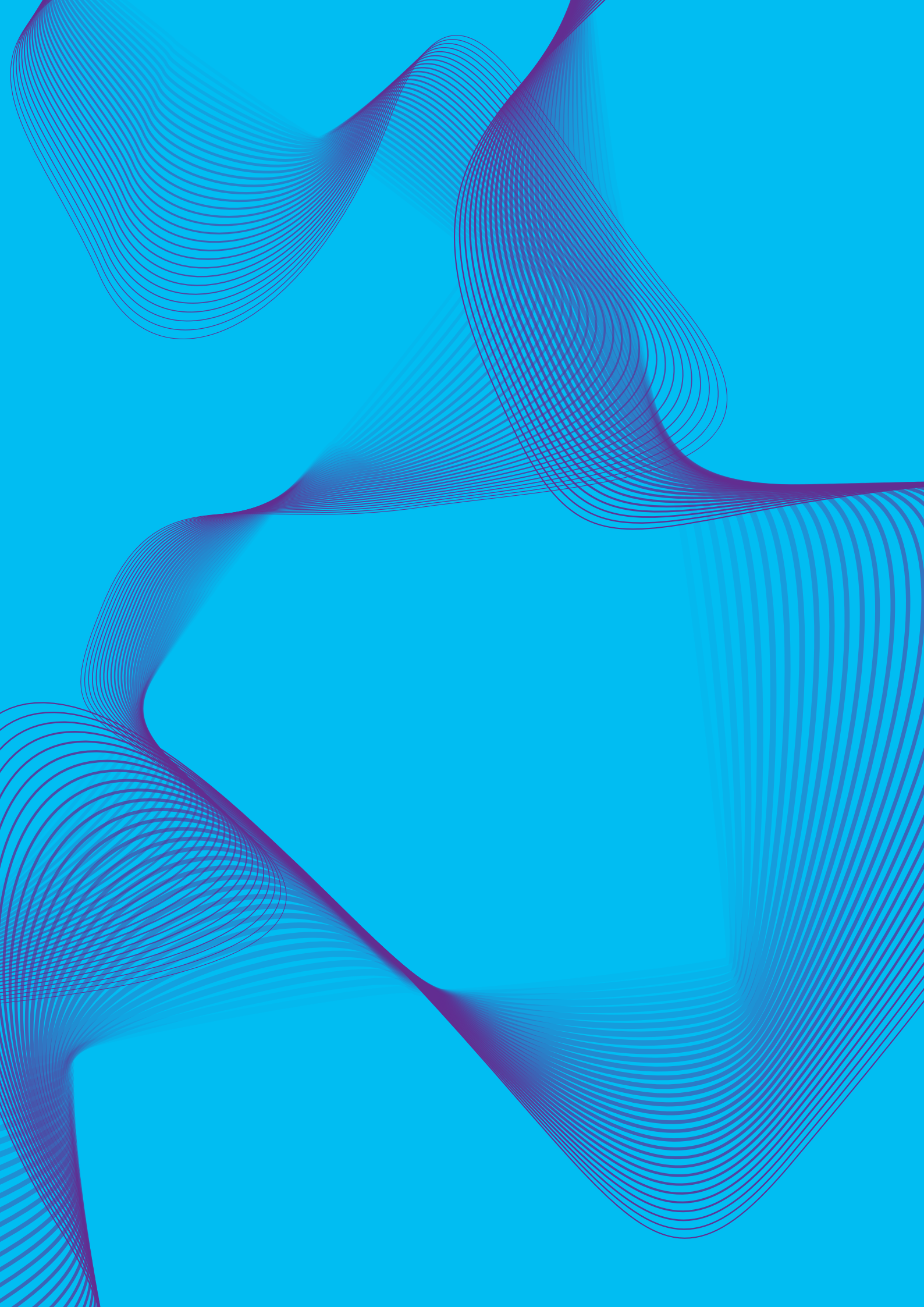


# **An analysis of the Commission for Countering Extremism's call for evidence**

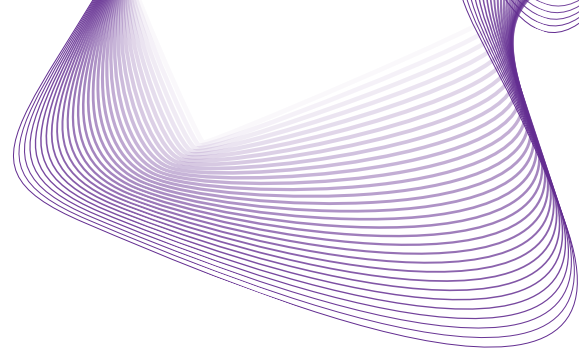
*Report 1: Public understanding of extremism*

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September 2019



# Executive summary



The Policy Institute at King's College London was asked by the Lead Commissioner for Countering Extremism, Sara Khan, to conduct an analysis of data derived through the Commission's online call for evidence which ran from November 2018 to January 2019. The call for evidence produced 2,835 responses – including 278 responses submitted by those who identified as practitioners or as responding on behalf of an organisation.

This report contains findings from the first stream of work which we conducted between April and July 2019. We were asked to analyse this data with a view to understanding public perceptions of extremism, as well as exploring the boundaries of what the public see as constituting extremism. To guide the analysis, the Commission set two research questions:

1. To what extent is there a shared public understanding of extremism?
2. Where is there agreement/disagreement on the boundaries of extremism?

## Key findings

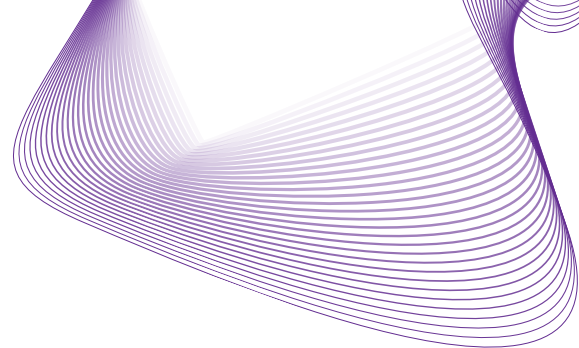
Extremism as a concept is deeply contested and difficult to define. Numerous studies show the intrinsic challenges of defining it, as well as the controversies therein. Despite this, our analysis of responses to the Commission's call for evidence shows some consensus emerging around core themes within definitions of extremism. Specifically, we found recurrent themes across responses which suggest that the public associate extremism with a set of behaviours and with a set of beliefs. Our key messages are:

- 1. Most respondents agree that extremism is difficult to define**, though very few (about 5 per cent) see a definition as impossible. Practitioners were more likely to see a definition as attainable, and more likely to see the Government's existing definition as helpful.
- 2. Despite the difficulties of definition, there were recurrent patterns within respondents' answers** that suggest many see some behaviours and some beliefs as core characteristics of extremism.
- 3. Respondents identified more than 100 different behaviours in their descriptions of extremism.** We categorised these into four broad categories that represent overarching behaviours that respondents mention in their descriptions and definitions of extremism:
  - a. Use or threat of violence;
  - b. Inciting violence;
  - c. Attempted denial of rights, freedoms or democracy;
  - d. Hatred, harassment or persecution of others.

**4. Respondents identified more than 80 different themes relating to, or underscored by, beliefs and opinions in their descriptions of extremism.** We categorised these into identified four categories:

- a. Beliefs that advocate the restriction of other people's beliefs, freedoms and/or democracy;
- b. Beliefs that mobilise ideology to support and/or justify harmful behaviour;
- c. Beliefs that are beyond commonly accepted mainstream societal and political norms;
- d. Beliefs that support the use or threat of violence.

# Introduction



The Policy Institute at King's College London was asked by the Lead Commissioner for Countering Extremism, Sara Khan, to conduct an analysis of data produced through their online call for evidence which ran from November 2018 to January 2019. The call for evidence produced 2,835 responses from members of the public and practitioners. The Policy Institute was commissioned to conduct two pieces of analysis on the dataset: first, an analysis of the public's understanding of extremism; and second, an analysis of the activities that practitioners have observed as extremism, the tactics they see extremists using to achieve their objectives, as well as the harms that emerge from extremist behaviour and activity.<sup>1</sup>

This report contains findings from the first stream of work which we conducted between April and July 2019. We were asked to analyse this data with a view to understanding public perceptions of extremism, as well as exploring the boundaries of what the public see as constituting extremism. To guide the analysis, the Commission set two research questions:

1. To what extent is there a shared public understanding of extremism?
2. Where is there agreement/disagreement on the boundaries of extremism?

