Examining the United Kingdom's Counter-terrorism Strategy:
A discourse analysis of Prevent and its depiction of violent Islamist extremism

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Abstract

This thesis examines the depiction of the threat posed by violent Islamist extremism in the United Kingdom's national terror strategy, Prevent. The research applies the Securitization theory and Carol Bacchi's “What's the Problem Represented to be?” – approach, to provide insights into how the policy frames the issue and its implications on the Muslim community. The study delves into the securitization process employed by the Prevent strategy, which positions violent Islamist extremism as an existential threat to national security. Through securitizing language and framing, the policy justifies the implementation of exceptional counter – terrorism measures. However, this securitization also has unintended consequences, as the policy's focus on specific extremist groups may inadvertently stigmatize and marginalize the entire Muslim community.
1. Introduction

1.1. Problem description
Since the terror attacks on September 11, 2001, by Al-Qaeda, Western Europe has witnessed a significant rise in notable acts of terrorism. Perpetrated by individuals who have undergone radicalization by violent Islamist extremists. This situation has consequently raised the imperative question of how European nations, including the United Kingdom (UK), are collaboratively addressing the challenge of countering violent Islamist extremism to mitigate its potential as a threat to national security.

In 2003 the United Kingdom (UK) counter-terrorism strategy CONTEST was introduced by the New Labour government of Tony Blair. The terrorism strategy contains of four strands: Prevent, Pursue, Protect and Prepare (HM Government, page 6).

In the beginning Prevent would play a minor role in CONTEST relative to the three other strands. Following the attacks in London on the 7th of July 2005, the importance of the Prevent strategy/policy increased as the government sought to deal with a risk of “home–grown” terrorism.

At its core, the Prevent strategy was built to be the “hearts and minds” dimension of the overall CONTEST strategy (O’Toole, DeHanas & Modood, 2012, page 373).

It aims to prevent radicalization to terrorism and has three strategic objectives to that end: (i) respond to the ideological challenge of terrorism, (ii) work together with institutions and sectors where there exists a risk of radicalization and (iii) prevent individuals from being drawn into terrorism and ensure that they will be given support and advice.

Since its formal debut, the Prevent policy has generated controversy (Younis & Jadhav, 2020, page 611).

The controversial counter–strategy Prevent has come under opposition, with critics who argue that it will not prevent extremism but rather risks labeling the Muslim community as a “suspect community” (Awan, 2012, page 1158).
This is a concern that have been raised by NGOs, unions, international rights groups such as the United Nations (UN) and religious organizations, etc (Younis & Jadhav, 2020, page 611). The prevention work demonstrates a conflict between a social policy and a security policy discourse, where the strategies have relied on controls like stricter laws and surveillance, especially on the British Muslim community. This even though the prevention work is thought to be equally important to promoting education and democracy.

Despite the fact that security threats are equally present in various violent extremist contexts, there exists a notable bias towards portraying violent Islamist extremism as a much greater threat to national security. This perception does not necessarily align with the comparative threat levels posed by other extremist groups, including those of the far – right. The result of this is leading to the possibility of discrimination and stigmatizing against the British Muslim community. Which also gives the perception to some in the community that they are looked at as the enemy within the environment (Qureshi, 2015, page 184)

It is also important to name that since the Prevent strategy was introduced in the UK, other European states political tactics and approaches towards violent extremism have been benefiting from it.

There is a lack of earlier studies and research that look more closely at how the violent Islamist environment is represented in the UK national security strategy Prevent, and how the securitization discourse is creating a stigmatization of the British Muslim community. Therefore, it is of high relevance to examine this presentation of problem of the societal challenge from this perspective.

Different quotes from the Prevent strategy will also be examined and discussed through Carol Bacchi’s discourse analytical policy method. This research study will also look into the Securitization theory and how that can be relevant with the Muslim community in the United Kingdom. Together with some literature review and previous research, there will be a discussion of how the Prevent strategy is producing Islamophobia and stigmatization towards the British Muslims in the United Kingdom.
1.2. Research question and research purpose

This study attempts to apply Carol Bacchi’s discourse analytical policy analysis called “What’s the problem represented to be?” to investigate the problem representation of the violent Islamist environment. It is specifically designed to provide a way of critically analyzing policies and takes the view of policy as a discourse.

In this case, Bacchi’s discourse analytical policy analysis is going to investigate the United Kingdom’s national terror strategy the Prevent policy. The essay's definition focuses on the strategy’s relevance. The Prevent policy is going to serve as the foundation for preventive action in civil society and also give different point of views on how to address and prevent violent extremism and terrorism.

The main purpose of this research is to provide a greater understanding of how the United Kingdom’s government views and problematizes violent Islamist extremism and how that securitization discourse creates a stigmatization towards the Muslim community and fueling Islamophobia. Providing a greater understanding of this will hopefully provide ideas for how to better the Prevent strategy/policy so it does not fuel the already existing Islamophobia in society across the UK.

The use of a “hard security approach”, that includes use of force and surveillance etc, is necessary but there is a need for a “soft security approach”, based on understanding cultural, social and political drivers as well (Subedi, 2017, page 136).

The research question that are chosen for this research study are adapted and formulated with the help of Carol Bacchi’s analytical model. With the help of her analytical model this research is going to tackle the issue provided in this study. In this way this research aims to provide a wider perspective on how various discourses can affect how a problem is seen based on the information that is provided to us.

The UK´s terror strategy/policy will be examined using the following research question:

*How is the threat posed by violent Islamist extremism depicted in the United Kingdom Prevent strategy/policy?*

In a later section I will provide a more detailed description of the research question and break it down and connect it to Bacchi´s “What’s the problem represented to be?”.
1.3. Delimitations
Several delimitations have been drawn within the study's framework. A distinction in and of itself is made by the essay's principal objective, which is to examine the state's efforts to combat violent extremism.

Additionally, using Bacchi's “What's the problem represented to be?” approach as a research design has resulted in a number of restrictions in this research.

The framework for what the study examines is established by the already developed research question, which also will define what material is suitable for this research study. The delimitation was done to investigate the discourse at national level and exclude local government papers once the essay's objective and methodology were established. Additionally, the restriction was placed on only researching the United Kingdom’s government policy Prevent.

1.4. Hypothesis
What I am expecting in this thesis is that the UK Prevent policy contributes to the securitization of Muslims by framing Islam and the Muslim community as potential security threats.

1.5. (Violent) Extremism, radicalization and terrorism: the key definitions/terms
In this section of the research the definitions and terms that are frequently used in the preventive work against violent extremism and terrorism is going to be presented. There is an important part where an analysis of the Prevent strategy will be necessary later in the study, thus it is crucial to first get a fundamental comprehension of the definitions of the key terms and definitions. Particularly considering that the various notions are problematic since they lack universally acknowledged definitions and can therefore have various meanings depending on which discourse is dominant (Bak, Tarp & Liang, 2019, page 4).
The different terms that will be defined in this section:

- Extremism
- Islamism/Islamist
- Radicalization
- Terrorism

**Extremism**

When Prevent was revised from the UK government, back in 2011, they defined extremism as follows:

“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. We also include in our definition of extremism calls for the death of members of our armed forces, whether in this country or overseas” (HM Government, 2013, page 1)

In the Geneva paper called Defining the concept of “violent extremism”, by Mathias Bak, Kristoffer Nilaus Tarp and Dr Christina Schori Liang, they define violent extremism as a violent type of mobilization that aims to elevate the status of one group, while excluding or dominating its “others” based on markers, such as gender, religion, culture and ethnicity. In doing so, violent extremist organizations destroy existing political and cultural institutions, and supplant them with alternative governance structures that work according to the principles of a totalitarian and intolerant ideology (Bak, Tarp & Liang, 2019, page 8).

