

## **Analysis of FOI 63470 data on the ethnic composition of Channel cases, and a comparison to the composition of terrorism-related criminal sanctions**

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This document presents an analysis of ethnicity data returned by the Home Office to Rights & Security International (RSI) on Channel cases, following a freedom of information request (FOI 63470). The third and final section contains a more experimental analysis, comparing the ethnic composition of Channel cases to publicly available data on terrorism-related criminal sanctions by ethnicity. This analysis is intended to inform public debate on the experiences of various measures to prevent or counter terrorism by different ethnic groups.

There are some notable trends; however, it is difficult to draw too many conclusions because the Channel-related data is based on only four years of activity and there are some significant year-on-year shifts, which affect the ability to identify a coherent narrative. This difficulty could be resolved through the disclosure of data for more recent years, as well as the ethnic composition of initial referrals made to Prevent, as most such data about initial referrals was not included in the freedom of information request.

Additionally, the Home Office describes the ethnic classification as having been 'recorded by the case officer' rather than based on the self-defined ethnicity of people processed by Channel. This may impact upon the accuracy of the data, so the analysis of trends by each ethnic group should be interpreted as reflecting the *perceived* ethnicity of each individual processed by Channel, which the individual may or may not agree with. However, this means direct comparisons can be made between Channel cases and data on terrorism-related criminal sanctions, as the latter also relies on a classification of people's ethnicities based on the assumptions of counter-terrorism officials.

The Home Office also states that 'there is a lot of missing data' regarding the matters that were the subject of the freedom of information (FOI) request, and that '[t]he recording of ethnicity is not mandatory on the Home Office Channel central case management system'. This means the dataset we analysed is incomplete and may only be indicative of possible trends.

Finally, the Home Office only agreed to disclose the requested information for each ethnic group where the breakdown per 'type of concern' is not less than ten. This decision may explain why some of the overall totals for each ethnic group are larger than the sum of the breakdowns provided per type of concern. However, this is unlikely to affect comparisons between people from Asian and white backgrounds due to the high volume of cases from those groups.

Although these are important limitations to note, they are unlikely to significantly affect parts of the analysis which compares trends between people recorded as Asian or White, and between 'Islamist and 'far-right' concerns; this is due to the high volume of cases that fall within these categories. Analysing trends at this level reveals some interesting patterns, as discussed below.

## 1. Summary

- The FOI data suggests that during the time period in question, people recorded as Asian and cases recorded as 'Islamist related' were subject to comparatively greater scrutiny than other ethnic groups and types of concern. This is despite increases in other types of concerns that were referred to Prevent and subsequently discussed at, or adopted by, a Channel panel. This is illustrated by the decreasing volumes of Islamist-related cases either screened out through no 'further action' taken or subject to a 'referral to other services', even though the overall number of referrals for this type of concern reduced over this period.
- By contrast, cases involving 'right wing extremism', which primarily involve people recorded as white, were increasingly referred to other services or designated as requiring no further action. That is, referrals for 'right wing extremism' were directed away from the Prevent and Channel process at the initial stage compared to 'Islamist-related' concerns.
- The 'White' category was the only ethnicity to be discussed at a Channel panel for the full range of Prevent concerns, whereas people recorded as being of 'Black' or, in particular, 'Asian' ethnicities tended to be discussed in relation to Islamist concerns.
- People recorded as being from 'White' ethnicities were more likely to be adopted as a Channel case (primarily for right wing related concerns) than people recorded as Asian, although separate Home Office data on terrorism-related criminal sanctions reveal that white ethnicities are less likely to experience the criminal justice outcomes of an arrest, charge or conviction for terrorism-related offences.
- Despite decreases over time in the Channel caseloads of people recorded as Asian, Home Office data on terrorism-related sanctions shows they are more likely to face terror-related criminal sanctions.
- We infer from these differences between Channel caseloads and criminal sanctions that, at a systemic level, officials may view suspected extremism among people from white ethnicities as a concern to pursue through non-criminal sanctions (i.e. Channel), if at all, while viewing suspected extremism among people from Asian ethnicities as a criminal justice matter.
- Data for 2018/19 data is unusual as it disrupts most of the trends identified in earlier years. For example, there is a higher volume of cases adopted by Channel, despite that year seeing the lowest number of referrals since 2015/16 (Home Office 2019). Obtaining data for more recent years will help to understand whether this was a one-off disruption or if it represents a longer-term shift in caseloads and outcomes.
- Between 2016/17 and 2018/19, the proportion of screen-outs reflecting 'Islamism' cases fell. At the same time, the proportion of screen-outs reflecting 'Mixed/Unstable/Unclear' ideology cases rose. In the data, this potential correlation is not certain. However, it suggests that there would be value in a further exploration of whether officials began to label certain types of cases differently, perhaps due to changes in policy or training. Further information about the 'Mixed/Unstable/Unclear' category itself, such as whether it contains subcategories, could aid a greater understanding of these trends.

