

Lived Experiences of Contact with Counter-Terrorism Policies and Practices

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OVERVIEW

This guide explores empirical evidence relating to lived experiences of contact with counter-terrorism measures in the UK. It updates a previous CREST guide examining public experiences of the UK counter-terrorism system (Lewis & Marsden, 2020) and focuses on research published since 2020 (i.e., since the previous guide was published). This guide identifies the key findings from contemporary research; discusses how this research aligns with the conclusions of the previous guide; and discusses the key implications of these findings for research, policy and practice. By examining the different ways in which individuals and communities might experience the counter-terrorism system, the authors highlight the importance of policymakers considering both the intended and (potential) unintended effects of different approaches when designing and evaluating different counter-terrorism measures.

This report is organised by four themes examined in the previous guide: general perceptions of counter-terrorism measures; experiences of counter-terrorism measures at airports and other border crossings; experiences of counter-terrorism police stop and search; and experiences with Prevent and the Prevent Duty. These themes were selected to reflect areas of counter-terrorism that are most public facing, and which had been subject to the most robust research. In line with the previous guide, the effects of both direct (i.e., personal) and indirect (i.e., a broader awareness of another person's experiences) contact with such measures are examined so as to highlight the need for policymakers and practitioners to consider how the effects of counter-terrorism measures might extend beyond the individual(s) directly affected.



An additional section has been added to further explore these indirect effects by examining how counter-terrorism measures might impact the family members, friends and communities of individuals who have direct contact with the counter-terrorism system. This analysis is primarily based on research published between 2017 and 2022, although older studies are cited where relevant.

METHODOLOGY

This guide includes empirical studies examining direct and indirect experiences of contact with counter-terrorism measures. Keyword searches were undertaken in multiple academic search engines, including Scopus and Google Scholar to identify relevant research published since 2020. Forward and backward citation searches of relevant studies identified in the previous CREST guide were also conducted. This guide primarily explores evidence from the UK, but also draws upon research conducted in comparable contexts, such as Australia, North America and European states. It includes studies that the authors have assessed to have robust methodologies, although limitations are explicitly stated where necessary.

STRENGTH OF EVIDENCE

This guide draws on 57 studies identified through the methods described above. This represents a relatively robust body of evidence, although research on some areas of counter-terrorism – particularly relating to Prevent and the Prevent Duty – is more comprehensive than for other measures.

While a growing number of larger quantitative studies have been published in recent years, research relating to lived experiences of counter-terrorism measures continues to be dominated by smaller-scale qualitative studies that focus on the experiences of particular members of Muslim communities, or specific sub-sections therein. The results of these studies cannot therefore be considered representative of the general population, or of any specific communities. However, this research provides rich empirical data which demonstrates how counter-terrorism measures are directly and indirectly experienced, and can provide important context to the findings from larger quantitative studies.

The experiences of some groups – particularly those affected by counter-terrorism measures related to far-right extremism – remains under-researched. However, broader lessons related to the direct and indirect effects of counter-terrorism measures may have relevance beyond specific communities.

KEY FINDINGS

GENERAL EXPERIENCES OF COUNTER-TERRORISM POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Relatively few studies relating to broader perceptions of counter-terrorism measures have been published in the past two years. Those studies that have been published continue to focus on the experiences of specific sub-groups of the population, particularly Muslim communities.

Research continues to highlight how counter-terrorism measures may be perceived to disproportionately target

certain groups, particularly Muslim communities, and how concerns about such disproportionality may be linked to broader concerns about Islamophobia within society. Contemporary research pointing to these issues aligns with the conclusions drawn in the original CREST guide. Mixed-method and quantitative studies provide more robust evidence in support of earlier findings that were largely based on smaller-scale qualitative research.

Enhancing perceptions of procedural justice may help to mitigate some of the concerns raised in Muslim communities. Studies suggest perceptions of procedural justice may positively influence perceptions of police legitimacy and trust and willingness to cooperate with or support particular security measures. This is particularly true of specific interactions with authorities, such as airport security procedures or police stop and search.

EXPERIENCES OF COUNTER-TERRORISM MEASURES AT (AIR)PORTS AND BORDERS

No empirical peer-reviewed studies specifically focusing on Schedule 7 stops in the UK have been published since 2020. Experiences of Schedule 7 stops are considered only briefly within broader discussions of counter-terrorism in a limited number of studies.

