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Failed and Friendless: The UK's 'Preventing Violent Extremism' Programme

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# Failed and Friendless – the UK's 'Preventing Violent Extremism' programme.

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**Abstract**

*This article suggests that Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE), the government's 'hearts and minds' response to the threat of domestic Islamist terrorism within the wider CONTEST strategy, has been exposed as both failed and friendless by growing political and academic scrutiny. PVE's monocultural focus on Muslims is in stark contradiction to the overriding policy goal of community cohesion, whilst its implementation has provoked accusations both of surveillance and of engineering 'value changes' within Muslim communities. Local conflicts relating to the operationalisation of PVE result from political disagreement over the balance between community engagement and policing within the Labour government, and these problems leave the future of this key anti-terrorism policy area unclear.*

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**Key words**: Extremism, Terrorism, Cohesion, Multiculturalism

## Introduction

It is beyond dispute that the UK has faced a significant Islamist terrorist threat in recent years. The 7/7 bombings of July 2005, in which 56 people from a variety of backgrounds died in four co-ordinated terrorist explosions on public transport, graphically illustrated this reality. The scale of the Islamist challenge has been subsequently confirmed by a number of uncovered plots, the failed attacks of 21st July 2005, and the attack on Glasgow airport in 2007. A particularly worrying element has been that most of those implicated have been Muslims resident, and often born,

in Britain. This suggests that some young Muslims are dangerously alienated from British values, and from the respect for diversity and free speech that necessarily underpins Britain's democratic, multicultural society (Prins and Salisbury, 2008). It might also be seen as confirming the analysis put forward after the violent disturbances in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford in 2001, all of which involved young Muslims, that much of Britain is profoundly ethnically segregated, with different ethnic communities leading 'parallel lives' and having little respect or trust for each other (Cantle, 2001). A key element of this analysis was that previous policy approaches of anti-racism and equal opportunities, whilst well-intentioned and having positive impacts on Britain's substantial ethnic inequalities, had resulted in a concern for each **separate** ethnic group, rather than developing a focus on positive relations **between** communities, or on the over-arching identities intrinsic to such a focus (Cantle, 2005; Thomas, 2007). This perspective suggested that the focus on individual ethnic groups had further hardened separate, and potentially antagonistic, ethnic/religious identities to the detriment of commonality. This nuanced analysis was developed in to a wider attack on multiculturalism itself (Phillips, 2005), and on how it has apparently weakened Britain's ability to oppose terrorism through its indulgence of ethnic separation (Prins and Salisbury, 2008).

The Government's overarching policy response since 2001 has been 'Community Cohesion' (Cantle, 2001; Home Office, 2005), the concern to promote cross-ethnic contact. Another key policy since the 7/7 bombings has been the Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) agenda, a 'hearts and minds' approach to Muslim young people and their communities as part of the Government's wider counter-terrorism CONTEST strategy (DCLG, 2007a; Home Office, 2009). It is PVE, often known as 'Prevent', that provides the focus for this article. The article examines the development and implementation of PVE since its inception in 2006, and discusses its impact in relation to four key criticisms made by a number of commentators as this policy has unfolded (Thomas, 2009; Birt, 2009; Turley, 2009; Kundnani, 2009). These are that PVE has had an unhelpful and broad mononcultural focus on Muslims, that it has been a vehicle for a significant growth in state surveillance of Muslim communities, that PVE in the way it has been designed and implemented is contradictory to other key governmental priorities such as Community Cohesion, and that the problematic design of PVE has left progress hobbled by intra-governmental

tensions at both national and local level. Each of these criticisms is outlined and discussed, drawing on academic material and on material submitted to and produced by the Parliamentary Select Committee Inquiry in to PVE (House of Commons, 2009; 2010). This enables the article to develop a discussion in conclusion around what this experience tells us about combating violent extremism in particular and, more broadly, about approaches to policy design, as well as suggesting how this policy agenda might develop in the future.

   Here, the contention is that this flagship policy has been increasingly exposed as both failed and friendless.   To support this discussion, the article starts with a short summary of the PVE policy agenda and its operationalisation.


**Preventing Violent Extremism**

Whilst the announcement of the PVE programme in October 2006 (DCLG, 2007a) created the impression that it was simply a response to the terrorist events of July 2005, Government had previously mapped out the key elements of the PVE strategy (FCO/Home Office, 2004), as well as identified key dilemmas over it that remain . This suggests that the 9/11 attacks of September 2001, the riots in northern England the same summer, and intelligence highlighting the involvement of British Muslims in Jihadist training camps in Afghanistan from the late 1990s onwards (Burke, 2007) had all combined to convince the Government that it had a significant Muslim problem in relation to attractions to violent extremism.

