

COMMUNITIES OVERCOMING EXTREMISM

———— THE AFTER ————
CHARLOTTESVILLE PROJECT

FINAL REPORT

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PREFACE

When I became mayor of Charlottesville in 2016, I never dreamed that our city would see a far-right, violent extremist attack that would leave three people dead. But that’s what happened during the “Unite the Right” rally in August 2017, when a dozen white nationalist militias descended upon the city, clashing violently with police and counterprotesters. This was actually the third in a series of extremist events in the city that year. The trauma of these events was something no city should ever have to endure.

As painful as the experiences were, they were also an opportunity for learning and growth. It was deeply inspiring to see so many people in Charlottesville and around the country standing firm against hatred, and uniting for democratic values of pluralism, toleration, and deliberation. The experiences also produced specific instances of leadership and innovation. For example: the private company Airbnb took action to cancel reservations of people coming to town for Unite the Right. And the city later worked with Georgetown University’s Institute for Constitutional Advocacy and Protection successfully to sue violent extremist paramilitary groups under a novel legal theory to prevent them from coming back.

It was against this backdrop that a coalition of public, private, non-profit, and philanthropic organizations came together to discuss and identify possible solutions to address new forms of extremism. From that coalition emerged Communities Overcoming Extremism: The After Charlottesville Project (COE), a capacity-building project convened between 2018 and 2019 by a bipartisan coalition of partners. COE’s thesis is that just as extremism emerged from within

democracy, democratic norms and institutions can overcome it. COE has revealed that America has what it takes—in the public, private, non-profit, and NGO sectors—to come together, identify solutions, and address this growing threat. These solutions are not based only on wisdom and expertise, but also on policies and initiatives that have been tried and lessons learned.

COE held two summits over the course of the project. The first brought together public sector leaders at Washington University in St. Louis in November 2018 and the second convened private sector leaders at the headquarters of Airbnb in San Francisco in July 2019. The summits included several hundred leaders and vigorous discussions of many matters of public policy and personal experience. COE focused on three specific kinds of capacity. First, through **alliances**, leaders and organizations can join hands to tackle the problem. Second, through **collective wisdom**, leaders can approach the problem as humans, rather than computers. Finally, **best practices** enable us to concentrate on what works while addressing challenges. The summits were designed to emphasize interconnection and shared learning, with each discussion followed

by a “wisdom circle” among participants. The second summit was conducted under Chatham’s House Rule (where only information may be cited, not the identity nor the affiliation of speakers or participants), so the material related to that summit reflects those constraints.

As we went through this project, we observed a difference between “hard” and “soft” methods of addressing extremism. “Hard” methods include things like intelligence, investigation, prosecution, and new laws. “Soft” methods include efforts to increase healing and reconciliation and to decrease marginalization and radicalization. Both are necessary for a comprehensive, society-wide approach to extremism, and both are represented here.

This final report represents a compendium of dozens of organizational and personal confrontations with extremism. A podcast series entitled [Overcoming Extremism](#) includes deep-dive conversations with many of the leaders featured in this final report, and you can find links to the episodes throughout the report.

As leaders committed to protecting the institutions of constitutional democracy, COE recognized that while we may have many differences of opinion in how to best address extremism (differences recognized throughout this report), we are better off engaging in this work together rather than working apart. We are better off relying on experience and collective wisdom rather than hard and fast protocols. To that end, this final report is intended to provide useful and relevant information for leaders and organizations working on their own to overcome extremism.

This report is a combination of a resource manual and a guidebook for the work of confronting extremism today. Extremism is a wily and ever-changing threat, and we are in a dangerous new time in America, with extremist threats increasing every year. Yet as concerning as these developments are for many, they also offer an opportunity for our democracy, in repudiating these forces, to pursue with renewed fervor our first principles of freedom, equality, and opportunity. That’s what I have learned and seen through this project: scores of inspirational leaders in both the public and private sectors doing the hard work of turning our democracy away from fear, prejudice, and violence, in a more hopeful direction.

Thank you for reading and for your own work to overcome extremism.



Michael Signer

Mayor of Charlottesville, 2016–2018

Founder and Chair,

Communities Overcoming Extremism:

The After Charlottesville Project

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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COE was produced and managed by a coalition of partners, including ADL, Fetzer Institute, Charles Koch Institute/Stand Together, Ford Foundation, New America, Georgetown University's Institute for Constitutional Advocacy and Protection, Democracy Fund, Aspen Institute's Justice and Society Program, and Defending Democracy Together. Ethan Ashley served as executive director of COE.

AUTHORSHIP

The editors of this report were Robert L. McKenzie, PhD, and Michael Signer, PhD. Research and writing assistance provided by Ilari Papa, Ryan Barry, Vincent Doehr, Alexis Klemm, and Bianca Navia.



DISCLAIMER:

This final report represents the contributions of panelists and participants at the two COE summits. It does not necessarily represent the opinion of any of the coalition members. It also describes the titles and affiliations of moderators, panelists, and speakers only at the time of the summits at which they appeared.

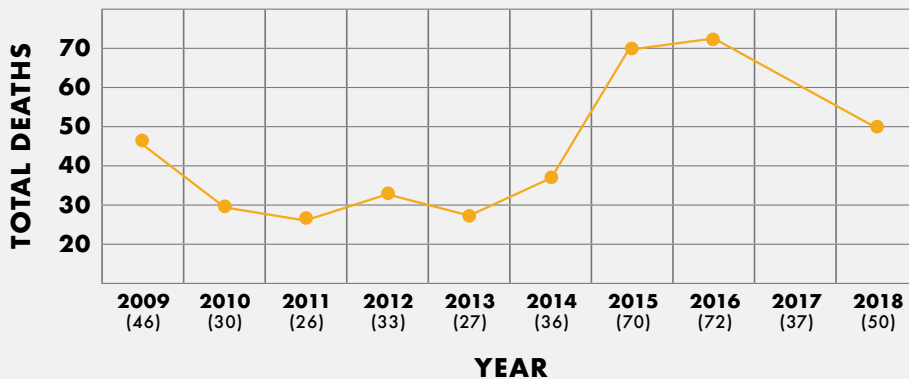


OVERVIEW

KEY CONVERSATIONS AND FUTURE QUESTIONS

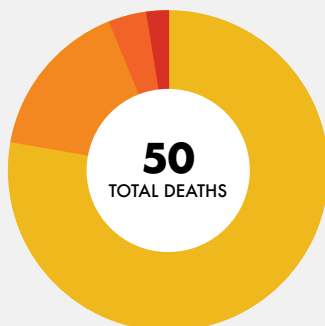
Following the violent extremist, far-right rallies in Charlottesville, Virginia, on August 11 and 12, 2017, a coalition of civil society organizations came together to form a year-long initiative: Communities Overcoming Extremism: The After Charlottesville Project (COE). COE launched to discover tools local leaders and organizations can use to address extremism. The events in Charlottesville were not isolated incidents. Studies performed by the Anti-Defamation League reveal an alarming rise in extremism in American communities.

DOMESTIC EXTREMIST-RELATED KILLINGS IN THE U.S. BY YEAR (2009-2018)



SOURCE: ADL

DOMESTIC EXTREMIST-RELATED KILLINGS IN THE U.S. BY PERPETRATOR AFFILIATION, 2018



ALMOST ALL of the 2018 extremist-related murders were committed by **RIGHT-WING EXTREMISTS**.

- White Supremacy: **78%**
- Anti-Government Extremism: **16%**
- Incel Extremism: **4%**
- Domestic Islamist Extremism: **2%**

NOTE: TOTAL DEATHS INCLUDE BOTH IDEOLOGICALLY AND NON-IDEOLOGICALLY MOTIVATED KILLINGS.

SOURCE: ADL

COE's ideologically diverse coalition of partners convened two national summits, where hundreds of leaders grappled with challenging questions about how to best overcome extremism. The summits were structured not to generate policy proposals but instead to create collective opportunities for learning and generating alliances through honest conversations.

This final report contains a complete survey of ideas, experiences, and lessons from the public sector and the private sector summits. The following highlights key conversations and future questions, divided into three critical areas in each summit.

At the conclusion of this report are letters from partner organizations containing their own assessments of COE, this final report, and their recommendations.

PUBLIC SECTOR SUMMIT

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

Key conversations: There were robust conversations about the role of the federal government in addressing extremism. The discussions included proposals for legislation that would provide for increased data collection and analysis of the threat of terrorist violence posed by domestic extremist ideologies. Conversations included thoughts on legislation that would create a federal crime of terrorism applicable to mass shootings and other terrorist violence committed to furthering ideological goals such as white supremacy.

Future questions:

- Whether and how best practices and laws from the context of international terrorism could be applied to domestic extremism while avoiding civil rights concerns.
- How the federal government can best interact with and support state and local governments in their work against violent extremism.

STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Key conversations: Participants discussed proposals for how these entities can protect the public from extremist groups, consistent with the First and Second Amendments. These proposals improved permitting for public events to enhance public safety while protecting speech and assembly, the design of security plans that will safely separate protesters and counter-protesters, and better coordination and communication to address public safety and cooperation of all agencies.

Future questions:

- How to draw time, place, and manner restrictions effectively to protect the public from violent groups bent on violence and intimidation.
- How to design community policing programs that proactively provide accountability and transparency, including through community engagement that highlights responsiveness and approachability.
- How law enforcement can build trust and engagement by tailoring its

approach to marginalized populations and challenging political violence.

CIVIL SOCIETY

Key conversations: Participants discussed how organizations which interact directly with the public, including nonprofits, schools, and police departments, can redouble evidence-based efforts to foster openness and peaceful pluralism in our society. The organizations can reduce “otherization” of each other—including those in marginalized populations—in our increasingly diverse society and build bridges to decrease potential radicalization.

Future questions:

- How civic organizations like schools and arts organizations can best design programs that will engage populations and reduce vulnerability to extremism.
- How organizations can include majority populations to prioritize issues of injustice and become allies of vulnerable populations, including people of color.
- How organizations can engage and include economically vulnerable communities, including economically disadvantaged white communities.

PRIVATE SECTOR SUMMIT

TRUST AND SAFETY

Key conversations: Participants discussed whether and how tech companies, with a particular focus on mid-level companies serving millions of customers, are ignored. Focusing on tech companies other than the largest platforms can strengthen and expand “trust and safety” programs, with an eye to cooperation and the development of best practices.

Future questions:

- How the private sector can best build effective teams to take vigorous action in recognizing and combating extremist activity online, providing their users with trust and safety from extremism.
- How companies can assess and design incentives to counter extremism on their platforms, examine how hate spreads, and devise rules that apply to their type of service.

- How company leaders and stakeholders can develop a decision-making process to reflect their values in emphasizing trust and safety against hate speech and violent content, including hiring diverse and effective teams to implement trust and safety.
- How self-regulation on the model of approaches to spam and pornography can address crucial questions for viability, including the protection of unpopular speech and is a necessary and viable move for companies running online forums.

PROTECTING NEW PLATFORMS

Key conversations: Participants discussed the issue of how, as extremism is removed from more platforms, it will likely move to new platforms, with gaming companies being one such proven area. They discussed how

platforms could be vigilant and innovative in anticipating their arrival and empowering community members to guard against them.

Future questions:

- How to address the vulnerability of e-gaming platforms, which have provided fertile ground for nurturing positive behavior and values but which are also open to exploitation.
- How gaming companies can develop proactive trust and safety teams to remove extremist content from their sites, perform research on new trends, and prevent extremist actors from exploiting vulnerabilities.
- How product design, including implementation of AI and machine learning, can emphasize resistance against extremism, but always with an experienced and empathetic guiding human hand.

ALLIANCES

Key conversations: Participants discussed how approaches to extremism can benefit

from cross-sector collaboration, as extremism crosses boundaries between public and private spaces and local and national ones. Participants considered private and publicly traded companies collaborating with ideologically diverse nonprofit and philanthropic organizations on how to apply learnings to increase tolerance and decrease radicalization.

Research questions:

- The value and viability of cross-platform sharing of ideas that can address extremism and violence. Collaboration among mid-level tech companies in striking a balance between freedom of speech and public safety, while potentially collaborating on policies, data-tracking, and clear metrics will help them do a better job at countering extremism.
- Examine the potential of alliances between civic organizations and private sector companies that may differ in opinions.



PART I: PUBLIC SECTOR SUMMIT

From November 28–30, 2018, COE held its first summit at Washington University in St. Louis. The summit featured forums and wisdom circles focused on the role of the public sector, including civil society, in overcoming extremism. Panel conversations addressed five main topics:

1. The role that education plays in fostering diverse and inclusive communities.
2. The responsibility of police departments to serve their communities while enforcing the law.
3. The steps that local authorities can take to maintain public safety during protests.
4. The steps local authorities can take to promote speech rights of protesters, counterprotesters, and other community members while maintaining that public safety.
5. The lessons history can teach us about the role of extremism in democracies, and “otherization,” including how discourse and policy threaten immigrant communities in the United States.



1. DEFINING EXTREMISM

Mike Signer, Founder and Chair, Communities Overcoming Extremism

Jonathan Greenblatt, National Director and CEO, Anti-Defamation League



Watch the video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H5gsrxJ7Wpc&feature=youtu.be>

Mike Signer began the summit with a working definition of extremism. He said, “Extremism is as difficult to define precisely as any other charged political term. Many people will have their own definitions, but I don’t want to get bogged down with debates about terminology, nor dogmatically vested in one idea. So let me suggest that we all begin with a working definition: extremism is political thought and action that intentionally employs intimidation or violence to pursue political ends.”

