Building U.S. Resilience to Political Violence

A Globally Informed Framework for Analysis and Action

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OVER ZERO

NEW AMERICA

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ABOUT THE ORGANIZATIONS BEHIND THIS RESEARCH

Table of Contents

Introduction

The United States has recently seen a rise in violence and hate speech, an increase in public rhetoric that seems to encourage violence, and a decline in the perceived legitimacy of U.S. democratic institutions. These well-documented trends are themselves alarming. Yet the next year will likely see an escalation in tensions and the risk of violence, due to political and cultural events, including the run-up to the U.S. presidential election and census.

Research on international violence and peacebuilding reveals that much can be done to prevent violence and increase resilience — if leaders with influence and resources are ready to face these challenges squarely now. With this in mind, this paper reviews insights and lessons learned from social science and international peacebuilding — positioning them amidst the specific U.S. experience — to identify and discuss those areas most likely to bolster U.S. resilience in the face of escalated risks for political violence.

We highlight four risk factors for violence: **elite factionalization**, **societal polarization**, **a rise in hate speech and rhetoric**, and **weakening institutions**. In addition to these four factors, the United States is already experiencing a rise in violent events, which can themselves be a spark for further violence. We then suggest five domains for philanthropic efforts to increase societal resilience to political violence and strengthen the long-term foundations of a healthy democracy and society: (1) shaping group norms by bolstering inclusive, influential voices within diverse American communities; (2) supporting targeted communities; (3) laying the groundwork for a coordinated response to violence; (4) engaging communication strategically; and (5) protecting and strengthening capacities for resilience, specifically through supporting democratic institutions and reckoning with U.S. history.

The Potential for Political Violence in the United States

U.S. national history is bound up with political violence. While this is the case for many nation states, it is significant as prior violence can be a predictor of future violence (even pocketed violence that is lesser known among most of society). In the United States, fault lines linger from: the genocide of native Americans, the enslavement of Africans, the Civil War, and other racial and ethnic violence — e.g., lynchings; class-based political violence, such as draft riots; and attacks on government installations, elections and public officials (such as fires and bombs detonated on university campuses by left-wing extremists in the 1970s).

It is critical to consider this history as we examine rising violence in the United States. Indeed, multiple government and private agencies have documented sustained growth of hate-inspired violence and a heightened targeting of minority group members *(1-3)*, as well as an undercurrent of gender-based violence (half of U.S. mass shooters between 2009-2017 have included a female family member among their victims) *(4, 5)*. Seen through the lens of international experience, our history means that this significant rise in violence in the United States is cause for concern *(6-8)*.

Significant Risk Factors

To identify particular dynamics in the United States that might fuel — or alternately, build resilience to — political violence, this section presents a brief review of risk factors for political violence identified through decades of research. We identify the factors most relevant in the United States today that, according to available data and research, appear to be moving along a negative trendline, thus raising the risk of violence while reducing our sources of resilience against it. By identifying these factors, we are positioned to consider sources of resilience to violence in the U.S. context and where they most need to be bolstered.

We define political violence as violence aimed at political ends—meant to control or change who benefits from, and participates fully in, U.S. political, economic, and socio-cultural life. Global conflict researchers have developed extensive databases offering a wide number of political, social, and economic variables that can be modeled to predict or suggest heightened risk of violent conflict.* Drawing from this research and an analysis of current U.S. dynamics, we identify four interrelated risk factors with trendlines in the United States that are worrying: elite factionalization, societal polarization, a rise in hate speech and rhetoric, and weakening institutions.

The first risk factor, *elite factionalization*, occurs when a country's politics devolve into distinct groups engaging in winner-take-all competition to promote their own interests at the expense of the other group or the overall collective (*9, 10*). Goldstone et al. (2010) note this is "often accompanied by confrontational mass mobilization...and by the intimidation or manipulation of electoral competition..." further explaining that it is this "relationship among political elites—a polarized politics of exclusive identities or ideologies, in conjunction with partially democratic institutions—...that most powerfully presages instability" (*10*).Indeed, actions and choices of political leaders are a key

ONE:
ELITE FACTIONALIZATION

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* In selecting databases, indexes, and other models that seek to categorize and/or quantify the risk of violent conflict, we consulted qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method frameworks. While a vast array of qualitative assessment frameworks exist, the five consulted for this research (**UN Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes**, **USAID Conflict Assessment Framework**, **USAID Field Guide for Helping Prevent Mass Atrocities**, **USAID Interagency Security Sector Assessment Framework**, and the **World Bank Conflict Analysis Framework**) are foundational in the sense that they are cited in the creation of other academic and research frameworks. The UN Framework, specifically, is widely cited as the standard for analysis and assessment from which to build. We selected quantitative and mixed-method reports (**Fund for Peace's Fragile States Index**, **Carleton University's Country Indicators for Foreign Policy Failed and Fragile States Index**, **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's Early Warning Risk Assessment for Mass Killing**, **Center for Systemic Peace's Polity IV**, **Institute for Economics and Peace's Global Peace Index 2018**, **The Political Terror Scale Project's Political Terror Scale 2018**, **Freedom House's Freedom in the World 2018**, **Brookings Institution's Index of State Weakness in the Developing World**, and **OECD's States of Fragility Framework 2018**) based on the following criteria: 1. Relevancy to armed conflict, political violence, and mass atrocities; 2. Timeliness of the data (With the exception of CIFP Fragile and Failed States from 2012 and Brookings Institution's Index of State Weakness in the Developing World from 2008, which were included because of their thoroughness and structural usefulness as a model, reports and indices were only included if they presented data from 2014 or later.); 3. Methodological best practice and diversity of data sources; and 4. Credibility of assessment body (no overt political, national, or ethnic bias or agenda). Notably absent from the included assessments are widely cited data sets such as the Uppsala Conflict Data Program and the World Bank Poverty and Equity Data, which track a particular indicator of risk or conflict. For the purposes of both clarity, consistency, relevancy, and brevity, the scope of inclusion was focused on frameworks and assessment models that aggregate and analyze various indicators specific to risks of violence to draw conclusions about future risk.

source of risk: The Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict concluded that "mass violence almost invariably results from the deliberately violent response of determined leaders and their groups to a wide range of social, economic, and political conditions that provide the environment for violent conflict, but usually do not independently spawn violence" (*11*).

This is one area in which the United States has shown marked decline. According to the Fragile States Index, the United States "is the most-worsened country in the world for the past five years" for a group of indicators including Factionalized Elites (*12, 13*). This score puts the United States in the same company as countries already in conflict, as well as those experiencing increased illiberalism or authoritarianism, such as Poland and Turkey (*12, 13*). Recent research reveals the U.S. Congress is more factionalized than at any other time since the post-Civil War Reconstruction period 150 years ago (*14*).

TWO: POLARIZATION

A second factor, inextricably intertwined with elite factionalization, is ***increasing polarization*** within American society (*15, 16*). In addition to intensifying, our polarization has changed in nature. Whereas once political divisions stemmed from disagreements over a particular issue or policy, they now stem from *how people feel about those on the other side of the political spectrum*, known as identity-based or affective polarization. This has occurred alongside a process of social sorting: Our personal identities have grown in alignment with our political ones. With this, we are no longer merely competing for political victories, but also for the victories of our racial, religious, ethnic, and gender identities — leading to an ever-heightened need for victory (*17-21*). As political scientist Lilliana Mason notes, "every election is a fight for larger portions of our self-concept — leading to an ever-more need for victory. Not only are victories more exciting, but losses are much more painful. It is as if the outcome of the Super Bowl also determined the fate of our favorite basketball, hockey, and baseball teams" (*22*).

As Americans increasingly connect political differences to core identities rather than issues, the space for deliberation, dialogue, and compromise recedes (*23, 25, 26, 197*). With this, the use of absolutist, moralistic rhetoric rises (with opposing groups mirroring one another's use of moralistic language) (*27-31*), and intergroup hostility, partisan animus, and intolerance grow (*18, 20, 26, 32-38*). Indeed, as of 2018, 24 percent of Republicans and 17 percent of Democrats believed it is occasionally acceptable to

send threatening messages to public officials, and 9 percent of both Democrats and Republicans agreed that violence would be acceptable if their opponents won the 2020 election (*25*).

