



BRIEFING PAPER

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Radicalisation in prisons in England and Wales

By Gabrielle Garton
Grimwood

Inside:

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Contributing Author:

Grahame Allen, Social and General Statistics

Summary

This Commons Library briefing describes how the Government is seeking to tackle extremism and, in particular, radicalisation in prisons.

It examines

- The difference between faith and radicalisation
- Why people become radicalised
- What is happening within prisons
- How radicalisation is being countered in prisons and
- Whether the National Offender Management Service is doing enough.

Faith, radicalisation and extremism are different things. Many prisoners enter prison with a faith and others find one while in prison. Few of these prisoners will be “radicalised” or become involved in extremism or terrorist activity, although (obviously) those that do present huge challenges to the authorities.

Peer-to-peer radicalisation within prisons has been identified as one factor fuelling extremism, not just in the UK but around the globe, and so combatting radicalisation in prisons is one strand of the Government’s counter-extremism strategy-y. The National Offender Management Service (NOMS) is reviewing how it deals with extremism in prisons and its report is expected later this year.

The [Government’s counter-extremism strategy](#) was published in October 2015. In it, the Prime Minister, David Cameron, pointed to the threat posed by extremism and (he argued) the need to confront intolerance. He pointed to various forms of extremism and called the fight against Islamist extremism “one of the great struggles of our generation”.

He accused previous governments of having made poor choices:

In the past, I believe governments made the wrong choice. Whether in the face of Islamist or neo-Nazi extremism, we were too tolerant of intolerance, too afraid to cause offence. We seemed to lack the strength and resolve to stand up for what is right, even when the damage being done by extremists was all too clear.

In discussing the threat from extremism, the counter-extremism strategy remarked that peer-to-peer radicalisation could be a particular problem. There were (it said) 1,000 prisoners whose behaviour in custody raised concerns about extremism:

And a much wider group of offenders [than those convicted of or remanded for terrorist offences or holding extremist views] are vulnerable to those promoting extremist ideologies while in prison. Peer-to-peer radicalisation is a particular concern, as is the activity of groups such as Al-Muhajiroun which has specifically targeted prisoners and those on probation.

Prisoners, it remarked, could be susceptible to extremist ideologies and so the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) had launched a full review of how prisons deal with Islamist extremism:

The Secretary of State for Justice has commissioned a full review into the overall approach to dealing with Islamist extremism in prisons, and findings will be reported to him in 2016. The review is looking at the nature and extent of the threat in prisons, current capabilities to manage that threat, including the management of high-risk offenders, and what we can learn from international best practice.

The [Prevent strategy](#), part of the Government’s wider counter-terrorism strategy CONTEST, seeks to deal with those individuals and groups promoting division and hatred,

and with the factors that predispose individuals or groups to respond to terrorist ideologies. Inherited from the previous Labour government, the strategy was recast in 2011 under the Coalition government, to separate out the community based integration work from the more direct counter-terrorism activities.

Under Prevent, public sector organisations are subject to a duty to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism. This duty was placed on a statutory footing by the *Counter-terrorism and Security Act 2015*, together with guidance setting out how different sectors should play their part in implementing the strategy.

In November last year, following the terrorist attacks in Paris, the [Home Secretary, Theresa May, described](#) how the review of radicalisation in prisons connected with the Prevent strategy:

Of course the Prevent duty we have introduced covers prisons as well as other public sector institutions. (...) My right hon. Friend the Minister for Security will soon be meeting the prisons Minister to talk about exactly these issues, because we do recognise that we need to look at what is happening in prisons and ensure that we are taking every possible step to reduce the potential for radicalisation.

A [study](#) by the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence at King's College, London in 2010 examined the evidence from 15 countries about how people could be radicalised or reformed in prison.

The report of the study pointed out that prisons could play both a positive and negative role, in tackling problems of radicalisation and terrorism yet also being places of vulnerability. It was no surprise, the report said, that prisons were breeding grounds for radicalisation, as they provided near-perfect conditions for radical ideologies to flourish:

This should come as no surprise. Prisons are 'places of vulnerability', which produce 'identity seekers', 'protection seekers' and 'rebels' in greater numbers than other environments. They provide near-perfect conditions in which radical, religiously framed ideologies can flourish. While the extent of the problem remains unclear, the potential for prison radicalisation is significant, and the issue clearly needs to be addressed.

Again, the report of the study remarked that religious conversion was not the same as radicalisation. In its conclusions, the report argued that prisons matter and it was important to gain a better understanding of their role in radicalising people and reforming them. Overcrowding and under-staffing could (the report went on) exacerbate the problem. The emphasis on "security first" had (it suggested) meant missed opportunities to promote reform and prisons should be more ambitious and innovative in promoting positive influences.

The argument about whether prisons are fomenting radicalisation and extremism was aired again in 2012 in the *Times*. Maajid Nawaz, founding chairman of the [Quilliam Foundation](#) – which describes itself as "the world's first counter-extremism think tank set up to address the unique challenges of citizenship, identity and belonging in a globalised world" – argued that British prisons were "forcing houses of Islamist extremism". The Prison Service (he said) needed to wake up. In reply, the junior justice minister at the time, Crispin Blunt, dismissed Maajid Nawaz's claims as partial and sensationalist:

Maajid Nawaz, of the Quilliam Foundation, takes a partial approach to extremism and radicalisation in prisons.

(...)

I am not complacent about the risks, but to describe our prisons as "forcing houses of Islamist extremism" is sensationalist and not backed by evidence.

5 Radicalisation in prisons in England and Wales

Ministers have recently reiterated their determination to deal with radicalisation in prisons. The junior minister for prisons, probation and rehabilitation, Andrew Selous, [said in January 2016](#) that “as the threat evolves, we evolve our response”. On the same day, the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, Michael Gove, [described radicalisation as a “genuine danger”](#):

Radicalisation in prison is a genuine danger not just in England, but across the European Union. (...) Those who seek to radicalise and to inject the poison of Islamism into the minds of young men need to be countered every step of the way.

In January this year, [David Cameron said](#) that prisons should be a place where people were deradicalised, not made worse:

It is very disturbing that, when people are in our care and when the state is looking after them, on some occasions, they have been radicalised because of what they have heard in prison either from other prisoners, or on occasion, from visiting imams. We need to sort this situation out.

In her [statement to the Commons](#) following the terrorist attacks in Brussels in March 2016, the Home Secretary, Theresa May, spoke again of challenging “the twisted narratives that support terrorism” and leading vulnerable people away from radicalisation.

In another [speech in February 2016](#), this time on prison reform, David Cameron suggested that a new approach might be needed to deal with prisoners identified as extremist or vulnerable to extremism:

And I want to be clear: I am prepared to consider major changes: from the imams we allow to preach in prison to changing the locations and methods for dealing with prisoners convicted of terrorism offences, if that is what is required.

This, then, is the background against which NOMS is conducting its review, which is being led by a former prison governor, Ian Acheson.

Other Commons Library briefings on prisons, counter-extremism and terrorism are available on Parliament’s topic pages for [prisons](#) and [terrorism](#).

1. Background and context

1.1 How many extremists are there in prison in England and Wales?

Terrorism related offences (Great Britain)

Between 11 September 2001 and 31 March 2015 there were 2,944 arrests for terrorism related offences in Great Britain.¹ Of these:

- 92% were male and 47% over the age of 30;
- Just under 1,750 (59%) of arrests were made under Section 41 of the *Terrorism Act 2000* with the remaining 41% made under other legislation;
- Just over 1,500 (52%) of suspects were released without being charged and 1,150 (39%) were charged.