He described the purpose of Communities Overcoming Extremism: “The thesis of Communities Overcoming Extremism is that just as extremism emerged from within democracy, democratic norms and institutions can overcome it. After all, Jim Crow and McCarthyism also came from within democracy and were conquered by democracy. The idea behind COE is that we have what it takes, in both the public and the private sectors, to increase our capacity to come together to address this threat, based on wisdom, honesty, the ventures tried and the lessons learned. Nobody in their right mind has a five-point plan for dealing with extremism. We are going

to approach this threat better through more old-fashioned tools—principles, character, experience—and wisdom. We believe in building three specific kinds of capacity. Alliances: leaders and organizations joining hands to tackle the problem. Collective wisdom: approaching the problem as humans, rather than computers. And best practices: concentrating on what works while addressing challenges.”

Jonathan Greenblatt spoke about the historic mission of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) in confronting and overcoming extremism. He praised the fact that participants from different backgrounds had joined the summit to find how to deal with extremism at the local level. Greenblatt reinstated the ADL’s mission to “stop the defamation of Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment to all” because “our fate is bound to the fate of others.” To achieve its goal, the ADL resorts to three main tools: advocacy to affect legislation; education to “change the hearts and minds” of the new generation with



Watch the video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XCFf5u_vIIU

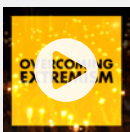
regard to bias and discrimination; and work with law enforcement by tracking and investigating hate crimes, as well as training about 15,000 officers about extremism, bias, and hate crimes. Greenblatt emphasized that in facing the increase in violence and hate crimes in the nation, leaders must come together to “build bridges,” find ways to help communities heal, and build a resilient society with stronger bonds.

He mentioned three working areas: policy, products, and practice. First, law enforcement needs more training on extremism and implicit bias. Legislators should also promulgate federal and state hate crime laws, while mayors must improve and instate anti-bias training in schools. Second, leaders should engage social media platforms, so they improve their products by consistently enforcing community standards, ensuring that users enjoy their freedom of speech while being safe. Silicon Valley should also focus its efforts on bringing innovation and designing algorithms and artificial intelligence tools that can halt the dissemination of bigotry online. Last, leaders need to take action and push back against

—
 "Don't let anyone tell you that standing up for a principle is somehow political."

- Jonathan Greenblatt
 National Director and CEO,
 Anti-Defamation League

discriminatory rhetoric. In order to make a significant change, Greenblatt cautioned against letting political differences divide social efforts. He said, “Don't let anyone tell you that fighting prejudice is a partisan thing. Don't let anyone tell you that standing up for a principle is somehow political.”



“Overcoming Extremism” podcast episode: Listen to Jonathan Greenblatt explain the ADL's role in strengthening American democracy's “immune system” against extremism.

Listen Now: https://podcast.rss.com/overcomingextremism1/?name=2019-10-17_jonathan_greenblatt_2019_1_nts.mp3

DOMESTIC TERRORISM

Panelists:

Mary McCord, Legal Director and Visiting Professor of Law, [Institute for Constitutional Advocacy and Protection at Georgetown University Law Center](#) (moderator)

Tom Brzozowski, Counsel for Domestic Terrorism, U.S. Department of Justice

William Daroff, Senior Vice President for Public Policy, [The Jewish Federations of North America](#)

Oren Segal, Director, [Center on Extremism, Anti-Defamation League](#)



Watch the video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FeBqo-leKds>

statute applicable to crimes of violence committed with the intent to intimidate or coerce a civilian population or influence government policy through intimidation or coercion would put all terrorist violence, regardless of the ideology motivating it, on the same moral plane. It would also integrate the investigation and prevention of domestic terrorism into the national counterterrorism program.

Mary McCord moderated a discussion of domestic terrorism with the panelists, using the then-recent mass shooting at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, as the catalyst. Panelists discussed the rise of extremist violence based on white supremacist and white nationalist ideologies. Oren Segal reported on the increase in violent crimes committed by those associated with far right-wing extremism. William Daroff discussed the Pittsburgh community's response to the attack. McCord and Tom Brzozowski discussed how the absence of a federal domestic terrorism statute applicable to mass shootings and terrorist violence using vehicles creates a double standard in the federal government's approach to terrorism. Perpetrators of violent crimes committed in furtherance of foreign terrorist organizations—overwhelmingly Islamist extremist organizations—are prosecuted as terrorists. Perpetrators of violent crimes committed in furtherance of “domestic” ideologies like white supremacy are prosecuted under state criminal laws or, in some cases, federal hate crimes laws. A federal terrorism



CASE STUDY

Mary McCord on a novel approach to curbing extremist violence:



“Increasingly, extremists are using paramilitary tactics as they step out of the internet’s virtual space and into the real world’s physical space. The Unite the Right rally was one of the most alarming examples of this. The “alt-right” groups—white supremacists, neo-Nazis, neo-confederates, and others—organized themselves as private militias under their own established command structures, marched in battalions to the rally venue with shield-bearing members protecting their flanks, utilized military tactics like forming phalanxes to offensively batter counter-protestors, and sent sorties out of the rally venue to engage in skirmishes with their ideological opponents. Meanwhile, self-professed militias, ostensibly there to protect the First Amendment rights of the alt-right, stood post at the rally venue, dressed in full military gear and heavily armed with assault rifles and sidearms, unlawfully appropriating to themselves the role of law enforcement wholly outside of public accountability. The rally culminated in the horrendous actions of James Fields, who used his vehicle to ram a group of peaceful counter-protestors, killing Heather Heyer and severely injuring many others.”

“As video of the melee spread across the globe, many commentators in the U.S. suggested the First Amendment protected the protest and the Second Amendment permitted the arms-bearing.

"But the First Amendment does not protect violence or incitement to violence. The Second Amendment, while preserving an individual right to bear arms for one’s self-protection, has never been held to allow private citizens to band together to create their own armed militias. This is important, for in the immediate aftermath of the Unite the Right rally, Kessler and other prominent white supremacist figures vowed to return to Charlottesville, as often as necessary, to avenge what they decried as the city’s violation of their rights when it declared an unlawful assembly, cutting short the opportunity for additional bloodshed.

“But while Kessler thought he could weaponize the First Amendment, we at the Institute for Constitutional Advocacy and

Protection (ICAP) at Georgetown Law knew that he could not. State constitutional and statutory provisions in nearly every state prohibit private paramilitary activity like what occurred at Unite the Right. Indeed, 48 states have a provision in their constitutions requiring the military to be ‘strictly subordinate to civilian authorities.’ Twenty-eight states have statutes barring private individuals from organizing as military units, parading, or drilling with firearms in public. And 25 states, including Virginia, have statutes that prohibit two or more people from assembling to train or practice in the use of firearms or ‘techniques’ capable of causing bodily injury or death in furtherance of civil disorder.

“The discovery of these legal tools—based on a *Lawfare* article by UVA professor Philip Zelickow, who was involved in litigation against the militia wing of the KKK in the early 1980s—gave us the idea for a lawsuit. Not a lawsuit for money damages incurred by the victims of Unite the Right, but a forward-looking lawsuit seeking a court injunction preventing individuals and groups

from returning to Charlottesville to engage in prohibited paramilitary activity. Representing the City of Charlottesville and local small businesses and neighborhood associations, we were successful. Before the one-year anniversary of Unite the Right, when Kessler planned another rally, we obtained court orders against 23 different white supremacist and militia groups and individuals, prohibiting them from returning to Charlottesville as part of a unit of two or more people, acting in concert, while armed with any type of weapon, including a shield, during any protest, rally, demonstration, or march.

“Other local jurisdictions have taken note and used their state anti-paramilitary laws as the basis for reasonable restrictions on weapons-carrying at public events where violence is expected. And still, others have brought or are contemplating similar lawsuits to protect public safety at upcoming rallies and protests. With extremist violence on the rise, law enforcement would be well served by using every tool in the public safety toolbox.”



“Overcoming Extremism” podcast episode: Listen to Mary McCord describe the national security approach to domestic extremism and why she believes we need a new federal statute criminalizing domestic terrorism.

Listen Now: https://podcast.rss.com/overcomingextremism1/?name=2019-10-17_mary_mccord_nts.mp3



CASE STUDY

In 2017, noted civil rights litigators Roberta Kaplan and Karen Dunn launched a federal civil lawsuit, *Sines v. Kessler*, on behalf of 10 Charlottesville residents against far-right defendants who allegedly orchestrated the Unite the Right rally, seeking money damages. Under the auspices of the nonprofit group [Integrity First for America](https://www.integrityfirstforamerica.org/) (<https://www.integrityfirstforamerica.org/>), the litigation employs laws that were written in the late 19th century to constrain the most violent activities of the KKK. In 2018, a federal judge denied defendants' motion for summary

judgment, finding that the plaintiffs had "plausibly alleged the Defendants formed a conspiracy to commit the racial violence that led to the Plaintiffs' varied injuries." Court hearings are anticipated in 2020. The lawsuit intends to take on the vast leadership of the violent white nationalist movement and to send a message to every hate group in the country that Americans will not give in to violence and hate. Groups like Integrity First for America will defend the dignity and equality of all people to ensure events like Unite the Right never happen again.



“Overcoming Extremism” podcast episode: Listen to Amy Spitalnick describe the strategy of suing far-right militia groups for money damages using laws designed to stop racial terror.

Listen Now: https://podcast.rss.com/overcomingextremism1/?name=2019-10-17_amy_spitalnick_2019_nts_.mp3



MAYORS PANEL

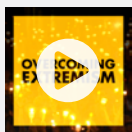


Watch the video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E99R7xbacS8>

A panel of mayors, moderated by Steve Benjamin, mayor of Columbia, South Carolina and president of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, discussed the problem of handling extremism at the local level. The panel included Andy Berke, Mayor of Chattanooga, Tennessee; Jorge Elorza, Mayor of Providence, Rhode Island; and Jesse Arreguin, Mayor of Berkeley, California.

Mayor Arreguin described the challenge of implementing Berkeley's anti-hate campaign and public communications around successive violent rallies in 2017. He described how, for public safety reasons, he tried dissuading counterprotesters from showing up at white nationalist events, and was attacked in the media afterward. Arreguin also discussed the challenges

of the police learning how best to create a physical space between protesters and counterprotesters. He also spoke with pride about leading a public anti-hate campaign with posters that were put up all over Berkeley. Mayor Elorza described how his diverse city has reached out to celebrate and include marginalized and "otherized" communities and his imminent plan to declare Providence a "City of Kindness." Mayor Berke recounted leading his city's response to a terrorist attack in 2015 when a local attacked military recruiting centers, killing five, and his progress since then in prioritizing diversity and inclusion, and his plans to develop the "Mayor's Council against Hate" to develop specific sector-specific programs against extremism.



"Overcoming Extremism" podcast episode: Listen to Berkeley Mayor Jesse Arreguin describe his experiences handling multiple white supremacist protests in 2017.

Listen Now: https://podcast.rss.com/overcomingextremism1/?name=2019-10-17_jesse_arreguin_nts.mp3

CASE STUDY

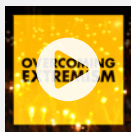
Mayor Berke's Council Against Hate

In 2015, a Muslim man killed five people at two military recruitment installations in Chattanooga. It could have been a disaster, leading to a cycle of escalating fear and panic and setting off violence toward the city's minority populations. Instead, through calm and steady leadership and comprehensive engagement with police and the city's minority populations, Mayor Andy Berke calmed tensions. In 2016, two vehicles belonging to a Jewish organization were set on fire in the city. In 2018, the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga saw two instances of white supremacist flyers being distributed around campus. According to the Chattanooga Police Department, there have been 133 such "bias incidents" within the city since 2012. Tennessee ranked ninth in the country for hate incidents.

In 2019, Berke announced a new Council Against Hate. The council, chaired by prominent local leaders Berke had recruited, was multifaceted and thoughtfully designed. Berke wove a three-part "theory of change" into the council. This approach was designed to achieve a legal framework to deter hate crimes through enforced penalties; to engage influencers in the business

and faith communities, in the media, and in other groups; to set cultural expectations around shared values; and to drive generational change by educating young people. It had different teams to work on different areas of hate, including researching the problem, engaging young people, and coordinating with the private sector.

The launch event was a working community meeting. Over 100 attendees joined different tables for the various action areas. There, a range of Chattanooga citizens representing a wide variety of ethnic and religious groups excitedly brainstormed ideas for how to protect their dynamic city from hate while inculcating values of pluralism and tolerance. When the meeting reconvened, there were specific ideas on fireproofing the city from extremism. Ideas ranged from asking the CEOs of local companies to join in a coalition to remove hate from workplaces to creating community information sessions on the dangers of inciting extremism online among young people, to leading bias training for members of the local media.



"Overcoming Extremism" podcast episode: Listen to Chattanooga Mayor Andy Berke describe handling a terrorist attack and why he founded the Council Against Hate afterward.

