

Government admits it's struggled to define extremism

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The government has "struggled" to define extremism, the home secretary has said, after a consultation found significant public opposition to the government's current definition.

In a [speech](#) to the Commission for Countering Extremism (CCE) last Friday, Sajid Javid said the government had "struggled to come up with a definition" of extremism.

He added that the issue was "not black and white", extremism "can be the thin end of a wedge" and "the challenge is being able to identify where an opinion crosses the line into extremism".

His remarks came as the CCE published the [results](#) of a recent call for evidence on the subject. Seventy-five per cent of public respondents to the commission said they found the government's current definition "very unhelpful" or "unhelpful".

The government's current definition is: *"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."*

National Secular Society chief executive Stephen Evans said the home secretary's remarks and the results of the CCE's consultation were "a reminder of the difficulties created by attempts to define extremism".

"The government is right to stress its commitment to democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and tolerance. But adopting a vague official definition of extremism risks undermining free expression - particularly for both those with strong religious views and those who strongly criticise religion."

The NSS [warned](#) against seeking to criminalise the expression of 'extremist' views or adopting a broad definition of extremism in [response](#) to the CCE's call for evidence in January.

The NSS also said the government should prioritise secularist principles, particularly free speech, human rights and common citizenship, in its attempts to challenge extremism.

The NSS has long resisted attempts to define extremism through its work as a member of the [Defend Free Speech](#) campaign.

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