

Counter terrorism policy and the space for student democracy in UK universities

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This paper considers the role of UK counter terrorism policy in shaping the nature of the 'space' of student university activism in the UK. Under the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015 (CTS) it is now a statutory duty for universities to 'prevent people from being drawn into terrorism'. This policy requires university staff to monitor the ideologies and activities of students considered 'at risk of vulnerability' to violent and non-violent extremism. The paper will consider the impact of this change in the law on the practice and role of the University.

Universities play an important role in public life; they offer a cultural, social and political infrastructure for creating knowledge and innovation, exchanging ideas, and opportunities for various types of social interaction. Increasingly, there has been a policy and security focus on student activities, particularly those of Muslim students. The government is concerned that UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) offer spaces that radicalise students. Yet there is little existing academic research on the structure or nature of universities as political or 'politicising spaces' (Crossley, 2008). Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, universities were key sites for the development of student radicalism. The student protests of the 1960s began a wave of democratisation that led to formal student involvement in institutional decision-making. This led social movement theorists to consider universities as 'free spaces' for the potential development of oppositional forms of political consciousness. Such 'free spaces' are considered to be physical spaces, situated between private lives and large scale institutions, free from the control of 'dominant' groups, in order to offer a place to share experiences and create alternative cultures (Evans and Boyte, 1986:17). However, within this literature there is no research on the role played by 'dominant groups' in facilitating or inhibiting the development of a 'free space'. This paper seeks to examine the role played by students as well as a range of such 'dominant groups' (government and security officials, elite social movements) in shaping the nature of 'free spaces' within universities.

This research thus asks how the 'space' of student political activity has been constituted or affected by counter terrorism policy and by the response to it of other actors.

The paper thus seeks to examine the activities and interactions of three sets of actors.

Government counter terrorism policy and officials: First I seek to examine the role of government officials in creating and overseeing and monitoring counter terror policy within higher education.

The Universities: Second, I examine how actors within higher education (university management; Universities UK; Security officials; universities lecturers and

administrators) are implementing UK counter terrorism policy throughout UK university sector.

Social movements: Third, I will consider the response to counter terrorism policy by various social movements. Crucially, this means looking both at social movements that are seeking to promote and support the establishment of the policy as well as those seeking to challenge and resist it or more generally to undertake activities which in practice come within the purview of counter terrorism policy and practice.