

## **From securing *whiteness* to securing *publics*? Marginalised communities and differential stakeholderhood in domestic security in the UK**

### *Abstract*

This article develops some conceptual questions about publics and stakeholderhood in security which were originally raised in a previous article published by this author. Themes around how racialisation has factored into stakeholderhood in security for British Muslims are developed here as the foundation for asking questions about publics and their differential relationality to the priorities of security manifested in public political discourse. Principally the article asks questions about the interests of publics vulnerable to the impacts of knife crime, and also about why protecting these publics has been comparatively under-invested in contrast to Prevent and domestic counter-terror. In drawing this comparison, the article advocates for a reconceptualization in public policy to prioritise securing publics against vulnerability to extreme violence in ways which would provide more equitable stakeholderhood in security.

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### *Introduction: Securing society or Securing Whiteness?*

This article has been developed from an article which was previously published by Breen and Meer entitled *Securing Whiteness* (see Breen and Meer 2019). The article engaged with a series of questions around stakeholderhood in domestic security, and in particular how this stakeholderhood has been differentially racialised in ways which have positioned British Muslims in juxtaposition with the priorities of securing white interests. Of course, arriving at such conclusions required a careful consideration of what constitutes whiteness, how this is operationalised through policies around domestic security and agencies through which these discourses become manifested. It is, of course, necessary to give some attention here to the ways in which whiteness is conceptualised. For our purposes here, whiteness is most usefully understood as a 'series of racialized cultural codes rather than phenotype, and specifically how these codes are bound up with particularistic sets of public policy norms' (Breen & Meer 2019: 599). Whiteness is indicative of a collective of such cultural codes whose purpose is to give sustenance and reaffirmation to qualities of Britishness and nationhood, but in ways which make stakeholderhood in national security disparate across racialised lines. One of the clearest ways in which this understanding of whiteness has been manifested has been through the advocacy of Fundamental British Values (FBV) in education under statutory duties embedded in the public policy frameworks around Prevent. FBV first appears in 2011, and is substantiated by way of reference to policy definitions of extremism under Prevent. Within the 2011 Prevent strategy, extremism is considered as 'vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values', with FBV being defined as values of 'democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs' (Prevent 2011, 107). The framing of FBV in this way has implications for relationality to whiteness and in particular for those groups which have been most significantly at the core of the focus of Prevent – namely British Muslims. It is important to note here that there have been some shifts and changes in recent years with a slow but consistent rise since 2016 in threats from far right extremists which culminated in 2020-21 being the first year for which referrals for far right extremism

exceeded those where the concern was around Islamic extremism with approximately 1,200 and 1100 referrals respectively (UK Government 2021a). However, over the lifetime of the Prevent strategy individuals referred by concern over Islamic extremism have been far more significant in number than for any other group, with referrals from 2015/16 to 2020/21 totalling approximately 15,400 (see UK Government 2021a). By way of contrast, over the same time period approximately 6,500 referrals were made as a result of concerns around far-right extremism (see UK Government 2021a). Whilst there has been the emergence of ethno-nationalist groups such as Britain First and National Action, a question still remains as to how far these numbers indicate a rise in far-right extremism in real terms versus a shift in the application of Prevent in recent years.