Of the 1,150 persons charged with terrorism related offences:

- 917 (80%) were subsequently prosecuted (of which 86% {786} were convicted);
- the principal offence for those charged under terrorism legislation was for "Preparation for terrorist acts" (21% of 531 cases), "Failing to comply with duty at a port or border control" (15% of 531 cases) and "Possession of an article for terrorist purposes" (15% of 531 cases);
- the principal offence for those charged under non-terrorism legislation where the offence was considered terrorism related was "Conspiracy to murder" (16% of 213 cases); and
- the principal offence for those charged where the offence was considered non-terrorism related was under the *Forgery and Counterfeiting Act 1981* (9% of 407 cases) and the *Malicious Communications Act 2003* (9% of 407 cases).

A further breakdown of these statistics is available on the gov.uk website: [Operation of police powers under the Terrorism Act 2000 statistics](#)

1.2 Counter-extremism strategy

The Government's counter-extremism strategy was published in October 2015.

In it, the Prime Minister, David Cameron, pointed to the threat posed by extremism and (he argued) the need to confront intolerance. He pointed to various forms of extremism and called the fight against Islamist extremism "one of the great struggles of our generation":

One of the greatest threats we face is the scourge of extremism from those who want to divide us. We see it in sickening displays of neo-Nazism, Islamophobia, antisemitism and, of course, Islamist extremism.

The fight against Islamist extremism is, I believe, one of the great struggles of our generation. In responding to this poisonous ideology, we face a choice. Do we close our eyes, put our kid gloves on and just hope that our values will somehow endure in the end? Or do we get out there and make the case for those

The counter-extremism strategy is discussed in the Commons Library briefing [Counter-extremism policy: an overview](#) (5 February 2016).

¹ Home Office, [Operation of police powers under the Terrorism Act 2000 and subsequent legislation: Arrests, outcomes and stop and searches, Great Britain, financial year ending 31 March 2015: data tables](#), 10 September 2015

values, defend them with all that we've got and resolve to win the battle of ideas all over again? ²

He accused previous governments of having made poor choices:

In the past, I believe governments made the wrong choice. Whether in the face of Islamist or neo-Nazi extremism, we were too tolerant of intolerance, too afraid to cause offence. We seemed to lack the strength and resolve to stand up for what is right, even when the damage being done by extremists was all too clear. ³

In similar vein, the Home Secretary, Theresa May, argued that, whatever its source, extremism and intolerance should be challenged:

But the threat posed by extremists is not limited to violence, nor to Islamist extremism. The rise of neo-Nazi groups, and the increase in anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim hatred is deeply concerning. Where non-violent extremism goes unchallenged, the values that bind our society together fragment. Women's rights are eroded, intolerance and bigotry become normalised, minorities are targeted and communities become separated from the mainstream. ⁴

She promised to expose extremist ideology for the lie it was and to thwart its destructive consequences:

We will disrupt all those who seek to spread hate and we will prosecute all those who break the law. But most importantly of all, we will stand up for all those who know that in Britain we are stronger together. Because when we join up all the voices of those who want to defeat extremism, they are louder and more powerful than the voices of those who seek to divide us. ⁵

In her [statement to the Commons](#) following the terrorist attacks in Brussels in March 2016, Theresa May spoke again of challenging "the twisted narratives that support terrorism" and leading vulnerable people away from radicalisation:

A week ago, the House debated the Second Reading of the Investigatory Powers Bill, which will ensure that the police and the security and intelligence agencies have the powers they need to keep people safe in a digital age. Through our Prevent and intervention programmes, we are working to safeguard people at risk and to challenge the twisted narratives that support terrorism. That includes working with community groups to provide support to deliver counter-narrative campaigns. Our Channel programme works with vulnerable people and provides them with support to lead them away from radicalisation, and, as we announced as part of strategic defence and security review in November last year, this year we will be updating our counter-terrorism strategy, Contest. ⁶

Information on the *Investigatory Powers Bill 2015-16* - including the [Explanatory Notes](#), the [second reading debate](#) and the [Commons Library briefing paper](#) prepared for that debate - is available via the [Bill page](#).

² HM Government (Home Office), [Counter-Extremism Strategy](#), Cm 9145, October 2015: Prime Minister Foreword

³ *Ibid*

⁴ *Ibid*

⁵ *Ibid*

⁶ [HC Deb 23 March 2016 c1576](#)

1.3 The Prevent strategy

The [Prevent strategy](#), part of the Government's wider counter-terrorism strategy CONTEST, seeks to deal with those individuals and groups promoting division and hatred, and with the factors that predispose individuals or groups to respond to terrorist ideologies. Inherited from the previous Labour Government, the strategy was recast in 2011 under the Coalition Government, to separate out the community based integration work from the more direct counter-terrorism activities.⁷

Under Prevent, public sector organisations are subject to a duty to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism. This duty was placed on a statutory footing by the *Counter-terrorism and Security Act 2015*, together with guidance setting out how different sectors should play their part in implementing the strategy.

In November last year, following the terrorist attacks in Paris, Theresa May described how the review of radicalisation in prisons connected with the Prevent strategy:

Of course the Prevent duty we have introduced covers prisons as well as other public sector institutions. When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Justice came into his post, he required a review of the provisions for dealing with radicalisation in prisons. That review has, I believe, yet to report, so there is a piece of work ongoing to look at what is happening in prisons. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Security will soon be meeting the prisons Minister to talk about exactly these issues, because we do recognise that we need to look at what is happening in prisons and ensure that we are taking every possible step to reduce the potential for radicalisation.⁸

Commons Library briefings on the *Counter-terrorism and Security Bill* and various Bill documents are available on the [Bill page](#).

⁷ HM Government, [Prevent strategy](#), Cm 8092, June 2011

⁸ [HC Deb 16 November 2015 c406](#)

2. Are prisons fomenting radicalisation and extremism?

2.1 Perceptions of Islam

A recent report from the Transition to Adulthood Alliance and Maslaha⁹ used interviews to examine the extent of Islamophobia in the criminal justice system (CJS).

Writing in the foreword, [Baroness Young of Hornsey](#) - who led the [Young Review](#) – remarked on how “distorted and pernicious ideas about Islam can have an impact on criminal justice decision-making and have consequence for young Muslim defendants”.¹⁰ This was not, she said, an excuse for criminality:

This report is not offered as an excuse for criminal behaviour but gives a context for the perceptions of this group about society’s attitudes towards them.¹¹

The report argued that criminal justice agencies see Islam in an often negative light and so those agencies are overlooking its potential for good:

The often negative light in which Islam is viewed by authorities at different stages of the CJS, sits in stark contrast to how Muslim prisoners and ex-offenders perceive it, which is as a positive and supportive influence in coping with both prison and release and resettlement. The increase of Imams in the prison chaplaincy over the last decade was perceived as improving Muslim prisoners’ experiences and providing confidence in the outcome of prison procedures. Failing to recognise and harness the potential of religion to contribute positively to the lives of young Muslims, is a missed opportunity on the part of authorities. How this prejudice, whether conscious or unconscious, plays out in criminal justice decision-making deserves particular attention.¹²

Amongst the key themes emerging from the interviews on which the report was based were bias and the social and political climate:

All of those interviewed acknowledged the reality of the disproportionately negative experiences of young Muslim men at every level of the CJS. Many recognise that subconscious or otherwise, there is a problem with unconscious bias and stereotyping towards Muslim men on the part of criminal justice agencies. There is also a recognition that the different aspects of an individual’s life are not understood especially in the case of a young Muslim man. These will include the nature of family and community relations, mental health, culture and religion.

(...)

⁹ [Maslaha](#) describes its work as creating “new ways of tackling long-standing issues affecting Muslim communities [combining] imagination and craftsmanship to improve services, change attitudes and challenge systems of inequality”.