It seems that extremism and violent extremism is defined as being a threat to a democratic society in both cases, and it could be applied to any form of group that tries to destroy existing political institutions and individual liberty.

In this thesis the definition from Prevent is going to be used.

**Islamism/Islamist**

Another term “Islamism” or “Islamist” is also often used together with “extremism” or “violent extremism”.
In the Prevent strategy Islamism or Islamist is defined as follows:

“Islamism is a philosophy which, in the broadest sense, promotes the application of Islamic values to modern government. There are no commonly agreed definitions of ‘Islamism’ and ‘Islamist’, and groups or individuals described as Islamist often have very different aims and views about how those aims might be realized. Some militant Islamists would endorse violence or terrorism to achieve their aims. Many Islamists do not” (HM Government, 2011, page 108).

According to the report from the Prime Minister’s task force, which also refers to Prevent, describes Islamist extremism as an ideology which should not be taken for the traditional religious practice (HM Government, 2013, page 1).

**Radicalization**

In a democratic society, trying to counter these types of different terms of extremism, another term has been developed as a result. Namely “radicalization”.

Radicalization is a process that explains how someone begins to have sympathies for extreme ideas and join extreme surroundings. The same term ”radicalization” has been used almost exclusively in context and in connection with the Islamist environment.

When someone is willing or chooses to use violence, or supports the use of violence, to further their own political, religious, ideological, or social convictions, they are said to be engaging in violent extremism (Subedi, 2017, page 135-136).

Since not all radicalization processes result in violent extremism and violent extremism does not necessarily contain radical elements, radicalization is merely one of the tools used to promote violent extremism (Subedi, 2017, page 135-136).

Thus, radicalization and recruiting are the means to an aim, such as the promotion of violent extremism (Subedi, 2017, page 135-136).

In the UK’s Prevent strategy, radicalization is defined as:

“The process by which a person comes to support terrorism and forms of extremism leading to terrorism” (HM Government, 2011, page 108).
This means that radicalization refers to the process by which an individual comes to support terrorism and extremist ideologies associated with terrorist groups. Since radicalization is thought to be a precursor to terrorism, it has been crucial to develop methods for stopping it early, which will help stop terrorist attacks from happening.

In addition to being socialized into extremist environments and contexts, Peter Neumann contends that radicalization also could be seen as a cognitive thought process that incorporates a variety of diametrically opposed religious or political ideologies (Neumann, 2013, page 874-875).

It is entirely possible to have radical and extremist thoughts without endorsing violent extremism. Radicalization need not to be identical with terrorism or violent actions. The question of where to draw the boundary between radical and moderate beliefs also arises when determining whether someone or a group should be labeled as radical (Sedgwick, 2010, page 481).

**Terrorism**

This leads us to the next term, namely terrorism. Just like violent extremism and radicalization it seems to be a source of debate whenever using the term terrorism (Bak, Tarp & Liang, 2019, page 10).

The current definition of terrorism in the UK Prevent strategy is as follows:

"It defines terrorism as an action that endangers or causes serious violence to a person/people: causes serious damage to property: or seriously interferes or disrupts an electronic system. The use or threat must be designed to influence the government or to intimidate the public and is made for the purpose of advancing a political, religious or ideological cause” (HM Government, 2011, page 108).

The term terrorism is used often as a degrading term to stigmatize and delegitimize opponents (Bak, Tarp & Liang, 2019, page 10).

It is important to remember that not all extremist groups, whether Islamist, extreme right – wing or other, will commit terrorist or violent acts. However, some groups pose particular threats, both internationally and domestically.
Since both radicalization and terrorism strive to further a political objective, they can be understood as reflecting a social phenomenon that can be dealt with and studied in an irreversible and objective manner (Neumann, 2013, page 878).

Which ideologies or beliefs and which groups or people are regarded radical or extreme is dependent on who believes that something is radical or dangerous. Only in comparison to what is seen as usual is something severe. Therefore, this demonstrates even more the reason why the definitions and terms are so disputed. Since what constitutes radicalization depends on societal standards, who is deemed to be a part of the process has changed throughout time and this is regarding anyone who is extremist, radical or terrorist or anybody else subjected to this (Neumann, 2013, page 876).

What all of the definitions have in common is the idea that being an extreme or radical is necessary in order to carry out a terrorist act.

In conclusion there are a lot of terms and different meanings of the use of violent extremism, radicalization and terrorism depending on who is leading the discourse and also who is the securitizing actor that securitizes a threat. To make it easy for the reader, this thesis is going to use the definitions that is used in the UK´s Prevent strategy.
2. Background

“You are either with us, or you are with the terrorists!”, that was the words of the former United States of Americas president George W. Bush after the September 11 attack, in 2001. Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York City and Washington D.C the US government declared a war on terror. This would prompt other countries around the world to enact national security policies and wage a global war against numerous terrorist organizations.

After the 90’s the landscape of counter – terrorism policy changed dramatically in the world and not the least in the United Kingdom. From being virtually none – existent in the 90’s, to now being a legally bound duty to certain professions.

The government in the United Kingdom has had a long history of counter – terrorism. Especially when it comes to nationalist terrorism from Northern Ireland and the Irish Republican Army (IRA) back in the 1970’s.

A short time before the events of 9/11, the Terrorism Act 2000 was applied. This would lead to the first piece of legislation to recognize the changing landscape of terrorism, particularly the rise of Islamist terrorism. Mainly in the UK, but also globally. The urgent need to deal with the challenges posed by Al – Qaeda, following 9/11, resulted in a succession of counter – terrorism legislative actions in the UK over the next few years.

Sir David Omand was tasked with developing a counter – terrorism strategy to address these challenges, back in 2003, and the result became known as CONTEST, with the four strands: Prevent, Pursue, Protect and Prepare (HM Government, page 6).

The strand called the Prevent strategy, was first invented by Tony Blair’s government in 2006 following the London bombings on 7th of July 2005 (7/7) (Heath-Kelly, 2017, page 299). It would become the first example of a counter – radicalization strategy in America or Europe. The Prevent strategy would work as a cross – institutional policy committed to stop individuals from being drawn into acts of terrorism (Taylor, 2020, page 851).
3. Literature review/Previous research

Prevent has been a topic of discussion and also in the public eye since 2006. The policy, that was created to prevent individuals from becoming radicalized, has had significant impact on both the political and social environment in the UK.

As a result, there has been a significant body of related studies. The majority of thinkers oppose the policy, and some describe it as “controversial” due to its ambiguous terminology and goals as well as the detrimental effects it has had on “targeted communities”, particularly the Muslim communities.

The policy's unique operating environment, which sets it apart from other pieces of legislation, has also been extensively explored.

Below there will be some articles that touches this subject and talks about how the UK government is depicting the threat from violent Islamist extremism in Prevent and how that is connected to the stigmatization of the Muslim community.

In a research report called “The impact of counter–terrorism measures on Muslim communities”, from 2011, Fenwick and Choudhury wrights that the lives of Muslims and non–Muslims in the United Kingdom are presented as being parallel because of their religion (Choudhury & Fenwick, 2011, page 175) and that the Muslim community is presented as the “new” suspect community (the old being the Irish community) (Choudhury & Fenwick, 2011, page 152).

In the article Choudhury and Fenwick uses four case studies. These four case studies are in four different areas in the UK, and they are using focus groups and also some semi–structured interviews (Choudhury & Fenwick, 2011, page 151).

The interviews are done with practitioners and officials at a national and local level. In this way they contribute to the existing research on the topic.

Choudhury and Fenwick argue that the counter–terrorism laws and policies are creating some sort of alienation towards the Muslims. Mainly the young individuals and students (Choudhury & Fenwick, 2011, page 151).
There are also indications that the counter-terrorism policies and strategies are feeding and sustaining terrorism. Al-Qaeda in particular are using the discrimination and the social and political marginalization of Muslims as part of their narrative when they recruit individuals (Choudhury & Fenwick, 2011, page 151).