Polarization fuels the segmenting of our media into self-selected media bubbles — and then is further compounded as citizens no longer hear the same presentation of facts. Rhetoric can be particularly powerful when its audience has limited (or no) alternative sources of information (*39, 40*). While today's media environment enables access to a wide variety of information sources, studies suggest that individuals are instead likely to draw key beliefs from sources that reinforce polarized views (*41, 42*). For example, in a landscape where political positions are tied to group identity, exposure to information that challenges existing beliefs (and identity) may backfire, leading individuals to reject such information and cling to their existing beliefs more strongly before (*43-45*).

Third, we highlight the increasing prevalence and acceptance of *hateful and dangerous speech*,[*] further dividing society into an "us" and "them," and justifying harm against those categorized as "them." Such rhetoric has become a troubling feature of mainstream political discourse in the United States, for it resembles patterns seen historically and globally in the lead-up to mass violence (*48-50*).

This speech targets the speaker's outgroup(s) as beyond the universe of moral obligations (e.g., painting its targets as animals/less than human), as guilty of past or future crimes or responsible for current problems (thus deserving of punishment), and as an existential threat (to "our way of life," "our safety," and even "our women and children"). Violence is thus depicted as necessary and even praiseworthy to protect "our group" against an external threat, limiting group members' agency to push back (*48, 51, 52*).

In the United States, norms of elite public discourse have shifted over the last two years, with the dissemination of ever-more

THREE:
HATEFUL AND DANGEROUS SPEECH

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[*]   A number of terms are used to describe the discussed communication. Most colloquially, this speech is known as "hate speech," while social psychologists have labeled it "contempt speech," given that contempt, rather than hate, is the underlying emotion driving such speech (*62*). Legal tribunals have labeled communication that leads to violence as "incitement," and "dangerous speech" has been defined as "any form of expression that its audience will condone or commit violence against members of another group" (*46-47*).

BUILDING U.S. RESILIENCE TO POLITICAL VIOLENCE

explicit speech from the highest levels of government (*53-56*). Consider the President discussing Mexicans as "bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists," while separately remarking that those coming to the United States "aren't people. They're animals" (*57*); the labeling of Baltimore, a predominantly African American city, as a "disgusting rat and rodent-infested mess" (*58*); while telling four Congresswomen, all of color, to "go back" to their home countries (three were born in the United States) (*59*). It is thus noteworthy that the El Paso shooter explained his motive as stopping the "Hispanic invasion of Texas" (*60*) and that an ABC News study found 29 cases echoing this rhetoric in connection with violence, threats, and alleged assaults (*61*).

"While it might be tempting to think that only extreme segments of the population can be influenced by such speech...experiments demonstrate that it appears to have a very broad contagion effect..."

While it might be tempting to think that only extreme segments of the population can be influenced by such speech, laboratory and social media experiments demonstrate that it appears to have a very broad contagion effect, with exposure changing perceptions of social norms and increasing the likelihood that those exposed to it will themselves spread such speech (*62, 63*).

Research is also clarifying *how* hate speech makes violence more likely. It emotionally desensitizes listeners; increases their negative attitudes toward targeted groups; and, most importantly, provokes an increased use of hate speech by those exposed (*62*). With dehumanizing rhetoric specifically, research reveals that exposure corresponds with greater support for violent policies targeting the dehumanized group (*64*) and causes a reciprocal response from the targeted group (*65*). When such speech is normalized, even moderates perceive a shift in the norms around group-targeted violence, leading to two outcomes: moderate voices may become further silenced and extremists — feeling more empowered and affirmed without dissenting voices in society — may be even more likely to participate in violence (*63, 66-68*).

In addition to targeting specific groups, such language interacts with polarization to create negative feedback loops and shift norms within groups toward support for violence. For example, research shows that people are more likely to endorse violence when they moralize the issue they are protesting (thinking of it only in "right" or "wrong" terms) and see that others in their network moralize that issue,

too (*29*). When positions are moralized and group members are mobilized around them, the issues may be more likely to be treated as "sacred," meaning their holders refute compromise and would accept violence to defend them (*69-71*).

Modern media and communications, specifically the prevalence of social media and messaging apps, also interact with the above dynamics to fuel risks of political violence (*72*). While the impact of new communication technologies on conflict dates back to the printing press, contemporary technology allows hate speech and group-targeted rhetoric to bypass traditional gatekeepers and reach audiences at unprecedented speeds. Cell phone coverage has been found to increase the probability of violent conflict in Africa (*73*), while social media algorithms privilege information that appeals to our negative primal emotions (fear, surprise, disgust) to draw the longest engagement from users (*74*). By allowing extremist voices to dominate the online conversation, this elevates formerly fringe positions to appear mainstream and changes the normative environment.

FOUR: WEAKENING DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

A fourth cause for concern in the U.S. comes from indications that some of our ***democratic institutions may be weakening or losing legitimacy.*** Political scientists have recently demonstrated that countries experiencing both high levels of elite factionalization and partial rather than full democracy are more likely to experience political instability. In such contexts, factionalized elites experience the system as unstable and have incentives to use advantages from outside the system (such as corruption and violence) to maintain power (*75*). While indices from Freedom House, Polity IV, and the Political Terror Scale assess overall U.S. democracy at a fairly constant score, they rate U.S. electoral integrity comparatively lower than other developed democracies (*76*).

In impairing government cooperation and its ability to address critical issues, polarization further challenges democratic institutions. As our institutions falter, so too does support for the U.S. government and democracy itself. This is significant, as research suggests the health of a democracy can be gauged by determining how highly citizens rate the importance of democracy and how open they are to undemocratic forms of government (*77*). Also, public trust in the government and the media has recently hit historic lows (*78, 79*), and the Federal Bureau of Investigations, Department of Justice, and Supreme Court have all lost cross-partisan credibility (*80, 81*). Attacks on career bureaucrats, a sidelining of subject-matter expertise, direct orders for agency

heads to violate the law, and a large volume of senior-level vacancies further impede a functioning bureaucracy (*82, 83*).

The current political disillusionment corresponds with growing openness to other forms of rule, including military rule. While two decades ago only one in 16 Americans believed "army rule" was a good system of government, it's since risen to one in six (*84*). Scholars further warn that diminished public trust in U.S. institutions can become dangerous if even one side of the political divide comes to believe that "the system is rigged" or that democracy is not functioning, as this group may then deem it necessary to commit violence against the group of people believed to be maneuvering or benefiting from the "rigging" (*25*).

Interactions Across the Four Factors

While each of these risk factors is a formidable challenge on its own, they also interact negatively. Collectively, elite factionalization, social polarization, media segmentation, and hate rhetoric drive U.S. society to become increasingly accepting of — or even demanding of — zero-sum policies and political actions that further weaken the United States' resilience to violence, whether by promoting extremist ideas or compromising the integrity, strength, or perceived legitimacy of our institutions. Real or perceived institutional weaknesses may further remove barriers to supporting or engaging in political violence.

Similarly, polarization and hateful rhetoric are bound together in a downward spiral in which politics becomes centered around group identity rather than issues. Exposure to such rhetoric increases the public's perception of intergroup division, which in turn increases the motivation to stand behind one's own group (85-89). Groups that perceive such division may even take preemptive action against the opposing group, action they see as defensive (90). The desire to do whatever it takes for one's group to "win" takes precedence over following the rules and preserving institutions. The prohibitions surrounding how we treat outgroup members — be they partisan or specific identity groups — also break down.

As group-targeted rhetoric becomes increasingly prevalent, more moderate voices get drowned out. Society seems more polarized than it actually is. Citizens begin to fear taking public action, experiencing a diminished sense of agency to push back on negative trends that appear increasingly mainstream. This cedes more space to extremists, in turn propelling other extremists to speak up and take action.

What Violence Does to a Society

As noted, international experience reveals that the societal impacts of political violence extend far beyond physical harm. Political violence can fundamentally alter whether and how people participate in democracy. It can intimidate voters, opposition candidates, or even journalists and media networks within and beyond targeted communities (*68*). Such intimidation not only undermines democracy but also breeds negative normative spirals: As moderates (those speaking out against violence) step away from public action, they cede more space to extremists; this propels other extremists and results in moderates thinking society is more polarized than it is. Lastly, political violence creates a climate of instability and chaos that can lead to a desire for order and authority, which often becomes a driver or rationale for non-democratic governance (*91*).

