Dr Sumedh Rao

PhD, CPsychol, AFHEA | Social and political psychologist

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Chartered social and political psychologist researching trust, intergroup contact and prejudice in divided and diverse societies. Trained in psychology, politics and policy, with recent experience leading qualitative research, and a background in evidence synthesis 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 Photovoice focus-group 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, conflict and public services for DFID and other agencies.

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 Administration, Sciences Po Paris — 2008

BSc (Hons) Politics and International Relations, University of London — 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, Birmingham; designed and delivered all lectures, cohort of about 80) and *Politics In Action* (final-year, Anglia Ruskin). Seminar lead for *Research for Public Policy and Management* (postgraduate), *Introduction to Social and Differential Psychology* and first-year research methods (Birmingham). 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).