



Call for Evidence

Commission for Countering Extremism

Guide to Online Form

Deadline: 11.45pm on 31 January

Introduction

In March 2018, the Home Office set up what is described as an independent *Commission for Countering Extremism* with the purpose of challenging “all forms of extremism” and advising the Government on “new policies to deal with extremism, including the need for new powers.”¹ The Commission’s remit does not include a study of terrorism or counter-terrorism policies such as *Prevent*.

The Commission recognises that definitions of “extremism” vary² and that there is no legal definition in the UK.³ As for how some Christian beliefs are increasingly perceived, the term is wide, vague and indiscriminate enough to be open to serious misuse. David Cameron as Prime Minister, declared the need to tackle both violent and “non-violent extremism”⁴ and the current Revised *Prevent* Duty Guidance⁵ recognises non-violent extremism even when “not accompanied by violence”⁶ as part of its fighting strategy against terrorism.

The Government’s stated aims for this Commission include seeking to engage with individuals and groups across society based on “our fundamental pluralistic values”.⁷ In the Spring of 2019, the Commission intends to publish a study on “all forms of extremism”⁸ with reference to England and Wales. The Lead Commissioner, Sara Khan writes: “Our country’s rich diversity, fundamental freedoms and liberal democracy define us as a nation and are cause for celebration. We embrace different races, religions, sexualities and beliefs.”⁹

The Government is to be supported and applauded in their efforts to tackle and defeat ideologies peddling incitement to violence and murder, including the overthrow of western governments and the structures of democracy and the rule of law underpinning them. However, the woolly statements and lack of definition mean there is a real danger Bible-believing Christians will be labelled ‘extremist’.

If you want to go straight to our [Guidance on completing the Online Form](#), and see links to the relevant documents, you may skip the next section below and go to [page 4](#). However, reading the section immediately below sets out the pertinent issues that will help you respond to the Commission's questions.

How are Christians and Christian Freedoms at Risk?

The Commission will advise Government on “new policies to deal with extremism, including the need for new powers.”¹⁰ Legislators have failed to define “extremism” and a parliamentary Human Rights Joint Committee noted: “It is far from clear that there is an accepted definition of what constitutes extremism, let alone what legal powers there should be, if any, to combat it.”¹¹

At face value, the Government's definition of extremism, noted above, appears non-controversial. Yet, the application of what it means to exercise mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths or beliefs has too often meant actual *acceptance* or *celebration* of other beliefs, which is categorially different from *tolerance* itself. Only a totalitarian state can place pressure on their citizens or delude itself in thinking it can compel them to take on its own beliefs, either through castigation or humiliation (slurs of being homophobic or bigoted). This includes censure, pressure to change religious beliefs with penalties, reprimands, loss of or exclusion from employment, or fear of arrest for daring to dissent from the new government-designated “authorised” beliefs.

People intolerant of traditional Christian beliefs appear to think it is acceptable to label Christians as “extremist”. Public figures have already pointed to concerns about how law-abiding Christians are at risk of being caught by the vagueness of the term “extremism”. Lord Evans, former head of MI5, wrote in 2015 when the Government sought to pass the Counter-Extremism Bill:

definitions will be crucial . . . One can imagine already the powers being used against harmless evangelical street preachers or the like, out of misplaced zeal and a desire to demonstrate that they are not directed against one religion alone.¹²

In 2014, when extremism disruption orders were debated by parliament, the then Justice Minister, Dominic Raab, wrote that their broad powers:

could be abused. Those engaged in passionate debates – such as Christians objecting to gay marriage – could find themselves slapped down.¹³

In 2015, Theresa May, as Home Secretary, denied the “extremist” label could be applied to Christians in such instances.¹⁴ One year later, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, reportedly declared that he is an “extremist” according to the government definition, because faith could, in some cases, outweigh the rule of law, one of the fundamental British values which are taken as markers of integration. He noted that because of religious illiteracy among government departments and ministers, the government generally cannot

distinguish between groups like the Muslim Brotherhood and a “sort of conservative evangelical group in a Church of England church.”¹⁵

As noted above, the Lead Commissioner states: “Our country’s rich diversity, fundamental freedoms and liberal democracy define us as a nation and are cause for celebration. We embrace different races, religions, sexualities and beliefs.” Bizarrely, she also claims to be a “robust” defender of “freedom of religion or belief.”¹⁶

Here we see an overt distortion and conflation between the *fact* that there are certain freedoms relating to religion, sexuality and beliefs, and the *value judgment* about embracing all of them, and this being the reason for celebration. The Government’s stated aim that the Commission will be impartial, is therefore, seriously undermined.