## 2. Data analysis of FOI 63470

### Q1 - The number and percentage of Prevent referrals that 'Required no further action' disaggregated by type of concern, 2015/16 to 2018/19

Year	Type of concern	Referrals	% of referrals
2015/16	Right wing extremism	143	5%
2015/16	Islamist extremism	1,664	60%
2015/16	Mixed/Unstable/Unclear	818	30%
2015/16	Other extremism	142	5%
<b>2015/16</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>2,767</b>	<b>100%</b>
2016/17	Right wing extremism	251	11%
2016/17	Islamist extremism	1,351	62%
2016/17	Mixed/Unstable/Unclear	392	18%
2016/17	Other extremism	195	9%
<b>2016/17</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>2,189</b>	<b>100%</b>
2017/18	Right wing extremism	466	15%
2017/18	Islamist extremism	1,358	44%
2017/18	Mixed/Unstable/Unclear	928	30%
2017/18	Other extremism	308	10%
<b>2017/18</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>3,060</b>	<b>100%</b>
2018/19	Right wing extremism	320	20%
2018/19	Islamist extremism	305	19%
2018/19	Mixed/Unstable/Unclear	723	46%
2018/19	Other extremism	236	15%
<b>2018/19</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>1,584</b>	<b>100%</b>

This table shows that the number of Prevent referrals that were considered to require no further action either increased or remained stable for all concerns - apart from Islamist-related referrals, which were progressively less likely to be screened out at the initial stage.

Referrals for 'right wing' concerns have seen an upward trend since 2015/16 (Home Office 2019), but the data in the table shows that these have been increasingly screened out. It points to a possible difference in judgement between public sector professionals or citizens who make a referral for a right-wing concern and the decision-making of Prevent officials over whether these initial referrals should be further scrutinised. The persistent screening out of this type of concern could reflect differing political or sociocultural views among

Prevent officials that de-emphasise threats from 'right wing extremism'.

By contrast, the screening out of 'Islamist' referrals has generally decreased over this period in both volume and proportion. This is unique to this type of concern, as referrals for 'other extremism' concerns have been increasingly screened out. The screening out of 'mixed/unstable/unclear', as a proportion of the total, fluctuates; however, the three years between 2016/17 and 2018/19 show an initial steep dip followed by a seemingly sharp rise.

Unexpectedly, 2018/19 saw a 48% decrease in referrals not requiring further action: from 3,060 screen-outs in the previous year to 1,584 in 2018/19. It is unclear why this is the case as the annual Home Office (2019) statistical bulletin for that year highlights 2018/19 as receiving the lowest number of referrals (n=5,738) since 2015/16. COVID-19 and the associated lockdowns are unlikely to have impacted significantly on the data because the first lockdown commenced on 23rd March 2020 and so falls outside of the time period covered by the freedom of information request.

