

Call for evidence

Q1. 1) Are you replying as a member of the public, as a practitioner or on behalf of an organisation?

Member of the public

Page 3: Member of the public

Q2. 2a) What is your name?

Ben Goldsworthy

Q3. 2b) What is your location? (map of regions)

North West

Q4. 2c) What is your gender?

Male

Q5. 2d) What is your age?

19-24

Q6. White

English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British

Q11. 2f) What is your religion?

No religion

Q12. 2g) We would like to be able to use extracts from responses in our study. If you would not like us to use any extracts from your response or would prefer we did so without using your name, please tell us here.

Yes, I am content for you to use extracts of my response in the study

Q14. 2h) What is your email address? We may use this to contact you further, either to talk to you about your response or to update you about the study.

me+cce@bengoldsworthy.net

Page 7: Section one: Part one

Q33. 1a.) Can you describe extremism?

Yes

Q34. 1b) If you said 'yes' or 'not sure', please describe what extremism looks like to you. (100 word limit)

An extremist belief is a belief that is not subject to scrutiny and that dovetails with a lack of willingness to accept that those who do not subscribe to the same belief do so in good faith, instead assuming they have ulterior motives in doing so or are inferior in some way. Though this often leads to violent or illegal actions, it does not necessarily do so, and violent or illegal actions are not necessarily extremist.

Q36. 2a) 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)

Very helpful Helpful Neither helpful nor unhelpful Unhelpful Very unhelpful

X

Q37. 2b) What is the main reason for your response? (100 word limit)

Any belief can become extremist. One can be an extremist democrat, legalist, liberal or tolerator just as one can be an extremist of their antitheses. The comment about calling for the death of members of armed forces is entirely unhelpful—a commander of an enemy army can do so, for example, as a prerequisite to the advancement of their military goals, but they are not necessarily an extremist.

Page 8: Section one: Part two

Q38. 3) How important do you think the following factors are when considering extremism in this country?

	Very important	Fairly important	Not very important	Not important at all	Don't know
Extremism-related criminal offending e.g. hate crime		X			
Extremist events e.g. marches, events in community or commercial venues		X			
Segregation e.g. by ethnicity, religion or gender		X			
Incidents in regulated spaces, e.g. schools, universities, charities, prisons		X			
Size and influence of extremist groups		X			
Extremist propaganda e.g. on social or traditional media			X		
Links between extremism and terrorism		X			
Attitudes indicating sympathy to extremist ideas or behaviour		X			

Q39. 4a) Is there one factor from the list above that you think is most important when considering extremism?

No

Q41. If you said 'not sure' or 'no', what is the main reason for your response? (100 word limit)

Polarisation and the decline of good faith discourse lead to extremism on both sides, and the measure of extremism on either can be assessed through all of the above factors, but no one factor is much use in isolation. Propaganda, however, appears the least useful metric, as the loudest voices in any given debate are not generally the most representative, nor the most influential.

Page 9: Section one: Part three

Q42. 5a) Have you witnessed anything you would regard as extremist happening in your local area, elsewhere in the country or online? Please select any options that apply.

Yes, in my local area

Yes, elsewhere in the country

Yes, online

Q43. 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.

Animal rights extremism

Anti-government / anarchist extremism

Christian extremism

Environmental extremism

Far Right extremism

Far Left extremism

Jewish extremism

Other

Q44. What other type of extremism have you identified?

Gender, sexual and relationship minority (a.k.a. LGBT) extremism, black extremism, white extremism, pro- and anti-Brexit extremism, anti-vegan extremism, etc.

