'Just three Skittles in a bowl will kill you. Would you take a handful?' [1]

Evidence, Public Policy and Islamist-inspired Violent Extremism

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[1] Adapted from a Tweet by Donald J. Trump Junior posted 19 September 2016 (deleted 28 September 2016) – available at: @DonaldJTrumpJnr (viewed 20 September 2016).

ABSTRACT This article is concerned with the use of evidence by the UK policy community to tackle Islamist-inspired terrorism. It focuses on how evidence for such terrorism is generated, interpreted and organized, and in particular pinpointing the challenges of reliability and prediction facing those with responsibility for tackling terrorism and its associated causes. Counter-terrorism policy is heavily exposed to risks of bias and distortion, but it is also vulnerable to various kinds of institutional group-think and vested interests. This article scrutinises three aspects of CT evidence-based policymaking. First, there are imperfections in the evidence base, mostly arising from data limitations and practical shortcomings. These include factual gaps in knowledge, difficulties in comparing evidence about Muslims with non-Muslims, methodological weaknesses, and difficulties in measuring profoundly subjective feelings about alienation and grievance. Secondly, the scope of the problem to which policy is addressed (and the policy paradigms that are alluded to) shape the priorities placed on the evidence base. How much weight should be given to evidence about the narrative of oppression or dissent used by extremists? Background oppositional identities are extensively researched and yet policymakers may choose to concentrate instead on factors in the foreground that have to do with actual violent conspiracies. Thirdly, important nuances in the evidence-policy nexus arise from the implicit generalizations that are held by policymakers. Evidence describing the problem of terrorism is better accompanied by an appreciation of (and perhaps evidence about) the behavioural situation of decision-makers and decision-making structures. This involves trade-offs, bargaining and accommodations to carry different constituencies, and has a bearing on the kind of evidence that is used in CT. The article closes with a discussion of the above distinctions, and concludes that

there is a risk of naivety in evidence-based policymaking that is not alive to the politics of radicalization and extremism.

(300 words)

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Introduction

This article is concerned with the use of policy-relevant evidence by the UK policy community to tackle Islamist-inspired terrorism. It focuses on how evidence for such terrorism is generated, interpreted and organized, and in particular pinpointing the challenges of evidential reliability and predictive capacity that confront policymakers with responsibility for tackling terrorism and its associated causes. The conclusions are not limited to Islamist-inspired terrorism and can be extended to several aspects of far right-wing-inspired terrorism.

Two decades of countering Islamist-inspired political extremism in western liberal democracies provides a significant source of experience and reflection, not least in terms of what is known about the motivation and behaviour of those involved in (and those thought to be personally or emotionally aligned with) acts of terrorism. In this period, governments have grappled with how best to respond to a range of political movements, organizations and ad hoc initiatives and their associated narratives, a small handful of which have succeeded in making a connection between a general agenda of grievance and oppositional identity, and political violence in some form. Almost all practical attempts to tackle such extremism and radicalization have come up against a familiar problem, namely penetrating and

making sense of the relationship between forms of non-violent dissent and the moral oxygen said to be sustaining specific violent conspiracies.

Against this background, policymakers have been stretched in their use of policy instruments that directly bear down on the actions of violent conspirators. The proverbial gold standard for these instruments, if they are to have surgical precision, is their accuracy in pinpointing the characteristics of potential or imminent violence. It is not enough to equate danger with what is happening now because this can sometimes paint a misleading picture, usually because it is only populated by a thin layer of operational intelligence. It is necessary to account for the context as well: why and where it is happening, and why and where it is more likely to happen in the future. Policies to tackle terrorism therefore rely in some sense on a general theory of political violence.

Obtaining a rich evidence base to explain the context in which such harm is conceived, planned and executed is the overarching policy objective. This is because it brings certain predictive qualities that can shape the policy measures to tackle such terrorism. And securing the breadth and depth of that evidence base is followed by another task, namely to ensure that evidence is appropriately interpreted to inform policy. This is the challenge facing such policymakers and analysts responsible for improving the evidence base.

Counter-terrorism (CT) policy is especially layered with these challenges, and warrants a closer, shrewder look at the relationship between evidence and policy. CT is heavily exposed to risks of bias and distortion in terms of the measurement of

attitudes and behaviours, but it is also vulnerable to various kinds of institutional group-think and vested interests. This article argues that CT evidence-based policymaking is affected by three factors that require more formal scrutiny. First, there are various imperfections in the evidence base supporting policymakers, mostly arising from gaps in data and practical shortcomings. Secondly, the scope of the problem to which policy is addressed (and the policy paradigms that are alluded to) shape the priorities placed on the evidence base. Thirdly, the conceptual models that are used to explain the problem have an influence upon shared thinking about policy among those responsible for CT policymaking and operational matters. Each of these has a bearing on the kind of evidence that is generated, endorsed and deployed in tackling extremism and radicalization, with important implications for policy formulation, evaluation, borrowing and reform.

Background and context

The immediate, shared purpose of CT is twofold: to gather intelligence that is as sharply focused as possible on the practical aspects of violent plots, and to use this knowledge in a manner that disrupts an actual or imminent chain of events and possibly prevents future harmful events. This surgical way of working relies on precision and reliability in gathering and understanding evidence about the defined problem, and herein lie some initial problems. The most important of these is to avoid an over confidence in the model or its supporting evidence base. For instance, one commentator has described this as a 'boomerang effect' (contrasting with a 'slingshot effect'): starting with one problem, the policy intervention narrowly misses

its target and only serves to create new problems in the form of fresh hostility and fears of casual harassment among a group.[2]

The appetite to identify operational models that de-clutter the causes of such terrorism cannot be understated. Furthermore, operational intelligence is rarely open to probing for long term quality assurance, and this can all to easily lead to an uneasiness about ad hoc approaches to CT policy. A key criticism is that it can serve to alienate vulnerable groups and people needlessly.[3] There are important political ramifications for security-based and community-based policies to disrupt violence, and the most awkward of these in a liberal democracy is the maintenance of confidence in a system designed to sift men and women of violence from others. The success and failures of operational policies dominates the politics of public agencies' relationships with western Muslim communities.

There are problems in how evidence is used to inform policy. One of these is that the data used by researchers and policymakers on various aspects of terrorism lack common standards for assessment and comparison. This can give rise to unconscious biases in how evidence is collated. Sheehan for instance notes the early use of 'small-n' qualitative case studies, and in follow-on efforts to create 'large-

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[2] Shamit Saggar, 'Boomerangs and slingshots: Radical Islamism and counter terrorism strategy', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* vol.35, no.3, 2009, 381-402.