¹⁰ Transition to Adulthood Alliance and Maslaha, [Young Muslims on trial: A scoping study on the impact of Islamophobia on criminal justice decision-making](#), March 2016: Foreword

¹¹ *Ibid*

¹² *Ibid*: page 6

The current political and social climate in the UK today, where Muslims are the subject of increased suspicion and surveillance, means these issues have to be responded to with increased urgency and commitment. The new and particular challenges facing Muslim communities call for new solutions.¹³

2.2 The difference between faith and radicalisation

Faith, radicalisation and extremism are different things. Many prisoners enter prison with a faith and others find one while in prison. Few of these prisoners will be “radicalised” or become involved in extremism or terrorist activity, although (obviously) those that do present huge challenges to the authorities.

As discussed in more detail later, the Muslim population within prisons has more than doubled. It was reported in October 2015 (for example) that, at HM Prison Whitemoor in Cambridgeshire, Muslim prisoners were now in the majority.¹⁴ The article quoted from the recent report by the Independent Monitoring Board for Whitemoor, which had observed that Muslims were also the biggest power bloc within the prison:¹⁵

5.1.2 Not only were Muslims the largest religion, they were also the biggest power bloc, displacing the greater multiplicity of gangs that had previously existed.

Alison Liebling’s 2012 study described a situation that still existed in 2014-15:

“There were some intimidating ‘heavy players’ among the Muslim population, who appeared to be orchestrating prison power dynamics rather than propagating or following the faith. Many physically powerful prisoners ‘re-established their outside identities’ as leaders in the prison and used their (newly acquired) faith status as a tool for establishing influence.”¹⁶

[A study led by Professor Alison Liebling of Cambridge University](#) – which looked at the spectrum of staff-prisoner relationships at Whitemoor - found that the role of faith and the risks of radicalisation were prominent features of the experience of staff and prisoners there:

Whilst the research did not set out explicitly to explore relationships between Muslim prisoners and others, the role of faith and in-prison conversions to Islam, or the risks of radicalisation, these became important themes in the research

For a broader discussion of religion in prison, see the [Guardian’s Comment Is Free page Do prisons need religion?](#) (14 June 2010)

¹³ Transition to Adulthood Alliance and Maslaha, [Young Muslims on trial: A scoping study on the impact of Islamophobia on criminal justice decision-making](#), March 2016: page 7

¹⁴ Liam Deacon, [“UK Gets First Muslim Majority Prison, Controlled By ‘Islamic Protection Racket’”](#), *Breitbart.com*, 18 October 2015

¹⁵ The Independent Monitoring Board has a statutory role. The *Prisons Act 1952* requires every prison to be monitored by an independent Board appointed by the Justice Secretary from members of the community in which the prison is located.

¹⁶ Independent Monitoring Board, [HMP Whitemoor Annual Report 2015 \(1 June 2014 – 31 May 2015\)](#), pages 4-5

because of their prominence in staff and prisoner experience at Whitemoor.¹⁷

Amongst the study's main findings were:

- There were tensions relating to fears of 'extremism' and 'radicalisation' in the prison.
- While the risks of alienation, loss of meaning, and violence, were more pressing than the (also real) risks of radicalisation, failure to address the former issues might make the risk of radicalisation higher.
- The new context: a high security prison with no vulnerable prisoner wings, post 9/11 and 7/7, containing several prisoners convicted of terrorist offences, with a younger prisoner population reflecting a fragmented religious and secular society, and attempting to fulfil an obligation to monitor and manage the 'risk of radicalisation', as well as the risk of violence, presented new challenges to staff, managers and prisoners at Whitemoor.
- Staff sometimes viewed any outward appearance of Islam as evidence of radicalisation, rather than a manifestation of faith, and these 'signs' were written up in security reports. Staff perceived Islam as a radical religion; they over-estimated extremism; this 'pushed prisoners together', reinforced their views and gave them more power.
- Staff and prisoners proposed segregation of Muslims and non-Muslims (by prison, wing, and kitchens) in order to curb the 'contamination' influence (that is, conversion, or radicalisation).¹⁸

Addressing these issues, the study concluded, would not be easy:

The tensions between treating all prisoners, including faith and minority groups, decently and being vigilant about the risks of violence and radicalisation are serious, and will require considerable further reflection.¹⁹

An opinion piece published by the Tony Blair Faith Foundation has likewise highlighted the distinction between faith and extremism and argued that radicalisation is a problem in prisons across Europe:

The spread of extreme Islamist ideologies in European prisons is a concern to governments. Understanding the distinction between Islam, or any other religion, and extremist ideologies that use the religion for promoting violence and hatred is crucial in tackling prison radicalisation. Increases in religiosity can help prisoners to be rehabilitated. Clampdowns on religious activity generally has the potential to antagonise religious prisoners and fuel radicalisation.²⁰

¹⁷ Alison Liebling, Helen Arnold and Christina Straub, [*An exploration of staff – prisoner relationships at HMP Whitemoor: 12 years on*](#), MoJ/NOMS, November 2011: Executive summary

¹⁸ *Ibid*

¹⁹ *Ibid*: page 175

²⁰ Mubarak Ahmed, [*Opinion: Prison Radicalisation in Europe*](#), Tony Blair Faith Foundation, 17 August 2015

2.3 Why do people become radicalised?

[A systematic review by the Youth Justice Board](#) (YJB) also looked at the theories of radicalisation and individual risk factors.

It concluded that a definitive view of what causes radicalisation might not be possible:

The reviewed literature found that few researchers had developed a general causal model or theory of the structural causes of Islamic terrorism and there was disagreement as to whether such a model was achievable. More prevalent were studies that listed several possible factors, usually social- psychological models, but failed to specify the interactions between the listed factors in any detail.²¹

Political grievances about “perceived Western hegemony” might, though, play some role in radical Islam:

Evidence from the individual biographies of those involved in radical Islam (both Islamic terrorists and activists) emphasises the role that political grievances play, particularly those grievances concerning the plight of the Muslim community internationally and anger at perceived Western hegemony.²²

Identifying situational explanations or risk factors did not, however, explain why some people would turn to terrorism while others in similar circumstances (the report said) would not. Networks might be important here:

Situational explanations, the lists of precipitating factors and grievance-based explanations point to a large group of potential participants. In isolation these factors fail to explain why most individuals who are exposed to the same overall influences do not turn to terrorism. (...) However, the research evidence highlights a further key component to becoming fully radicalised, that of exposure to a network or movement. Social network theory, resource mobilisation theory and framing theory offer another way of studying the radicalisation process, one that links structural factors, group processes and individual motivations within an integrated analytical framework.²³

Earlier this year, in its inquiry into young adult offenders, the Justice Committee heard evidence from (amongst others) Raheel Mohammed of Maslaha. He argued that factors such as lack of educational attainment and unemployment - which have a disproportionate effect on young Muslim men - might be linked to maturity and, in turn, to radicalisation:

The T2A [Transition to Adulthood] Alliance ... state that a delay to the important role transitions of getting a job, leaving home and getting married will affect your maturity. That has a disproportionate impact on young Muslim men. According to the last census, 100,000 Muslim men of working age were unemployed and 400,000 left school with no qualifications. That will have an impact on their maturity. It is about making a sentencer understand what that means in relation to a young Muslim man, but also taking into account the bias we are hearing

²¹ YJB, [Preventing Religious Radicalisation and Violent Extremism: A Systematic Review of the Research Evidence](#), 2012: page 42

²² *Ibid*

²³ *Ibid*

about, based on the fact that they are seen as being Muslim and are affected by the wider public debate around radicalisation and terrorism.²⁴

2.4 What is happening within prisons?

What is the threat from peer to peer radicalisation?