### Q2 - The number and percentage of Prevent referrals that were 'Referred to other services' disaggregated by type of concern, 2015/16 to 2018/19

This table (below) shows that a large number of Prevent referrals are subsequently referred to other services. It suggests that the initial screening process may provide some degree of safeguards against malicious or inappropriate referrals that are made, particularly given the tendency of some public sector staff to make referrals to demonstrate compliance with the Public Sector Duty or as a means of

signposting people onto more appropriate services through Prevent (Derfoufi and RSI 2022). However, there are differences in this outcome by the type of concern.

Year	Type of concern	Referrals	% of referrals
2015/16	Right wing extremism	428	11%
2015/16	Islamist extremism	2,514	66%
2015/16	Mixed/Unstable/Unclear	355	9%
2015/16	Other extremism	496	13%
<b>2015/16</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>3,793</b>	<b>100%</b>
2016/17	Right wing extremism	443	16%
2016/17	Islamist extremism	1,582	58%
2016/17	Mixed/Unstable/Unclear	304	11%
2016/17	Other extremism	412	15%
<b>2016/17</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>2,741</b>	<b>100%</b>
2017/18	Right wing extremism	418	14%
2017/18	Islamist extremism	1,181	40%
2017/18	Mixed/Unstable/Unclear	944	32%
2017/18	Other extremism	405	14%
<b>2017/18</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>2,948</b>	<b>100%</b>
2018/19	Right wing extremism	522	18%
2018/19	Islamist extremism	558	20%
2018/19	Mixed/Unstable/Unclear	1,401	50%
2018/19	Other extremism	342	12%
<b>2018/19</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>2,823</b>	<b>100%</b>

The 'Islamist' category saw consistent reductions in the numbers signposted to other services over this period, reinforcing the idea that referrals for these cases are subject to greater scrutiny at this early stage. This is in volumes (from 2,514 in 2015/16 to 558 in 2018/19) and as a portion of all cases referred to other services, from 66% in 2015/16 to 20% in 2018/19.

Signposting of 'right wing' concerns towards other services were generally stable over this period as it remained in the low 400s (and 11-16% of total referrals each year) until 2018/19, when over 500 of cases within this category were referred elsewhere.

The 'other' category sees reductions in signposting to other services over the data

period, but not as profoundly as the 'Islamist extremism' category, and it remains stable (between 12%-15% referrals to other services). This could be associated with the higher volume of referrals classified as mixed/unstable/unclear concerns and referred to other services.

Finally, referrals of 'mixed/unstable/unclear' cases to other services increased dramatically over this period. The data shows a threefold increase from 355 in 2015/16 and 304 in 2016/17 to a total of 944 in 2017/18 and 1,401 in 2018/19. By 2018/19, this category accounted for half of all cases referred to other services. This pattern is consistent with existing concerns over the increased prevalence of people with mental health issues or learning differences being referred to Prevent (Hall 2021). However, Aked et al. (2021)'s research reveals that people within this category may still be engaged by Prevent teams embedded within psychiatric services, particularly where it involves patients from Muslim backgrounds.

Similar to what appears to have occurred regarding screen-outs (see above), signposting to other services for 'mixed/unstable/unclear' ideology cases rose during the same period that such signposting for cases labelled as 'Islamist extremism' fell, as portions of the total. It is unclear whether these two trends were correlated, and if so, why.

### Q3 - The number of Prevent referrals that were 'discussed at a channel panel' by ethnicity and type of concern, 2015/16 to 2018/19