At the Commission's request, we focused on answers to two questions in the call for evidence:

- Q33. Can you describe extremism? [Yes / No / Not Sure]
- Q34. If you said "yes" or "not sure", please describe what extremism looks like to you. (100 word limit)

We worked with Ipsos MORI to code the free text comments and responses provided in responses to Q34. In practice, this meant identifying a series of core themes ("codes") and tagging responses with these codes where themes were similar, or creating new codes where new themes emerged. The process continued iteratively until all responses had been read; these codes were then quality assured by other members of the research team. A fuller description of the methodology can be found in the technical annex at the end of this report.

## About the sample

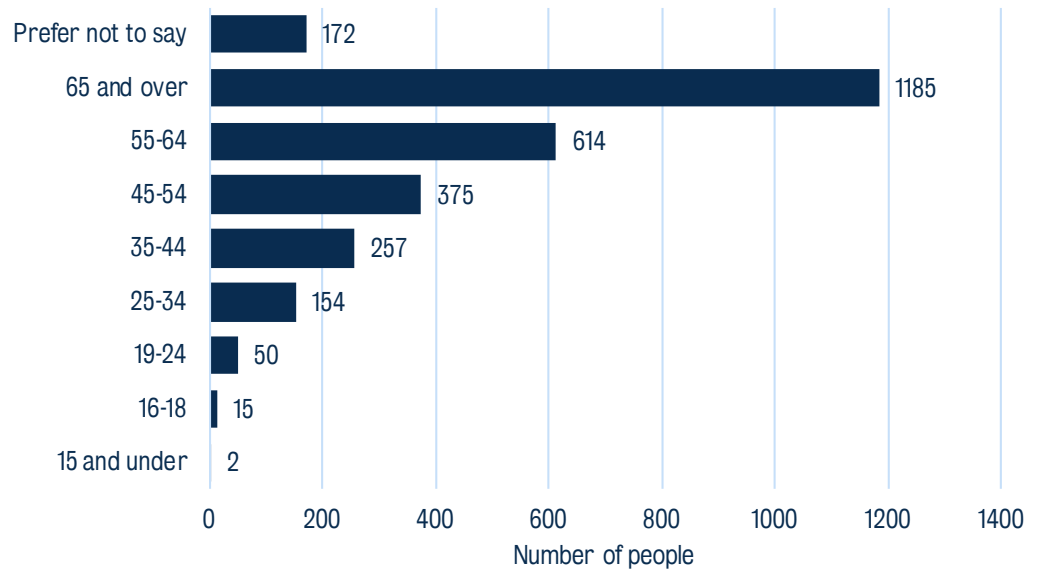
The Commission's call for evidence received 2,835 responses from the public, 2,580 responses from members of the public, and 255 from practitioners or organisations who identified themselves as working in, or on, countering extremism (244 online, and 11 offline responses).<sup>2</sup> Most respondents came from the UK, and particularly from the South of England. A small number of respondents came from outside of the UK: two from Europe (excluding the UK), and the 8 from the rest of the world. The

<sup>1</sup> See *An analysis of the Commission for Countering Extremism's call for evidence – Report 2: Tactics and harms*

<sup>2</sup> There is a difference in the number of practitioners' responses between this report, and our other report. Only 11 of the email respondents answered this question, in contrast to the 34 respondents to other questions on which we focus in the second report. We did not receive any demographic data for these 11 respondents.

majority of respondents to the call for evidence were over the age of 55, and identified as male (1,712 or 60 per cent); 1,033 (or 37 per cent) of respondents identified as female, and a small proportion of respondents (68) who preferred not to say or did not identify as male or female (11).

**FIGURE 1: RESPONDENTS BY AGE**

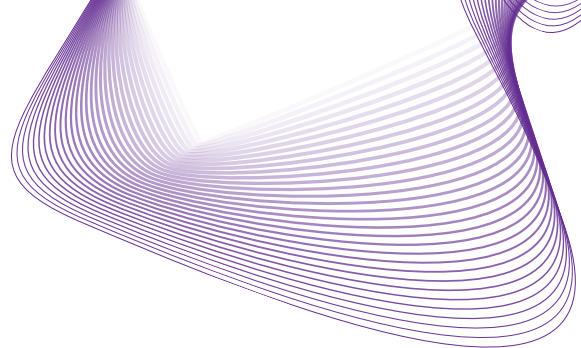


One feature of the sample was that a large number of responses were received from members and supporters of the Christian Institute, which had released a proforma that provided guidance for people to help them with their responses.<sup>3</sup> For Q33, the Christian Institute stated that “Extremism is a vague and subjective concept that is difficult to define” and suggested clicking on “Not Sure”. For Q34, they suggested:

“You may wish to make some of the following points, in your own words:

- ♦ Say you are not sure it is possible to define extremism, especially ‘non-violent extremism’, in a way that will be acceptable to most people. One person’s extremism can be another person’s mainstream belief.
- ♦ The term extremism is cheapened because so many people use it to insult and marginalise those who disagree with them.
- ♦ Great social reformers of the past were labelled ‘extremist’ simply because they shook up the consensus of their day.
- ♦ Extremism must be more than holding strong or traditional views, or trying to encourage others to share those views.
- ♦ It is very difficult to define non-violent extremism in a way that respects freedom of

<sup>3</sup> Available here: <https://www.christian.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Extremism-Consultation.pdf>

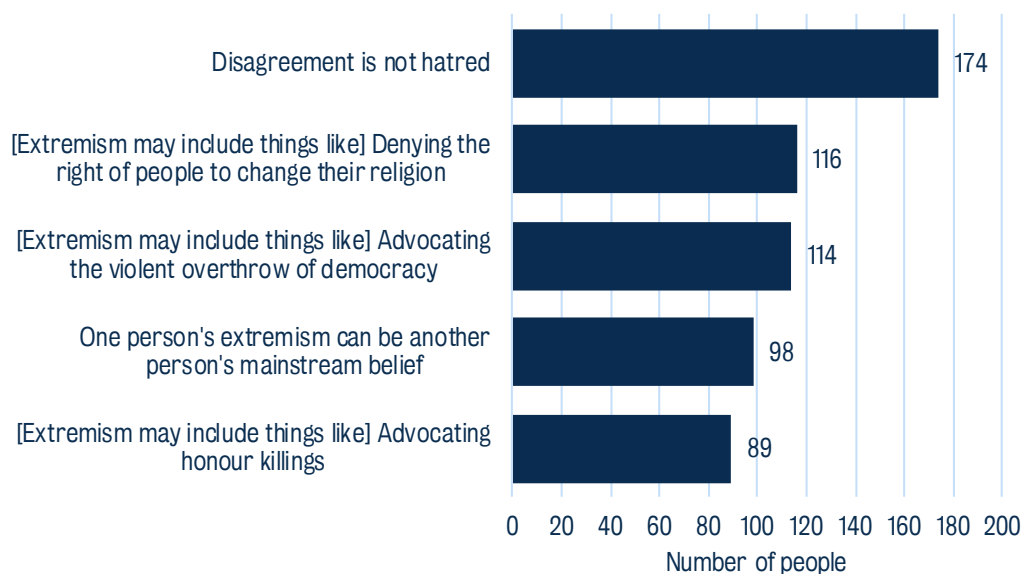


speech. Efforts to tackle extremism should focus on the real problem of those who encourage or support terrorism or violence.

- ♦ Sometimes unpopular ideas are just what a society needs. Democracy needs dissent, and silencing it undermines the foundations of a free society.
- ♦ Disagreement is not hatred. People must be free to engage in open and vigorous debate about ideas, beliefs and lifestyles.
- ♦ Genuine extremism may include things like:
  - ♦ advocating the violent overthrow of democracy;
  - ♦ denying the right of people to change their religion;
  - ♦ advocating honour killings;
  - ♦ calling for the deaths of British soldiers, police etc;
  - ♦ following a leader, or being part of a group, that advocates violence;
  - ♦ promising spiritual paradise as a reward for murder.

Whilst welcoming the engagement from the Christian Institute, the Commission were also keen to ensure they had a balanced and representative view of the public's view of extremism. The Commission was therefore keen to understand the extent to which the Christian Institute's responses shaped and/or influenced the wider picture of the public's understanding of extremism. To do this, we used the Christian Institute's proforma to identify respondents who appeared to be using the proforma in their responses.

**FIGURE 2:** CHRISTIAN INSTITUTE MOST STATED RESPONSES



As Figure 2 shows, there seem to be a large number of responses from the Christian Institute, and one which raised particular responses and themes. We used this form to identify Christian Institute campaign responses to the definition of extremism question, and to identify whether this significantly shifted the overall findings of the consultation; our methodology focuses purely on this question alone, meaning that we may have overlooked or omitted Christian Institute respondents who did not answer here, or who produced their own answers. To be clear, we did not isolate these respondents from our final analysis; however, we were interested in the extent, if any, to which Christian Institute responses affected the overarching picture of the public's understanding of extremism. In the charts that follow, we have included a subcategory called "Campaign", to show how this cohort of respondents answered specific questions.