If “tolerance” means to live in peace with others of different beliefs and lifestyles, then Christians should be tolerant. All people are to be respected. However, no one can or should be compelled to “embrace”, much less “celebrate” beliefs, religions or sexual lifestyles with which they disagree. Christians should not be required to embrace or celebrate same-sex relationships any more than atheists should be required to embrace or celebrate Jesus Christ as the Son of God. So why is one sincerely and passionately held belief treated as extremist and intolerant, while the other is not? The Commission presents itself as “impartial” which means it should not hold any pre-conceived, much less fixed, value judgments between different beliefs. We should note that in any event, religion and belief are “protected characteristics” in law (Equality Act 2010).

Following research into [evidence in the public domain](#), Voice for Justice UK has recently uncovered scandalous evidence that exposes the conflicts of interest of some members of the Commission: certain traditional Christian beliefs are treated as being part of “less progressive religious communities”, while Christians holding to pro-life or pro-traditional marriage beliefs are bracketed together with ISIS and the Taliban.

There is a burgeoning body of cases against Christians who uphold traditional belief, which can only get worse if Lead Commissioner Sara Khan’s befuddled extension of extremism to all those who do not accept the ideas of liberal democracy is accepted. Such woolly and biased thinking begs the question, why are only ‘Christians’ being labelled extremist here? Surely this applies equally to Muslims, Jews, Hindus and all holding socially conservative beliefs? Large swathes of Britain’s faith communities are effectively being smeared because of their sincerely held, lawful beliefs!

For a brief overview of the Consultation, [read here](#)

For the Commission’s Terms of Reference, [read here](#)

For the online form, [read here](#)

Online Form

Following the introduction from the Lead Commissioner, you are asked some questions about yourself. Immediately after this, there are questions about extremism beginning at section one, part one. This section asks for your own personal experiences and insights regarding extremism. Alongside the multiple-choice questions, there are opportunities to offer explanations for your answers. There are word limits to observe, so we urge you to consider what you wish to say before writing. Your answers are not subject to time-limits and you can save your answers and return later. This is your opportunity to tell the Commission your concerns.

RESPOND IN YOUR OWN WORDS Answers worded in such a way as to suggest they are part of a campaign will be ignored, so it is vital you choose your own words for all answers.

Section One, Part One

1 a) Can you describe extremism?

There is no legal definition of extremism and a variety of definitions from academics and others have been offered.¹⁷ As definitions tend to be vague or too wide, we suggest you choose *Not Sure*.

1 b) If you said 'yes' or 'not sure', please describe what extremism looks like to you. (100 word limit)

This is your opportunity to say briefly, why it is problematic defining the term. These are some ideas to consider when providing your response:

- “Extremism” is a difficult term to define. Ideas or beliefs, treated as unpopular by some, are at risk of being caught by this term.
- The Government is targeting not only violent extremists, but also what it calls non-violent extremists.¹⁸ What does this mean? What is it capable of including? If you believe in the uniqueness of, and exclusive claims of Jesus Christ, as the Son of God, are these beliefs “non-violent extremism”? How about a belief in the sanctity of life, and that killing an unborn child is morally wrong? Or, belief in marriage being exclusively for opposite-sex couples? Throughout history, men and women advancing what were, in their day, unpopular, even *offensive* ideas, were classed as dangerous and a threat to the established order: in modern government jargon, they might have been seen as a threat to “social cohesion”. Today, we are inspired by their courage, outspokenness and willingness to reject the political correctness of their time.
- The “extremist” slur used against bible-believing Christians can’t be used as a tactic to silence ideas that some people believe are “wrong”.

2 a) How helpful is the following definition of extremism? “Extremism is the vocal or active opposition to our fundamental values, including democracy, the rule of law, *individual liberty and the mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs*. We also regard calls for the death of members of our armed forces as extremist”. (HM Government Counter-Extremism Strategy, 2015) Italics added.
We suggest you choose “very unhelpful”.

2b) What is the main reason for your response? (100 word limit)

Below are a number of suggested ideas, facts and arguments to help you respond.

- If the rule of law and individual liberty (cited in above quotation) is to be applied without bias and discrimination, these principles must apply not only to atheists and LGBTs but also Christians manifesting publicly their beliefs that uphold pro-life principles and traditional marriage. The Equality Act 2010 provides protection for those who are religious, as well as for people who define themselves according to “sexual orientation”.¹⁹
- Too often, law-abiding Christians who are perceived to have offended certain sensitivities and have fallen foul of the apparent consensus, are put through the humiliation and upheaval of job losses, investigation or arrest, and suffer penalties for breaking so-called “equality” codes, interpreted so as to protect only some groups. The application of such codes almost always defers to perceived LGBT sensitivities and totally ignores Christians who also suffer offence and victimisation. If the rule of law, also included in this definition, is to mean something for everyone, it cannot be selectively applied in deference to one group. While the above definition of extremism appears reasonable at face value, its typical application is too loaded with controversy and bias.

