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The Anderton Dilemma: Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism Between Freedom, Security and Subjectivity

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Abstract
This article offers a socio-semiotic analysis of Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) policies, arguing that they function not only as security measures but as classificatory dispositifs that reshape the semantic boundaries of democratic legality. In response to the individualisation of contemporary violent extremism, European states have progressively shifted from repression to prevention, extending governance into the anticipatory regulation of subjectivities. Drawing on Foucault's concept of governmentality and Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power, the article interprets radicalisation theory as a technology of classification that translates political conflict into vulnerability, vulnerability into risk, and risk into an object of administrative intervention. This semantic chain does not necessarily criminalise dissent, but it rearticulates the distinction between radicality and violence through probabilistic and pre-emptive logics. The rule of law is thus confronted with a structural transformation: legality increasingly coexists with risk-based governance that operates prior to unlawful conduct. The article further situates this preventive paradigm within the broader infrastructures of surveillance capitalism, where predictive profiling and behavioural modulation intensify the governance of possible futures. The tension between freedom and security therefore emerges as a semiotic and institutional reconfiguration of democratic conflict. The central question becomes whether preventive democracies can preserve the irreducible openness of political subjectivity while governing through anticipatory classification. Taking inspiration from the film (and novel) "Minority Report", in the paper such dilemma is defined "Anderton Dilemma".

Keywords Terrorism · Radicalisation · Prevention · Surveillance · Subject

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1 Introduction: From Terrorism to the Preventive Paradigm

Contemporary European democracies are increasingly characterised by multiple structural tensions. One of the most widely debated tensions today concerns the relationship between the principle of popular sovereignty and the rule of law [1]. Much less attention is on the contrast between rule of law and the spread of forms of anticipatory governance aimed at neutralising threats before they materialise. Security is no longer confined to the repression of unlawful acts; it increasingly operates within the terrain of possibility, uncertainty, and risk [2–4]. This transformation does not simply concern counterterrorism. It reflects a broader reconfiguration of the relationship between democratic conflict and governmental power. Over the past two decades, the landscape of political violence in Europe has changed significantly. The emergence of homegrown terrorism in early 2000s [5] and then, in the last decade, the rise of individualised, self-radicalised actors has challenged traditional security paradigms. Attacks carried out by individuals embedded in diffuse ideological environments have rendered repression alone insufficient. In response, European states have progressively embraced Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) strategies designed to intervene earlier in the trajectory of radicalisation. The focus has shifted from dismantling organisations to identifying vulnerabilities, from punishing offences to managing risk [6–8].

This preventive turn extends beyond criminal justice. Schools, universities, social services, municipalities, and civil society organisations are increasingly incorporated into security governance [9–11]. Educational programmes promote democratic values and resilience; referral mechanisms enable early detection of individuals considered "at risk"; mentoring and disengagement initiatives seek to redirect trajectories before violence occurs. Prevention thus becomes embedded in ordinary administrative life rather than confined to exceptional security measures. What is at stake in this transformation, however, is not merely the effectiveness of counter-terrorism policy. The preventive paradigm intervenes not only against violence but within the formative stages of political identity. When radicalisation is conceptualised as a gradual process linking grievance, ideology, and potential violence, the boundaries between legitimate radical dissent and violent extremism become more fluid. Democratic governance begins to operate upstream, within processes of subject formation [12–14].

This development raises a deeper theoretical question: how does anticipatory security governance reshape the semantics of political subjectivity in constitutional democracies? Radical critique has historically played a constitutive role in democratic life. Movements once considered subversive have often become agents of social transformation. If dissent is increasingly interpreted through a logic of risk, the normative space of democratic conflict may be subtly redefined. The issue is not necessarily the overt suppression of speech or association, but the transformation of the categories through which political positions are interpreted and governed. Existing scholarship on P/CVE, particularly within critical studies of violent radicalisation, has extensively examined questions of effectiveness, securitisation, community impact, and human rights compliance. Critical analyses have highlighted risks of over-policing, discrimination, and the erosion of civil liberties [15]. Yet comparatively less attention has been devoted to the relationship between preventive gover-

nance and processes of subjectivation. In particular, the classificatory frameworks underpinning radicalisation theory—and their implications for the rule of law and democratic pluralism—remain under-theorised. The expansion of preventive rationalities has profound semantic consequences: it reshapes how dissent, vulnerability, and political identity are understood within legal and administrative systems. This article argues that P/CVE policies function not merely as security instruments but as *dispositifs* of subjectivation. By conceptualising radicalisation as a process embedded in vulnerability and identity formation, preventive strategies transform dissent into an object of risk-based governance [2, 16]. Radicalisation theory operates as a classificatory technology that expands the semantic field of security while redefining the threshold between radicality and violence. This shift does not simply produce a trade-off between freedom and security; rather, it reconfigures their structural relationship within what may be described as *preventive democracies*; an institutional change increasingly linked to the surveillance capitalism [49].