In our view, although a significant number of respondents seem to have followed the proforma, the Christian Institute's responses does not substantially influence the picture of extremism we have drawn out through our analysis.



# The public understanding of extremism



Extremism is a highly contested and slippery concept, and one that arouses many emotions. As our findings show, extremism is still seen as a concept that is difficult to define, and one whose existing definition is not helpful. That said, our analysis also shows that there are areas of consensus and agreement, even within the uncertainty around definitions. There are real areas of consensus over what we might see as the core elements of extremism – in particular, the link between extremism and certain types of beliefs and a second link between extremism and specific behaviours.

To be clear, we are not suggesting that holding some beliefs is tantamount to being an extremist; nor that engaging specific behaviours is equivalent to declaring oneself an extremist. As we attempt to show below, public definitions of extremism show common patterns of references to behaviours and beliefs. These patterns run through the responses to the call for evidence and as such can be seen as central themes in the public's understanding of extremism. It goes without saying that a more detailed study, with a larger or more representative sample, might yield different results and answers. But, at the very least, our analysis suggests there is emerging consensus over that the public understand extremism through a set of behaviours and beliefs.

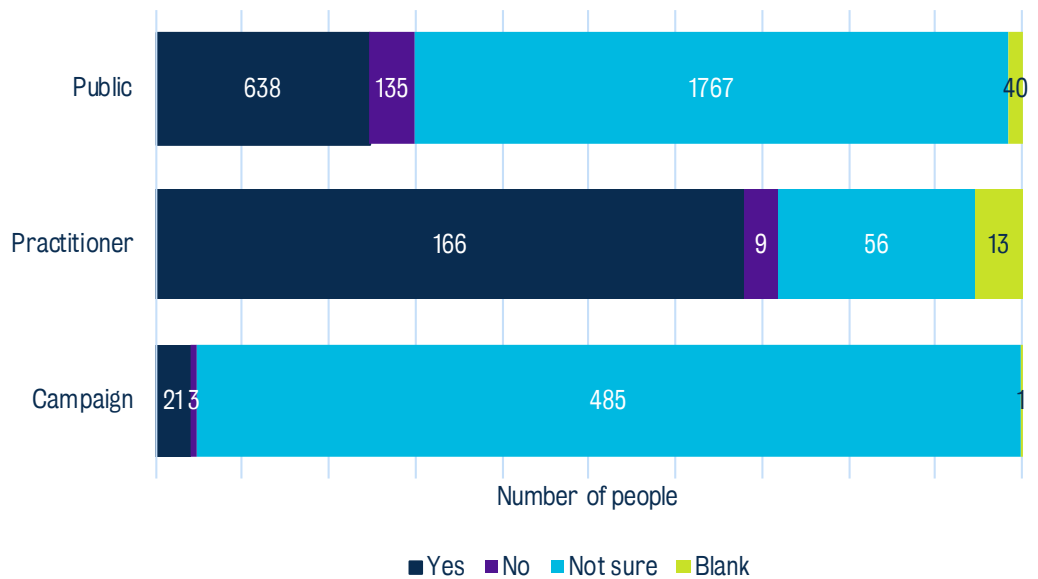
## Defining extremism

The overriding sense from responses to the call for evidence is that extremism is difficult to define, no doubt reflecting the highly contested nature of extremism as a social phenomenon (see Figure 3). Many respondents find extremism hard to define and see existing definitions as unhelpful. As one practitioner described it,

“Extremism is a multi-dimensional continuum of beliefs and behaviours, rather than something that can be easily summed up in a definition. Religious or politically hard-line behaviours can shade into extremism, with a difference between belief (which cannot be policed) and behaviour (which can).”

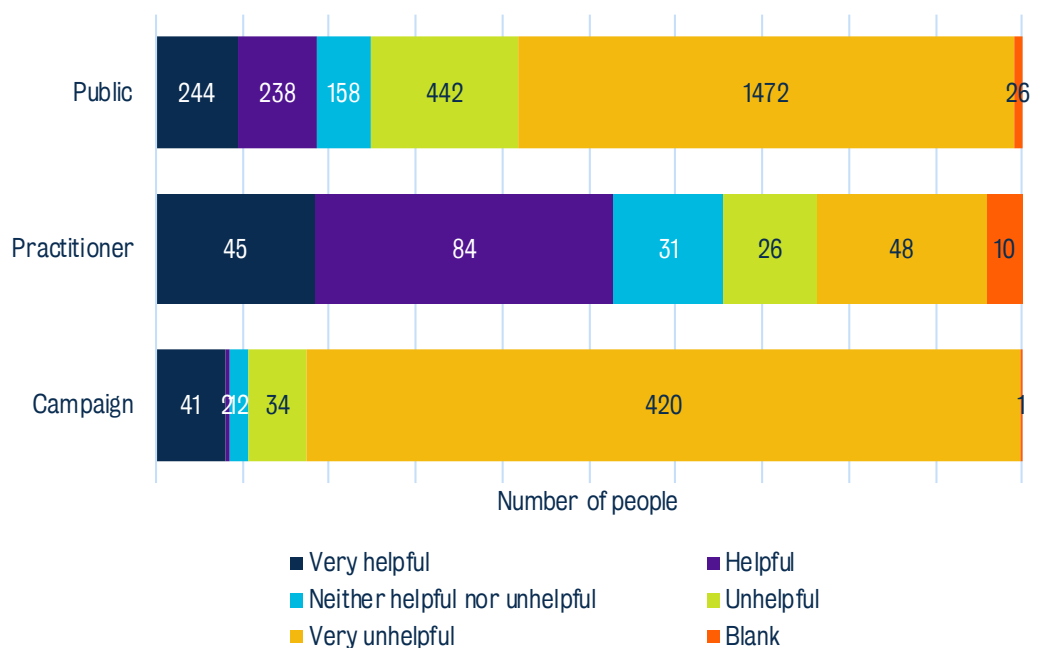
Despite this, of the 2,824 respondents to this question (there were 2,835 respondents in total), only 144 (about 5 per cent) felt that extremism was impossible to define (see Figure 3). Of the public, two thirds of respondents to the call for evidence were not sure whether extremism could be defined, in contrast to about a quarter of respondents who felt a definition would be feasible. Respondents from the Christian Institute overwhelmingly felt that unable to define extremism. Practitioners, however, felt very differently about defining extremism - nearly 70 per cent of practitioners felt that they were able to define extremism.

**FIGURE 3: RESPONDENTS' VIEWS ON WHETHER EXTREMISM CAN BE DEFINED**

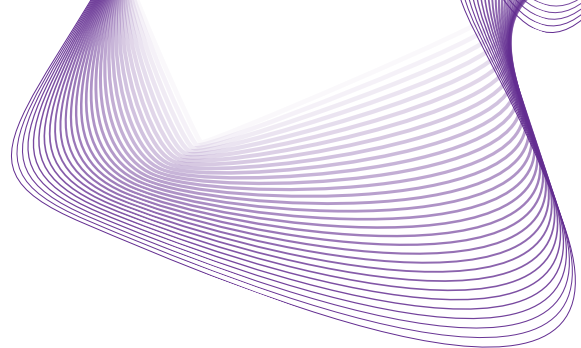


As Figure 4 shows, practitioners were more likely to be positive about the government’s definition of extremism.<sup>4</sup> When asked whether they found the definition helpful, about half of practitioners found it helpful or very helpful. In contrast, the public was more sceptical with around three quarters finding the definition unhelpful or very unhelpful; this was even more stark for Christian Institute respondents, of whom 90 per cent found the definition unhelpful or very unhelpful.

**FIGURE 4: RESPONDENTS' VIEWS OF THE GOVERNMENT'S DEFINITION OF EXTREMISM**



<sup>4</sup> The definition used in the question was derived from the 2015 Government Counter-Extremism Strategy: “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”.



## Behaviours

Respondents mentioned more than 100 different behaviours in their descriptions of extremism. Some mentioned illegal behaviours such as violence against women, use of weapons, murder and terrorism; others talked of inciting violence, advocating terrorism and intimidation; a whole pattern emerged around the suppression of other people’s rights and freedoms, with respondents seeing extremism as the attempt to deny people their rights and opportunities.

We categorised the myriad different behaviours into four broad categories (Figure 5). These categories represent overarching behaviours that respondents mention in their descriptions and definitions of extremism:

- a. Use or threat of violence;
- b. Inciting violence;
- c. Attempted denial of rights, freedoms or democracy;
- d. Hatred, harassment or persecution of others.

To be clear, engaging in one of these does not equate to being an extremist; rather, these are the behaviours that respondents repeatedly described in their definitions of extremism.