In discussing the threat from extremism, the counter-extremism strategy remarked that peer-to-peer radicalisation could be a particular problem. There were (it said) 1,000 prisoners whose behaviour in custody raised concerns about extremism:

As of the end of June 2015, there were 182 offenders convicted of, or on remand for, offences linked to terrorism and extremism in prisons in England and Wales. They include people who hold neo-Nazi views and Islamist extremists. A wider group of prisoners hold extremist views but have been convicted for offences other than terrorism. And a much wider group of offenders are vulnerable to those promoting extremist ideologies while in prison. Peer-to-peer radicalisation is a particular concern, as is the activity of groups such as Al-Muhajiroun which has specifically targeted prisoners and those on probation. There are approximately 1,000 prisoners whose behaviour in custody gives cause for concern around extremism.²⁵

Prisoners, it went on, could be susceptible to extremist ideologies and so the MoJ had launched a full review of how prisons deal with Islamist extremism:

Prisons can provide an atmosphere where individuals are particularly vulnerable to extremist ideological messages. (...) The review is looking at the nature and extent of the threat in prisons, current capabilities to manage that threat, including the management of high-risk offenders, and what we can learn from international best practice.²⁶

Are UK prisons forcing grounds for extremism?

The argument about whether prisons are fomenting radicalisation and extremism was aired again in 2012 in the *Times*.

Maajid Nawaz, founding chairman of the [Quilliam Foundation](#) – which describes itself as “the world’s first counter-extremism think tank set up to address the unique challenges of citizenship, identity and belonging in a globalised world” – argued that British prisons were “forcing houses of Islamist extremism”:

Over the past 20 years, the number of Muslims in Britain’s jails has hugely increased. They make up more than 10,000 of the 80,000 prison population. This should worry us greatly — especially as British prisons have been the forcing houses of Islamist extremism.

(...)

Young men, plunged into prison, find that safety lies in adopting an aggressive Muslim identity. I was told that “no one messes with the Muslims in here. The brothers run things.” Of course,

²⁴ Justice Committee, *Oral evidence: Young adult offenders*, HC 397, 12 January 2016

²⁵ HM Government (Home Office), *Counter-Extremism Strategy*, Cm 9145, October 2015: page 15

²⁶ *Ibid*: page 88

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some who are keen to correct the errors of their ways convert to Islam or rediscover the faith of their fathers. But for vulnerable new convicts, joining the “brothers” offers physical, if not spiritual, protection from the dangers of prison life. Someone who has gone to prison as a car thief suddenly finds no other choice but to categorise himself as a “Muslim” car thief.

The system inadvertently reinforces this outsider identity and the control of the Muslim gangs by catering for the communal needs of these prisoners. A special diet and collective prayer breaks are provided and very conservative Muslim chaplains are bought in.

None of this is bad in itself. None of these religious dispensations should be stopped — everyone’s faith should be respected. But I fear that the Government underestimates the explosive potential of young criminals seeking protection in a Muslim identity that rejects the mainstream.

The Prison Service (he said) needed to wake up:

If we don’t act, we may find that this burgeoning population of 10,000 prisoners harbours many more Richard Reids.

Replying, the junior justice minister at the time, Crispin Blunt, dismissed Maajid Nawaz’s claims as partial and sensationalist:

This is a complex area. Many prisoners who are Muslims in prison are Muslims because they are looking for fellowship, safety, belonging and all of the things that bring people to faith. That is equally true for Christians in prison. Conversion to Islam does not equal radicalisation.

I am not complacent about the risks, but to describe our prisons as “forcing houses of Islamist extremism” is sensationalist and not backed by evidence. If we were to follow the kind of confrontational prescription proposed by Mr Nawaz we could no doubt create that very situation, which a great deal of impressive operational and analytical talent is working very hard to avoid on behalf of us all.²⁷

The Home Affairs Committee, during its inquiry into the [roots of violent radicalisation](#), examined the evidence on whether prisons were centres for radicalisation. It observed that it was not clear whether radicalisation was on the increase nor whether it lasted beyond the prisoner’s release from prison:

The role of prisons and universities was less obvious. Much of the uncertainty relates to the fact that a number of convicted terrorists have attended prisons and universities, but there is seldom concrete evidence to confirm that this is where they were radicalised.

(...)

While Michael Spurr [the chief executive of NOMS] disagreed about the effects of overcrowding, he did agree that there is a potential in prisons for “people to be manipulated because they are vulnerable” and that the risk was exacerbated if people’s negative perceptions of society were reinforced while in prison.

(...)

²⁷ Maajid Nawaz, “Prison is turning angry young men into fanatics”, *The Times*, 11 January 2012 [paywall], available, with Crispin Blunt’s reply, on the [Quilliam Foundation](#) website

However, it is difficult to judge the extent to which radicalisation in prisons a) is genuine and b) endures beyond release. Staff at Belmarsh believed that extremist views were widely disseminated but found it hard to know how far they were adopted. (...) There are frequently-cited examples of prisoners who became terrorists, such as the shoe-bomber Richard Reid, who spent time in Feltham Young Offenders Institution, in which it is in fact unclear whether radicalisation actually took place in custody.²⁸

Michael Spurr had cited an example of someone radicalised in prison.²⁹ Short prison sentences, the Committee argued, could have serious unintended consequences in life choices and behaviour:

Prison has often been described as an instrument for 'making bad people worse' and short prison sentences, in particular, have been identified as leading to serious unintended consequences in terms of life choices and behaviour. There are plenty of examples of recruitment of vulnerable inmates to gangs and there are specific examples—for instance from Los Angeles—of recruitment through gangs being linked in some way to terrorist purposes. It is difficult to find firm evidence or to quantify the impact, and from our visit to Belmarsh it does appear that being recruited to a self-identified Muslim grouping within prison is more about association and personal safety than about radicalisation ...³⁰

In its response to the Home Affairs Committee's report, the Home Office suggested that both radicalisation and disengagement from extremism could take place in prisons:

We know that some people who have been convicted and imprisoned for terrorist-related offences have sought to radicalise and recruit other prisoners. Equally, we know that prisons offer an opportunity for disengagement from terrorism and extremism.³¹

How should the criminal justice system respond to such threats?

Writing in the *Guardian*, Baroness Young described the statistics on young black and minority ethnic (BME) and/or Muslim men in the CJS as disturbing and alarming:

The figures confirm a disturbing picture. As well as disproportionately high numbers of both groups being stopped and searched by the police, the shocking fact is that Britain imprisons a higher proportion of its black population than the US. And since 2002, the percentage of Muslims in prisons in England and Wales has nearly doubled – though, contrary to popular

²⁸ Home Affairs Committee, [Roots of violent radicalisation](#), HC 1446 2010-12, 6 February 2012: pages 16-18

²⁹ Home Affairs Committee, [Roots of violent radicalisation](#), HC 1446 2010-12, 6 February 2012: page 16. For further comments from Michael Spurr, see Raphael Rowe, "[From jail to jihad? The threat of prison radicalisation](#)", *BBC News* online, 12 May 2014 and "[Islamic Radicalisation In Prisons A 'Significant Threat' Says Michael Spurr](#)", *Huffington Post UK* online, 12 May 2014

³⁰ Home Affairs Committee, [Roots of violent radicalisation](#), HC 1446 2010-12, 6 February 2012: page 17

³¹ Home Office, [The Government Response To The Nineteenth Report From The Home Affairs Committee Session 2010-12: Roots of violent radicalisation](#), Cm 8368, June 2012

perceptions, just 1% are imprisoned for terrorist-related offences.³²

Baroness Young gave evidence about radicalisation to the Justice Committee's inquiry into young adult offenders. She emphasised the role of trust and leadership within the CJS and what could happen if trust was lacking:

We cannot run the criminal justice system ... unless there is real trust. Once that breaks down, it becomes a real problem. It is almost like making a pre-emptive strike: "If they're going to see me like this, this is how I'm going to be." That undermines trust and does not allow things to work as smoothly as they might.

