

# Commission releases first round of evidence of extremism

The Independent Commission for Countering Extremism publishes statistics from call for evidence, which received 3,000 responses.

It also releases 5 peer-reviewed academic papers on the threat from the Far Right and the Far Left. The views are those of the author and not necessarily the Commission's.

This marks the start of a summer of publishing evidence as the Commission builds up to a report making recommendations on extremism for the Home Secretary.

More than half (52%) of the respondents to a first-of-its kind call for evidence have witnessed extremism in some way, the independent Commission for Countering Extremism has revealed.

Of these almost half (45%) said they'd seen it online and two-fifths (39%) said they'd seen it in their local area.

Between November 2018 and January 2019, the Commission led by Sara Khan, asked the public to share their experience and views on extremism.

Almost 3,000 people responded, and the Commission is today publishing a statistical digest.

Alongside the statistics, the Commission is also publishing five academic papers.

Dr Chris Allen's paper charts National Action's embrace of violence and explores the impact of banning the group.

Dr Joe Mulhall's paper describes the modern Far Right targeting the mainstream with anti-Muslim politics and co-opting the free speech debate.

Dr Ben Lee offers an overview of the Far Right.

Dr Ajmal Hussain et al, in association with the Peace Foundation offer a review of a project to build dialogue between young men with 'Islamist' and 'Extreme Right' views.

Dr Daniel Allington et al use innovative polling methods to explore the attitudes of the Far Left.

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

They are the first batch of the academic papers it commissioned in April on the Far Right, Islamism and other forms of extremism, drivers of extremism,

online extremism and responses to extremism.

The commission will be publishing evidence and analysis across the summer as it builds up to a report making recommendations on extremism for the Home Secretary.

The call for evidence statistics and the academic papers are available on the Commission's [website](#).

Lead Commissioner Sara Khan said:

My work is built on evidence, engagement and impartiality.

I've travelled across the country and have told Government about the deep concerns that exist about extremism.

I'm grateful to everyone who has contributed to this call for evidence.

I was shocked that more than half of the respondents have witnessed extremism in some way, and that two-fifths of them said they'd seen it in their local area.

We are also publishing the first set of our academic papers. They are important and powerful contributions to the debate.

Together they underline the breadth and severity of the concerns we have in 2019.

We must guard our right to debate, protest and offend. We should use the word 'extremism' with caution.

But I believe we can, and must, do more.

The Government's 2015 strategy was an important milestone. It laid the foundations for vital work.

But there's a real need update the strategy to keep pace with the nature of the problems in 2019.

This isn't just a job for government. I want to see all of society involved in a proportionate and fair response to these critical issues.

I believe we need to put forward a positive vision of countering extremism, which is about upholding our democratic society and our great country.

## **Summary of Call for Evidence**

## **What do people understand by 'extremism'?**

Three quarters (75%) of the public respondents find the government's current definition of extremism "very unhelpful" or "unhelpful". Yet just over half (55%) of practitioners found it either "very helpful" or "helpful".

## **The scale of extremism**

Just over half (52%) of all respondents had witnessed extremism in some way. Of these, two fifths (39%) reported seeing it in their local area. Of those who had witnessed extremism, just under half (45%) reported seeing it online.

## **Extremists' tactics and objectives**

The public and practitioners associated the Far Right with propaganda (e.g. on social or traditional media), events (e.g. marches) and criminal offending (for example, hate crime) more than with any other activities.

The public associated Muslim / Islamist extremism with criminal offending and links to terrorism, while practitioners associated propaganda, criminal offending and incidents in regulated spaces.

## **Harms caused by extremism**

The top 5 that are most at risk:

1. Everyone
2. Religious minority communities
3. Black, Asian, and minority ethnic communities
4. People countering extremism
5. Women

Eighty-three percent of practitioner respondents were concerned that extremism is causing harm to our wider society and democracy.

