

Press release: Commission for Countering Extremism selects leading academics for research papers

The independent Commission for Countering Extremism has today (Tuesday 9 April) announced the leading academics it has commissioned to write research papers on the far right, Islamism, far left and online extremism for its study into all forms of extremism.

The commission, announced by the Prime Minister after the terror attacks of 2017, has selected 29 academics and experts with a wide range of expertise, from extremism to community cohesion, to write 19 papers on different aspects of extremism after a competitive bidding process.

These papers will start to provide in-depth academic insights into extremism, as well as feed into the commission's study into all forms of extremism, released later this year.

The topics include the influence of social media on extremism on and offline; the extent to which far right and Islamist ideologies have entered mainstream public and political life and explorations of the links between extremism and terrorism through the lens of UK-based Islamist and far right groups, Al-Muhajiroun and National Action.

One paper will explore the tactics and objectives of the far left and their acceptance among the public, while 3 others will critique current approaches to countering extremism.

Two papers will examine how to change extremists' attitudes and behaviours, while 3 others will provide the latest insight on how extremists are influenced by their external environment.

A further 2 will map the spectrum of far right and Islamist world-views and groups, from those close to public and political life to those at the most violent fringe.

The papers are part of the commission's evidence-gathering for a first-of-its-kind study into the scale of extremism in our country. Lead Commissioner Sara Khan will present the study to the Home Secretary with recommendations later this year.

The commission, which was officially established as an independent body last March, has already gathered extensive evidence through visits to 15 towns and cities across England and Wales. The lead commissioner has spoken to more than 500 experts, activists and community groups about extremism on the frontline.

The organisation has carried out polling, reviewed academic literature on extremism and set out the 5 themes – its [terms of reference](#) – that it will

consider for its forthcoming study. These are the public's understanding of extremism; the scale of extremism; extremists' objectives and tactics; the harms caused by extremism and the current response to extremism.

The commission is currently analysing the almost 3,000 submissions it received to the first [public call for evidence](#) on extremism.

As part of its evidence-gathering for the study, the commission is also reviewing government data on indicators of extremism, conducting a survey on public perceptions of extremism and speaking to individuals and communities with first-hand experience of the harms of extremism.

Sara Khan, Lead Commissioner for Countering Extremism, said:

In the wake of the terrorist attacks of 2017, I was asked by the previous Home Secretary to provide the government with impartial, external advice on the tools, policies and approaches needed to tackle extremism.

Since that time, the threat from extremism has grown – both in our country and across the world.

We cannot be under any illusion – we are living in an era of extremism and growing intolerance. In every one of the towns and cities I have visited, I have heard concerns about the changing face and increasing prominence of extremism online, the far right and Islamist extremism. This is having a devastating impact on individuals, communities and our wider society.

Countering extremism is a crucially important issue that requires serious and credible research to guide policymakers. The wide range of views put forward by these academic papers will be a vital element of our study on all forms of extremism in our country. They will provide in-depth academic insight that will complement the data and information we are collecting from thousands of individuals and organisations on the ground.

Extremism is complex and there are many as yet unanswered questions about the scale of it and the best approach to tackling it, but my commission's study will start to set out what we can – and must – do as a country to stand up against those who seek to divide us.

The full list of papers is below. For data collection purposes, 2 papers will be included in the list below at a later date.

An overview of the far right

A paper mapping the spectrum of far right worldviews and groups, from those close to mainstream public and political life to the most violent fringe.

- By Dr Benjamin Lee, Senior Research Associate, Politics, Philosophy and

Mainstreaming the far right

A paper exploring how and to what extent the far right has entered mainstream public and political life.

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

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

A paper exploring the links between extremism and terrorism through a deep dive into the UK's first proscribed far right group, National Action.

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

Overview of Islamism

A paper mapping the spectrum of Islamist worldviews and groups, from those close to mainstream public and political life to the most violent fringe.

- By Dr Sadek Hamid, independent academic and author, publications include *British Muslims: New Directions in Islamic Thought, Creativity and Activism* (with Philip Lewis), (2018), *Sufis, Salafis and Islamists: The Contested Ground of British Islamic Activism*, (2018)

Mainstreaming Islamism

Two papers exploring how and to what extent Islamists have entered mainstream public and political life.

- By Imam Sheikh Dr Usama Hasan, Head of Islamic Studies, Quilliam, assisted by David Toubé, Director of Policy, Quilliam & Muna Adil, Quilliam
- By Damon Lee Perry, independent academic and author, publications include *The Global Muslim Brotherhood in Britain: Non-Violent Islamism and the Battle of Ideas* (Routledge 2019).

Al-Muhajiroun: Links between Islamists, extremism and terrorism

A paper exploring the links between extremism and terrorism through a deep dive into the first UK-based proscribed Islamist group, Al-Muhajiroun.

- By Dr Michael Kenney Associate Professor and Program Director of International Affairs, Graduate School of Public and International

Affairs, University of Pittsburgh

Other forms of extremism

One paper exploring the tactics and objectives of the far left and their acceptance among the public.

- 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

Drivers of extremism

Three papers exploring how and to what extent extremism is influenced by external environmental factors.

- By Dr Charlotte Heath-Kelly, Associate Professor of Politics and International Studies, University of Warwick
- By Professor Tahir Abbas, Assistant Professor, Institute of Security and Global Affairs, Leiden University
- By Dr Noémie Bouhana, Associate Professor, Department of Security and Crime Science, University College London

Extremism online

One paper exploring how social media affects extremism online and offline.

- By Professor Imran Awan, Professor of Criminology and Deputy Director of the Centre for Applied Criminology, Birmingham City University, Dr Pelham Carter, Senior Lecturer in Psychology, Birmingham City University & Hollie Sutch, PhD scholar, Birmingham City University

Critiquing approaches to countering extremism

Three papers exploring current and alternative approaches to countering extremism.

- By Dr Diane Webber, Visiting Fellow, Georgetown University Center on National Security and the Law & Dr Alison Struthers, Assistant Professor, University of Warwick School of Law
- By Dr Katherine E. Brown, Department of Theology and Religion, University of Birmingham & Professor Fiona De Londras, Birmingham Law School, University of Birmingham

- By Professor Helen Fenwick, Professor of Law (specialising in counter-terrorism law and policy and human rights), School of Law, University of Durham

Understanding effective approaches to changing attitudes and behaviours

Two papers examining past and present methods and techniques to change attitudes and behaviours that may be applicable to counter extremism.

- By 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
- By Dr Kurt Braddock, Department of Communication Arts and Sciences, The Pennsylvania State University