[3] Paul Gill, 'Bombing Alone: Tracing the motivations and antecedent behaviours of lone-actor terrorists', *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, vol.59, no.2, 2014, 425-435.

n' quantitative data sets to test particular hypotheses, and argues that some of the latter have run into the same problems of 'contextually sensitive judgements [about] coding' that afflict the former.[4] Thus, reliability may not be any greater as a result of substantial additional investments in data collection. This is further compounded by worries over 'data supply chains',[5] such that none of this can be taken on trust – those producing data are potentially affected by their incentives, which then impacts on their independence from external pressures.

An important sensitivity is the inherent risk that evidence can become undermined and corrupted, even unintentionally. For example, while the use of unattributed tip-offs is crucial to ensuring real-time responsiveness to 'street-level' risks, this necessarily means surveillance extending to law-abiding individuals who may hold serious misgivings about the impression of bias that these policies can lead to. And such impressions can slip into a general expectation of victimization and alienation. With this concern in mind, a former UK Independent Reviewer of of Terrorism Legislation, David Anderson QC, has suggested that it is

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[4] Ivan Sheehan, 'Assessing and Comparing Data Sources for Terrorism Research', in Cynthia Lum and Leslie Kennedy (eds), *Evidence-Based Counterterrorism Policy* (New York: Springer-Verlag 2012), 13-40.

[5] Yoshiko Herrera and Devesh Kapur, 'Improving Data Quality: Actors, incentives, and capabilities', *Political Analysis* vol.15, 2007, 365–386.

legitimate for the state to scrutinize (and the citizen to inform upon) the exercise of core democratic freedoms by large numbers of law-abiding people. The benefits claimed…have to be weighed with the utmost care against the potential consequences, in terms of both inhibiting those freedoms and alienating those people.[6]

This boils down to having greater certainty about what is known, and what can be inferred, about the steps to violent extremism. And since this phenomenon is constantly evolving, it is no surprise that such certainty is subject to review and iteration, and is also heavily exposed to allegations of ingrained bias against Muslim groups, as well as the reactions of critics to those allegations.[7]

There is another tension, namely, how close to the problem of terrorism should policy interventions be situated? This dilemma has been a source of dispute, with some arguing that the root causes are scattered and lie far back in antagonistic values and practices, while others have stressed the need to concentrate on impacting moving parts that are known, traceable and tangible – background versus

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[6] David Anderson QC (Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation), *Review of the Terrorism Acts in 2014*, September 2015, para 9.31 – available at: https://terrorismlegislationreviewer.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Terrorism-Acts-Report-2015-Print-version.pdf (viewed 12/4/17).

[7] Gillian Tett, 'The real risks of keeping America safe', *Financial Times Magazine*, 13 February 2017.

foreground factors, as it were.[8] In the UK, policy (notably the Prevent programme) has operated in both spheres and has tried, sometimes in vain, to make sharper-than-plausible distinctions about the purpose and focus of particular policies. In 2016, one junior minister, Karen Bradley MP, stressed to the Joint (Lords and Commons) Committee on Human Rights (but without persuasion, it would seem), that:

The Prevent strategy is part of our counter-terrorism strategy. That is not the same as the counter-extremism strategy, because extremism is wider than terrorism. It is hate crime and the other harms that can be caused to society by the promotion of ideology that leads to harm.[9]

In identifying an oppositional ideology as the policy problem, the choice of policy instruments in response includes challenging ideologies and value systems that sustain (perhaps unknowingly) a grievance agenda. The idea is to go backwards in order to go forwards – if it is possible to do so – and this insight is a common feature of many policy areas such as tackling drug abuse, rising obesity and sexual transmitted diseases. In this case, it means successfully reducing the underlying

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[8] Paul Gill, 'Towards a Scientific Approach to Identifying and Understanding Indicators of Radicalization and Terrorist Intent: Eight Key Problems' – available at: http://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/1482248/1/Gill-P_Commentary_v1.pdf (viewed 12/4/17)

[9] House of Lords and House of Commons Joint Committee on Human Rights, *Counter-Extremism*, Second Report of Session 2016–17, para 39.

support for extremism as a means of undermining the softer, support capabilities of would-be terrorists. In reptilian terms, it is a deliberate exercise to reorder resources to go beyond beating back hungry crocodiles. The focus instead is on the swamp and how this might be drained of equally hungry predators.

This clichéd and cumbersome metaphor nevertheless shows the spectrum across which counter extremism, counter radicalization and counter terrorism operates. By concentrating on the causes, there is a need to develop an approach to evidence that is equally robust and involves knowledge about who supports violence, who does not, the complex interplay between these sometimes misleading categories, and accounting for counterfactuals such as when support for extremism does not drive violence. Even by restricting analysis to those engaged in acts directly preparatory to violence, what is known about how this happens remains sketchy,[10] although more robust data draws on background factors that influence individual motivation and collective narratives of oppression.[11]

One definition of the policy problem holds that a very small minority of western Muslims subscribe to violent conspiracies. They are the proverbial bad apples in the barrel, and the task is to measure their whereabouts and intent, so as to disrupt and prevent, or prosecute and deter. A decade ago, former head of MI5, Jonathan

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[10] John Alderdice, 'The individual, the group and the psychology of terrorism', *International Review of Psychiatry*, vol.19, no.3, 2007, 201-09.

[11] Richard Perl, *Combating Terrorism: The challenge of measuring effectiveness,* (Washington DC: CRS Report for Congress 2007).

Evans, declared on the record that around 2,000 individuals posed this kind of known threat at any one time.[12] A contrasting definition points to a range of sentiment within Muslim groups, some of whom share hard-line grievances and sympathies for violence, perhaps internalised as self-defence, and fuelled by policies that appear to tar all Muslims as would-be terrorists or terrorism-apologists.[13] The difficulty of ensuring surgical precision in operationalizing the former model are well known, while the latter (employing some Muslims as a source of surveillance on others) can be a queasy task in practice.

Behind these models there are sharply contrasting world views of the values and norms that might be fuelling antipathy and suspicion. Some can be attributed to the effects of scrutiny and surveillance, but some of this is caught up in feelings of alienation towards western secularism, political institutions, lifestyle patterns, overlapping with mixed sentiments about the end of colonialism.[14] They pose serious measurement issues, starting with agreeing a robust way of comparing various kinds

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[12] Jonathan Evans, Speech to the Society of Editors, Manchester, 5 November 2007 – available at: https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2007/nov/05/terrorism.world (viewed 12/4/17).

