

Violence–Proofing U.S. Democracy: Immediate Priorities For Philanthropy

A WORKING PAPER FROM OVER ZERO,
NEW AMERICA, AND THOUGHT PARTNERSHIPS

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A Note from the Authors

This working paper is intended to spark engagement, in philanthropy and beyond, with the importance of building resilience to political violence – both for its own immediate sake, but also because resilience matters to protect and manage backlash against U.S. democratic renewal. We point toward action steps that funders, officials, and community leaders can take in the months ahead. But these steps also comprise necessary foundations for medium- and long-term efforts to strengthen democratic institutions, rebuild civic trust, and seek justice for all.

The analysis here rests on our prior extensive exploration of underlying and acute risk factors for political violence, the increase in such violence over recent years, and its more systemic roots. That prior analysis can be found [here](#). In this paper, we have focused on a particular subset of risk factors that worsened in 2021. We do not attempt to speak to all the intersecting crises of public life in the United States, such as the entrenched economic inequality that diminishes both agency and support for democratic institutions, or the pervasive strand of misogynist thought and violence in our society.

Most importantly, we seek to highlight that, despite the significant set of risks and challenges we face, we - civil society, philanthropy, individuals - have agency to shape our country's path. But doing so will require intense investment and engagement, as well as acknowledgment of the urgent risks society faces. Groundbreaking work is already occurring in these areas, often at the local level, within affected communities, and by dedicated organizations and researchers; funders should engage directly with those groups.

Events move rapidly in politics and conflict prevention, but underlying dynamics change much more slowly. Some of the specific figures and examples we use, many of which come from the first half of 2021, will have been overtaken by events or surpassed in public thinking by other topics -- for example, the rise of contention around public education, politicization of military and security forces in the second half of 2021, and emerging information about the degree of coordination in advance of the events of January 6, 2021.

Finally, we recommend readers engage with several important pieces of writing that were released as we finalized this paper: [Racial Reckoning in the United States: Expanding and Innovating on the Global Transitional Justice Experience](#), by Ashley Quarcoo and Medina Husaković; [The Rise of Political Violence in the United States](#), by Rachel Kleinfeld; and International IDEA's [Global State of Democracy Report](#), 2021.

Executive Summary

U.S. philanthropy is keenly focused on re-invigorating and renovating democracy, supporting a wide range of actors and approaches. Successful strategies to strengthen formal and informal institutions, and reverse polarization, **will need to include strategies to prevent and build resilience against political violence**. International experience teaches that the risks of violence endure—and sometimes reach their heights—amidst efforts to reform dysfunctional systems and address democratic backsliding.

In other words, rising risk of political violence is not just an outcome of democratic failure, but a side effect of efforts at democratic renewal. As such, philanthropy needs to prepare to minimize and mitigate violence as part of longer-term efforts to renew U.S. institutions and build bridges among American communities.

This working paper for philanthropy briefly summarizes current trends that, in light of global experience, suggest heightened risks of violence. The U.S. has a long history of political violence and struggle to address institutional injustices. The further decline of our democratic structures, and the loss of shared bipartisan norms around non-violence and the role of government, are turning our institutions into sites of contestation in a struggle for power. Rather than being the instruments through which we resolve disputes peacefully, our democratic institutions are thus increasingly likely to be flashpoints for violence. Our security forces, too, are increasingly politicized, with extremist groups seeking to recruit from their ranks and public figures invoking them in political disagreements. We know from international experience that when security forces become a source of politicized disputes over power and legitimacy, rather than a neutral enforcer of laws, the risk of political violence increases.

Lastly, although many observers had hoped 2021 would bring a decline in hateful rhetoric, incitement, and misinformation, this has not happened. Instead, both traditional and social media continue to be flooded with divisive and false narratives. We now face a growing number of examples of how this rhetoric promotes violence, and how media platforms can be used to organize or incite it.

Against this worrisome backdrop, we propose **six funding strategies and specific recommendations to integrate violence prevention and mitigation into existing strands of work on polarization, institutions, or justice issues**:

BOLSTERING DEMOCRACY AND INSTITUTIONS Democratic backsliding—including institutional health and public distrust of institutions—can both fuel and be fueled by political violence, particularly when occurring alongside polarization. This poses an urgent problem for funders already active in efforts to bolster democracy. We propose immediate attention to preventing further democratic backsliding, particularly where it may proximally increase the risk of violence around flashpoints (e.g., elections, public health); rebuilding public trust in institutions; and addressing the impact of violence on institutional health.

ADDRESSING THE THREAT OF EXTREMISM The spike in support for extreme ideologies and activities may seem both an obvious concern and yet outside the scope of traditional philanthropy. We point to successful models donors can scale and emulate to address the

mainstreaming of extremist ideas and the visible presence of extremist group members in local government and security forces, both of which contribute to a more permissive environment for violence and undercut initiatives aimed at community-building and institutional reform. Philanthropy can also play a significant role in supporting and rebuilding trust among communities most deeply affected by extremist activity.

ADDRESSING THE HARMFUL COMMUNICATIONS LANDSCAPE Rhetoric that justifies discriminatory actions and violence against marginalized groups due to perceived wrongs or system failures (e.g., “stolen election”) continues to rise and spread. Support should go to mitigating the impact of specific threats, supporting individuals and communities that are targeted, ensuring that mainstream media responds in helpful ways (and avoid inadvertently contributing to harm), and providing accountability for social media platforms whose business models and algorithms drive the reach and speed of harmful content. Mis/disinformation work should be integrated with other funding verticals, including those addressing white supremacy and extremism, polarization, and political violence.

RESETTING NORMS AT THE ELITE AND COMMUNITY LEVEL Perceptions of what is normal or expected for peers (“perceived norms”) powerfully influence how we act, even when inconsistent with our privately-held beliefs. We must reset social norms that reject violence, conspiracy theories, and discriminatory language and policies. Given the intensity of identity-based polarization, it will be necessary to prioritize norm-setting within groups, rather than expect a single campaign or spokesperson to be effective across polarized communities.

CREATING ACCOUNTABILITY Global experience teaches that norms need to come with accountability—both to reduce the likelihood of cycles of violence and retribution, and to re-establish expectations that laws and norms apply equally to all. Accountability also serves a restorative purpose for aggrieved communities and can reinvigorate trust and engagement in civic institutions across communities. Important opportunities exist to support accountability work at local or national levels, through techniques from forensic research to historical accounting to dialogue and truth-telling.