### *Prevent, Fundamental British Values and Muslim communities as stakeholders in security*

The legacy of Prevent has clearly predominantly represented a mechanism whereby Muslim groups have been disparately monitored and policed. Concerns around the ways in which this was impacting for Muslim communities were initially raised substantively in Kundnani's seminal critique of Prevent entitled *Spooked: how not to prevent violent extremism* (Kundnani 2009). One of the key concerns arising out of Prevent has been the approach taken with identifying 'areas of need' in the allocation of funding. In its initial stages funds were allocated to Local Authorities with a view to 'capacity building' within Muslim communities as part of a wider strategy for fostering more robust resilience to threats of ideological extremism (Kundnani 2009: 10). However, rather than allocating funds based on pre-existing intelligence around extremism in particular Local Authorities, the initial Prevent funding was distributed simply based on the critical mass of Muslims within Local Authorities (Kundnani 2009: 10). Furthermore, the initial premise of Prevent was presented drawing on 'shared values' as part of the strategy for challenging extremist ideologies and investing in religious community organisations in ways which facilitate a robust community infrastructure to this end (Thomas 2009, 284). There was funding available for local community resilience building with regard to ideological extremism, but the strategy effectively implied a *quid-pro-quo* relationship with British Muslims. Essentially, the implicit understanding was that Muslims would be accountable to provide information about individuals within the community to authorities in exchange for investment in community infrastructure. We will revisit the implications of how Muslims have been positioned as a result of this dynamic along with their subsequent differential stakeholder status in counter-terror services more widely later on in this article. If we return to our focus on Prevent, the inherent power dynamics in the implied *quid-pro-quo* dynamic have been problematic, and as the strategy ensued there would be further problems for Muslims as stakeholders. For example, over time the 'shared values' element has undoubtedly been brought into question, with the positioning of FBV as a benchmark against which deviation has become indicative of ideological extremism. The idea that deviation from values defined as fundamentally British necessarily implies that there is some risk of ideological extremism implicitly suggests that deviation from predetermined notions of Britishness is problematic. The prioritising of Prevent funding in areas with high representation of Muslim groups clearly demonstrates that the strategy has actively targeted British Muslims with the caveat that any indication of waning allegiance to Britishness bears the risk of being identified as 'suspect.'

The relationship between the 'Muslim-centred' focus which has characterised Prevent and the codified notion of Britishness embedded in FBV is far from incidental, and each may function as dual components in the sustaining of racialised tensions and division which has been the context within which radicalisation has occurred, at least in the British context (Thomas 2009, 285). The concept of

FBV is also interesting in that it implicitly suggests that white non-Muslim Brits assume FBV as a default feature of their cultural identity, whereby the reality that the vast majority of British Muslims are of minority ethnic backgrounds implies that they are more likely to be expected to pro-actively demonstrate how they are consistently adhering to FBV to avoid falling under suspicion. Alongside this the Muslim-specific approach to allocating funding has also arguably fuelled resentment among white, working-class groups, whilst leaving some Muslims feeling that they have been targeted as a result of broad, negative generalisations about their communities (Thomas 2009, 285, 286). What is also interesting if we return to FBV, is the ways in which the priorities of white groups with predominantly Christian backgrounds have been located within these policy frameworks, with FBV being most substantively embedded under the remit of Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural development (SMSC) in schools (DfE 2014). Drawing on FBV and its locatedness within the Prevent strategy helps us to deconstruct the ways in which notions of national identity have been codified in public policy, and the ways in which these have facilitated disparate stakeholderhood between white Brits and British Muslims which also bears out across highly racialised lines. Within this context whiteness can be understood as a series of racialized cultural codes which are embedded within and bound up with particularistic sets of public policy norms (Breen & Meer 2019: 599). For our purposes here, FBV represents one such cluster of codes which bear a primary function in the reaffirmation of qualities of Britishness and national identity, in ways which have specific implications for British Muslims (Breen & Meer 2019: 599). Thinking of whiteness in this way is useful, as it is consistent with bodies of work on whiteness in Critical Race Theory which draw clear distinctions between whiteness and white individuals (Bonnet 1997). Within this understanding, whiteness as a racial discourse does not necessarily require white people to act in the interests of reinforcing whiteness, and this also means that individuals do not have to be 'white people' to actively reinforce and act in the interests of whiteness (Breen & Meer 2019: 598). Whilst this distinction is useful, it is important to bear in mind that whilst white individuals may not necessarily reinforce whiteness as a racial discourse, the likelihood is that most individuals in a white majority society such as the UK who *do* act in the interests of whiteness will be white individuals (Gillborn 2005). It is also important here for us to consider how intersecting dynamics of identity might work together to inform how white individuals are located in their relationality to whiteness as a racial discourse. For example, intersections across gender identification, social class, immigration status, sexuality along with many others may produce 'temporary ambiguities' whereby white individuals find themselves occupying a liminal position in relation to whiteness (Preston & Chadderton 2012: 92). At these moments, whiteness as a racial discourse cannot be relied upon to uphold the interests of those white individuals who find themselves marginalised in a particular time and space. Exercising criticality around whiteness then should not be considered an assault on white people but rather a confrontation of the socially constructed and reinforced power of white identifications and interests (Gillborn 2005, 488).