## **How to respond to extremism**

The public and practitioners agreed that "a lot more" should be done online to counter extremism (56% and 73% respectively). When asked who has a role to play, practitioner respondents' top choice was social media and tech companies and the public respondents chose faith groups and leaders.

## **Methodology**

We ran an online call for evidence on extremism between November 2018 and January 2019.

Over a 12-week period we received 2,824 responses through an online questionnaire – including 244 submitted by practitioners or on behalf of an organisation.

We received 78 additional documents via the online questionnaire and 12

written responses by post. In addition, we received 43 submissions from practitioners and organisations by email.

These submissions will feature in the wider analysis for our report, but they were not included in the statistical analysis referenced in this release.

We developed the questions based on the commission's terms of reference.

We tested them with our expert group and with academics with expertise in extremism and public surveys.

The questionnaire had two sections. Section 1 was structured, semi-structured and short open questions (100-word limit) that were intended to be answered by all respondents, designed to allow people to share experiences and views on countering extremism.

Section 2 had longer, open questions with space for answers of up to 750 words, with the option to attach additional documents or evidence, primarily aimed at practitioners and experts. We received responses from across the country and from a wide range of age groups and demographics. The data therefore reflects the views of both the public and those who have direct experience of extremism.

## **The 5 academic papers**

### **Overview of the far right**

Dr Benjamin Lee, Senior Research Associate, Politics, Philosophy and Religion, Lancaster University, Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats (CREST)

Dr Lee says:

This paper provides readers with an overview of the far-right in the UK. It covers the various ideological strains that inhabit the far-right space (broadly interpreted) as well as some of their different aims and objectives.

The paper finishes by setting out some of the available indicators of the scale of far-right support in the UK.

### **Modernising and Mainstreaming: The Contemporary British Far Right**

Dr Joe Mulhall, Senior Researcher, at HOPE not hate, Panel Tutor, University of Cambridge Institute of Continuing Education

Dr Mulhall says:

By analysing the rhetoric espoused at a series of major far-right events across 2018 and comparing it to societal polling it becomes

evident that large parts of the contemporary far-right's platform – namely anti-Muslim politics, co-option of the free speech debate and an anti-elite populism – has widespread public support.

## **National Action: Links between the far right, extremism and terrorism**

Dr Chris Allen, Associate Professor in Hate Studies, The Centre for Hate Studies, Department of Criminology, University of Leicester

Dr Allen says:

In 2016, National Action made history for being the first far-right group to be proscribed in the UK. Investigating the group's history, ideology and activities, this article considers how its commitment to a 'pure' form of nationalism helped it to transition from non-violent to violent extremism.

## **The values of the Far Left and their acceptance among the general British public and the self-identifying 'very leftwing'**

Daniel Allington, Senior Lecturer in Social and Cultural Artificial Intelligence, King's College London, Siobhan McAndrew, Lecturer in Sociology with Quantitative Methods at the University of Bristol & David Hirsh, Senior Lecturer in Sociology at Goldsmiths, University of London

Allington says:

The sectarian Far Left consists of a number of small, close-knit groups, each of which aspires to lead the workers into revolution. Survey data suggest that people who agree with the ideas promoted by the sectarian far left are more likely to sympathise with violent extremism.

## **Talking Our Way Out of Conflict: Critical reflections on 'mediated dialogue' as a tool for secondary level CVE**

Dr Ajmal Hussain, Research Fellow in Sociology, School of Social Sciences, University of Manchester, Professor Hilary Pilkington, Professor of Sociology, School of Social Sciences, University of Manchester, Jon Nicholas, Kelly Simcock and Harriet Vickers of the Tim Parry Johnathan Ball Peace Foundation, along with Lee Rogerson of Street Talk.

Professor Pilkington says:

This paper reflects on a researcher-practitioner collaboration in conducting a mediated dialogue between young people from an

'Islamist' milieu and from an 'extreme right' milieu. It situates the intervention in the literature on the effectiveness of intergroup contact in reducing prejudice and on social cohesion and suggests how it might be developed for use in community led counter extremism practice.