**FIGURE 5: EXTREMIST BEHAVIOURS**

1. Use or threat of violence	2. Inciting violence	3. Attempted denial of rights, freedoms or democracy	4. Hatred, harassment or persecution of others
Behaviours that involve the use or threat of violence, terrorism or criminal behaviour	Behaviours that attempt to incite or support violence, terrorism or criminal behaviour	Behaviours that restrict freedoms and democracy and/or are outside of reasonable behaviour	Behaviours that involve hatred, harassment, intimidation and/or persecution of others
Ex.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Terrorism</li> <li>- Breaking the law</li> <li>- Violence against women</li> <li>- Torture</li> </ul>	Ex.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Supporting the killing of other people</li> <li>- Encouraging rape</li> <li>- Advocating breaking the law</li> </ul>	Ex. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Actions that are intolerant</li> <li>- Actions that deny human rights</li> <li>- Actions that suppress democracy</li> </ul>	Ex.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hate mail</li> <li>- Hatred towards different cultures</li> <li>- Harassment of individuals</li> </ul>
<b>2170 respondents</b>	<b>1214 respondents</b>	<b>1156 respondents</b>	<b>844 respondents</b>

Of the four categories, descriptions of extremism most often contained concepts relating to the use of violence. As Figures 5 and 6 show, 77 per cent of respondents mentioned the use of violence in their definitions of extremism. For instance, one respondent stated that “Extremism must surely include a threat (implicit or explicit) of violence or harm to life/property”. As another respondent said, “I think extremism is ideas which promote violence”. Another respondent wrote:

“Speech, written words or actions that dehumanise, and incite violence or death to someone or a group of people. Not being open to listening to other opinions/ views/facts. Shutting down or attempting to shut down speech which consists of

differing viewpoints, that does not dehumanise, incite violence or death.”

Three other common themes emerged in descriptions of extremism (see Figures 5 and 6). The first was around inciting and advocating violence and criminality (just over 4 in 10 of respondents). The second was relating to behaviours which attempted to deny or suppressed other groups or constricted their rights and freedoms (about 4 in 10 respondents). In the first category, we found responses such as:

“To me extremism is linked to violence or terrorism. It would be either the carrying out of terrorist or violent actions against a section of society, or the verbal incitement to carry out such acts of violence or terrorism.”

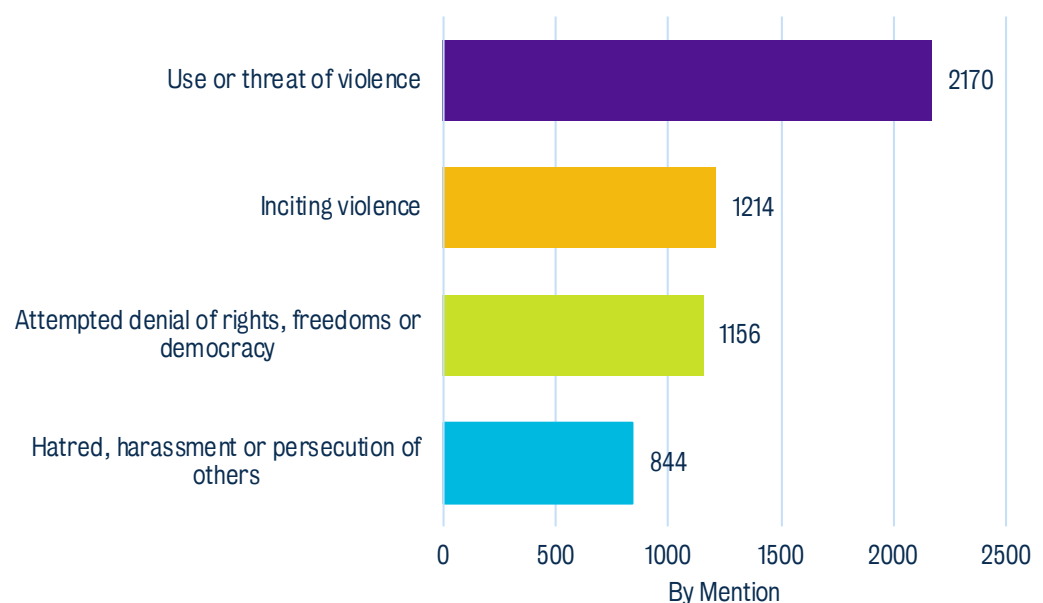
In the second category, we saw responses such as:

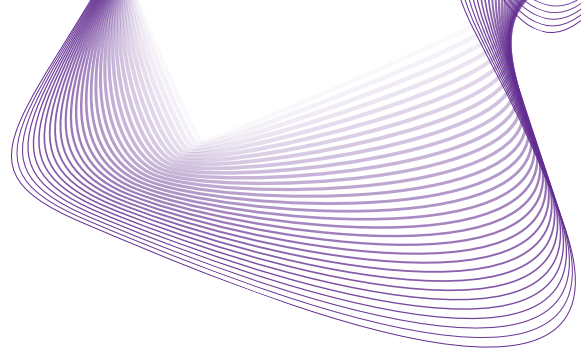
“Extremism is activity that is harmful in some way to others, often because of the use of violence. It might involve actual acts of physical violence to individuals, to the police or the army or to society at large. It might deny the right of some to change their religion. It must mean more than holding strongly held beliefs as labelling such views as extremist could endanger freedom of speech.”

The third group was smaller (about 30 per cent respondents mentioned it), but no less important and related to hatred, harassment or persecution of others. For instance,

“Anyone promoting hate that has been practiced recently by certain members of society attempting to gag the legitimate voices of society. Also those who attempt to take away the freedom of individuals and groups with whom they disagree. Anyone who seeks to harm, physically, mentally or emotionally any other person.”

**FIGURE 6: EXTREMIST BEHAVIOURS BY MENTION**

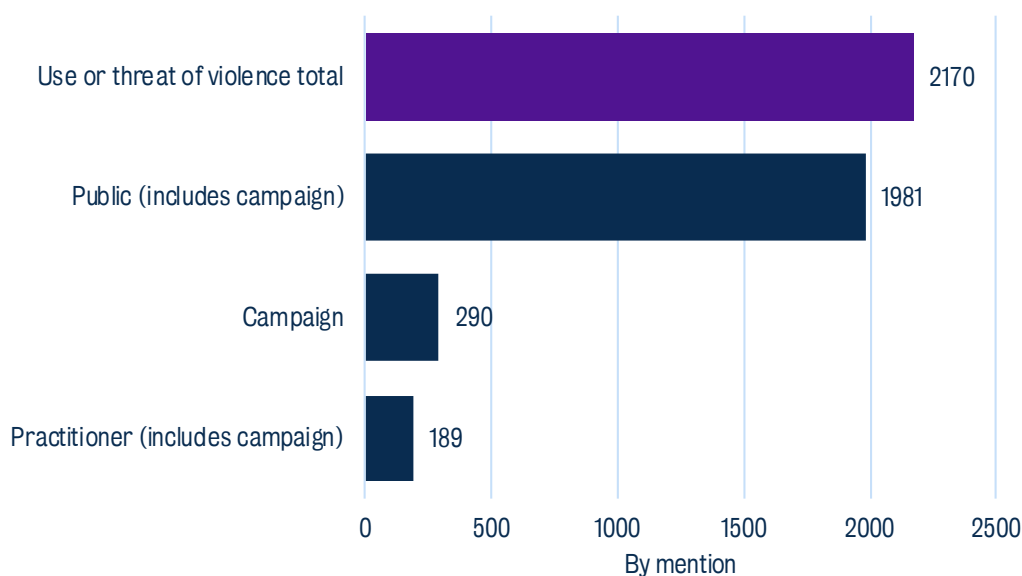




We wanted to test whether any of these themes emerged in the responses of particular categories of respondent, in part to see whether there were differences in how different subsamples articulated their definitions of extremism.

As Figure 7 and 8 show, descriptions which mentioned the “Use or threat of violence” were equally likely to be from practitioner respondents as public respondents (about three quarters of each subsample included this in their definition). Campaign respondents, however, were less likely to refer to violence in their descriptions (only about half of respondents mentioned it).