Section one: Part two

At the start of this section, it is stated: **There is no single measure of extremism. Experts have proposed a range of factors that may indicate the scale of extremism.**

3) How important do you think the following factors are when considering extremism in this country?

We suggest you choose “Don’t know” for all of the listed points, except one. As discussed above, “extremism” is difficult to define. It is open to many interpretations as to “who” and “what” should be included. A parliamentary Human Rights Joint Committee noted: “It is far from clear that there is an accepted definition of what constitutes extremism, let alone what legal powers there should be, of any, to combat it.”²⁰ You may, however, wish to comment on the link between extremism and terrorism.

4a) Is there one factor from the list above that you think is most important when considering extremism?

We suggest you choose “Yes”.

4b) If you said ‘yes’ or ‘other’, please tell us which factor you think is most important and why. (100 word limit)

You may want to explain that because there are many subjective views as to what “extremism” means, it is safe and non-controversial to limit this word to mean incitement to violence and murder, including the overthrow of democracy. Efforts to tackle extremism should therefore focus on encouragement to the commission of violence/terrorism.

If you said ‘not sure’ or ‘no’, what is the main reason for your response? (100 word limit)

If you chose “Not sure”, explain that there are varied views as to what “extremism” could mean. Ultimately, Christians who believe marriage is exclusively for opposite-sex couples, and that abortion is the killing of a human being, should never be at risk of being categorised as extremist. You may want to explain any of the points shown in the suggested responses relating to the questions above.

Section one: Part three

5a) Have you witnessed anything you would regard as extremist happening in your local area, elsewhere in the country or online?

Given the Government’s definition of extremism (including “mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs”), if you have been victim to censorship, bullying or unfair infringement based on your Christian beliefs, you may choose the item that is appropriate to you. Or, if you feel you can summarise nationwide cases of Christians who have been targeted, you can choose, “Yes, elsewhere in the country.”

5b) If you said ‘yes’, what type(s) of extremism have you witnessed?

Please select any that apply from the following options that were suggested to us during our engagement and from our ongoing research.

There are one of two ways you can approach this section. Either you choose one of the options provided, or you choose “other”. The choice you make will generate different subsequent questions, so we urge to think carefully before you make your choice.

If you choose “Other”, you are then asked: What other type of extremism have you identified, followed by a page (5c) of further questions, and an opportunity to explain in 100 words reasons for your response.

In the list of options provided, “Christian extremists” are included, yet there is a conspicuous absence of people who show overt hostility to Christians: “secular extremists”. This evident and blatant bias is deeply problematic. This is your opportunity to bring to the Commission’s attention the problem of extremists who want to shut down all public manifestation of the Christian faith with intimidation, bullying, harmful, alienating and unfounded accusations that include being “homophobic” or anti-women (common reactions to expressing pro-life perspectives). We need to recognise there is a great deal of

Christophobia in society that goes unchallenged; it is usually ignored or not taken seriously in the way that allegations of Islamophobia are. This omission could be highlighted.

5 c) If you choose any of the other options listed (apart from “other” and “not sure”):

It appears you are free to tick as many of the options as you wish but the first choice you make on the list appears to determine the questions that follow in the next section. In any event, you will be asked a series of short questions relating to the type of extremism you chose, followed by two further questions, one of which allows you to provide the main reason for your response in 100 words. You could explain how hostility to Christians has been or is now a problem to you. **Personal testimony or revealing your own feelings about this will carry more weight than mere reference to nationwide cases that have no direct bearing on you personally.**

From the list, if you choose “Far Left Extremism”, this is an opportunity to explain what you have witnessed that can be considered “extremist”. One prevalent and topical concern is for Jewish people who feel increasingly targeted by incitement to violence, including the conspiracy of Holocaust denial, typically lumped together with calls for death to Jews. Targeting and smearing the reputation of a whole ethnic group with threats is not just illegal but causes serious harm, alienation and hurt.

Section one: Part four

6a) Can you describe the harms caused by extremism?

6b) If you said ‘yes’ or ‘not sure’, how would you describe these harms? (100 word limit)

If you said ‘no’, what is the main reason for your response? (100 word limit)

You may want to fill in or ignore this section, which is in three parts, as it depends on whether you are able to describe the “harms” caused by extremism. One example of an obvious harm that is “extremist” concerns Christian converts. They commonly face victimisation, harassment or violence from individual Muslims and/or their families who are intolerant of someone who has chosen to change their religion.

7a) From the following list, which are the three groups you believe are most at risk of harm caused by extremism?