An initial £6 million 'Pathfinder' , or pilot, fund for the 70 Local Authorities in England having Muslims as 5% or more of their populations was announced in 2007(DCLG, 2007b); this was subsequently expanded significantly in 2008 as a three-year, £45 million fund for all Local Authorities with 4,000 or more Muslims (Thomas, 2009). In parallel, further development came through significant funding to Youth Offending Teams through the Youth Justice Board, and to the Prison Service, both reflecting well-founded concerns that radicalisation of individual Muslims was taking place during incarceration (Warnes and Hannah, 2008). The important role played for radical Islamist political groups by Further and Higher Education settings also led to a funding focus on Universities and Colleges (DIUS, 2008), whilst PVE funding has led to 300 new dedicated Police posts nationally, some of them attached to the

newly-established Regional Counter Terrorism Units (CTUs). This all added up to a 2008-2011 PVE budget of £140 million, some £85 million of which came from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), and the security-focussed remainder from the Home Office.

Pressure came on Local Authorities through the Local Area Agreements under the Common Spending Assessment to adopt 'National Indicator 35' around developing 'resilience to violent extremism'; some Local Authorities refused to adopt it initially, but all were required to report on it to Government Offices (LGA, 2008).Many Local Authorities have remained deeply anxious about PVE (Turley, 2009). However, pressure from government saw PVE continue to grow to the point where all Local Authorities with significant Muslim communities were involved, although a number of Muslim community groups refused to participate (House of Commons, 2010).

PVE has to be understood within the wider context of broader anti-terrorism policies. The Initial CONTEST strategy (Home Office, 2003), subsequently updated by CONTEST 2 (Home Office, 2009), outlined four distinct but inter-related elements: Pursue, Prevent (PVE), Protect and Prepare. Government has acknowledged that, in the original strategy , 'Prevent' was the least developed element, and it has subsequently been prioritised (House of Commons, 2010).Here, PVE can be understood as a 'hearts and minds' approach aimed at people seen as vulnerable to persuasion to support terrorists and who might 'reject and undermine our shared values and jeopardise community cohesion' (Home Office, 2009:15).Such a prioritisation of community engagement within the overall strategy acknowledges that , 'Intelligence is the most vital element in successful counter-terrorism' (English, 2009:131).This approach focuses both on increasing the resilience  and addressing the grievances of communities, and on identifying vulnerable individuals, as well as challenging and disrupting ideologies sympathetic to violent extremism (Home Office, 2009). Here, 'resilience' can be understood as resisting the appeal of, or even standing up, to extremist political activity and terrorist recruitment attempts within Muslim communities. Largely operationalised through education and welfare-based state organisations, and through support for community organisations, PVE can be seen as a relatively restrained and preventative anti-terrorism approach in

comparison to other western states facing a similar threat both now , and in the recent past (Gupta, 2008)

A summary of PVE activities funded by the initial 'Pathfinder' pilot year (DCLG, 2008) claimed that over 44,000 people, almost all of them Muslim youths taking part in broad and unfocussed activities, had been engaged with nationally, but admitted that little independent evaluation had taken place. An exception was Kirklees in West Yorkshire (home of two of the 7/7 bombers), where independent evaluation identified a lack of clarity over the aims of the well-meaning work and its relationship to community cohesion (Thomas, 2008). The national expansion of PVE did lead to new guidance over evaluation approaches, but this was confined to vague suggestions that Local Authorities 'might' decide to develop external evaluation of programmes (DCLG, 2009a). The significant evidence generated through the Parliamentary Select Committee Inquiry in to PVE (House of Commons, 2009;2010) highlighted how difficult it is to quantify 'success', especially if this is seen as a longer term approach rather than concerned with the prevention of terrorist plots now. Indeed, oral evidence to the Inquiry from the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) suggested that PVE represented a 'generational' struggle to influence young Muslims (House of Commons, 2010). That Inquiry process acknowledged that PVE had enabled stronger relationships between Local Authorities and Muslim communities in some areas, had strengthened the organisation and transparency of some Muslim community organisations, promoted the voices of women and young people within community processes, and had highlighted the need for more open debates within Muslim communities around the causes of domestic violent extremism. However, it concluded that the impact of the problems and contradictions of PVE outweighed any positive impacts, and so called for significant re-shaping of the programme (House of Commons, 2010).

This article now goes on to identify and explore the key problems of PVE. They are, firstly, that PVE has focussed on Muslim communities only, a broad and monocultural approach that has proven counterproductive. Secondly, that this monocultural focus has been a vehicle for surveillance and intelligence –gathering by Police and Security services, so antagonising the very communities that PVE is trying to win over. This focus on Muslims is in stark contradiction to wider government priorities of Community Cohesion, and may well be having damaging

consequences as a result. Finally, the actual design and implementation of PVE has led to very significant tension between government departments at national level, and between different agencies at a local level.

**An unhelpful Muslim focus?**

From the start, PVE has focussed on Muslim communities, and particularly on young Muslims. This focus might appear self-evident given the serious Islamist threat faced, but it is argued here that this focus, and the way that it has been framed and operationalised, has been damagingly counter-productive.  Of concern here is the impact PVE has had on Government's relationships with and standing in the nation's varied Muslim communities, both in focusing solely on them, and in the manner in which it has been conducted, with the suggestion that PVE has represented clumsy attempts at 'social engineering' through a 'values-based' (Birt, 2009) approach that has had a negative impact by-enforcing the otherness of Muslim communities. This section first outlines how PVE has focussed solely on Muslim communities, and then discusses the tensions generated by how this has been operationalised.

