# Fighting extremism requires rebuilding UK communities and high streets



A fundamental challenge in addressing extremism in the UK lies beyond direct security measures—it resides in the fabric of local communities themselves. The erosion of communal spaces and the decline of high streets are symptomatic of a deeper political and social malaise that fosters distrust and division. Nick Garland, an Associate Fellow at the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), highlights how the shrinking of shared social infrastructure coincides with a rise in political extremism, particularly from the radical right.

Garland points to the sustained impact of post-2010 austerity policies, which have led to widespread closures of shops, pubs, libraries, community hubs, and children’s centres—already weakened by decades of deindustrialisation and the diminishing power of local government. These changes have intensified a sense of disempowerment and erosion of agency felt by many outside London, where political trust is notably more fragile. Yet, despite this, local bonds remain relatively strong; people generally harbour positive feelings towards their neighbours and immediate communities.

The link between social infrastructure and extremism is underscored by sociologist Sacha Hilhorst’s work, which finds that as youth clubs and community halls close and public spaces are privatised, individuals increasingly retreat into isolation and online echo chambers fertile for misinformation, division, and radicalisation. This echoes broader concerns raised by government officials and commentators about the complexities of tackling extremism, which require not only enforcement and regulation but also grassroots engagement and renewal of social capital.

The government has initiated steps to address these deficiencies. The Plan for Neighbourhoods, announced in March by the Deputy Prime Minister and backed by additional funding in the Chancellor’s spending review, represents an attempt to revitalise community-led initiatives. However, the success of such programmes remains uncertain given the ongoing fiscal pressures facing local authorities and the uneven economic geography of the UK. Restoring vibrant local infrastructure cannot be centrally mandated—it requires genuine empowerment of communities themselves, supported but not directed by Whitehall.

Echoing these observed challenges, former Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg emphasises the importance of unity across diverse communities in combating extremism at the local level, particularly in London. His call for inter-faith cooperation and government backing of grassroots efforts aligns with Garland’s argument that strengthening social cohesion is inseparable from fighting radical politics. Similarly, government speeches reiterate the critical role of education, media responsibility, and international cooperation in a comprehensive anti-extremism strategy. For instance, education campaigns aimed at equipping young people with resilience against extremist ideologies, and media oversight to prevent inadvertent promotion of extremist content, are key pillars in the broader response.

The complexity of extremism requires a multifaceted approach that goes beyond banning orders or surveillance laws. Community resilience and revitalised public spaces form the foundation upon which trust and mutual understanding can flourish. Without addressing the tangible decline in shared social infrastructure—those everyday places where people meet, connect, and build bonds—efforts to combat extremism will remain incomplete. Garland concludes that while the government recognises these challenges, repairing the social contact that underpins healthy politics is a demanding task that must unfold from the ground up.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.lbc.co.uk/opinion/views/you-cant-fight-extremism-without-fixing-high-street/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.lbc.co.uk/opinion/views/you-cant-fight-extremism-without-fixing-high-street/)
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* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.lbc.co.uk/opinion/views/you-cant-fight-extremism-without-fixing-high-street/), [[2]](https://www.standard.co.uk/comment/nick-clegg-the-fight-against-extremism-must-unite-the-capital-9017831.html), [[5]](https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/lead-commissioners-speech-on-the-role-of-the-media-in-challenging-extremism), [[7]](https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/nicky-morgan-speaks-about-tackling-extremism)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.lbc.co.uk/opinion/views/you-cant-fight-extremism-without-fixing-high-street/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.lbc.co.uk/opinion/views/you-cant-fight-extremism-without-fixing-high-street/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.standard.co.uk/comment/nick-clegg-the-fight-against-extremism-must-unite-the-capital-9017831.html> - In this article, Nick Clegg discusses the importance of unity in combating extremism in London. He emphasises the need for inter-faith groups to work together and for the government to support community initiatives. Clegg also highlights the role of the media in challenging extremist narratives and stresses the significance of celebrating London's diversity to strengthen resilience against extremism.
3. <https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/4390/uk-fight-extremism> - This piece outlines strategies to combat extremism in Britain, focusing on stopping terror subsidies, countering radicalisation, and promoting community engagement. It discusses the role of Islamist groups in providing social services to gain legitimacy and the importance of addressing the root causes of extremism through education and community involvement.
4. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-34418734> - The article reports on the UK government's Counter-Extremism Bill, detailing measures such as banning orders, extremism disruption orders, and closure orders. It also discusses the strengthening of Ofcom's role to tackle extremist content in broadcasting and the implications of these measures for freedom of speech and the media.
5. <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/lead-commissioners-speech-on-the-role-of-the-media-in-challenging-extremism> - In this speech, the Lead Commissioner addresses the media's role in challenging extremism, clarifying misconceptions about the term and its scope. The Commissioner emphasises the need for the media to responsibly report on extremism and to avoid inadvertently promoting extremist views.
6. <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/foreign-secretary-speech-on-the-challenges-of-extremism> - The Foreign Secretary discusses the challenges posed by extremism, highlighting its global nature and the need for a comprehensive approach. The speech covers the government's strategy to counter extremism, including international cooperation and addressing the ideological roots of extremist movements.
7. <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/nicky-morgan-speaks-about-tackling-extremism> - In this address, Nicky Morgan outlines the government's approach to tackling extremism, focusing on education and community engagement. She discusses the importance of equipping young people with the tools to challenge extremist ideologies and the role of schools and universities in this endeavour.