Page 11: Animal rights extremism

Q45. 5c) For animal rights extremism, what attitudes, activities or behaviours have you witnessed that you regard as extremist? Please describe what you have witnessed in the text box accompanying any of the following options that apply. (100 word limit)

Extremism-related criminal offending e.g. hate crime

I am aware of the actions of groups like the Animal Liberation Front

Extremist events e.g. marches, events in community or commercial venues

-

Segregation e.g. by ethnicity, religion or gender

-

Incidents in regulated spaces, e.g. schools, universities, charities, prisons

-

Influence of extremist groups

PETA, though more influential in the US, seems to be just as savvy at media manipulation in the UK

Extremist propaganda e.g. on social or traditional media

-

Links between extremism and terrorism

This applies to the extent that one considers the actions of groups like the ALF to be terrorism

Attitudes indicating sympathy to extremist ideas or behaviour

-

Other or unsure

-

Q46. Do you think this type of extremism:

Is increasing

Q47. What is the main reason for your response? (100 word limit)

Veganism as an ideology rejects the use of animal products in their entirety. This is a valid view, but some take it to the extent of denouncing those who do not take such drastic steps as villains. This is extremism.

Page 12: Anti-government / anarchist extremism

Q49. Do you think this type of extremism:

Is increasing

Q50. What is the main reason for your response? (100 word limit)

Though the government at present does not represent what I consider best, I understand that others do for just as valid a set of reasons. Anti-government extremists consider anyone who supports the state a immoral collaborator, but even DWP employees need to eat.

Page 13: Christian extremism

Q52. Do you think this type of extremism:

Is decreasing

Q53. What is the main reason for your response? (100 word limit)

Christian extremism seems to be on the decline since the heady days of the IRA/UVF, the Ann Widdecomes and the attempted censoring of things like The Life of Brian and Jerry Springer: The Opera. However, a lot of contemporary far-right and white extremism appears to have a Christian undercurrent, so I am not sure dividing the two is particularly helpful.

Page 14: Environmental extremism

Q55. Do you think this type of extremism:

Is increasing

Q56. What is the main reason for your response? (100 word limit)

Climate change is happening, but its causes are complex. Environmental extremists believe that any scientist who questions the orthodoxy must be doing so out of some mercenary motive, funded by the Koch Brothers or the like. Not that they might be onto something, or just innocently wrong. The recent actions of groups like Extinction Rebellion suggests to me that this form of extremism is on the rise.

Page 15: Far Right extremism

Q57. 5c) For Far Right extremism, what attitudes, activities or behaviours have you witnessed that you regard as extremist? Please describe what you have witnessed in the text box accompanying any of the following options that apply. (100 word limit)

Extremism-related criminal offending e.g. hate crime	The majority of recorded hate incidents/crimes do appear to be committed by far-right extremists
Extremist events e.g. marches, events in community or commercial venues	Far-right groups organise marches, but appear to be routinely outnumbered by counterprotesters
Segregation e.g. by ethnicity, religion or gender	Far-right extremists often call for the segregation of people on racial grounds, and the creation of a 'white ethnostate'
Incidents in regulated spaces, e.g. schools, universities, charities, prisons	Far-right support seems to come more from the undereducated than the overeducated, so whilst I can't speak for prisons they seem to have minimal presence on campuses. A 'traditionalist society' set up at my alma mater has a whopping 127 likes on their Facebook page
Influence of extremist groups	Tommy Robinson is now a UKIP advisor (although how much influence UKIP has at this point is debatable)
Extremist propaganda e.g. on social or traditional media	-
Links between extremism and terrorism	The murder of Jo Cox
Attitudes indicating sympathy to extremist ideas or behaviour	-
Other or unsure	-

Q58. Do you think this type of extremism:

Is increasing

Q59. What is the main reason for your response? (100 word limit)

Far-right and far-left are not particularly useful terms for distinguishing between political outlooks, but I will assume far-right here means ethno-nationalist and white supremacist beliefs. These are still far, far in the minority, but it does appear that the Overton window has shifted somewhat to the 'left', which risks increasing the scale of this form of extremism as non-extremist right-wingers find themselves marginalised and radicalised.