It is significant for our purposes to consider that much of the work which focuses on the above understandings of whiteness have been conducted in education (see Gillborn 2009; Rollock 2012; Chakrabarty 2012; Breen 2018; Bhopal and Rhamie 2014), and the institutions of education have also been key agencies through which the Prevent strategy has been operationalised. If we return to FBV for example, in line with our understanding of whiteness above, there are clearly complexities with how values and national identity relate with each other, and how far white British groups themselves identify in relation to FBV. However, these complexities and nuances around relationality to FBV as a coded embodiment of whiteness are invariably exaggerated for Muslim groups, specifically with regard to the implicit parameters for stakeholderhood in national identification (Breen & Meer 2019: 599). The locating of FBV in schools alongside the statutory duty to report with regard to Prevent has

seen education as one of the key sites within which Muslims have been confronted with disparate stakeholderhood in national identification, and subsequently within education itself. Our original analysis in *Securing whiteness* explored a range of examples within education which demonstrated the relationship between stakeholderhood in education and in national identity, and whilst it is important to set out the conceptual approach which was utilised here, this article does not intend to replicate these examples substantively. However, the main premises and development of arguments around disparate stakeholderhood in domestic counter terror strategies including Prevent can be demonstrated in principle through two main examples: the Trojan horse letter, and Muslim engagement with counter terror authorities concerning Salman Abedi. Each of these examples will now be discussed in turn, before we move on to explore the implications for rethinking stakeholderhood in security more substantively in the second half of the article.

### *The Trojan Horse letter as an example of disparate stakeholderhood in education and security*

The Trojan Horse letter and its aftermath has been written about extensively in academic literature, but what makes the affair so significant is the embodiment of converging phenomena, few of which are directly concerned with domestic security. The Trojan Horse affair demonstrates the ways in which multiple organisations and agencies synthesised their activities in a particular time and space in ways which constricted Muslim interests in the context of education. Alongside this, the affair also exposed the extent to which wider discourses around Islam in the public sphere exercise power in ways which default to white interests and the expense of equitable stakeholderhood in security for Muslims as British citizens. The Trojan Horse letter made claims around an 'Islamic takeover plot', which alleged that there had been a coordinated effort to 'Islamicise' a number of schools in Birmingham (Holmwood et al 2020: 1). Part of the accusation included plans to install governors at schools as one way of increasing Islamic influence (Mackie 2014). There have been contradictory public political narratives around the claims in the Trojan Horse letter, with outcomes from the Kershaw enquiry indicating that, whilst there had been some flexing of rules by stakeholders in the ways that governors were appointed to some of the schools, there had been 'no systemic plot to take over schools' (Kershaw 2014: 8). Findings from the Clarke report however had a very different interpretation, stating:

*There has been co-ordinated, deliberate and sustained action, carried out by a number of associated individuals, to introduce an intolerant and aggressive Islamic ethos into a few schools in Birmingham. This has been achieved by gaining influence on the governing bodies, installing sympathetic headteachers or senior members of staff, appointing like-minded people to key positions, and seeking to remove headteachers they do not feel to be sufficiently compliant (Clarke 2014: 14).*

Prior to both the Kershaw enquiry and Clarke report, the Trojan Horse letter was met with immediate concern, and under Michael Gove's direction a number of Ofsted inspections were carried out in school which had a majority intake of Muslim pupils (Miah 2017: 89). In the letter itself, only six schools were named, but OFSTED inspections were carried out in a total of 21 schools (Miah 2017: 89). It is the inconsistencies in these inspections discussed below which are important for our purposes here, and there are two principal implications.