On the other hand, we came across some examples where trust has been built up. When a particularly difficult incident took place in one prison that we visited, where some non-Muslim prisoners set light to a copy of the Koran, it was dealt with very quickly, openly and transparently. We were told by the Muslim prisoners in that particular prison that that was due to the leadership in the prison, working very closely with the chaplaincy, which was headed by the imam. That triangle of trust enabled a potentially difficult situation to be handled.³³

Lessons from abroad: international perspectives

Concerns about radicalisation in prisons are not, though, unique to the UK.

A [study](#) by the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence at King's College, London in 2010 examined the evidence from 15 countries about how people could be radicalised or reformed in prison. Again, the report of the study remarked that religious conversion was not the same as radicalisation.³⁴ Prison imams were not (the report said) a panacea.³⁵ The report pointed out that prisons could play both a positive and negative role, in tackling problems of radicalisation and terrorism yet also being places of vulnerability:

- Prisons matter. They have played an enormous role in the narratives of every radical and militant movement in the modern period. They are 'places of vulnerability' in which radicalisation takes place. Yet they have also served as incubators for peaceful change and transformation.
- Much of the current discourse about prisons and radicalisation is negative. But prisons are not just a threat – they can play a positive role in tackling problems of radicalisation and terrorism in society as a whole. Many of the examples in this report demonstrate how prisons can become net contributors to the fight against terrorism.³⁶

³² Lola Young, "[Black and Muslim people are the criminal justice system's greatest fear](#)", *Guardian* online, 10 December 2014

³³ Justice Committee, [Oral evidence: Young adult offenders](#), HC 397, 12 January 2016

³⁴ International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, [Prisons and Terrorism: Radicalisation and De-radicalisation in 15 Countries](#), 2010: Introduction

³⁵ *Ibid*

³⁶ *Ibid*

On radicalisation, the study examined why prisons might be a breeding ground:

- Prisons are often said to have become breeding grounds for radicalisation. This should come as no surprise. Prisons are 'places of vulnerability', which produce 'identity seekers', 'protection seekers' and 'rebels' in greater numbers than other environments. They provide near-perfect conditions in which radical, religiously framed ideologies can flourish.
- Over-crowding and under-staffing amplify the conditions that lend themselves to radicalisation. Badly run prisons make the detection of radicalisation difficult, and they also create the physical and ideological space in which extremist recruiters can operate at free will and monopolise the discourse about religion and politics.³⁷

It was no surprise, the report said, that prisons were breeding grounds for radicalisation, as they provided near-perfect conditions for radical ideologies to flourish:

Prisons are 'places of vulnerability', which produce 'identity seekers', 'protection seekers' and 'rebels' in greater numbers than other environments. They provide near-perfect conditions in which radical, religiously framed ideologies can flourish. While the extent of the problem remains unclear, the potential for prison radicalisation is significant, and the issue clearly needs to be addressed.

Overcrowding and understaffing could (the report went on) exacerbate the problem:

Badly run prisons also create the physical and ideological space in which extremist recruiters can operate at free will and monopolise the discourse about religion and politics.

Although it was unclear whether deradicalisation programmes could help stop terrorism, there was some evidence to suggest that, in the right circumstances, they might:

Whether individual disengagement and de-radicalisation programmes can make a strategic contribution to bringing a terrorist campaign to an end remains to be proven. The programmes that have been examined suggest that they can – as long as the political momentum is no longer with the insurgents and other external conditions are conducive.³⁸

The report highlighted too some of the dilemmas about whether to treat terrorist prisoners any differently from others:

Governments everywhere have had to address a trade-off between wanting to treat terrorists 'just like other prisoners' and preventing them from mobilising outside support, recreating operational command structures, and radicalising others. (...) Even within ... mixed regimes, however, it rarely seems to be a good

³⁷ International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, [Prisons and Terrorism: Radicalisation and De-radicalisation in 15 Countries](#), 2010: Introduction

³⁸ *Ibid*: page 60

idea to bring together leaders with followers and mix ideologues with hangers-on.³⁹

The emphasis on “security first” had (it suggested) meant missed opportunities to promote reform and prisons should be more ambitious and innovative in promoting positive influences.

In its conclusions, the report argued that prisons matter and it was important to gain a better understanding of their role in radicalising people and reforming them:

Prisons matter. Often ignored by the public and policymakers, they are important vectors in the process of radicalisation, and they can be leveraged in the fight against it.⁴⁰

2.5 Countering radicalisation in prisons

In January 2016, David Cameron said that prisons should be a place where people were deradicalised, not made worse:

It is very disturbing that, when people are in our care and when the state is looking after them, on some occasions, they have been radicalised because of what they have heard in prison either from other prisoners, or on occasion, from visiting imams. ... [I]f anything, we must ensure that people who are already radicalised when they go to prison are de-radicalised rather than made worse.⁴¹

Much of NOMS' National Security Framework document is not publicly available, for reasons of security. Prison Service Instruction 43/2011, *Managing and reporting on extremist behaviour in Custody*, has not been published outside NOMS. However, NOMS' programme of work to counter extremism was summarised by the then minister, Lord Bach, in February 2009, in response to a question from Baroness Warsi:

The National Offender Management Service is delivering a programme of work to address the risks associated with violent extremism and radicalisation in prisons including improved intelligence gathering; training and awareness-raising for staff, support for chaplaincy teams; and work to research and develop appropriate interventions. Within this programme a series of briefings, written materials and events have been delivered. Work is currently taking place to determine the future training needs.⁴²

In an article in the *Prison Service Journal* in 2012, a senior official at NOMS noted the growing interest in how prisons deal with terrorism and radicalisation and described the development of NOMS' policies to date:

Alongside a range of awareness raising, training (both internal and external) and briefings, a range of behaviours of potential concern have been identified and formalised to help front line staff understand the complexities of radicalisation and produce assessments of threat, both quantitative and qualitative. One of the most critical areas of work has been attempting to look below

³⁹ International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, *Prisons and Terrorism: Radicalisation and De-radicalisation in 15 Countries*, 2010: page 59

⁴⁰ *Ibid*

⁴¹ [HC Deb 27 January 2016 c264](#)

⁴² [HL Deb 12 February 2009 c241WA](#)

the surface behaviours to understand the risk factors and the most appropriate response to them. (...)

The ability of NOMS staff to engage directly with extremists who not only have undergone a process of radicalisation but have gone to the extreme of acting on their ideology is a privileged one, not readily available to any other sector of government. A programme of activity, led by forensic psychologists, undertook extensive fieldwork to understand the dynamics and drivers behind the radicalisation and criminal acts of a number of terrorist offenders. This work resulted in a digest of learning which became the basis for the development of bespoke interventions and a framework for the formulation of case management.

(...)

The role of the chaplaincy and specifically of Muslim chaplains and imams in responding to the risks posed by extremism and radicalisation has been much discussed. It was a key focus of the EPWG and is one of the areas of greatest divergence in terms of scale and nature of provision between England and Wales and other administrations where provision of spiritual and pastoral support can be patchy and uncoordinated.⁴³

The Ibaana programme was at one point mooted to target the small number of Muslim prisoners holding entrenched extremist views. It was mentioned by the Prime Minister's task force on tackling radicalisation and extremism:

5.3.2 Appropriately recruited Muslim Prison Chaplains are already employed to challenge the extremist views of prisoners and to provide religious direction for Muslim prisoners. Using their experience, they are developing the 'Ibaana' programme, designed to target the small number of prisoners with the most entrenched extremist views. One-to-one sessions over several hours with a trained chaplain will be used to challenge the theological arguments used by these prisoners to justify their extremist views.⁴⁴

The programme was never implemented and it was confirmed in July 2015 that it had been cancelled, although it might be replaced:

The Secretary of State has also asked the Ministry of Justice, supported by external expertise, to review our overall approach to dealing with Islamist extremism in prisons and probation. This will include considering whether the Ibaana programme should be replaced and if so what a replacement should look like.⁴⁵

In a [speech in February 2016 on prison reform](#), David Cameron suggested that a new approach might be needed, to deal with prisoners identified as extremist or vulnerable to extremism:

We have around 1,000 prisoners who have been identified as extremist or vulnerable to extremism.