Studies have shown that small-scale acts of violence, and even mildly violent political metaphors and images, can increase public support for subsequent violence (*92*). In other words, violence (or even violent speech) may beget more violence. This is significant, as hate crimes and extremist violence continue to rise. The 2018 mass shooting at a Pittsburgh synagogue and the mailing of pipe bombs to prominent Democrats actually *increased* peoples' belief that using violence was justified for partisan purposes (*25*). Similarly, a week after the 2017 Charlottesville Unite the Right rally violence, there was a surge of online interest in violence for the white nationalist cause. Internet searches indicating a desire to kill Jewish Americans increased 1,800 percent, while searches for killing ethnic minorities and African Americans went up 200 percent and 40 percent, respectively. Simultaneously, searches on how to join the Ku Klux Klan increased by 800 percent, and there was a 22,000 percent rise in people wanting to donate to the KKK (*93*).

Political violence is also a form of signaling, or communicating a message about where societal power lies (*94*). For instance, it can be used by groups to signal dominance over others, as when a post-election celebratory rally turns into a riot. It can also demonstrate changing norms, such as when vigilante violence appears to be approved (either explicitly or tacitly) by political leaders (*95*).

> "Small-scale acts of violence, and even mildly violent political metaphors and images, can increase public support for subsequent violence"

Why This Matters Now

Against this backdrop of structural risk factors and rising violence, 2020 features several potential flashpoints for violence — a divisive impeachment investigation, which has already stoked accusations that it is meant to start a civil war (96); the U.S. census in April 2020 (97, 98), which seems to have mobilized extremist groups interested in impacting the count (99); and months of campaign rallies before an intensely contested national election in November.*

To prevent or de-escalate violence and to strengthen U.S. institutional resilience, it is critical that philanthropists and other actors engage now. This is for two reasons: First, as conflict dynamics escalate, options for intervening can narrow. For instance, "in-group moderates" — individuals amenable to joining a violence prevention coalition with other groups or speaking out against violence within their group — may be more likely to be targeted by their fellow group members as traitors as conflict escalates. And, as violence occurs, it can increase underlying risk factors and beget further violence (e.g., by damaging perceptions of institutions, strengthening and solidifying existing social cleavages, providing evidence for violence as self-defense and setting off revenge cycles, and further marginalizing and disenfranchising groups of people). Second, effective responses require advance planning and preparation. Coalitions built on trust and shared understanding are a critical source of resilience, but such trust-building takes time.

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* Violence can occur at all points in the leadup to and after an election. Globally, most election-related violence occurs during the campaign period, including voter suppression and intimidation; clashes between supporters of different parties; attacks on political parties, party offices, or officials; attacks on candidates; and credible threats (100). Violence can also happen during elections (on election day), when it can be employed to intimidate voters (either to vote a certain way or not to vote). Finally, election violence can occur after results come in, including through protests against the election results, or violence perpetrated as a celebration of the results (e.g., targeting groups perceived to have lost). The above risk factors all influence the likelihood and scale of potential electoral violence.

Violence Prevention: What Works

We propose resilience as a frame for violence prevention in the contemporary United States because it builds on existing strengths of our society while identifying and addressing challenges that less comprehensive approaches miss. As the risk factors described above suggest, political violence is not the result of a few bad actors and can seldom be managed through narrowly targeted law enforcement measures alone. Instead, political violence is a whole-of-society problem, to which resilience offers a comprehensive response. As described by the United Nations Development Programme:

> Societies that are resilient to violent conflict are those where different groups can constructively interact with one another to address potential causes of tension, such as socio-economic, political, ethnic or religious differences, or unequal resource allocation. (*101*)

Resilience provides a larger frame in which to anchor the vital work of preventing radicalization, de-radicalizing, and stopping extremist groups from spreading violence with impunity. It also offers an asset-based approach. U.S. society is filled with actors working to engage across cultural and political divides, share fact-based information, and build understanding. U.S. institutions, though weakening, remain strong by global standards, and Americans' enthusiasm for them remains high. Our culture is dynamic and can change quickly in positive as well as negative directions. This paper identifies resiliency that already exists within the United States and can be supported, while also proposing key priorities for mitigating risk. To identify priority areas for resilience, we considered the current U.S. situation in a comparative context, drawing on the science of intergroup dynamics, decades of global peacebuilding practice, and historical case studies relevant to the United States.

WE IDENTIFY FIVE IMMEDIATE-TERM INTERVENTION APPROACHES AS CRITICAL TO THE CURRENT CONTEXT:

(1) shaping group norms against violence;

(2) supporting targeted communities;

(3) laying the groundwork for coordinated responses to events that can trigger or escalate violence;

(4) engaging communication strategically; and

(5) protecting and strengthening existing capacities for resilience.

These interventions represent opportunities for funders and external leaders, in cooperation with local and national efforts, to prevent political violence.

We propose multiple initiatives and approaches below. This is no accident; no one program or initiative will ever alone prevent violence. Success requires considering the overall ecosystem and the constellation of actors and promoting a multitude of complementary approaches. As successful local peacebuilders in East Timor noted, "Each of the complementary strategies...would have been insufficient on its own, yet [they] worked together to produce substantial changes in the target communities"(*102*).

Violence Prevention: Intervention in Action

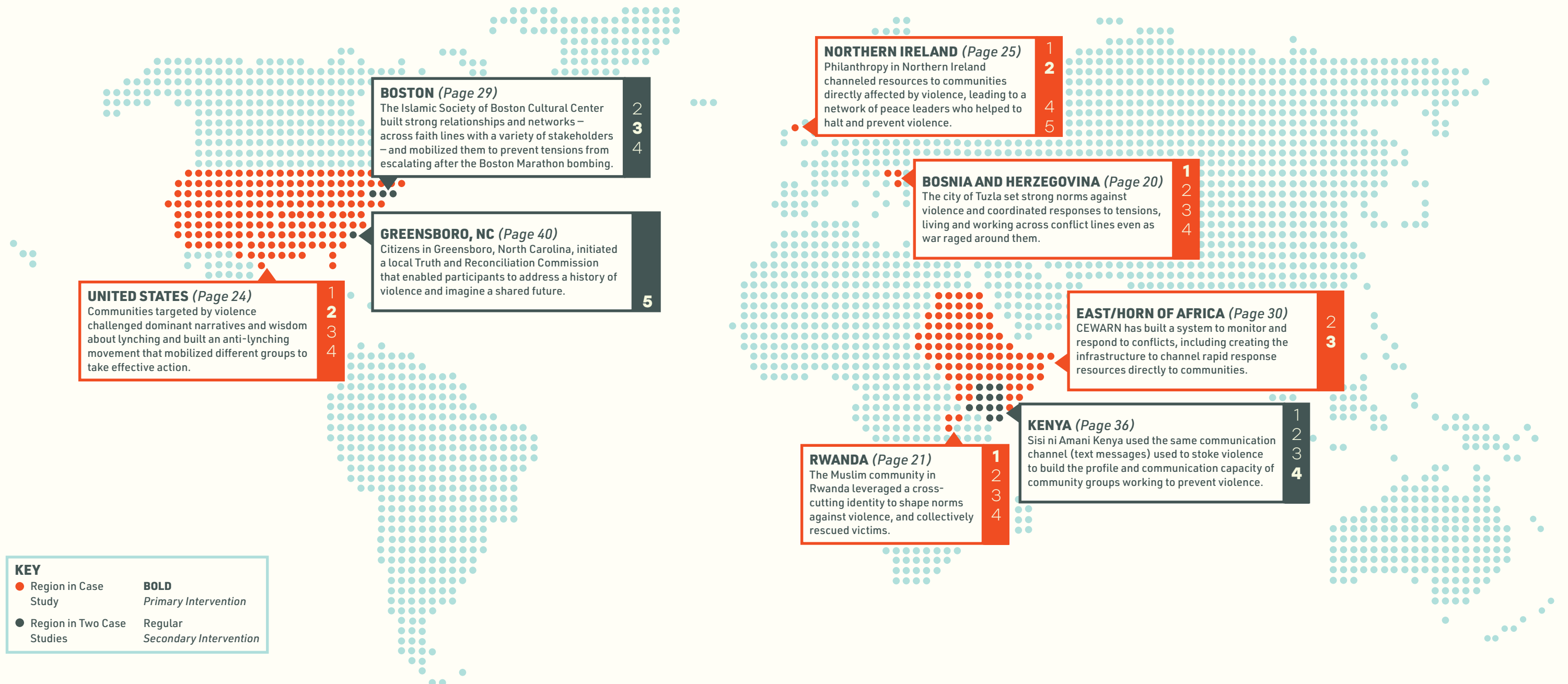We identify five immediate-term intervention approaches as critical to the current context. These interventions represent opportunities for funders and external leaders, in cooperation with local and national efforts, to prevent political violence. We've identified case studies where you can see each type of intervention in action.