Firstly, the practices of OFSTED in the wake of the Trojan Horse letter can be seen to demonstrate a disparity in stakeholderhood in education which is clearly demarcated across highly racialised lines. One of the ways in which OFSTED functioned in this initial responsive period seemed to revolve around re-framing activities which had previously been noted and even praised in previous reports. For example, in the case of Oldknow, the school had been named in the Trojan Horse letter and was subsequently inspected shortly afterwards in April 2014. OFSTED concluded that the school was 'inadequate' with regard to the 'behaviour and safety of pupils' and also 'leadership and management', which resulted in the school being rated as 'inadequate' overall (OFSTED 2014a). Further concerns were raised about the use of funding to subsidise an international trip to Saudi Arabia for Muslim pupils, with the report stating that 'the choice of destination meant that pupils from other faiths were not able to join the trip' (OFSTED 2014a, 7). The difficulty here is that Oldknow had previously been inspected in 2013 and had been praised for its approach with regard to the 'behaviour and safety of pupils' and also 'leadership and management' (OFSTED 2013). The school was rated as 'outstanding', and received further praise for providing the international trip to Saudi Arabia, which was described in the 2013 report as a life changing opportunity for pupils (OFSTED 2013: 6). A range of similar examples are explored elsewhere including in the work of Miah (2017) and in the original *Securing Whiteness* article which has served as the bases for the ideas developed here (see Breen & Meer 2019). Whilst it is important to establish how the conclusions presented in *Securing Whiteness* were substantiated, rather than replicate all of the evidence here, we will consider one more example with relation to the Trojan Horse letter, namely the way in which OFSTED engaged with Park View school. It is important to highlight here that Park View school was sponsored by Park View Academy Trust, and two further schools within the Trust were also brought into question as a result of the Trojan Horse letter. With regard to Park View school itself, OFSTED had inspected the school in 2012 and rated the school as 'outstanding', and was also praised by Sir Michael Wilshaw due to the school achieving high attainment rates whilst catering to an intake of which around 60% qualified for Free School Meals (Adams 2014a). The school was then inspected again in 2014, and a report based on visits on the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> of March made only minor recommendations which would have resulted in Park View retaining an existing rating of 'outstanding' (Adams 2014a). This initial report was circulated in government but was never made public owing to it coming to public attention that Park View school had been named in the Trojan Horse letter. Subsequently, OFSTED returned to the school on the 17<sup>th</sup> of March 2014 to conduct a second inspection which rated the school as 'inadequate', meaning that the governing body could be removed as well as the existing academy sponsor, the government having autonomy to appoint a new sponsor of their choosing (Adams 2014a). The following extracts are taken from a statement published by the Park View Educational Trust concerning the conduct of OFSTED following these events:

*We believe they were working to a timeline and in a climate of suspicion, driven by the Trojan Horse letter and coupled with unproven allegations about Park View that had started to appear in the media... the OFSTED reports find absolutely no evidence of extremism or an imposition of strict Islamic practices in our schools ... The idea of a Trojan Horse plot has created a perfect storm for individuals and organisations with agendas around education, immigration, faith, securitisation and straightforward party politics (PVET 2014).*

The examples above demonstrate how quickly and extensively state apparatus around security were to target not only schools named in the Trojan Horse letter but also schools with a significant critical mass of Muslim stakeholders. The claims around an 'Islamic takeover plot' coming to public attention were met with rapid responses and inconsistencies in both the findings of subsequent OFSTED reports but also practices around inspections. Not only were Muslims targeted through the actions of OFSTED, but their stakeholderhood in education and civic rights for institutions to adhere to due process were

also undermined. These inconsistencies also reveal conscious and targeted efforts to manipulate official reports which would become publicly available, and therefore feed themselves into the Islamophobic discourses which fuelled the Trojan Horse affair.