[13] Shamit Saggar, *Pariah Politics: Understanding Western Radical Islamism and What Should Be Done*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2010).

[14] Ameer Ali, 'From Islamophobia to Westophobia: The long road to radical Islamism', *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs*, vol.3, no.1, 2016, 1-19.

of disadvantage that affects Muslims and non-Muslims alike.[15] Going back to swamp-drainers, the task of tackling hard-line opinion, even where peacefully expressed, is seen as a legitimate goal among neo-conservatives.[16] By contrast, their more pragmatically-minded opponents hold that such a strategy of 'draining the swamp' is dangerously counter-productive: it risks alienating Muslims further, and is in any case an impractical proposition because non-violent extremism is so subjective as to be politically undefinable and liable to fuel repressive state action.[17]

The parameters of evidence-based public policy

By concentrating on currently active plots and on the pipeline of probable such plots, CT policy operates in the foreground of a much larger set of issues. These involve the challenges of long-term integration of discrete minorities, balancing secular and faith-based values, handling 'homeland' foreign policy tensions, and managing safeguards on democratic free expression. The first of these have been the subject

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[15] Jean Martin, Anthony Heath and Karin Bosveld, 'Is ethnicity or religion more important in explaining inequalities in the labour market?, Sociology Working Papers, Paper Number 2010-02 – available at:

http://www.sociology.ox.ac.uk/materials/papers/2010-02.pdf (viewed 12/4/17).

[16] Robin Simcox, *'We Will Conquer Your Rome': A Study of Islamic State Terror Plots in the West* (London: Henry Jackson Society 2015).

[17] Clive Walker, *Terrorism and the Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011).

of significant government interest recently, with a claim that a palpable lack of integration has created a fertile environment for extremism. Thus, according to the high profile Casey Review of December 2016:[18]

> Resilience, integration and shared common values and behaviours – such as respect for the rule of law, democracy, equality and tolerance – are inhibitors of division, hate and extremism.

It is worth pausing on some newer findings. One of these has been that the pace and nature of radicalization may be dramatically accelerated and altered in certain circumstances involving western females.[19] Another is that the overlap between the crime-terror nexus has been under-estimated.[20] And another is that

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[18] *The Casey Review – A report into Opportunity and Integration* (London: Department of Local Government and Communities 2016), p.8 – available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/575973/The_Casey_Review_Report.pdf (viewed 12/4/17).

[19] *'Till Martyrdom Do Us Part' - Gender and the ISIS Phenomenon* (London: International Centre for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence/Institute for Strategic Dialogue 2015) – available at: http://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Till_Martyrdom_Do_Us_Part_Gender_and_the_ISIS_Phenomenon.pdf (viewed 12/4/17).

[20] *Criminal Pasts, Terrorist Futures: European Jihadists and the New Crime-Terror Nexus* (London: International Centre for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence 2016) – available at: http://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/ICSR-

analysis of lone-actor terrorism highlights a new capacity to avoid tripwires that can alert the authorities.[21] Existing understandings about the role of the state and by the interplay between collective identities and loyalties adds further colour. Social conservatives place emphasis on state responsibility to protect individual and societal security,[22] and this creates an implicit expectation that CT policies must work with what evidence they have, whatever shortcomings there might be in specific targeting of violent extremism. This realisation echoes among commentators on the right who express scepticism about the general reliability of social science-derived evidence, and also towards generalized theories of human behaviour and the scientific positivism on which many of these are based.[23] Meanwhile, social liberals, starting from a perspective towards state involvement in and responsibility for domestic security, show their own caution in the face of this trade-off, sensing reputational damage from poorly targeted surveillance and preferring to accept a much higher threshold of direct evidence before intervening.[24] In both cases, there

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Report-Criminal-Pasts-Terrorist-Futures-European-Jihadists-and-the-New-Crime-Terror-Nexus.pdf (viewed 12/4/17).

[21] Clare Ellis *et. al.*, *Lone-Actor Terrorism Analysis Paper*, Countering Lone-Actor Terrorism Series No. 4 (London: RUSI 2016).

[22] Peter Osborne, 'Islam and the British Conservative Tradition', University of Bristol lecture, 17 November 2016.

[23] Peter Godfrey-Smith, *Theory and Reality: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2003).

[24] Martin Innis, 'Policing Uncertainty: Countering Terror Through Community

are contrasting expectations about the kind and level of evidence that is desirable (and attainable).

Imperfections and interruptions

The role of evidence in CT is undoubtedly affected by the big and small frames within which policy problems are identified, but is also impacted by a number of smaller factors that stem from how political and policy preferences are structurally organized. The following factors in particular impinge on the evidence base:

Technical feasibility and methodological reliability. Caveats about generalizations are commonplace in social science research on terrorism,[25] especially studies examining interlocking aspects of socio-economic circumstances and psychological, emotional, faith and political identities.[26] In the case of distinct religious minorities in the UK, research has been developed comparatively recently based on a collection of direct and indirect measures of group membership (a direct religious identity question appeared for the first time in the 2001 General Census). In many survey-based

Intelligence and Democratic Policing', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol.605, 2006, 222-26.

[25] Paul K. David and Kim Cragin (eds), *Social Science for Counterterrorism: Putting the Pieces Together* (Santa Monica: RAND 2009).

[26] Dinesh Bhugra, Antonio Ventriglio and Kamaldeep Bhui, 'Acculturation, violent radicalization, and religious fundamentalism', *The Lancet Psychiatry*, vol.4, no.3, 2017, 179-181.

studies small sample sizes have led to data limitations, and the need to aggregate the experience of otherwise distinctive sub-groups. For example, British Muslims from an Indian background are rarely examined separately from those with Pakistani and Bangladeshi origins, although there is arguably a compelling case based on empirical findings that disaggregate this particular religious minority.[27] Data reliability is further hampered by large-scale survey methodology that uses random sampling of minority population groups in areas of residential concentration, with limited understanding beyond these core locations.[28]

Some of these limitations of quantitative research are also found in qualitative work that seeks to provide a more nuanced account using intra-group disaggregation to describe of the dynamics of subjective experience and sentiment. An important aspect of this has been the question of situating and contextualising Islam and Islamic identity in a pluralist western setting, and pushes against the basic idea of a Muslim 'community'. According to GhaneaBassiri:

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[27] Simonetta Longhi, Chetti Nicoletti and Lucinda Platt, 'Explained and unexplained wage gaps across the main ethno-religious groups in Great Britain', *Oxford Economic Papers*, vol.65, no.2, 2013, 471–93.