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR COORDINATED RESPONSE TO IMMEDIATE RISKS As with public health crises or natural disasters, rapid response infrastructure can ensure we are prepared in the face of crisis moments that could spur political violence. A resilience-based approach requires support for coordination across groups, issues and regions; geographic and risk analysis to prioritize key areas for significant investment; and investment in cross-community relationships before crises. Funder investments before the 2020 elections, as well as the civic efforts that leaders depended on in the wake of the Boston Marathon bombing and Pulse nightclub shootings, show the value of this approach.

Finally, we note a set of **philanthropic best practices that are vital to success on this sensitive and challenging topic**. Above all, funders must assess their strategies for where they may inadvertently heighten risks of violence and commit to Do No Harm approaches, especially toward the most vulnerable communities. Holistic funding strategies that allow for learning, support organizational health, see the field as an ecosystem, and engage targeted communities in both planning and doing the work are also essential.

Global experience underscores that efforts to change entrenched political arrangements, re-invigorate institutions, or address perceived unfairness must be twinned with specific focus on preventing and managing outbreaks of violence. Work to address polarization, incivility, democratic decline and the dysfunction of U.S. institutions thus will not be effective without additional consideration of violence prevention and resilience. In sum, society needs shock absorbers, at both the local and national level, built into any effort to exit the dangerous divide in which we find ourselves.

Understanding Current Risks

U.S. philanthropy is deeply engaged in trying to stem and reverse multiple, intersecting crises in American democracy—harmful polarization, rampant mis/disinformation, a decay of democratic institutions and norms, and a surge in hate ideologies, particularly white nationalism.

Meanwhile, the rise in U.S. political violence, and the threat of much more, is inseparable from these trends. While each of these trends increases the risk of violence, violence itself decays civic institutions and frays the bonds that hold communities together. Thus, if they are to be effective, strategies to strengthen formal and informal institutions and reverse polarization will **need to include efforts to prevent and build resilience to political violence.**

This working paper for philanthropy briefly summarizes current trends that, in light of global experience, suggest heightened risks of violence and democratic backsliding in the U.S. It then offers recommendations for effective funding strategies to counter these negative trends. It further describes how those strategies can be integrated into existing strands of work on polarization, institutions, or justice issues.

[Freedom House](#), long noted for its tracking of democracies, wrote that pressure on U.S. institutions and norms has led to the U.S. experiencing one of the 25 steepest declines in democratic standing over the past decade. In the 2020-2021 period, division over both the content and form of U.S. democracy has grown more entrenched in law and practice. The United States is moving toward dual systems of election administration that are highly vulnerable to contestation. All of this rests on a set of false narratives that have undermined confidence in the 2020 election results.

This split in laws is paralleled by polarization in public opinion that has normalized threats of violence from public figures and increased threats and acts of violence against ethnic and religious minorities as well as government officials. In the past few years, public support for political violence has risen significantly.

Funders and thought leaders are working to formulate cultural and institutional responses, from efforts to bridge divides to combating mis- and dis-information and reforming our national political institutions. However, none of those efforts alone will stem the risks of violence and the road to positive outcomes is fraught with risk. Global experience underscores that efforts to change entrenched political arrangements, or address perceived unfairness, must be twinned with efforts to prevent and manage outbreaks of violence.

Efforts to address polarization, incivility, democratic decline and the dysfunction of U.S. institutions thus will not be effective without additional consideration of violence prevention and resilience. In short, society needs shock absorbers, at both the local and national level, as it seeks to exit this dangerous moment.

We have written at length about the risk factors for political violence, and how to build resilience to them, [here](#). In this guide to action, we draw on that research to identify four trends, all moving in the wrong direction in 2021, that international experience suggests pose both immediate and lasting risks for violence. Below, we describe each trend and the ways it increases risks for violence in the U.S. We later turn to strategies that funders can take now to help prevent violence and thus increase the likelihood that existing investments in de-polarization, bridge-building, political reform, and other areas will succeed.

ONE

Democratic Backsliding: Politicization of Electoral Integrity, Public Education

Democratic institutions in the U.S. have become sites of contestation rather than impartial pillars. This makes them more likely to become flashpoints for violence, and none more so than the institutions that administer elections. As of July 14, according to the [Brennan Center for Justice](#), “Eighteen states have already enacted 30 laws this year that will make it harder for Americans to vote.” During the 2021 legislative sessions, 49 states have introduced “more than 400 bills with provisions that restrict voting access.” Some of [this legislation](#) “create[s] the serious prospect of an election crisis by giving state legislatures the opportunity to overturn election results they don’t like.” Restrictive laws also include measures that collectively make it more difficult to vote by mail and in person, including stricter ID and signature requirements for mail-in ballots, stricter in-person voter ID requirements, limits to early voting days and hours, shortened deadlines to request and submit a mail-in ballot, limits on access to mail ballot drop boxes, and more. Additionally, certain states have also enacted [measures](#) that undermine voting and elections, including expanded power for partisan “poll watchers,” increasing opportunities for harassment and voter intimidation and imposing “criminal penalties on election officials.” Critically, these newly enacted measures appear to fall below internationally-accepted [standards](#) for free and fair elections, which call for voters to be able to participate in elections without coercion or intimidation.

These efforts to overturn election results and the rhetoric that accompanies them have created a climate of fear around election administration. In some cases, senior political figures have promoted spurious fraud claims and incendiary rhetoric, such as in the recent California recall and New York’s 2021 primary election, marking a worrisome acceleration in this trend. [Local officials report](#) “a continuing barrage of threats and intimidation,” in Georgia, Arizona, Michigan and elsewhere. One in three election officials [report](#) feeling unsafe because of their job. [Election officials](#) across the country have quit or taken early retirement due to the hostile climate. In [Pennsylvania](#), for example, about one-third of county election officials left their positions in the past year and a half.

As the country looks toward the 2022 and 2024 elections, election administration is both less professional and more contested. Significant numbers of voters believe that fraud is widespread; meanwhile, an increasing number of voters will experience difficulty voting or disenfranchisement. Changes in the election laws and institutions in multiple states create opportunities for competing results; by 2024, some states will have alternate slates of electors. Each of these developments increases risk and creates potential flashpoints for violence.

Other institutions, such as public health and education, are also becoming local flashpoints. In schools, for example, contestation around how U.S. history is taught and how public health is managed has produced threats and confrontation in a number of states. Physical confrontations among demonstrators, parents, and school employees have occurred in multiple states. As with election officials, hostility and threats are driving educators and public health officials from their positions. For instance, the diversity coordinator for Eureka, Missouri’s Rockwood School District [resigned](#) “after threats of violence grew so severe that the district hired private security to patrol her house.” This spring, almost one in four public health workers [said](#) they were feeling “bullied, threatened or harassed,” and more than 10% had received job-related threats.