In conclusion the research article points out that the counter-terrorism policies has led to the Muslim community being the new “suspect community”. That has created feelings of alienation, anxiety, isolation and vulnerability amongst the Muslim community in the United Kingdom. To add to that the feelings of the Muslim community, as a result of the counter-terrorism policies, have been shown to fuel the recruitment discourse of Islamic extremist groups.

Other academics has been theorizing the concept of “suspect communities”. One of these academics is Imran Awan.

Awan wrote an article called “I am a Muslim not an extremist: How the Prevent strategy has constructed a suspect community” in 2012.

In the article he conducts an early analysis into the 2011 Prevent policy saying that this repetition of the strategy will continue to alienate the Muslim community in the UK. Awan also continues to write that this repetition will reproduce the “suspect community” and fueling the alienation of Muslims in general (Awan, 2012, page 1158).

Awan contends that this is influenced by things like ethnic profiling, “excessively wide powers”, and the intentional portrayal of some Islamic factions as “extremists”. Awan comes to the conclusion that greater investigation is required into the roots of extremism beyond focusing on a single answer inside Islam, as this is leading to a community's widespread alienation and marginalization.

Francesco Ragazzi thought about this as well and questioned whether it went far enough in his article “Suspect community or suspect category? The impact of counter – terrorism measures on Muslim communities”, from 2017.

In the article Ragazzi centers on how social policy and security are often intertwined, as well as the impact the contentious Prevent program has had on Muslim communities (Ragazzi, 2017, page 725).
Ragazzi writes in his article that the Muslims have replaced the Irish as the “suspect community” (Ragazzi, 2016, page 726).

The article later leads into his discussion about the somehow strange connection between the state of the UK and the British Muslims. He discusses the issue that being a British citizen would be a “reward” rather than an inalienable right for the Muslims.

Ragazzi also writes that the concept of “trusted” Muslims not becoming “suspect” Muslims is a fine line that is constantly in need of negotiation. The “suspect” Muslims of tomorrow might have been the “trusted” Muslims of yesterday, he writes (Ragazzi, 2016, page 733-734).

Another research article by Christos Boukalas called “The Prevent paradox: destroying liberalism in order to protect it”, from 2019, Boukalas examines the UK Prevent strategy through a state – theoretical lens (Boukalas, 2019, page 467).

The article argues that the counter – extremism works to prevent the emergence of non – liberal political subjectivities in order to prevent the possibility of a political future. The Prevent policy divides society along political lines in order to accomplish this, aligns welfare institutions with the security apparatus, mobilizes society in a security effort, exercises an authoritarian “pastoral” power, replaces trust with generalized suspicion, and constructs subjectivities devoid of the ability to express historical agency. The Prevent policy is a political conundrum/paradox since it is an anti – liberal project that seeks to defend and sustain liberalism (Boukalas, 2019, page 467).

He then argues that the Prevent strategy seem to be lacking clarity in terms of approaches and aims (Boukalas, 2019, page 468).

According to Boukalas the Prevent policy is “construing the Muslim community as the actionable site of counter – terrorism” (Boukalas, 2019, page 467).

He takes into account the covert attacks on the British Muslims in the United Kingdom and how the 2015 legislation amendment and its change has affected them. The idea that the United Kingdom was further colonizing its own communities through it’s “logic of security” and “social policy” was particularly intriguing and therefore Boukalas sees the Prevent policy as a colonial “civilizing” project (Boukalas, 2019, page 477).

The Prevent strategy is a project of the state of the UK (Boukalas, 2019, page 474).

Therefore, in the UK the discourse is that extremism is the source and outcome of radicalization. To further explain it, radicalization is the foundation of terrorism and the Prevent strategy prioritizes the targets according to the threat level they pose to the security of
the state, (Boukalas, 2019, page 470-471), and as of now the highest threat level is from Islamist terrorism (HM Government, 2018, page 8).

The Prevent strategy introduces a value clash that renders the Muslim youths and making them a subject to surveillance and alienation which further leads the Muslim community to become a form of suspect category (Boukalas, 2019, page 468).

Fahid Qurashi demonstrates in his article “The Prevent strategy and the UK War on terror: Embedding infrastructures of surveillance in Muslim communities”, how the “war on terror” discourse has securitized the social structures within the Muslim communities through ethnographic study (Qurashi, 2018, page 1).

Qurashi also writes about the “suspicion and fear” that exists in the communities and pressure that comes when felt when having your British citizenship questioned (Qurashi, 2019, page 4).

The Prevent strategy has been the main cause of normalizing and disseminating Islamophobia along society in the UK. It does so by inscribing it’s prejudice and assumptions into the institutional structures which further leads to the shaping of the public sector employees (Qurashi, 2018, page 3).

In the Prevent strategy the issue of terrorism and extremism is widely connected with Muslims and Islam, which develops the Islamophobia even further because the terror threat is regarded as an Islamic threat (Qurashi, 2018, page 3).

If the terror threat is framed like an Islamic threat then that means that the infrastructure and focus of counter – terrorism practices, like surveillance, is and would be directed towards Muslims (Qurashi, 2019, page 4).

Surveillance is the main core of the Prevent strategy and it has reshaped the relationship between the state of UK, the Muslim community and the wider society (Qurashi, 2019, page 4).

The discourse that the Prevent strategy has created have now sought to categorize the Muslim community into “good” and “bad” Muslims.

In the article called “Governing through Prevent? Regulation and contested practice in state – Muslim engagement”, from 2016, the five authors argue that the Prevent strategy made shifts
In relations between the Muslim community and the UK government (O’Toole, Meer, DeHanas, Jones & Modood, 2016, page 162).

In the article they argue that analyzing the significance of the Prevent strategy and counter-terrorism policies, have led towards the securitization of the UK governments relationship with the Muslim community because of the conflict that exists. This have also further led to participatory initiatives being introduced which has the purpose of disciplining Muslim communities in the process constituting Muslims as the “suspect community” (O’Toole, Meer, DeHanas, Jones and Modood, 2016, page 161).

They also write that the Prevent strategy was widely perceived as a programme of spying, which was acknowledged by a House of Commons Selected Committee (O’Toole, Meer, DeHanas, Jones and Modood, 2016, page 163).

The UK government saw, through the Prevent strategy, that Muslims were constituted as simultaneously “at risk” of being radicalized and “risky” – meaning that Muslims was posing a security risk (O’Toole, Meer, DeHanas, Jones and Modood, 2016, page 164).

To reform, manage, regulate, and “discipline” Muslim behavior, this would require a number of extensive interventions in Muslim religious, social, and civil systems from the UK government. Through the Prevent strategy, the UK government created a variety of mechanisms for disciplining Muslim subjects, such as the use of a set of reductive distinctions between moderate and extremist, good or bad Muslims, creating a constrained range of subject positions for Muslims as well as attempts to mobilize the Muslim community as a whole in combating extremist ideology (O’Toole, Meer, DeHanas, Jones and Modood, 2016, page 164)

Heath – Kelly is another major researcher on this strategy/policy. In her article “Counter-Terrorism and the counterfactual: Producing the radicalization discourse and the UK Prevent strategy”, from 2013, she discusses how the UK counter-terrorism currently is relying upon the invention of “radicalization” to take control of communities rendered as suspicious (Heath – Kelly, 2013, page 394).