Listen Now: https://podcast.rss.com/overcomingextremism1/?name=2019-10-17_mayor_berke_nts.mp3

2. BEYOND NICE: DEVELOPING EDUCATION THAT FOSTERS VIRTUES AND VALUES

Panelists:

George Selim, Senior Vice President of Programs, [Anti-Defamation League](#) (moderator)

Lisa Consiglio, Executive Director and Co-Founder, [Narrative 4](#)

Will Grandberry, WGIII Ministries

Pardeep Singh Kaleka, Co-Founder, [Serve 2 Unite](#)

Arno Michaelis, Co-Founder, [Serve 2 Unite](#)

Marty Swaim, Member, [Challenging Racism](#)

Extremism poses one of the greatest threats to national security and fosters division among American communities. To address extremism, racism, discrimination, and other types of hatred-based social marginalization, panelists discussed their work in organizations striving to foster empathy and compassion in communities. Their stories demonstrate the power of community leaders, local governments, educators, and civil organizations collaborating to identify the issues that lead to fear, distrust, and hatred. Most broadly, panelists agreed on a vision of investing individuals with the skills that enable them to recognize people of different backgrounds in one community living together in peace and prosperity.

Participants discussed how building alliances requires actors to embrace their vulnerability in pursuit of common goals. All communities must fight extremism using human connection and narratives, for these have the power to strengthen, inspire, and unite us. They also discussed that during the process of building or regaining trust, establishing a framework for shared expectations, unity, and compassion, including accepted guidelines on civil discourse, can set a standard of mutual respect.

To appreciate the intersection in our narratives, participants highlighted the value of listening honestly and wholly to the experiences of others, no matter how insurmountable the differences in experience may seem. Engaging with children and their communities directly to identify their barriers and needs can be an extraordinarily useful tool in creating meaningful change, and education can play a central role in teaching compassion. Working with children and young adults to address trauma caused by social issues helps not only empower them but deepens their ability to empathize. For example, many children in black communities are traumatized by racism and police violence, which erodes their trust in law enforcement and their ability, as well as their will, to be open, understanding, and sympathetic. In other cases, poverty and hunger diminish children's capacity to learn, as they cannot concentrate when they lack sufficient nutrition. Storytelling can play a unique role in helping communities understand that despite the diversity among identities and experiences, there are commonalities between all peoples.

CASE STUDY

Lisa Consiglio of [Narrative 4](https://narrative4.com/) (<https://narrative4.com/>) described the organization’s work utilizing storytelling as a tool to develop empathy in young adults. Operating across four continents and 12 countries, including the U.S., Narrative 4 “equips people to use their stories to build empathy, shatter stereotypes, break down barriers, and—ultimately—make the world a better place.” Through the organization, children who have undergone traumatic experiences in the U.S., from survivors of the Sandy Hook shooting to victims of police brutality, connect with their peers in other countries who have also experienced trauma. Together, they draw strength from the stories of their peers, understand their capacity to overcome, and identify mechanisms to balance their trauma and institutions. Without explicitly being taught, they learn to become empathetic to the experiences of others. Narrative 4 also connected students from the University Heights High School with the New York Police Department to increase understanding between law enforcement and youth and to help begin to dissolve the stereotypes each group holds of the other.

CASE STUDY

[Serve 2 Unite](https://www.giftofourwounds.com/serve2unite) (<https://www.giftofourwounds.com/serve2unite>) is based on innovation, youth empowerment, service-learning, and problem-solving. The organization was founded by two men from opposing backgrounds—Arno Michaelis, a white supremacist and one of the founding members of a skinhead group, and Pardeep Kaleka, whose father was killed by a white supremacist in a shooting at a Sikh temple. The men connected and eventually established an organization that works with young people to establish a healthy sense of identity, purpose, and belonging that diverts them from violent extremist ideologies, gun violence, school shootings, bullying, and substance abuse, along with other forms of self-harm. The inspiring story of the founders reflects their goals of overcoming divisions and growing after undergoing traumatic experiences. Children play a central role in the work of the organization by identifying their own issues, developing a method to address them, and leading the initiative to overcome their identified obstacle. Serve 2 Unite helps facilitate the process by offering resources, training, and connection to community members who can further assist them in carrying out projects. In one instance, children wanted to tackle Islamophobia in their schools. Serve 2 Unite connected them to a mosque so they could learn more about Islam by interacting with their Muslim peers and the imam. They devised an idea to honor the Muslim value of community service and collaborated with a local mosque to help homeless veterans. The successful initiative highlighted the importance and benefit of turning empathy into action.



CASE STUDY



Former Cleveland Mayor Jane Campbell described the [Charter for Compassion](https://charterforcompassion.org/) (<https://charterforcompassion.org/>), an alliance that includes over 400 cities around the world who have affirmed their commitment to including compassion as a strategic principle for governance after Karen Armstrong, a writer about comparative religion, won a TED Prize in 2008 for her idea on the importance of compassion across various religions. She used the prize to initiate and found the Charter for Compassion. The Charter states that “The principle of compassion lies at the heart of all religious, ethical and spiritual traditions, calling us always to treat all others as we wish to be treated ourselves.” It allows communities to apply the principle of compassion with flexibility and on an individualized basis. Mayor Campbell reaffirmed her belief that “relationships are not formed at times of crises; they’re called upon at times of crises.” The Charter

“organizes a network that is diverse and engaged... [to] overcome extremism with the ultimate power of love.”

Mayor Campbell cited several examples. For example, Botswana, which has decided to become a country of compassion, has decided to begin a new expansion of medical assistance by focusing on delivering aid to children under the age of five. Atlanta has organized “living room conversations” in which people from different backgrounds can ask each other questions. And in Rotterdam, in the Netherlands, where the queen appoints mayors (while the people elect the government), although some elected officials have embraced the extreme right, the mayor of Rotterdam defied far-right principles by deciding to become a city of compassion.



3. POLICING REFORMS

Panelists:

Arif Alikhan, Director, [Office of Constitutional Policing and Policy, Los Angeles Police Department](#)

Ed Chung, Vice President, [Criminal Justice Reform, Center for America Progress](#)

Regina Holloway, Senior Program Manager, [The Policing Project, New York University School of Law](#)

Bishop Omar Jahwar, [Urban Specialists](#)

Stephanie Morales, [Portsmouth Commonwealth's Attorney](#) (Virginia)

Will Snowden, Director, New Orleans office, [Vera Institute for Justice](#)

COMMUNITY POLICING

Police are here to protect the community, which is ideally captured by community policing. This practice ensures trust and healthy relationships between the police and the communities they serve. Unfortunately, policing can often fall into a paradigm of enforcement, rather than protection. This, combined with other problems with policing, can erode trust.

As the role of law enforcement in America has become one of force rather than protection, the concept of community policing has entered the policy discourse of activists, local officials, and law enforcement officers themselves. Advocates of community policing seek a recommitment of police forces to the communities which they serve. Given the context of racial profiling, police brutality, and the school-to-prison pipeline, and the challenges and failures of policing when addressing violent conflicts at protest events in Charlottesville, Berkeley, and Portland, among others, community policing advocates in St. Louis described their belief that the method should ensure police are here to ensure the well-being of the community they serve.

At its core, community policing is an attempt to

return to the definition of what it means to be a member of law enforcement: to protect and to serve communities. In this sense, community policing is not a radical change of police purpose. Instead, it is a recommitment to the founding ideals of policing. A police department should seek to know its place within the community and gain the support of its members, both of which can be accomplished by establishing trust and accountability. By enacting policies in line with these goals, police agencies become an asset to the community, rather than a liability.

One of the most significant obstacles to community policing efforts is cost-cutting by police departments and local governments. In the reevaluation of the priorities of a police force, attempts to redefine policy and change the system are often the first to be cut. Police departments should instead focus on ensuring that officers are always up to date on training and have ample opportunities to engage with the community in a genuine, long-term manner. Training should attempt to convey the understanding of privilege and absolute authority that officers possess during interactions with

civilians, particularly with minority communities.

Accountability and trust are essential elements of a healthy relationship between police and communities. Police forces can strive to earn the trust of the communities they serve in multiple ways. While communities must be assured that there are effective mechanisms in place for the accountability of police officers, police officers should be regarded as invaluable resources for the community. Law enforcement must interact with the community outside of enforcing penalties, both regularly and over a long period of time. Programs should be designed to create lasting relationships between police forces and their communities. Policies and training that decrease the stakes during interactions between police and communities will allow the formation of positive relationships more easily.

Accountability is most prominently discussed during the prosecution of officers who are involved in civilian shootings. Although police departments should always act with consideration toward the community, accountability should continue by holding regular public briefings and informational sessions, as well as extending opportunities to receive feedback from the public, to establish a framework of the community needs

and responses. Instead of viewing accountability as an afterthought, it should instead be a continuous process to ensure all stakeholders are on the same page regarding the boundaries of acceptable behavior. Police forces should emphasize transparency by providing public access to records and information. They can create further connections by reducing the number of situations in which they openly carry weapons.

The incentive structure of police departments needs amending. Many police departments measure success by the number of arrests or notices of violations issued; community policing advocates for measuring the effectiveness of the police in addressing community-identified issues instead. By reframing the metric of success, police redefine their role in the community, emphasizing their duty is to enable the community to thrive, rather than to derive success from punishment enforced.

Engagement programs must be long-term, frequent, and focused on debunking stereotypes as well as communicating community needs. Programs seeking to engage at-risk youth can echo this notion. With more diverse police departments, it is more likely that at-risk youth will hold positive role models and trust their police



departments. They will see the variety in future career opportunities open to them.

One policy frequently proposed to increase community-police ties is for officers to live in the community they serve. Advocates claim that the policy mandates officers are a part of the community they are serving, increasing the motivations for police to act as reliable resources for the community. However, the policy has been criticized for reducing the pool of qualified and diverse applicants for police departments. Critics also argue that, without time away from where they work, officers can become jaded and more likely to view their role in the community as an extension of their role in the police force.

Another reform that was discussed was to provide resources to acknowledge and support police officers' work in areas including homelessness, mental health, and public health. In such situations, the best way to serve and protect their communities is not through enforcing law and order. Local authorities should ensure that both the police and the community are equipped with the proper resources to respond in such situations, which will strengthen the bond between communities and police, making the reporting of emergencies more likely, as well as ensure that police will have the correct response to non-law enforcement situations.

PROTECTING MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES AND PREVENTING HATE CRIMES

Panelists also discussed how extremist political events could have a particularly harmful effect on marginalized populations. Local and state governments bear a moral responsibility for leaders to address political violence during protests and in marginalized communities. The problem in keeping communities safe begins with community policing and law enforcement which knows the local community. Because of fractured municipalities, there are usually different legal restrictions in various districts. For example, laws for assembly could be different in one city than they are in another. These differences make it difficult for both individuals and law enforcement to know and understand the law. Accordingly, there is a shift from police who know, live in, and protect their communities to police who are commissioned to protect communities with which they are unfamiliar. This shift harms community relations and offers an answer as to why

marginalized communities feel that the police are not protecting them.

Panelists agreed that bridging the gap between marginalized communities and law enforcement is necessary to address politically-motivated acts of violence. However, confronting this issue requires communication between marginalized communities and local and state governments. Communities that lack a relationship with law enforcement must initially demonstrate a willingness to respond to political violence. Reaching out and speaking to law enforcement about eliminating hate crimes helps to create a foundation of trust for stronger community relations. Local leaders should use their prominent positions to call out political violence, creating a climate that disrupts bias, discourages intolerance, and provides a legal framework for assembly rules.

4. MAINTAINING PUBLIC SAFETY WHILE PROTECTING PROTEST

Panelists:

Danyelle Solomon, Vice President, [Race and Ethnicity, Center for American Progress](#) (moderator)

John Inazu, Sally D. Danforth Distinguished Professor of Law & Religion and Professor of Political Science, [Washington University in St. Louis](#)

Michael Lieberman, Washington Counsel and Director, Civil Rights Policy Planning Center, [Anti-Defamation League](#)

Mary McCord, Legal Director and Visiting Professor of Law, [Institute for Constitutional Advocacy and Protection at Georgetown University Law Center](#) (moderator)

Chelsea Parsons, Vice President, [Gun Violence Prevention, Center for America Progress](#)

FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND PUBLIC SAFETY

The First Amendment guarantees the right to freedom of press, religion, and individual expression for individuals and groups. It also protects the right to “peaceful assembly,” ensuring all voices an opportunity to be heard. In protecting these freedoms, local officials must also consider public safety. Any restrictions must be reasonable, viewpoint-neutral, and should provide ample alternatives for communication for protesters and counterprotesters. Summit participants discussed the absolute need to design and implement security plans that will safely separate protesters and counterprotesters at potentially violent protest events. Governments must communicate with the public and with event participants about these plans before, during, and after the events, and they must work together with all potential government actors—federal, state, and local—to ensure maximum cohesion and cooperation.

When localities wish to relocate protesters away from the object of their protest, they must consider that courts often are concerned

that such relocation may diminish a protest’s significant value. Restrictions must be narrowly tailored and designed to protect rather than restrict free expression, and that all parties communicate about and respect any restrictions, to protect the expressive, but peaceful, right to assemble.

In the wake of the tragedy in Charlottesville and with the increase in violent extremism nationwide, public officials must address the current dangers surrounding the right to protest. Localities should be able to cite the demonstrated likelihood of violence when issuing permits or defending permit decisions in court while taking into account traditional Constitutional concerns about a “heckler’s veto.” Parties should engage on a local level to discover and implement the tools and practices to encourage peaceful assembly.