Year	Type of concern	Ethnicity						Total
		Asian	Black	Mixed	Other	Unknown	White	
2015/16	Right wing extremism	-	-	-	-	41	145	188
2015/16	Islamist extremism	324	55	18	39	275	108	819
2015/16	Other extremism	-	-	-	-	24	25	64
2015/16	<b>Total</b>	<b>331</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>278</b>	<b>1,071</b>
2016/17	Right wing extremism	-	-	-	-	76	186	274
2016/17	Islamist extremism	200	53	26	32	309	151	771
2016/17	Other extremism	11	-	-	-	53	48	118
2016/17	<b>Total</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>438</b>	<b>385</b>	<b>1,163</b>
2017/18	Right wing extremism	-	-	-	-	88	324	428
2017/18	Islamist extremism	223	69	27	47	176	116	658
2017/18	Other extremism	24	-	-	-	35	42	113
2017/18	Mixed/Unstable/Unclear	20	-	-	-	41	38	111
2017/18	<b>Total</b>	<b>275</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>520</b>	<b>1,310</b>
2018/19	Right wing extremism	-	-	10	-	109	412	545
2018/19	Islamist extremism	233	57	21	32	118	79	540
2018/19	Other extremism	40	12	-	11	54	72	198
2018/19	Mixed/Unstable/Unclear	-	-	-	-	10	20	45
2018/19	<b>Total</b>	<b>288</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>291</b>	<b>583</b>	<b>1,328</b>

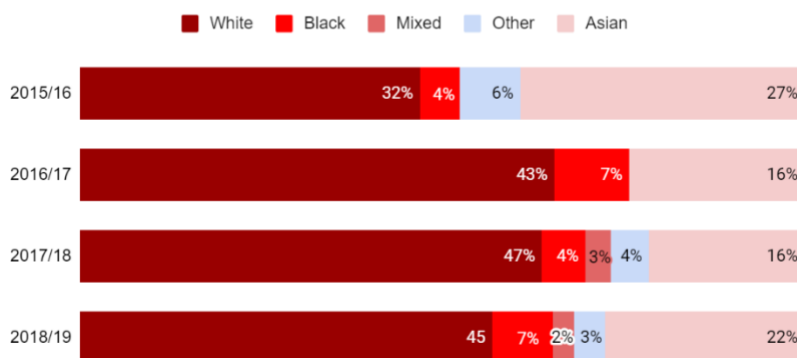
Since 2015/16, people recorded as being from white backgrounds have come to represent an increased portion of Prevent referrals, becoming the single largest group discussed at a Channel panel from the following year (see Home Office 2019). They have risen from 26% (n=278 of 1,071) in 2015/16 to 44% (n=583 of 1,328) in 2018/19.

Perhaps expectedly, the bulk of referrals discussed at a Channel panel involving white ethnicities relate to right wing concerns, increasing from 52% in 2015/16 (n=145 of 278) to 71% in 2018/19 (412 of 583). The second largest concern that involves white ethnicities being discussed at a Channel panel is Islamist related concerns, although it is unclear why this has reduced significantly from 39% in 2015/16 (108 of 278) to 14% in 2018/19 (79 of 583). The reduction does coincide with the introduction of the mixed/unstable/unclear category and it should also be noted that **the white category is the only ethnicity to be discussed at a Channel panel for the full range of Prevent concerns. By comparison, people recorded as Black and, in particular, those recorded as Asian are primarily discussed in relation to Islamist concerns. This is a cause for concern as it potentially reveals some stereotyping in relation to people from Black and, in particular, Asian backgrounds.**

People from Asian backgrounds who are discussed at a channel panel reduced from 31% in 2015/16 (331 of 1,071) to 22% in 2018/19 (288 of 1,328). The 'unknown' ethnic category represents one-fifth of all referrals discussed at a Channel panel, which makes an overall analysis of ethnicity limited. The 'other' ethnicity represents 3-4% of all cases on average, mixed around 3%, and Black people less than 6%.

**Q4 - The number of Prevent referrals discussed at a channel panel that were 'adopted as a channel case' disaggregated by ethnicity and type of concern, 2015/16 to 2018/19**

Proportion of Cases adopted by Channel, by ethnic group (excluding 'unknown')