ONE: Shaping group norms against violence.

TWO: Supporting targeted communities.

THREE: Laying the groundwork for coordinated responses to events that can trigger or escalate violence.

FOUR: Engaging communication strategically.

FIVE: Protecting and strengthening existing capacities for resilience.

BOSTON *(Page 29)*
The Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center built strong relationships and networks — across faith lines with a variety of stakeholders — and mobilized them to prevent tensions from escalating after the Boston Marathon bombing.

2 **3** 4

GREENSBORO, NC *(Page 40)*
Citizens in Greensboro, North Carolina, initiated a local Truth and Reconciliation Commission that enabled participants to address a history of violence and imagine a shared future.

5

UNITED STATES *(Page 24)*
Communities targeted by violence challenged dominant narratives and wisdom about lynching and built an anti-lynching movement that mobilized different groups to take effective action.

1 **2** 3 4

NORTHERN IRELAND *(Page 25)*
Philanthropy in Northern Ireland channeled resources to communities directly affected by violence, leading to a network of peace leaders who helped to halt and prevent violence.

1 **2** 4 5

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA *(Page 20)*
The city of Tuzla set strong norms against violence and coordinated responses to tensions, living and working across conflict lines even as war raged around them.

1 2 3 4

EAST/HORN OF AFRICA *(Page 30)*
CEWARN has built a system to monitor and respond to conflicts, including creating the infrastructure to channel rapid response resources directly to communities.

2 **3**

KENYA *(Page 36)*
Sisi ni Amani Kenya used the same communication channel (text messages) used to stoke violence to build the profile and communication capacity of community groups working to prevent violence.

1 2 3 **4**

RWANDA *(Page 21)*
The Muslim community in Rwanda leveraged a cross-cutting identity to shape norms against violence, and collectively rescued victims.

1 2 3 4

KEY

● Region in Case Study

● Region in Two Case Studies

BOLD
Primary Intervention

Regular
Secondary Intervention

ONE:
Shaping Group Norms Against Violence

Perceived norms are what people think others — especially members of "their group" (*103*) — will approve of or are doing. Such norms are critical because they powerfully influence behavior, sometimes even more than a person's beliefs (*66*). Perceived norms are especially influential in impacting individuals in uncertain or high-threat situations, such as polarized contexts (*104*).We are also most influenced by the norms of our peer groups — those groups we are a part of. For example, when people believe hateful rhetoric is socially acceptable within their group, they are more likely to accept and even spread it (*62*).

In the United States, where there are high levels of partisan polarization, it is especially important that we pay attention to norms within groups ("intragroup norms") and identify avenues for influencing them. Defusing hateful and dangerous speech depends on leaders within given groups speaking out against such rhetoric and related violence. Group leaders opposing violence or "in-group moderates" (though they need not be politically centrist) are often targeted as conflict escalates. Experience shows that other group members tend to turn against them, label them as traitors, and attempt to silence them. Others who might have influence but have yet to speak out are then more likely to remain silent after seeing the costs of engagement. Once such leaders within each group become quiet, extreme positions become — or are perceived as — the norm, and we lose a key resource for de-escalating rhetoric and actual violence.

Shaping positive group norms across diverse groups within society is thus a core area of focus. Through building intragroup ***acceptance of a certain set of desirable or expected behaviors (norms), groups can set expectations that group-targeted or dangerous rhetoric will not be condoned.*** Identifying and engaging key individuals who can be influential norm-setters is especially important where the norms of a group may begin to shift toward accepting dangerous rhetoric or actions. Leaders (social referents) or individuals with a large number of social connections within the given group (hubs) are particularly important in setting and upholding norms. This is significant, as research reveals that shifting in-group perceptions about how people should behave toward opponents and outgroup members may actually more easily and effectively change behavior than attempting to change people's beliefs and attitudes toward outgroup members (*105, 106*).

WHAT FUNDERS AND LEADERS CAN DO

In the short term, funders and leaders can focus their efforts in three ways.

Support projects dedicated to strengthening *within-group* norms of nonviolence, tolerance, and inclusion. Funders can act now by empowering influential conservative and liberal leaders — both local and national — to speak against violence and support dialogue. As explained above, such leaders are often the first to be targeted as traitors as societies move toward violence. Outside resources can often protect and empower them by connecting them to each other and helping them build platforms and tools for outreach to their fellow citizens.

Support leaders who can leverage cross-cutting or overarching identities that span multiple groups (e.g., religious or business leaders) in their outreach. Due to social sorting and affective polarization, and amidst a period of perceived intergroup threat and hate rhetoric, people have retreated to singular, rigid partisan identities. Leaders who can emphasize existing cross-cutting identities — or create new ones — provide multiple outlets for normative influence, making their followers feel as if speaking out is safer. While acting alone is very hard, it becomes easier as part of a group that also provides belonging, recognition, and a sense of pride. Cross-cutting identities can be reinforced or built around movements, brands, or local town or regional identities.

Build coalitions of local leaders in diverse roles and capacities. Two key dynamics have emerged as critical for communities successful in abstaining from violence amidst surrounding war. First, these communities have multilayered, diffuse leadership, where roles were fulfilled by different leaders at different levels. In other cases, those leaders acting independently were deeply embedded and trusted in their communities, and were open to ideas, options, and inspiration generated from their constituency (*107*). Funders and intervenors can thus identify key, respected local norm-shapers from diverse groups, then help them build cohorts and capacities to reach members of their own group and to communicate with members of other groups. Since leaders can bring their groups along with them for such dialogue, these coalitions can become a platform for cross-group coordination and ultimately action.

CASE STUDY: BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA
AMIDST WAR, NETWORKS OF INCLUSIONARY LEADERS SUSTAIN A UNIFYING IDENTITY AND NORMS PROMOTING PEACE IN TUZLA, BOSNIA.

Amidst Bosnia's civil war, the mayor of Tuzla, along with a network spanning local government, civic organizations, and religious leaders, promoted and upheld norms against division and violence. The group emphasized a unified Tuzlan identity that proved strong enough to resist the ethnic and religious divisions underlying the surrounding violence. This unified identity was emphasized through many channels, including public rallies by the Miners Union that began even before the war reached Tuzla, ongoing public speeches by the mayor throughout the city, and the creation of a song celebrating the Tuzlan identity. The coalition built on pre-existing relationships and ties — including companies, professional associations, and neighborhood organizations (*108*) — that mobilized as tensions rose.

Despite nationalists' organized attempts to influence and pressure elites and media, this coalition of actors generated strong norms of citywide cooperation that extended to civilians and even to local security forces. Indeed, early on, as many elites appeared reluctant to publicly take action against the nationalist sentiments being promoted, civil society groups and an umbrella organization comprising prominent city figures (journalists, industry leaders, intellectuals) strongly and publicly advocated for continued coexistence, providing the space and cover for such elites to join (*108*).

The coalition leveraged its capacity to reach different segments of society — through the mayor, other government officials, labor organizations, teachers, civic groups, and more — and its diversity (*109*) across religious and ethnic lines to set strong cross-cutting norms of coexistence. As the war continued, it responded to events that could trigger violence and provided victims psychosocial support, mediating escalating tensions between groups, and disseminating information and support as the city faced severe food shortages (*109*). Even while the city was besieged, Tuzlan residents of all religions and nationalities resisted violence. When a shell hit the city, killing 71 young people, the city unified in mourning rathethan turning against one another (*107-109*).

CASE STUDY: RWANDA
CIVILIAN PARTICIPATION VERSUS RESCUE IN THE RWANDAN GENOCIDE.