**FIGURE 7: USE OR THREAT OF VIOLENCE – BY RESPONDENT GROUP**

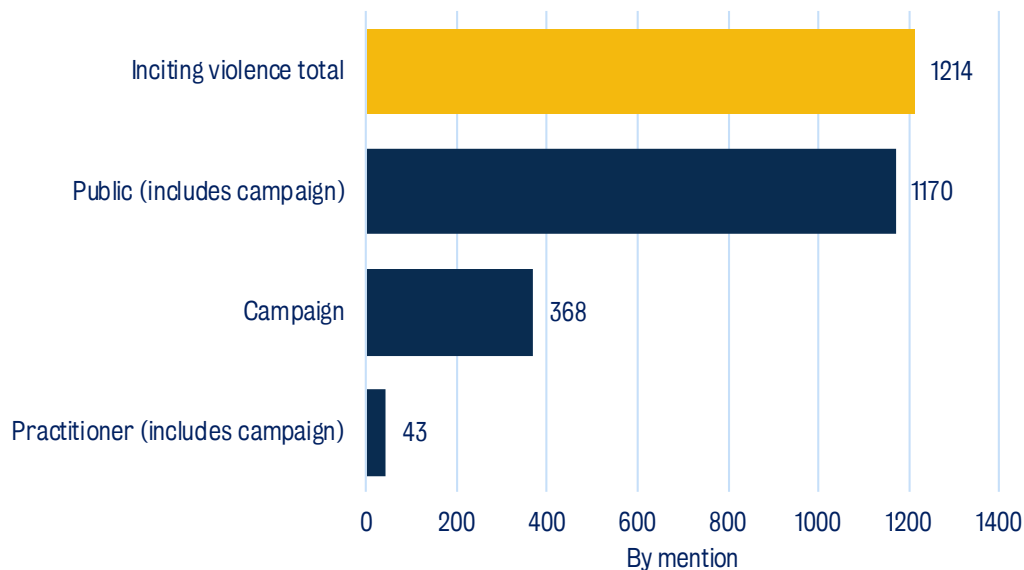


**FIGURE 8: USE OR THREAT OF VIOLENCE – PERCENTAGE BREAKDOWN PER SUBGROUP**

SUBGROUP	MENTIONS/RESPONDENT SUBTOTAL
Public (N=2580)	77%
Campaign (N=511)	57%
Practitioner (N=255)	74%

As Figures 9 and 10 show, references to “Inciting violence” were more likely to come from the campaign and from members of the public than from practitioners. About three quarters of campaign respondents and half of the public respondents described extremism as involving the glorification or incitement of violence; by contrast less than 1 in 6 practitioners mentioned this in their descriptions of extremism.

**FIGURE 9: INCITING VIOLENCE – BY RESPONDENT GROUP**

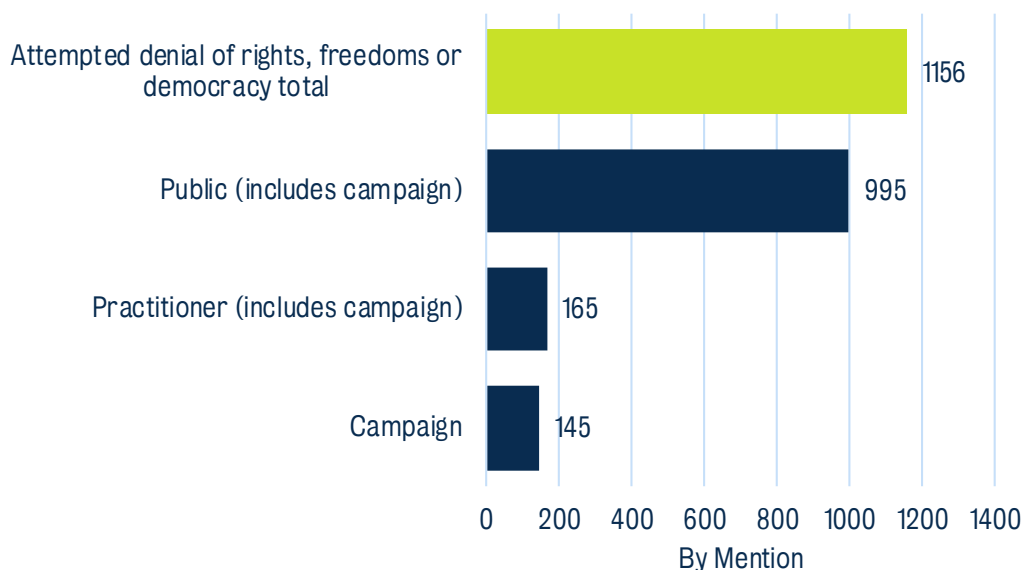


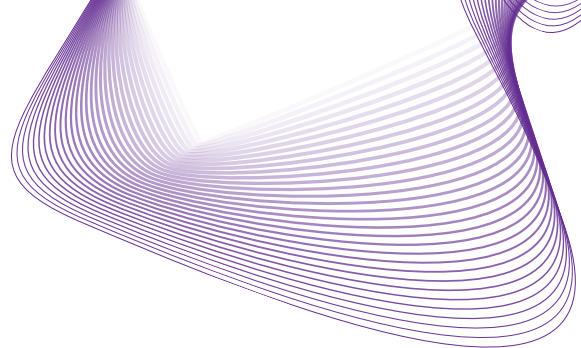
**FIGURE 10: INCITING VIOLENCE – PERCENTAGE BREAKDOWN PER SUBGROUP**

SUBGROUP	MENTIONS/RESPONDENT SUBTOTAL
Public (N=2580)	45%
Campaign (N=511)	72%
Practitioner (N=255)	16%

Figures 11 and 12 show that practitioners were much more likely to mention attempted denial of rights, freedoms or democracy in their descriptions (about two thirds in contrast with members of the public and campaign respondents were less likely (38 per cent and 28 per cent respectively mentioned suppression). As

**FIGURE 11: ATTEMPTED DENIAL OF RIGHTS, FREEDOMS OR DEMOCRACY – BY RESPONDENT GROUP**



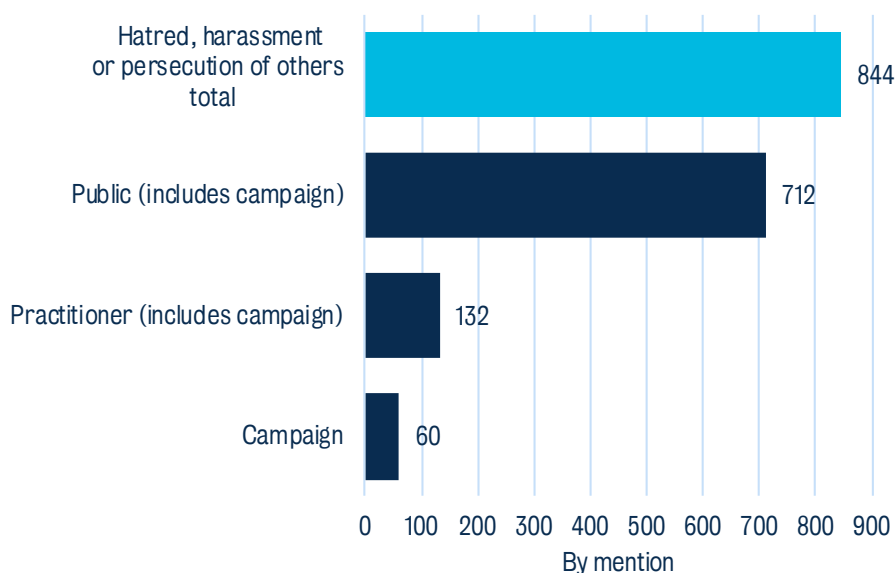


**FIGURE 12:** ATTEMPTED DENIAL OF RIGHTS, FREEDOMS OR DEMOCRACY - PERCENTAGE BREAKDOWN PER SUBGROUP

SUBGROUP	MENTIONS/RESPONDENT SUBTOTAL
Public (N=2580)	38%
Campaign (N=511)	28%
Practitioner (N=255)	65%

Figures 13 and 14 show, just over a quarter of respondents mentioned some form of “harassment or persecution of others” in their descriptions. Practitioners were more likely to include references to than members of the public, with more than half of practitioner responses including some reference to hatred, in contrast to about a quarter of public respondents (and a tenth of campaign respondents).

**FIGURE 13:** HATRED, HARASSMENT OR PERSECUTION OF OTHERS – BY RESPONDENT GROUP



**FIGURE 14:** HATRED, HARASSMENT OR PERSECUTION OF OTHERS – PERCENTAGE BREAKDOWN PER SUBGROUP

SUBGROUP	MENTIONS/RESPONDENT SUBTOTAL
Public (N=2580)	27%
Campaign (N=511)	11%
Practitioner (N=255)	51%

The differing responses across different subsamples suggests different perceptions and understandings of extremism between practitioners and the public. While many discuss the use of violence in their descriptions, there is a notable difference in attitudes the other three categories of behaviours: for the public, there appears to be a stronger link between extremism and inciting or advocating violence. For practitioners, extremism is more about hatred and suppression, than calling for violence.