Year	Type of concern	Ethnicity					Total
		Asian	Black	Mixed	Other	Unknown	
2015/16	Right wing extremism	-	-	-	-	25	98
2015/16	Islamist extremism	100	14	-	19	86	262
2015/16	Other extremism	-	-	-	-	-	18
2015/16	<b>Total</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>378</b>
2016/17	Right wing extremism	-	-	-	-	27	124
2016/17	Islamist extremism	52	22	-	-	60	187
2016/17	Other extremism	-	-	-	-	13	27
2016/17	<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>338</b>
2017/18	Right wing extremism	-	-	-	-	32	169
2017/18	Islamist extremism	50	14	-	12	55	170
2017/18	Other extremism	-	-	-	-	-	28
2017/18	Mixed/Unstable/Unclear	-	-	-	-	-	16
2017/18	<b>Total</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>383</b>
2018/19	Right wing extremism	-	-	-	-	52	250
2018/19	Islamist extremism	97	28	-	13	38	208
2018/19	Other extremism	19	-	-	-	21	78
2018/19	Mixed/Unstable/Unclear	-	-	-	-	-	20
2018/19	<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>556</b>

The data returned shows that people recorded as being from white ethnicities have come to represent a higher proportion of Channel cases over time while those recorded as Asian have decreased. This is more clearly shown in the bar graph (left), which is based on the raw data returned by the FOI request (below). Without data for more recent years, it is unclear if this pattern continues or if, as indicated by the figures for 2018/19, recent years have seen a return to the approximate balance between people from white and Asian backgrounds adopted for a Channel intervention in 2015/16.

Other than this, the data shows a very complicated picture which makes it difficult to draw other conclusions as the proportion of each ethnicity and type of concern varies.

Overall, and following an initial drop of 11% in all cases adopted from 378 in 2015/16 to 338 in 2016/17, these reductions were cancelled out by an increase of 13% (n=383) in 2017/18 compared to the previous year and a further **dramatic and unexplained increase of 45% in referrals discussed at a Channel panel in 2018/19 to 556**. Each ethnic group experienced their highest rise in cases adopted by Channel in 2018/19, **which is curious because 2018/19 saw the fewest Prevent referrals since 2015/16** (Home Office 2019). It would be worth seeking an explanation for this phenomenon, as it represents a distinct shift from the pattern in the previous years.

Overall, cases adopted rose by 47% during this period, from 378 in 2015/16 to 556 in 2018/19. White ethnicities are the only category to have seen a consistent rise the number of cases adopted as a Channel case over this period, with the greatest rise in right wing concerns, whereas other categories have risen and fallen during different periods. In contrast, **the number of Asians (or perceived Asians) adopted as part of a Channel intervention decreased initially but rose alongside the unexplained increases in 2018/19**. Cases adopted by a Channel panel where it involves people recorded as Asian decreased by 47% in 2016/17 (down to 54 compared to 102 previously) but then rose by 13% in 2017/18 to 61 cases and by 100% in 2018/19 to 122.



### 3. 'Proportionality' estimates

This section presents an experimental analysis of the ethnic composition of people processed by a Channel panel compared to the composition of people who receive criminal sanctions for a terrorism-related offence. The analysis is intended for comparative purposes only and to inform public debate in the absence of a reliable dataset to measure the 'proportionality' of activity under Channel. Most terrorism-related arrests occur under non-terrorism legislation (Hall 2021), and are included in this analysis.

#### Methodological issues

There are a number of limitations that should be borne in mind, but equally valid reasons for making a comparison.

The Home Office (2021) dataset on terrorism-related criminal sanctions is not an objective assessment of the nature of violence, as it reflects the decision-making of state authorities regarding where to focus activity, which is itself shaped by the political direction set by the Home Secretary. An example of how political considerations can impact on countering violence lies in the fact that Prevent does not extend to Northern Ireland to address violence by Catholic-Nationalist-Republican (CNR) or Protestant-Unionist-Loyalist (PUL) groups, despite the region's long and bloody history and acts of politically motivated violence which persistent today (see Derfoufi and RSI 2022: pp.29-31). Second, arrests, charges and convictions for terror-related offences represent criminal justice measures which require a higher evidentiary threshold than the decisions to discuss or adopt cases under Channel (see Pettinger 2020). (It should be noted, however, that some individuals and their families engaged under the Prevent scheme report pressures to comply (CRIN 2022) and public sector staff and community leaders report being targeted and censored (Younis and Jadhav 2019; Derfoufi and RSI 2022)).