She also argues that the British Muslim population are labeled as both “risky” and “at risk” of becoming radicalized by the Prevent strategy/policy (Heath – Kelly, 2013, page 405). This in turn will lead to the framing and securitization of the British Muslim communities by the UK government through the Prevent policy. By blurring the lines between disciplinary and
securitizing governance, risk management and security technology can concurrently produce “at risk” populations as “risky” and transforming vulnerability into potential hazard. The “broad – brush” association of terrorism with “at risk” Muslim communities within Prevent does, in fact, communicate this “riskiness”, securitizing their residents in the name of others as a location from which future threats might emerge, while simultaneously disciplining them for their own good (Heath – Kelly, 2013, page 405).

The Prevent strategy has also been made nationally deployed across the healthcare and educational sectors in the UK. The argument here is that the healthcare and educational sectors have access to the public, and now National Health Service (NHS) and schools are being used as bases for conspiracy to point out who the radicalized are (Heath – Kelly, 2017, page 314).

During the year of 2015 the UK government implied the ”Prevent duty”, which is associated with the Prevent strategy/policy. In their book Busher and Jerome writes that the Prevent duty would be implemented in the education system, health system and social care (Busher & Jerome, 2020, page 2).

The purpose of the Prevent duty would be that it would ensure that the staff and employees would be able to see and identify children who may be close to radicalization. Another purpose of the Prevent duty would also be that it would teach the staff and employees how to handle it when they see those children vulnerable to radicalization (Busher & Jerome, 2020, page 2)

The Prevent duty would also require to create parents who would stay strong and resilience to radicalization by teaching them the importance of British values, which would enable them to challenge extremist views (Busher & Jerome, 2020, page 2).

In their article, from 2012, Yasmin Hussain and Paul Bagguley discusses the process by which the Muslim communities in the UK have become “securitized”. They argue that British Muslims have been increasingly viewed as posing a security threat by politicians, the non – Muslims and the media (Hussain & Bagguley, 2012, page 715-716).
They discuss the issue of securitizing the Muslim communities as a problem, which in turn have led to Islamophobia and racism and they show how anti – Muslim sentiments are found across ethnic groups (Hussain & Bagguley, 2012, page 716).

A lot of these articles and literature documents discusses the impact that the Prevent strategy have had on the Muslim community in the UK in form of alienation and suspect communities. The threat from violent Islamic extremism is depicted as dangerous in the Prevent strategy and therefore also creates the assumptions that support it. This is further leading towards new and harsher policies towards immigrants fleeing from countries with Islam as a religion. By creating a policy and a strategy called Prevent, it will also give the UK the tools it needs to use in the ”war on terror”. Using a strategy like the Prevent strategy, runs the risk of fostering the so called “with us” or “against us” duality (Sedgwick, 2010, page 481-482).

Other studies, such as the one from Kühle and Lindekilde from 2012, shows that young Muslims who are at risk of being radicalized feel that the security policy measures in the preventive work have made it difficult for Muslims who have conservative ideas to dare to participate in the public debate without being labeled as radical. This fear increases the risk of the young Muslim people being excluded from the democratic conversation. This in turn leads to the efforts in the preventive work instead having a counterproductive effect (Kühle & Lindekilde, 2012, page 1607).
4. Theoretical framework

The Securitization theory is best suited for this research because of the counter – terrorism policies the United Kingdom is conducting. The threat from terrorism, both foreign and within its own borders, have been an issue of safety for the UK as a whole. Many times, we see leaders/politicians of a state in Europe, such as the UK, securitize immigrants because they are felt as a threat to the national cohesion, welfare system and culture (Balzacq, 2015, page 494). This in turn creates a narrative around the immigrants, who could potentially carry with them foreign Islamist extremists and terrorism, as a security threat. This further leads to the securitization of immigrants and also therefore includes the securitization of Muslims, which will be further explained in section 4.2.

Securitization theory, developed by scholars such as Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, suggests that issues can be constructed and framed as security threats to legitimize exceptional measures beyond normal politics. This securitization process often involves framing a specific group or ideology as an existential threat to the state or society, leading to the deployment of extraordinary security measures. Based on this framework, the hypothesis, from section 1.4, suggests that the UK Prevent policy contributes to the securitization of Islam by framing it as a potential security threat. This securitization process may inadvertently reinforce Islamophobic narratives and practices for the following reasons:

The implementation of the Prevent strategy has resulted in the surveillance and monitoring of Muslim communities to identify signs of radicalization. This targeted approach can create a perception that Muslims are inherently more likely to be involved in terrorism, reinforcing stereotypes and fueling Islamophobic sentiments.

4.1. The Securitization Theory

The Securitization theory was created by the Copenhagen School of Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, Jaap de Wilde and others. The name emerged as such because most writings emerged at the Conflict and Peace Research Institute in Copenhagen during the 1990’s.
The central claim of Securitization theory is that security is a speech act, and that action only takes place when the word “security” is spoken. Something only becomes a security risk when it is classified as such (Taureck, 2006, page 3).

A securitizing actor asserts a right to take extreme measures to ensure the survival of a certain referent object by asserting that the referent object's existence is threatened. The problem is therefore transferred from the realm of regular politics to that of emergency politics, where it can be resolved quickly and without having to adhere to the democratic guidelines for formulating a policy (Taureck, 2006, page 3).

This means that, in terms of security, it no longer has any preexisting meaning, and is instead open to whatever a securitizing actor claims it to be (Taureck, 2006, page 3).

According to Buzan, to know when something goes on to be securitized, the securitizing actor will follow three steps: (i) identifying existential threats, (ii) emergency action and (iii) effects on inter – unit relations by breaking free of rules (Taureck, 2006, page 3).

According to Thierry Balzacq securitization is a collection of policy tools, emotions, image repertoires etc, which are used in a context by a securitizing actor. In turn this securitizing actor, which could be the state government, advice an audience to form a network of suggestions about the vulnerability of a subject (Balzacq, 2015, page 495).

This means that an issue of some sort is given a higher priority as a threat to the state, which in turn the audience of the state listens to and gives the authorization to handle the problem at any cost, as a securitizing threat (Balzacq, 2015, page 495).

One can say that when the spoken word “security” is said by an actor of the state, it will move the politics above and beyond regular politics and become some sort of “special kind” (Buzan, de Wilde & Wæver, 1998, page 23).

This leads us back to the Copenhagen School of Securitization theory. The Copenhagen School rest on a constructivist epistemology that sees security objects as the things people talk about – the things we people negotiate and accept (Buzan, de Wilde & Wæver, 1998, page 26).

The theory has two conceptual dimensions. The first is how a problem can be securitized, or more specifically, what requirements must be satisfied before securitization can begin. On a
scale from non– politicized to politicized to securitized, the other is when a problem can be said to have been successfully securitized (Peoples & Vaughan – Williams, 2010, page 77).

The following are the criteria for securitization: A speaker who poses someone or something as an existential danger to a certain audience must be present. This is known as a securitizing move. A successful securitization, in turn, only takes place when the referent object accepts a security move and the securitized issue starts to pose a threat (Buzan, de Wilde & Wæver, 1998, page 25).

In essence, there are three parties involved in a securitization process: the speaker who makes the securitizing moves, the speech act, which is the discourse framing of a problem as a threat (Peoples & Vaughan – Williams, 2010, page 77), and the referent object, who is the target of the threat and who must accept the threat in order for the process to be completed (Peoples & Vaughan – Williams, 2010, page 78).

The claim that security threats are always existential for the survival of a particular referent object, such as the state or territory, social order, culture, natural environment, or financial system, is made by the Copenhagen School (Stritzel, 2015, page 15).

The Copenhagen School believes that security needs to be understood in the context of a “state of exception”. With the process of securitization, a problem is dramatized as a problem of absolute priority, allowing an agent to legitimately claim a need to raise the problem above the constraints of regular political rules and procedure and open debate to treat it by “extraordinary measures” (Stritzel, 2014, page 15).

Security is similarly characterized in terms of a distinct modality marked by the highest urgency, priority of action, and breaking free from “normal rules” of politics (Stritzel, 2015, page 15).