Page 16: Far Left extremism

Q60. 5c) For Far Left extremism, what attitudes, activities or behaviours have you witnessed that you regard as extremist? Please describe what you have witnessed in the text box accompanying any of the following options that apply. (100 word limit)

Extremism-related criminal offending e.g. hate crime

Far-left extremists routinely commit acts that fall under the flawed-but-current UK legal definition of hate incidents/crime against groups that are perhaps not considered traditionally oppressed (white people, men, straight people, etc.), but official responses to these seem lacking compared to other hate-motivated incidents. However, there does seem to be an anti-Jewish streak to the far-left that is receiving a lot of coverage.

Extremist events e.g. marches, events in community or commercial venues

-

Segregation e.g. by ethnicity, religion or gender

Far-left extremists appear to promote the segregation of people on the basis that in each of these categories, one type (e.g. male, white, etc.) is inherently oppressive

Incidents in regulated spaces, e.g. schools, universities, charities, prisons

Far-left extremists shutting down discussions/debates/events on campuses is well-documented at this point

Influence of extremist groups

Far-left extremists do appear to have somewhat more of a tacit level of support amongst the media

Extremist propaganda e.g. on social or traditional media

-

Links between extremism and terrorism

-

Attitudes indicating sympathy to extremist ideas or behaviour

As above, regarding the media portrayal of groups like Antifa

Other or unsure

-

Q61. Do you think this type of extremism:

Is increasing

Q62. What is the main reason for your response? (100 word limit)

As the far-right grows, so does its mirror image in the far-left. Polarisation works both ways, and a far-left extremist who believes that everyone who disagrees with them is a fascist is just as bad as a far-right extremist who believes that everyone who disagrees with them is a Jewish shill/SJW/whatever the trendy new term is.

Page 18: Jewish extremism

Q67. Do you think this type of extremism:

Remains the same

Q68. What is the main reason for your response? (100 word limit)

One event that sticks out in my mind is the furore over the Labour Party's initial reluctance to accept the IHRA definition of 'antisemitism' with all of its examples. Some Jewish extremists seemed unwilling to accept that this might be down to a genuine disagreement or concern over specific elements of the definition, and instead chalked it up to antisemitism.

Page 21: Other extremism

Q76. Do you think this type of extremism:

Is increasing

Q77. What is the main reason for your response? (100 word limit)

Assuming vegans are virtue signalling. Assuming someone who believes in traditional gender/sexual roles is trans/homophobic. Assuming someone supporting Brexit is anti-immigrants, or uneducated and misled, or motivated by financial gain. Assuming someone against Brexit is anti-democratic, or part of a 'metropolitan elite', or motivated by financial gain. Assuming malice on the part of one's opponents rather than simply having come to different conclusions or having different priorities can happen with any belief —extremism can happen with any belief.

Page 22: Section one: Part four

Q78. 6a) Can you describe the harms caused by extremism?

Yes

Q79. 6b) If you said 'yes' or 'not sure', how would you describe these harms? (100 word limit)

Extremism poisons the discourse that a democratic society requires to function. It stops being two sides collaborating in the search for the truth and starts being two sides combatting on another in search of victory. Extremism also begets extremism, just as extreme measures beget extreme measures. When two people are talking, they are not fighting. When they are unable to talk, and each considers the other a threat to their very existence, people start to get hurt.

Q81. 7a) From the following list, which are the three groups you believe are most at risk of harm caused by extremism?

Everyone

Q82. 7b) What is the main reason for your response? (100 word limit)

Anyone can be an extremist of anything, to the potential detriment or risk of their opponents and the more moderate members of their own side.

Q83. 8a) Have you seen evidence of extremism online causing harm?

Yes

Q84. 8b) If you said 'yes' or 'not sure', how would you describe these harms? (100 word limit)

The more sensitive amongst us are prone to an attack of the vapours when seeing mean things online, but even the more resilient can eventually be beaten down by the sheer scale and constancy of abuse that the Internet enables.

Q85. 8c) Would you describe extremism online compared to extremism in your local area as...?

Less harmful

Q86. 8d) What is the main reason for your answer? (100 word limit)

Sticks and stones, and all that.

Q87. 9a) Does extremism cause harm to society and its institutions more widely e.g. to democracy?