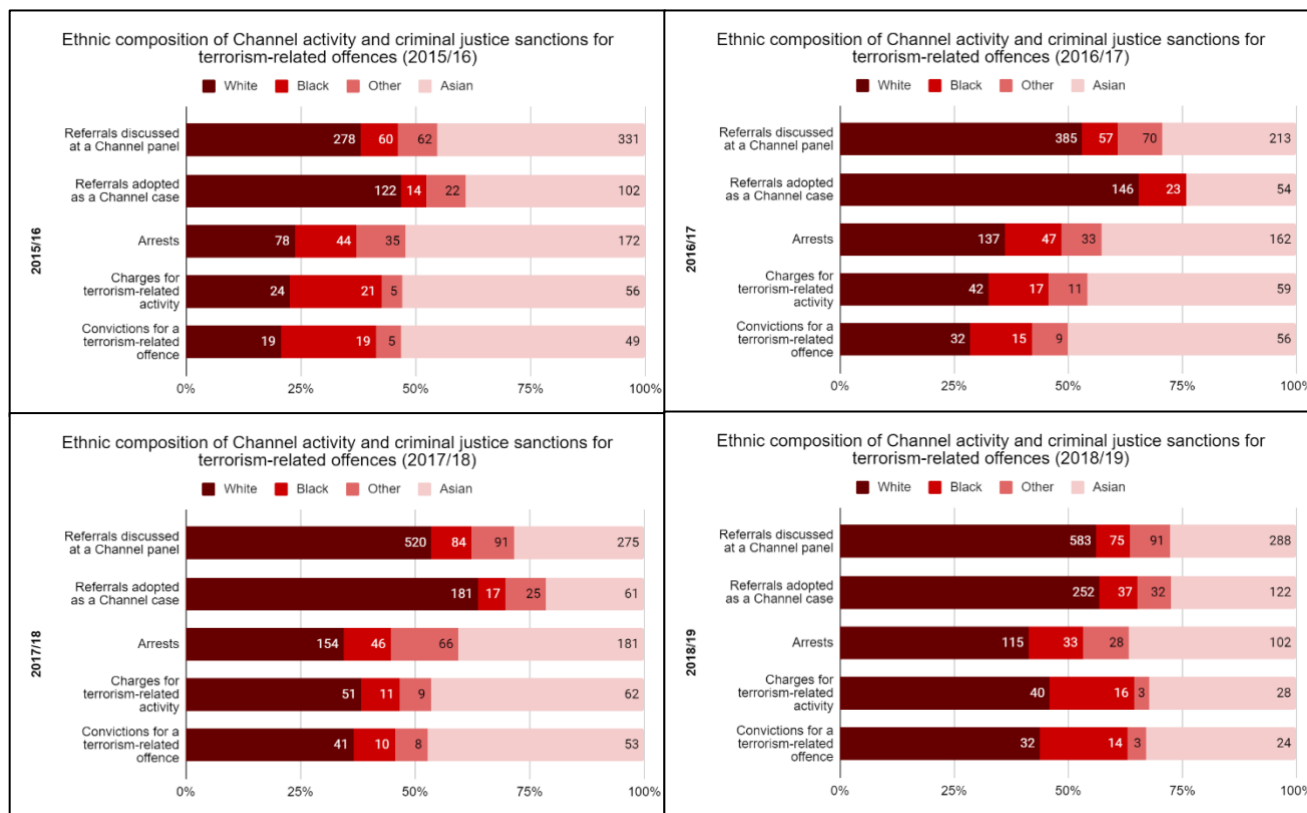
However, it is reasonable to expect some consistency in the targeting of terrorist threats and vulnerability to ideologies that promote violence, particularly given that all of these activities fall under the remit of the Home Office and in light of cross-governmental efforts to unify counterterror activities under the CONTEST strategy (see HM Government 2018). The analysis presenting in this final section is intended to help inform public debate.