[28] David Voas, 'Surveys of Behaviour, Beliefs and Affiliation', in James Beckford and N. Jay Demerath (eds), *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion* (Thousand Oaks, CA: 2007), 128-150.

[There is] no monolithic Muslim community but Muslim communities with varying visions of Islam that stand pluralistically in relation to one another as well as to non-Muslim communities.[29]

Despite several notions of western Muslim identity, there remains a need to provide a convincing account of collective faith-based identity that transcends national and other considerations.[30]

As regards evidence for tacit support for extremism, a key empirical insight is that such support is both knowingly and unknowingly given. Survey data frequently points to significant numbers of Muslims who report some sympathy for the goals of violent extremism, sometimes appearing equivocal about disrupting terrorism and involving law enforcement agencies.[31] There two problems, however: failing to provide an informed comparator (comparable feelings might be found in a non-Muslim sample), and a lack of a contextual interpretation for the intensity of feelings said to support violence (perhaps fuelled by CT focusing on Muslims exclusively).

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[29] Kambiz GhaneaBassiri, 'Writing Histories of Western Muslims', *Review of Middle Eastern Studies* (special edition, Researching Western Muslims), vol.46, no.2, 2012, 169-78.

[30] Tariq Ramadan, *Islam, The West and the Challenges of Modernity* (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 2004, 2nd edn).

[31] Maria Sobolewska, 'Religious extremism in Britain and British Muslims', in Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin (eds), *The New Extremism in 21st Century Britain* (Abingdon Oxon: Routledge 2010).

Gaps in knowledge. What is known about Western Muslim minorities has mostly appeared in the past decade or two, and there remain some substantial gaps in knowledge that are beginning to be addressed systematically. One example is the relationship between spatial segregation and social trust.[32] But, despite small pockets of scholarship, comparatively little is known about the factors that drive individual and collective religious identity and span ethnic, linguistic and national boundaries,[33] ideas of secularism within non-western Islamist thinking,[34] and how foreign affairs shape minority and majority attitudes and might fuel militancy.[35] These are important pieces of the puzzle for policymakers struggling to distinguish between the various research design reasons that limit their understanding. These can range

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[32] Eric Uslaner, *Segregation and Mistrust: Diversity, Isolation and Social Cohesion*, (New York: Cambridge University Press 2012); Anthony Heath and Neli Demireva, 'Has multiculturalism failed in Britain?', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol.37, no.1, 2014, 161-180.

[33] David Voas and Fenella Fleischmann, 'Islam Moves West: Religious Change in the First and Second Generations', *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol.38, no.1, 2012, 525–545.

[34] Humeira Iqtidar, *Secularising Islamists? Jamaat-e-Islami and Jamaat-ud-Dawa in Pakistan*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2011).

[35] Stephen Fisher, Anthony Heath, David Sanders and Maria Sobolewska, 'Ethnicity, religion and support for the war in Afghanistan', paper presented at the 2011 annual Elections, Public Opinion and Parties annual conference.

from an inability to tap into strength of feeling about foreign policy matters,[36] to outdated ways of coding religious group membership and faith-based identity.[37]

Such doubts are not unique to CT policy. They are in common with several other policy areas and in particular the so-called 'wicked issues' that governments face that are long-term and complex in nature, packed with large numbers of moving parts, and test the scope and limits of state action. A prominent example is climate change (posing much greater risks to the general public and yet is ranked lower than terrorism in the public's mind), which is burdened by an over-supply of scientific data, and the 'amplification' of risk by prominent 'public science champions'.[38]

Meaningful comparators. There are two aspects of the comparator problem. The first is a half-full-versus-half-empty conundrum. For example, a UK national newspaper, *The Daily Mail*, published findings from a ComRes poll in 2015 highlighting that 27 per cent of British Muslims held 'some sympathy for the motives behind the Charlie Hebdo attacks' in Paris (alongside 11 per cent who were 'sympathetic to those

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[36] Andrew Blick, Tufyal Choudhary and Stuart Weir, *The Rules of the Game* (York: Rowntree Foundation 2007).

[37] Jörg Stolz, 'Explaining Islamophobia: A Test of Four Theories Based on the Case of a Swiss City', *Swiss Journal of Sociology*, vol.3, no.3, 2005, 547-66.

[38] Mike Hulme, *Why We Disagree About Climate Change: Understanding controversy, inaction and opportunity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2009).

wanting to fight against Western interests').[39] The larger story promoted by the newspaper went further. This dwelt on the reaction of others (including the BBC and Muslim campaign bodies such as the Islamic Human Rights Commission) who stressed the poll's finding that *most* Muslims opposed those wanting to fight against Western interests. In others words, this is a common example of polling evidence supporting both characterizations.

The second complication arises when judging factual statements about Muslims in comparison with non-Muslims. Many stand-alone such studies lack a built-in reference point either from the larger society or from relevant strata within society. Thus, we know that certain proportions of young western Muslim men do not condemn all forms of political violence, but this can only matter if it is more (or less) common among this group than among young men generally.[40] There are potentially significant comparisons to be drawn with, say, young Indian men or with young black men (both mostly non-Muslim) which affects the frame within which the dominant 'Muslim story' is set. Without useful comparison points, there is a risk of losing

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[39] Available at: http://www.comresglobal.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/BBC-Today-Programme_British-Muslims-Poll_FINAL-Tables_Feb2015.pdf (viewed 12/4/17).

[40] Amy Nivette, Manuel Eisner and Denis Ribeaud, 'Developmental Predictors of Violent Extremist Attitudes: A Test of General Strain Theory', *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 2017, vo.54, no.6, 755-90.

contextual understanding of the kind that is vital for CT purposes, and also for wider social and economic integration.[41]

Evidential continuity and causal inferences. The degree to which a continuous body of evidence is available to policy-makers matters. Arguably longitudinal analysis is the gold standard as this provides an ability to map many more moving parts thought to influence particular outcomes or behaviours. Continuous cross-sectional survey research can also be used to replicate these potential insights. Very few such longitudinal analyses have been carried out[42] although some are focused on a wider set of issues such as racial or religious harassment or health outcomes.[43] The risk with relying on stand-alone snapshot studies is that knowledge about changing or continuous individual and household circumstances is lost. An example of this can be seen in the educational and socio-economic rise of British Bangladeshis.[44] This

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[41] Anthony Heath, 'Six theses on Muslim integration (plus reply from David Goodhart)', 2015 – available at: https://www.integrationhub.net/six-theses-on-muslim-integration/ (viewed 12/4/17).