The second implication to the inconsistencies in OFSTED inspections is that the wake of the Trojan Horse affair saw not only the introduction of the statutory duty around Prevent but this was coupled with an additional emphasis on FBV as part of the OFSTED 'Common Inspection Framework' of 2015 (Miah 2017: 101). The fact that the Trojan Horse affair was followed almost immediately by the introduction of FBV as part of the statutory Prevent duty (Breen & Meer 2019: 601) clearly demonstrates a synthesis whereby the targeting of Muslim groups and undermining of their stakeholder status in education is fundamentally bound up with national identification. Not only have preventative domestic security strategies been fundamentally informed by reference to how far deviation from Fundamental British Values can be identified, but the emphasis on Britishness and values also constitute statutory reifications of whiteness in policies around domestic security. Within this understanding, the relationship between agencies with a duty to report on Prevent such as OFSTED and FBV as a set of majoritarian cultural markers, self-evident in their relationality to the perceived threat of Islamic influence in the public sphere (Breen & Meer 2019: 609), cannot be considered independently of each other. Misalignment with the cultural markers underpinning FBV bears nuanced and specific risks for British Muslims which non-Muslim citizens do not have to navigate, with suspicion or affiliation with ideologically motivated extremism sitting at the apex. Whilst it is evident that there is an inherent civic inequity in the ways in which deviation from FBV bears disproportionate implications for British Muslims, this is also indicative of a differential stakeholder status in domestic security demarcated across racialised lines and reified in public policy.

#### *Muslims as stakeholders in counter-terror services*

Having considered some key examples around the Trojan Horse affair and what these demonstrate with regard to differential stakeholder status for British Muslims in education and Prevent itself, we will now move on to consider Muslim stakeholder status in counter-terror outside of education by drawing on the example of Salman Abedi. The case of the Manchester Arena bombing on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May 2017 represents a key example of how the dynamics between Muslim communities and Prevent is reflected in counter-terror services more widely. As we have considered earlier on in this article, Prevent presented something of a *quid-pro-quo* relationality to British Muslims, with funding being presented on the understanding that this would be in exchange for information on individuals in the community. These dynamics have invariably characterised the positionality of Muslims in relation to counter-terror services more widely, and Salman Abedi represents a case whereby Muslims were pro-active in ways consistent with expectations placed on Muslims to share information implicitly embedded in Prevent. Following the Manchester arena attack, it was reported that Muslims had been in contact with counter-terror authorities for some time expressing concerns about radicalisation in and around Manchester (Breen & Meer 2019: 607). Among these reports, there had been concerns raised about Abedi, with Muslims reporting him to counter-terror services but receiving no further correspondence (Mendick et al 2017). Abedi was also reported by members of Didbury Mosque after being banned following an altercation with an Imam, and was reportedly put on a 'watch list' as a result of his behaviour (Grafton-Green 2017). It was also reported that members of Abedi's inner circle had also contacted counter-terror services several times including as far back as 5 years prior to the attacks to inform them that 'he was supporting terrorism' and had suggested that he condoned suicide bombing (Mendick et al

2017). In 2017 the then Home Secretary Amber Rudd stated that Abedi was known as a risk 'up to a point' by intelligence authorities, and it has since been claimed that security services repeatedly missed opportunities to intervene (Grafton-Green 2017). The levels of engagement between Muslims and counter-terror services indicate that there had been concerns in the community for a number of years, and a special report by the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament identified a range of areas where MI5 and counter-terrorism police could have taken more action (see ISC 2017).

The Manchester arena attack resulted in 22 fatalities, and whilst perhaps more could have been done to intervene, the point here is not to point the finger at counter-terror authorities. Rather, the point here is to take account of the extent of engagement with counter-terror services by Muslim community members and to consider how this sits when we contrast the response to concerns being raised about Abedi with the extent of the response to the Trojan Horse letter. In both cases concerns are raised about Islamic radicalism and extremism, but there is a significant difference in the responses to these concerns. The response to the Trojan Horse letter was extensive and led to the increased surveillance of Muslims as stakeholders in education to the extent that OFSTED failed to adhere to due process. The comparative difference in the case of Abedi does raise the question as to whether or not more substantive action would have been taken had the voices informing concern been those of white, non-Muslim citizens? Or if there would have been a more substantive response if it was not known that information had come from within Muslim communities themselves. Contrasting these examples raises some interesting questions about Muslims as stakeholders in domestic security, security policy and as citizens. In particular, there appears to be a differential stakeholder demarcated across racialised line for Muslims, who bear a greater risk of being over-surveilled but whose voices may be undervalued compared with their white counter-parts when engaging with counter-terror services (Breen & Meer 2019: 608). There are also further questions to ask with regard to publics and stakeholder in security beyond the ways in which extremism and the risks this poses to the public are presently framed in domestic counter-terror policies. The next section will develop some of these questions further with a view to demonstrating the relevance of the questions posed above for how we might think about publics and stakeholder in security more widely.