To develop this argument, the article proceeds in four steps. Section 2 analyses the transformation of violent extremism in Europe and interprets radicalisation as an eccentric process of subjectivation emerging from contexts of marginality and recognition deficits. Section 3 examines the European preventive turn, highlighting how P/CVE strategies have restructured institutional governance across different national contexts. Section 4 explores radicalisation theory as a technology of classification, drawing on reflections on governmentality and symbolic power to illuminate the production of "at-risk" categories and the expansion of security rationalities. Section 5 discusses the implications of this transformation for the rule of law, pluralism, and the balance between freedom and security. Section 6 analyses the relationship between preventive democracy and surveillance capitalism. Finally, the conclusion reflects on the semiotic and normative implications of governing possible subjects in preventive democracies, examining how anticipatory classification reshapes the legal boundaries between dissent, risk, and violence: taking inspiration from the film (and novel) "Minority Report" what I called "Aderton Dilemma".

2 Radicalisation and Subjectivation: Theoretical Foundations

Over the past two decades, violent extremism in Europe has undergone a significant transformation. The decline of vertically structured terrorist organisations and the rise of self-radicalised individuals acting within loosely connected ideological environments have reshaped both the empirical landscape of terrorism and the analytical frameworks used to interpret it. Classical terrorism in Europe—whether left-wing, right-wing, or ethno-nationalist—was typically embedded in structured organisations with clear ideological programmes, leadership hierarchies, and strategic objectives. Contemporary jihadist as well as far-right violence, by contrast, increasingly takes the form of what may be described as post-organisational extremism [17, 18]. Rather than centrally coordinated attacks, European countries face acts perpetrated by individuals who operate independently, often inspired by diffuse ideological narratives circulating online and embedded in broader emotional and symbolic atmospheres.

These actors are frequently homegrown, socialised within European societies, and radicalised in local contexts marked by social marginalisation, existential frustration, and weak institutional integration. Ideologically, their commitment often resembles a "thin-centred" moral narrative [19, 20] structured around victimhood, humiliation, and polarised distinctions between purity and corruption [21]. The degree of theological or doctrinal sophistication is often limited, and links to established religious communities may remain weak. This transformation destabilises traditional counter-terrorism paradigms. If terrorism is no longer primarily an organisational phenomenon but increasingly an individualised and fragmented trajectory, repression alone appears insufficient. The analytical focus shifts from dismantling networks to understanding the social and subjective pathways that lead individuals to embrace violence.

To grasp these dynamics, violent extremism must be analysed not only as ideological radicalisation but also as a process of subjectivation. Support for violent extremism can be interpreted as an eccentric form of subjectivation emerging from the experience of marginality. In contexts characterised by atomisation, anomie, and socio-economic exclusion, young individuals may experience a deficit of recognition and meaningful participation [22–24], a condition that is particularly severe for young Muslim minorities in Europe [25]. Democratic institutions, while formally inclusive, may fail to provide effective channels of voice, representation, and social mobility. Moreover, while secularisation may free individuals from oppressive moral constraints, it can also deprive them of meaningful symbolic resources—a deficit that is particularly acute during adolescence. The resulting condition is not merely material deprivation but existential marginality: a sense of insignificance, humiliation, and invisibility that, sometimes, produces a quest for significance [26].

Within such contexts, extremist narratives offer a mechanism of re-subjectivation. They provide a moral framework through which personal frustration is interpreted as collective injustice; a sense of belonging to a symbolic community; and a restoration of agency through decisive action. Violence thus becomes not only an instrument but a medium through which the subject attempts to affirm existence and restore dignity.

This interpretation does not romanticise extremism. Rather, it situates radicalisation within broader processes of social disintegration and crises of recognition. The crucial point is that violent commitment cannot be reduced to ideological indoctrination alone. It is embedded in lived experiences, stratification dynamics, and fragile processes of identity formation.