Following the model established by an unprecedented lawsuit brought by the City of Charlottesville using state anti-militia and anti-paramilitary laws to obtain court orders preventing individuals and groups from returning to the city

to engage in the organized, armed use of force, two cities in Tennessee in late October 2017 used similar state laws to impose reasonable time, place, and manner restrictions on planned “White

Lives Matter” protests, including a weapons ban, checkpoints, and separate zones for protesters and counterprotesters.

THE SECOND AMENDMENT AND FIREARMS AT PROTEST EVENTS

In maintaining public safety during protests, local officials must consider the implications of allowing people to carry firearms and other weapons into events, in light of the Second Amendment and related state and local laws that vary from state to state and community to community. Firearm regulation preemption statutes exist in a variety of forms in 43 states, and they prohibit any local jurisdiction from passing an ordinance that prohibits the possession of firearms. Under many of these firearms regulation preemption statutes, a local authority that is successfully sued may be required to pay costs and the plaintiff’s attorney fees. Some of these laws also eliminate qualified immunity, permitting local officials to be

sued personally for violating Second Amendment rights. Some summit participants supported changing these laws and allowing local officials more leeway regarding weapons incidental to the time and place of the protest to maintain public safety. These participants believe giving local jurisdictions the ability to place ancillary restrictions on firearms would aid in eliminating the threat of violence during protests. Other participants were concerned about treating “protest” as a distinct form of assembly and questioned the notion of broadly restricting the exercise of some rights in order to exercise another right.



5. LESSONS FROM HISTORY

Panelists:

John Halpin, Senior Fellow, [Center for America Progress](#) (moderator)

Ronald Chisom, Co-Founder, [The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond](#)

Alvin Edwards, Founder, [Charlottesville Clergy Collective](#)

Ariel Guerrero, National League of Cities

Bernadette Onyenaka, National League of Cities

Zeenat Rahman, Director, [Inclusive America Project, The Aspen Institute](#)

Panelists engaged in a provocative and engaged discussion of the legacies of a past of systemic racism, including white privilege and white supremacy, how they interact with extremism, and how to think about and overcome them. Panelists agreed that reflecting on history can inform how violence and extremism can be fought in a contemporary context, through the study of successful anti-hate leaders, movements, and collaborations. To begin, they noted, we lack a standard definition of racism. Without a basic description, discussions about race and discrimination cannot enact real change due to conflicting interpretations and opinions. Creating an inclusive, honest, and productive environment for all people who currently lack the terminology to express themselves more effectively facilitates communication. It is crucial, therefore, to have an inclusive vocabulary to discuss racism—and what to do about it.

This quest can begin with *anti*-racism. Panelists agreed this undertaking should be a collective process starting with the undeniable facts of history. It begins with acknowledging the bitter truth of history, including America's strong historical ties to white supremacy. It continues with seeking to build open communities of trust, forming meaningful relationships, agreeing on shared goals to promote change, and

understanding each community's issues.

Panelists discussed the need to approach the topic of white supremacy with a resolute anti-racist compass, while also attempting to be inclusive and avoid turning allies away, including white people who are new to the anti-racist conversation. Panelists, taking into account the sensitive and controversial nature of this topic, discussed one of the key ways to begin a conversation about white supremacy, which is to name it as a system rather than attacking or assigning guilt to a person or group of people. They described white supremacy, at its core, as a system that everyone exists within, and all members of society have something to gain by confronting it. In other words, it is not a "white people" problem.

However, white people are vitally needed to collaborate with people of color, who, historically, have not had the power to create change. White people are not alone in the fight against white supremacy, nor do they shoulder all the responsibility. However, they do have a unique role in moving uncomfortable issues forward and having discussions with those in their communities, especially other white people. It is vital to take the diversity of personal experience, trauma, discrimination, and the history of people of color

into account in the fight against white supremacy.

In the “wisdom circle” after the panel, a discussion occurred among leaders about the controversial idea of privilege. After one participant explained her defensive reaction to the concept of privilege, another explained that privilege does not need to be seen as a burden or a debt. Instead, it can be a “fund to spend from,” a set of resources for someone to be able to support equity and inclusion.

In the same vein, it is necessary to address issues such as anti-bias education, overcoming apathy and desensitization in communities, and the difference between rural and urban issues regarding white supremacy and extremism. Although schools may lack curricula based on activism and social problems, there are creative ways to reach children, whether through career days, theater, or even sex education.

To overcome apathy, leaders should work to be creative and give their communities the power, resources, and infrastructure that will

engage and mobilize them. People often join white supremacist groups to find a sense of community; if individuals can be excited about productive, diverse, and positive community-based initiatives, communities can establish fellowship and engagement. Moreover, the issue of poverty must not be ignored when discussing rural communities, especially in rural white communities, which often feel left behind, so discussion of white privilege with white people affected by poverty may not build alliances in the fight against hatred. White supremacy cleverly plays into poverty by convincing people that the only thing they have is their whiteness. This ideology can lead impoverished white communities to act against their own interests, radicalizing and inspiring hate where there is the potential for inclusivity and community.

Finally, the power of alliances, seen in the collaboration of organizations with local governments, municipalities, and elected officials to promote racial equity in cities and towns, is essential to the success of any anti-hate effort.



CASE STUDY

[The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond \(PISAB\)](https://www.pisab.org/about-us/) (<https://www.pisab.org/about-us/>), is focused on this analytic approach; the initiative examines the origins of racism and then discusses tactics of anti-racism organizing, organizing with a humanistic approach. The Institute defines itself as a national and international collective of anti-racist, multicultural community organizers and educators dedicated to building an effective movement for social transformation. It aims to overcome racism by cutting its roots rather than just addressing the effects of the phenomenon. The PISAB offers workshops as well as technical assistance and consultations. The Institute has 100 trainers and has conducted 20,000 trainings and workshops, and has impacted about one million people all over the world.

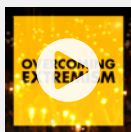
CASE STUDY

Ariel Guerrero founded the O&G Racial Equity Collaborative to advise institutions on racial equity knowledge building, leadership and implementation. Guerrero proposed solutions including the need to create the proper language to talk about extremism, encourage elected officials to become proximate to the problems in their communities, examine community organizing structures and power-

sharing, orient the lenses of government to the most marginalized groups, and understand the role white supremacy has played throughout history, including the tangible effects still felt today. Often, however, there is neither shared trust among clergy nor outreach in the communities that clergy serve.

CASE STUDY

Clergy members must be rooted in solidarity, fellowship, and accountability. As the Charlottesville Clergy Collective demonstrates, clergy must also engage in outreach to better identify the needs of their community. Alvin Edwards, a former mayor of Charlottesville and the pastor of Mt. Zion First African Baptist Church, Charlottesville's largest African American church, launched the Charlottesville Clergy Collective to provide an inter-faith forum for engagement with community and social justice issues. In the lead-up to the violent rallies in 2017, the Collective convened its leaders and community members for strategy discussions and community convenings. It created prayer groups and supported different options for members who wanted to engage in counterprotests, attend alternative events away from the scene of the protests, or stay behind and pray for the community. He believes that creating options, and supporting social justice through an interfaith community, was a source of resilience to the community.



“Overcoming Extremism” podcast episode: Listen to Alvin Edwards explain the role of the Clergy Collective during Charlottesville's extremism events in 2017.

Listen Now: https://podcast.rss.com/overcomingextremism1/?name=2019-10-18_pastor_edwards_and_sarah_ruger_remastered.mp3

6. BREAKING DOWN SILOS TO ADDRESS “OTHERIZATION”

Panelists:

Vegas Tenold, Author, [Everything You Love Will Burn: Inside the Rebirth of White Nationalism in America](#)

Rachel Brown, Founder and Executive Director, [Over Zero](#)

Meryl Justin Chertoff, Executive Director, [The Aspen Institute’s Justice and Society Program](#) (moderator)

Usra Ghazi, Director, [America Indivisible](#)

Jenan Mohajir, Senior Director of Leadership, [Interfaith Youth Core](#)

Camilo Perez-Bustillo, Director of Advocacy, Research and Leadership Development, [Hope Border Institute](#)

Anisha Singh, Senior Organizing Director, [General Progress](#)

THE PROMISE OF COALITIONS AND INTERSECTIONALITY

Across society and institutions, we see efforts to divide Americans from one another, which can result in extremism and even violence. Panelists discussed how arbitrary distinctions made across lines of race, gender, and religion create dichotomies that need not exist within society. These “otherizations” have, in some cases, led to hatred against those who are deemed different based on uninformed rationalizations. Hate is a human instinct based on the evolutionary need to taxonomize individuals to determine the superiority of a specific group, which ultimately poses a threat to the freedom of those forced to fight the silos into which they fit. To move forward, we must stop trivializing the everlasting trauma perpetuated by modern communities of hate and extremism. We need to take the challenge of modern hate groups seriously. A nation historically reluctant to change is now facing an increasingly impossible problem, one that requires a reckoning with history to effectively combat extremism.

Fundamentally, “otherization” is the result of cultures pitted against those that are different, often with the intent of making one group feel

superior or inherently better. Americans must come to acknowledge the beauty and benefit of religious and racial pluralism, rather than the divisiveness of the differences that may exist. Developing and maintaining coalitions helps foster ideas and solutions to issues which many marginalized populations hold a stake in combating. Overcoming extremism begins with having the courage to break down boundaries and blur the lines which divide society. Panelists discussed the fact that a fundamental step in preventing the “otherization” of individuals lies in understanding the boundaries used to determine the groups that are deemed morally correct, and those considered to be inherently wrong. These distinctions are created to divide the two groups and to make the “us” feel superior, dissociating two communities that otherwise share commonalities.

Panelists related that intersectionality is a critical element in ensuring communities come together to counter hate. Among differing religions, races, and genders, common cultural denominators present themselves—and have the potential to unite people across identities. Seemingly

unconnected groups can find shared stakes in coming together to fight these issues endured across communities. Developing intersectional coalitions allow for a more efficient fight against marginalization and hate towards minority communities. For example, following the events of September 11, 2001, members of the Sikh community were often misidentified as Muslims, and upon seeing the hate Muslim people endured, they were presented with the decision to either clearly differentiate their identity or fight the prejudice alongside the Muslim community. Their choice to stand as one allowed for a long-term alliance to form based on trust, mutual respect, and shared expectation that justice for one means justice for all.

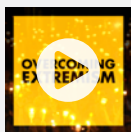
Any effort to build trust and engagement between community members and officials of local government must be mutual, panelists agreed. This consideration should come from a nonpartisan perspective, as taking care of the community is not a political stance but a fundamental duty of the government. Therefore, developing adequate spaces to host conversations between communities, NGOs, government agencies, and law enforcement becomes a necessary step in the advancement of real change.

Education, panelists agreed, can be the core of movements to combat extremism. Organizations have aimed to develop education programs to address profiling and problematic practices, like those committed by TSA agents against members of the Sikh and Muslim community and those perceived to be Muslim. These programs

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Overcoming
extremism
begins with
having the
courage to
break down
boundaries
and blur the
lines which
divide society.

address issues between TSA practices and the cultural values of these individuals, and through collaboration between advocacy groups and agencies such as TSA, a reformation of biased processes can begin. The importance of religious literacy is based not only on basic operations but in the simple understanding of cultural differences.



“Overcoming Extremism” podcast episode: Listen to journalist Vegas Tenold describe being embedded with the alt-right during the “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville.

Listen Now: https://podcast.rss.com/overcomingextremism1/?name=2019-10-17_vegas_tenold_nts__to_use.mp3

CASE STUDY

[FoodSpark](https://www.foodspark.org) (<https://www.foodspark.org>) in St. Louis, Missouri, acts as a catalyst for conversation between members of the community and local government, through something as simple as a potluck dinner. The organization aims to bring changemakers together in order to “spark connections, engage conversations, and create ideas that address local social issues.” The structure includes four steps which evolve in four months. In the first month, participants gather over a potluck dinner and start having conversations about specific topics. Afterward, they “extend and deepen the conversations of each topic” and generate ideas in the FoodSpark Lab. In the fourth month, participants try to extend the impact of their ideas and attract crowdfunding by pitching them at a dinner party. FoodSpark’s community impact includes engaging over 2,000 people in 63 events about 44 topics. Participants have sparked 29 ideas so far and have funded seven of them.

CASE STUDY

Since 2011, the [Inclusive America Project of the Aspen Institute’s Justice and Society Program](https://www.aspeninstitute.org/programs/justice-and-society-program/inclusive-america-project/) (<https://www.aspeninstitute.org/programs/justice-and-society-program/inclusive-america-project/>) has studied, published, and convened stakeholders to leverage best practice models and consolidate learning around ways to combat “otherization.” These include promoting religious literacy, encounters with others, religious freedom, diversity and inclusion, sustained dialogue, and storytelling.

Efforts initially focused on youth service organizations like the Boys & Girls Clubs of America and the Y, which have a broad presence nationally in both diverse and non-diverse communities. Recently, there has been a focus on making the case to philanthropy to invest in religious pluralism as an element of building an inclusive and tolerant civic culture. IAP leverages the convening power of the Aspen Institute to raise the visibility of these topics and to provide a neutral, values-based forum for dialogue trust; it has been able to foster unusual and valuable collaborations.