Conspicuously absent from this long list are Christians. We suggest that one of your three choices includes “other” to cover this omission. You can then explain in the box below reasons for your choice. What is included in this list implies that while non-religious people can be victims of extremism, Christians can’t. **If the Commission fails to hear from Christians, they will have good reason to believe there is no existing problem. Make sure your voice gets heard!**

7b) What is the main reason for your response? (100 word limit) Here is an opportunity to speak of your concerns. Again, if you can appeal to personal testimony, that is the most

powerful. If you can't appeal to personal experience, you may simply write of your concerns about how Christians are excluded from the above list of people in 7a.

We have no specific comments on Questions 8a to 8d inclusive.

9a) Does extremism cause harm to society and its institutions more widely e.g. to democracy? We believe the answer is "yes".

9b) If you said 'yes' or 'not sure', how would you describe these harms? (100 word limit)

In the context of intimidation, bullying and intolerance or censorship of Christians who express pro-life or pro-traditional marriage beliefs, or speak of the exclusive claims of Jesus Christ, you can explain how shutting down expression of Christian belief is harmful to society. Christians, like humanists and others, are part of the populace and hold the same rights to express their beliefs freely and publicly, without having to face threats of censure, or social or legal opprobrium.

Where you can, appeal to your own experience and the hurt or harm that is caused. The media is deluged with stories about people from various identity groups who are marginalised or bullied. The biased media gives little or no attention to Christians who also suffer marginalisation or bullying.

Section one: Part five

Questions 10a and 10 b:

First you asked, "Do you think more should be done to counter extremism?" followed by "What is the main reason for your response? (100 word limit)".

As noted earlier, there is no legal definition of extremism and so any answer you provide must take this into account. Having said that, the Government has produced a definition (see page two above). We suggest you highlight that any definition must not be capable of infringing free speech and freedom to manifest beliefs. If these freedoms get conflated with "extremism", it will seriously undermine the democratic freedoms that underpin our country. Silencing what are thought to be unpopular ideas and the outward manifestation of religious beliefs is the mark of a totalitarian state.

Any of the points mentioned throughout this briefing could be used here.

We have no specific comments on Questions 11, 12a, 12b, 13a and 13b.

14) What is the one thing you would give greater priority to, in our efforts to counter extremism offline and online, and why? (100 word limit)

This is your closing opportunity to explain and summarise what you believe is the top priority. Freedom to manifest religious beliefs and speech for Christians should never be equated with "extremism". In the same way, individuals from other groups, e.g. secularists who reject Christian beliefs, don't get labelled "extremist" when exercising their freedoms. The Government should instead redouble its effort to tackle what is evidently a threat to all

freedoms, namely, incitement to violence and murder, and calls for the overthrow of democracy.

Section two: Evidence on extremism

This section is optional. It is most appropriate for academics, civil society groups, and practitioners but you are free to answer the questions. **We have no specific comments on Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8 and 9.**

For Questions 7 and 10: If you were unable to make all your points under earlier answers, there is an opportunity to elaborate here.

You are now invited to submit all your responses.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/commission-for-countering-extremism/about>

² *Study into Extremism: Terms of Reference*, Commission for Countering Extremism, September 2018, p. 8.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁴ Foreword, *Counter-Extremism Strategy*, 19 October 2015, p. 5.

⁵ *Revised Prevent Duty Guidance: for England and Wales*, HM Government, revised 16 July 2015.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/people/sara-khan>

⁸ Foreword, *Study into Extremism: Terms of Reference*, Commission for Countering Extremism, September 2018.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/commission-for-countering-extremism/about>

¹¹ *Counter-Extremism*, Joint Committee on Human Rights, Second Report of Session 2016-17, 20 July 2016, p.4.

¹² Jonathan Evans, *To defeat terrorism, police and spies need better tools*, Daily Telegraph, 1 July 2015.

¹³ Dominic Raab, Banning online “extremists” isn’t the answer, Daily Telegraph, 2 October 2014.

¹⁴ BBC Radio 4, interview with John Humphries, 13 May 2015.

¹⁵ Welby: Government assumes believers are just ‘a bit bonkers’, Daily Telegraph, 8 November 2016.

¹⁶ Foreword, *Study into Extremism: Terms of Reference*, Commission for Countering Extremism, September 2018, p. 5.

¹⁷ Consider the list of definitions cited by the Lead Commissioner: *Study into Extremism: Terms of Reference*, Commission for Countering Extremism, September 2018, p. 8.

¹⁸ HM Government, *Counter-Extremism Strategy*, October 2015, Cm 9148, see especially pp. 5, 7

¹⁹ “Religion” and “sexual orientation” are among nine protected characteristics, protected in law. See the Equality Act 2015. For an overview of the law from the Equality and Human Rights Commission, go to: <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/equality-act/protected-characteristics>

²⁰ *Counter-Extremism*, Joint Committee on Human Rights, Second Report of Session 2016-17, 20 July 2016, p.4.