### *From Securing whiteness to securing publics?*

The arguments presented above, and the more substantive analysis presented in *Securing Whiteness* raise some questions, primarily that of how far stakeholder in security might be disparate or inequitable based on the racialisation of publics. In the case of the examples above, our concerns are around British Muslims and what we might call their civic equity in security. It is also important to consider the specifics around the fact that the type of extremism which domestic security policies are concerned with is that which is ideologically driven. Both of the examples above demonstrate that domestic security policy and strategy has been concerned with the notional ideological extremist, whether it be individuals such as Salman Abedi, or concerns that nurturing such characters may occur as a result of excessive Islamic influence in schools. The notion that such individuals can be identified by way of their deviation from FBV is a simple concept, but has complex overtones with regard to how far publics have access to full stakeholder in security based on their relationality to whiteness. What does the above mean for other publics which may face racialised marginalisation and what this means for their stakeholder in security? And given the nuances and complexities to whiteness which we explored earlier, what about white publics who occupy a liminal positionality to whiteness? These questions are concerned with publics whose interests might not be at the forefront of Prevent

and our current policies around domestic security, publics who might be facing risks of extreme violence but which are either not ideologically motivated, or motivated by more complex, nuanced and transient ideologies than that which violent extremism has been associated with in recent years.

If we return to thinking about Prevent, violent extremism has meant a very specific form of ideologically motivated violence, or risk of such violence. Within this context, violent extremism is ideological in the sense that it is motivated by a distorted or manipulated interpretation of a longstanding religious tradition in Islam. In fact it is this very feature of Prevent which has made it so substantively problematic, and which has facilitated a racializing process which has constructed Muslim communities as 'suspect' (see Hickman et al 2012) whilst exerting pressure for Muslims to 'co-operate' in exchange for disparate stakeholdership. What Prevent *has* represented is a commitment to investment in protecting publics from threats of 'violent extremism' which has been substantively financed and invested in at the policy level. So whilst we would not advocate for an approach that replicated the apparatus of Prevent, it is interesting to ask questions about the publics at the forefront of its beneficiaries. This can essentially be reduced to the question 'which publics are we invested in protecting and securing?' We have already addressed this question with regard to disparate stakeholdership in domestic security for British Muslims and how this is demarcated across racialised lines. Opening up this question more widely might also lead us to consider threats of extreme violence to publics which are not ideologically motivated in the ways that Prevent has been concerned with, and also who needs to be perceived of as at risk in order for their security to become a priority for public policy and funding.

#### *From securing publics against 'violent extremism' to 'extreme violence'?*

Whilst protecting publics from violent extremism has been at the heart of counter-terror strategies in the UK, this is not the same as protecting publics from threats of extreme violence. For instance, collating publicly available figures from the Home Office reveals that somewhere in the region of 8,800 homicides were committed by individuals using a knife between 1977-2017 (Home Office 2018), compared with approximately 3,416 deaths as a result of terrorism since 1970 (Allen et al 2022). It is clearly part of this picture that concerted efforts to legislate against threats of terrorism will have impacted on the number of related deaths being so much lower than those related to knife-related homicides. Nevertheless, the gap in these numbers reveals that the reality is that many more people have been impacted by knife-related crimes and that comparable investment in tackling this would also have invariably dramatically reduced knife-related homicides over the same period. Our analysis thus far might suggest that part of the explanation may lie in which publics are perceived of as being at risk. Whilst knife crime is a national issue, there are social factors which play into knife crimes impacting for young people and their families in areas of high crime and socio-economic deprivation. To take a more contemporary picture, there have been 93 deaths as a result of terrorism in England and Wales since 2003 (Allen et al 2022: 7). By comparison, since 2010 alone there have been 383,200 offenses involving a knife or sharp instrument in England and Wales excluding Greater Manchester, with 2,351 resulting in homicide (Allen et al 2021: 7). The question over which publics are being secured becomes more relevant when we consider that space and place have significant impacts on determining vulnerability to knife crime (British Youth Council 2019: 20). Furthermore, areas which have faced the most significant cuts to spending on youth services have seen the highest rates of increase in knife crime since 2014 (British Youth Council 2019: 20). It is perhaps no surprise that there is a strong relationship between areas which have received cuts to youth services and socio-economic



