



Online Extremism and Misinformation Conference

31 March 2023
2.30pm - 4.30pm



University
of Exeter



QUEEN'S
UNIVERSITY
BELFAST

THE SENATOR GEORGE
J. MITCHELL INSTITUTE
FOR GLOBAL PEACE,
SECURITY AND JUSTICE

Context

Hosted by the Senator George J. Mitchell Institute for Global Peace, Security and Justice at Queen's University Belfast, this virtual conference on Online Extremism and Misinformation explores the dangerous and complex world of online extremism and misinformation by showcasing current research in these areas and the implications with respect to how we approach their study moving forward.

This conference builds on work currently being carried out by a global research team on a groundbreaking research project: Comparative Analysis of Online Extremism Between Islamic Jihadists and the Far Right.

The research team includes Dr Stephen Herron (Queen's University Belfast), Dr Weeda Mehran (University of Exeter) and Dr Ben Miller (Emory University) are carrying out interdisciplinary research with the aim of not only increasing global awareness on a vitally important area but to also have real, tangible, policy relevant outcomes to help both understand and deal with online extremism.

The team alongside Professor Anthony F. Lemieux (Georgia State University) and Professor Maura Conway (Dublin City University) have already successfully published their first journal article entitled Two Sides of the Same Coin? A Largescale Comparative Analysis of Extreme Right and Jihadi Online Text(s) in the journal Studies in Conflict and Terrorism to much international acclaim. This first article, interdisciplinary in approach, describes and discusses a comparative semiotic analysis of online text collected from eight extreme right websites and four violent jihadi groups' online magazines.

This has led onto further work by Dr Stephen Herron, Dr Weeda Mehran and Dr Ben Miller which includes work on a second paper entitled Nothing in Common? Analysing Identity Formation in the Far Right & Jihadi Extremist Rhetoric. This paper will examine the emotional, cognitive, psychological and social dimensions of the textual discourse in the online ecosystem of far right and jihadi extremists and their function in the construction of group identity. In this paper, the team will conduct a semiotic comparative analysis of online text material by a selection of far-right groups and jihadi extremists by adopting a mixed method approach of qualitative and quantitative analysis (Natural Language Processing) in analysing the data. The team will highlight similarities and differences between the far-right and jihadi extremist narratives particularly in association with construction of group identity through cognitive processes, psychological processes, temporal outlook and personal concerns.

By using an interdisciplinary mixed methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative methods to analyse the online actions of Far Right and Islamic Jihadists the team aim to provide policy relevant, high impact outcomes, including moving from reactive approaches when dealing with online extremism to pre-emptive and predictive based approaches.

Acknowledgements

The conference organisers are sincerely thankful for support received from Queen's University Belfast Agility Fund towards this conference. They are indebted to Professor John Brewer, Professor Richard English and Professor Janice Carruthers at QUB for support and advice and to the Senator George J. Mitchell Institute for Global Peace, Security and Justice for hosting and assisting in organising this virtual conference.

Schedule

2.30pm - 2.40pm

Welcome, Conference Context
and Research Overview
Dr Stephen Herron

SESSION ONE:

**APPROACHES TO RESEARCHING AND
UNDERSTANDING ONLINE EXTREMISM
AND MISINFORMATION**

2.40pm - 2.50pm

Responding to the Online Extremisphere.
Evolving Ethical Dilemmas

Dr Lisa McInerney
*Independent Consultant and Former
Global Policy Area Lead for Violent
Organisations at Twitter*

2.50pm - 3.00pm

Introduction to Mixed Methodologies for Researching
Extremism and Adversarial Disinformation

Dr Ayse Lokmanoglu
*Post Doctoral Fellow, Center for Communication
and Public Policy, Northwestern University*

3.00pm - 3.10pm

You Say Information, I Say Data

Robert Palfreyz
*Managing Director, Minerva Social Risk
Management and Former British Army Officer*

3.10pm - 3.15pm

Break

SESSION TWO:

**CASE STUDY EXAMPLES OF ONLINE
EXTREMISM AND MISINFORMATION**

3.15pm - 3.25pm

Analysis of Recruiting & Vetting Interviews of
Candidates for Membership in The Base