If violent extremism can be understood as a form of eccentric subjectivation, then the transformation of counter-terrorism policies must also be interpreted in relation to subjectivity. The shift from repression to prevention signals not merely a strategic adjustment, but a reorientation of governance towards the formation and regulation of political identities. The next section examines how this reorientation has materialised in European policy frameworks.

3 From Repression to Prevention: the European Preventive Turn

The transformation of violent extremism in Europe—from vertically organised structures to individualised and processual trajectories—has not only reshaped security policies but has also concretely restructured the institutional architecture of counterterrorism across European states. The shift from centrally coordinated networks to self-radicalised individuals acting within diffuse ideological environments has compelled governments to intervene earlier, more diffusely, and across a broader range of institutional domains: preventing Islamist attacks continues to be the primary objective of most interventions, particularly given that such forms of terrorism have constituted the main terrorist threat in Europe for nearly a decade [27]. This sort of "evolution in continuity" is clearly visible in the national trajectories analysed in comparative research [28, 29].

In France, following the attacks of 2015 by Islamic State, the government developed structured national action plans integrating different forms of prevention. Educational policies became a central pillar, with programmes explicitly aimed at strengthening republican values, detecting early signs of radicalisation within schools, and training teachers and local administrators. Alongside these measures, specialised units were established to monitor individuals flagged as vulnerable, and local prefectures were granted expanded coordination roles. Prevention thus became embedded in the ordinary functioning of the educational and administrative system rather than remaining confined to police intervention [30].

In the Netherlands, a comprehensive national strategy was formalised earlier and developed into a highly integrated, multi-stakeholder approach [31]. Municipalities play a central role in case-based interventions: local "safety houses" coordinate information between police, social services, schools and youth workers. Individual trajectories are monitored and addressed through tailored interventions that may include mentoring, family counselling, psychological support, or administrative measures. Violent Jihadist radicalisation is conceptualised not only as an ideological problem but as a multidimensional vulnerability linked to social marginality, online exposure, and identity crises. The Dutch model illustrates particularly clearly the institutionalisation of early detection mechanisms. Teachers and youth professionals are trained to recognise behavioural indicators—withdrawal, sudden ideological rigidity, expressions of grievance framed in absolutist terms—and to activate referral pathways. Intervention is not triggered by criminal conduct but by perceived risk signals.

In Belgium, especially after the Brussels attacks between 2016 and 2018, performed by people inspired by Islamic State, preventive strategies were strengthened within a complex federal architecture [32]. Local prevention cells (LIVC-R) were created to coordinate actors at municipal level. These platforms gather representatives from police, social services, and educational institutions to discuss individuals considered at risk of violent radicalisation. The Belgian case demonstrates how prevention operates through structured administrative collaboration rather than solely through judicial mechanisms.

The United Kingdom represents one of the earliest and most institutionalised examples of the preventive paradigm through the *Prevent* strategy, introduced within the broader CONTEST framework and significantly expanded after 2011 [33, 34].

Prevent places a statutory duty on schools, universities, health services and local authorities to identify and report individuals considered vulnerable to different forms of violent radicalisation—mainly but not exclusively of Jihadist origin. The Channel programme operationalises this logic through multi-agency panels that assess cases and design tailored support interventions. While often presented as a safeguarding mechanism, the UK model has generated sustained debate over the risks of over-securitisation of education and the potential chilling effects on political expression, especially among Muslim communities [35].

By contrast, Italy presents a different configuration. The country lacks a fully institutionalised national P/CVE framework comparable to those of France or the Netherlands. However, local initiatives—particularly in regions such as Lombardy or Friuli-Venezia Giulia—have developed school-based and community-oriented projects aimed at preventing polarisation and violent radicalisation. These initiatives often focus on intercultural dialogue, digital literacy, and youth empowerment. The absence of a comprehensive national plan has resulted in a more fragmented but also less centralised preventive landscape.

In Portugal, the relative absence of major jihadist attacks contributed to a more limited development of explicit radicalisation prevention strategies. While EU counter-terrorism measures were adopted, national prevention policies have remained largely indirect, focusing instead on multicultural integration and anti-discrimination initiatives. Here, the preventive logic operates more implicitly, through social cohesion policies rather than dedicated radicalisation programmes.