TWO

Loss of Shared Commitment to Democratic Norms

American democracy, and indeed any democratic system, requires that both the public and elected officials hold a shared commitment to fundamental norms. In the U.S. context, this means that the Democratic and Republican parties and their voters must agree on the rules that govern elections, the transfer of power, and policy-making. Perhaps highest among such shared commitments would be an agreement to resolve differences non-violently.

However, [scholars](#) have [raised concerns](#) about the erosion of commitments to democracy and democratic norms over the past several years. Since late 2020, party elites have failed to accept—and actively challenged—the outcome of the [2020 elections](#); pre-existing rules governing the conduct of elections, as discussed above; and tenets of the Bill of Rights, including [freedom of assembly](#). Recent [polls](#) reveal that sentiment in favor of secession is also rising dramatically among some voters.

CHART DATA ON NORM EROSION

NORM	EROSION
Legitimacy of election outcomes	More than half of GOP voters believe that the 2020 elections were fraudulent and that Trump is the “true president.” Source
Non-partisan electoral processes	14 states have adopted laws interfering with professional and non-partisan election administration. Source
Equal voting rights	18 states have adopted laws that restrict access to voting. Source
Right to assemble and protest	9 states have adopted laws restricting the right to peaceful assembly, such as new penalties for protestors who block traffic, liability for organizations that work with protestors, and even immunity for drivers who hit protestors. Source
Local control of public education	8 state legislatures and 4 state-wide school boards have adopted laws restricting what may be taught about slavery and race relations. Source
Disputes resolved through political process w/o violence	39% of Republicans, 31% of Independents, and 17% Democrats support Americans taking violent actions if elected leaders fail to act. Source
Non-partisan public health	46% of Americans opposed reinstating masks and social-distancing guidelines in their states. 85% of Democrats and 42% of Independents support bringing back guidelines, while 73% of Republicans oppose. Source
	64% of unvaccinated Americans have little to no confidence that the vaccine is effective against variants like the delta variant, despite evidence that they offer strong protection. Source
	80% of unvaccinated Americans (as of July) say they probably will not (35%) or definitely will not (45%) get vaccinated. Source

The chart above highlights a worrisome number of moves away from democratic norms across the political spectrum; a disproportionate number are the result of efforts by key factions within the GOP. Indeed, an index measuring political parties’ commitment to democracy from the V-Dem Institute [finds](#) that while the Democratic party’s score did not substantively change between 1970 and 2018, the Republican party’s commitment to democracy plunged between 2016 and 2018.

We highlight the asymmetric nature of this backsliding because when an organized group within a political party endorses or condones anti-democratic actions, and even violence, it is a sign of increased risk. Unfortunately, we’ve seen a range of efforts to enforce rejection of democratic norms among GOP elites, from censure to threats of violence. Examples include the targeting of Representative Liz Cheney and Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger,

and death threats issued to moderate Republican candidates in [Florida](#) and [GOP election officials](#) in Arizona, Michigan and several other states. This dynamic silences and sidelines actors who would be critical in making progress on bridge-building, depolarization, and other longer-term efforts to strengthen democracy's underpinnings. Globally, the silencing of credible leaders who could speak against violence within their own group is known to presage increased risk of violence.

Global experience also tells us that radicalization drives counter-radicalization, and it is rare that norms comprehensively denigrated by one political group to remain untouched by the other(s). After months of public debate about the legitimacy of the legitimacy of the 2020 presidential elections, it was disheartening to hear New York City Democratic mayoral nominee Eric Adams [suggest](#) that the primary election may not be legitimate if it didn't go his way, for example.

These trends extend to the broader public. [Recent studies have found](#) that "substantial numbers of Republicans endorse statements contemplating violations of key democratic norms, including respect for the law and for the outcomes of elections and eschewing the use of force." The [Voter Study Group](#) found that about 16% of both Democrats and Republicans thought that using violence to advance political goals was at least "a little" justified. Research links a willingness to engage in political violence with ethnic antagonism, "especially concerns about the political power and claims on government resources of immigrants, African-Americans, and Latinos." One [survey](#) found that 31% of Republicans, 8% of Democrats, and 16% of Independents reject the idea that in elections, "the loser...must concede defeat," a key norm of democratic contestation.

This has also manifested in proactive efforts by some political and media leaders to spread misinformation about the 2020 election and the January 6th violence. [Polls](#) conducted in 2021 regularly show that between two-thirds and three-quarters of Republicans believe that President Joe Biden was not legitimately elected. More than half of Republican respondents [say](#) that Donald Trump is the "legitimate president" in 2021. Revisionist narratives downplaying the January 6 violence as a "[normal tourist visit](#)," depicting it as justified given legitimate election concerns, and casting the insurrectionists as "political prisoners" compound these risks.

THREE

Politicization of Security Forces

This is not a new problem. The U.S. has a history of using force against marginalized communities. Infiltration of U.S. security forces by extremists, including [white nationalists](#), has intensified and waned in tandem with levels of extremism in American society as a whole.

Defense officials have [acknowledged](#) that extremist groups are actively recruiting in the military. Historically, links between extremist organizations and military members and retirees pose two sets of challenges. Given the high respect in which the military is held, they provide luster to extremist groups. In addition, extremist groups actively seek out active-duty and retirees both for the skills they have learned and for their access to weapons and restricted materials. There is a decades-long [history](#) of [stolen weapons](#) falling into the hands of extremist groups. [Twelve percent](#) of individuals who were charged in federal court after the January 6th storming of the Capitol had some type of military experience.

The problem of extremists in U.S. law enforcement is likely of even greater magnitude than in the U.S. military, and less well-understood. This trend poses a significant challenge for national and local efforts to prevent the growth of extremist groups. The perception that law enforcement may contain significant numbers of extremists will also make efforts to build trust and bridges with marginalized communities more difficult.

Scholars of civil-military relations [warn](#) that “over the past three decades, civilian control [of the military] has quietly but steadily degraded. Senior military officers may still follow orders and avoid overt insubordination, but their influence has grown, while oversight and accountability mechanisms have faltered.” Active duty and retired military leaders appear to be increasingly “[empowered](#) to be partisan” and more likely to [speak publicly](#) about politics and policy.

Although it has been applied imperfectly over the history of the United States, the expectation that deadly force is monopolized by apolitical bodies is a core underpinning of U.S. democracy. The politicization of security forces has led to much violence and misgovernance in other parts of the world and should be viewed with alarm here.

