

PREVENT

IMPACT: The United Kingdom's Prevent policy aims to prevent vulnerable individuals from becoming terrorists. The policy relies on the unfounded claim that ideology is the main driver of terrorism. Critics have noted that the policy effectively renders all Muslims potential criminals and a U.N. expert has called for the policy to be abandoned.

- Prevent is one of the **four components of the United Kingdom's multi-pronged "counter-terrorism" strategy**, also known as CONTEST. It was created in 2003 but became a greater focus following the deadly July 7, 2005 bombings in London as the government sought to introduce measures to "prevent radicalization" at home.
- The Prevent duty defines extremism 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." The Home Office's **2011 Prevent strategy review explicitly singled out the "global Muslim community,"** claiming that **radicalization in the United Kingdom was "driven by an ideology** that sets Muslim against non-Muslim."
- A 2016 open letter signed by over 250 academics stated that "Prevent remains fixated on ideology as the primary driver of terrorism," and that "**academic research suggests that social, economic and political factors, as well as social exclusion, play a more central role in driving political violence than ideology.**"
- Individuals who are reported to the Prevent program and are deemed to be exhibiting signs of "radicalization" are referred to Prevent's "de-radicalization" program, Channel. In the Channel guidance, the **government admits "there is no single way of identifying who is likely to be vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism."** A document providing guidance on the Prevent duty confirmed this view, noting that there is "no single socio-demographic profile or pathway that leads an individual to become involved in terrorism, making involvement in terrorist activity inherently difficult to predict."
- In 2015, the British parliament passed the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act, which made **Prevent statutory**, meaning that all public sector workers were obliged to show "due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism." Under the act, teachers, doctors, and social workers were tasked with the duty to identify individuals in their care who may show signs of "extremism."
- In 2017, the Home Office released a report on the Prevent duty, noting that **from April 2015 to March 2016, a total of 7,631 individuals were referred to Prevent** due to "concerns that they were vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism." Out of this group, **only 381 people were referred to Channel. This meant that around 95% of referrals to Prevent were discarded.**
- Miqdaad Versi, the assistant secretary general of the Muslim Council of Britain, found that based on the data provided by the Home Office, "**Muslims have an approximate 1 in 500 chance of having been referred to Prevent last year, approximately 40 times more likely than someone who is not a Muslim.**" To put this in perspective, Muslims make up just 5% of the U.K. population.
- Anna Sekular, senior caseworker at Prevent Watch, a community-funded legal and advocacy group supporting those impacted by Prevent, noted that the youngest client the organization has worked with was a **three-year-old who was referred to the program for having an "extremist mindset."** In another case in 2018, **Prevent officers questioned Adam, an eight-year-old Muslim boy without his parents consent**, asking if "he knew the Qur'an" and to **"recite verses he had memorised from the Qur'an,"**

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amongst other questions regarding his faith. Adam’s parents were also questioned about their faith and stated that their son had been **left “traumatised and scared by the events.”** Prevent Watch [notes](#) that “Prevent has created an environment within which Muslim children are viewed through a securitized lens.”

- In 2015, **280 academics, lawyers, and public figures published an open letter [criticizing the policy because “it reinforces an ‘us’ and ‘them’ view of the world, divides communities, and sows mistrust of Muslims.”](#)** The letter noted that under Prevent, “growing a beard, wearing a hijab or mixing with those who believe Islam has a comprehensive political philosophy are key markers used to identify ‘potential’ terrorism.”
- In 2015, the **National Union of Students (NUS), [called for a boycott of the government program.](#)** The largest trade union for lecturers and academics in higher education, [University and College Union \(UCU\)](#), supported the boycott and described the Prevent duty as having a “chilling effect” on academic freedom.
- In 2016, the **National Union of Teachers (NUT) [called for Prevent to be “scrapped” following concerns that it results in “suspicion in the classroom and confusion in the staffroom.”](#)** One teacher at the NUT’s annual conference [stated](#) that the Prevent training was “crude and often involves loads of stereotypes.” **Teachers also noted that the program disproportionately targeted Muslim students.**
- In 2016, over 140 academics and experts [signed](#) an open letter raising concerns regarding the [22 risk factors](#) outlined in the Prevent strategy. The individuals [called](#) on the government to release the academic study behind this framework, as the current “‘science’ has not been subjected to proper scientific scrutiny or public critique.”
- A 2016 report by the Open Society Foundations, [argued](#) that Prevent was “flawed,” “counterproductive,” and creating “a serious risk of human rights violations.”
- In April 2016, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Assembly, Maina Kiai, [found](#) that the Prevent program had “created unease and uncertainty around what can be legitimately discussed in public.” Kiai stated that “the spectre of Big Brother is so large, in fact, that I was informed that some families are afraid of discussing the negative effects of terrorism in their own homes, fearing their children would talk about it at school and have their intentions misconstrued.” He [concluded](#) that the **program could end up “promoting extremism, rather than countering it, due to its [stigmatization and alienation of segments of the population.](#)”**
- In 2017, the UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance [stated](#) “there has been **no evidence that Prevent actually prevents extremism, or that the causal link between extremism and terrorism is empirically sound.**” The rapporteur [warned](#) that “enforcement of the Prevent duty is fueling distrust among racial and ethnic minority communities, especially Muslim communities.” The **rapporteur recommended the government “suspend the Prevent duty.”**
- On **January 22, 2019, the U.K. Home Office [announced](#) “there will be an independent review of the Prevent programme.”** The security minister, Ben Wallace, called on critics of the policy to produce “solid evidence of their allegations”, accusing them of using “distortion and spin.” In response, Harun Khan, the secretary general of the Muslim Council of Britain, said: “We welcome the government’s support for a review. However, those tasked with its implementation must have the independence, credibility and trust required to deliver it.”