Contemporary research relating to broader experiences of counter-terrorism measures at airports and other border crossing was similarly lacking. The few studies that have been published since 2020 analyse the airport experiences of ethnic and/or religious minorities.

These studies highlight how indirect and direct experiences of counter-terrorism measures whilst travelling can have negative short and long-term psychological effects. Reflecting findings in the previous CREST guide, airports can be perceived by ethnic and/or religious minorities as particular sites of discrimination. Concerns about being potentially viewed with suspicion whilst travelling were found to drive some individuals to adapt their behaviour to try and avoid negative encounters.

Perceptions of procedural justice and the perceived fairness of particular security measures may positively influence

willingness to cooperate with security measures, and may contribute to improved attitudes towards these measures, reflecting findings in the previous CREST guide.

EXPERIENCES OF COUNTER-TERRORISM POLICE STOP AND SEARCH

Very little research has been published on Section 43 practices or the use of counter-terrorism stop and search more broadly since the previous guide was published. Recent research has focused on better understanding what influences racial and ethnic imbalances in the application of stop and search in the UK, and how racial profiling is experienced in European states.

Research examining experiences of non-counter-terrorism-related police stops can be applied to the counter-terrorism context, particularly given that research has illustrated how police stops may be perceived as being related to counter-terrorism, even when this is not explicitly the case.

Research in continental Europe finds people in socially discriminated against groups express concerns that counter-terrorism police stops are informed by ethnic, racial or religious profiling. Such findings – which align with the research conducted in the UK that was examined in the previous CREST guide – illustrate how such concerns can affect how individuals experience contact with the police.

Negative experiences of stop and search can affect attitudes towards the police and may harm trust in, and the perceived legitimacy of, the police. In contrast, perceptions of procedural justice may positively influence perceptions of stop and search experiences.

PREVENT AND THE PREVENT DUTY

Prevent continues to be the most widely-researched workstream of CONTEST. Research on Prevent is now increasingly drawing on quantitative data, continuing a trend first identified in the original CREST guide on public experiences of the UK counter-terrorism system.

The majority of relevant research published since 2020 has focused on the implementation of the Prevent Duty in educational settings, with a small number of studies focusing on healthcare.

There is a growing body of quantitative evidence to suggest that overt opposition to Prevent amongst the general population is muted, with the largest study to date reporting that 8 per cent of the general public held an unfavourable opinion towards it (ICM, 2020). However, this figure still represents a significant proportion of the population who hold concerns about the strategy.

The level of support and/or opposition towards the Prevent Duty identified in contemporary studies varies. Whilst some authors report that the majority of their respondents are unopposed to the Prevent Duty, other studies find that concerns are far more pronounced within some samples and/or communities. However, just because people are not opposed, does not necessarily mean they are overtly positive towards the Duty.

The effects of Prevent interventions remain under-researched. There is a clear evidence gap relating to the experiences of individuals supported through Prevent. Similarly, whilst the potential consequences (both intended and unintended) of Prevent interventions are widely discussed in the literature, more empirical research into these effects is needed in order to better understand how Prevent is experienced.

Key evidence gaps identified in the earlier CREST guide remain, particularly in relation to the experiences of individuals who directly come into contact with Prevent interventions.

A growing body of research has pointed to more negative perceptions of the Prevent Duty amongst pupils and students. These studies stand in contrast to research amongst educators, which has pointed to lower levels of concern about the impacts of the Prevent Duty. More research in this area is needed to understand whether and how the Duty is producing unintended consequences for young people.

THE DIRECT & INDIRECT EFFECTS ON FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

Research examining how counter-terrorism measures are experienced and perceived by family members and others in close proximity to individuals directly affected is limited. Relevant research predominantly consists of smaller, qualitative studies, and data is often anecdotal.

Research has highlighted how families and local communities may be affected by two particular points of interaction with the counter-terrorism system: reporting of radicalisation; and raids and arrests.

- Research on the former is mixed. Some studies highlight the importance of engaging with families for effective prevention work, while others raise concerns that asking family members to perform this role may strain family relationships.
- Research on raids and arrests underscores the long-lasting impact these can have on others present in the household, especially children. Police raids can stigmatise and isolate those directly affected, but might also create a sense of vulnerability among others.