#### Results

The four stacked bar graphs in this section illustrate the ethnic composition of people (by ethnic appearance) subjected to the different stages of Channel and against tougher criminal justice sanctions for terror-related offences between the years 2015/16 and 2018/19. The degree of severity of possible measures are ranked from the least serious at the top (discussed at a Channel panel) to increasingly tougher sanctions, with the most severe at the bottom (convicted of a terror-related offence). The raw volumes of each ethnic group that faces each Channel or criminal justice measure are stated inside each bar graph and the proportion that these numbers equate to can be seen at the bottom axis.

The graphs show that **people from Asian recorded backgrounds are more likely to experience the harshest outcomes, while people from white recorded backgrounds experience the opposite.** In other words, people from Asian backgrounds represent a higher portion of those who experience criminal justice measures than is suggested are at risk by cases adopted by the Channel project, while the comparatively higher proportion of people from white backgrounds who receive a Channel intervention

each year is not reflected in the data on criminal justice measures. This pattern is consistent throughout the four years reported, even as people from white recorded backgrounds became the largest group to be adopted as a Channel case since 2015/16 – primarily for right wing related issues (Home Office 2019). The final year of 2018/19, once again, bucked this trend by showing a more proportion ratio of people white and Asian people as having been discussed or adopted by Channel in comparison to their respective proportions in charges or convictions of terror-related offences.



Data adapted from:

- Freedom of Information Request 63470, as requested by Rights & Security International
- Home Office (2021) Operation of police powers under the Terrorism Act 2000: financial year ending March 2021: annual data tables.

Without more comprehensive data, it is difficult to understand whether the increasingly lower proportion of Asians recorded as ‘adopted as a Channel case’ is due to evidence of criminality that results a decision to pursue criminal justice measures or due to cultural and political judgements that produce this effect. A referral to Channel is one route towards prosecution, but the link is not straightforward, as it is unlikely that all cases of Asians (and others) who face criminal sanctions would first feature as a Prevent referral.

The Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, Jonathan Hall QC (2021, para 5.43), provides some indication of a change in criminal cases that contradicts national government’s traditionally narrow focus on ‘Islamist-related’ threats. He recently stated that there has been ‘a significant increase in the proportion of White and Black persons arrested, charged and convicted of terrorism-related offences and a correspondingly significant decrease in the proportion of persons of Asian ethnic appearance arrested, charged and convicted.’ This suggests an increase in perceived far-right related threats and is consistent with the views of the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol), which has published an analysis pointing to a continued increase in arrests, convictions and penalties for far-right related terrorism across Europe (Europol 2022). This includes an assessment of far-right related incidents



as having increased in the United Kingdom alongside a greater readiness among paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland to use violence (Europol 2020). Obtaining more recent data will aid an understanding of the extent to which these trends are reflected in cases discussed and adopted by Channel, as well as the monitoring of changes to the handling of referrals relating to Islamist concerns.

## Overall Conclusion

In conclusion, the data in FOI 63470 and Home Office figures on terror-related cases point to a different experience of people from Asian recorded backgrounds compared to those recorded as white. It suggests that people recorded as Asian faced tougher sanctions during this period. This is measured by their lower likelihood of being screened out from Channel through 'no further action' or being 'referred to another service', despite being less likely to be adopted as a case, as well as featuring more prominently in terrorism-related criminal measures. It suggests there is greater scrutiny of people from Asian backgrounds and Islamist related cases, irrespective of the important shifts in political threats that have resulted in people from white backgrounds featuring more prominently more independent assessments of the threats faced by the UK (Hall 2021; Europol 2020, 2022). By contrast, people recorded as white were more likely to be 'managed' through less intensive, preventative measures, as judged by their increased presence in cases adopted by Channel but a proportionally lower likelihood of facing terror-related criminal measures.

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