[42] Richard Berthoud and Morten Blekesaune, *Persistent Employment Disadvantage*, esp ch.3, Department for Work and Pensions Research Report No 416 (London: HMSO 2007).

[43] Alita Nandi *et. al.*, *Ethnic and racial harassment and mental health: Identifying sources of resilience* (Colchester: ISER Working Paper No. 2016-14 2016).

[44] Raya Muttarak, 'Generation, ethnic and religious diversity in friendship choice:

large (and overwhelmingly Muslim) group has started to experience upward mobility in the past ten years, albeit from a low base, but research throws scarcely any light on related attitudes and opinions within this group towards Muslim identity, global Islam and group cohesion.[45]

Subjective and objectives lenses. Internalized, collective grievance that spills over into oppositional culture, is something that is not easily penetrated by social research. And yet many agree that this narrative runs through Islamist-inspired extremism, often underscored by a sense of humiliation:[46]

> Muslims are acutely aware that they belong to a world civilization with great influence in the past and are today again a large presence in the world. Their anger and frustration stems from the fact that in spite of the splendour of the past…they seem powerless in the face of attacks on their honour and dignity.

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exploring inter-ethnic close ties in Britain', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* vol.37, no.1, 2014, 71-98.

[45] *The Economist*, 'Breaking out', 21 February 2015, 25-6

[46] Akbar Ahmed, Submission to the Commonwealth Commission on Respect and Understanding (London: Commonwealth Secretariat 2007) – quoted in Shamit Saggar, 'Boomerangs and Slingshots', 390.

The above characterization is set in a frame that is only loosely connected to the objective empirical reality that focuses the work of researchers interested in patterns of systematic social exclusion affecting western Muslim groups.[47] There are robust measures of geographic dispersal, dilution of social disadvantage, enhanced educational attainment and even cross-ethnic and cross-religious friendships – where these occur. It is much less clear what is to be made of these circumstances, however well-evidenced. There is little suggestion that exclusion and even alienation directly affects affinity with religious identity. Research has generally not delved deeply into the drivers of Muslim collective identity and consciousness beyond noting that religious self-identity has grown more, on average, among many western Muslim groups than almost all other religious identities. But that does not say a great deal about causality since Muslims may sense that they are surrounded by a more hostile secular climate than before, which is very different from objectively greater secularism.

Inter-disciplinary insights. The part played by subjective feelings is less clear since the factors behind powerlessness and rage are caught in a more unstable vortex. These can be rooted in notorious acts of injustice and loss of dignity in the past, recreated as:[48]

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[47] Justin Gest, 'Western Muslim integration', *Review of Middle Eastern Studies* (special edition, Researching Western Muslims), vol.46, no.2, 2012, 189-98.

[48] Commonwealth Secretariat, *Civil Paths to Peace: Report of the Commonwealth Commission on Respect and Understanding* (London: Commonwealth Secretariat 2007), 39-40.

…deep-seated feelings of anger and disrespect that continue to live on in the minds of later generations that cannot have been directly affected [and which] portray the other in a wholly negative light, divesting them of any moral authority or legitimacy.

This is an acute problem for policymakers. At one level, as noted, it is wise to be cautious about known social exclusion as a contributory factor behind extremism and radicalization. However, the established facts of exclusion are also known to feature in a political narrative of oppression and moral exceptionalism. At another level, a much larger factor appears to be the call by extremists to others to subscribe to a common goal, namely the 'righting of a wrong'. This is a generalized sentiment that is hard to quantify through conventional survey research, and may be typically found on internet chatrooms that are aimed at an already-part receptive audience.

Social psychology as well as social psychiatry are two likely disciplinary perspectives to tease out how a broad call to allegiance on behalf of a group triggers a more specific form of support for direct action and violent confrontation. The particular gap in evidence is the degree to which western Muslims are *both* in despair about collectively held grievances and feel a loss of patience with mainstream routes to redress. The failure to find a solution to Palestinian losses since 1948 and 1967, or to the Iraqi and Syrian conflicts post 2003, are prime examples.

Aligning evidence to the scope of the policy problem

There are significantly different conceptualizations of the CT policy problem. For instance, the problem can be set at a high and broad level that emphasises the end-to-end narratives developed and used by extremists, how these can take root and their implications. This narrative comprises many areas of criticism of and antagonism towards western societies and governments, ranging from condemnation of violence, issues of secularism, family structures, the role of women and foreign policy.[49] Moreover, it is reinforced by fears that security and intelligence agencies are in the business of recruiting Muslims to spy on fellow Muslims.[50] The point is that this is a very large canvass.

Some areas are accompanied by issues of dissent.[51] For example, the UK Government came in for criticism by the Joint Committee on Human Rights in July 2016, arguing that a proposed new law to criminalise non-violent extremism would

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[49] Michael Arthur, 'The global challenge of terrorism', Speech to the Indian Supreme Court Bar Association, New Delhi, 9 November 2005.

[50] Sahar F. Aziz, 'Policing Terrorists in the Community', *Harvard National Security Journal*, vol.5, 2014, 147-224.

[51] Muslim Council of Britain, Written evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee, 8 July 2004 – see:
http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200304/cmselect/cmhaff/886/886we08.htm (viewed 12/4/17).

be unworkable.[52] The Committee cited a lack of a definition of the action the proposed law was intended to curb as the single biggest flaw in the approach. One commentator noted: 'The current definition of extremism will catch the terrorist with an underhand intent but also the sceptical non-believer.'[53] Simply put, the worry was that such a measure would create a new category dubbed as thought criminals. This alludes to the hotly disputed question of how and where violence is raised as an option or is seen as acceptable, not least by those who have suggested that there is a form of group-wide equivocation in response.[54] It is unclear what the underlying evidence is for such a position.[55] It may be that the condoning of violent methods is apparent but that it is also buried in a number of constructions of oppositional identity.

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[52] Joint Committee on Human Rights Counter-Extremism, Second Report of Session 2016–17 – available at:

http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/jt201617/jtselect/jtrights/105/105.pdf (viewed 12/4/17).

[53] Roger Smith, 'Criminalising sceptics', *The Law Society Gazette*, 13 June 2016, 8.

[54] Martin Bright, *When Progressives Treat with Reactionaries: The British State's Flirtation with Radical Islam* (London: Policy Exchange 2006).

[55] Vamik Volkan, *Killing in the Name of Identity* (Virginia: Pitchstone Publishing 2006).