Whilst the terrorist bombings and other plots quoted above are clearly serious, they have involved very small numbers of individuals. This was apparently acknowledged by government in introducing PVE: 'There has always been a tiny minority who oppose tolerance and diversity' (DCLG, 2007b:2), but the same document baldly stated that 'the key measure of success will be demonstrable changes in attitudes among Muslims' (DCLG, 2007b:7). This impression that Government was concerned with Muslim communities in general was confirmed by the broad brush targeting of PVE funding at all significant Muslim communities even though there is no evidence from plots to date that terrorists are more likely to emerge from 'dense' Muslim communities (Finney and Simpson, 2009).Whilst a number of DCLG PVE documents talk about extremism in other communities,

 *'We have been unable, however, to document any practical Prevent work in the community that is not directed in some way at Muslim communities, and we have been unable to find any examples of work that focuses substantially on far-right extremism'* (Kundnani, 2009:24).

This  focus on Muslims per se is also highlighted by the large-scale engagement with Muslim young people (DCLG, 2008), and the clear emphasis of Muslim community capacity building of civic infrastructure locally (Thomas, 2008) and nationally (DCLG, 2009b), such as enhanced training and support for Mosque schools. The nature of this PVE engagement with Muslim communities has proved controversial. Shortly after the 7/7  bombings, the Government established seven working groups under the collective title 'Preventing Extremism Together' (PET), whilst also establishing the Commission on Cohesion and Integration (DCLG, 2007c), whose subsequent report re-energised many of the original Community Cohesion recommendations (Cantle, 2001) . The PET process had significant Muslim involvement, and ranged across issues of economic, social and educational experiences, creating an expectation that it would lead to an explicit focus on 'Muslim' disadvantage (Kundnani, 2009). In fact, Government was already focussed on educational and economic social exclusion of Pakistani and Bangladeshi-origin young people and communities (SEU, 2001), so, arguably addressing underlying root problems (English, 2009), but showed no inclination to integrate this as an explicitly holistic Muslim policy initiative. As a result, PVE emerged the following year as an agenda concerned with radicalisation, and issues of 'values' and community organisation that might be contributing to it (DCLG, 2007a).

In this way, PVE has offered Muslim community organisations funding for capacity building through an explicitly anti-terrorism agenda. The labelling of an entire community as susceptible to terrorist involvement that is arguably inherent in this approach is exacerbated by the way government has gone about this. Birt (2009) identifies a tension in government's approach between 'values based' and 'means based' strategies, with the pragmatism of the 'means-based' approach being sidelined by an inherently judgemental and interventionist 'values-based approach'. The former sees Islamist terrorism in the UK as largely a socio-political phenomenon and so focuses on the personal and political factors attracting some young Muslim men to radicalisation, and engages with groups and individuals who can work constructively with such young men. This approach is favoured by professional practitioners on the ground being asked to operationalise PVE, including the Metropolitan Police's 'Muslim Contact Unit, which has worked constructively with Islamist groups who dislike British society but who vehemently oppose violence (Birt,

2009), and is supported by strong empirical evidence (University of Central Lancashire, 2009). However, the 'values' based' approach has dominated government's view of PVE and the way they have shaped it nationally. It has arguably given the impression that government is overtly intervening to shape religious practice and to promote new types of community leadership within Muslim communities.  This 'values-based' understanding sees a problem with the way Islam itself is being understood and practised by many second and third generation Muslims, leading to a need to promote and develop a more moderate and progressive British Islam (Birt, 2009). Whilst President Obama has initiated a move in the US towards the 'means-based' approach, the British government has gone the other way since the 2006 airliners plot towards the 'values-based' approach through PVE, an approach confirmed by recent refinements: 'As part of CONTEST 2, the revised Prevent strategy reflects this shift in emphasis and works out its rationale in greater detail' (Birt, 2009:54). One approach has been to fund new organisations, promoting them as the voice of modern and moderate British Islam. This approach has seen The Quillam Foundation (2009), headed by ex-Islamist radical Ed Husain (2007) receive over £1 million, the Sufi Muslim Council over £200,000 and the Radical Middle Way almost £400,000 (Kundnani, 2009). This has been supported by explicit guidance to Local Authorities and others receiving PVE funding to prioritise work with Muslim women and young people as under-represented voices and experiences within Muslim communities (DCLG, 2007b;2009b). Together, this can be seen as an attempt by government to engineer different types of leadership and representation from Muslim communities, with the assumption that this will lead to more progressive attitudes, values and behaviour. This has been supported by withdrawal of funding and engagement with national umbrella Muslim organisations, such as the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), not seen as taking a sufficiently robust enough position against Islamist terrorism at home or abroad. Ironically, the MCB's formation and development in the 1990s was encouraged by both Conservative and Labour governments as a clear national voice for 'moderate' Muslims, even though the MCB was always led by Islamist activists whose overtly political perspectives were at odds with the vast majority of practising British Muslims (McRoy, 2006). The MCB had considerable success in lobbying for state support for Muslim faith schools and more policy focus on religious affiliation (such as a question on faith in the 2001 Census), but their relationship with government came under increasing strain as the

