

Commission for Countering Extremism publishes further eight academic papers on extremism

The independent Commission for Countering Extremism is today (31 July 2019) publishing eight peer-reviewed academic papers on the causes of extremism, extremism online, and approaches to countering extremism.

The papers cover the arguments on the causes extremism, the complex relationship between social media and extremism, as well as discussions on how to best counter extremism.

The academic papers are the views of the author and not necessarily the Commission's views.

The Commission will continue to publish evidence and analysis across the summer as it builds up to a report making recommendations on extremism for the Home Secretary.

On Friday 19 July, the previous Home Secretary announced plans for a refreshed counter-extremism strategy.

The new Prime Minister has put uniting the country at the heart of his vision.

Sara Khan today argues that if we are to unite the country, then we have to challenge extremism.

Lead Commissioner Sara Khan said:

I've held the most extensive national conversation on extremism. It has lifted the lid on a range of urgent concerns we must address.

I'm releasing some of the findings as we build up to our landmark report on extremism.

The public are fearful of violent extremism, but they are also deeply concerned about hateful extremism.

At the same time minorities are having their rights restricted.

And there is a wider context of intolerance and incivility, especially online.

To unite the country – and to protect our freedom and democratic principles – we have to address each of these issues.

Today, I am publishing eight academic papers covering the causes of

extremism, social media and online extremism, and responses to extremism.

I want to thank the authors of these academic papers for their work, and for their contribution to our national conversation on extremism.

Academic papers on what causes extremism

The moral ecology of extremism: a systemic perspective

Dr Noémie Bouhana, University College London

Author's summary:

Polarisation, social media, multiculturalism, economic strain, loss of political trust... The list of suspected drivers of extremism grows every day. How do we tell which of them really contribute to the risk of extremism? Why do some individuals seem more vulnerable to this risk than others? This paper answers these fundamental questions.

Drivers of extremism: global political antagonisms reproduced in Cypriot and Italian insurgencies

Dr. Charlotte Heath-Kelly, Reader in International Security, Political and International Studies, University of Warwick

Author's summary:

In this paper, Dr Heath-Kelly uses her interviews with militants from Italian and Greek-Cypriot struggles to show how international politics shapes local conflicts. Social movements respond to shifting norms on the global stage, using them to shape local struggles – claiming legitimacy for protest, resistance and even violence.

Academic papers on extremism online

Extremism online – analysis of extremist material on social media

Professor Imran Awan, Birmingham City University

Hollie Sutch, Birmingham City University

Dr Pelham Carter, Birmingham City University

Authors' summary:

This paper examines the role of extremism online and uses two primary studies to generate empirical evidence that examines the differences between general online discussion of extremism and discussion inspired by offline events through the analysis of tweets and YouTube comments. We focus on two offline events (the Shamima Begum case and the New Zealand Christchurch terrorist attacks). Our findings suggest that increased anonymity is associated with an increase in extremist language, that conspiracy theory and media bias-based language is more common in response to offline events than general online discussion.

Exploring radicalisation and extremism online – an experimental study

Dr Mark Littler, University of Huddersfield

Author's summary:

This paper explores the relationship between exposure to online extremist content and social and political attitudes including support for violence. Analysis found no relationship between these phenomena, with work exploring the role of network proximity suggesting that the source of extremist content has little impact on social and political attitudes.

Academic papers on responses to extremism

Belief, attitude, and behaviour change: leveraging current perspectives for counter-radicalisation

Dr Kurt Braddock, Penn State University

Author's summary:

To effectively prevent vulnerable audiences from being persuaded by extremist ideologies, it is important to first understand the processes by which persuasion occurs independent of context. This paper describes multiple persuasion frameworks that have been utilized and studied in several other domains that can be applied to counter-radicalisation efforts.

Embedding human rights in countering extremism: reflections from the field and proposals for change

Dr Katherine E. Brown, Corresponding Author. Senior Lecturer in Islamic Studies, Department of Theology and Religion, University of Birmingham

Professor Fiona De Londras, Chair of Global Legal Studies, Birmingham Law School, University of Birmingham

Jessica White, PhD Candidate, Department of Political Science and International Studies, and Theology and Religion

Authors' summary:

Countering extremism (CE) programmes and policies have been criticised for infringing on human rights. The expanding remit of CE means that state and security agendas now infuse many more areas of 'ordinary living' than would previously been countenanced, with a disproportionate impact on socio-economically disadvantaged parts of society. Under such conditions extremist beliefs can inadvertently be affirmed, extremist behaviours strengthened and extremist modes of belonging and identity normalised. To help address this, this paper proposes the instigation of a rights-based approach to CE and of independent review of CE activities

Critiquing approaches to countering extremism via certain preventive measures

Professor Helen Fenwick, School of Law, Durham University

Author's summary:

This paper concerns the impact of the Prevent duty and accompanying Guidance in the education sector. It considers the argument that the duty leads to stigmatisation of Muslims, and could thereby have the counter-productive effect of deterring some Muslims from co-operating in counter-terrorism efforts, concluding that any such effect can be combatted.

Critiquing approaches to countering extremism: the fundamental British values problem in English formal schooling

Dr Diane Webber, Visiting Fellow, Georgetown University Center on National Security and the Law, Washington D.C

Dr Alison Struthers, Assistant Professor, University of Warwick School of Law

Authors' summary:

Teaching fundamental British values in schools to deter and counter extremism is seen as a central part of counter-terrorism policy. We critique the current approach, highlighting the more controversial aspects of the FBV agenda and point to other values frameworks more suited to the role of combatting extremism within schooling.