A rather different view of the policy problem centres on tolerating extremism. This Faustian Pact (as it is seen) holds that extremism that is not overtly violent remains self-contained. In this sense, the UK came to be seen as a host for various extremist individuals and movements since the 1990s ('Londonistan' in the shorthand critique), contrasting with the more muscular approach taken by the French authorities towards extremism from that point onwards.[56] Furthermore, the conflict in question is not a total-war type, and nor is it permanent or involve a universal area-of-conflict. David Kilcullen's *The Accidental Geurrilla* points out that many of the small, localized conflicts that take place are nested within a much larger 'big war'. Without an appreciation of counter-insurgence, he concludes, that the problem will be incorrectly framed:[57]

> Counter-terrorism…focuses on the enemy: the individual terrorist and the network of terrorist operatives. It seeks to destroy this network, proceeding from the assumption that removing the network removes the problem. In this sense, like most conventional warfare, it is 'enemy-centric.' On the other hand, counter-insurgency…has much older roots in imperial policing and colonial small wars [and] is 'population-centric.' Its basic assumption is that insurgency is a mass social phenomenon, that the enemy rides and

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[56] Reuel Marc Gerecht and Gary Schmitt, *France: Europe's Counterterrorist Powerhouse* (Washington DC: American Enterprise Institute European Outlook 3 2007); John Bowen, *Can Islam Be French? Pluralism and Pragmatism in a Secularist State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2010).

[57] David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Geurrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (New York: Oxford University Press 2006), xv.

manipulates a social wave consisting of genuine popular grievances, and that dealing with this broader social and political dynamic…is the most promising path to ultimately resolve the problem.

The French experience is said to have deliberately set out to disrupt extremists' day-to-day activities in order to reduce the chances of a universal oppositional narrative taking hold. But the bind lies in what it has led to: the approach may have unintentionally reinforced the narrative of oppression,[58] painting the French state as the aggressor.[59] The state of crisis in France over terrorism in the two year run-up to the 2107 Presidential election certainly opens up a debate about the effectiveness of the approach. 'In view of the succession of appalling attacks in France, it has not done them much good', wrote one commentator.[60]

Understanding of the problem, thus, shapes what follows in terms of evidence to inform policy. At one end, there is a suggestion that a near-comprehensive

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[58] Tom Tyler, 'Toughness vs. Fairness: Police policies and practices for managing the risk of terrorism', in Cynthia Lum and Leslie Kennedy (eds), *Evidence-Based Counterterrorism Policy* (New York: Springer-Verlag 2012), 353-63.

[59] Yasemin Shooman and Reim Spielhaus, 'The Concept of the Muslim Enemy in the Public Discourse' in Jocelyn Cesari (ed), *Muslims in Europe and the United States after 9/11* (London: Routledge 2010), 198-228.

[60] Philip Johnston, 'Conrad's Secret Agent would find himself at home in today's Britain', *The Daily Telegraph*, 27 July 2016, 14.

understanding of causal factors for downstream behaviour is attainable. At the other end, there are generalizations that deliberately dampen confidence in any and all forms of evidence cited as relevant. Infamously, the late Denis Healey, a former UK Chancellor, retold the story of an interviewer from a polling company who had unashamedly self-completed survey questions in a railway carriage in full view of others. His anecdote was to cast doubt on the method as opposed to the data itself. Notwithstanding his experience, a more reasoned basis for caution centres on the level of transparency that governs evidence gathering methods using social surveys.[61]

Two examples can be used to illustrate the distance between these two points. The first is the highly charged analogy (repeated in the title of this article) drawn by Donald Trump (Junior) between Skittles and Syrian refugees. In this simplistic yet widely intuitive model, the challenge is to identify - swiftly and unambiguously – small numbers of individuals within a much larger group that can potentially cause harm. However, this is difficult because the manifestation of future harm is disguised, sometimes bordering on being undetectable. Moreover, the population within which the alleged harm emanates is moving (the flow of Syrian refugees seeking to enter western democracies (up to a million in Germany's case in 2015-16), and the underlying population of displaced Syrians (one in three left their homes during the conflict)). The risk calculus is muddied to say the least, so it is no

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[61] Rachel Ayrton, *Time for a revival? A historical review of the social survey in Great Britain and the United States* (Southampton: National Centre for Research Methods 2017).

surprise that confidence levels in evidence plummet. So a precautionary principle should be to try to eliminate (or at least isolate) the risk altogether by eradicating any possibility of the population group entering the larger US population (Trump's point). This may be a draconian and irrational reaction, for sure. But it is also portrayed as a prudent one that takes risk management seriously and to its limits: avoiding a small likelihood of something with a big impact is preferred if such an option is available. (The small known risk can alternatively placed alongside the risks of other harms: for example, in 2005 the UK's then-Chief Scientific Advisor, David King, publicly stated that the risks of climate change outweighed those of terrorism.)[62]

A further example of a long-standing evidence gap is the role of female terrorists. Western states facing Islamist radicalism have had little experience of anything other than 'men of violence'. Indeed, Muslim-men-as-potential-terrorists has been sown into a dominant narrative for a long period. The attacks in New York in 2001, Madrid in 2004, London in 2005, and more recently in Paris (2015) and Berlin (2016), all reinforced this frame, and not surprisingly policymakers have pursued strategies that have not questioned this assumption. The strategy to apprehend those intent on harm has thus concentrated on small groups of relatively young men operating either at the behest of a male ringmaster or autonomously as franchise holders of a tightly knit group. Female participation has been thought to be minimal and limited to an ancillary role.

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[62] Quoted in BBC, 'Global Warming "Biggest Threat"' – available at:
http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/3381425.stm (viewed 12/4/17).

This frame is potentially flawed in two ways. The first is that women can be better terrorism assets to deploy than men simply because they have a lower, 'on-average', risk profile to start with. This has been a tactical ploy of various terrorism campaigns in the past such as the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka and also in Israel-Palestine where widows have been tasked with avenging the fall of their husbands. The second flaw is subtler, and notes that women as much as men are likely to be involved in providing tacit support in plotting terrorist attacks. This circle of implicit backing can provide both logistical assistance as well as moral oxygen. The evidence frame of who is recruited and how this happens has barely touched on women's direct and indirect roles,[63] allowing a CT policy lacuna to develop.

In the UK, this lacuna has been filled by a think-tank, the Institute for Strategic Dialogue. In 2014 ISD successfully launched a dedicated programme on Women and Extremism which included a database of the social media postings of western female recruits to ISIS.[64] This has rapidly become a rich tool to gather otherwise disparate evidence about their experience in recruiting others. The series concluded that 'although often assumed to be passive agents, women have played significant

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[63] Sahar Aziz, 'From the Oppressed to the Terrorist: Muslim American women caught in the crosshairs of intersectionality', *Hastings Race and Poverty Legal Journal*, vol.9, no.1, 2012, 191-264.