In Greece and Romania, the development of P/CVE strategies has been even more limited. In both contexts, civil society actors have taken the lead in implementing projects addressing discrimination, hate speech and youth marginalisation. The absence of structured national prevention plans reflects different threat perceptions and institutional priorities. Nevertheless, even in these cases, European-level frameworks and funding mechanisms have introduced the language of vulnerability and resilience into local governance.

Across these diverse contexts, a common trend is observable. Radicalisation is no longer framed primarily as organisational membership or conspiratorial coordination. It is conceptualised as a gradual and context-dependent process embedded in everyday social environments—schools, neighbourhoods, prisons, and online spaces. This reconceptualisation has produced several concrete institutional consequences: the multiplication of multi-agency coordination platforms; the integration of educational institutions into security governance; the development of referral and early-warning mechanisms; the extension of monitoring practices into administrative domains.

In practical terms, the object of intervention has shifted. While classical counter-terrorism centred on dismantling networks and prosecuting offences, contemporary prevention focuses on identifying individuals who display indicators of vulnerability. Intervention may take the form of mentoring, counselling, psychological support, family mediation, or administrative supervision. The threshold for institutional attention is therefore lowered: it is no longer criminal behaviour but risk signals that activate governance. Importantly, this transformation is not uniform in intensity. In France and the Netherlands, prevention is deeply institutionalised and structurally integrated into governance. In Italy and Portugal, preventive initiatives are more dispersed and

project-based. In Greece and Romania, prevention remains largely dependent on civil society mobilisation. Yet the underlying rationality converges: early intervention is preferable to repression [36]; vulnerability must be addressed before it hardens into violence. This shift has direct implications for the relationship between subjectivity and governance. In the contexts analysed, prevention programmes frequently target young individuals experiencing social marginalisation, identity struggles, or exposure to extremist narratives. Radicalisation is thus interpreted not only as ideological deviation but as a symptom of social disintegration. The preventive paradigm responds by attempting to reconstruct trajectories. Educational programmes aim to reinforce democratic values; mentoring schemes seek to restore social bonds; digital counter-narrative initiatives attempt to disrupt online recruitment; prison-based interventions focus on disengagement and reintegration. Prevention does not simply counter violent ideology; it intervenes directly in processes of identity formation. It seeks to redirect individuals away from extremist pathways by re-embedding them within recognised social and institutional frameworks. More broadly, the preventive orientation of P/CVE policies reflects a wider transformation in contemporary regimes of social control. Scholars have described the emergence of forms of actuarial justice and risk governance that focus on the management of probabilities and populations rather than on the punishment of past offences [37, 38].

The ambivalence of this transformation is visible across the examined cases. On the one hand, preventive strategies aim to enhance inclusion, resilience and social cohesion. On the other hand, the identification of "at-risk" individuals may generate perceptions of stigmatisation, particularly when certain communities feel disproportionately scrutinised. The governance of violent extremism is no longer confined to exceptional measures; it becomes part of ordinary administrative life. This evolution marks the emergence of what may be described as *preventive democracies*: political systems that seek to defend themselves not only by punishing transgressions but by intervening in the conditions under which transgressions might emerge; upon closer inspection, this can be seen as an extension of the *community policing* logic which, already between the 1980s and 1990s, originating in Anglo-American countries, became the cornerstone of policies aimed at tackling petty crime and urban disorder across Europe [39]. These national configurations are not merely institutional variations shaped by different threat perceptions or political cultures. Despite their diversity, they presuppose a shared epistemic framework that conceptualises radicalisation as a complex process and vulnerability as a legitimate object of governance. The multiplication of multi-agency platforms, early detection mechanisms and referral systems reflects not only administrative innovation but a deeper transformation in how political deviance is understood and classified. To grasp the implications of this shift, it is therefore necessary to examine radicalisation theory itself as a technology of classification that structures perception, intervention and legitimacy.