FOUR

Toxic Trends in Misinformation and Hate Speech

While many observers hoped that 2021 would bring a decline in the continued spread of misinformation and hate speech, statistics from the first half of the year are not promising. Elites, particularly those affiliated with the MAGA wing of the GOP, continue to promote misinformation sowing doubt in our electoral process and democratic institutions; at the same time, foreign entities have amplified false and inflammatory claims around politics, COVID and education. The far-right conspiracy group QAnon continues to gain adherents to its false theories. In a mid-2021 poll, 15% of Americans—23% of Republicans—[agreed](#) with the statement that “the government, media, and financial worlds in the U.S. are controlled by a group of Satan-worshipping pedophiles who run a global child sex trafficking operation,” a false conspiracy associated with QAnon.

The spread of misinformation and normalization of hate speech are key accelerants for violence. They also make efforts to restore norms, institutions and inter-community relations more difficult. Amidst spikes in group-targeted rhetoric, the organization Stop AAPI Hate found that reported hate incidents against Asian-American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Americans [almost doubled](#) in March 2021. The Anti-Defamation League [reported](#) “a dangerous and drastic surge in anti-Jewish hate” across the United States in mid-2021, on top of numbers that were already at historic highs. A mid-2021 [FBI threat assessment](#) finds that some supporters of QAnon “likely will begin to believe they can no longer ‘trust the plan’ referenced in QAnon posts and that they have an obligation to change from ‘digital soldiers’ towards engaging in real world violence.” The report [warns](#) that QAnon could inspire violence against Democrats and others perceived as political opponents. Further, hate rhetoric and subsequent violence can spark tit-for-tat spirals of violence between communities.

This ecosystem is underpinned by social media platforms' business models and algorithms that drive users towards extreme and harmful content. This information environment allows violence to be organized, justified, and coordinated at greater speed and weakens the mitigation playbook.

Political violence, in turn, undercuts trust in democratic institutions and faith in cross-community solidarity. It is both likely to beget more violence and undercut projects of democratic renewal. It is therefore imperative that philanthropy incorporate violence prevention and resilience into its grant-making for democratic renewal, and it is to that specific toolkit that we now turn.

Funding Priorities

Political violence is an outgrowth of structural, society-wide vulnerabilities. To address it, we must create an ecosystem of interventions that operate at the local, regional, and national levels; reach diverse stakeholders; and address short- and longer-term risks. This comprises a “resiliency-based approach” to political violence: a society-wide, comprehensive response.

The categories of interventions that can create resilience to political violence closely parallel areas prioritized by funders engaged in depolarization, bridge-building, social justice, media and misinformation, and political reform work. This means, in some instances, funders can address political violence risks through building on existing momentum, insights, and connections from ongoing efforts.

In this paper, we focus on immediate-term interventions necessary to address acute risks and enable [medium-and long-term work](#). While not comprehensive, these approaches are essential to create the foundation and conditions for successful programming.

BOLSTER DEMOCRACY AND DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

Democratic backsliding—including institutional health and distrust of democratic institutions—can both fuel and be fueled by political violence, particularly when occurring alongside polarization. Efforts to target minority communities are also a common feature of authoritarian systems

Our immediate funding priorities focus on preventing further democratic backsliding, especially where it may proximally increase the risk of violence around flashpoints (e.g., elections, public health); rebuilding public trust in institutions; and addressing the impact of violence on institutional health.

IMMEDIATE PRIORITY FOCUS ON LOCAL PROCESSES AND INSTITUTIONS UNDER SUSTAINED PRESSURE, INFORMED BY GEOGRAPHIC RISK ANALYSIS.

INTERVENTION Challenge [legislation](#) that interferes with democratic processes and thereby increases risks of violence. This includes legislation that undermines citizens' ability to vote, introduces partisanship into electoral administration, and/or targets groups on the basis of their ethnic or presumed political identities.

Geographic focus: [States](#) where such legislation has been proposed or is gaining traction.

NOTES This might include supporting lawsuits and legal challenges to such legislation. These challenges can be polarizing, so funders should prepare for any blowback through supporting parallel efforts to generate public support for the democratic institutions and norms such legislation challenges. Community-based mobilization and engaging diverse messengers that can reach and influence cross-partisan audiences can be helpful here.

INTERVENTION Bolster institutional trust that has eroded amidst COVID-related anti-lockdown and false "stolen election" narratives. Pay attention to trust through the full election cycle, including counting, tabulation, results, and dispute resolution.

Geographic focus: One possible starting point is places with elections in 2022 that can become flashpoints for violence, as well as areas that were heavily contested in 2020 (e.g., Georgia or Maricopa County, Arizona).

NOTES Address harmful and build alternative narratives surrounding institutional integrity and how election systems operate and can be trusted or challenged within a credible system. As with all communications, different messages and messengers will resonate among different audiences, so it's important to support local organizations in developing, testing, and ultimately scaling targeted messaging, and to invest in building a base of messengers capable of reaching key audiences.

IMMEDIATE PRIORITY ADDRESS THE CURRENT CLIMATE OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE TO ENSURE IT DOESN'T SHAPE INSTITUTIONS AND CHILL CIVIC LEADERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION (AND ENGENDER FURTHER VIOLENCE).

INTERVENTION Support local institutions and officials (election administrators, local mayors, governors, etc.) to manage and mitigate threats, deal with relevant trauma, and build resilience.

NOTES Funders should support efforts to identify the most pressing needs for these institutions and officials and develop responsive programming. Investment is needed to identify and scale effective long-term and rapid response approaches in partnership with affected communities, such as trauma support and security best practices. Networks positioned to reach these key institutions and officials at scale should be supported in identifying their members' needs, providing tools and support, and creating spaces for peer-to-peer learning and support.

In the medium- (2-5 years) and long-term, efforts must address institutional vulnerabilities. This includes, for example, addressing discrimination and marginalization, so that Americans across identities experience consistent norms of non-violence in place of structural violence. This requires developing or strengthening checks on institutions' capacity to engage in group-targeted violence and addressing structural incentives for polarization. Efforts should also equip civil society to generate public support for such efforts and to manage any blowback they might engender, whether misinformation, targeted harassment, threats, and so on.

Also critical to building sustained resilience will be efforts to reckon with history—working to build a narrative that is widely-shared, truthful, and inclusive of a wide range of experiences. Global experience shows such efforts are crucial to

- (1) addressing grievances and inequities;
- (2) preventing cycles of violence and discrimination;
- (3) norm-setting around who is part of the “we” in the U.S.; and
- (4) developing a shared narrative around murky periods in our history, their impact on communities, and a commitment to their non-recurrence.