CASE STUDY

[Interfaith Youth Core](https://www.ifyc.org), (<https://www.ifyc.org>) a national organization that aims to encourage religious pluralism at universities and the community at large, has many young alumni who have begun initiatives inspired by the values of the organization. A young Somali-American woman and alumnus of Youth Core was an influential activist during the Muslim travel ban and acknowledged the importance of blurring the lines which divided her from her conservative classmates. She aimed to bridge the gap between Republican students and more liberal activists on her college campus by developing relationships with a club of Republican students. Her actions, much like the goals of Youth Core, establish respect between community members, build a platform to address issues openly and honestly, and aim to stop “otherization.”

EXCERPT

Former Senator John Danforth (R-MO) gave a keynote address focused on the power of institutions to shore up democracy against extremism:



divide us. That is the tactic of demagogues. Or they can bring us together. That was the genius of Abraham Lincoln, who, towards the end of the Civil War, called on Americans to ‘bind up the nation’s wounds.’ We should demand leaders who hold America together, and we should call out leaders who drive us apart.”

"Organizing peaceful community responses to demonstrations by neo-Nazis and other hate groups will depend on private sector engagement, but it would benefit from participation by local governments. Suppose a community that anticipates the arrival of hateful demonstrators could simultaneously produce 10 times as many people, not for a violent confrontation with the demonstrators, but to gather in a different part of town and make a powerful statement of tolerance and unity. Such a response would require a degree of planning and execution unlikely to originate in the private sector alone that would profit from encouragement by the local government.

“Finally, government officials, especially those in elective politics, are more than advocates and implementers of specific programs. They are leaders who have public megaphones, and they can use those megaphones for good or for ill. Often what they say is more important than the programs they advance. They can appeal to the best in us, or they can appeal to the worst in us. They can

—
"We should demand leaders who hold America together, and we should call out leaders who drive us apart."

- Former Senator
John Danforth (MO)

EXCERPT

Gold Star parent Khizr Khan spoke about why the Georgetown militia lawsuit was so significant:



“Most Americans had heard and seen the chants and the march and assault on Charlottesville on television, but very few know what has happened since. Under the able leadership of Mike Signer and other able lawyers of the city, with the collaboration of Georgetown University Law Center’s Institute for Constitutional Advocacy and Protection, also called ICAP, and its able leadership by Mary McCord and her team of lawyers, on behalf of the city, local businesses and local communities filed a lawsuit against those who assaulted our peaceful community by armed rally. Just a few months ago after a brief legal discovery period, in the suit titled City of Charlottesville, et al., v. Pennsylvania Lightfoot Militia, et al., the City of Charlottesville and defendants reached an agreement and signed a consent decree which then became a consent order...

“What inspires me to continue to speak in defense of our Constitution, our democracy, our rule of law and against extremism, among thousands of letters and messages, is a letter sent to us by a retired Army nurse who served in the Second World War. She writes on the 26th page in the last paragraph of her letter, ‘Mr. Khan, continue to speak. Had more people spoken against the violence

prior to the Second World War, we could have avoided the atrocities committed against mankind, against our Jewish brothers and sisters and children. Please continue to speak and remind us that silence is not an option...’

“And again quietly advised by two Holocaust survivors when I went to receive the Terezin Legacy Award in Boston last year...both said that there are plenty of similarities in today’s political and public discourse and rampant extremism and violence as they witnessed and lived through prior to and during the Second World War in Germany and Europe. I have promised them that I will do my humble part to remind us to continue to stand against extremism and never forget.

“I am honored to be standing before you. Thank you for being beacons of hope and light. When this anomaly is behind us, your names will be written in gold on the pages of history for being on the right side of the equation. Until then, be safe and continue to look after each other and your communities. Thank you.”

EXCERPT

Former George W. Bush advisor and *New York Times* columnist Peter Wehner gave a keynote address about the “promise of politics” and the need to rehabilitate functioning political institutions as an alternative to radicalism and extremism:



“Politics is a profession of trial and error, of adjustment and readjustment. We can’t expect anything like perfection. But what we can reasonably expect from lawmakers is competence, good judgment, and integrity; and some degree of commitment to the public interest and the common good. We should also expect to find, at least now and then, a spirit of sympathy, conciliation and magnanimity. Politics rightly understood isn’t about fun and games, about entertainment and stagecraft. Nor is it merely about expressing one’s own values and excoriating the other person’s. It’s about the hard and intricate work of solving pressing human problems; about getting more big things right than wrong; and in the process making the world a little bit better, a little less inhumane, a little more just.

“You and I, our friends and neighbors, our colleagues and acquaintances are the true authors of the American story. We are not like a cork caught in ocean currents, powerless to shape our future. We can shape the outcome of events.

“As a remedy for nihilism and cynicism, it may be helpful to remember that the politicians who led us through the Civil War, two World Wars and the Depression were made of the same flawed human stuff as are the politicians of today. Americans are fortunate that several of them were great, and greatness is certainly in short supply today. But it usually is. And even the great ones made mistakes along the way. In addition, the political systems of their eras, like ours today, struggled with corruption, inefficiency and disputatiousness.

“Politics will never be pretty.

But it just needs to work. And for that, it needs a public that will allow it to work; that will insist that it works.

“Deep differences will always exist in our country; the goal of politics is to find ways to live peaceably and respectfully, given those differences. Democratic virtues of moderation, compromise and civility are necessary and vital if our society is to function well. And we have to bear in mind, too, that politics is fundamentally about problem-solving. If politics isn’t making things better in people’s lives, in ways that are concrete and practical, then it’s failing in one of its primary responsibilities... At its best, politics gives us the space to live our lives and pursue

our passions—some grand, some ordinary, some silly—and at its very best, politics ennobles us by attaching us to great causes for justice and human dignity.

“But that can’t happen unless and until we recover a sense of the importance of politics, a respect for the craft of governing, and the value of competence and excellence. Sometimes people idealize politics; when they do, it’s a mistake. But so is constantly denigrating it. Today we’re leaning far too much in the direction of denigration. We need to raise our sights, to expect more from our politicians and from ourselves...Ours is a remarkable Republic, if we can keep it.”

CASE STUDY



Attorney and former White House Fellow Samar Ali described [Millions of Conversations](https://www.millionsofconversations.com/) (https://www.millionsofconversations.com/), which she launched to build bridges between Muslim Americans and white Americans in red and purple states. Ali described becoming the victim of a vicious anti-Muslim conspiracy

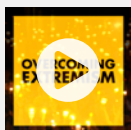
theory while serving as an aide to the governor of Tennessee, and how she learned that she could break down suspicion and hatred through personal connections. She said, “it didn’t take a profound personality shift or a stack of contrary evidence to convince this member of the legislature I wasn’t a terrorist or enemy of the state. All it took was seeing me face to face. All it took was a person to person encounter.” Using that knowledge, she has created a new organization that will deploy Muslim American “ambassadors” throughout America to build bridges and connections, dispelling bigotry and reducing extremism. She

"When people are centered around principles, they listen more, judge less, think deeper, and feel a sense of responsibility. Difference should not be something we fear; it is a part of us. I am you and you are me. This is the common ground we can celebrate and reclaim as Americans."

- Samar Ali
Millions of Conversations

described the new organization's purpose:

"It's time for us to get back to basics and rediscover—together—what makes this country so special: to move beyond tribal divisions, to find the strength of our individual selves in the collective. We all have to talk openly about American values—about freedom of speech, individual freedom, love of family and community, hard work, the freedom of worship, and separation of religion and state. Conversations rooted in principles can break through tribal divides. When people are centered around principles, they listen more, judge less, think deeper, and feel a sense of responsibility. Difference should not be something we fear; it is a part of us. I am you and you are me. This is the common ground we can celebrate and reclaim as Americans... I believe our One Million Conversations will be a model for the rest of our country to follow as we become a majority-minority country. Imagine how much impact we can make if we do this all together. This is more than a campaign to address the challenges facing American Muslims like myself. It's a campaign to provide the thought leadership all of America needs to redefine and strengthen our sense of community."



"Overcoming Extremism" podcast episode: Listen to Samar Ali describe being the subject of extremist harassment in Tennessee and why she founded Millions of Conversations.

Listen Now: https://podcast.rss.com/overcomingextremism1/?name=2019-10-17_samar_ali_nts.mp3

EXCERPT

Ali Noorani of the National Immigration Forum described his organization’s new strategy of engaging with evangelicals on immigration and refugee policy to avoid “otherization”:



“Way back in 2011, we embarked on a new strategy. We decided we were going to get away from the echo chamber of liberal America. We were going to focus our resources on the Southeast, Midwest, and Mountain West to learn how conservative America was grappling with the issue of immigration.

“We were determined to meet people where they are, but we were not going to leave them there.

“And, along the way, we came to learn that in these regions, if you hold a Bible, wear a badge, or own a business, more likely than not, you want a common-sense solution to the immigration system...

“So, what does this look like?

“While the coalition we have built, [Bibles, Badges and Business](https://immigrationforum.org/article/bibles-badges-and-business-principles/) (https://immigrationforum.org/article/bibles-badges-and-business-principles/), consists of thousands of faith, law enforcement and

business leaders, since time is short, I’d like to spend a few minutes on two examples.

“One of our primary partners is the Evangelical Immigration Table, consisting of some of the nation’s most influential evangelical organizations. Since 2012, we have worked with these leaders at the local and national level to share information, reach out to the broader community and, at strategic moments, advocate for policy change.

“Looking back on how we developed such a strong partnership, it came down to one thing: Respect. As an organization, we needed to enter this new relationship willing to listen, willing to get out of our comfort zones, willing to do the work necessary to earn trust. I’m that way; this is not a transactional relationship. It is a relationship based on a shared belief that all people should be treated with dignity.

“An example of the importance

"As an organization, we needed to enter this new relationship willing to listen, willing to get out of our comfort zones, willing to do the work necessary to earn trust."

- Ali Noorani, *National Immigration Forum*

of efforts like the Evangelical Immigration Table can be taken from the administration's child separation, or zero tolerance, policy earlier this year.

"The policy caught the public's attention in April and May. As the media began to investigate what was happening, the pressure, by and large, came from the political and secular left, which was very important.

"On June 1, the Table sent a letter signed by national evangelical leadership to the White House urging the administration to end the policy of family separation at the border.

"The letter read, 'As evangelical Christians guided by the Bible, one of our core convictions is that God has established the family as the fundamental building block of society. The state should separate families only in the rarest of instances.'

"Through the Table's grasstops network, the letter was then signed by 3,495 leaders, including 1,013 pastors.

"The letter was soon signed by over 12,000 evangelical women...

"Twenty days after the initial letter from evangelical leadership, and multiple press reports on the harmful effects of the policy in religious press, the president signed an executive order to

end the policy.

"The administration changed its rhetoric and policy, in large part, because of pressure from the conservative faith community.

"Another example comes from Twin Falls, a town of 34,000 in southern Idaho.

"Over the course of 2016, fake news reports escalated a crime committed by immigrant youth into an international incident where city leadership, business owners, and others were threatened via email and telephone.

"In the face of enormous pressure, the Twin Falls city council could have endorsed various anti-immigrant initiatives that were picking up steam at the local, state and federal level.

"Instead, the faith community—a quarter of the city's residents are Mormon and there is a large evangelical community as well—law enforcement, business leaders, and educators mounted a campaign to provide facts, and support the city council in this ugly debate.

"In the end, the city's leaders persevered. They would not let the hate and extremism take over their community. And Twin Falls remains a city that welcomes and integrates immigrants and refugees."

EXCERPT

Sarah Ruger from the Charles Koch Institute spoke about the power of alliances that bridge divisions and tackle hate.



Watch the video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UCFz1c0mZIQ>

She said that the Charles Koch Institute got interested in the COE due to its advocacy for the First Amendment and the right of free speech. After Charlottesville happened, she and her colleagues had to “grapple with the very real harms that unfettered free speech can cause.” This experience emphasized the challenge of “offensive ideas that are not easy to combat and that cause deep divides.”

In order to bring people together and mend the social fractures, she described how the Charles Koch Institute launched the Greatest Collaboration Initiative, which will pursue three main strategies. First, it will research the “roots of intolerance” by bringing experts and researchers together and building upon the existing body of knowledge. Second, it will fund platforms that allow people to have “dialogues across the divide” without violence or censorship

in order to demonstrate that such discussions are possible. Last, the Initiative will empower entrepreneurs who have found the best tools to overcome divisions.

Ruger reiterated the importance of bridging divisions and constructing “unlikely or courageous collaborations” to demonstrate that we can work with partners with whom “we disagree on any number of other issues.” Doing so enables learning and increases effectiveness. Ruger spoke about how the Charles Koch Institute and the Fetzer Institute, two organizations that embrace different ideological views, had collaborated in planning COE in the name of a more loving and compassionate society. She emphasized that “something as difficult to deal with as hate, it’s going to take something as radical as love to do that.”

EXCERPT

Bob Boisture, President and CEO, Fetzer Institute, stressed that overcoming extremism requires a force as powerful as love, advocating “deep spiritual work,” compassion, and collaboration as antidotes to the fear and separation of our times.



Boisture went on to articulate three propositions informed by the mission of the Fetzer Institute to help “build the spiritual foundation for a loving world,” by his 35 years advocating for left-leaning causes, and by listening to conservative friends and colleagues.