'values-based' approach became predominant, with contact cut over the pro-Hamas views of an MCB leader (McRoy, 2006). This government's attempt to create a new generation and type of 'community leaders' can be seen as a parallel of policy approaches to ethnic minority communities in the wake of serious urban disturbances in the early 1980s (Kundnani, 2009), and has clearly provoked resentment from more established Muslim community groups (House of Commons, 2009).

Ironically, the PVE funding approach has sometimes resulted in working with exactly the sort of traditional Muslim Community Leaders, many of them MCB affiliates that the 'values-based' l approach has tried to move away from, as evidenced with the considerable support for Mosque Schools (Thomas, 2008; ). At the local level, Muslim organisations have often felt that they are being treated as clients and service delivers, rather than strategic partners, either playing no role in delivery (Thomas, 2008), or having to compete with each other for funding and overtly 'sign up' to government positions against terrorism (which virtually everyone opposes) and 'extremism' (which no one can agree a definition of). The danger of this 'values-based' approach, and the fact that funding is contingent on its acceptance, is that it closes down the open debates and involvements needed to undermine the appeal of violent extremism: 'One effect of Prevent is to undermine exactly the kind of radical discussions of political issues that would need to occur if young people are to be won over and support for illegitimate political violence diminished' (Kundnani, 2009:35).Here, in such a broad focus on Muslim communities as a whole, whilst prioritising the acceptance of certain 'values', PVE has represented the worst of all worlds, approaching an entire faith community as being at risk of terrorist involvement, whilst forcing particular political and doctrinal issues that have only limited meaning to most Muslims going about their ordinary, day to day lives. In fact, the ruling out under the PVE 'values-based' approach of certain legitimately-established Muslim organisations, would seem to play in to the hands of certain Islamist groups, such as Hizb-Ut-Tahir, who demand that Muslims have nothing to do with any democratic, secular processes within wider society. For Birt (2009:54), the fundamental difficulty of PVE, 'is an over-emphasis upon counter-terrorism without engaging Muslims as citizens, rather than as an 'at risk' set of communities'.

**Government spies?**

Perhaps the most heated criticism of PVE has been that its significant growth has been cover for the development of surveillance of Muslim communities, with claims that, 'there is evidence that the Prevent programme has been used to establish one of the most elaborate systems of surveillance ever seen in Britain' (Kundnani, 2009:8). Whilst this has been strongly denied by the government (DCLG, 2009c), there has been a very significant growth in Police and Security Service involvement in PVE , and, arguably, an associated blurring of roles, between education and policing, between security apparatus and local democratic accountability, and between the Prevent and Pursue arms of CONTEST 2 (Home Office, 2009). Such blurring of roles is arguably inevitable within a counter-terrorism strategy that attempts to include community development aspects as well as policing and security functions (English, 2009). The resulting allegations of covert surveillance and intelligence-gathering are discussed below, and whilst the actual evidence of them is very limited, the impression of it has taken firm hold (House of Commons, 2010), fuelled by political campaigning and media coverage (Kundnani, 2009; The Guardian, 2009b).

The basis of these claims has been an increased focus on policing, identification of threats, and monitoring/information-sharing within the 2008-2011 expansion of the PVE programme, with the Home Office 'providing additional funding to establish over three hundred new Police posts across the country dedicated to Prevent' (DCLG, 2009b:25), and additional money for Police forces to work with Schools, Universities and Colleges on PVE. The context for this has been the establishment in 2007 of the Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism (OSCT), designed to overcome cross-departmental confusion, and the resulting development of Counter Terrorism Units, to which some of these new Police posts have been attached. This has been mirrored by the security service MI5 developing regional offices for the first time. These very significant policing and security developments have fuelled fears of surveillance for some, and prompted conflicts around power, information and appropriate roles at a local level. The reality of Police officers playing prominent roles in local Prevent boards, 'has raised questions of police interference in the political relationships between Local Authorities and Muslim communities' (Birt ,

2009:8).Indeed, some agencies feel that the Police are actually in charge of this supposedly 'hearts and minds' programme at the local level:

*T*he police are such key drivers at a local level together with your counterterrorism officers and the intelligence services, they become the funnel through which what is happening in the community is funnelled back to the government... it is the police who are leading the agenda (Lachman, 2009).