However, efforts to reckon with history—whether educational initiatives, community dialogues, reconciliation fora, or other steps to acknowledge and address structural inequalities—can be messy and contentious. Thus, here, too, programming must equip civil society and engaged stakeholders to build public support for and manage any backlash to these efforts.

ADDRESS THE ONGOING THREAT OF EXTREMISM

The mainstreaming of extremist ideas, and the visible presence of extremist group members in local government and security forces, contributes to a more permissive environment for violence and undercuts initiatives aimed at community-building and institutional reform.

Immediate priorities for addressing extremism focus on preventing its growth and mainstreaming, while simultaneously addressing these groups' already problematic size, prevalence, and infiltration of key institutions. Cognizant of the shortcomings of prior, more securitized approaches to addressing these risks, efforts must also navigate and work to rebuild and maintain trust among affected communities.

IMMEDIATE PRIORITY TRACK AND UNDERSTAND EXTREMIST GROUPS.

INTERVENTION Support research tracking and monitoring the growth, evolution, recruitment and financing of extremist groups.

NOTES

- Special attention should be given to tracking groups at the local level, complementing national-level efforts that already exist.
- Support local and affected community groups in gaining tools and expertise to monitor and understand emerging threats. (See, for example, the [Western States Center](#).)
- Invest in research on extremism in the military and law enforcement.

IMMEDIATE PRIORITY COUNTER RECRUITMENT TO EXTREMIST GROUPS.

INTERVENTION Support more research, pilot programs, and evaluation/best practices in countering both online and offline recruitment by extremist groups.

NOTES State and local governments, civil society, religious and community organizations, and other stakeholders need tools and support to help prevent radicalization and provide off-ramps and alternatives for vulnerable members of their communities.

IMMEDIATE PRIORITY IDENTIFY AND MANAGE THREATS.

INTERVENTION Fund development, with input from targeted communities, of better approaches to de-escalation and violence interruption for both law enforcement and community leaders. Support network-building and sharing of best practices, including identifying approaches that are ineffective or counter-productive.

NOTES Invest in community mental health and healing amidst continuing threats and violence. Support lawsuits, monitoring, and other tools to hold perpetrators of violence accountable. This includes ensuring accountability for law enforcement as relevant.

IMPROVE THE HARMFUL COMMUNICATIONS LANDSCAPE

Our contemporary communications ecosystem is sowing division, driving and reinforcing misinformation, and justifying violence. As part of this, we've seen an uptick in divisive political rhetoric that justifies discriminatory actions and violence against marginalized groups due to perceived wrongs or system failures (e.g., "stolen election").

Support should go to mitigating the impact of specific threats, such as the mainstreaming of group-targeted, anti-democratic, and extremist rhetoric and conspiracy theories; addressing the harmful consequences of problematic communications; and ensuring that the mainstream media is able to respond in helpful ways (and avoids inadvertently contributing towards harm). Both research and organized pressure are needed to secure accountability for harms and to shift the social media platform business models that drive users toward harmful content. Funders should recognize that mis/disinformation is not only a discrete policy area but should also be integrated with other funding verticals, including those addressing white supremacy and extremism, polarization, and political violence.

IMMEDIATE PRIORITY BUILD SUPPORT FOR PLATFORM ACCOUNTABILITY

INTERVENTION Increase funding for research and advocacy to document, build public pressure, and create accountability for harms on social media platforms. This should also go toward changing laws and policies around algorithms, content oversight and moderation, and protection for targeted groups.

NOTES

- Focus on known flashpoints and risks (e.g., an election cycle) while laying the groundwork for long-term changes.
- Ensure that efforts are connected to and informed by affected community members.
- Combine public pressure with demands for specific, research-driven changes in platform policies and algorithms.

IMMEDIATE PRIORITY STRENGTHEN MEDIA CAPACITY FOR CONSTRUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT

INTERVENTION Support media organizations and journalists experiencing reputational attacks (e.g., “fake news”), threats, and violence, including through building rapid response capabilities.

NOTES Work directly with media organizations and journalist support networks (e.g., Election SOS) to better understand and meet journalist/media needs. Address the [disproportionate targeting](#) based on gender and race.

INTERVENTION Address the challenge of [news deserts](#), including through supporting local news outlets and ethnic/religious media, which remain uniquely trusted by many Americans.

NOTES [Local news](#) outlets also provide critical insights on trends in violence, local risks, and sources of resiliency. They are a key source for monitoring efforts (described below).

INTERVENTION Provide [training](#) and capacity-building for journalists to ensure reporting does not inadvertently fuel risks for violence, including, for example, through inflammatory coverage of tensions or past violence, dehumanizing coverage of affected communities, providing a platform for perpetrators and their ideologies, etc.

NOTES Couple training and capacity building initiatives with efforts to influence those who make editorial decisions and oversee headlines and news scrolls (e.g., editors and other newsroom decision-makers).

IMMEDIATE PRIORITY SUPPORT AUDIENCE-SPECIFIC INTERVENTIONS TO PREVENT AND INTERRUPT ATTRACTION TO MIS/DISINFORMATION

INTERVENTION Support research to better understand where and why mis/disinformation is resonating and the strategies, tactics, and structures fueling its spread.

NOTES Audience research to understand why and how misinformation is targeting and spreading among specific audiences is key. Interventions must leverage these insights to use targeted messaging and trusted messengers to disrupt misinformation and its resonance.

INTERVENTION Provide funding for developing and testing off-ramps from mis/disinformation, designing alternative spaces and content that attract vulnerable users away from mis/disinformation, and rehabilitation for those emerging from rabbit holes.

Make explicit efforts to learn from past mistakes and ensure input from affected communities, to avoid promoting models that are ineffective or cause harm.

NOTES

- Invest in designing and testing online interventions that segment and target specific audiences.
- Seek to meet the same needs users are currently addressing through mis/disinformation and conspiracy spaces (e.g., a sense of belonging, a way to deal with feelings of shame, status).
- Equip influential offline stakeholders—whether parents or faith leaders—with tools to engage those in their sphere of influence who are vulnerable to harmful content.

IMMEDIATE PRIORITY INTERRUPT AND ADDRESS HARMS STEMMING FROM DANGEROUS COMMUNICATIONS, INCLUDING THE TARGETING OF SPECIFIC COMMUNITIES AND INDIVIDUALS VIA MISINFORMATION, CONSPIRACY THEORIES, AND INFLAMMATORY RHETORIC.

INTERVENTION Increase funding for [psychosocial](#) and security services to those targeted with mis/disinformation, conspiracy theories, and hate speech.

