), there is a dearth of evidence-based research that examines the complex tapestry of relations that have been forged to govern in PREVENT's name at meso-level, yet have pragmatic implications at meso-micro-level.

Conclusion: Directions for Future Research

To better understand counter-radicalisation in practice there is a requirement for evidence-based research that documents the narratives and experiences of counter-terrorism police officers, as well as the wider assemblage of professional practitioners tasked with counter-radicalisation. This perspective challenges Richard Jackson's claim that engagement with state actors represents an *antithesis* of emancipation which critical scholars cannot overlook (as cited in Fitzgerald et al., 2016; *emphasis added*). More specifically, Jackson advocates an 'epistemic reorientation of the discipline' towards a praxis which 'excludes working with state actors and lending them expertise and credibility' (as cited in Fitzgerald et al., 2016: 4-5). Jackson's position contrasts Harmonie Toros' argument that 'critical terrorism studies should work with the state in pursuit of emancipation because they are not unitary actors but contain emancipatory and counter-emancipatory agendas' (as cited in Fitzgerald, 2016: 5). By following Toros' template of engagement a greater understanding of the empirical reality of PREVENT can be realised.

What is required is empirically-informed research which evaluates *how* counter-radicalisation is actualised, implemented and performed. In furthering the empirical evidence-base, scholars will avoid falling into a theoretical pitfall which regurgitates fatigued debate(s); specifically, I am referring to analyses heavily centred around PREVENT in the context of suspect profiling

and Islamic terrorism. As Innes et al., observe, this reflects the fact that 'most previous studies of PREVENT have provided community perceptions and reactions to PREVENT as a policy frame' (2017: 252). To be clear, I am not questioning the extent to which such research is germane; given the multiple-existences of power at play, it would be fruitful for research to analyse PREVENT from a vantage point of political theory; as Lipsky (1980 as cited in Regaazzi, 2016: 8-9) observes, political analysis helps illuminate 'bureaucratic struggles, forms of symbolic competition, as well as how categories of suspicion, established in official policy documents, become translated, enacted and re-appropriated in local contexts by street-level bureaucrats'.

The situation presented has been exacerbated by commentaries inextricably built on third-hand evidence with many critiques of PREVENT focusing on 'discursive underpinnings through textual analysis of policy documents' (O'Toole et al., 2015: 165). This has left an understanding of the shifting complexity of PREVENT partially realised. Paul Thomas usefully captures the state of play in that: 'we cannot fully understand a highly-contested national policy regime such as PREVENT without drawing on ground-level empirical evidence about the ways in which it has actually been understood, practiced and contested' (2017: 318). Whilst policy analyses and theoretical endeavours are far from redundant, there is a requirement for evaluative, original empiricism which unpacks the evolving nature of PREVENT beyond third-hand (and arguably anachronistic) critique.

To conclude, evidence-based research proffers implications for policy and practice; this is important given the contested nature of governance highlighted in this paper. The empirical reality of PREVENT is a complex assemblage fashioned by resonances between multiple and heterogeneous sites of authorisation (Amoore and de Goede, 2008). Thus, a more nuanced account of PREVENT is needed, one which critically considers the fusing of disparate actors that have become the hallmark of counter-terrorism relations. This can be realised, in one way, through evidence-based research that evaluates the empirical reality of PREVENT, particularly from the perspectives of police practitioners tasked with counter-radicalisation.

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[i] This statement is taken from *The Guardian.* I therefore cannot guarantee its accuracy.

[ii] PURSUE, PROTECT and PREPARE make up the further three pillars of CONTEST (see HM Government, 2009a).

[iii] The 2011 revision of PREVENT altered the size, approach and autonomy of counter-radicalisation. Government funding was restricted to 25 priority areas (considered risk 'hotspots') on an intelligence-led basis. Of note, numerous further areas have adopted priority status (see HM Government, 2011a).

[iv] The accepted Home Office definition of radicalisation has been outlined to provide clarity for the reader, though a precise definition is contested within academia.