In conclusion the process of securitization within the Copenhagen School's Securitization theory is called Speech – act. This process consists of two steps, the first of which concerns when a securitizing actor declares that a reference object is exposed to an existential threat. The securitizing actor must possess enough authority and influence that his speech act initiates the securitization process.

The second step in the process involves a relevant audience such as the general public or a group of politicians being convinced by this speech act, followed by a shared understanding
that this is a security threat. The process is only fulfilled if both of these steps are completed successfully.

4.2. Understanding Security as a Speech Act

Based on the text above the Securitization theory views security as a speech act, where an issue becomes a security threat when it is labeled and framed as such by a securitizing actor. In the context of the Prevent strategy, the UK government or relevant authorities are the securitizing actors who have the power to define and communicate what constitutes a threat of violent Islamist extremism.

The theory focuses on how security issues are constructed and framed as existential dangers that require urgent and exceptional measures beyond regular politics. The research question aims to explore how the threat of violent Islamist extremism is portrayed in the Prevent strategy, which may involve the use of specific language, narratives, and imagery to emphasize the urgency of addressing the perceived threat.

By applying the Securitization theory, the study can analyze the Prevent strategy to identify instances of speech acts where the threat of violent Islamist extremism is securitized. This includes looking for language that presents the threat as an immediate danger to national security and justifies exceptional actions.

The Securitization theory helps in understanding how securitizing an issue affects policy implementation. In the context of the Prevent strategy, once violent Islamist extremism is securitized, it may lead to the implementation of specific measures, such as surveillance, monitoring, and interventions aimed at countering radicalization.

The theory acknowledges the role of the audience in the securitization process. It is essential to explore how the portrayal of the threat of violent Islamist extremism in the Prevent strategy influences public perception, fear, and support for the proposed security measures.

Securitization often has implications for communities perceived as posing the security threat. In the case of the Prevent strategy, it may impact the Muslim community in the UK, leading to stigmatization, alienation, and potential human rights concerns.
If the threat is “real” or not will not matter when leading the discussion and defining the threat as such (Shepherd, 2010, page 53).

Therefore, the concept of “audience” is an important part of the Securitization theory, because the theory is an intersubjective process that is in need of an audience that is coherent (Balzacq, Léonard & Ruzicka, 2015, page 499).

4.3. Criticism of the Securitization theory

Barry Buzan argues that securitization should be seen as something negative, as evidence that there has been a failure to deal with an issue within “everyday” politics (Buzan, de Wilde & Wæver, 1998, page 29).

When, for example, a state securitizes an issue, it leads to the actor being given the opportunity to act in a way that would not otherwise be possible, exceptional actions are legitimized. Which makes it of the utmost importance to consider the side effects.

It helps to create greater tolerance for actions outside the usual political procedures, which in turn becomes a political fact that can have consequences. For instance, the discussion of migration being a security issue might, for example, result in portraying them as dangerous, which in turn leads to a negative image, which then could lead to the stigmatization of the immigrants.
5. Method

In this research study, a discourse analysis is going to be used. The Canadian – Australian professor Carol Bacchi’s discourse policy analysis, "What’s the problem represented to be?", is going to be used as a base for this research study and is usually shortened as "WPR".

WPR will provide a methodical and organized analytical tool with specific questions so that in this research it will be able to evaluate policy texts. Such as the United Kingdom Prevent policy. There are many distinct approaches to discourse analysis, and each of them will contain recommendations for how an analysis should be conducted.

The method is based on the assumption that the policy contains proposals concerning how a problem in society should be handled. This in turn leads to an understanding regarding what is viewed as problematic to policymakers (Bletsas & Beasley, 2012, page 21).

A discourse analysis should be viewed as a theoretical and a methodological totality, it is also crucial that the fundamental assumptions of the approach matches the theoretical foundation of the research study.

The next section of this research study will define the discourse analysis. It will also discuss how it pertains to this research study, so that later there will be a introduction of the WPR, from Bacchi.

5.1. Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis, which has its roots in post – structuralist theory, makes the assumption that language is how we learn about the world and how we construct representations of it. Discourse analysis concentrates on linguistically created representations, which means that the world that is experienced is the same reality that is articulated to us as humans (Herz & Johansson, 2013, page 8).

Thus, it is recognized that language does not directly copy reality but rather contributes to its shaping and modification (Bergström & Boréus, 2018, page 255).
This could be seen as it is an important part of the Securitization theory, where the so-called speech – act plays a big part for something to be considered as a security threat by a securitizing actor.

In this sense, one might consider how people's words and deeds (in this example, the UK Prevent policy), express how social reality is classified. The approaches used by the municipalities to address the issue are determined by how violent Islamist extremism is regarded in those approaches.

Because of this, as well as the fact that the research and discussion surrounding the societal challenge are continually evolving, it is crucial to continuously assess and critically review how the government frames the issue. What is given in Prevent is also thought to have legitimacy and credibility because the government is required to present the official solution to the issue as well as to represent the views of the British people and societal values. In turn, this produces a fact or knowledge, which dictates how the preventive activity should be done.

According to Bacchi a discourse is viewed as a way in which power is exercised, with some social actors such as groups, institutions and people having a larger chance than others to shape the discourse that is dominant (Bacchi, 2009, page 25).

Power excludes any alternative ways of seeing the world since power is thought to be the foundation for how our social reality has been produced and how we communicate about it. Power can therefore be viewed as both an enabling and an impeding force (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, page 13).

Several key analytical principles are present in discourse analysis. Examples of such are fundamental ideas. The WPR claims that several fundamental ideas, including those without a widely agreed upon definition, are used often in plans and are portrayed as having a self-evident meaning. As previously stated, concepts can be understood in a variety of ways depending on the discourse and context in which they are used. Since humans give concepts a variety of meanings, it is critical to be able to recognize these central ideas in issue representations in order to look into the meanings that are given to the concepts (Bacchi, 2009, page 8).

Discourse analysis can also be used to draw attention to dichotomies in an action plan.
A dichotomy is made up of two notions, or binaries, that are mutually exclusive and dependent on one another. Thus, for a binary within a dichotomy to exist, one concept must preclude the other. It establishes a social and linguistic hierarchy in which one side is deemed to be more significant than the other.

By recognizing dichotomies, power interactions can be clarified. As a result, dichotomies must be considered while analyzing policy papers since they can affect how the issue is portrayed (Bacchi, 2009, page 7-8).

Extremism versus democracy is a useful illustration of a dichotomy for this topic.

A description of the WPR that will make up this research’s form of discourse analysis will be presented below.

5.2. Choice of Method

The decision to apply the WPR – model as a method is because it is a more of a critical, as opposed to a descriptive, technique of analysis because it examines how issue representations are created. The fundamental premise of the WPR – model is that all policy documents that include an action plan contain problem statements of a problem (Bletsas & Beasley, 2012, page 21).

According to the WPR, how a problem is framed influences how society and politics are shaped, as was previously discussed. Policy document and discourse are associated because a discourse affects what is formulated and securitized in a policy document, and a policy document affects what is formulated within the discourse (Bacchi, 2009, page 35). As a result, policy documents can be viewed as a representation discourse. In this case the problem that is being framed in the Prevent policy is how violent Islamist extremism is depicted in the counter – terrorism strategy.

Bacchi suggests that policies create problems rather than solving them as it affects which issues get attention from the government. These are problematized at the same time as other subjects are left unproblematic. This may result in that society is governed by problematization rather than policies in itself (Bletsas & Beasley, 2012, page 22). To look at how the threat posed by violent Islamic extremism is depicted in the Prevent strategy/policy is to look at how the UK government is leading the discourse.
Bacchi emphasizes that depending on the individual who is using the WPR approach the outcome of it may differ. Even though the material is the same thing. The reason being that we view ourselves and also our surroundings differently depending on who we are and our context (Bletsas & Beasley, 2012, page 22).