Professor Tony Lemieux
*Professor of Communication,
Georgia State University*

3.25pm - 3.35pm

Hate Speech Predicts Engagement on Social Media.
A Case Study from Turkey

Dr Kamil Yilmaz
*Post Doctoral Researcher,
Cyber Threats Research Centre (CYTREC),
Swansea University*

3.35pm - 3.45pm

Self-fulfilling Prophecy?
The Taliban's Social Media's Jihadi Victory Narrative

Professor Michael Semple
*(Professorial Research Fellow: Mitchell Institute /
School of History, Anthropology, Philosophy and
Politics, Queen's University Belfast)*

3.55pm - 4.25pm

Q & A Session

4.25pm - 4.30pm

Conclusions and Conference Close
Dr Stephen Herron

Speaker Biographies

Dr Lisa McInerney

Dr Lisa McInerney is an independent consultant, with specialist knowledge of violent organisations, and their online strategies to reach specific target audiences.

Lisa was previously Twitter's Global Policy Area Lead for Violent Organizations, leading a Trust & Safety team responsible for policy development and enforcement guidance related to terrorism and violent extremism, and participated in GIFCT's Crisis Response Working Group.

With a total of over 16 years experience in research and analysis related to violent online political extremism—across a range of ideologies, Lisa has been invited to contribute on related issues at a variety of international events including at the UN, the European Commission, and the OSCE.

Prior to joining Twitter in 2018, Lisa was Programme Manager for VOX-Pol—a European Commission-funded Network of Excellence, focused upon violent online political extremism.

Dr Ayse D. Lokmanoglu

Ayse D. Lokmanoglu is a Post-Doctoral Fellow at the Center for Communication & Public Policy at Northwestern University and a member of Vox-Pol leadership team.

Her work takes a mixed methods approach that integrates computational methodologies and critical cultural theory to examine information campaigns in digital media associated with racial, gender, and religious supremacy.

Her dissertation “Imagined Economics: An Analysis of Non-state Actor Economic Messaging” was awarded the 2022 National Communication Association Gerald R. Miller Outstanding Doctoral Dissertation Award.

She has published in journals including *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, *International Journal of Communication*, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, *Health Communication*, *Social Science and Medicine*, and many others.

Contact Ayse at ayse.lokmanoglu@northwestern.edu

Robert Palfrey

Rob Palfrey's first career was as an infantry officer in the British Army, serving from 1998 until 2014, and deploying to Northern Ireland, Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan across that period.

Upon leaving, Rob formed Minerva Social Risk Management to try and implement some of the many lessons from those experiences in the private and third sectors.

His work focuses upon behavioural change and building social licences to operate in complex adaptive environments.

Contact Rob at robpalfrey@minervasrm.com

Professor Tony Lemieux

Anthony F. Lemieux is a Professor of Communication, founding co-director of the Atlanta Global Studies Center, and a lead researcher in the Transcultural Conflict and Violence Initiative at Georgia State University.

Contact Tony at alemieux@gsu.edu

Dr Kamil Yilmaz

Dr. Kamil Yilmaz currently works as a post-doctoral researcher at the Cyber Threats Research Centre (CyTREC), Swansea University in the UK.

He holds a PhD in applied (political) anthropology from Columbia University (2012). He also holds multiple master's degrees in criminal justice, International Affairs, and Political Anthropology.

He has taught undergraduate and graduate students in counterterrorism, international politics, discourse analysis and research methods, based both on theory and practice.

In addition to numerous articles in international peer-reviewed journals and book chapters, he has published a book entitled "Disengaging from Terrorism: Lessons from the Turkish Penitents" (Routledge 2014), which has been reviewed as being one of the most innovative books on terrorism and political violence.

He is interested in Computational Social Science and his research interests include political violence, anthropology of terrorism, discourse analysis, radicalization and deradicalization processes related to terrorism, and terrorists use of the Internet and social media.

Contact Kamil at kamil.yilmaz@swansea.ac.uk

Professor Michael Semple

Professor Michael Semple is a Professorial Research Fellow at the Senator George J. Mitchell Institute for Global Peace, Security and Justice and the School of History, Anthropology, Philosophy and Politics at Queen's University Belfast.