First, the violent extremism arising from the toxicity of our civic life requires a critical mass of people dedicated to radically changing our civic life. Boisture made a “hard-headed case for using ‘soft’ strategies” like opening hearts, building trust, and bridging divides to assist in overcoming extremism and social division. Second, it is vital to have “everybody at the table on an equal footing, committed to respecting the dignity of everyone else, ready to forthrightly share their perspectives but also to listen deeply and

be open to being changed by the perspective of others.” Conversations need to be inclusive. People who are vulnerable to extremism have often experienced “persistent, sustained cultural and moral aggression by liberal elites and liberal activists....They have felt like their values have been demeaned, their faith disrespected, their intelligence denied, and moral integrity and voices diminished.” This requires more than an invitation. It requires personal outreach to build relationships upon trust and vulnerability. Third, Boisture urged awareness of how our own biases contribute to this polarization and to guard ourselves against demonizing the other side. Doing the hard and crucial “spiritual work” will aid in the struggle of “constricting evil and expanding love.”

PART II: PRIVATE SECTOR SUMMIT

For Communities Overcoming Extremism's second summit on July 17, 2019, at Airbnb's headquarters in San Francisco, about 120 leaders gathered for keynotes, panel discussions, and wisdom circles focused on questions including:

How can companies tackle extremism consistently if they cannot define it succinctly? How can communities reach a balance between free speech (protected by the First Amendment), the Second Amendment, the right to protest, and the safety of citizens? Should the private sector regulate itself? How can it do so without risking becoming alternative government? What role should the government play when it comes to regulation? How can the tech/private sector balance innovation and free speech with user safety? What are the unintended consequences of moderating speech? What can we do to reduce

their negative impact? Who should do what? Who will take the lead in the fight against hate and extremism? Whose responsibility is it?

How can the private and public sectors foster better and more effective apolitical alliances? How do we measure success when malicious actors can migrate to more lenient platforms?

The summit was conducted under Chatham House Rule, which means that content can be shared, but attributions to individuals or organizations require permission. The following description reflects those rules and agreements.



1. DEFINING EXTREMISM

Panelists:

Oren Segal, Director, [Center on Extremism, Anti-Defamation League](#) (moderator)

Jesse Arreguín, Mayor, [City of Berkeley](#), California

Sharb Farjami, CEO, [Storyful](#)

Robert L. McKenzie, [Director and Senior Fellow, New America](#)

The first panel discussed some of the inherent difficulties in defining extremism and the attendant challenges that has for a wide range of institutions and organizations attempting to combat the spread and influence of extremism. The panel noted that although there is growing public pressure for the federal government and tech companies to address extremism, the specific steps are often left vague.

Rather than focusing solely on extremism, the panel discussed the need for more scholarship and data to better understand hate groups in the United States. The public conversation on this topic would benefit extraordinarily from a large body of independent and rigorous research. One panelist discussed the need for more original research on a set of constellations of extreme hate groups: the KKK, neo-Nazis, white nationalist, and related groups in the United States. The panelist noted that term “constellations” is most appropriate because these groups do not function as political parties or movements, but rather as ideologically-driven fringe groups that are akin to cults or gangs.

But other panelists noted that not all extremists fit neatly into any one particular hate group. Some extremists operate as lone wolves without apparent links to any group or movement. What is more, many violent extremists and hate groups

use nuanced and coded language to avoid detection and being banned from platforms.

Panelists discussed the need to find new ways to better assess what content is hateful. They also discussed the need to think about how to categorize and assess individuals and groups which engage in hateful activities, but which do not explicitly engage in and/or promote violence. Panelists discussed how the internet has amplified and accelerated extremism as well as violent extremism and hate groups. Social media platforms have facilitated the connection of individuals and groups who, despite being located in different geographical locations and with very little in-person coordination, now have the ability to communicate in real time. This hyperconnectivity allows extremists to promulgate disinformation, conspiracies, and harmful content with a vast number of persons far beyond their immediate, personal circles. Panelists discussed the need for greater communication and transparency on the part of social media companies regarding both their policies and enforcement activities to combat extremism and hate. Panelists also expressed an urgency for more collaboration between social media companies and a wide range of stakeholders: researchers, civil society and advocacy groups, and state and local government offices.

EXCERPT

Robert L. McKenzie, Director, Muslim Diaspora Initiative and Senior Fellow at New America, discussed the need for more research.

“The threat from online violent extremism is growing and in the wake of so many horrific and tragic attacks, the public outcry over extremist recruitment and messaging online has reached a tipping point. As jihadist networks and far-right ideologues become savvier at mobilizing via social media, the calls for mitigating hate on the social networks will grow ever more intense. Yet these discussions should be based on data and insight rather than fear and intuition. In order to formulate the right responses, there are still many unanswered questions that must be addressed.

“What are the constellations and contours of hate groups in the United States? What types of

hateful content are being promulgated by these groups, and how? Beyond specific groups, how should we think about broader networks of hate? What are the dynamics of connection between online activities and real-world violence? And when and where are hateful activities most pernicious and threatening?

“Answering these questions won’t rid the world of hate, but will be important steps to better understand and mitigate violent extremism and dangerous speech online. And this, in turn, could help mitigate future terrorist attacks.”

2. FIGHTING HATE & EXTREMISM IN THE GAMING COMMUNITY

Panelists:

Names withheld at the request of the presenters

Panelists noted that the gaming industry has experienced tremendous growth: 65 percent of American adults play video games, and the video game industry as a whole is worth around \$150 billion, more lucrative than the film and music industries combined. Amid this dramatic growth, popular platforms, such as Twitch and Discord, have now blended the technology and social media scenes with gaming. Twitch is

an interactive online platform that allows users to broadcast content and also participate by watching gamers and using chat features, and Discord is a chat and communication platform. While a positive community for many, participants noted that hate and extremism have also penetrated online gaming, most recently seen during Gamergate in 2014. Gamergate was an organized effort by bad actors in the gaming

community to “take back” their culture from those who don’t “belong” (LGBTQ+ folks, female journalists, people of color, and liberals) by harassing and forcing them off platforms.

In the wake of Gamergate, gaming platforms have struggled with hate and white supremacy. To begin, it is difficult to discern which of the thousands of communities online are malicious. For example, the meme “Pepe the Frog” and phrase “Subscribe to PewDiePie” has been co-opted by the far-right as ways to covertly signal group affiliation to others, and have distinctly negative connotations, while in other contexts, these references may be innocuous. Additionally, video games that focus on a specific time period, such as World War II, make it challenging for moderators to determine whether a gamer is merely role-playing, say, a Nazi, or subscribes to Nazi ideas, in reality. Many gaming-related companies do their best to educate their reviewers on the latest internet trends and give

users the tools, such as block lists, to censor inappropriate content. These companies’ responses are worth highlighting. Users are responsible for their actions online. Companies that host user content can and should build a tool to support their users and enable them to customize their experience.

Unfortunately, while most platforms strive to keep their users safe, they lack the resources, workforce, funding, or time to stop all harmful content. Future research, funding efforts, and media reporting must increasingly focus on gaming and internet issues to better inform the public. Otherwise, “people don’t think about the content they never get to see.” Additionally, statistics should determine the exact number of toxic actors in the gaming community. Platforms also need to be more transparent in their reporting of negative content and should develop a method to report and track cross-platform harassment.

3. NEW ECOSYSTEMS FOR EXPLOITATION

Panelists:

Paul Beyer, Founder and Director, [Tom Tom Founders Festival](#) (moderator)

Janett Riebe, Head of Safety Policy, [Pinterest](#)

Dave Willner, Director of Community Policy, [Airbnb](#)

Panelists proposed that private companies have a social and moral responsibility to deal with hate and extremism on their websites. They have the responsibility of devising policies and protections, and having plans in place when their users encounter hateful or extremist content. However, the private sector also faces challenges and limitations in overcoming extremism.

Technology companies typically use human

moderators alongside automated detection. These human moderators can often make better determinations based on context, as “hate does not translate the same in all cultures.” On the other hand, individuals who moderate hateful content on a daily basis can suffer psychological consequences and might risk their own safety if extremists discover their identities and decide to target them. Considering how large some

social media platforms are, moderators face an overwhelming amount of content and find it challenging to assess the context for each individual piece of content referred to them. In addition, the more moderators there are, the harder it is to coordinate their work. Automated systems tend to be best at flagging content for moderation at scale, identifying patterns, and performing routine tasks such as moderating spam or nudity.

To make the tools at their disposal more effective, companies should strive to hire diverse teams and match the training their employees receive to reality online. Their adversaries try to fool the systems in place, making the process of countering online hate dynamic. Recording data, such as which communities are being targeted, can help companies get a better perspective on broader trends occurring on their platforms. Considering that users can manipulate any technological tool to proliferate hate, the private sector entities should collaborate and exchange best practices, successes, and failures. Some have suggested utilizing a “hash database” of hateful content, as is currently done by some companies with child pornography and terrorist content. This idea may be worth considering, but it faces significant challenges. The Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT), the counter-terrorism shared database, has come under repeated criticism for its lack of accountability and transparency. Given the context-dependent nature of extremist content and the ability for otherwise innocuous or simply obnoxious speech to be co-opted by hateful groups and take on new meaning (discussed above), a hash database of offensive content could quickly become a tool of censorship.

During these discussions, the concept of “filter bubbles” was raised. Some have argued that

the internet has become a means for users to entrench themselves within a single viewpoint, increasing their probability of becoming radicalized and their propensity to harm others. Recent research suggests a more nuanced portrait, with only limited evidence to support the existence of “echo chambers.” Participants suggested companies pursue a nuanced and tailored approach to addressing the potential dangers of filter bubbles.



4. SPEECH ONLINE: PROMOTING FREE EXPRESSION, COMBATING HATE

Panelists:

Casey Mattox, Vice President, Legal and Judicial Strategy, [Americans for Prosperity](#)

Mary McCord, Legal Director and Visiting Professor of Law, [Institute for Constitutional Advocacy and Protection at Georgetown University Law Center](#) (moderator)

Amy Spitalnick, Executive Director, [Integrity First for America](#)

The attacks in Charlottesville ignited a fierce debate about the prevalence of extremist speech in the U.S. During the attacks, white extremists claimed their free speech and freedom to carry weapons were protected under the first two amendments of the Constitution. However, some legal experts and civil society groups argue that the First Amendment does not protect some of the actions of some of the white nationalists at the Unite the Right rally. Directing and inciting violence is not First Amendment-protected speech, and there is evidence that some of the rally participants engaged in such incitement. White nationalists may contend they were armed to protect people exercising their First

Amendment rights, but the evidence proved that was only part of the story. Violence was planned and instigated. This rally was clearly racially motivated and was meant to aggressively flex the muscles of white extremists while intimidating and harming vulnerable populations.

Much of this premeditation surfaced after the event in detailed planning on hidden social media platforms such as Discord, disputing claims by Unite the Right rally participants that their ideas were mainstream. Panelists discussed how the role of technology companies in combating extremism is a complex one, beginning with questions with no easy answers. For example,

at what point does a company have an obligation to warn authorities of premeditated violence? If technology companies do crack down on extremist behavior online, would that simply drive extremists underground, making it difficult to track their movements? How is the president's use of social media inflaming discussions of white supremacy and extremism? How should technology companies go about moderating communities of hate and extremism online?



5. THE UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF MODERATING SPEECH

Panelists:

Sarah Ruger, Director, Free Expression, [Charles Koch Institute/Stand Together](#)

Emma Llansó, Director, Free Expression Project, [Center for Democracy & Technology](#)

John a. Powell, [Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society, U.C. Berkeley Law School](#)

Ahmad Sultan, Associate Director, [Center for Technology and Society, Anti-Defamation League](#)

The panel discussed how technology companies are facing a significant challenge in increasing legal liability for their users' speech, coupled with the true challenges of moderating content at a massive scale. Panelists noted that the European Union is moving towards an increase in government regulation of speech platforms, as seen in recent German legislation. This approach, however, poses challenges in distinguishing between clearly illegal content and content that might be lawful but still violates rules imposed by private companies.

The regulatory picture differs in the U.S., where American law, principles, and tradition prioritize free speech protections and significantly constrains the government's ability to regulate speech. The First Amendment and Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act (CDA) limits liability for private companies for content users create on their sites and constrains the government's ability to impose speech codes from above. Since the First Amendment applies to the government, not the private sector, tech companies implement their own rules at their own discretion. Given the European push for speech regulation and efforts by undemocratic countries to use technology companies to impose local speech laws, having each company be clear about its own speech values is increasingly important.

Moderating content poses several risks, though.

Companies need to develop clear definitions of what constitutes hate or other harmful speech in order to moderate consistently. This is a major challenge because such determinations heavily depend on context and consist of nuances that might fall out of definitions. Moderators may lack the context or expertise, making their job more difficult and increasing the probability of mistakes. Imposing liability and penalties on companies might also push them to over-censor to avoid fines. For instance, Facebook has removed breastfeeding pictures as part of its policy against nudity, and YouTube has closed accounts that document the Islamic State's atrocities in Syria due to its terrorism policy.

Participants noted challenges with de-platforming. That is, even if the moderators have the necessary expertise and context, it is difficult to understand the motivations of users. Furthermore, de-platforming individuals due to the content they post will not necessarily eliminate the causes they embrace. In fact, studies have shown that individuals can move to other, more lenient online spaces, such as Gab or 8Chan. These sites typically have fewer users, content reaching a more limited audience. Panelists noted that the similarity in users' views could exacerbate the challenge of echo chambers and radicalize individuals even further. It also makes it harder to track the presence or potential plans of

extremists. For example, Airbnb used public social media accounts to confirm certain Charlottesville attendees embraced extremist ideologies before it revoked their Airbnb reservations.