This is confirmed by Birmingham City Council (2009), the largest single recipient of PVE funding nationally: 'Our delivery plan utilises intelligence from West Midlands Police (e.g. Counter-Terrorism local profile) in order to target funding and provision as necessary '.  Critics (Kundnani, 2009:6)  identify growing concerns from both Muslim community organisations and public sector professionals that involvement in PVE required them to pass on information to the police, whilst at the same time, Local Authorities felt that information flows within PVE were one way only, with them expected to pass intelligence on, but CTUs and  Police not willing to pass anything the other way, often claiming that Local Authority Chief Executives did not have the right 'clearance' (Turley, 2009). Arguably, these concerns demonstrate a naivety about the way community interaction and security aspects of counter-terrorism strategies will inevitably interact, as the Northern Ireland experience indicates (English, 2009). This misunderstanding has perhaps been unhelpfully fuelled by the PVE label being used for such a wide range of policy functions (House of Commons, 2010).

This fear of surveillance has been heightened by the 'greater involvement of Police officers in education-based PVE activities that would be normally seen as the territory of youth and community workers:

A significant part of the prevent programme is the embedding of counter-terrorism police officers within the delivery of other local services. The implication of teachers and youth, community and cultural workers in information-sharing undercuts professional norms of confidentiality (Kundnani, 2009:28).

 The argument here is not that the Police do not have a legitimate counter-terrorism role to play but whether that such an overt involvement in funding and monitoring PVE activity, and increasingly even delivering it to young people and community

groups, is effective, or rather whether it is counter-productive through the unhelpful blurring of professional roles and their proper boundaries. Local Authorities clearly feel that this Police involvement has unhelpfully blurred the distinction between 'Prevent' (education and community development-based activity) and 'Pursue' (necessary surveillance and policing interventions) with this having a counterproductive effect: *'there is a danger that the levels of suspicion and mistrust around Prevent could be used as a tool by those elements who seek to undermine cohesion'* (Turley, 2009:12).

The more recent development of the 'Channel' initiative within PVE is seen as progress at the local level. Channel works with much smaller numbers of 'at risk' young people identified through multi-agency partnership mechanisms, and utilises both diversionary and de-radicalisation approaches, tailored to the individual (House of Commons, 2010). However, this may well simply be a smaller scale surveillance or 'fishing expedition' in that there is little evidence as to how those genuinely at risk of involvement in 'violent extremism' can be identified in advance, so casting doubt over the whole role of and significant resource allocation to the Police within PVE. Despite very close government investigation of those Britons to date involved in Islamist terror plots,' the security services can identify neither a uniform pattern by which a process occurs nor a particular type that is susceptible' (Bux, 2007:269).The danger here is that 'fact' based profiles of susceptibility underestimate the process of relationships and peer group operation that can tip individuals towards violence, and that predicting this in advance is very difficult. Clearly, high levels of vigilance are needed against further Islamist terror plots, but the question here is whether crude focus on Muslim communities as a whole, steered overtly by the Police and security forces in an effort to 'spot' likely terrorists will really be effective, or may even be counter-productive because of the suspicions and distrust this approach engenders amongst ordinary Muslims. The term 'hearts and minds' originates in counter-insurgency campaigns and was based on isolating insurgents through winning the support and trust of the majority (English, 2009). On that basis, the success or otherwise of PVE is unclear, as the appearance and partial reality of state surveillance that is central to its operationalisation has seriously damaged the prospect of community partnership. In contrast, moving towards community cohesion- based approach 'would create the space and legitimacy for a more

sophisticated, intelligence-led approach to tackling specific local threats as and when they occur' (Turley, 2009:22). Such an approach would suggest a clear separation between policing and cohesion-based community development activities, as highlighted by the overwhelming majority of submissions to the Parliamentary Inquiry (House of Commons, 2009) and their subsequent recommendations (House of Commons, 2010).

**At odds with wider policies?**

Whilst the criticisms of PVE discussed above are significant, arguably the most fundamental problem with PVE has been its lack of congruence with key governmental policy priorities, in particular Community Cohesion. This section discusses that tension, by focussing on how PVE conflicts with Cohesion. The Introduction highlighted the extent to which race relations policy approaches shifted markedly after the 2001 urban disturbances towards Community Cohesion (Cantle, 2001; Home Office, 2005). Central to the Community Cohesion thesis was the view that past policy approaches had hardened ethnic segregation and negatively impacted on attempts to create genuine integration and shared identities (Cantle, 2005, ). Whilst highly contested (Flint and Robinson, 2008), there is clear evidence that Community Cohesion has been understood and supported by educational practitioners (Thomas, 2007). This meant that the explicitly monocultural focus of PVE was immediately identified at ground level, , as problematically at odds with Community Cohesion (Thomas, 2008).Government were adamant that PVE, 'is not the same as a wider concern for community cohesion' (DCLG, 2007b:2),but consistently struggled to clarify this distinction.