Between April and July 1994, Rwanda's genocide killed upwards of 800,000 civilians, mostly Tutsis and some moderate Hutus. While organized militia groups led the violence, the broader public participated widely (*110*). Hutu communities experienced strong social pressure to participate (e.g., through radio broadcasting and local social networks), with research finding that such coercion explains "64% of the stated motivation for Hutu participation in the genocide" and that in-group pressure (rather than fear, anger, or an actual desire to participate) is more likely to explain "less violent" individuals' participation (*110*). At the same time, Rwanda's Muslim community (which consists of both Hutu and Tutsi) broadly resisted participation in the genocide and engaged in extensive and coordinated rescue of victims: "the vast majority of the Muslim community did not participate in the genocide," indeed, "a disproportionate number of survivors, both Muslim and non-Muslim, had been protected by Muslims" (*107*). "Some Muslims offered to pay militias not to kill. Others said, 'You will have to kill me first'" (*107*). The Muslim community also provided shelter at mosques. In one such mosque in Kigali, Hutu militia demanded the Tutsi be handed over. Those in the mosque responded, "There is no Hutu, no Tutsi. We are all simply human beings." The group was attacked and many were killed (*107*).

This collective courage was the result of intense preparation: As rhetoric emphasizing Hutu-Tutsi divides intensified, Muslim leaders proactively reinforced a common Muslim identity (which was strong due in part to the community's historical marginalization) (*107*) and promoted norms of peace, resistance, and rescue. Leaders framed the deepening divisions as a test of faith, rather than an inter-ethnic conflict. They also created clear behavioral expectations and guidance shared within the community (e.g., teachers talking to their students, announcements at mosques, and a publicly issued pastoral letter from Muslim leaders) and in more public (and therefore riskier) ways. Citing the Quran, they specifically "instructed people not to participate in violence when it came…reminding them that all people are equal, ethnicity should not be divisive, and people should not kill but should try to rescue victims" (*107*). In creating these positive norms, Rwanda's Muslim leaders created an environment in which people could depend upon their neighbors and broader community to collaborate in high-risk rescue actions — an important difference with the broader context, where people engaged in rescue behavior did so largely in secret, fearing being turned in by neighbors and even family members (*111*).

TWO:
Supporting Targeted Communities

Beyond its immediate toll, group-targeted violence (violence targeting people based on their identity or group membership) can disenfranchise and isolate entire communities. This weakens societal fabric and impairs resources and insights critical to preventing or mitigating violence.

Even small-scale political violence can have — and is often intended to have — a so-called "demonstration effect," by intimidating others in a targeted community from civic and public engagement. In intimidating and thereby suppressing targeted groups, hate or vigilante violence achieves its goals. Lynching, in particular, played this role in U.S. history, helping maintain the disenfranchisement of African-Americans (*112, 113*) and other groups, based on race and national origin. While discussions about political violence in the United States often center on the role of national leaders and law enforcement agencies, global experience in violence prevention suggests that it is essential to engage leaders from communities targeted with or affected by political violence.

Targeted communities and their leaders must have a central role if efforts to end and prevent violence are to be successful. Often, targeted communities are already engaged in preventing and addressing the impacts of such violence. In addition to serving as norm-setters and social referents (see above), their leaders bring vital resources not easily found elsewhere, including a real-time knowledge of local events; contextual analytic knowledge; the capacity, flexibility, and likelihood to take action in response to early warning signs; and a long-term commitment to local conflict resolution (*114*). Partnering with leaders from targeted communities can thus procure higher-quality information, analysis and risk assessment; aid in communication with and mobilization of other local communities; and more effectively interrupt cycles of violence (*115*). In Northern Ireland, for example, the truth-telling and cross-community relationship-building work done by community leaders often ran significantly ahead of the official peace process (*116*).

Further, communities that experience violence face the potential for several other negative consequences, and thus require support both in the immediate aftermath of violence and when addressing its ongoing impact. Local civilian populations often suffer a range of poor physical and mental health outcomes (*117, 118*). Depending upon how extensive it is and how it is handled, political violence can destroy the way a community functions (*119-121*). Finally, the experience of violence and its aftermath can deteriorate government systems (*117, 122-124*).

WHAT FUNDERS AND LEADERS CAN DO

Sustaining civil society in a diverse democracy requires providing ongoing, long-term support to leaders and communities at risk of being further marginalized by hate speech and violence. In the short term, funders can:

Ensure that leaders from targeted communities are heard. This can start with steps as simple as making sure that they are represented and elevated in elite and public conversations — and not just as speakers on behalf of their community but also on issues affecting society at large. Doing so can challenge negative depictions of these communities, as well as bring local information to light more quickly. To ensure that leaders from targeted communities have quick access to media and policymakers, and support in the case of escalation, funders can invest in efforts to network and build additional external support for such leaders (*114, 125, 126*).

Provide security assistance to threatened community leaders. Public-facing leaders from targeted communities often face significant levels of harassment and threats. Resources that enable these leaders and their communities to remain safe and feel supported represent an investment in immediate violence prevention (*127*), as well as longer-term resilience.

Support communities that experience violence. It is important to support existing community infrastructure and responses to violence. Studies show that recovery from political violence is highly dependent on individuals' perceptions of community resilience — their estimations of the strength and endurance of the community and their trust in their community's leadership (*128*). Priorities for such support must include investments in relationships and processes, as well as material resources or structures, and opportunities for individual and collective meaning-making and accountability (*129-132*).

In the intermediate and long term, when the goals are to sustain a healthy civil society, funders can channel resources to community organizations that promote healing from violence, continuity of leadership, and organization within civil society and targeted communities, and to efforts to build inclusive local or national identities. They can also support correcting inaccurate mainstream narratives about targeted communities and increase the representation of targeted communities in popular culture and in positions of authority. Evidence suggests that short-term programs meant to change emotions toward a targeted group (e.g., distrust of Muslims) or entrenched narratives and stereotypes (e.g., "immigrants take our jobs") do not work particularly well. However, long-term efforts that expose participants to the perspective and narratives of the other group in repeated, structured intergroup contact, have shown more impact (*133-136*).

CASE STUDY: UNITED STATES
TARGETED COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL LEADERSHIP IN THE ANTI-LYNCHING MOVEMENT.

The anti-lynching movement provides a U.S. example of diverse leaders using cross-cutting identities to connect and effect change. During the 1880s and '90s, the white public saw racial terror lynchings as a brutal but justified means of punishing and preventing the sexual assault of white women by African-American men. Through her in-depth reporting, African-American journalist Ida B. Wells revealed that, in every case, this narrative was either fabricated or severely exaggerated. Wells's reporting mobilized a constellation of reformers into an organized effort against lynching. In leading roles, this included Wells herself along with the NAACP and Commission on Interracial Cooperation (both born out of the interracial movement of the early 20th century).

These efforts in turn mobilized various stakeholders, such as northern whites, southern blacks, and white southern liberals, through targeted campaigns and in-depth reporting. As part of this, black women put in long-term work to mobilize white women — whose security and purity were used to justify lynching — around a shared Evangelical identity, leading to the birth of the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching (ASWPL). The ASWPL women used their "sacred" position in Southern society to challenge prominent narratives and prevent local lynchings. Tapping into their preexisting relational networks, the ASWPL mobilized new and hard-to-reach audiences, including rural, southern whites. This constellation of activists together changed social norms around the perception and practice of lynching (*112, 113, 137, 138*).

CASE STUDY: NORTHERN IRELAND
PHILANTHROPY AND AFFECTED COMMUNITIES IN NORTHERN IRELAND.

Northern Ireland's "Troubles" were a 30-year period in which conflict over the region's status sparked daily political violence. Out of a population of 1.6 million, more than 3,600 were killed, 40,000 injured, and 20,000 imprisoned. Society was starkly divided along political/confessional lines, with communities typically 90 percent Loyalist/Protestant or 95 percent Republican/Catholic. Violence was most pervasive in low-income communities, creating a self-perpetuating cycle of isolation, hardship, and radicalization. When the conflict was still at its height, community activists and philanthropists alike recognized the opportunity to strengthen voices for peace and offer alternatives to violence within each community, while creating opportunities to connect groups across the divide around shared needs and values. Peace and women's activist turned foundation president Avila Kilmurray describes the theory of change: "community development and empowerment, when based on principles of inclusion, participation and equity, would contribute to eventual conflict transformation" (*139*). Grant-making and advisory entities were created, such as the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland, with boards and leadership deliberately structured to reflect the divided nature of the society.