4 Radicalisation Theory as a Technology of Classification

The preventive turn analysed in the previous section cannot be fully understood without examining the epistemic and classificatory frameworks that sustain it: mainstream radicalisation theory, a paradigm in terrorism studies that emerged after the attacks of 11 September 2001 and later became institutionalised in Europe following the Madrid (2004) and London (2005) bombings, has profoundly shaped contemporary security governance. According to Rik Coolsaet [40] the term *radicalisation* was initially institutionalised by policymakers and security agencies before spreading into the scientific community. Whereas traditional approaches to the study of political violence focused on the social factors that generate terrorism within a society, this new way of conceptualising terrorism centred on a different question: what are the factors that lead an individual to become a violent extremist? With a clear predominance of psychologism, the new radicalisation paradigm aspired to provide applied knowledge—that is, knowledge directly usable by security agencies and public institutions in the fight against terrorism. Preventing rather than treating jihadist political violence thus became the new imperative underpinning the alliance between the scientific community and security agencies [41]. In this sense, radicalisation theory operates as a technology of classification within contemporary regimes of security: so, to grasp its deeper implications, it is necessary to situate it within broader reflections on governmentality and symbolic power, particularly those developed by Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu.

In his lectures on *Security, Territory, Population* and *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Foucault [42–44] described the emergence of a governmental rationality centred not on territory or sovereignty, but on the management of populations. Modern security *dispositifs*, he argued, do not simply prohibit or punish; they regulate circulations, manage probabilities, and intervene within processes rather than acts. Security, in this perspective, is not primarily juridical but statistical and anticipatory. It operates through risk calculation, normalisation, and the modulation of environments. The object of intervention is no longer the transgressor after the fact, but the distribution of possible behaviours within a population. Mainstream radicalisation theory can be interpreted as operating within this governmental rationality. By conceptualising extremism as a gradual and processual trajectory—moving from grievance to ideological commitment to potential violence—it transforms political dissent into a continuum of risk. The radicalising subject is not yet a criminal; he or she becomes a point within a field of probabilities. Prevention, therefore, does not target a completed offence. It seeks to regulate emerging trajectories of conduct. Multi-agency referral mechanisms, early-warning indicators, vulnerability assessments, and behavioural monitoring all operate within this anticipatory logic. They aim to regulate the circulation of narratives, identities, and affects before they crystallise into violence. In Foucauldian terms, P/CVE policies exemplify a form of security governmentality: they seek to modulate the formation of political subjectivities before they crystallise into violence. A crucial feature of radicalisation theory is its reliance on processual and gradualist models. The "conveyor belt" hypothesis, vulnerability frameworks, and staged radicalisation models share a common assumption: that there exists a trajectory linking radical ideas to violent extremism. Even when scholars criticise linear

models, the idea of a continuum persists. Radicalisation becomes a spectrum, and individuals are positioned at different points along it. This semantic construction has profound implications. In democratic societies, radical political positions—including anti-system ideologies—are not per se illegitimate. The historical development of constitutional democracies has depended on the inclusion of radical critique within the public sphere. However, when radicalisation is framed as an early stage of potential violence, radicality itself becomes ambiguous. The boundary between radical dissent and violent extremism becomes less a juridical distinction and more a matter of risk assessment. The shift is subtle but decisive: what was once a matter of political contestation becomes a matter of probability. This transformation does not necessarily entail the criminalisation of radical ideas. Rather, it situates them within a field of suspicion. Radical speech may be tolerated formally, yet simultaneously monitored as an indicator of future threat. The semantic continuum thus extends the security gaze into the domain of identity, belief, and expression.

While Foucault helps illuminate the governmental rationality underpinning preventive strategies, Bourdieu allows us to analyse the classificatory power through which these rationalities become institutionalised. In Bourdieu's lectures at the *Collège de France*, Bourdieu [45] conceptualised the state as the holder of the "monopoly of legitimate symbolic violence." The state does not merely enforce laws; it produces the official categories through which social reality is perceived and organised. Classification, for Bourdieu, is not neutral. It is a site of struggle. The power to define categories—such as "youth at risk," "deviant," or "radicalised"—is a form of symbolic domination. Once institutionalised, these categories shape administrative practices, resource allocation, and individual trajectories. Radicalisation theory contributes to the production of such official categories. The notion of the "at-risk youth" is emblematic. It is not a legal status codified in criminal law; yet it functions as an operational category guiding institutional action. Schools, social services, and local authorities mobilise this classification to justify interventions. Through this classificatory process, individuals are inscribed within administrative grids that redefine their social position. A young person expressing strong political grievances may be reinterpreted as vulnerable to radicalisation. The category does not simply describe; it produces effects. It reorients interactions between institutions and individuals, potentially reshaping self-perceptions. In Bourdieu's terms, this is an act of symbolic power: the imposition of a vision of the social world that is misrecognised as objective and neutral. Radicalisation becomes a quasi-naturalised problem, and preventive intervention appears as an obvious necessity. Yet these classifications are embedded within broader struggles over meaning. Different actors—policymakers, academics, community leaders—compete to define what counts as radical, extremist, or violent. The field of P/CVE is thus also a field of symbolic contestation. Bourdieu's concept of field also illuminates the institutionalisation of radicalisation expertise. Over the past decade, a specialised field of security professionals, researchers, NGOs, and policy advisors has consolidated around P/CVE. This field produces knowledge, tools, and best practices, often under the auspices of European programmes and transnational networks. Within this field, specific forms of capital—technical expertise, risk assessment methodologies, data collection capacities—acquire legitimacy. The authority to diagnose radicalisation and to design preventive strategies becomes concentrated