Tech companies face an overwhelming amount of content, making it impossible for them

to moderate everything posted. However, participants noted that cross-collaboration between companies, increased transparency in policies and data-tracking, and clear metric-setting could help the private sector do a better job at countering extremism.

6. BUILDING ALLIANCES

Panelists:

Mike Signer, Founder and Chair, [Communities Overcoming Extremism](#) (moderator)

Sharif Azami, Program Officer, [Fetzer Institute](#)

Sarah Longwell, Executive Director, [Defending Democracy Together](#)

Jackie Mahendra, Senior Advisor, [Luminate](#)

Sarah Ruger, Director, Free Expression, [Charles Koch Institute](#)

Ariel Simon, Vice President, Chief Program and Strategy Officer, [The Kresge Foundation](#)

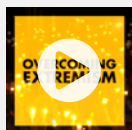
America is in a dynamic period where the complexities of extremism, xenophobia, and hate outweigh our understanding of them. In this panel, participants discussed the fact that the prospect of constructing alliances is now essential to progress and change. In light of debilitating acts of hatred and extremism, communities aim to rebuild and increase their resilience against polarizing forces. The political discourse on combating extremism often narrowly focuses on legislative change or on the agency of individuals to simply “do better.” An often-overlooked component to combating discriminatory forces is the private sector, where corporations and institutions have the ability to influence change at the structural level. Panelists discussed how the formation of alliances between private sector institutions and change-driven organizations could encourage fundamental operations to incorporate inclusivity and diversity.

Businesses regularly change their operations to address new market dynamics; the case of extremism is no different. Panelists noted that by the years 2045–50, those currently considered racial and ethnic minorities are projected to make up the majority of the American population. To effectively prevent hateful acts, companies should examine current structures and operational procedures for deficiencies. Active engagement between civil society and private sector entities will provide companies with the perspective and tools to counteract the blind spots and cultivate a better understanding of the subtle complexities involved in diversity.

Private philanthropy also plays an important role in tackling societal challenges. For instance, institutions with large public influence hold a social responsibility to act against hate and to meaningfully contribute to the broader public discussion at the community level.

Panelists noted that progress is not made by the individuals who are distanced from the manifestation of these issues, but rather by those within local communities. The Kresge Foundation, a private philanthropic organization based in Detroit, invests approximately \$40 million per year into its city. Because Detroit has one of the largest African American populations in the nation, this means investments in a community directly affected by the consequences of hate and discrimination.

Panelists noted that there are different definitions of success in combating of extremism, whether it is to mitigate the consequences of extremism, or to extinguish the phenomenon entirely. Although the latter seems far more appealing, panelists pointed out that it requires a degree of humility, as we do *not* possess the knowledge or the tools to eliminate all instances of hate. The only definitive understanding we have is that we do not know everything, making it essential to collaborate with others who may know more.



“Overcoming Extremism” podcast episode: Listen to Sarah Ruger describe why the Charles Koch Institute supports work against extremism and the power of alliances.

Listen Now: https://podcast.rss.com/overcomingextremism1/?name=2019-10-18_pastor_edwards_and_sarah_ruger_remastered.mp3

7. DESIGN FOR GOOD

Panelists:

Daniel Malmer, [Anti-Defamation League](#) (moderator)

Tracy Chou, CEO, [Block Party](#)

Safiya Noble, Associate Professor, [UCLA](#), [Author, Algorithms of Oppression](#)

Alex Wong, Policy Manager, [Medium.com](#)

This panel focused on the aspect of design within the business of tech companies, and how design can both create more tolerance and pluralism, or enable extremism—and what to do about it. Participants agreed that the intent of building software products is to benefit people. However, they suggested that product design consists of a far broader scope than just the “look and feel” of the product. The plan for these platforms should not happen in a vacuum; it should happen within a context. In order to reduce the harm of extremism and foster ethical online conduct,

product design should look at the overall context, considering consumers, economic incentives, and representation for society’s most vulnerable communities.

Comprehending the context of a platform’s users and adversaries also assists in discouraging extremist behavior. Platforms must consider the negative consequences that certain design features might have on consumers who fall victim to hateful logic. Understanding the framework in which these bad actors interact with users on

the platform remains vital in moderating extremist content. Although algorithms may be able to regulate illegal content, machine learning models cannot tackle extremism and hate on their own. Intelligent human moderation has to track the subtleties of context between users and extremist adversaries. Alongside machine learning, a trust and safety specialist could proactively screen a product's design to determine how adversarial actors might use it. A hybrid system containing both proactive screening and machine learning would be the most advantageous in designing a product that prevents extremism.

However, panelists noted that current economic incentives dissuade tech companies from seeking this greater framework in product design. For

example, platforms whose business model depends on advertising design their product to prioritize the most engaged with topics on the web, representing solely the interests of capital and not minority society. Focusing only on popularity, platforms become incentivized to put forward content which may contain sexist and racist logics. In turn, a platform's product design could encourage harmful extremism. Hateful narratives tend to be less frequent on subscription-based platforms because subscribers usually do not want to pay for hateful content, so panelists noted that companies wishing to avoid extremism more effectively may wish to change their platforms to a subscription basis.

8. POLICY AND REGULATION

Panelists:

Rachel Gillum, Senior Director, [RiceHadleyGates, LLC](#) (moderator)

Nadia Aziz, Interim Co-Director and Policy Counsel, [Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law](#)

Andy Berke, Mayor, [Chattanooga, Tennessee](#)

John Samples, Vice President, [Cato Institute](#)

In the United States, limiting speech, even hateful and violent speech, participants agreed, is a particularly sensitive subject, given the extensive protection from government regulation granted by the First Amendment. However, private companies do not currently face the same restrictions as the government.

The government alone lacks access to the tools it needs to fight against online extremist content. A collaboration between public and private sector actors could help recognize and apprehend threats, but with risks. Since private

companies are not constrained by the same due process protections that curtail governments' powers, panelists noted that governments may encourage private companies to take actions that governments cannot. Some participants expressed concern that this circumvention places the liberties of Americans at risk since tech companies can do what the government is not allowed to do: develop a code or guideline for the regulation of certain kinds of speech. Panelists noted incentives for private companies to address extremism include reputational and

business reasons, in addition to regulatory ones. Under Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, individuals are liable for their actions online, including inciting violence, and the companies that host user content must comply with all federal laws. Still, companies generally are not liable for their users' content. While the private sector is not presently obliged to act as a legal matter, participants agreed they do have a responsibility to their users and the broader public to moderate their online spaces, and that the most viable path to effectively realizing this responsibility

is self-regulation, as occurred through collective action against spam and pornography.

Participants also noted another set of critical concerns regarding the actions of tech companies. Historically, law enforcement has compromised the interests of marginalized, minority communities in the name of law and order. In order to prevent such abuses of the system from occurring again, any self-regulatory program must emphasize transparency and engagement with marginalized populations.

9. CASE STUDIES

Summit attendees learned about two companies who have decisively acted to confront and overcome extremism on their platforms.

CASE STUDY: AIRBNB

For Airbnb, the events of Charlottesville influenced its broad stance against violent extremist groups. A week before these events, Airbnb became aware of online forums where white supremacist groups were talking about booking Airbnbs in order to attend the rally. In response, Airbnb devised a research program with the aim of designing clear and enforceable guidelines to address this alarming trend. From its research, Airbnb found many of these hate groups shared similar characteristics, and that they continuously evolve, using coded language and other subversive forms of communication to spread their violent agenda. The company decided to cancel the reservations of those attending the rally, despite the threat of a boycott. Airbnb

designed neutral, apolitical criteria for its policy, focused on trust and safety. If an Airbnb customer does not meet these criteria, then he or she is not permitted to book through Airbnb. Airbnb maintains a consistent improvement process, where the policies are continually reviewed, amid an ever-changing landscape of extremism.



CASE STUDY: PATREON



Watch the video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YmcK6GvgVPs&has_verified=1

Over two years ago, the crowdfunding platform Patreon encountered extremism when an ethno-European nationalist group began using the platform to raise money to block refugees from crossing the Mediterranean physically. The platform decided to ban a leader of the group for violating company policies against violence. In a discussion at the summit, a company leader noted

one learning moment was the failure initially to clarify the overall context of the decision, allowing many to speculate that the decision stemmed from ideological bias. In order to prevent the Patreon community from losing trust in its decision-making, Patreon's CEO worked with the company's trust and safety policy team to explain the decision in a [video](#). Communicating the logic behind its decisions and providing an overview of its policies in this holistic way, personified by the company's leader, helped Patreon prevent extremist groups from exploiting the platform to promote violence while also instilling trust in its online community.



“Overcoming Extremism” podcast episode: Hear Ifeoma Ozoma, Public Policy and Social Impact Director of Pinterest, talk about Pinterest's efforts to push back against extremism on the platform through customer-driven trust and safety programs.

Listen Now: https://podcast.rss.com/overcomingextremism1/?name=2019-10-17_ifeoma_ozoma_2019_new_mix_with_wrap_up.mp3

PART III: PARTNER LETTERS

Several of COE's partners opted to include letters in this final report containing additional analysis and recommendations. Please find them below.

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One year after the “Unite the Right” white supremacist rally and riots in Charlottesville shocked the nation, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) was pleased to join with a diverse group of partners to launch “Communities Overcoming Extremism: The After Charlottesville Project.” This national capacity-building project has been focused on identifying best practices and empowering communities with tools to combat the significant rise in extremism, intolerance, and hate crimes that cities and communities have been experiencing.

Though the project is now ending, the relationships that have been built and the lessons learned about how diverse public and private sector coalitions can build capacity to prevent and respond to violent extremist events like Charlottesville in the future are a strong and enduring legacy.

The release of the Communities Overcoming Extremism final report is timed for the one-year anniversary of the horrific Shabbat morning murder of eleven worshippers at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh by an individual allegedly inspired by white supremacist and anti-immigrant ideology – the most deadly anti-Semitic attack in American history. We honor their memory with our ongoing commitment to this work.

Clearly, the need remains to promote collaborative public-private partnerships and community-based coalitions to work with federal, state, and local officials on policy responses to address extremism and bias-motivated violence – and to build capacity to promote intergroup relationships and work towards an America as good as its ideals.

Policy Recommendations

Speak out against anti-Semitism and all forms of hate

- Public officials and civic leaders — from mayors to the President — and law enforcement authorities should use their bully pulpits to speak out against anti-Semitism and all forms of hate and extremism.

Enforce existing laws

- The Administration must send loud, clear, and consistent messages that violent bigotry is unacceptable and ensure that the FBI and the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division will enforce relevant federal laws and vigorously investigate and prosecute hate crimes.

Continue to hold congressional hearings on the increase in hate crimes and the rise of extremist groups

- Over the past six months, congressional committees in both the Senate and the House have held hearings on the increase in hate crimes, the rise of extremist groups and proliferation of their propaganda. Additional hearings will raise awareness and identify best practices and effective responses to hate.
- Congress should support legislation that calls upon the federal government to improve coordinated response, collect data on domestic terrorism and ensure training for law enforcement on best practices to combat domestic terrorism. Any legislation in this arena must focus on specific criminal acts and not cross the line to punishing First Amendment-protected expression.

Federal, state and local law enforcement agencies should improve their procedures for responding to and reporting hate crimes

- Data drives policy. We cannot address a problem if we are not effectively tracking and measuring it. Every state should enact comprehensive, inclusive hate crime laws. Effective responses to anti-Semitic incidents and hate violence by public officials and law enforcement authorities can play an essential role in deterring and preventing these crimes.
- The federal government and state and local officials should provide the necessary training to encourage all law enforcement agencies to more comprehensively collect and report hate crimes data to the FBI and state authorities.

Promote anti-bias, bullying prevention and civics education programs in elementary and secondary schools

- Laws addressing hate violence are important, but they have limits. We must recognize that it is not possible to legislate or regulate racism, anti-Semitism and bigotry out of existence. Congress, the Department of Education, state legislatures and mayors should increase funding to promote an inclusive school climate, and for anti-bias education and hate crime prevention. Schools should be directed to implement properly crafted anti-bullying, cyberbullying and harassment education and training initiatives.

Strengthen laws against perpetrators of online hate

- The connection between online abuse and in-person violence cannot be ignored. At the federal and state level, policymakers should work to fill the gaps in addressing the impact of technological advances. This includes addressing the offline consequences of online hate, pursuing genuine dialogue with the technology sector to better counter extremism online and working with technology companies to find solutions to emerging challenges.
- Consistent with the First Amendment, Congress and state legislators should craft laws that hold perpetrators of severe online hate and harassment more accountable for their conduct.

Increase platform responsibility to address online hate and harassment

- Every social media and online game platform must have clear terms of service that address hateful content and harassing behavior, and clearly define consequences for violations.
- Social media and online game platforms should adopt robust governance. This should include regularly scheduled external, independent audits so that the public knows the extent of hate and harassment on a given platform.



Communities Overcoming Extremism is a unique opportunity to unite people.