CFNI, Atlantic Philanthropies, and others, sustained a web of community and cross-community initiatives that, at first, promoted well-being and mental health and sought to include local concerns in national peace processes. As the peace process moved toward the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement and its subsequent implementation, the foundations supported restorative justice efforts and re-integration of ex-combatants — partnering with ex-combatants and sometimes advising government negotiators to go faster or slower (*140*).

These efforts enabled ex-combatants to become leaders for peace within their communities and are credited with playing a major role in helping complete the peace agreement and sustaining negotiations, as well as implementation when cease-fires broke down or other challenges arose. All were founded on a "commitment to inclusion and the building of community relationships," which translated into "drawn-out community consultations" and willingness to partner with individuals and organizations that had played key roles in sparking and sustaining violence (*139*).

THREE:
Laying the Groundwork for Coordinated Response in the Event of Violence

While research has illuminated risk factors that heighten the likelihood of violence and may trigger it, it is not possible to predict exactly how and when violence might unfold. As such, it is critical to build a broad capacity for quick response. International violence prevention calls this capacity "Early Warning and Response." It occurs at national and local levels, as well as in informal contexts, and involves engaging community, government, and private actors in identifying and monitoring risks and coordinating responses (*115*). In other words, violence prevention and mitigation require not just engaging relevant actors but also building sustainable relationships and capacity to collaboratively develop and implement strategies and interventions. The central lesson this field offers the United States is the importance of engaging a constellation of actors with diverse and complementary capacities for response — both through formal and informal networks and relationships (*114*).

WHAT FUNDERS AND LEADERS CAN DO

Because the United States is enormous and diverse, and faces disparate risks of violence, the concept of early warning networks can best be applied by looking at how communities can organize — and already have organized — to promote resilience and cross-group communication at the local level, and then see how that work can be connected to national organizations and national influencers. Fortunately, the foundations for these networks already exist in many places but need support and connection to complementary resources and influence.

Generate and/or strengthen early warning and response networks across the United States. Such networks should connect communities targeted with and affected by violence with national partners and, as conflict escalates, with media, political leaders, and others who can influence key actors in the violence. These networks and relationships need not be formalized through institutions, though they can be (*141, 142*). The goal is forming such networks *before* local violence erupts and

establishing channels of communication and habits of cooperation and action prior to a moment of crisis. These networks monitor and respond to triggers of violence and any escalation in risk factors (e.g., backsliding institutions, increased elite factionalization, polarization, or dangerous and hateful rhetoric). Additionally, these networks can be a space to set norms against the use of violence across participating communities. If done well, these networks will form a foundation for long-term resiliency work. We note that this approach can be employed across various levels — community, regional, and national — although each may need to engage a different set of actors.

Focus on building relationships and trust within these networks. As Jonathan Cohen, acting executive director of Conciliation Resources, explains, "identifying conflict threats has to be about more than systems and tools; it needs to be underpinned by the relationships of trust that enable people directly affected by violence to raise their voice and to act" (*114*). Research shows that the types of networks best able to engage in prevention are those that are already active (*143*); those where members have already built strong ties of trust across groups; and those diverse enough to represent and reach into multiple segments of society (*24, 144*). Because it can be harder to establish trust within and across diverse communities, network-builders should invest in relationship-building at the outset of early-warning network formation and should allow for the time and effort needed for members to develop a shared understanding of the network's work.

Build infrastructure capable of channeling fast support to communities and relevant stakeholders. Research shows that local communities are likely to act on early warning data (*114, 145, 146*). That is, communities threatened by violence are highly motivated to establish or reestablish safe, stable environments but often lack the resources to get initiatives off the ground. At the same time, one of the biggest challenges faced by early warning systems is a lack of effective response (*143*). To prevent this problem, networks must quickly learn from local leaders about needed support, and then channel needed resources or knowledge to those local leaders best positioned to de-escalate and protect citizens in advance of burgeoning or active violence. Networks can facilitate this by developing relationships with actors who have access to different types of resources and power — e.g., funders, other local stakeholders, or regional and national actors — and discussing preventive response plans (*114, 142, 145*). International systems

have addressed this issue by setting up rapid response funding infrastructures, which enable a quick turnaround of financial support for projects focused on prevention, as well as de-escalation and conflict resolution. Importantly, the act of setting up a rapid response funding infrastructure in itself helps to establish the ecosystem and relationships that will be used over the course of conflict-prevention work. Rapid response funding has supported initiatives such as mobilization of local leaders, protection of targeted communities, mediation, and security-sector coordination (*114, 143, 147*).

Take an asset-based approach to increasing local capacity to mitigate conflict. There has been a growing recognition of the need to identify, monitor, and build upon existing community capacities for conflict prevention. This is often done by assessing indicators of positive peace and resiliency (*114, 148*). What existing assets within communities — and within the constellation of actors involved — can be strengthened? By employing this kind of asset-based approach, funders can not only help facilitate prevention but also enable networks to seize opportunities.

Engage in consistent learning from response efforts. Ongoing planning, implementation, and adaptation of response capacities is key. As part of this, processes must convene different actors to debrief one another, share learnings, and update their strategies based on new insights and evolving contexts. This adaptive approach will position stakeholders to respond to changing events in real time (*143*).

CASE STUDY: BOSTON
ISBCC: LEVERAGING DIVERSE RELATIONSHIPS TO EFFECTIVELY RESPOND TO VIOLENCE.

Long before the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing, the Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center (ISBCC) had built strong relationships with other faith leaders and institutions, local government, law enforcement agencies, and the media. Within hours of the marathon attack, the ISBCC took a clear public stance against violence, opened the mosque to stranded marathon participants, and reached out to the mayor's office. To ensure cross-group communication after the bombers were linked to an ISBCC sister organization, ISBCC responded to every media request it received.

To support authorities, ISBCC called for community cooperation with law enforcement agencies. Meanwhile, to ensure the safety of its community, it hosted Know Your Rights Trainings and set up a free hotline for legal assistance for community members. To honor victims of the bombing, ISBCC held a prayer vigil that was featured in the *Boston Globe*. For the first Friday prayers after the attack, ISBCC invited interfaith leaders who, with press present, made statements of unequivocal support for the Muslim community. In sum, ISBCC successfully managed a crisis that could have led to escalated targeting and tension by leveraging existing relationships and collaborating with partners (*149*).

"ISBCC successfully managed a crisis that could have led to escalated targeting and tension by leveraging existing relationships and collaborating with partners"

CASE STUDY: EAST AND HORN OF AFRICA
EARLY WARNING AND RESPONSE: CONNECTING THE REGIONAL TO THE LOCAL.

The regional-level Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN) for East and Horn of Africa collaborates with government representatives and NGOs at the local and national levels across eight member countries. It monitors risks of violence to respond and better understand violence unfolding in the region. CEWARN's structure links regional and national actors — including local officials, national government representatives, NGOs, and researchers — reflecting the importance of engaging local communities in its work, especially when it comes to response. As former Acting Director Raymond Kitevu has noted, CEWARN has "realized that we should not be dictating from the center here in Addis, but it should be done...as a bottom up approach...locally driven and owned, so we only want to support what [local communities] think is best for them" (*150*). CEWARN collects quantitative and qualitative data and works with a diverse group of stakeholders, including field monitors, civil society organizations, social media analysts, and national research institutions. As a result, CEWARN's work has shed light on previously unknown violence in marginalized areas (*151*).

CEWARN's Rapid Response Fund (RRF) is an innovative mechanism for flexible and quick response to violence and for capacity-building to equip local stakeholders with the necessary tools and skills to address conflict in the region (*152*): "RRF supports home-grown solutions to conflict and beefs up the capacity of local institutions to effectively respond to crises. This is in line with current trends in global Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution (CPMR) efforts that emphasize that violent conflicts are most effectively solved at the closest point to where they are occurring" (*153*).

Kitevu further described the RRF's impact: "Before we had to contact governments and we were not sure if actions were being taken, so now we want to tie it to actual action, so that we know the information and what has been done then...we want the best response to conflicts via the RRF to come from the local communities" (*150*).