[64] Carolyn Hoyle *et. al.*, *Becoming Mulan? Female western migrants to ISIS* (London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue 2015) – available at: http://www.strategicdialogue.org/wpcontent/uploads/2016/02/ISDJ2969_Becoming_Mulan_01.15_WEB.pdf (viewed 12/4/17).

roles in a number of contemporary terrorist organizations.'[65] In the subsequent period, efforts have been made to address this gap. The task has been aided, somewhat ironically, by the spectre of Samantha Lewthwaite, the widow of Germaine Lindsay (one of the four who carried out the 7 July 2005 attacks in central London). Lewthwaite has gone on to be a significant suspected terrorist in her own right (dubbed the 'White Widow' by the press), and has created something of a special status to appeal to young women.

The is part of a much broader pivot in the evidence base that seeks to be more responsive to new developments and feedback (why keep looking for hardened young male extremists when there are others in the pipeline who do not match this profile?) And it is a reflection of how nimble policymakers are in making use of evidence that remains limited as a predictive tool. Developing capacity and capability to do these things is a familiar institutional challenge for the many public agencies established to tackle harm.[66]

Conceptual models for explaining policymakers' shared thinking

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[65] Saltman and Smith, *'Till Martyrdom Do Us Part'*, 5.

[66] See for example *The FCA's approach to advancing its objectives 2015* (London: Financial Conduct Authority 2015) – available at:

https://www.fca.org.uk/publication/corporate/fca-approach-advancing-objectives-2015.pdf (viewed 12/4/17), 11; or Risk Outlook 2016/17 – available at:

http://www.sra.org.uk/risk/outlook/risk-outlook-2016-2017 (viewed 12/4/17).

Decisions about the type of evidence to gather and how this is to be used for CT purposes are set in the context of how we explain the work of policymakers, their relationships with researchers, and their responses to an imperfect picture of the causes of problems that they are seeking to remedy. Policymakers themselves may be understandably sceptical that sufficient evidence can be gathered in such a multifaceted field as CT. The moving parts involved are numerous and the interaction between only a small fraction of these is understood. So it is prudent to build the evidence base in a series of both thin and thick iterative layers. But it is also shrewd given the complexity of the phenomenon, finite resources and political willpower. To be sure, policy failure tests is whether to abandon what is known in general on the basis of what is discovered in a specific case. Taking the earlier example, Lewthwaite's links with more than one conspiracy did not change the fact that most suspects are male. Erratic changes can devastate curation of an evidence base that stands the test of time.

Obstacles and opportunities for evidence-based public policy arise from the implicit generalizations that are held by policymakers. In other words, this approach is not directly concerned with describing the problem but rather with the behavioural situation of decision-makers and decision-making structures. It draws on a significant body of research among students of business and organizational dynamics who are similarly interested in cultural influences on decisions and behaviour, and has been taken up among students of governmental machinery interested in shared thinking and norms among policy actors. Such literatures have examined, *inter alia*, the role

of dominant ideas and hierarchies in public expenditure,[67] bureaucratic understanding of social movements and terrorism,[68] the rise of dominant political and scientific communities,[69] and discourses on diversity and equality found within management research itself.[70] Writing about the first of these, Parry describes how such a dry topic as the public administration of public expenditure, despite appearances, manages to yield an incisive look into an eco-system of values and shared assumptions that influence decision-making:

> The clue is the often-overlooked, and not very sparkling, subtitle 'Community and Policy *Inside* British Politics'. This betokens a work of sociology, shading

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[67] Hugh Heclo and Aaron Wildavsky, *The Private Government of Public Money* (London: Macmillan 1974).

[68] Colin Beck, 'The contribution of Social Movement Theory to understanding terrorism', *Sociology Compass*, vol.2, no.5, 2008, 1565–1581; Jeff Goodwin, 'What Must We Explain to Explain Terrorism?' *Social Movement Studies*, vol.3, 2004, 259–62.

[69] Theodore Porter, *Trust in Numbers: The Pursuit of Objectivity in Science and Public Life* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press 1995).

[70] Cliff Oswick and Mike Noon, 'Discourses of diversity, equality and inclusion: Trenchant formulations or transient fashions?', *British Journal of Management*, vol.25, no.1, 2014, 23-39.

into anthropology: a study of human behaviour within a legal and political framework, rather than of the framework itself. (Italics added.)[71]

The idea of a conceptual lens through which issues are collectively understood by policymaking communities is a familiar political science tool. It was most effectively articulated by Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow's study of the Cuban Missile Crisis, *Essence of Decision*.[72] *Essence* alerts us to the ways in which particular decisions and policy directions are not adequately explained by the objective evidence before policymaker alone – by 'exploring the fundamental yet often unnoticed choices among the categories and assumptions that channel our thinking about problems'.[73]

Objective evidence is not unimportant, but it contained within this conceptual lens. And the lens conditions assumptions about what is important, what is achievable, what is permissible and, also, crucially, what can be lived with. So it helps explains policy that is 'good enough' rather than 'optimal'; hence, it describes good policy as that which is acceptable, both in terms of buy-in among members of the policy community and the consent of individuals and groups affected by its

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[71] Richard Parry, 'The Influence of Heclo and Wildavsky's *The Private Government of Public Money*', *Public Policy and Administration*, vol.18, no.4, 2003, 3-19.

[72] Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: Longman 1999, 2nd edn).

[73] Allison and Zelikow, *Essence*, 2.

practical measures.[74] Meanwhile, as seasoned policymakers know, that they must

manage the politics of what is achievable. As Adam Schiff, a senior member of the

US House Intelligence Committee, noted in 2015:

> There are reportedly 700,000 to a million names on the US terrorism watch
>
> list alone. To track all of these potential threats, here or abroad, while taking
>
> time to gain additional intelligence, is unrealistic.[75]

Essence employs distinctions between rational actor, organization behaviour

and governmental politics models in explaining how and why the same evidence

might be very differently understood and marshalled between these frames. In one

setting, evidence is the authentic partner of rational decision-makers who want to

know why something is happening in terms of the objectively-defined goals and

interests of affected parties. To take a familiar example, evidence is rationally sought

illustrating the degree of extremist sentiment on a particular university campus. In

another setting, however, knowledge of this kind is not sufficient, and is

supplemented by understanding of how bureaucracies function, adapt, co-opt and

even think institutionally, and how they produce outputs that follow a pattern and

become part of what is at stake. Thus, the original evidence insufficiently explains

what is happening within such a university's management and collegiate structures.