Researchers are also situated in a cultural, societal, and historical context. This as a result, our opinions on what should be done to address an issue, or even what a problem is, depend on who examines the material and when they do. Therefore, it is crucial to recall one’s own subjectivity while reading policy and be transparent about these features when applying the framework.

5.3. Criticism of the WPR – model

There have been some criticism against the WPR – model. The critics are saying that the WPR can be perceived as relativistic with a far too one sided focus on the use of language. If the WPR considers that everything is a discourse, marked by language, the risk increases that other external criteria, to which a discourse can be related, are not taken into account. The WPR approach does not deny that a real problems exist, but simply emphasizes that we cannot understand a problem outside of the representations presented to us.

It is therefore not disputed in this essay that the threat from the Islamist environment does not exist. However, the WPR approach believes that it is not the problematic conditions but the representations themselves that show how we should respond to a problem, which explains why the representation of a problem becomes central.

In this way, the WPR – model offers an opportunity to highlight what is considered “obvious” in policy documents, but also to analyze phenomena that have previously been overlooked (Bergström & Boréus, 2018, page 292).
5.4 Delimitations of the WPR – model

In the WPR – model the aim is to read policies from a discerning perspective and how the “problem” is represented within them and to highlight this problem being represented to critical scrutiny (Bletsas & Beasley, 2012, page 21).

This WPR – model is done through a set of six questions which could be applied to your own research study:

1. What’s the ‘problem’ (for example, of ‘problem gamblers’, ‘drug use/abuse’, ‘gender inequality’, ‘domestic violence’, ‘global warming’, ‘sexual harassment’, etc.) represented to be in a specific policy or policy proposal?

2. What presuppositions or assumptions underpin this representation of the ‘problem’?

3. How has this representation of the ‘problem’ come about?

4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the ‘problem’ be thought about differently?

5. What effects are produced by this representation of the ‘problem’?

6. How/where has this representation of the ‘problem’ been produced, disseminated and defended? How has it been (or could it be) questioned, disrupted and replaced? (Bletsas & Beasley, 2012, page 21).

In order to investigate how problem statements can be made visible and analyzed in policy documents, Carol Bacchi’s development of these six analytical questions would create a helpful tool for a research study.

In order to effectively address the extensive nature of the WPR – model within the scope time of this bachelor thesis, it was necessary to establish clear boundaries for the analysis. This means that the WPR – approach will not be used as a whole. Therefore, it was necessary for this research study to only have one specific research question (which will be presented
that was considered as the most relevant to this research study, and therefore delaminating the other five questions.
The research question allowed this research study to focus on analyzing the aspects of the material that directly pertain to this research inquiry.

5.5. How the analysis will be conducted with the help of the WPR approach

The material that has been chosen must be carefully and in – depth read through as part of the discourse analysis process (Esaiasson, Gilljam, Oscarsson & Wängnerud, 2017, page 211).

When doing the analysis of the Prevent strategy/policy, there will be a carefully done read through of the material. The reading must also be done in the light of Bacchi’s WPR – method of analysis and her concentration on the research question.
The outcome of the Prevent strategy/policy analysis will be given under a single, overarching question in the analysis section.

This section here will outline the analytical strategy and present the research question that have emerged in relation to the WPR – model.
One important reason for choosing this method is that the discourse analysis is suited when the purpose of something is to understand the material as a whole instead of as random pieces of information.

It will go on to further explain how the analysis will be conducted based on the research question.

*How is the threat posed by violent Islamist extremism depicted in the United Kingdom Prevent terror strategy/policy?*

Carol Bacchi’s discourse analytical policy analysis, called “What’s the problem represented to be?”, helped me write my research question. Originally the question goes:

“What’s the “problem” represented to be (constituted to be) in a specific policy or policies?” (Bacchi, 2009, page 2).
With this research question the aim is to provide for the reader how the threat from the violent Islamist extremism is depicted in the UK Prevent terror strategy/policy. Depending on the discourse the problem in a policy document could be presented differently.

The Securitization theory is a suitable framework for the research question as it enables an in-depth analysis of how the threat of violent Islamist extremism is depicted in Prevent. It helps uncover the underlying discourses, power dynamics, and potential consequences of framing the issue as a security threat, providing valuable insights for policy development and implementation.

There have been a lot of criticism towards Prevent saying that there is a contradiction between a security policy and a social policy discourse. This would be relevant to investigate whether this could be found in the Prevent policy. Discourses should not, according to Bacchi, be seen as something fixed. They are often intertwined – something that could create a contradiction or tension (Bacchi, 2009, page 13).

I am analyzing the UK Prevent strategy through the lens of both Securitization theory and the WPR – model. I am investigating how the strategy portrays the threat of violent Islamist extremism as an existential danger to national security, using securitizing language and framing. I'm also exploring the implications of this depiction on the Muslim community, including potential reinforcement of Islamophobic narratives and practices. Through this analysis, I aim to uncover how the Prevent strategy constructs the problem of extremism and its connection to the Muslim community, and how this framing influences public perception, policy priorities, and potential unintended consequences.

5.6. Ethical research considerations
As this study uses discourse analytic policy analysis, which focuses on looking at language in documents, it is important for the researcher to be aware of their own participation in the study. A discourse analysis can look different depending on who is interpreting the material (Jörgensen & Phillips, 2002, page 3-4)

This is because, the WPR approach as a discourse analysis, is an analysis tool where the researcher both controls and limits what it is to be investigated. The study may very well have been influenced by my interest in the subject but also by the knowledge that I have acquired.
during the course of my education. Hence it is possible for two different individuals conducting a discourse analysis to reach different conclusions.

This is something that the reader should have in mind when they are reading this research study. Therefore, it is essential to explain step by step how the research is conducted in this study and how the interpretation has been carried out. This gives the reader a chance to test for themselves the claims that have been made in the analysis (Bergström & Borèus, 2005, page 252-253).
6. Material

The empirical primary material that is going to be analyzed in this research thesis is the United Kingdom counter – terrorism policy/strategy called the Prevent strategy from 2011.

You can find the “Prevent Strategy (2011)” and other related materials on the official UK government website or through reputable research databases. To access it, follow this step:

- Visit the official UK government website https://www.gov.uk and use the search function to look for “Prevent Strategy (2011)”. This should lead you to the relevant policy document and related resources.

Even if the preventive work on counter – terrorism goes back further, a demarcation has been deliberately made in the study regarding the choice of the Prevent strategy and also time period. The Prevent strategy/policy, from 2011, that is being used for this research study is relevant because it has gained a lot of criticism from researchers and academics.

It is a part of United Kingdom's counter – terrorism measure CONTEST, which contains of four strains – Prevent being one of them. The Prevent strategy/policy was presented to the UK parliament by the secretary of state for the Home Department by Command of Her Majesty in June of 2011 and contains 116 pages. This thesis will assess most of the policy document, but mainly sentences with the term “violent Islamist extremism”, “Al – Qaeda”, “Muslim” and “surveillance”.

As mentioned earlier, discourses are constantly changing, and since they are never truly uniform, it is important that discourse analysis is done within a specific time frame to enable a deeper understanding of the discursive field during a certain period of time. The counter – terrorism policy, which address both the UK population and decision – makers, have been chosen because they are relevant to them. It is representing the prevailing discourse in the UK. The strategy include different forms of extremism – but points out Islamist terrorism as being the biggest threat to the national security (HM Government, 2011, page 6).
The UK government has not developed the strategies to conduct a critical discussion of a problem, but instead to present a societal challenge in a neutral way. They are therefore meant to have a neutral stance and therefore it is our job as “researchers” to conduct the critical discussion.

Below follows a brief summary of the material to present the objectives of the Prevent strategy.