conditions, with poverty and socio-economic inequalities in and of themselves being a major cause of knife crime (British Youth Council 2019: 21). Most alarmingly, for 72% of knife crime incidents in 2021 it was the offender's first offence, and this figure has been stable since 2018 (UK Government 2021b). In 2020-21 around 91% of all people admitted to hospital as a result of a knife related incident were men (Allen et al 2021). Knife related offences have averaged around 19,000 per year from 2011-2021 (MOJ 2021), with approximately 18% being committed by young people aged 10-17 (MOJ 2021). Whilst this does show that under 20% of all knife crime is carried out by young people under the age of 18, this is still an alarming statistic for young people and families living in areas of high socio-economic deprivation and where cuts to funding for youth services have been substantive.

All of the above leads us to ask why the prevention of extreme violence in the form of knife crime has not been invested in in the same way that counter terror has been given the stark threat to publics in the UK context. Approaches which have been traditionally employed have not worked effectively in protecting publics vulnerable to the impacts of knife crime. Most notably, increased policing and stop and search have also arguably constructed black and Asian communities in areas of high deprivation as suspect communities just as Prevent has framed Muslims as threats to the security of white publics. But it is also important to discuss race here, and in the process provide some clarifications on where the conclusions of this article are headed. The arguments presented here are not leading towards a conclusion which falls victim to reaffirming notional racialised discourses around perceptions of knife crime in the British public political sphere. National data is inconsistent, and the vast majority of statistics on ethnicity and knife crime are focused on London and crime figures from London Metropolitan police. There are problems here not least in that London itself cannot be considered to be typical of the national picture around knife crime, and in addition the representation of diversity and minority ethnic groups in London is far higher than national representations of the same communities and minority ethnic groups. But the main problem is that disparities in recorded offending are highly correlated with relation to inequalities around police contact, and in particular the use of stop and search (Stott et al 2021). Consequently, the relative overrepresentation of BAME people in arrest, prosecution and conviction statistics, cannot be separated out, or understood independently from, police targeting of areas with high proportions of black and South Asian minority ethnic communities (Stott et al 2021). Therefore to entertain recorded offenses within the context of and knowledge of the wider and well documented tensions around race and policing in London, whereby the majority of statistics on knife crime and ethnicity are available, would be nothing short of an exercise in academic bad practice. Owing to these issues the national picture on ethnicity and knife crime is far from clear. So the arguments being developed here are *not* to entertain that the security of particular minority ethnic communities is being overlooked because there might be a disproportionate impact or relationship with knife crime, but rather to acknowledge *that there are highly racialised discourses around knife crime which have constructed wider unsubstantiated perceptions* that some minority ethnic groups might be more impacted by the effects of knife crime.

#### *Which publics are we advocating for?*

The picture is clear with regard to knife crime that the threat to public security is at present massively more substantive than threats posed by domestic terrorism. Risk factors around knife crime include location and space and place with socio-economic deprivation, cuts to funding for youth services and gender all appear to be risk factors around knife crime. Publics living in areas of high socio-economic deprivation which have been hardest hit by the effects of austerity are likely to face the highest levels

of risk around the effects of knife crime, and it is argued here that the threats of extreme violence that such publics face are not a priority by way of comparison with the investment that has been made in counter-terror in the UK. As the very approaches to counter terror can be deconstructed to expose the differential stakeholderhood in security faced by British Muslims relative to their white non-Muslim counterparts, there are too disparities in the security of publics which are prioritised and those which are not. Whilst this disparity with regard to knife crime does not mirror the racialised processes which have led to inequities in stakeholderhood for Muslims in domestic security, we have demonstrated that those publics most vulnerable to the impacts of knife crime occupy liminal spaces. With the picture on ethnicity and knife crime being difficult to establish, we can still acknowledge that minority ethnic groups living areas impacted by socio-economic deprivation and cuts to youth services will invariably face at least the same risks as their white counterparts. Those white groups at risk will as a result of their own social locatedness exist at the fringes of whiteness, with limited access to its privileges bearing out with many more temporary ambiguities than their more affluent white peers, and with the prevalent threat of knife crime representing intermittently present moments within which whiteness cannot be relied upon to uphold their interests. It is the perception of *who* is at risk which has likely informed the lack of priority around the safeguarding of publics against the threats of extreme violence posed by knife crime, which have consistently and vastly outweighed those related to domestic terrorism.