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[74] Peter Clarke, 'Learning from Experience – Counter Terrorism in the UK since

9/11', Speech to Policy Exchange, 24 April 2007 – available at:

http://www.gees.org/documentos/Documen-02228.pdf (viewed 12/4/17).

[75] Quoted in 'Arrest of 2 men in Brooklyn highlights new challenges in fighting ISIS',

The New York Times, 1 March 2015, 15.

And in a further setting, attention switches to political bargains and accommodations that accompany policy decisions, and this implies the need to understand which or whose interests are affected, and then place this additional knowledge within a wider understanding of political trade-offs and compromises. Hence, there is a need for fresh evidence to account for the behaviour of individuals and groups within these structures. Specific decisions may appear sub-optimal, not due to a lack of resources but rather because they must 'carry' – i.e. not alienate – the largest possible constituency of relevant interests.

What does this mean for evidence for CT purposes? We start by examining objective evidence regarding a single conspiracy and the conspirators' sense of advancing their interests through a successful attack (i.e. who is most gripped by the violent extremist narrative and able to act on it?) We then move to consider the policies and measures put in place to detect and disrupt such a plot that must also accurately read the interests of, and constraints on, those who must respond to this knowledge. Such measures are owned by particular organizations variously accountable for their outcomes. The decision to raid a number of properties is an example of a measure sanctioned using evidence-based assessments (i.e. how advanced has a plot become and what is the trade-off between interception and further intelligence gathering?) How particular organizations deploy scarce resources in this scenario is revealing, and they may be required from time to time to make commitments involuntarily. Because they think and act as organizations, it is necessary to use this frame of reference in observing and assessing their actions and inactions. Finally, we need to factor in the political and power interests of those involved. They are engaged in some form of collective 'game' with accompanying

trade-offs, whose players individually and collectively will have a stake in evidence about the policy problem that vindicates the bargaining position that they have taken.

Together organizational behaviour and governmental politics theories also reveal how the rational actor view of decision-making becomes muddied. And this raises the question of how evidence is mobilized to reinforce particular conceptual models. These conceptual models cut across what is at stake externally in society and internally within government. The implication is that the relationship between evidence and policy is not a linear one based on a traditional 'black box' paradigm of the policymaking process. The paradigm is based on an doubtful assumption that decisions involve trade-offs between competing goals that are known and elucidated by a rich and non-contentious supply of policy-relevant evidence.

Concluding remarks

There are three wider implications for CT policy that arise. Before discussion of these, an important rider was mentioned at the start of the article and needs to be reinforced here, namely, there is very little that emerges from this article that limits the conclusions to 'Islamist-inspired terrorism' (echoing the title of this article). Many of the issues and dilemmas are not necessarily untrue of far right-wing-inspired terrorism as well. Therefore, there is a distinct possibility that the lessons may also be spread beyond the heated confines of Muslims and security.

The first implication is that any imperfections or interruptions in the flow of reliable data for rational actor purposes should be seen, at least partly, as a reflection of how organizations behave and the political-power dynamics at stake. For instance, a reliable survey of a target population sub-group (e.g. young Muslim men with extremist sympathies) attains value only once it serves the interests and motivations of those with responsibility to gather and act upon evidence.

Secondly, the places where organizations operate and political bargaining takes place are not neutral settings, and these will contain biases of various kinds that promote the collection and use of certain kinds of evidence. For instance, operational police forces pursue (and review) policies and programmes that routinely balance intelligence-based group targeting against general ethnic profiling. The heated politics of targeting and profiling is now a familiar hot button feature of policing.

Finally, the arena of political bargaining touches on the CT responsibilities assigned to organizations. For example, substantial investments in Prevent inspired policies since 2011 have spawned new bureaucratic structures that have penetrated into communities, leading to criticism of this approach. The venom has been directed to particular parties in the negotiation who have not grasped the mixed signals of their involvement. The Prevent programme includes a promotional message to parents, schoolteachers, university administrators and others to detect radicalized sympathies at an early stage, but it also carries an obligation to report more sinister behaviours. The professional practitioner is thus both a promotional and an enforcement agent in the eyes of grassroots sceptics. Moreover, there is an

important distinction here between the professional policymaker and the professional practitioner interest which can be easily conflated. This exposes the effects of feedback, co-production and accountability loops that link both as well as the effectiveness of such loops in producing credible evidence that carries authority.[76]

The result is that CT evidence is seen as manipulable to fit each of these faces of CT policy, and there are predictable consequences for the reliability of evidence that seeks to describe where sympathy for non-violent extremism lies. The upshot is a model of science that consciously avoids naivety: recognizing places and domains in which it is highly unlikely that objective research (both in design and data) is respected in itself.[77]

As compared with the period before, Muslim non-violent extremism has taken more of a centre stage in government CT strategy since 2011. Emphasis now lies on the ideas and values that support violent extremism.[78] In this climate, generalized

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[76] Joel Busher, Tufyal Choudhury, Paul Thomas and Gareth Harris, *What the Prevent duty means for schools and colleges in England: An analysis of educationalists' experiences* (Coventry: Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, 2017)

[77] Marie Breen Smith, 'Subjectivities, "suspect communities", governments and the ethics of research on terrorism', in Richard Jackson *et. al.* (eds), *Critical Terrorism Studies: A New Research Agenda* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge 2009).

[78] HM Government, *CONTEST: The United Kingdom's Strategy for Countering Terrorism HM Government* (London: 2011) – available at:

sympathy for extremism can be so subjectively grounded in mistrust as to be virtually unable to be researched or quantified for its explanatory value. It creates a large, now-known limitation on the evidence base.

Finally, it is tempting to think that, despite these limitations, CT policy is fed by an evidence base of likely harm, and that wider public understanding of harm follows from this. The storm created by President's Trump's efforts to introduce group-specific travel restrictions into the US a week into his administration, suggests otherwise.[79] Opinion polling on the issue indicates significant public backing for such a ban, most likely not founded on known facts about the risks, but rather on a set of inner fears about a pariah religious group. For that reason, future evidence gathering by CT policymakers might be better informed by an appreciation of public anxieties – and how these are anything but irrational to the public. The danger is that shared understandings of the sources of terrorism become detached from political assessments. Because evidence is branded (i.e. it does not occupy a blank space), it cannot be divorced from the politics of extremism and radicalization – which includes an astute awareness of the politics of professional policy communities and the politics of public opinion.

(7,377 words)

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www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97994/contest-summary.pdf (viewed 12/4/17)

[79] Gillian Tett, 'The real risks'.