And we know, through intimidation, violence and grooming, some of these individuals are preying on the weak, forcing

⁴³ Richard Pickering, "[Terrorism, Extremism, Radicalisation and The Offender Management System — The Story So Far](#)", *Prison Service Journal*, September 2012 No 203, pages 9-11

⁴⁴ HM Government, [Tackling extremism in the UK: Report from the Prime Minister's Task Force on Tackling Radicalisation and Extremism](#), December 2013: page 6

⁴⁵ [PQ HL1769, 24 July 2015](#)

conversions to Islam and spreading their warped view of the world.

I understand not only what a problem this is causing for prison management who are trying to deliver a safe environment, but also what a danger the risk of radicalisation poses for public safety when prisoners are released.

(...)

And I want to be clear: I am prepared to consider major changes: from the imams we allow to preach in prison to changing the locations and methods for dealing with prisoners convicted of terrorism offences, if that is what is required.⁴⁶

It was reported that this new approach might entail ending the policy of dispersal (that is, locating high risk prisoners in several prisons in the high security estate) and convicted terrorist prisoners might instead be put in one prison, dubbed the “British Alcatraz”:

The government is seriously considering placing all convicted Islamist terrorist prisoners in England and Wales in a single secure unit, a proposal for a “British Alcatraz” that is prompting alarm among prison chiefs.

(...)

However, a leading counter-terror expert warned that bringing together all convicted Islamist prisoners in one “jail within a jail” risks creating a focal point for public protests.⁴⁷

2.6 Review by Ian Acheson of radicalisation in prisons

Ministers have recently reiterated their determination to deal with radicalisation in prisons.

In January this year, the junior minister for prisons, probation and rehabilitation, Andrew Selous, outlined the steps being taken to tackle it:

⁴⁶ Prime Minister’s Office and MoJ, [Prison reform: Prime Minister’s speech](#), 8 February 2016

⁴⁷ Alan Travis “[UK government considers single secure jail unit for Islamist terrorists](#)”, *Guardian* online, 13 February 2016. The proposal for one prison to hold all convicted terrorist prisoners (if such a proposal emerges) would have some similarities to a “supermax” prison. As the Howard League for Penal Reform notes, the idea of a single maximum security prison was put forward by Lord Mountbatten in 1966 but was not implemented, with the policy of dispersal being introduced instead: “The current system for imprisoning those who are deemed to need high security conditions stems from the 1960s, following some high profile escapes. The 1966 investigation by Lord Mountbatten (Mountbatten 1966) suggested a single maximum security prison (like the supermax prisons in the United States) and a categorisation system. The latter recommendation led to the four categories that are still in place today – A, B, C and D (see Prison Service Order 0900 – Categorisation and Allocation). Prisoners who are given a category A rating are those prisoners whose escape would be highly dangerous or a threat to national security. The idea of a supermax prison was superseded by the recommendations of the Radzinowicz Committee (ACPS 1968), which led to the development of the dispersal prison system. Dispersal prisons are high security training prisons for long term prisoners – usually category A and B but sometimes category C.” [Howard League for Penal Reform, [Prison information bulletin 4: High Security Prisons: Prisoner perspectives](#), 2008]

As the threat evolves, we evolve our response. I can tell her that we are strengthening the training for new prison officers to ensure that they are able to tackle criminal activity in whatever form it takes within prisons. As the Secretary of State said earlier, he has asked the Department to review its approach to dealing with Islamist extremism in prisons, and we await that report shortly.⁴⁸

Earlier that day, the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, Michael Gove, had described the review (led by former prison governor Ian Acheson) of relevant security concerns and the spread of peer-to-peer radicalisation:

Radicalisation in prison is a genuine danger not just in England, but across the European Union. That is why we have charged a former prison governor, Ian Acheson, with reviewing how we handle not just the security concerns, but the dangerous spread of peer-to-peer radicalisation in our prisons. It is also the case that, in appointing a new chief inspector to follow on from the excellent work of Nick Hardwick, the experience of Peter Clarke in this particular area will count very much in his favour.

(...)

Across the House, there is a recognition that we must deal not with only violent extremism, but with extremism itself. Those who seek to radicalise and to inject the poison of Islamism into the minds of young men need to be countered every step of the way.⁴⁹

2.7 Is NOMS doing enough?

The Prison Officers' Association (POA) has accused NOMS of not doing enough. Islamic extremists, it alleges, are actively seeking prison sentences or jobs in prison, to attempt to radicalise prisoners. The review therefore needed (in the POA's view) to look more widely at the problems:

But Glyn Travis, assistant general secretary of the POA, told the Guardian the problem of radicalisation was "far wider than imams", and accused the justice secretary and the head of the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) of "burying their heads in the sand" over the situation.

"The probe has to have a far wider reach," he said. "We have concerns that Islamist extremists are deliberately getting custodial sentences in order to target vulnerable prisoners.

"They are often clever and well educated and can brainwash young people."⁵⁰

⁴⁸ [HC Deb 26 January 2016 c146](#)

⁴⁹ [HC Deb 26 January 2016 cc127-8](#)

⁵⁰ David Batty, "[Islamists actively seek prison sentences to radicalise other convicts, say officers](#)", *Guardian* online, 12 December 2015

3. The growth in the Muslim prison population

Another recent trend has been the huge rise in the number of Muslim prisoners. That is not to say, of course, that Muslim prisoners are necessarily extremists or terrorists.

An [article on the BBC News](#) website examines this trend. It observes that the Muslim prison population has more than doubled, but this is not attributable either to the growth of the UK Muslim population nor to convictions for terrorism offences:

The media focus on terrorism might lead some to think that the Muslim prisoner population increase is linked to convictions of Islamist extremists. But the figures don't bear that out either.⁵¹

There have been some well-publicised instances of conversion and radicalisation within prison but NOMS' stance is that there is no conclusive evidence of radical Islamisation.⁵²

Some information about the prison population and, in particular, Muslim prisoners is in the Commons Library briefing [Prison population statistics](#) (July 2013). More recent data are in the [Prison population: Social Indicators page](#) (November 2015).

3.1 Prison population by religion

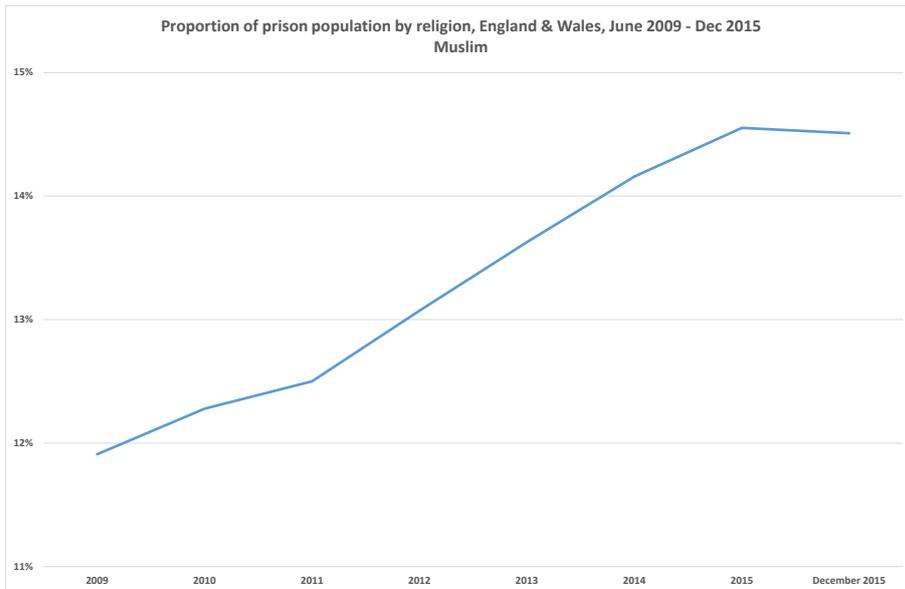
The appended table 1a shows the total prison population in England and Wales has risen from just under 83,400 at 30 June 2009 to just under 85,000 at 31 December 2015, a rise of almost 2%.