Michael's research interests include the political culture of the Afghan Taliban and kindred militant Islamic movements, the role and potential of dialogue and social media in conflict transformation, and the challenge of pluralism in the post 9/11 Muslim world.

Professor Semple worked as a political officer in the United Nations team which helped to implement the Bonn Accord on Afghanistan after 2001 and served as Deputy EU Special Representative in the country.

He continues to advise governments and parties involved in the Afghan peace process, at a senior level, informed by his ongoing research.

He collaborates with international peace-related NGOs and think tanks, and engages with policy makers. He is active in the public and policy debate around conflict transformations and Afghanistan.

Contact Michael at michael.semple@qub.ac.uk

Research Team Biographies

Dr Stephen Herron Research Fellow, Queen's University Belfast

Dr Stephen Herron is an anthropologist specialising in the study of conflict and the military, veterans' issues, online extremism and misinformation. He is one of only a handful of bespoke military and conflict anthropologists in the United Kingdom and has conducted fieldwork with hundreds of soldiers, veterans and family members.

He is currently a Research Fellow at the Senator George J. Mitchell Institute for Global Peace, Security and Justice at Queen's University Belfast where he working on developing original research techniques for examining online extremism and misinformation.

Dr Herron's current academic research includes being part of a global team undertaking a comparative analysis of Islamic Jihadist and Far Right online messaging strategies. As part of this team Dr Herron is using virtual ethnography techniques to provide unique insights into extremist behaviour online.

Email Stephen at stephen.herron@qub.ac.uk

Dr Weeda Mehran Co-Director: Centre for Advanced International Studies; Director for International Relations, University of Exeter

Dr Weeda Mehran is co-director of Centre for Advanced International Studies and the programme director for International Relations at the University of Exeter. Her research focuses on terrorism, security, and radicalisation.

Her current research takes a multi-disciplinary & comparative analysis approach to studying media campaign across a number of violent extremist groups such as the Taliban, the Islamic State, Al Qaeda, and Tahrir-e Taliban of Pakistan, and a number of far-right extremists.

Email Weeda at weeda.mehran@exeter.ac.uk

Dr Ben Miller Associate Teaching Professor, Emory University

Dr Ben Miller is an Associate Teaching Professor at Emory University where he researches natural language processing of literary and linguistic features to better understand social process like radicalization.

His work has appeared in venues like Digital Scholarship in the Humanities, Housing Policy Debate, and the ACL Anthology, and has been supported by the NSF, NEH, SSHRC, Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, and others.

Email Ben at bjmiller@mit.edu

Senator George J. Mitchell Institute for Global Peace, Security and Justice

Established in 2016, the Senator George J. Mitchell Institute for Global Peace, Security and Justice responds to the unprecedented global challenge of building a peaceful, inclusive and secure world by bringing together the unparalleled expertise at Queen's University Belfast, on these issues.

The Institute, under the leadership of Professor Richard English, brings together researchers, practitioners, policy-makers and peace-builders from diverse backgrounds and international locations who share their multiple perspectives and work collaboratively to solve specific problems associated with the GRI's priority themes:

Legacy

Embedding peace processes in everyday life.

How do peace processes become embedded in daily life following political settlement?

Rights and Social Justice

Establishing international norms.

How do we establish international norms of human rights in local cultures?

The Policy and Security of Institutional Peace Building

Ensuring just and ethical responses.

How and can we ensure just and ethical responses to a diverse range of security risks?

Religion, Arts and Peacebuilding

Shaping approaches to peace-building in many cultures.

How do values and beliefs in different cultures shape approaches to peace-building?

The Institute works at the interface of theory and practice. An Institute priority is knowledge exchange between academics and practitioners, with a key goal being the cross-fertilization of ideas on conflict transformation, peace-building and social justice.

We host regular workshops, conferences and civic conversations encouraging participation from all sections of society. We believe our civic engagement strongly enhances the impact of our research.

"I believe there's no such thing as a conflict that can't be ended. They're created and sustained by human beings. They can be ended by human beings. No matter how ancient the conflict, no matter how hateful, no matter how hurtful, peace can prevail."

Senator George J. Mitchell



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for Global Peace, Security and Justice**
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BETTER WORLD
SINCE 1845**