*Moving forward: What is it that is being advocated here?*

Whilst we have established a disparity in how we are addressing issues which pose threats of serious violence to publics based on who those publics are, it is also important to consider how the ideological mechanisms by which threats of serious violence arise might be different from those which have been at the centre of policies around violent extremism. Part of why this is important is because exploring these potentially new ideological mechanisms might help us to understand what is needed in order to effectively safeguard publics in more equitable ways. Perhaps extreme violence is a better term than violent extremism moving forward as this could be reconceptualised such that it encompasses threats to public security which are informed by both more traditional and more nuanced forms of ideologies. For example, we noted above that 2020-21 was the first year that referrals to Prevent for those influenced by far-right ethno-nationalist ideologies exceeded those for Muslim groups (UK Government 2021a). The steady increase in far-right extremism in the UK has been ongoing, with 12 out of 32 plots to kill since 2017 being driven by far-right extremism (Dodd 2022). We have also seen the mobilisation of these new threats in the form of organisations and online groups such as National Action, Britain First and Knights Templar. Whilst far-right ideologies are far from new, these new shifts in how Prevent is being applied might indicate the necessity for a re-envisioning of how ideologically-informed threats of violence are conceptualised in public policy discourses given the prevalence that Islamic extremism has occupied in counter terror policies in the UK. To this end, we contend that there is a case for rethinking threats of extreme violence and the ideological mechanisms which motivate them as part of a way of fracturing the longstanding association of ideological extremism with Muslim groups, and moving towards a more nuanced and dynamic understanding which would allow for a public policy approach suitable for addressing threats to security faced by publics in more equitable ways. Achieving this will require more substantive enquiry and will likely require a number of further articles in order to construct a clear image of what such a reconceptualisation might look like. Further to this point, there are also questions to ask about the extent to which knife crime is ideologically informed and whether extreme violence is always ideologically driven. On the surface level knife crime may appear to lack ideological premises, but in the context of particular socio-economic and spatial

dynamics people are more likely to become engaged in knife crime, and so it is worth considering if there is something ideological which is more likely to develop within such social conditions. This may not be an established or tangible set of ideological ideas which have been constructed out of the purposeful manipulation of more longstanding religious or philosophical traditions to further political or criminal ends through the threat or enactment of extreme violence on publics. When considering factors which draw young people into knife crime, there may be collective understandings borne out of the conditions within which knife crime happens most prevalently, around the circumstances within which it is necessary to put oneself at risk of violence or to exercise violence. Such collective understandings may not fit traditional notions of ideology, rather they might be situationally located, generationally specific, fragmented, transient, and informed by social norms and conventions in local and age-specific social networks, representations of norms and conventions around violence in TV, film and music in popular culture, and the consumption of social media.

### *In conclusion...*

The arguments presented here are not to suggest that in order to safeguard publics from the threat of knife crime we need to replicate the approach taken with Prevent for the many and various reasons which are covered in this article. But there is a question over stakeholdership in security for marginalised publics which could serve as a rationale for rethinking how we conceptualise extreme violence in the public-political arena. A good start might be to focus on the risks posed to marginalised publics both in terms of vulnerabilities to being drawn into extreme violence in the form of knife crime, and the more fragmented, nuanced, rapidly changing and transient ideologies which inform this. Further exploration of these factors could serve as the basis from which a public-political re-conceptualisation of extreme violence could be constructed which is more suitable and equitable for protecting publics from contemporary threats of ideologically informed extreme violence including young people and serious violence, but also more traditionally ideologically informed violence including resurgences in threats from the new far/alt right ethno-nationalist movements.

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