among recognised experts. The autonomisation of this field has two consequences. First, it reinforces the epistemic authority of radicalisation theory, making it difficult to challenge its underlying assumptions. Second, it contributes to the diffusion of preventive rationalities across institutional domains. The educational system, for instance, may adopt risk indicators developed within the security field. Social workers may incorporate radicalisation awareness into their professional practice. In this way, the classificatory schemes of the security field permeate other fields, reshaping their internal logics. Returning to the notion of subjectivation, radicalisation theory can be understood as part of a broader biopolitical strategy aimed at governing the life of populations. The target is not merely behaviour but the formation of identities and dispositions. From a Foucauldian perspective, biopolitics involves the regulation of life processes—birth rates, health, education, and social integration. P/CVE policies extend this regulatory logic into the domain of political identity. The goal is to foster resilient, moderate, and integrated subjects, while preventing the emergence of deviant trajectories. At the same time, the symbolic classifications described by Bourdieu [46] reveal the ambivalence of this process. By labelling certain individuals as vulnerable or at risk, institutions may unintentionally contribute to stigmatisation and self-fulfilling prophecies. The act of classification can become an act of counter-subjectivation: it seeks to normalise but may also reinforce marginality. Thus, radicalisation theory functions simultaneously as a framework of care and a mechanism of control. It offers tools for social support and integration, yet it also expands the domain of security into the intimate sphere of identity formation.

5 Freedom, Security and the Rule of Law

As discussed above, the preventive turn entails not only a policy adjustment but a reconfiguration of the relationship between security and political conflict. By shifting attention from completed offences to emerging trajectories, contemporary democracies increasingly intervene before violence materialises. This development raises a fundamental normative question: how does anticipatory governance reshape the balance between freedom, security, and the rule of law? The tension between freedom and security is not new. It has accompanied modern constitutionalism since its inception. Yet the move from repression to prevention introduces a structural transformation. Classical criminal law operates *ex post*: it sanctions demonstrable conduct on the basis of evidence and due process. Preventive governance, by contrast, operates *ex ante*. It intervenes prior to wrongdoing, often on the basis of risk indicators rather than established offences. This transformation does not abolish the rule of law, but it modifies its operating environment. Administrative measures, monitoring regimes, and multi-agency referrals are frequently justified through probabilistic assessments. Although such measures may fall short of criminal sanctions, they can significantly affect individuals' rights—limiting mobility, shaping educational pathways, or influencing access to public spaces.

The normative difficulty lies in the growing prominence of probabilistic reasoning within governance. When intervention is justified by the likelihood of future harm, the distinction between suspicion and proof becomes less clear-cut. The expansion