It is difficult to accurately understand the unintended consequences and harms that counter-terrorism measures might cause for friends, family members and communities. More research is needed to understand this issue so that appropriate steps can be developed to reduce this type of potential harm.

EVIDENCE GAPS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Overall, research continues to focus predominantly on the experiences and perceptions of those within Muslim communities. There is only a limited amount of research on the experiences of other population groups, or individuals within radical milieus that may come into contact with the counter-terrorism system, such as those within the extreme-right. More research examining the

experiences and perspectives of diverse populations and groups will be important for understanding how and whether experiences differ across different communities, and how best to mitigate the unintended consequences or harms caused by these experiences in different contexts.

There has been little recent research into experiences of stop and search practices or airport security measures. There is a lack of research that analyses how experiences may have altered due to developments in policy and practice over time (e.g., changes to how extensively measures are used).

The effects of Prevent interventions remain under-researched. There is a clear evidence gap relating to the experiences of individuals supported through Prevent. Similarly, whilst the potential consequences (both intended and unintended) of Prevent interventions are widely discussed in the literature, more empirical research into these effects is needed. This will help to understand whether Prevent interventions are producing unintended or desired outcomes; whether and how intervention providers adequately consider and mitigate the potential negative effects of their work; and how interventions might be refined and improved.

More research is needed to understand the drivers of positive and/ or negative attitudes towards Prevent. This research could be used to examine the extent to which attitudes are being driven by lived experiences of the strategy, or by a broader awareness of the strategy, such as that gained through media reporting. Where attitudes are found to be linked to lived experiences, this research could be used to identify areas of good practice, as well as issues that might need to be addressed. Where attitudes are found to be driven by a broader awareness, it could be used to inform messaging around the strategy.

Research into experiences of family members and close associates of those directly affected by counter-terrorism measures is limited and is primarily based on small-n, geographically limited, qualitative studies. This topic requires further study, utilising a broader variety of methods. In particular, there is a need to go beyond anecdotal evidence to understand the potential harms

that counter-terrorism measures might have on children and families, and how such harms might be minimised.

Lessons from research into public facing counter-terrorism measures could potentially be used to inform measures that are less public facing. By drawing on this evidence base, policy-makers and practitioners would be better placed to identify, and take steps to mitigate, the potential unintended consequences across the range of counter-terrorism measures currently in use.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There are likely to be benefits from embedding the principles of procedural justice more explicitly into the counter-terrorism system. The importance of enhancing perceptions of procedural justice is a consistent theme across different sections of this guide. Taking concrete steps to improve perceptions of procedural justice – through, for example, training for frontline counter-terrorism professionals – would represent a workable and potentially effective approach for mitigating some of the negative effects of public-facing counter-terrorism measures.

Policymakers need to better understand and consider the potential indirect or secondary effects when developing counter-terrorism measures, and when evaluating their impact. Policy leads should commission research to better understand the indirect effects of different measures on families and communities so that they can better identify and take steps to mitigate these second order effects.

There is an unmet need to understand the process and impact of Prevent interventions. Very little is known about the intended and unintended effects of being referred to Prevent or of the outcomes of this process. Research able to identify the positive and negative effects of engaging with Prevent interventions will make it possible to improve provision where necessary and provide empirical evidence able to speak to the concerns that have been raised regarding the strategy.

A cautious and iterative approach should be taken when applying the lessons from research and practice on Islamist extremism to right-wing extremism. Although some aspects may be relevant, the evidence-based ability to determine whether policy and practice is directly transferable has yet to develop.

More research is needed to understand the effects of recent changes in UK counter-terrorism policy and practice. This guide highlights how the delivery of various counter-terrorism measures has changed, but little is known about how these changes have been experienced or perceived by the public. Research examining changing experiences or perceptions would help interpret whether changes are producing positive or negative effects, and in turn help inform future policy developments.

ABOUT THIS PROJECT

This Executive Summary comes from part of a CREST project to inform the refresh of the CONTEST strategy. The project provides updates to the evidence base behind key CONTEST topics. To read the Full Report this Executive Summary was produced from, as well as other outputs from this project, visit our website: crestresearch.ac.uk/project/contest

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