

The effectiveness of the UK's CONTEST strand of Prevent

This research will focus on critically analysing the legal basis and enactment of Prevent to determine whether there is a need for the government to seriously review the product.

Key details

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Police region	Eastern
Level of research	PhD
Project start date	October 2021
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Research context

Whitehall was divided over what Prevent meant; was it purely about al-Qaeda inspired extremism or was it about other groups as well? With that in mind, the then Home Secretary, Amber Rudd, said that there is still no clear legal definition of 'extremism' (Hooper, 2017). Within six years post the 2005 London bombings, almost £80 million was spent on 1000 schemes across 94 local authorities.

The Prevent strand of CONTEST has always been a controversial subject, particularly amongst the Muslim community. The focus of Prevent on violent Islamists soon raised concerns amongst some of the UK's Muslim population that they were going to be unfairly stigmatised as communities under suspicion. The strategy has undergone a number of revisions, which allowed the UK Government to

address these concerns.

Prevent promised a comprehensive approach to contesting extremist ideologies, supporting vulnerable individuals and communities susceptible to extremist messages and working closely with a range of institutions such as schools, prisons and charities to help them play an active part in addressing radicalisation.

On some level the strategy is a great success, having brought many people to justice whilst foiling numerous terror plots and this should be recognised, such as the four ISIS members arrested in Germany last April (2020) for planning to attack US Air Force bases and more recently, February 2021, the arrest of 14 people arrested across Germany and Denmark for planning bomb attacks.

The trouble is since its inception, the communities in which Prevent was set up to assist still feel victimised, still feel spied upon and still feel stigmatised. Added to that are the other communities feeling left out in the cold as far as funding goes.

Subsidiary Question

This research will focus on critically analysing the legal basis and enactment of Prevent and whether the product is fit for purpose and cost effective, to determine whether there is a need for the government to seriously review the product.

The objective of this PhD will be to analyse the benefits of the UK Prevent strand and the legislation supporting its application by public bodies by addressing the following questions.

1. What is the decision-making process of Prevent referrals by public bodies?
2. Does the number of referrals correlate to social status, employment and upbringing?
3. What is the legal basis of CONTEST?

Research methodology

This research will adopt a cross sectional approach in collecting primary qualitative data through structured interviews and surveys with key stakeholder involved in Prevent. It is accepted that cross-sectional research will not allow for conclusions to be drawn about changes that have occurred over time since the inception of Prevent.

The advantage of this type of research is that it will provide a snapshot of perceptions at a particular time. This study will focus on representatives from the Muslim Community, as current media articles suggests that it is this community who feel that Prevent spies on them, but will also involve the wider community to provide a comparison to support or negate that argument.

The method that will be used for managing and analysing this data will be conducted in four phases. Firstly, each will be manually transcribed and verbatim interview transcripts produced. Secondly, core themes will be identified using 'opening codes'. The third phase will incorporate core themes and key quotes into thematic charts using the framework analysis method. Finally, the thematic charts will be analysed and themes identified. The author invites further contact for a more detailed breakdown of how raw interview data will be managed and analysed.

Through my Masters (MSc) research into this area the members of the Muslim Community interviewed did not feel that this was the case and had positive views on Prevent, however this was an extremely small group of representatives. For this reason, it was difficult to draw any conclusions to support or negate these reports and this study will expand on that research.

Police officers, medical professionals and teaching professionals, a minimum of 30 in each field, will also be included in this study to establish their understanding or misunderstanding of Prevent and whether this is linked to the documented feelings within the Muslim Community.

The Muslim Community in Suffolk will be identified locally through a police single point of contact (SPOC) for Prevent within Suffolk police. The SPOC is a serving police officer of Muslim ethnicity who has a close working relationship with all communities within Suffolk.

This contact was used during my MSc research into this subject and proved extremely valuable. Through this contact I was able to interview a person had had been radicalised and travelled to Syria to carry out terrorist activities before returning and being subject to the Prevent programme.

This SPOC will also put me in contact with their equivalent in other force areas. The police service is split into regions and the Eastern Region have the Eastern Region Special Operations Unit (ERSOU) who have oversight for Counter Terrorism matters in Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Kent, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire. This organisation will be able to give me access to these other units Nationally to enable me to access data related to Prevent.

Additionally, Freedom of Information (FOI) requests will be used.