NOTES

- Identify and channel support to organizations and networks from affected communities.
- As part of this, funders will need to listen and learn from such communities about their most pressing needs and provide the type and amount of support needed (whether gen-ops, psychosocial, in-kind support, etc.)

IMMEDIATE PRIORITY STRENGTHEN CIVIL SOCIETY CAPABILITIES TO BETTER UNDERSTAND, PREEMPT, MANAGE, AND RESPOND TO MISINFORMATION AND OTHER HARMFUL COMMUNICATIONS.

INTERVENTION Strengthen the connective tissue between efforts to research and counter mis/disinformation and efforts to prevent political violence, including through supporting organizations positioned to translate and build connections across these sectors.

NOTES

- Support ongoing translation between research and practice to ensure relevant findings, [best practices](#), and field experiences are informing this work.
- These efforts should be connected to affected communities, including women and minority communities, that are the most often targeted but least likely to be engaged in research or policy prescriptions.

INTERVENTION Support ongoing efforts to monitor and respond to mis/disinformation and harmful narratives. This can include support for developing and testing different counter-messaging and [messengers](#) to address hateful rhetoric and misinformation, [media literacy programming](#), or monitoring and [rapid response efforts ahead of known flashpoints for misinformation](#) (e.g., elections).

NOTES

- These efforts should share relevant monitoring and response tools with key civil society leaders and other stakeholders.
- Successful approaches should be identified, bolstered, and scaled.

INTERVENTION Support efforts to move mis/disinformation out of the mainstream.

NOTES

- Support efforts to push platforms to reform or strengthen algorithms, content oversight and moderation, and protection for targeted groups (per above). For instance, [Change the Terms](#) works to update platform policies to better address online hate.
- Specifically address politicians and media personalities repeating and lending credibility to conspiracy theories (see norms section, below). Notably, if mis/disinformation spreaders are de-platformed while high-profile voices continue to endorse them, experience [shows](#) that would-be recruits seek out the content elsewhere and the effect of de-platforming is limited.

INTERVENTION Support civil society and research efforts to monitor white nationalist and far right activities and narratives, offline and across messaging and social media platforms. Use this information to inform proactive and responsive interventions.

NOTES Mis/disinformation often taps into or recycles white nationalist narratives and rhetoric. Monitoring these trends will position organizations to better understand and respond to misinformation.

In the medium- and long-term, funders should support civil society in rigorously evaluating these interventions and in iterating and scaling effective approaches (e.g., effective approaches at deterring social media users from rabbit holes, de-mainstreaming misinformation and harmful rhetoric, etc.). Effective media literacy programming should be tested, evaluated and scaled—as should approaches that address the [social benefits users derive](#) from consuming and sharing mis/disinformation. Funders should also support researchers, thought leaders, and civil society organizations in anticipating and preparing for changes in the communications landscape that could intensify existing divisions and risks for violence (e.g., a new technology, platform, or modality). Further, funding should address the structural factors that contribute to harmful communications—media distrust, platform algorithms and limited transparency, unsustainable and insufficient funding for legitimate news outlets, and the hateful ideologies that underlie and animate mis/disinformation today.

RESET NORMS AT ELITE AND COMMUNITY LEVELS

Perceptions of what is normal or expected of peers (“perceived norms”) powerfully influence how we act, even when inconsistent with our privately-held beliefs. We must reset social norms to reject violence, conspiracy theories, and discriminatory language and policies that target groups on the basis of their identity. Given the intensity of identity-based polarization, it will be necessary to prioritize norm-setting within groups, rather than expect a single campaign or spokesperson to be effective across polarized communities.

IMMEDIATE PRIORITY ENGAGE LEADERS FROM INFLUENTIAL GROUPS TO SHIFT AND SUSTAIN NORMS OF NON-VIOLENCE WITHIN THEIR COMMUNITIES.

INTERVENTION Activate and connect leaders to model norms that promote democracy and cooperation and reject behaviors that increase risks of violence within their own communities. In [Whitefish, Montana](#), for instance, private citizens, prominent government officials, NGOs, and faith leaders coordinated to respond to and stem anti-semitic and white supremacist threats in the town.

NOTES Such efforts should occur across the political spectrum, leveraging influential voices, such as business leaders, faith leaders, and veterans, and other prominent individuals with ties to influential communities. These leaders can shift norms within their own groups, as well as for other groups that respect/listen to them.

INTERVENTION Support efforts to scale communications and narrative storytelling that reset/reinforce norms of non-violence among communities most influenced by harmful norm changes, especially those at risk for participating in or supporting violence.

NOTES

- This will be particularly effective if led by credible messengers or insiders.
- These initiatives can target outlets where key audiences get their information (e.g., faith-based outlets, a popular news network, a targeted social media campaign, etc.)

IMMEDIATE PRIORITY REBUILD CROSS-CUTTING SOCIETAL NORMS THAT REDUCE RISKS OF VIOLENCE.

INTERVENTION Build (or rebuild) cross-cutting identities that subsume political and other fault lines and connect people across differences. A cross-cutting identity could be a geographic identity, a faith identity, or a particular sports team fandom etc.

This may mean investing in groups that are positioned to activate positive norms through shared identities and values. For example, civic associations focused on social cohesion (local YMCAs, Rotary Clubs, etc.); professional associations (e.g., business associations, local chambers of commerce, bar associations, sports leagues); local political and community leaders (e.g., mayors or school principals) able to activate geographic identities (e.g. "Boston Strong"); organizations and movements, themselves a social identity, focused on addressing societal threats and bolstering cohesion through their work.

NOTES

- Within these identities, leaders can activate norms rejecting political violence, replacing them with ones of cooperation.
- Funders can complement this local work with national narrative efforts. For example, supporting news and media in avoiding activating lines of division throughout their communications; large-scale storytelling and multi-media campaign initiatives; and engaging influencers who activate different identities (e.g. mommy bloggers, YouTubers, celebrities with cross-cultural resonance such as The Rock and Dolly Parton, etc.).

INTERVENTION Support efforts to showcase cross-partisan cooperation and friendships among elected officials and other influential figures.

NOTES

- Showcasing cross-partisan warmth (e.g., laughing or getting coffee together) has been [shown to reduce](#) perceptions of partisan animosity and division, even if occurring amidst policy disagreements.
- Avoid divide-bridging that normalizes or validates harmful and objectively debunked narratives, such as stolen election claims. This could risk normalizing and validating such narratives and related actions.

IMMEDIATE PRIORITY RESET NORMS REJECTING POLITICAL VIOLENCE WHERE SUPPORT FOR VIOLENCE AND ANTIDEMOCRATIC ACTIONS IS GROWING FASTEST.