There may be a variety of reasons for this. For many, extremism clearly encapsulates the use of violence, perhaps because the use of violence is more visible to a larger audience. It is interesting to see that the public seem to associate extremism with inciting violence; this may reflect recent cases in the media of individuals encouraging others to adopt violence; it may reflect a wider concern about those who are advocating violence online. Certainly, it would be interesting and useful to investigate further. For practitioners, the focus seems to be on the less visible, more long-term and, arguably, subtler aspects of extremism: driving or deepening hatred between people and groups, and suppressing or marginalising people and groups.

## Beliefs

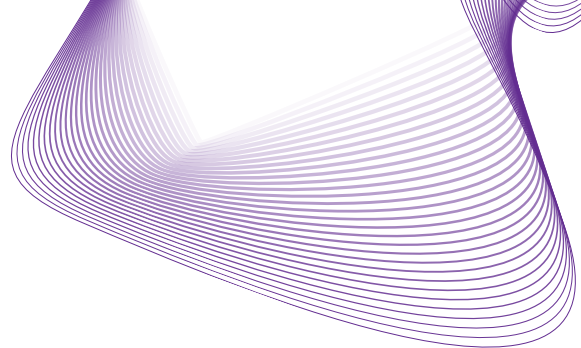
A second pattern around beliefs emerged across definitions of extremism. Respondents mentioned more than 80 different themes relating to, or underscored by, beliefs and opinions in their descriptions of extremism. For some, extremism entails and is driven by ideology, including political, religious or social agendas; for others, extremism is oppositional: it sits against and in conflict with other religions, political stances and freedoms; for yet others, extremism involves supporting beliefs that inherently encourage acts of violence and hatred against others.

As with other elements of our codebook, we attempted to aggregate the 80 subthemes into broader overarching categories (see Figure 15). As with this process in other elements of this report, this does not mean that holding one (or more) of these beliefs makes one an extremist. What it does mean is that patterns around these beliefs emerged repeatedly in the respondents' descriptions of extremism. Specifically, we identified four categories:

1. Beliefs that advocate the restriction of other people's beliefs, freedoms and/or democracy;
2. Beliefs that mobilise ideology to support and/or justify harmful behaviour;
3. Beliefs that are beyond commonly accepted mainstream societal and political norms;
4. Beliefs that support the use or threat of violence.

Figure 16 shows two themes around beliefs were relatively common in descriptions of extremism: those beliefs that mobilise ideology to support and/or justify harmful behaviour, and those that advocate the restriction of other people's beliefs, freedoms and/or democracy. In the first of these categories, for instance, we saw:





**FIGURE 15:**  
CATEGORISATION OF  
EXTREMIST BELIEFS

<b>1. Beliefs that advocate the restriction of other people's beliefs, freedoms and/or democracy</b>	<b>2. Beliefs that mobilise ideology to support and/or justify harmful behaviour</b>	<b>3. Beliefs that are beyond commonly accepted mainstream societal and political norms</b>	<b>4. Beliefs that support the use or threat of violence</b>
Eg: - Beliefs that are opposed to democracy - Views that are opposed to human rights	Eg: - Opinions that are motivated by an ideology - Beliefs that are motivated by social values, eg feminism	Eg: - Beliefs that consider others to be inferior - Opinions that are radical	Eg: - Opinions that are outside of the law - Views that support public disorder
<b>886</b>	<b>876</b>	<b>646</b>	<b>192</b>

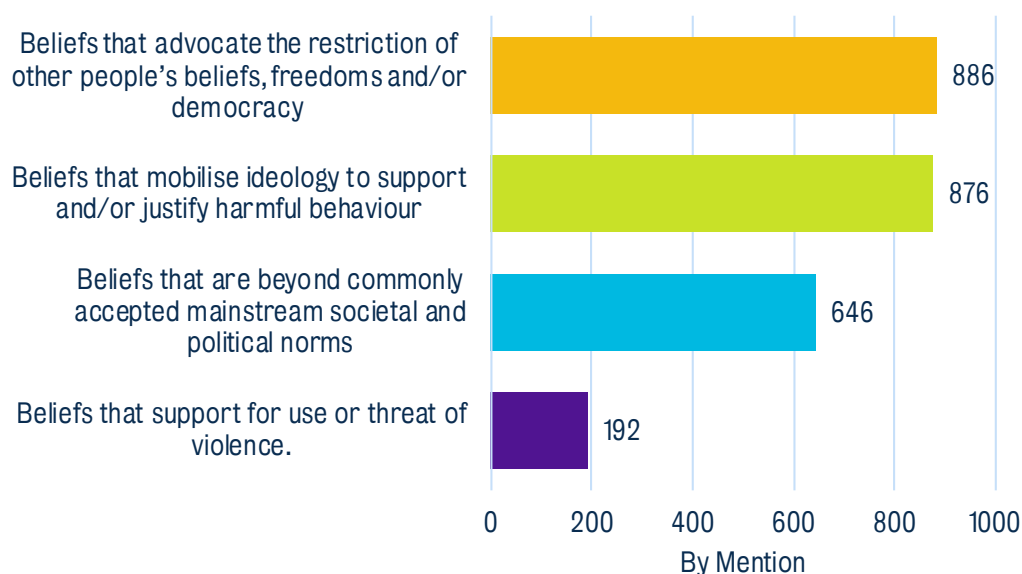
“An ideology which calls for the violent extermination or ‘ethnic cleansing’ of those who do not subscribe to it. Violent action has to be a key part of the definition”

In the second, respondents described a closing down of other peoples’ freedom:

“Behaviour and thinking usually, but not exclusively, inspired by religious ideologies which strongly contradicts established Western values such as freedom of speech, gender equality and religious freedom.”

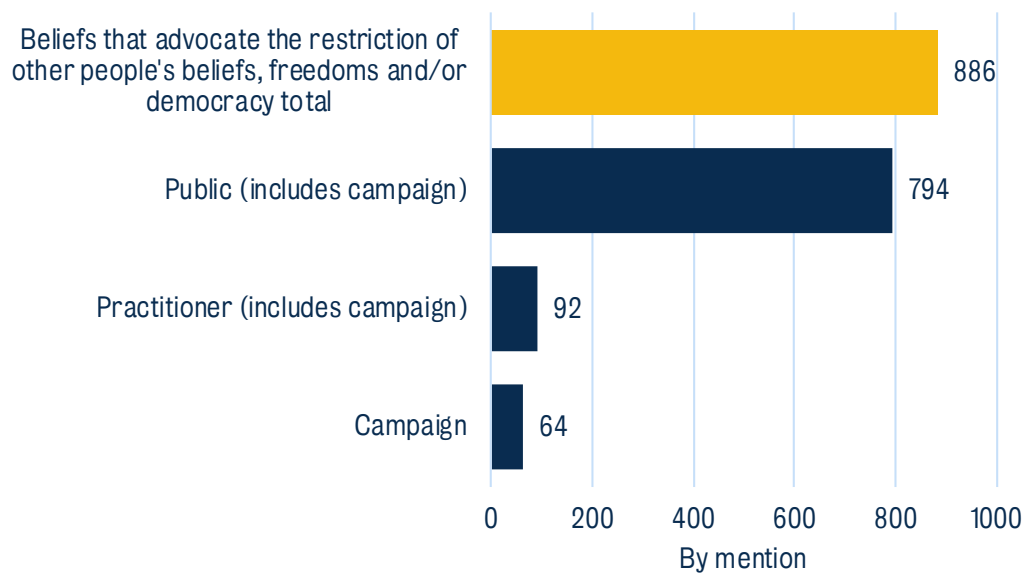
A third – and perhaps more complex – theme emerged relating to beliefs that respondents saw as being “intolerant”, “unreasonable or immoral”; we categorised these as “beyond commonly accepted mainstream societal and political norms”. A much smaller group mentioned beliefs that support the use or threat of violence.

**FIGURE 16:** EXTREMIST BELIEFS BY MENTION



As with behaviours, we were interested in ascertaining whether practitioners and the public configured their descriptions of extremism in similar ways. To do this, we explored each belief category according to the public, practitioners, and Christian Institute respondents. Respondents who described extremism as involving the restriction of other people’s beliefs, freedoms and/or democracy were just as likely to be members of the public as they were practitioners (see Figures 17 and 18).