BUILDING U.S. RESILIENCE TO POLITICAL VIOLENCE

FOUR:
Engage Communication Strategically

Just as communication can push societies toward divisions and violence, it can also be used to build resilience and de-escalate conflict. To be effective, communication-based strategies must move beyond "messaging" and focus specifically on engaging the right messengers and channels to reach core audiences. This requires considering the communication infrastructure and ecosystem to tap into existing channels for dissemination and the recruitment of messengers (*49, 154*). A key consideration is understanding where and how a target audience receives information, as well as who is trusted and who is not. Further, approaches that may intuitively seem helpful, such as highlighting or bringing attention to the problem, may actually backfire in the context of identity-based polarization. Familiarity with key research on areas such as correcting misinformation, social norm perceptions, and cognitive biases about other groups is critical to avoid reinforcing negative messaging and causing further harm to communities already targeted (*43, 44, 66, 105, 155*).

"As conflicts escalate, both information and its channels of distribution become contested resources over which conflict actors compete..."

With all of this in mind, engaging the channels by which communication is already being disseminated is critical. The **news media** is particularly key here, and supporting an independent media has arguably never been so important.

The **media is a pillar of democracy and a vital source of resilience that is critical** to ensuring that the public has the information necessary to evaluate the performance of government and hold it accountable. The media's role in fact-checking and assessment is especially needed today, when repeated falsehoods and misleading information seem ever-present and even stem from the highest echelons of government.

As conflicts escalate, both information and its channels of distribution become contested resources over which conflict actors compete, seeking to shape the discourse and key audiences' understanding of the conflict. This competition can include introducing regulations, targeting journalists physically, and launching strategic communication efforts (*156*).

In a polarized society, journalists can unwittingly become tools for division and escalation. Reporting on fringe or extremist views (since they are "newsworthy") may actually inadvertently depict them as more prevalent or socially acceptable than they are, and even bring these ideas to new audiences. How media is resourced, and how journalists are trained to report amidst division, therefore matters enormously. The way the media reports and shapes public understanding of what a conflict is, and who its actors are, plays an important role in conflict escalation and de-escalation (*156*).

This polarization, when combined with media segmentation and echo chambers as discussed in Section II, is cause for concern (*40, 157, 158*). Although Americans have access to a wide variety of information sources, self-sorting and information bubbles create worrying similarities to environments where people lack sources to refute hate speech and incitement. History teaches us that such environments are dangerous: for example, the dominance of hate radio in rural Rwanda that is believed to have accelerated the 1994 genocide (*157, 158*).

It is not enough to engage with traditional media alone. Various social media and messaging platforms that make up the **new media environment** have played roles in polarizing societies and accelerating violence, from Myanmar to Sri Lanka to the United States. New media tap into and bolster historical narratives and intergroup dynamics that existed offline long before the advent of the internet (*72, 159*). Communications strategies need to pay specific attention to how actors are using various platforms and take into account their unique characteristics when shaping responses.

Finally, in addition to news, popular media — and its storytelling function — plays an important role in shaping public frames and narratives about groups and can be a useful tool for creating long-term social change.

WHAT FUNDERS AND LEADERS CAN DO

Thinking and funding in the communications and media arena need to be bolstered and should include immediate and longer-term goals related to resilience. This implies adding focus on audiences, storytelling, and how media choices can escalate or de-escalate tensions — and recognizing the need for disaggregated social media strategies.

Immediate Priorities: Support, Protect, and Train the Media

Funders and leaders can ensure that the news media is able to continue to play an important role in resilience, while also ensuring that it has the tools and knowledge necessary to do so in a time of division and tensions:

- Support the press in the face of threats or attacks. This can be done by providing security, arranging legal representation, and galvanizing public support. Each of these investments can help to counter potential erosion of press freedom.

- Train journalists to heed best practices for reporting on intergroup divisions (without unintentionally exacerbating existing escalatory dynamics). A media cognizant of the key risk factors related to intergroup dynamics and political violence can avoid inadvertently increasing risks and escalating conflict dynamics — and can even mitigate risks of conflict, drawing on the field of conflict-sensitive reporting (*160*).

- Trainings can also share approaches to addressing intergroup differences without emphasizing group distinctions. This can be done through reframing reporting that makes political identity salient to reporting that addresses ideological differences, which shifts the conversation from "us vs. them" to "me vs. you" (*161, 162*). Other approaches include avoiding politically charged language (*161*) and emphasizing intergroup commonalities, rather than focusing on distinctions, by including consensus issues alongside divisive ones in political discussions (*162*). Training can also provide guidance for reporting on violence in ways that do not create or reinforce negative norm perceptions.

- Train journalists to be mindful of amplifying dehumanizing rhetoric. Being exposed to dehumanizing rhetoric is harmful both for targets and members of the perpetrator's ingroup. The mere *perception* that one's own group is dehumanized by an outgroup — a rhetorical tactic often used by fearmongering leaders — can lead people to dehumanize that outgroup in return, leading to a backlash (*65*).

- More proactively support communications approaches that shift social identity and norms, helping reduce bias through storytelling across forms of media (*163*). Public figures can serve as a vehicle for communication between groups, helping reduce bias without the risk of negative interactions (*163-166*). For example, prominent media figures such as Ellen DeGeneres played a documented role in shifting public perceptions of LGBTQ Americans. Further, the media can frame divisions in a way that

enables more nuanced understanding of identities and options for moving forward; can provide real-time information in moments of escalation and even violence itself; and can shape positive norms (e.g., by reporting on local peace efforts and stakeholders). Indeed, there is a field of work on "media-related" peacebuilding, which integrates media actors into broader efforts and leverages their role (*156*).

- Reach new audiences by taking media segmentation into account. As part of this, funders and leaders can identify and bolster trusted sources of information for target audiences. For an alternative narrative to be credible and accepted, the target audience needs to not only believe the content itself but also trust the source. Effective programming will engage trusted local leaders to reach and influence target audiences, support local and specialized news and hubs, and partner with and educate media that serve a variety of regions and identities.

Immediate Priorities: Focus on Social Media

Efforts targeting social media and the broader online space will be most effective if they proceed from analysis of how social media fits into the broader media environment, the roles different platforms are playing, and who their users and audiences are. For example:

- **Consider how online hate speech fits into the larger information ecosystem.** Content found on any single social media platform taps into and reinforces information from other platforms (*159, 167, 168*), as well as offline narratives and intergroup dynamics deeply rooted in a given context. In seeking to address hate speech on a particular platform, it is important to look beyond how the single platform operates to how it fits within the broader information ecosystem: whether and how individuals rely on that platform as their primary source of information, which audiences find it credible, and how the platform interacts with other sources of information — including offline sources and other social media sites and messaging apps. For instance, if someone is initially encountering hateful rhetoric on YouTube and later sharing it via Facebook, focusing efforts on Facebook will not effectively counter the issue.

- **Set positive online norms and create pathways for engagement.** Just as norms can powerfully impact actions offline, they can also shape online behaviors. Efforts to address online rhetoric must engage individuals with influence over the target group to set positive norms. This can be through promoting positive actions and beliefs as normal or expected for the given group, as well as through showcasing

BUILDING U.S. RESILIENCE TO POLITICAL VIOLENCE

positive behaviors. Norm-setters can also provide "ladders of engagement," the small, incremental steps for individuals to become gradually more involved in positive actions. In the online context, steps might include liking a post, commenting, creating a post, creating a page, or organizing an event (*50*).

- **Provide spaces for collective action.** Even online, it is easier to act in a group than it is alone. Support efforts to create online communities engaged in positive behaviors to bypass risks associated with acting alone (being called out, trolled, or doxed). This can involve coordinating individuals to participate in a campaign, collectively share and like one another's content, or coordinate comments on a particular post (*50*).

All efforts should consider the various actors who play a role in media creation and structure, including those with influence over media legislation, structures, and content; those who are board members of major news entities; and those in the newsroom — e.g., journalists, publishers, and editors (*156*).

These immediate actions are critical and should be accompanied by medium- to long-term efforts that address the challenges of the media environment more comprehensively and that enable our democracy and social fabric to catch up with the new media environment. In the intermediate to long term, it is critical to sustain media institutions and support efforts to reach across an increasingly segmented and polarized media environment. Ultimately, efforts will have to address structural causes of media segmentation, including the funding and regulatory environments for traditional and new media.

Longer-Term Priorities: Support Narrative Change

Funders and leaders can engage popular culture figures and the broader media in telling stories and developing programming that uses best practices to change narratives about targeted groups, to promote positive norms against violence, and to diversify the perception of social identities. Such stories will build toward a healthier pluralistic fabric. The U.S. entertainment industry has a considerable tradition of partnering with outsiders to introduce characters and storylines dealing with challenging issues from racism to sexuality to the challenges faced by veterans. Internationally, researchers have documented positive outcomes from these types of interventions. For example, a radio soap opera in Rwanda was able to positively change norms and behaviors across divided groups (*169*).