One of the key conclusions of Community Cohesion in relation to the 2001 disturbances was that ethnic tension had built up in towns such as Oldham because of funding schemes targeted at specific ethnic and geographical communities (often the same thing in a reality of ethnic housing segregation) and the associated myth that some (ethnic) communities were being favoured over others (Ritchie, 2001). This led to an emphasis, reinforced by the recommendations (DCLG, 2007c) that policy and funding should work across ethnic groups, so building shared identities. The design and implementation of PVE has been in clear contradiction to that approach and has had the predictable results of creating suspicion, competitive

claims, and 'virulent envy' (Birt, 2009) from other ethnic minority faith groups envious of the very considerable government support for Muslim faith organisations and infrastructure, (House of Commons, 2010),  whilst vehemently denying that their faiths have any problems with 'extremism'. A more worrying envy comparison has come from certain white communities, particularly those white working class communities who have been marginalised by post-industrial restructuring and the dominant neo-liberal political responses to it (Byrne, 1999). A 'white backlash' (Hewitt, 2005) against the implementation of anti-racist measures, and the fact that such perceptions contributed to urban unrest (Cantle, 2001; Ritchie, 2001) had already been identified and Community Cohesion was meant to offer a holistic solution. However, it far from clear how much that new vision has been operationalised, judging by the monocultural focus of PVE. The result has been two-way envy and resentment, with Muslim communities asking why 'extremism', including its violent political form of far-right activists, was not being addressed in some white communities, whilst non-Muslims questioned why such significant public resources were being directed towards often bland and generalised youth and community activities for Muslims only. The growing political strength of the British National party, , did lead government to establish a 'Connecting Communities' fund (DCLG, 2009c) ,aimed at certain white working class areas , in practice witnessing far-right-related political tensions, but described by DCLG as being 'communities under pressure'. However, despite the impression created, this fund was **not** part of PVE, and had modest resources attached to it.

This policy expansion to white areas was accompanied by explicit guidance by CLG Minister John Denham that, 'cross-community activities could form a legitimate part of Prevent activities' and the promise of money to support it (DCLG, 2009c). Both these initiatives go some way to answer the criticisms of PVE outlined above, and Denham also explicitly refuted the allegations of PVE as surveillance of Muslim communities, or as an attempt to change the values and leadership of Muslim communities. However, the amendments to the Muslim-only focus of PVE were minor at best, and the interpretation of purpose by Denham suggested more questions than answers. For Denham, PVE, 'is a crime prevention programme', and that a distinction from cohesion needs to be maintained:

Community Cohesion – building a strong society with shared values and a strong sense of shared identity – is a broader and more ambitious aim, involving every part of every community equally, not just the Muslim communities. Prevent needs to remain focussed on preventing crime (DCLG, 2009c).

Whilst addressing discussions around surveillance and political interference, this crime prevention formulation, is highly problematic for two reasons. Firstly, assuming the 'crime' to be prevented is terrorist activity, why has PVE activity worked with such large numbers of Muslim young people, yet focussed so little on political , social and individual/psychological factors likely to make at least some young Muslims at risk of being involved in violent extremism? The evaluation evidence available suggests that engagement with such issues has been studiously avoided for a number of reasons, leaving PVE activity as bland and generalised youth activities for Muslims only (DCLG, 2008; Thomas, 2008, 2009). Crime Prevention youth activities, have worked with smaller numbers of carefully-targeted young people, often referred by relevant agencies. The 'Channel' programme has worked with 200-300 young people to date (ACPO, 2009), and would seem to fit the 'crime prevention' understanding well, but the broader PVE activity to date simply doesn't fit any meaningful understanding of that concept. Secondly, it avoids discussion of how the monocultural approach of PVE discussed above may actually be re-enforcing the likelihood of some young Muslims being attracted to violent extremism. The Community Cohesion analysis of ethnic relations in Britain (Cantle, 2001) was precisely that 'parallel lives' had encouraged tensions between communities, and separate, oppositional identities. This reality has been confirmed by more recent research amongst young people in Oldham and Rochdale, Greater Manchester, with significant numbers of white and Muslim young men having highly prejudiced and antagonistic attitudes towards 'others' (Thomas and Sanderson, 2009). Denham (DCLG, 2009c) focussed on how building resilience against extremism amongst Muslim communities was a key aim of this 'crime prevention' PVE policy, but arguably you cannot build resilience against intolerance and racism without individuals and their communities having the confidence, skills and links, the 'bridging social capital' (Putnam, 2000), or cross-community links, that comes from meaningful and ongoing cross-ethnic contact. Indeed, Denham himself said in the Government's response to the 2001 urban disturbances that the areas of the country

not experiencing racial tensions were those who had 'succeeded in uniting diverse groups through a shared sense of belonging to, and pride in, a common civic identity' (Denham, 2001:11). The Government's consistent defence of why a PVE policy separate to Community Cohesion is needed is that terrorists can emerge from cohesive communities, with the ACPO (2009) supporting this because of, 'the fact that the four suicide bombers in 2005 were nurtured in cohesive communities'. However, this is simply not true – three of the bombers grew up in the highly-ethnically-segregated and racially tense Leeds suburb of Beeston, an area which fits the theory of 'parallel lives' (Cantle, 2001) From that perspective, attractions to violent extremism whether radical Islamist or racist white extremism, are likely to be stronger in isolated and monocultural communities where ethnic segregation and singular identities are the norm (Thomas, 2009). yet PVE has done exactly that, work with Muslims only, thereby giving the message that their Muslim faith is the only form of identity and experience that is of importance.