INTERVENTION Support and connect conservative leaders who wish to rebuild norms rejecting political violence. This can include leaders not currently involved in politics but nevertheless influential among Republicans, including faith leaders, veterans, business leaders, and so on.

NOTES Revisionism or disregard for the Capitol insurrection has become a litmus test for the GOP. Leaders who wish to reject these norms often pay a price (or think that they will pay a price) for speaking up and are less effective alone than collectively. Supporting these leaders in resetting norms can make an important difference.

INTERVENTION Diminish financial support for leaders who question the legitimacy of the 2020 election or minimize the January 6 violence. Make rejection of violence a requirement for high-status interactions, board and fellow status, etc.

NOTES Here, funders can leverage their networks and social capital to create financial incentives for rejecting violence, and penalties for condoning it.

In the medium- and long-term, efforts should also focus on evaluating and iterating the above-outlined approaches to reach and influence different target audiences. It's critical to remember that norms are ever-changing: the above-mentioned efforts focus on the threats of the moment, but specific attention will be required as and where norms erode among other communities in addition to the ones we've prioritized above. Further, long-term efforts can go beyond simply promoting non-violence to promote norms of cooperation, mutual respect, dignity, healthy debate, etc.

CREATE ACCOUNTABILITY

Global experience teaches that norms need to come with [accountability](#)—both to reduce the likelihood of cycles of violence and retribution, and to re-establish expectations that laws and norms apply equally to all. Accountability serves a restorative purpose for aggrieved communities, reinvigorating trust and engagement in civic institutions. It also contributes toward developing a shared narrative of “what happened,” helping prevent polarized accounts from entrenching and spurring further division, partisan recriminations, and violence. Accountability thus helps strengthen democratic institutions. It can occur formally through the justice system and/or through historical accounting and truth-telling at local or national levels.

IMMEDIATE PRIORITY CREATE A FACT-BASED AND ACCESSIBLE ACCOUNT OF “WHAT HAPPENED” ON JANUARY 6TH AND OTHER RECENT INSTANCES OF POLITICAL AND GROUP-TARGETED VIOLENCE.

INTERVENTION Support efforts to create a more complete historical account of recent political violence, particularly the January 6th insurrection and enabling factors. This includes supporting civil society and community initiatives to document and share instances of political and group-targeted violence. Consider recent work in Philadelphia, Boston, and San Francisco to develop community-level truth commissions for victims of unjust policing and prosecution.

NOTES This can include digital forensics, visual and oral history, as well as research.

INTERVENTION Broaden the base of support for accountability. Engage a constellation of leaders from across America—whether local officials, faith leaders, business leaders, and so on—to support efforts to objectively fact-find, hold those responsible to account, and generate a full and shared understanding of the events.

NOTES The broader the visible support for these efforts (across identities, political parties, and geographies), the more likely they are to be viewed as legitimate and effectively reduce the risk of future violence.

While an immediate-term priority, accountability must remain a medium- and long-term effort to cement norms rejecting political violence. What this looks like will in part depend on the results of current accountability efforts. Further, medium- and long-term efforts should incorporate initiatives to address historical harms as outlined in the institutions section of this paper.

LAY THE GROUNDWORK FOR COORDINATED RAPID RESPONSE

In the same way that we look to prevent public health crises or create structures to withstand a natural disaster, we should also build a rapid response infrastructure to ensure we are prepared in the face of flashpoints and escalating tensions that could spur political violence. A resilience-based approach requires identifying actors, communities, and initiatives already working to understand and address risks and building on their momentum, knowledge, and social capital. This mandates an infrastructure that supports coordination across groups, issues and regions to ensure that monitoring and risk assessments are connected to response capabilities within and across geographies. This also requires the use of geographic and risk analysis to prioritize key areas for significant investment.

Past models to emulate include the years of strong community ties that let civil and religious authorities in Boston manage community tensions after the Boston Marathon bombing; and trusted connections among law enforcement, local government, and LGBTQ groups in Orlando that held up after the Pulse nightclub shootings.

IMMEDIATE PRIORITY CREATE AN INFRASTRUCTURE FOR COORDINATED RESPONSE.

INTERVENTION Develop or strengthen cross-identity coalitions that bring diverse stakeholders together to build trust, shared conflict analysis, and coordination and rapid response capacities. For instance, prior to the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing, the Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center (ISBCC) had built strong relationships with local government, intra- and inter-faith leaders, law enforcement, and the media. This facilitated inter-community coordination in mounting a rapid response to the attack.

NOTES

- Create the trust and connective tissue among individuals, organizations, or communities already engaged in relevant work.
- Participants might include community groups, religious and civic leaders, elected officials and law enforcement, and business leaders.
- State tables and coordinating networks that monitored violence during the 2020 election cycle (and their local partners) can be revived or repurposed.
- It's critical that representatives from affected communities be involved in the design and implementation of these coalitions.

IMMEDIATE PRIORITY CREATE AN INFRASTRUCTURE FOR COORDINATED RESPONSE.

INTERVENTION Build [connective tissue and coordination capabilities](#) between response initiatives and ongoing monitoring efforts, such that response networks can integrate insights on risk indicators into research efforts and that researchers can regularly and rapidly provide responders with the most relevant risk assessments and information.

NOTES

- Best practice dictates that these structures exist within and across geographies, so that grassroots efforts are connected both to one another and to state and national-level initiatives.
- Connect early warning and early response so they are part of the same system.
- Together, this helps ensure that risk awareness—from the grassroots to the national level—can quickly and effectively trigger an appropriate response.

INTERVENTION Avoid boom and bust cycles by providing steady support, rather than solely around elections or other moments perceived as high-threat.

NOTES

Support affected communities and diverse organizations and leaders. This will help position organizations to address emergent risks alongside longer-term priorities, rather than, for example, working to hire new talent or scale organizational resources in high-need response moments.

IMMEDIATE PRIORITY CONDUCT ONGOING RISK MONITORING.

INTERVENTION Support research institutions and affected community organizations in conducting ongoing monitoring of qualitative and quantitative risk indicators and tracking political violence itself. This should include resources to connect local and national efforts, as well as work to streamline and collate data to be accessible to end users/responders.

NOTES

· [Best practice is](#) to ensure a combination of qualitative and quantitative risk indicators, and to combine data analysis and monitoring with a system of field monitors connected to local communities and positioned to provide high quality qualitative information.

· Organizations including Bridging Divides Initiative, ISD, SPLC, ADL, Western States Center, and Stop AAPI Hate, among others, are already deeply engaged in tracking different risk indicators.