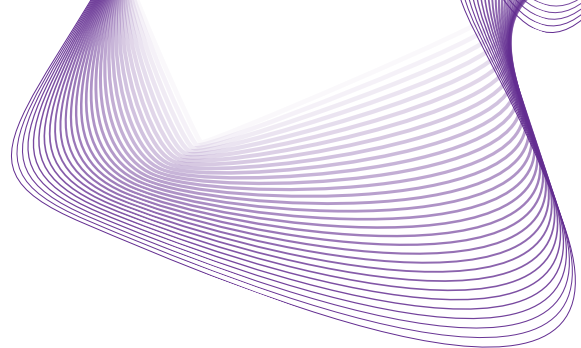
**FIGURE 17:** BELIEFS THAT ADVOCATE THE RESTRICTION OF OTHER PEOPLE’S BELIEFS – RESPONDENT BREAKDOWN



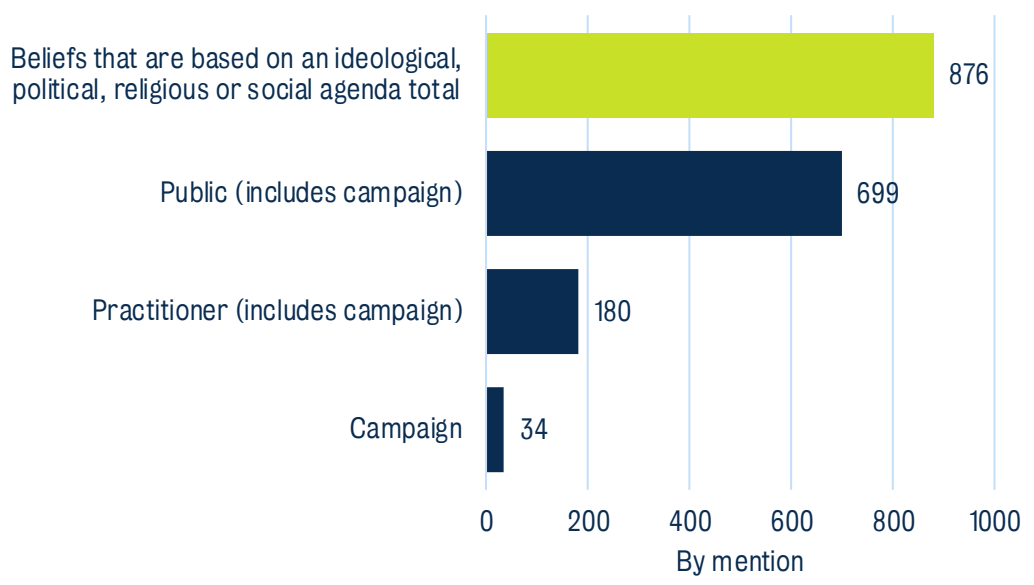
**FIGURE 18:** BELIEFS THAT ADVOCATE THE RESTRICTION OF OTHER PEOPLE’S BELIEFS – PERCENTAGE BREAKDOWN PER SUBGROUP

SUBGROUP	MENTIONS/RESPONDENT SUBTOTAL
Public (N=2580)	31%
Campaign (N=511)	18%
Practitioner (N=255)	22%

As Figures 19 and 20 show, practitioners however, were much more likely to describe extremism in terms of beliefs mobilise ideology to support and/or justify harmful behaviour, with nearly three quarters mentioning this in their definition. In contrast, only a quarter of the public and a very small proportion (just over 1 in 20) of campaign respondents mentioned this.



**FIGURE 19:** BELIEFS BASED ON AN IDEOLOGICAL, POLITICAL, RELIGIOUS OR SOCIAL AGENDA – RESPONDENT BREAKDOWN

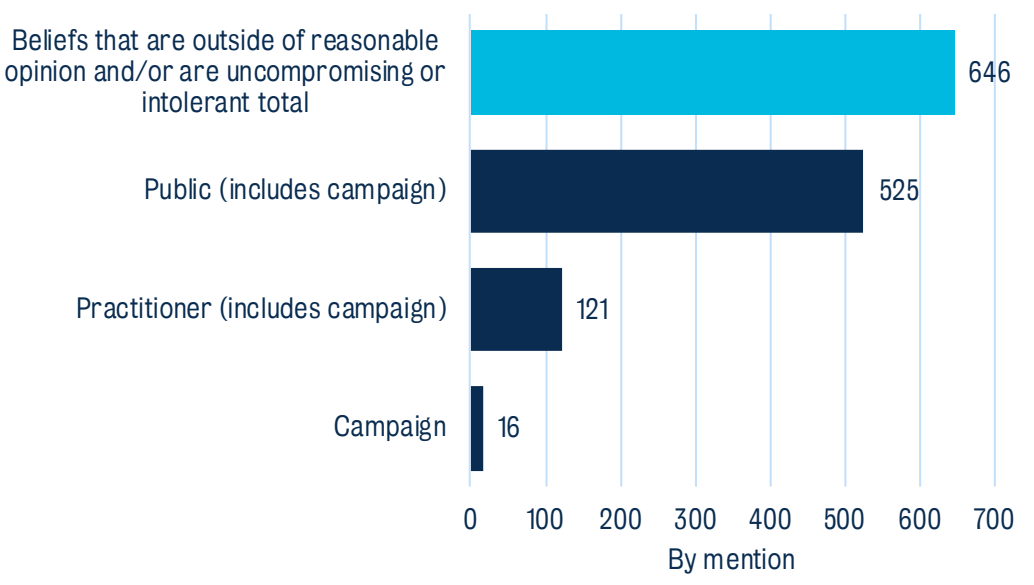


**FIGURE 20:** BELIEFS BASED ON AN IDEOLOGICAL, POLITICAL, RELIGIOUS OR SOCIAL AGENDA – RESPONDENT BREAKDOWN

SUBGROUP	MENTIONS/RESPONDENT SUBTOTAL
Public (N=2580)	27%
Campaign (N=511)	6%
Practitioner (N=255)	70%

As Figures 21 and 22 show, about a fifth of public respondents saw extremism as constituting beliefs that are outside of reasonable opinion and/or are uncompromising or intolerant. Practitioners were twice as likely to see extremism as consisting of something fundamentally against societal norms; by contrast, campaign respondents were very unlikely to see this, with only a handful mentioning it in their responses.

**FIGURE 21:** BELIEFS THAT ARE OUTSIDE OF REASONABLE OPINION AND/OR ARE UNCOMPROMISING OR INTOLERANT – BY RESPONDENT BREAKDOWN



**FIGURE 22:** BELIEFS THAT ARE OUTSIDE OF REASONABLE OPINION AND/OR ARE UNCOMPROMISING OR INTOLERANT – PERCENTAGE BREAKDOWN PER SUBGROUP

SUBGROUP	MENTIONS/RESPONDENT SUBTOTAL
Public (N=2580)	20%
Campaign (N=511)	3%
Practitioner (N=255)	43%

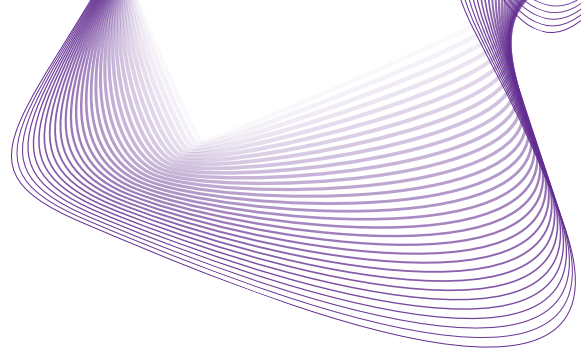
## The boundaries of extremism

In the previous sections we have looked at where there was broad agreement across and within groups who responded to the call for evidence. The Commission also asked us to identify what the boundaries of extremism might be – what we termed the “grey areas”.

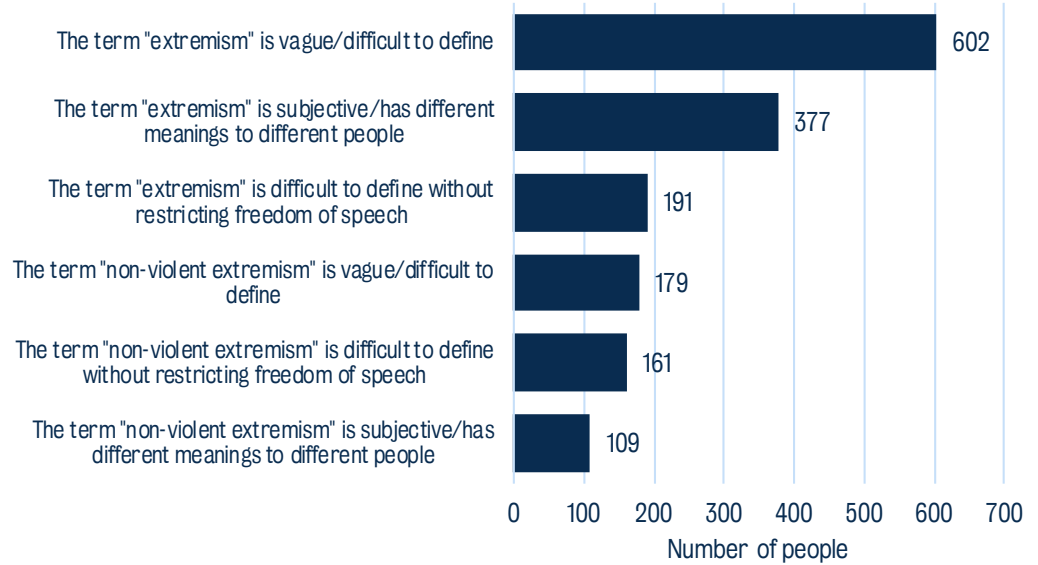
This is a challenging task for our approach, which overtly seeks to capture similar ideas across multiple responses. However, we saw areas of conflict and contestation emerge as respondents discussed behaviours and beliefs that were perfectly legal, but morally repugnant. Levels of uncertainty increased as these drifted towards those behaviours and beliefs that were distasteful, or unpleasant. In our view, it is this spectrum that makes identifying a clear boundary of what is “extremist” and what is not very difficult to ascertain.