In terms of religious identity, the largest rise in the number of prisoners identifying themselves as a particular religion in percentage terms has been the number of prisoners identifying themselves as Jewish (81%) albeit from a low base. The number of prisoners identifying themselves as Muslim has risen by 24% and Christian by 4.5% while prisoners identifying themselves as "No religion" has fallen by 11%.

At 31 December 2015, the proportion of prisoners identifying themselves as Christian was 49.5%, as No religion 30.6%, as Muslim 14.5% and the remaining categories 5.4%. Since 30 June 2009, the proportion of prisoners identifying themselves as Christian has risen by 1.2 percentage points, as Muslim by 2.6 percentage points while those identifying themselves as No religion has fallen by 4.4 percentage points. The chart below tracks the change in the proportion of prisoners identifying themselves as Muslim over the period.

⁵¹ Danny Shaw, "[Why the surge in Muslim prisoners?](#)", *BBC News* online, 11 March 2015

⁵² The shoe bomber Richard Reid is said to have converted to Islam while in prison, although [this article from the BBC website](#) suggests that he was radicalised after his release. ["Who is Richard Reid?", *BBC News* online, 28 December 2001]



The proportion of prisoners identifying themselves as differing religions can be compared with the general population. In the 2011 Census, just over 33 million people in England and Wales identified themselves as Christian (59% of the usual resident population) - the largest religious group. Muslims made up the second largest religious group with 2.7 million people (5% of the population). The number of people who reported that they did not have a religion was just over 14 million (25% of the population).⁵³

3.2 How does NOMS' approach to tackling radicalisation affect Muslim prisoners?

For the most part, NOMS' approach is not to have separate regimes for Muslim prisoners, but to meet the needs of Muslim prisoners (and other prisoners with particular needs) within the regime of the prison. There is, for example, no separate Muslim prisoners' strategy, although this has been called for in the past.

In 2008, the then junior justice minister, Shahid Malik, confirmed (in response to a PQ about Whitemoor prison) that it was not NOMS policy to locate prisoners according to their religion:

Prison Service policy is for prisoners to be allocated to prisons appropriate to their security category; safety and security; individual needs in respect of sentence planning; as well as taking into account matters such as the continuation of family contact. It is not policy to locate prisoners in particular prisons or any part of a prison on the grounds of religion.⁵⁴

⁵³ ONS, [What does the Census tell us about religion in 2011?](#) 16 May 2013

⁵⁴ [HC Deb 12 November 2008 c1162W](#)

3.3 Why is there no separate strategy for Muslim prisoners?

In its [equalities report for 2009-10](#), NOMS reported the outcome of a Muslim prisoner scoping study (MPSS), which had concluded that there was no need for a separate strategy:

The MPSS found evidence to support the HMCIP finding that Muslim prisoner perceptions are more negative than those of non-Muslim prisoners. However, many of the issues and concerns raised, whilst distinct in certain obvious respects, were consistent with those facing other groups of prisoners who also sometimes have aspects of their identity overlooked. The MPSS therefore concluded – in line with the approach set out in Race Review 2008 – that rather than developing a separate strategy for Muslim prisoners, the focus should be on delivering services fairly and improving staff-prisoner relationships across the board.⁵⁵

Action had, though, been taken at national and local level:

Whilst no separate strategy resulted from the study, the issues raised by the study's findings were tackled through a series of actions both at national level – including providing prisons with the capacity to monitor outcomes for prisoners by religious affiliation and developing and rolling out faith awareness training for staff – and locally, by each establishment working through a checklist for ensuring that the faith needs of all groups are met.⁵⁶

3.4 NOMS' policies

The [NOMS single equality scheme for 2009-12](#) discussed religion and belief, offering an overview of how policy has developed:

The 2003 investigation by the CRE found some failures to meet the faith needs of BME prisoners, and in particular Muslims. The Race Review 2008 concludes that there has been significant progress since that time, with the majority of issues having been fully addressed. (...)

(...)

The Race Review also reports the HMCIP finding that a smaller proportion of Muslim prisoners than non-Muslim prisoners feel that their religious beliefs are respected, and HMCIP have since found that Muslim perceptions about other aspects of prison life, and particularly safety and relationships with staff, are consistently less favourable than those of non-Muslims.⁵⁷

Prison Service Instruction 51/2011 (revised November 2013) sets out policy on [faith and pastoral care for prisoners](#).

NOMS' [service specification for faith and pastoral care of prisoners](#) (2015) is also available on the [gov.uk](#) website.

3.5 HMCIP thematic review of the experience of Muslim prisoners

The then HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, Dame Anne Owers, published the report of her [thematic review of the experience of Muslim prisoners](#) in June 2010. The report painted a complex picture:

The headline finding, from surveys and interviews, is that Muslim prisoners report more negatively on their prison experience, and

⁵⁵ NOMS, [Equalities Annual Report 2009-2010](#): page 4

⁵⁶ *Ibid*

⁵⁷ NOMS, [Promoting Equality in Prisons and Probation: The National Offender Management Service Single Equality Scheme 2009-2012](#), March 2009

particularly their safety and their relationship with staff, than other prisoners – this is even more pronounced than the discrepancy between the reported experiences of black and minority ethnic prisoners compared to white prisoners. The differential perception has slightly lessened over the last three years, but is still pronounced. On the positive side, Muslims were more likely than non-Muslims to report that their faith needs were met in prisons, reflecting the strengthening of the role of Muslim chaplains. Beneath those headlines, however, are some more complex findings.⁵⁸

Dame Anne observed that, although much attention was being paid to preventing extremism and radicalisation, there was still no strategy for meeting the needs of Muslim prisoners:

2.7 ... However, a strategy for meeting the needs of Muslim prisoners has not materialised, nor has monitoring by religion. At the same time, identifying extremism and preventing radicalisation have become major NOMS policy concerns and directly affect Muslims. The focus on extremism has been driven by the government's counter-terrorism strategy, known as CONTEST. One component of this is Prevent, which aims to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting violent extremists. The Prevent strategy has five key strands: challenging violent extremist ideology; disrupting those who promote violent extremism and supporting the institutions where they are active, including prisons; supporting individuals who are being targeted and recruited; increasing the resilience of communities to violent extremism; and addressing grievances that can otherwise be exploited. Importantly, the Prevent strategy also states that work is needed to 'reduce inequalities, tackle racism and other forms of extremism' because, for example, 'reducing inequalities undermines the narrative pushed by Al-Qaida and by promoters of violent extremism, which relies on encouraging a sense of victimhood.'⁵⁹

The Prison Reform Trust welcomed the report:

Commenting on the report Juliet Lyon, director of the Prison Reform Trust, said:

*The Prison Reform Trust welcomes this timely report and its recognition of the important work conducted in prisons by Muslim chaplains. Too often Muslim prisoners are seen as potential extremists in the making instead of a diverse population in need of a safe environment, individual supervision and support and proper preparation for release.*⁶⁰

The report was debated in the Lords in July 2010. In that debate, Lord McNally suggested that the evidence of radicalisation in prisons was not conclusive:

I do not have precise figures on conversions [to Islam within prisons], but I know the background to this question of whether or not there is radical Islamisation in prisons. The studies that I have been shown reveal no conclusive evidence of this, although

⁵⁸ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, [Muslim prisoners' experiences: A thematic review](#), June 2010: Introduction. Pages 7 and 8 of the report offer a summary of its findings. Recommendations and good practice are set out on pages 43 and 44.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*: Background, page 10

⁶⁰ Prison Reform Trust, [PRT response to Muslim prisoners thematic report by HM Prisons Inspectorate](#), 8 June 2010

there are examples which give rise to concern. The staff and the wider Prison Service keep a close eye on imams in prisons. Bringing them in to lecture, preach and minister within prisons has been one of the benefits, but we must make sure that it is a positive influence, as the noble Lord suggested.