IMMEDIATE PRIORITY BUILD RAPID RESPONSE DISBURSEMENT MECHANISMS.

INTERVENTION Build rapid response disbursement mechanisms that can be flexibly deployed during crises (e.g., for funding to civil society organizations, [mediation, negotiation, connections to elite actors](#), crisis communications, etc.).

NOTES This will help ensure that, at critical moments, attention will be on action rather than disbursement logistics.

Such funding can go to civil society organizations positioned to prevent tensions from escalating to violence or to influence elite actors and deploy high level mediation and negotiation efforts.

In the medium- to long-term, funders should continue to bolster the above efforts, adding in new response mechanisms and expanding or strengthening connective tissue among key communities.

A Note About Immediate, Medium, and Long-term Priorities

We have focused here in-depth on immediate funding priorities, defined as those that address acute risks. However, these risks for political violence did not emerge from nowhere, and 6-12 months of focused funding will not be sufficient to reverse them. Over 2-5 years and beyond, funders will need to leverage the immediate-term work to develop a deeper and more robust understanding of effective approaches to countering political violence and underlying risk factors. This involves replicating and scaling effective initiatives that are initially implemented in the most high-risk localities and engaging additional communities. Funders should also build and sustain diverse coalitions of actors engaged in this work. Throughout these efforts, insights, lessons-learned, and best practices should be compiled and disseminated to relevant stakeholders.

We highlight this to reiterate that, for philanthropy to effectively stem risks of political violence, it must manage acute risks while making sustained progress on deeper, more structural challenges that similarly presage further violence.

Funding Through Best Practices

Five best practices underlie the above recommendations; we unpack them in a bit more detail here.

ONE

Do No Harm

Even the most well-intentioned interventions can backfire and/or cause unintended harm. Throughout your planning process and prior to funding any intervention, consult with stakeholders to conduct risk assessments. Particularly consider whether programs that create short-term benefits might inadvertently create long-term harms (that are also more difficult to repair). As part of your risk assessment, [consider](#) whether any work will provide legitimacy or a platform to actors with a track record of inciting political violence, or alternatively will disempower influential messengers or connectors working to prevent such violence. Finally, invest in physical and online security for your grantees.

Because political violence is a whole-of-society problem, an effective grantmaking approach will require funders to scrutinize their comprehensive portfolios with the same values lens they apply to the political violence work. An organization or prominent individuals associated both with non-violence work and with support for individuals, parties or entities that condone or promote hate speech and violence will be ineffective at best. At worst, it undermines the anti-violence project. Full transparency to grantees about the grantmaker's full scope of activities can ensure that grantees are able to make informed decisions.

TWO

Support Field Building and Learning

Building resilience to political violence requires a diverse set of implementers to develop shared problem definitions and the ability to coordinate, reflect, learn and share best practices. Funding can support research and analysis of trends and risk factors to inform interventions and resource allocations. Research can also focus on understanding and analyzing best practices and tools, as well as on evaluation and learning from existing efforts. But such research often takes place in a vacuum, therefore a second step is equally critical: Research initiatives should be connected to field organizations and

other key stakeholders to help inform their efforts. Field building organizations (for example, organizations that build and engage networks) can offer capacity training and support across initiatives. This category includes groups that convene networks of organizations working on this issue for shared learning, analysis, and relationship building and organizations that develop tools and resources for the field. This latter category includes mediation, dialogue, and negotiation practitioners; human rights organizations; organizations focused on transitional justice; groups working on healing, trauma, and addressing harms; and groups focused on community security approaches.

THREE

Ecosystem/mapping approach

Mapping key stakeholders across these priority areas will be critical. Relevant stakeholders will vary depending on the thematic area. For example, a focus on democratic institutions may include engaging with political leaders and movements, and may also include engaging with youth (who have [the highest level](#) of support for authoritarianism across different demographics), while addressing conspiracy theories and extremist recruitment may involve working with faith leaders, veterans groups, and diverse online influencers. It's also critical to conduct an ecosystem mapping to identify other funders operating in this space and their priorities and approaches. This will help ensure that duplicative efforts are avoided, complementary approaches are supported, and gaps in programming are filled. Ideally, such a mapping would engage funders along the ideological spectrum, so that each can leverage its investments and influence in a mutually reinforcing way. Just as a whole-of-society approach is necessary to effectively curb the risks of political violence, a whole-of-philanthropy commitment is required to avoid further entrenching divisions or perpetuating harms. This may require difficult but necessary conversations, institutional reflections, and mitigation efforts.

FOUR

Engage frontline and targeted communities

As noted, affected communities and their leaders must have a central role if efforts to address violence are to be successful. Political violence can marginalize and disenfranchise affected communities, even intimidating them from participating in the democratic process. Engaging these communities directly brings vital resources not easily found elsewhere, including a real-time knowledge of local events, and the capacity, flexibility, and likelihood to take action in response

to early warning signs. But it also has mutually-reinforcing benefits in strengthening those communities' ability to access the democratic system, and in fostering relationship-building and understanding across affected communities. Supporting affected communities can extend beyond financial resources to creating pathways for community leaders to be heard (e.g., providing media connections and a platform), providing security assistance to threatened community leaders, and providing mental health support to individuals and organizations that have been targeted with violence and threats.

FIVE

Provide holistic support to grantees

Recognizing that creating resilience to political violence will require sustained, long-term commitment, it's critical to build trust and relationships with organizations and communities positioned to carry forward this work and influence key audiences. Communicate this support to grantees so that they can operate without worrying whether funding will dry up if priorities shift. It's also important that grantees feel empowered to adapt their work as dynamics change and certain approaches prove more effective than others. As possible, provide general operations support ("gen ops support") rather than just project support, allowing grantees to use funding more flexibly to meet their most pressing needs as the landscape evolves (e.g., to hire additional team members, bolster security support, retain crisis comms support, and so on). Grantees also need iterative learning capacity, to evaluate and build on their own and others' work.

Given how mentally and emotionally taxing this work can be, in-kind support, including mental health counseling and resources, can complement core/gen ops funding and significantly boost the impact of overstretched grantees. This might include crisis comms, PR support, cyber or physical security offerings, mental health counseling and resources, and/or connections to other stakeholders or leaders. The donor community itself needs best practices for providing such support, as well as for helping sustain the growing number of mutual aid groups and other community efforts that lack legal structure. Try to make this support as accessible as possible (e.g., not requiring a written proposal or paperwork where possible, having a simple process for requesting support, etc.). Donors should also work with grantees to become more financially sustainable, including through introducing them to additional funders.

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