**Problematic policy design?**

Over and above the fundamental flaws and contradictions of PVE that have been explored above, there have been a number of problematic features of the way that the policy has been organised, and implemented. These have included misleading titles, a lack of meaningful evaluation, significant tensions between central and local government, and, tensions between different parts of central government over the proper focus for PVE activity. The disquiet from Muslim community groups over the focus of PVE and worries from local government around the lack of congruence with community cohesion, both discussed above, have led central government to connive in the use of misleading titles without any fundamental changes to PVE. Local evaluation of the initial phase of PVE (Thomas, 2008) found the bland title of 'Pathfinder' being used, whilst government formally dropped 'Preventing Violent Extremism': 'This term is no longer used to describe that funding'(DCLG, 2009b:34), in favour of the enigmatic 'Prevent'. This was in recognition of the fact that many Muslims felt stigmatised as potential terrorists by the PVE title. More serious has been the lack of independent and robust evaluation, with few exceptions (Thomas, 2008; University of Central Lancashire, 2009).Whilst government seemed relaxed over the need for such evaluation (DCLG, 2009a),  ACPO  (2009) acknowledge the

effects of this absence: 'the apparent lack of evaluation of Prevent initiatives has made the 'value for money' assessment of Prevent difficult'.

It is likely that such evaluation would reveal significant disparities between what central government has claimed for PVE and the reality of much of its operation on the ground. Consistent with wider Labour policy approaches, PVE was supposedly a locally-determined policy but has been strongly driven from the centre through use of NI35 and monitoring/pressure from local Government Offices. Despite substantial initial misgivings (Thomas, 2008), Local Authorities have formally co-operated, but in practice have demonstrated a wide range of responses. A small minority, some of which have received very substantial funding, have been vociferous in their support for PVE (Birmingham City Council, 2009) but a large number seem to have subverted the funding to a significant extent, 'many statutory and community partners have been uncomfortable with direct counter-terrorism work and have sought to employ the funds for other ends' (Birt, 2009:54). The result, as discussed above, has usually been bland and unfocussed youth activities (Thomas, 2008;DCLG, 2008), with the Association of Police Authorities (APA) (2009) commenting that, 'many Police Authorities question whether, in practice, there is any real difference between Prevent and community cohesion'. The problem here, though, has been that this activity is monocultural and so ineffective in terms of cohesion, just as it has little demonstrable focus on factors and issues likely to lead some individuals towards violent extremism. For APA, the solution is a tighter focus on Muslim 'extremism', with some recent evidence that Police influence is being used to block PVE support for more general youth activities (Birt, 2009).

What this reality on the ground exposes is the biggest tension within PVE – the tension between the two government departments delivering PVE, DCLG and the Home Office. Each department has contributed some of the overall budget, with DCLG 'owning' some of the PVE strategy objectives, whilst OSCT/Home Office 'own' the others (APA, 2009). This might not be problematic in itself, but it is clear that the operationalisation of PVE has been built on real inter-departmental tensions over purpose and priority, as identified by the Local Government Association (2009): 'Tension between OSCT and CLG on the nature of the focus of Prevent, and the activity which should flow from that, can be a problem at times', with lack of

consistency identified as a result.   It is clear that a 'turf war', something far from new in the history of counter-terrorism policies (English, 2009), has been taking place, based on significantly different views of effective ways forward:

We in local government support John Denham's view of Prevent as distinct but necessarily situated within the broader context of community cohesion and equalities...Police and the security services will necessarily see things from a different perspective....these messages need to be properly aligned across government(LGA, 2009).

From this perspective, the very limited and nuanced changes in PVE (DCLG , 2009c) discussed above can actually be understood as hard-won concessions in the right direction by a Minister with a clear track record of support for Community Cohesion (Denham, 2001), and the Inquiry by the CLG Select Committee (House of Commons, 2009; 2010) as an attempt to bolster and support those moves, whilst the Home Office 'arm' of PVE have demanded more robust scrutiny and surveillance of, and judgements on, Muslim communities and organisations (APA, 2009). This suggests that PVE as it stands has few friends even within government, with both DCLG and the Home Office profoundly dissatisfied with it, but for very different reasons, so introducing instability in local policy design and delivery.