(...)

On the dangers of radicalisation in prison, in many ways prison staff reflect the fears of our wider society. Therefore, it is worth reminding people that only 80 of those in prison are there for terrorist offences and that the vast majority of convictions are not terrorist-related. What we must not do - and we have some hard lessons to learn from drug regimes - is think that people go to prison as Muslims or having converted to Islam and are then radicalised.⁶¹

In response to a question from Lord Dholakia about why Muslims were over-represented in the prison population and one from the Bishop of Chester about staff attitudes and relationships between prisoners and staff, Lord McNally outlined some training initiatives.⁶²

3.6 Role of prison chaplains

The views and concerns of Muslim chaplains were described in the report by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons. Many (for example) considered that staff lacked confidence in dealing with Muslim prisoners and focused too much on security issues:

The Muslim chaplains we interviewed gave four main concerns, most of which echoed those raised by prisoners. A lack of staff understanding of Islam was the main issue. Nearly all chaplains felt that staff had negative misconceptions about Islam and needed focused training on Islamic beliefs and culture. Many thought that staff lacked confidence in dealing with Muslim prisoners and focused too heavily on security risks. They also complained of a lack of time to fulfil their duties and, particularly, to see new converts. As a result, they were hindered in their effectiveness as a key part of the Prison Service's approach to managing the risk of radicalisation, and unable to provide assurance to staff. Linked to this was a perception that they were not trusted by the prison authorities to tackle the signs of radicalisation. Finally, they complained about enduring frailties in provision of appropriate food and canteen products for Muslim prisoners. The persistence of cross-contamination of utensils, occasional lack of care in providing halal food, and expense of Islamic items, such as prayer mats, were all particularly criticised.⁶³

In response to a PQ in the Lords in February 2011, Baroness Hanham (junior minister at the Department for Communities and Local Government) said that prison chaplains had a critical role to play:

The Government recognise the value of chaplains, of all faiths. They have a critical role to play in universities and prisons, including offering spiritual guidance to students and offenders, as well as providing wider, more generic pastoral support. Universities and prisons will want to continue finding the most

⁶¹ [HL Deb 12 July 2010 c508-9](#)

⁶² [HL Deb 12 July 2010 c508-9](#)

⁶³ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, *Muslim prisoners' experiences: A thematic review*, June 2010: Summary, page 8

appropriate ways to support people on matters of faith and citizenship.

The Government's *Prevent* strategy, which aims to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism, has identified universities and prisons as playing an important part in helping vulnerable individuals resist the influence of terrorist radicalisers. The *Prevent* strategy is currently under review.⁶⁴

4. The experience in Scotland

The [Prevent duty guidance for Scotland](#) sets out how prisons should work with offenders:

72. This responsibility for public protection and reducing re-offending gives prisons and criminal justice services a clear and important role both in working with offenders convicted of terrorism or terrorism-related offences and in preventing other offenders from being drawn into terrorism and the extremist ideas that are used to legitimise terrorism and are shared by terrorist groups.⁶⁵

It goes on to detail how prisons should ensure that risk assessments are done and what interventions might be appropriate.

4.1 Prison population by religion

The appended table 2a shows the total prison population in Scotland has risen from just under 7,800 at 30 June 2008 to just under 7,900 at 30 June 2013, a rise of 1.6%.

In terms of religious identity, the largest rise in the number of prisoners identifying themselves as a particular religion in percentage terms has been the number of prisoners identifying themselves as having no religion (22%) and Muslim (17%) while prisoners identifying themselves as Christian has fallen by 7%.

At 30 June 2013, the proportion of prisoners identifying themselves as Christian was 45%, as No religion 41.5% and as Muslim 2.5%. This compares to the number of people in the population at the 2011 census where 54% of people identified themselves as Christian, 1.4% as Muslim and 36.7% as no religion.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ HM Government and Scottish Government, [Revised Prevent Duty Guidance: Scotland: Guidance for specified Scottish authorities on the duty in the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 to have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism](#), March 2015 (revised July 2015): page 16

⁶⁶ Scottish Government website, [Demographics](#), 13 April 2016

Appendix 1: Prison population by religion (England and Wales)

Table 1a: Prison population by religion, at 30 June

England and Wales

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	December 2015	
								42,063	as % of total in custody
<i>All Christian</i>	40,244	41,226	42,511	43,176	42,341	42,706	42,678	42,063	49.5%
Anglican	21,428	20,526	19,713	18,898	17,516	16,873	16,230	15,835	18.6%
Free Church	1,187	1,147	1,136	1,047	1,002	1,021	861	848	1.0%
Roman Catholic	14,087	14,437	15,001	15,237	15,367	15,535	15,564	15,197	17.9%
Other Christian	3,542	5,116	6,661	7,994	8,456	9,277	10,023	10,183	12.0%
Muslim	9,932	10,437	10,672	11,248	11,426	12,106	12,543	12,328	14.5%
Hindu	431	435	452	456	451	447	476	438	0.5%
Sikh	661	669	711	777	799	732	788	705	0.8%
Buddhist	1,817	1,872	1,793	1,756	1,638	1,629	1,556	1,543	1.8%
Jewish	220	233	228	252	268	319	372	398	0.5%
Other religious group	835	911	1,010	1,058	1,308	1,565	1,307	1,383	1.6%
Non recognised	11	24	17	19	14	28	10	11	0.0%
No religion	29,201	26,830	26,113	25,269	24,484	25,619	26,284	26,007	30.6%
Not recorded	39	2,365	1,867	2,037	1,113	358	179	92	0.1%
Total	83,391	85,002	85,374	86,048	83,842	85,509	86,193	84,968	

Source:

MoJ, *Offender Management Statistics Quarterly*, various editions

Appendix 2: Prison population by religion (Scotland)

Table 2a: People in custody by religion at 30 June

Scotland

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	
							as % of total in custody (2013)
Church Of Scotland	2,486	2,538	2,448	2,386	2,293	2,145	27.2%
Roman Catholic	1,793	1,905	1,861	1,840	1,875	1,784	22.6%
Other Christian	335	341	336	331	329	357	4.5%
Muslim	168	167	180	183	196	201	2.5%
Buddhist	33	47	35	30	24	20	0.3%
Jehovah Witness	4	2	3	2	4	-	-
Sikh	10	9	8	8	10	11	0.1%
Hindu	2	2	3	4	7	5	0.1%
Jewish	3	4	3	5	6	9	0.1%
Mormon	3	4	5	6	7	-	-
Other	110	77	59	71	65	78	1.0%
None	2,814	3,087	3,042	3,240	3,439	3,273	41.5%
Total	7,761	8,183	7,983	8,106	8,255	7,883	100%

Source:

Scottish Government, *Prison statistics and population projections Scotland and Prison Statistics Scotland*, various edition

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