of administrative discretion into preventive domains increases the importance of procedural safeguards and judicial oversight [47, 48]. Preventive strategies have also reinforced the role of executive authorities in counter-extremism policies. In several European contexts, measures such as the closure of places of worship, travel restrictions, or restrictions on public assemblies rely on security assessments rather than criminal convictions. Even when subject to legal review, these measures often depend on confidential intelligence and broad evaluative criteria. More subtly, prevention extends through non-coercive mechanisms embedded in ordinary institutions. Schools and social services may report concerns about behavioural changes interpreted as early warning signs. Participation in mentoring or disengagement programmes may be formally voluntary, yet institutionally encouraged. In such contexts, the boundary between support and surveillance becomes less distinct. Democratic pluralism depends on the legitimacy of conflict. Radical political positions—even those sharply critical of constitutional orders—remain part of democratic life so long as they do not translate into violence. The preventive paradigm, however, risks reframing certain forms of dissent through a security lens. Expressions of anger or anti-system rhetoric may be interpreted as indicators of vulnerability rather than solely as political speech. This does not necessarily produce direct censorship. Rather, it may generate indirect effects: communities or individuals may adjust their behaviour in anticipation of scrutiny. The issue, therefore, is not the formal suppression of pluralism, but the subtle transformation of the normative environment within which dissent is expressed. A further concern relates to equality. Preventive attention is often concentrated on socially marginalised groups. Even when policies are formally universal, their implementation may disproportionately affect specific communities. The category of vulnerability may thus intersect with existing socio-economic hierarchies, raising questions about non-discrimination and equal treatment. The preventive turn embodies a structural paradox. It emerges from legitimate aims—the protection of life and democratic institutions—yet operates through mechanisms that expand executive discretion and risk-based intervention. The central question is not whether prevention should exist, but under what conditions it remains compatible with constitutional principles. Ensuring such compatibility requires clear legal definitions, proportionality in administrative measures, meaningful judicial review, and a sustained commitment to protecting non-violent political dissent. Without these safeguards, preventive governance risks gradually eroding the normative foundations it seeks to defend. In preventive democracies, security increasingly takes the form of risk-based administrative intervention operating alongside, and sometimes prior to, criminal law. The rule of law must therefore adapt to a landscape in which preemptive administrative action, while preserving its core commitments to legality, accountability, and pluralism.

6 Preventive Democracy and Surveillance Capitalism

If preventive democracy extends security rationalities upstream into processes of subject formation, its contemporary operation cannot be understood without analysing the infrastructural role of digital platforms. The expansion of anticipatory gover-

nance coincides historically and structurally with the rise of what Shoshana Zuboff [49] defines as *surveillance capitalism*: a new economic logic based on the extraction, analysis and monetisation of behavioural data. According to Zuboff, surveillance capitalism is not simply an extension of digital technology but a mutation in the logic of accumulation. Human experience becomes raw material for data extraction; behavioural surplus is translated into predictive products; and these products are traded in behavioural futures markets. The core objective is not merely to know users, but to predict—and increasingly to shape—their future behaviour. Prediction becomes a privileged form of power. This logic has profound implications for preventive democracy.

Preventive governance and surveillance capitalism share a common temporal orientation: both are organised around the management of the future. Radicalisation theory constructs individuals as trajectories of risk; platform architectures construct users as bundles of behavioural probabilities. In both cases, the subject is not primarily addressed as a juridical agent responsible for past actions, but as a predictive profile whose future conduct must be anticipated and modulated. The convergence is not accidental. Digital environments now constitute one of the primary spaces in which radicalisation processes unfold. Online propaganda, algorithmic recommendation systems, and affectively charged content ecosystems shape the symbolic environments within which identity formation occurs. However, these environments are not neutral communication arenas. They are structured by optimisation logics oriented toward engagement, attention capture and behavioural reinforcement. Zuboff argues that surveillance capitalism operates through what she calls "instrumentarian power": a mode of power that does not seek ideological consensus but behavioural tuning. Unlike totalitarian power, it does not aim to transform beliefs directly; instead, it modifies the choice architecture within which individuals act. Nudging, micro-targeting, personalised feeds, and recommender systems gradually shape dispositions and perceptions without overt coercion.

From the perspective developed in this article, such mechanisms intersect with preventive security rationalities in at least three ways. First, the production of behavioural data intensifies the classificatory capacity of both public and private actors. Vulnerability indicators, online expressions of grievance, patterns of association, and emotional signals become quantifiable variables. The distinction between commercial profiling and security profiling becomes increasingly porous, especially where public authorities rely on private platforms for monitoring extremist content or identifying at-risk individuals. Second, the predictive logic of platforms normalises the idea that individuals can be governed through probabilistic assessment. When risk scoring becomes ubiquitous in credit systems, advertising, and content moderation, its extension to security governance appears less exceptional. Preventive democracy thus operates within a broader cultural environment in which prediction is perceived as rational, neutral, and technologically inevitable. Third, surveillance capitalism amplifies the structural conditions that, as discussed in Sect. 2, underlie eccentric processes of subjectivation. Algorithmic amplification of polarising content, conspiracy narratives, and grievance-based discourses contributes to environments of emotional intensification. The same infrastructures that enable prevention also generate

the atmospheres within which radicalisation can flourish. The governance of risk and the production of risk are entangled within the same digital ecosystem.