**Conclusion: A policy agenda with a future?**
The problems, contradictions and limitations of the PVE policy agenda discussed above arguably leave Britain in a worrying impasse. It is beyond dispute that Britain faces a very serious, largely home-grown Islamist terror threat, one that shows few signs of diminishing in the foreseeable future (Home Office, 2009). Whilst particular foreign policy initiatives may have played an accelerant role for this threat, there is clear evidence that it pre-dates the Iraq War and even the 9/11 attacks, having its roots in profound global economic, technological, geo-political and religious developments (Burke, 2007). This article has attempted to address the issue of whether the government's PVE initiative (DCLG, 2007a) has been a helpful contribution or not to increasing Britain's resilience, safety and security against this terrorist threat. Its conclusion has been that there are profound problems and limitations with the PVE agenda to date, a view echoed by the Parliamentary Inquiry

in to the portion of PVE overseen by DCLG (House of Commons, 2009; 2010). In summarising these criticisms, this final section also attempts to suggest the more positive ways forward that are implicit in the criticism of what has gone before.

It first has to be acknowledged that the education and community-based approach of PVE within the overall CONTEST (Home Office, 2009) counter-terrorism strategy represents a patient and balanced approach when compared to the current and historic approaches of other states when facing a domestic terrorist threat (English, 2009; Gupta, 2008). A strategy based purely on policing and security approaches might well have exacerbated considerably the concerns expressed here. Indeed, this flawed but  arguably constructive British approach of PVE needs to be viewed in the light of the regressive re-thinking of national attitudes and approaches to Muslim communities per se in previously liberal European states like the Netherlands (Sneiderman and Hagendorn, 2009).

Nevertheless, it is hard to be positive about PVE to date, with the tensions inherent in its design and implementation leading to it 'falling between two stools' (Thomas, 2009).This is not due to a lack of resources, as significant resources have been allocated to a range of Local Authorities, community groups and criminal justice agencies. Instead, the concerns are about the monocultural and arguably counter-productive focus on Muslim communities, and on how this must be seen as an inexplicable contradiction to the post-2001 policy direction of Community Cohesion, (Cantle, 2001) which has prioritised shared identities as a way of overcoming racial tension and the appeal of oppositional identities. In contradicting that overarching governmental policy goal, PVE has predictably created envy and suspicion from other communities, whilst also damaging relations with Muslim communities through a clumsy 'values-based' approach of social engineering (Birt, 2009), and often failing to actually engage with key political and religious issues that may be driving support for 'violent extremism' (Thomas, 2008;2009). Further, the very significant involvement  of the Police and Security Services within  the wide range of PVE activity has created fears of surveillance (Kundnani, 2009), and real damage to relationships on the ground between Muslim communities and their Local Authorities and Police forces (Turley, 2009; LGA, 2009). These local tensions around funding, purpose and responsibility have been exacerbated by inter-departmental tensions within national government over the focus and role of PVE, a political impasse

between cohesion-focussed engagement and security-focussed monitoring and intervention that has ruled out significant changes to PVE (LGA, 2009; DCLG, 2009c). This has resulted in an arguably well-intentioned 'hearts and minds' approach that has attempted to get to the roots of home-grown Islamist terrorism, rather than simply repressing it (Gupta, 2008), being friendless, with neither governmental department at the national level, or Local Authorities and the Police at local level, satisfied with PVE as it stands, and many Muslim communities suspicious, rather than enthusiastically embracing it (Birt, 2009). This friendlessness has extended to the other main political parties, who have sharply criticised PVE and suggested that they would re-orientate it (Guardian 2009a; 2009b), whilst also expressing precisely the contradictory perspectives that have arguably hobbled PVE to date (Neville-Jones, 2009).

Whether PVE has also failed is a harder question to answer, partly because of the difficulty in identifying what can be termed success for an education and community-based focus on the communities and areas that Islamist terrorist might emerge from. The necessary lack of public knowledge about foiled terrorist plots (Home Office, 2009) means that the number of terror incidents, or plots leading to convictions, or indeed the lack of them, cannot be used a meaningful indicator. What is clear is that if building resilience against terrorism and maintaining credibility for governmental attempts to oppose it (English, 2009) within Muslim communities is the measure, then the Muslim suspicion of, and resentment towards, PVE (Birt, 2009; Kundnani, 2009) is a highly negative indicator, as is the clear and widespread public criticism of PVE's lack of congruence with efforts to develop Community Cohesion and positive cross-community relations (House of Commons, 2010). These criticisms point possible ways forward. Enhanced Community Cohesion activity, alongside a public acknowledgement that, rightly or wrongly, the PVE name and monocultural approach has not gained traction with the key communities it focuses on, could provide a way to move forward that avoids stigmatising or scrutinising particular communities, but which nevertheless challenges communities to debate and take action against 'extremism' of all kinds. A good example of the way forward here is the British Youth Parliament 'Project Safe Space' initiative, where young people of all ethnic backgrounds have come together around the country to debate what attracts some people to extremism and violence, and what can be done to address it. Such

sessions have involved dialogue between politicians, academics and Police officers with young people, often directly confronting highly controversial issues like suicide bombing in robust but controlled conditions (House of Commons, 2010). Whilst such cohesion-based PVE approaches cannot guarantee safety against further terrorist outrages – no 'hearts and minds' approach can do that – they would help to remove the barriers and limitations that have left PVE to date friendless and, arguably, failed.

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