6.1. Prevent strategy/policy

The UK government published in 2011 the Prevent strategy/policy, and it would be a part of the overall UK counter-terrorism strategy, CONTEST. The main goal of the Prevent strategy is to reduce the overall threat from terrorism in the United Kingdom. This process to reduce the threat from terrorism is by stopping people from becoming terrorists and or support terrorism and is clearly described in the Prevent strategy. The Prevent strategy/policy aims to protect people from becoming radicalized or lured into extremism. In the Prevent strategy it is simply expressed as the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism.

The 2011 Prevent strategy has three specific strategic objectives:

- *React to the ideological challenge of terrorism the UK faces and react to the individuals who promote it* (HM Government, 2011, page 7).

- *To ensure those individuals who are close to be lured into terrorism, that they will be given appropriate support and advice which in turn will prevent them from being drawn into terrorism* (HM Government, 2011, page 7).

- *Address those areas where there are risk of radicalization of individuals and work with sectors and institutions to prevent them from being radicalized* (HM Government, 2011, page 7).
The Prevent strategy/policy was implemented with the intention of preventing people from becoming radicalized and moving towards terrorism. The Prevent policy's reach has deepened significantly since it was made a requirement for public sector organizations in 2015 (Qurashi, 2018, page 1).

The Prevent strategy/policy is a buildup of the UK multi – agency program called "Channel program", which helps individuals from becoming radicalized (HM Government, 2011, page 8).
7. Analysis (Result and Discussion)

In this analysis section result and quotes from Prevent, together with the research question, will be presented and then followed by a discussion section.

7.1. Result

The research question aims to clarify a basis for how the threat of violent Islamist extremism is presented in Prevent.

The results of this thesis, applying both Securitization theory and Carol Bacchi's discourse policy analysis (WPR), provide a comprehensive understanding of how the threat posed by violent Islamist extremism is depicted in the UK Prevent strategy/policy. The analysis examines the discourse used by the UK government to address this threat and its implications on the Muslim community, focusing on the problem representation and the construction of the “suspect community”.

The analysis focuses on specific sections of the Prevent strategy document that are central to the depiction of the threat posed by violent Islamist extremism. The selected sections encompass key policy statements, problem definitions, and counter-terrorism strategies, and they were chosen to represent the core narrative of the strategy and its securitization discourse.

The chosen sections were analyzed based on their prominence in framing the threat of violent Islamist extremism as an existential danger to national security. Sentences, themes, and paragraphs were chosen if they contained securitizing language, emphasized the urgency of countering this threat, and associated it with specific extremist entities like Al – Qaeda and its affiliates. The goal was to capture the recurring themes and language patterns that construct the securitization discourse.

The analysis does not aim to comprehensively examine every sentence or theme in Prevent due to its extensive length. Instead, a targeted approach was adopted to focus on the sections that most prominently convey the securitization discourse. While the document as a whole is rich and complex, the chosen sample size was considered sufficient to capture the consistent
themes and language patterns that contribute to the securitization narrative. This approach balances depth of analysis with the practical constraints of scope and resource limitations.

The result reveals that the securitization discourse employed by the UK government to portray violent Islamist extremism as the most significant terrorist threat is a recurring theme throughout the policy. This discourse is not limited to specific sections but rather pervades various parts of the analysis, both explicitly and implicitly.

In numerous instances, the policy explicitly points out how the UK government strategically frames violent Islamist extremism as the primary threat. Phrases like “greatest terrorist threat”, “most significant terrorist threat” and the emphasis on Al–Qaeda and its affiliates consistently highlight the government's effort to securitize this form of extremism. These explicit statements underline the securitization discourse's prevalence in Prevent, amplifying the urgency of addressing this perceived threat. By associating the threat with specific groups like Al–Qaeda and its affiliates, the government justifies prioritizing resources and efforts to counter this perceived danger. The language used in the Prevent policy frames violent Islamist extremism as a grave risk to the UK's population and interests overseas, further emphasizing the urgency of addressing this threat.

The results identified specific quotes that show the UK government’s portrayal of Al–Qaeda, its affiliates, and like–minded terrorist organizations inspired by violent Islamism as the primary terrorist threat:

"The most significant terrorist threat we face comes from Al–Qaeda, its affiliates and like-minded terrorist organizations inspired by violent Islamism” (HM Government, 2011, page 13).

This quote above is assuming that the primary terrorist threat to the UK is from Al–Qaeda and similar extremist organizations inspired by violent Islamism. The policy frames violent Islamist extremism as the main source of terrorism, implying a strong association with the Muslim community. The policy document positions the UK government as the authority in defining the threat and shaping counter – terrorism measures.
The assessment of the result focused on specific quotes and sections of Prevent, particularly those that prominently conveyed the securitization discourse. Such as these quotes below:

"Because Al Qa’ida and related groups pose the greatest current threat to people in this country and our interests overseas and because they seek recruitment and radicalisation on a significant scale, most of our Prevent work has been directed to controlling their activities. We judge that this will continue to be the case...” (HM Government, 2011, page 16).

“However, it is also the case that the greatest terrorist threat we currently face comes from Al Qa’ida and groups associated with it. For as long as that remains the case resources must be prioritized accordingly and focused on this area” (HM Government, 2011, page 25)

These two quotes jointly establish a discourse where violent Islamist extremism is depicted as the most significant security threat to the UK, requiring specific and prioritized preventive measures. The strategy indicates a focus on controlling the activities of these extremist groups due to their potential for recruitment and radicalization.

Prevent also addresses other forms of extremism and terrorism but its main focus is Al–Qaeda based on these quotes:

“The review concludes that Prevent should address all forms of terrorism but continue to ensure resources and effort are allocated on the basis of threats to our national security. As it is the greatest threat to the UK as a whole, the priority will be to focus on terrorism associated with Al Qa’ida (HM Government, 2011, page 25).

"At present the greatest threat to the UK as a whole is from Al–Qaeda and groups and individuals who share the violent Islamist ideology associated with it” (HM Government, 2011, page 6).

The quotes reflect a recurring theme in the document where the government prioritizes countering Al–Qaeda, and threats associated with it, due to their perceived significance as a security threat, their recruitment efforts and the potential scale of their radicalization activities.
By singling out specific extremist entities, Prevent effectively securitizes them. This grants legitimacy to the use of extraordinary measures that go beyond conventional politics, all in response to the perceived threat. Through this process, Prevent is able to allocate resources and prioritize efforts to control these groups activities, underscoring the magnitude of their recruitment and radicalization endeavors. As a consequence, the strategy gains heightened authority and urgency in addressing the challenge of violent Islamist extremism.

The result shows that based on the quotes above, Prevent, focuses on a specific form of extremism associated with Islam, potentially overlooking other sources of terrorism. The policy reinforces the UK government's authority to prioritize counter – terrorism efforts and resource allocation based on its depiction of the threat.

This discourse constructs a social reality where violent Islamist extremism could be assimilated with the British Muslim community, which could be seen as a threat from the non – Muslim population in Britain.

Applying the WPR – model, the analysis identifies the problem represented as the construction of the Muslim community as a “suspect community”. Through the securitization discourse, the Prevent policy categorizes Muslims as “risky” or “at risk” of radicalization, leading to feelings of alienation, anxiety and vulnerability within the Muslim population, as mentioned in the Literature review/Previous research in section 3, on page 16 and 17. This depiction reinforces existing stereotypes and prejudices, leading to the stigmatization of Muslims as a potential threat to the national security.

Bacchi's WPR – model highlights the implications of the securitization discourse on social cohesion. By framing violent Islamist extremism as the primary threat, Prevent inadvertently fosters divisions between different communities, leading to a “with us” or “against us” duality. This polarization can further alienate Muslim communities and exacerbate tensions, hindering efforts to build trust and unity among diverse groups.

