

A Warning to Policymakers about Pseudo-academic Opinion that wants to be Research

by Dr Rob Faure Walker (4th August 2020)

Two recent excellent research reports, [False Positives](#) and [Islam on Campus](#), have shown with powerful evidence how **the Prevent Counter-Terrorism Strategy reinforces Islamophobia, undermines free speech, and does not fulfil its intended purpose of preventing political violence.**

In the face of this compelling evidence, policymakers must be warned of the growing trend of **pseudo-academic thought leadership being established in opposition to academic research and movements seeking to address historical and current injustice.** Often created with close government connections and support, this style of lobbying is promoting a dangerously blinkered approach to policy formation. This briefing explores three examples of this developing form of pseudo-academic work that policymakers must be aware of and avoid. Each example fails to meet the minimum standards expected of serious and independent academic research and they serve as a warning for **how policymakers might avoid policy-led evidence and create better and evidence informed policy.**

The Cross-Government Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group held a roundtable discussion on [“Islamophobia and Hate Online”](#) on 23rd June, yet failed to address Prevent as a cause of Islamophobia. The Group is formed by ‘a small unit based jointly in the Prime Minister’s Office and the Cabinet Office’ ([CivilService.Gov](#)) and this raises **serious questions over its independence**, as does the inclusion of Sara Khan (Lead Commissioner for the Home Office’s Commission for Countering Extremism) and Nik Adams (National Coordinator for Prevent). The inclusion of these senior supporters of the counter-extremism agenda in the group might explain why the Prevent Strategy and counter-extremism were not discussed as causes of Islamophobia.

The Centre for Muslim Policy Research’s report on [Xenophobia And The Myth Of The ‘Other’: A Focus On Islamophobia](#) highlights the risk that policymakers who rely on research that is not held to the high ethical and peer-review standards of academia may not see the full picture. The report offers an impressive review of literature on ‘the human need to scapegoat others’ and on how this has led to the current trend of Islamophobia in the UK. However, they ignore existing powerful research that demonstrates how the right-wing media, nationalist politicians and the counter-extremism industry (including Prevent) have fuelled the othering of Muslims. This means that **the report avoids the most serious causes of Islamophobia and division in society today.**

Don’t Divide Us was launched as a website via a jointly signed [letter in the Spectator](#) on 30th June. Don’t Divide Us makes reasonable arguments that ‘soulless acronyms’ like BAME and POC and the conflation of political concerns in the US and the UK are unhelpful. But they seek to discredit vital and well-researched anti-racism initiatives and social justice movements and this will perpetuate the historic and colonial injustice that continues to divide us. **Black Lives Matter because they have historically mattered less than others and, despite the cynical proclamations of Don’t Divide Us, we are more united if we recognise this.**

The anti-intellectual arguments made by these three organisations will support failed policies like Prevent and perpetuate historic injustice. They serve as a warning for the kind of **policy-led evidence that policymakers must avoid.** At SOAS COP, **we can help connect you with experts who are able to help you distinguish between cynical opinion and genuine evidence-based research. So, please do not hesitate to get in touch with us.** We can put you in contact with the real experts.

Visit our website for further briefings (<https://blogs.soas.ac.uk/cop/>). If you would like a personal briefing or clarification on any of the issues raised here, please contact the author at rw52@soas.ac.uk. Do contact Professor Alison Scott-Baumann and her team for further briefings and access to other experts as150@soas.ac.uk

The views expressed in SOAS COP Briefings are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of SOAS.