Yes

Q88. 9b) If you said 'yes' or 'not sure', how would you describe these harms? (100 word limit)

See answer to 6b.

Page 23: Section one: Part five

Q90. 10a) Do you think more should be done to counter extremism?

Yes

Q91. 10b) What is the main reason for your response? (100 word limit)

Polarisation is on the rise, and extremism with it. We're not quite at the stage that the US is, I don't think, but I for one would certainly not like to see what its like.

Q92. 11) How much should be done in the following areas to counter extremism?

	A lot more	A little more	Maintain current level	A little less	A lot less
Civil society	X				
Counter terrorism					X
Education	X				
Faith		X			
Foreign policy				X	
Integration	X				
Justice		X			
Law enforcement				X	
Media		X			
Online				X	

Q93. 12a) Is there one area from the list above that you think is most important when countering extremism?

No

Q95. If you said 'not sure' or 'no', what is the main reason for your response? (100 word limit)

I believe education and the development of a robust civil society are jointly the most important. Education, because people fear what they do not understand, and civil society, because when people of a local community feel involved in it, and with other people who hold different beliefs/are a different colour/whatever, extremism will find little foothold.

Q96. 13a) Are there particular institutions or groups that you see as having a role in improving our current efforts to counter extremism? Please select up to three from the following options that were suggested to us during our engagement and from our ongoing research.

Civil society

Faith groups and leaders

Media companies

Q97. 13b) What is the main reason for your response? (100 word limit)

Civil society is the most vital, and in many parts of it faith groups and leaders have an outsized level of influence. Media companies are also hugely influential where even faith does not reach, and the malign influence of overly-partisan news outlets (e.g. the Rupert Murdoch rags or some of the wackier columnists in the Guardian) on political discourse needs to be countered.

Q98. 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)

Censoring extremists will not make the problem go away; nor will locking the loudest ones up. Government should focus on devolving power to local areas so that people can learn to deal with their own issues, strengthening civil society and a robust sense of community that is anathema to extremism.

Page 24: Section two: Evidence on extremism

Q100. 2) Do you have any evidence on how well the following factors can be used to measure extremism at a local or national level? (750 word limit) Extremism-related criminal offending e.g. hate crime Extremist events e.g. marches, events in community or commercial venues Segregation e.g. by ethnicity, religion or gender Incidents in regulated spaces, e.g. schools, universities, charities, prisons Size and influence of extremist groups Extremist propaganda e.g. on social or traditional media Links between extremism and terrorism Attitudes indicating sympathy to extremist ideas or behaviour

Hate incidents/crime are recorded based on the perception of the supposed victim/witness. This makes them a near-useless indicator of the actual scale of hate-motivated crimes (and the idea that a non-criminal incident being motivated by hate is of any concern to the police is ridiculous), measuring instead the level of hate perceived by (generally) minority groups. When something like Brexit happens, and some in the media claim it was motivated by hate, those groups understandably get worried and think they live in a hateful country. They perhaps report as hate-motivated things they wouldn't have considered so previously. Hate crime figures rise, the media reports on a 'wave of hate' and the cycle continues.

Imagine if theft was recorded on the same basis. Whether someone has just misplaced something or has actually had it stolen are conflated in the statistics. The papers report on a rise in theft. When someone loses something, they remember that they're supposedly in the midst of a theft wave. Perhaps they spend less time looking for it, or assume that it has been stolen immediately. And so it goes.

Q108. 10) Many of the people we have spoken to say that offering a positive vision for our country is key to countering extremism. What could that vision look like? (750 word limit)

There's a bit in Thomas Paine's Rights of Man where he describes the result of a vote in the Massachusetts constitutional convention. 'After the debate...was closed, and the vote taken, the objecting members rose, and declared, "That though they had argued and voted against it, because certain parts appeared to them in a different light to what they appeared to other members; yet, as the vote had decided in favour of the constitution as proposed, they should give it the same practical support as if they had voted for it."'