Dr Sumedh Rao

PhD, CPsychol, AFHEA | Social and political psychologist

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Chartered social and political psychologist working on conflict and governance, through research, evidence synthesis and policy evaluation. Trained in psychology, politics and policy, with recent experience leading qualitative research on trust, intergroup contact and prejudice, and more than 80 commissioned reports for governments and international organisations.

Academic posts

Research Associate, The Open University — Oct 2024 – Mar 2027

Leverhulme Trust project *Anti-Catholicism in the UK since 1945*. Lead the qualitative strand: conducted 37 of 44 interviews and facilitated five of seven focus groups across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, with analysis grounded in rhetorical and discursive psychology. Co-developed the national survey (5,542 respondents) and co-author the project monograph.

Research Associate (0.5 FTE), University of Oxford — Nov 2023 – Sep 2024

ESRC project *Shared Spaces* on youth intergroup contact in Bradford and Belfast. Analysed the combined Photovoice focus-group and walking-interview data, and prepared the qualitative data for deposit with the UK Data Service.

Teaching Fellow (0.5 FTE), University of Birmingham — Sep 2022 – Jun 2024

Associate Lecturer, Anglia Ruskin University — Jan – Jun 2023

Associate Lecturer, University of Greenwich — Nov 2022 – Jan 2023

Teaching Associate, University of Birmingham — Sep 2017 – Jun 2018

Policy and research posts

Independent research consultant — 2015 – 2016; 2022 – present

Evidence reviews for UNDP and for FCDO through the K4D helpdesk.

Research Fellow, GSDRC, University of Birmingham — May 2010 – Jan 2015

Rapid evidence synthesis on governance and conflict for DFID, AusAID, the OECD, the WHO and the European Commission.

Earlier roles — 2001 – 2010

Overseas Development Institute; Development Initiatives; OECD (Policy Analyst); Department for International Development (Programme Officer); UNESCO UK Permanent Delegation; Embassy of Japan (JET Programme); United Nations Association; JET Programme teacher in Japanese state schools.

Education

PhD Social and Political Psychology, University of Birmingham — 2022

Identity, threat and trust in Northern Ireland. Fifty interviews in Derry-Londonderry and analysis of Northern Ireland Life and Times survey data.

Master of Public Affairs (MPA), Sciences Po Paris — 2006 – 2008

BSc (Hons) Politics and International Relations, London School of Economics and Political Science — 2006

BSc (Hons) Psychology, University College London — 2000

Peer-reviewed publications

1. Rao, S., Dupont, P.-L., Manley, D., Taylor, L. K. & McKeown, S. (2026). The habitual, spatial and temporal conditions of everyday youth intergroup contact in an ethnically diverse city. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 65(2), e70075.

2. Rao, S. (2026). Setting parameters on the role of social identity in unpacking intergroup conflict: The case of Northern Ireland. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 32(3), 244–252.
3. Rao, S., Van Assche, J., McKeown, S. & Sagherian-Dickey, T. (2026). Political trust in divided societies: Who trusts whom in Northern Ireland? *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 32(3), 296–299.
4. Schaefer, C. D., McKeown, S., Ali, S., Dupont, P.-L., Manley, D., Rao, S. & Taylor, L. K. (2025). The longitudinal effects of intergroup contact on youth attitudes towards ethnic minorities and constructive societal engagement. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 35(1), e70026.
5. McKeown, S., Schaefer, C. D., Ali, S., Dupont, P.-L., Manley, D., Rao, S., Taylor, L. K. & Meleady, R. (2025). The longitudinal relationship between youth intergroup contact and social cohesion outcomes in two divided societies. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 55(6), 1016–1031.
6. Acar, B., Van Assche, J., Ardaya Velarde, S., Gonzalez, R., Lay, S., Rao, S. & McKeown, S. (2024). R-E-S-P-E-C-T, find out what it means to mixing: Testing novel emotional mediators of intergroup contact effects. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 103, 102070.
7. Furnham, A. & Rao, S. (2002). Personality and the aesthetics of composition: A study of Mondrian & Hirst. *North American Journal of Psychology*, 4(2), 233–242.

Book under contract: Wolffe, J., Dixon, J., Byford, J., Geraghty, E. & Rao, S. *The History and Psychology of Prejudice: Anti-Catholicism in the UK since 1945*. Bloomsbury.

Policy publications and impact

Examples from more than 80 commissioned reports for the OECD, UNDP, WHO, DFID/FCDO, the European Commission and U4:

- Rao, S. (2022). *Lessons learned from centre of government delivery units*. K4D Helpdesk Report 1150. Institute of Development Studies.
- Rao, S. (2015). *Is the private sector more efficient? A cautionary tale*. Discussion Paper 10. UNDP Global Centre for Public Service Excellence.
- Rao, S. & Marquette, H. (2012). *Corruption indicators in performance assessment frameworks for budget support*. U4 Issue 2012:1. Chr. Michelsen Institute.
- Cited in FCDO's business case for its £5m public financial management programme in Nepal (2017).
- Lead author of the Shared Spaces team's written evidence to the 2023 parliamentary inquiry on children, young people and the built environment.

Teaching

Module lead for *Corruption and Clientelism: Global Perspective* (final-year undergraduate, Birmingham; designed and delivered all lectures, cohort of about 80) and *Politics In Action* (final-year undergraduate, Anglia Ruskin). Seminar lead for *Research for Public Policy and Management* (postgraduate), *Introduction to Social and Differential Psychology* (undergraduate) and first-year undergraduate research methods (Birmingham). Guest lectures at the University of Exeter (2026, with a staff research seminar) and Bournemouth University (2023, on political psychology in Northern Ireland and policy work, for the module *Psychosocial Perspectives on Contemporary Politics*). Professional training for the European Commission and the Commonwealth Secretariat.

Funding

- British Academy Early Career Researcher Network Elevate grant, AI governance forum (2026, co-applicant), £9,000
- OECD, *Ensuring Fragile States Are Not Left Behind* (2011, PI), €20,200
- U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre, with Prof Heather Marquette (2011, Co-I), £16,050

Professional standing, service and languages

Chartered Psychologist (BPS); Associate Fellow, Higher Education Academy (2024); British Academy Elevate leadership programme (2026). Chair, Political Studies Association Early Career Network (2018–19); ISPP web resources coordinator (2016–19); Chair, Development Studies Association Development Management Study Group (2014–16). Reviewer for *Peace and Conflict*, *International Peacekeeping*, *Governance* and U4. Languages: English and Konkani (native); French (C1, DALF); Japanese (JLPT N1); Spanish (B2, DELE).