One of the main issues leading to mistrust of Prevent has been the allegations that the Prevent policy is being used as a surveillance tool against the British Muslims.
In Prevent it says:

“But one of the most damaging allegations made about Prevent in the last two years has been that it has strayed into the area of Pursue and become a means for spying on Muslim communities. This allegation was raised in the media and in a research paper in late” (HM Government, 2011, page 31).

The results show that the allegations come from the claim that some of the UK Prevent projects got funding if they would collect information about individuals, mainly suspected Muslims, and pass it on to the UK police. The information the UK police looked for was highly controversial and included data on mental health, associates and sexuality (HM Government, 2011, page 31).

The Home Office got to investigate the claims and they concluded that there was little or no evidence to support the allegations of Prevent being used as a means for spying on Muslim communities (HM Government, 2011, page 31).

It still remains as a concern about Prevent being used as a spying tool and that the Prevent policy has strayed into Pursue, another strand of the UK counter – terrorism measure CONTEST.

The analysis highlights concern about Prevent being misused as a surveillance tool against Muslim communities.

The Prevent Duty (a strand of Prevent), implemented in education, NHS – healthcare, and social care (Busher & Jerome, 2020, page 2), is seen as a potential source of surveillance and may inadvertently alienate Muslim youths and parents, undermining trust and community engagement.

The results underscore the importance of balancing security concerns with protecting civil liberties and human rights. While addressing the threat of violent Islamist extremism is crucial, critics argue that overly securitizing Muslims and implementing broad surveillance measures may infringe on civil liberties and democratic values.

The result emphasizes the importance of balancing security concerns with protecting civil liberties and human rights, particularly in policies that affect specific communities. Failing to address the nuanced aspects of counter – terrorism strategies may have unintended consequences and undermine trust in institutions.
In conclusion, the results of this study shed light on how the threat posed by violent Islamist extremism is depicted in Prevent through the lens of the Securitization theory and the WPR – approach. The securitization process and the omissions within the policy have significant implications for the British Muslim communities, potentially reinforcing Islamophobic narratives and practices. While Prevent focuses extensively on violent Islamist extremism, certain other forms of extremism remain relatively underrepresented. This omission inadvertently narrows the scope of the policy's counter-terrorism efforts, potentially leaving gaps in addressing emerging threats. By not adequately addressing these other forms of extremism, the policy may inadvertently weaken its overall effectiveness in countering the entire spectrum of terrorist activities.

The result of this study also calls for more inclusive counter-terrorism policies that consider the diverse nature of the threat and actively engage with affected communities to build trust and cooperation.

While Prevent focus extensively on violent Islamist extremism and associates it with threats like Al-Qaeda, the analysis does not explicitly indicate that the policy equates the entire British Muslim community with this threat. However, the result does suggest that the securitization discourse used in Prevent can lead to the construction of Muslims as a “suspect community”, reinforcing stereotypes and divisions. Therefore, while the policy's primary focus is on certain forms of extremism, its language and framing might indirectly contribute to stigmatization and marginalization of the Muslim communities in the UK. The result show that it is important to consider the broader implications of the policy's language and framing. However, as with any policy, unintended consequences can emerge. The language used in Prevent may inadvertently influence public perceptions of Muslims and Islam, echoing the broader challenge of counter-terrorism policies inadvertently influencing societal attitudes towards specific groups. These complexities highlight the ongoing need to strike a delicate balance between security considerations and avoiding unintended stigmatization. The securitization of the issue of violent Islamist extremism may inadvertently contribute to the stigmatization and marginalization of Muslim communities, even if they are not the direct target of the policy.
7.2. Discussion

The findings in this thesis are consistent with previous research that has highlighted concerns about the impact of Prevent on British Muslim communities. Several aspects of this thesis results resonate with the themes and conclusions discussed in the literature review. The study's results underscore the concept of Muslims being constructed as a “suspect community”, aligning with the observations of Choudhury and Fenwick (2011), Awan (2012), Ragazzi (2017), and others. This depiction, influenced by the securitization discourse of Prevent, has implications for the alienation, anxiety, and vulnerability experienced by the Muslim population.

The study's findings echo concerns raised by scholars like Heath – Kelly (2013) and Qurashi (2018) about the normalization of Islamophobia through the association of terrorism and extremism with Islam and Muslims. This thesis focusses on how the Prevent strategy's language and framing contributes to the stigmatization and marginalization of Muslim communities and that aligns with these scholar's observations.

The thesis emphasis the need to strike a balance between security concerns and civil liberties resonates with previous research, such as the work of Boukalas (2019), which highlights the challenge of Prevent being both an anti – liberal project and a means to protect liberalism. This tension between security and civil liberties is a recurring theme in discussions about counter – terrorism policies.

The thesis exploration of how Prevent has shifted the relationship between the UK government and Muslim communities aligns with the work of O'Toole et al. (2016) and Qurashi (2018), who discuss how the securitization of this relationship has led to participatory initiatives and surveillance practices within Muslim communities.

There are several areas that could be investigated for further research aswell.

One area is to investigate the longterm impact of the Prevent strategy on the perceptions, attitudes, and experiences of British Muslim communities. A longitudinal study could shed light on whether the securitization discourse's effects persist over time or evolve in response to changing policies and societal dynamics.

Second thing could be to conduct a comparative analysis of counter – terrorism strategies in other countries to understand how similar discourse and policies impact various communities. This could provide a broader perspective on the complexities of counter – terrorism efforts and their implications for social cohesion.
A third thing could be to investigate alternative approaches to counter – terrorism that prioritize community engagement, social inclusion, and human rights, while still effectively addressing security concerns. Comparative analysis of policy outcomes and community responses could offer insights into best practices.

Or a fourth aspect might be to analyze the role of media in shaping public perception of counter – terrorism policies, including Prevent. Investigate how media representations contribute to or challenge the securitization discourse and its effects on societal attitudes.
8. Conclusion

In this thesis, the aim was to investigate how the UK Prevent strategy depicts the threat of violent Islamist extremism and its potential connection to the stigmatization of the British Muslim community. Through a comprehensive analysis utilizing both Securitization theory and Carol Bacchi's discourse policy analysis, this thesis explored the language, framing and implications of the Prevent strategy's depiction of this threat.

The analysis delved into specific sections of the Prevent strategy document, focusing on its discourse and narrative construction surrounding violent Islamist extremism. This examination revealed recurring themes of securitization, the framing of Muslims as a “suspect community” and the prioritization of counter-terrorism efforts. The thesis framework drew from a wealth of previous research that questioned the impact of Prevent on British Muslim communities, highlighting concerns about alienation, surveillance, and Islamophobia.

This study's relevance stems from its contribution to a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between counter-terrorism policies, national security, community dynamics and civil liberties. By scrutinizing the Prevent strategy's language and discourse, we shed light on the potential unintended consequences that can emerge from well-intentioned policies. The study also adds to the growing body of literature that calls for a balanced approach in addressing security concerns without marginalizing specific communities.

As we conclude this thesis, it becomes evident that counter-terrorism policies like the Prevent strategy are not isolated endeavors. They have far-reaching implications that extend beyond security considerations alone. The analysis of this study underscores the delicate balance that must be struck between safeguarding a nation's security and upholding the principles of inclusivity, civil liberties and social cohesion. It is imperative for policymakers and society at large to recognize that the language and framing used in such policies can influence public perceptions, community dynamics and the very sense of belonging for certain groups.

In a world grappling with the challenges of extremism, this study serves as a reminder that effective counter-terrorism measures must navigate a complex landscape where discourse and policy intersect. It is my hope that this research encourages further exploration into policy alternatives, community engagement strategies and media literacy initiatives that can mitigate the unintended consequences of securitization while fostering a more inclusive and resilient society.
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