A diverse group of organizations—including those founded by Koch, Ford, and Soros—came together to walk alongside people in some of the communities most affected by extremism, to learn from them directly, discover new tools to address identity and political violence, and surface questions to inform ongoing exploration into what drives intolerance and how to cure it.

The sense of urgency behind these efforts can hardly be overstated. The tragedies of Charlottesville were one of the watershed events that brought us together. Over the past two years, there have been more acts of violence motivated by racial and religious bigotry.

This is a severe problem, and we're all motivated to do something. But the problem is complex, and *complex problems are best solved bottom up through social entrepreneurs, community leaders closest to the problem, and unlikely allies coming together*. There's no one-size-fits-all solution, instead, we need a framework that individuals can apply or tap into. Though far from exhaustive, such a framework would include axioms such as:

Invest in long-term efforts to equip local leaders with the knowledge to be successful. That includes supporting research, developing tools, sharing case studies, elevating stories of hope, and enhancing knowledge of the law.

Resist the temptation to take shortcuts like censorship and other top-down prescriptions that will ultimately cause more harm than good. Be wary of anyone who offers up a silver bullet.

- **Protect civil liberties.** They're all the more important in uncivil times and essential for protecting the vulnerable and marginalized.
- **Build capability and knowledge in local leaders** including educators, community leaders, and law enforcement.
- **Promote civics and empathy building** educational programs.
- **Elevate innovative models and stories of hope**, examples of everyday of people cooperating across divides and bringing people back from the brink of radicalization or xenophobia.
- **Encourage all levels of public officials and civic leaders** to emulate courageous collaboration and civil dialogue.
- **Call for research** into causes of intolerance.
- **Don't censor.** Censorship is a dangerous tool that both disrespects the dignity and rights of individuals. Even when the blunt instrument of censorship is aimed at those who hold extremist views, it simply pushes those views out of the public eye to further radicalize and gain strength in the shadows.
- **Don't impose top-down policies** such as federal "hate speech" legislation and federal security policies.
- **Don't prioritize short-term virtue signaling over long-term effectiveness.** Long-term effectiveness requires scientific inquiry to test what will be most effective.

This framework is rooted in the belief that respect for the dignity of every person is essential for social progress. That's why we're passionate about advancing the fundamental rights of every individual—including self-expression. These liberties must stand even when it is hardest—when that the views people express are ones we find repugnant.

Fortunately, history shows that free expression is perhaps the most powerful tools in confronting injustice. The forward-thinkers of the past who urged greater openness and inclusion were usually unpopular at first. But the elevation of their stories of injustice and perseverance, as well as the dialogue that ensued, changed people's minds, resulting in advances that made modern liberal democracies possible.

“Free expression remains a powerful tool in addressing the injustices of our time.”

Drivers of political and identity-based violence are complex, and there are no easy answers. These challenges come through in the report, including sections addressing:

Content Moderation

Consider the challenges of moderating online communities. The issue of fostering free expression and combatting offensive content is one faced by many tech companies, media outlets, and other online platforms. However well intentioned, calls for government to intercede and rewrite important public policies, such as Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, risks chilling self-expression and discussion while failing to address how individuals radicalize online.

Federal Criminal Code

Calls for Congress to expand existing terrorism laws to apply to “domestic terrorism” risk unintended consequences of a sweeping approach to a complex challenge. Every state already has laws against the use of weapons to harm or make true threats of violence against others. Additionally, the U.S. criminal code has existing terrorism laws that are already applicable to extremist violence (See, e.g., 18 USC 2332, et seq.). Broadening these federal laws to designate specific organizations as “domestic terrorists” would criminalize any aid or support to those organizations and raise civil liberty concerns for individual citizens associated with such organizations. Instead, there's room to apply learnings from international conflict and political violence work to domestic extremism.

Community Policing

Conversations with local leaders confirm that law enforcement has a significant role to play in our communities by ensuring public safety and holding individuals accountable for violating the law. There are better ways to share knowledge between police and other public officials such as implementing best practices to foster trust and accountability between law enforcement and the communities they serve. These practices include building positive relationships with their community, respecting civil liberties, and avoiding tactics that encourage the use of excessive force against citizens. The most effective way to achieve public safety in local communities results from police and community members working collaboratively to maintain public safety.

Participants explored the challenges bulleted above during the summits hosted by Communities Overcoming Extremism, and they merit further exploration. But some with a more partisan mindset will approach this report, these ideas, and this partnership with derision rather than debate. They'll claim collaboration means compromising your principles. That's not the case. Uniting with anyone to do right isn't about compromise at all. It's about standing firmly on principle to make more progress than any of us could on our own.

The easy thing is to do is to refuse to pull up a seat at the table or to stand at a distance and virtue signal through censorship. The effective long-term solution is to create a space for dialogue and ideas. It's tempting to take the easy path that chills the speech we don't like—even objectively repugnant speech. But this has the opposite of its intended effect.

“We’re going to enter a highly fractured time in 2020. It’ll be all the more important that we lean into dialogue and away from empty partisan virtue signaling.”

This polarized climate, exacerbating challenges around extremism, makes partnership among groups that many would view as unlikely allies all the more rare and special. The problems are complex and merit much further discussion. It's going to get harder to do so, but we invite all the members of this group and others to continue to explore what solutions will most effectively address these challenges.

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Reflections from Fetzer Institute’s Sharif Azami on the After Charlottesville Project: Communities Overcoming Extremism.

As I write these reflections, news is breaking about a shooting at a synagogue in the eastern German city of Halle. So often when we talk of extremism, it is important to acknowledge that the issue is more than just “realpolitik” and that often human lives are at stake.

This initiative is a positive example of a comprehensive approach to building capacity—at the local, state, and national levels—to address public safety while also respecting individuals’ rights to free speech rights under the U.S. constitution. It is also models the type of courageous collaboration the initiative encourages, as unlikely allies put aside political and philosophical differences to learn about and address the roots of extremism so that we can all promote a healthy democracy.

As we conclude the project, I am taking away key lessons for what I and my organization can do to overcome extremism and polarization:

Explore how to neutralize the language around hate and extremism: Jonathan Greenblatt of ADL said, “Don’t let anyone tell you that fighting prejudice is a partisan thing. Don’t let anyone tell you that standing up for a principle is somehow political.” At the Fetzer Institute, we believe love is the antidote to hate. However, navigating the issue of language is a serious challenge for us, especially when it comes to engaging spirituality in a diverse society. The same challenge is evident in the space of extremism and polarization. Issues of religious and civil liberty are important to all Americans, and therefore, we cannot afford to see hate and intolerance as a partisan issue.

Ensure basic safety while engaging diversity: For the long term the Fetzer Institute is committed to trust building and citizenship formation, especially as they relate to civic virtues and inner development for a flourishing democracy. That said, it is also essential to have effective public policy interventions to ensure basic safety for all. Moreover, as the report suggests, there is a need to be vigilant about addressing the trust gap between local law enforcement and minority communities.

Prioritize the revival of local civil society: Strong civil society is essential for a thriving democracy because this is where community meets to build trust and cultivate essential civic virtues for citizenship formation. It also enables local participation which is critical for a healthy democracy. As the report notes, it is imperative to explore how might we support resilient local civil society and build strong community bonds. We should also promote tools and evidence-based models for promoting a comprehensive understanding of a changing demographics and build bridges among the various segments of local communities toward social healing and reconciliation.

Helping build the spiritual foundation for a loving world



As we build local capacity and promote community resilience, we need to explore methodologies for how to 1) foster empathy and understanding locally; 2) identify and overcome the drivers of polarization and distrust; 3) support efforts around healing trauma; and 4) understand the effects of implicit bias and privilege on a healthy democracy.

Understand the role of technology and social media: The tech industry can play a positive role in supporting social cohesion. As tech and artificial intelligence becomes more advanced, it is vital for the industry to cooperate and partner with civil society institutions. Moreover, it is not enough to just institute internal teams to mitigate “brand risks.” Tech companies should consider actual partnerships with civil society institutions to design more effectively as well as to promote social cohesion. Furthermore, it would be advisable for the tech industry to work collectively on issues of extremism as “mid-level” companies are often ignored by large corporations and as a result their trust and safety programs are not as sophisticated as that of large companies.

Revive a culture of democracy and ethical leadership/politics: Mike Signer notes that “as extremism emerged from within democracy, democratic norms and institutions can overcome it.” Therefore, exploring democratic revival and developing a shared and compelling vision for engaging diversity in America might provide us a strong framework for addressing the challenge of polarization. It is also imperative to consider the importance of leadership development and how civil society might provide and prepare future leaders for a democratic revival as they will have the influence to “bind up the nation’s wounds.” As Pete Wehner notes, we should “recover a sense of the importance of politics, a respect for the craft of governing, and the value of competence and excellence. Sometimes people idealize politics; when they do, it’s a mistake. But so is constantly denigrating it. Today we’re leaning far too much in the direction of denigration. We need to raise our sights, to expect more from our politicians and from ourselves. Ours is a remarkable Republic, if we can keep it.”

During the design phase of the initiative, I suggested changing the project title from “Communities Confronting Extremism” to “Communities Overcoming Extremism.” For us, this work is about overcoming the challenge of polarization, and confrontation in itself can be considered a contributing factor to political polarization. At the same time, extremism and political violence is a form of polarization that requires extraordinary vigilance as it can diminish any possibility for a healthy public square.

In conclusion, addressing polarization will require strong alliances and good faith from diverse stakeholders. The ACP is a testament to how courageous collaboration can achieve positive results. We hope we can build on this initiative and invite a broad set of civil society leaders for a constructive dialogue and collaboration on how we might build a healthy public square and promote community wellbeing.

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INSTITUTE FOR CONSTITUTIONAL ADVOCACY AND PROTECTION
GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY LAW CENTER

October 16, 2019

The Institute for Constitutional Advocacy and Protection (ICAP) at Georgetown Law launched in August 2017 just days before the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia. As a small team of litigators (many with prior experience at the U.S. Department of Justice), our mission is to use the power of the courts to defend American constitutional rights and values. Little did we know then that white supremacists, neo-Nazis, neo-Confederates, and the so-called “alt-right” would use the Unite the Right rally to weaponize one of the most fundamental of those constitutional rights—the right to freedom of expression—in order to engage in well planned violence against those protesting their hateful rhetoric. But violence and the incitement to imminent violence is not protected by the First Amendment, and that prompted ICAP to take action.

Representing the City of Charlottesville, local small businesses, and neighborhood associations, we brought suit in state court against 23 individuals and organizations whose participation in the Unite the Right rally violated state anti-militia and anti-paramilitary-activity statutes. By coordinating together as armed military units (some very openly dressed in full battle gear and carrying assault rifles and others working in concert to form phalanxes with shields and spears), these defendants violated state constitutional and statutory provisions meant to prohibit rogue private armies, unaccountable to governmental authority. The successful lawsuit resulted in court orders prohibiting such organized, coordinated armed activity by the defendants at future rallies, demonstrations, protests, and marches.

Importantly, the litigation did not infringe on First or Second Amendment rights. The defendants remain free to express their viewpoints, no matter how offensive they may be to the majority of the population. What they may *not* do is engage in violence or incitement to violence under the purported protection of the First Amendment. Similarly, the individual defendants and those associated with the defendant organizations may carry firearms for their individual self defense, but they may not organize themselves as private arms-bearing militias, projecting authority they do not have. Such activity is illegal not only in Virginia, but in every state in the country pursuant to state constitutional and statutory provisions.

The Communities Overcoming Extremism project provided the important opportunity to share our knowledge and use of these important laws with government actors struggling with how to protect public safety while preserving First Amendment rights. Using the state anti-militia laws as legal authority, ICAP has consulted with local jurisdictions large and small across the country about how to issue content-neutral time, place, and manner restrictions for rallies and protests where there is reason to believe violence may occur. Government officials may ban armed militia groups from rally venues; they may establish separate security entrances for self-selected protestors and counter-protestors; they may keep these groups apart with fencing and neutral zones between them. These measures allow those who truly want to engage in their rights to free expression and *peaceful* assembly to do so without the threat of violence.

The successful use of these tools requires communication between government officials and their communities, and with both protestors and counter-protestors. This requires overcoming some of the barriers to trust that have built up over the decades between law enforcement and vulnerable communities, including communities of color. Too often, the appearance at rallies and protests is that law enforcement is “protecting” the protestors espousing racist and hateful ideologies, while abandoning those who seek to counter those ideologies. More work must be done to build trusting relationships and to ensure that law enforcement reflects the diversity of the population.

More work also must be done to give local jurisdictions the ability to prohibit firearms at public rallies and protests. Although the Second Amendment does not protect organizing as an armed private militia (something the Supreme Court has affirmed in the last decade), many states prohibit local jurisdictions from prohibiting firearms through ordinances or regulations. Although these state firearms regulation preemption statutes should not apply to temporally and geographically limited restrictions during protests and rallies, the laws often specifically invite lawsuits and shift the costs and attorneys’ fees to the local jurisdiction should it lose the suit. This is enough to scare most cities and counties from taking even the most reasonable public safety measure—the prohibition of firearms—at protests that are most likely to result in violence. These statutes tie the hands of law enforcement, who ultimately are charged with protecting the public.

This is a dangerous and critical time for America, with increased polarization of political views and increased political violence, include terrorist violence. ICAP is proud to stand with its partners in this project in exploring ways to combat hate and extremism and in using lawful means of protecting First Amendment rights for those whose goal is speech, not violence.