This does not imply a simple functional alliance between states and platforms. Tensions and conflicts persist, particularly around regulation, privacy and content moderation. However, at a structural level, preventive democracy increasingly relies on infrastructures designed according to surveillance capitalist logics. The governance of possible extremism is embedded within systems optimised for behavioural prediction and modification.

The democratic implications are significant. In classical liberal constitutionalism, the legitimacy of intervention is grounded in the commission of unlawful acts. Preventive democracy already stretches this principle by intervening at the level of vulnerability and risk. Surveillance capitalism adds a further displacement: the continuous capture and modulation of behaviour occurs outside explicit juridical frameworks, within opaque algorithmic systems governed by private interests. The result is a double transformation of subjectivity. On the one hand, individuals are classified as potentially radicalisable subjects within administrative security frameworks. On the other, they are continuously profiled and nudged as behavioural units within digital markets. The preventive subject is simultaneously a security object and a commercial data object.

7 Conclusion: Governing the Possible Subject

The film *Minority Report* (2002), directed by Steven Spielberg and inspired by a short story by Philip K. Dick, depicts a society in which crimes are prevented before they occur through predictive technologies. Using three psychics ("precogs") who foresee violent acts, the police arrest suspects before the crimes occur. Chief John Anderton, a strong supporter of the system, suddenly finds himself predicted to commit a murder he has never heard of. Convinced he is being framed, he goes on the run to prove his innocence. During his escape, he begins to question whether the predictions are truly infallible and discovers the possibility of a "minority report"—an alternative vision that suggests the future may not be fixed. As he investigates, Anderton uncovers hidden manipulation within the PreCrime system, forcing him to confront both the reliability of predictive justice and the ethical implications of punishing people for crimes they have not yet committed. The transformation of violent extremism in Europe—from organised structures to individualised trajectories—has placed contemporary democracies before a comparable dilemma—the "Anderton dilemma". As this article has argued, P/CVE policies are not merely technical adaptations to evolving threats. By conceptualising radicalisation as a gradual and potentially identifiable process, preventive strategies intervene upstream in the formation of political subjectivities. Violent extremism, interpreted here as an eccentric process of subjectivation emerging from marginality and humiliation, is met by institutional attempts to redirect, normalise, and stabilise trajectories.

Radicalisation theory plays a decisive role in this transformation. As a classificatory framework, it reorganises institutional perception and action. Categories such as vulnerability, risk, and "at-risk youth" translate political dissent into objects of

administrative attention. What was once primarily a matter of democratic contestation increasingly enters a chain of semantic redefinition: conflict becomes vulnerability; vulnerability becomes risk; risk becomes an object of management. In this process, the threshold between radicality and violence is no longer drawn solely through juridical distinctions but through probabilistic assessments embedded in preventive governance.

The tension between freedom and security thus cannot be reduced to a simple trade-off. It reflects a deeper structural shift within preventive democracies: the move from governing actions to governing potentialities. When citizens are increasingly addressed as bearers of possible futures rather than as responsible agents of past conduct, democratic conflict is subtly reconfigured. The space of dissent remains formally intact, yet it may be indirectly reshaped by anticipatory scrutiny and risk-based classification.

The integration of preventive rationalities with the infrastructures of surveillance capitalism further intensifies this dynamic. In digital environments structured by behavioural prediction and algorithmic modulation, subjectivities are continuously profiled and steered. The governance of extremism is embedded within a broader regime of predictive power. The "Anderton dilemma" therefore extends beyond state security apparatuses: it permeates everyday life, where individuals are simultaneously political subjects and data subjects, both classified and anticipated.

The crucial question is not whether prevention should be abandoned. In a context of individualised and unpredictable violence, preventive strategies are likely to remain central to democratic self-defence. The challenge is rather to preserve the irreducible openness that defines democratic subjectivity. The "minority report" symbolises precisely this: the possibility that the future is not fully governable, that trajectories can diverge, that conflict does not automatically crystallise into violence.

Preventive democracies will remain democratic only insofar as they preserve this space of contingency. This requires maintaining a clear distinction between radical dissent and violent action, strengthening legal safeguards around risk-based interventions, and critically interrogating the classificatory categories through which vulnerability and extremism are defined. The governance of possible subjects has become an enduring dimension of contemporary political orders. Whether it consolidates democratic resilience or gradually narrows the horizon of pluralism depends on the normative limits and institutional reflexivity that accompany it.

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