It is probably what drives some to prefer what one might term a “relativist” approach towards extremism – namely that it is a matter of perspective and therefore defies definition (see Figure 23). It may also be why many respondents preferred to define extremism in terms of what it was *not*, rather than what it was (see Figure 24). It may also be why there was such support for definitions of extremism which focused on social norms and mores – those definitions that extremism consists of a set of ideas or behaviours that go against the “mainstream”. From viewing disagreement as “healthy”, to it being “more than just holding traditional or strong views”.

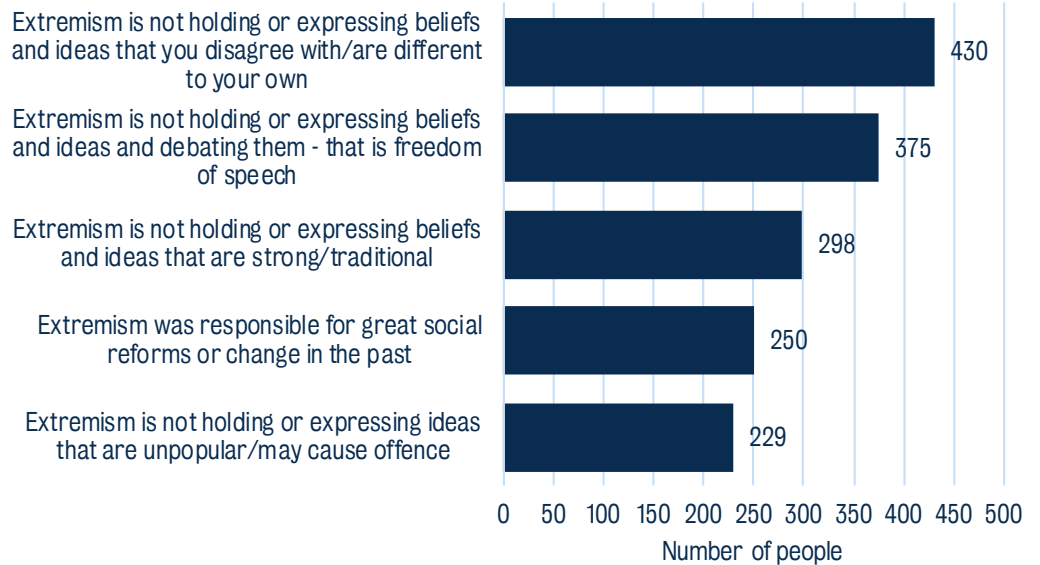
In short, the clearest boundary, from our perspective, is over what constitutes extremism when it moves from the obviously illegal, into the illegitimate and undesirable. Further work will be needed on this to ascertain how important this is.



**FIGURE 23: PERSPECTIVES ON DEFINING EXTREMISM**



**FIGURE 24: PERSPECTIVE ON EXTREMISM BEING ABOUT GOING AGAINST THE MAINSTREAM**

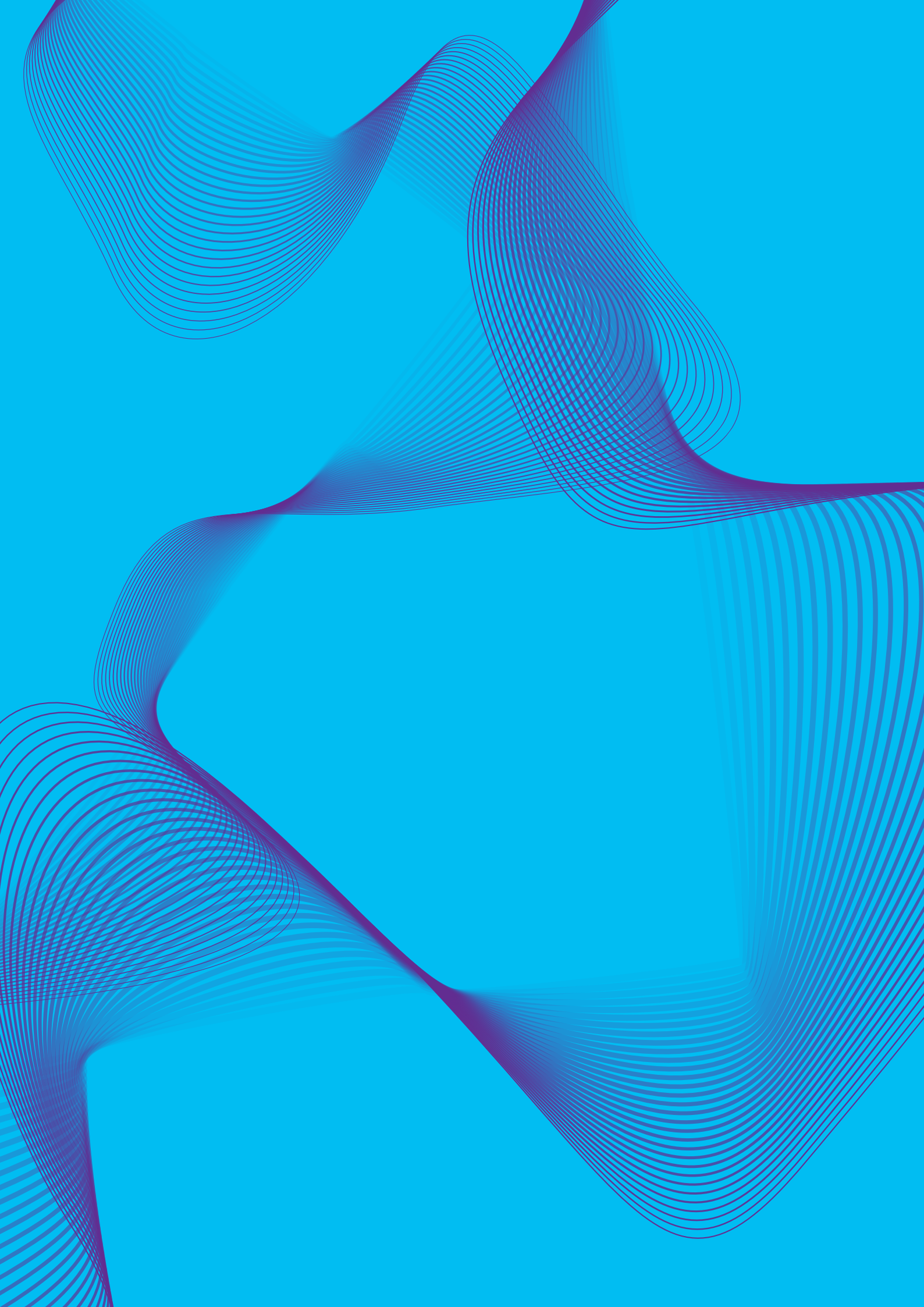


# Conclusion

Our analysis of responses to the Commission's call for evidence shows some consensus emerging around themes within definitions of extremism. At the outset, we were asked by the Commission to answer two questions. The first was to what extent there is a shared public understanding of extremism? In our view, there is considerable consensus that the public see recurrent patterns of beliefs and behaviours as core facets of extremism.

The second question we were asked was whether there is agreement and/or disagreement on the boundaries of extremism. Further work is needed to answer this, but our analysis suggests that there are some areas of considerable consensus and agreement, but that fades as beliefs and behaviours move away from illegality and into illegitimacy and immorality. Where behaviours and beliefs are overtly illegal (e.g. around terrorism, violence and criminal behaviour), there appears to be confidence over what constitutes extremism.

However, where beliefs and behaviours move away from illegality into the immoral or illegitimate (those that see certain groups as inferior), respondents appear less confident about what constitutes extremism. Where beliefs and behaviours are unpalatable and repugnant in some contexts, but perfectly acceptable in others (for instance, beliefs that challenge democracy or British values), confidence about what constitutes extremism is much weaker. These areas are the most challenging from a policy perspective; they are also the areas that will need more further work if we are to fully understand them.





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