

# Government's own legal advice says plans to outlaw 'non-violent extremism' are incompatible with free speech

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The Government's plans to ban 'non-violent extremism' are "sinking without trace", a source close to the efforts has told the [Guardian](#).

Critics including the National Secular Society and the Christian Institute have said the plans pose a serious threat to freedom of expression and that the Government cannot define 'non-violent extremism' without entrapping large numbers of people with eccentric or unorthodox views that are peacefully held.

Proposed 'extremism disruption orders' would tackle "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".

The *Guardian* reported that the Government's own legal advice agreed with critics of the proposals, finding that it could not define 'non-violent extremism'.

They quoted a source who was reportedly "close to the process" who said "The bill is sinking without trace. They cannot get a working definition of extremism – lawyers are effectively saying it's incompatible with issues like free speech."

The measures were first proposed under David Cameron, when Theresa May was still Home Secretary, but since then the Government has failed to announce concrete definitions since they were first mooted.

NSS campaigns director Stephen Evans commented: "For several years the Government had been promising to outlaw non-violent extremism, while being totally unable to define what that non-violent extremism actually is.

"We share their aspiration to tackle extremism and challenge the Islamist ideology that fuels terrorism, but the extensive delays and now the Government's own legal advice demonstrate the fundamental flaws in their approach.

"Shutting down freedom of speech and the freedom to peacefully hold unpleasant or obnoxious views does nothing to strengthen British values, in fact a draconian response would undermine them.

"We again urge the Government to drop these ill-considered proposals for 'extremism disruption orders'.

"In the meantime, all of us, including civil society organisations and citizens, have a duty to speak out and challenge extremism of all kinds, just as we would object to racism or abuse of other kinds."

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