CASE STUDY: KENYA
LEVERAGING COMMUNICATION TO COMBAT TENSIONS.

In 2007-2008, Kenya experienced unprecedented election-related violence, with over 1,000 killed and hundreds of thousands displaced. Sisi ni Amani Kenya (SNA-K), a Kenyan NGO (founded and previously run by one of the authors of this report), built a messaging infrastructure, including a text messaging platform and offline civic engagement, to build resilience to violence. Text messaging was newly prevalent in Kenya and was used to stoke violence in 2007-8 (*170, 171*). Through partnering with the largest telecom provider in Kenya and working with over 50 community organizations, SNA-K built a 65,000-person subscriber base across key regions in the country, creating the groundwork for a coordinated response in the face of real-time conflict escalation. In collaboration with the Electoral Commission of Kenya, SNA-K conducted text-based civic education and promoted public forums on civic and political issues (*172*).

SNA-K also built a strong brand, working with local norm-setters to build a cross-cutting identity that united neighbors across conflict divides. Critically, the brand and groups of leaders included supporters of competing politicians who agreed to prevent violence in their communities. Through its real-time messaging, SNA-K used its brand and platform to set positive norms and expectations in the lead-up to the election. SNA-K also monitored tensions in each of the communities. When tensions or trigger events were identified, SNA-K sent a tailored message to subscribers in the community and leveraged existing relationships with civil society and government stakeholders to elevate situations to the relevant responders when necessary. Crucially, the community itself believed that these interventions were effective: "100% of those who witnessed conflict and received a SNA-K message reported that the messages had a positive impact," indicating the importance of the messages in promoting peace and having a calming effect, while 40 percent "believed the messages actually prevented violence" (*172*).

FIVE:
Protect and Build Existing Capacities for Resilience

This paper has focused on near-term action that can prevent and defuse violence. But building a resilient society is a long-term proposition that requires the health of all of our society's foundational institutions — be they governmental or independent, national or local — as well as a reckoning with the historical traumas underlying modern-day fault lines.

WHAT FUNDERS AND LEADERS CAN DO

While many of these challenges require long-term solutions not reviewed in depth here, an array of immediate responses can set the groundwork for reforms while sustaining key aspects of the promise of government "of the people, for the people, by the people." Additionally, there are a number of things that funders and leaders can do to help communities reckon with the divisive undercurrents of their history. Funders and leaders can:

Protect Existing Institutional Capacities in the Short Term

A strong and functioning U.S. democracy will be a critical source of resilience to political violence. Thus, long-term gains can be made by investing in efforts to rebuild public trust in government and improve public engagement in, and the functioning of government at, both the local and national levels. To aid in this, investors can support efforts to promote a robust and independent civil society and media, as both play invaluable roles in holding the government accountable. States, local governments, and citizens groups, too, can be a bulwark against democratic backsliding and a means to bolster feelings of connection to government and to build ties and shared interests across communities (*76, 173, 174*).

Strengthening our institutions will be a vast, long-term project, and this work is its own sector. We highlight key challenges directly related to the risk of violence throughout the 2020 election cycle that cannot be deferred. For example, public perception that elections are free and fair, for example, offers a critical source of resilience and legitimacy. The perception or reality of voter suppression or foul play, on the other hand — whether through media, on-the-ground actions, or structural efforts such as gerrymandering — heightens perceptions of antagonistic identities and increases distrust in the political process (*76, 174*).

Priorities include:

- Support efforts to promote voter registration and mobilization, as well as flexible voting initiatives, while fighting against voter suppression initiatives (*173, 175-177*).

- Closely monitor and challenge gerrymandering efforts, such as the successful effort challenging state legislative districts in North Carolina (*178, 179*).

- Apply the monitoring and response embodied in early warning and response systems to threats to democratic institutions, mobilizing coalitions when institutions and the "rules of the game" (rather than a particular policy or party) are threatened. This will require, as outlined above, mobilizing coalitions of existing actors with the capacity to reach different audiences and apply relevant knowledge, resources, access, and capacities in real time.

- Support government transparency efforts, for example through advocacy organizations, processes such as Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests, and government watchdogs such as inspectors general. All are important parts of a functioning democratic ecosystem.

Bolster Capacities for Resilience by Addressing Underlying Fault Lines

Global experience reminds us that societies with violent pasts are more at risk for the recurrence of violence when they have not yet reckoned with the divisive undercurrents of their history. The United States now finds itself at a precipice: while unaddressed historical traumas play a significant role in modern rhetoric and violence, the process of addressing our divisive history might further stoke divisions, at least initially (*180*). Decades of research in the field of transitional justice provides models and case studies for how communities and countries can begin to grapple with the past — including why it is necessary, how to sequence and manage such processes to avoid further destabilization, and what platforms or processes have worked elsewhere (*180-182*). It is worth noting that the field of transitional justice draws largely upon restorative justice approaches (*182*), which highlight the need to reconstruct a unifying memory of history (a foundation for unified participation in the future), to re-establish a sense of belonging for all and responsibility (for perpetrators of violence), and to reinvest in a vibrant public participation process that includes all parties.

While readers may mainly be familiar with this field through the dramatic approach of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the range of available models is much broader. Indeed, global experience offers many lessons in how to sequence and manage such processes without further destabilizing vulnerable societies (*183*). Efforts to address history at the local and national levels include new processes for trials, national or local truth commissions, reparations, memorials, storytelling forums, and institutional reform (*183*). Importantly, restorative reckonings already have a foothold in American history, with the U.S. reparations to Japanese-American citizens (*184*), and in Canada via the Truth and Reconciliation Commission initiated to address its history with the nation's indigenous people (*185*). At the subnational level, citizens' groups in Greensboro, North Carolina (*186-188*), and the state of Maine (*189*) have undertaken truth processes to address local histories with African-American and indigenous groups, respectively.

Questions of history and shared national experience will continue to arise in the United States. Funders and leaders can use the following best practices to help promote conversations and processes around restorative justice that produce positive outcomes and build toward unified understandings of even the most difficult history:

- Endorse dialogue and discussion about the need to address past trauma here in the United States — at a local, regional, or national level.

- Support communities interested in addressing history as they search for and mobilize around an appropriate platform.

- Connect communities implementing such platforms to one another to enable learning from each other's challenges and best practices.

- Utilize international resources and learnings in all the approaches above. In addition to rigorous and insightful academic work on specific cases and approaches (*181, 186, 190-196*), both the United Nations and the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) offer resources and guidelines that will be foundational to localizing an approach.*

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*   The **ITCJ website** is itself an excellent resource. While different United Nations programs have their own publications on transitional justice, **this resource page** provides links to them. Additionally, the United Nations University (**UNU**), which is the academic and research arm of the United Nations as well as a liaison between the United Nations and its various peacebuilding partners, is an excellent resource.

CASE STUDY: GREENSBORO, NORTH CAROLINA
RESTORATIVE HISTORY IN ONE U.S. COMMUNITY.

Communities may choose to enact a truth and reconciliation process even without the formal scaffolding of local or national government. Citizens in Greensboro, North Carolina, initiated a local Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) — the first in the United States — and focused it on a single incident of racial violence, known as the "Greensboro Massacre." In 1979, Ku Klux Klan (KKK) and American Nazi Party members fired into a crowd of protestors in an African-American neighborhood, killing five demonstrators and injuring 10 others. After the event, city authorities placed victims under surveillance and pressured local media to misreport the event as an equal shootout between radical fringe groups, rather than a one-sided attack. Despite a videotape of the attack, all-white juries acquitted the perpetrators in two separate criminal trials. Survivors, feeling there had been a lack of meaningful justice, pursued and won a federal civil suit against the perpetrators and the Greensboro police department and used the proceeds to establish local social justice organizations.

In 1999, inspired by the South African TRC, those organizations, consultants from the International Center for Transitional Justice, and philanthropic groups began to organize a re-investigation of the Greensboro Massacre. In 2004, the Greensboro TRC (GTRC) was launched. With a mandate to examine the causes and consequences of the violence, the GTRC collected over 200 statements from victims, perpetrators, and community members and held three public hearings before releasing a report in 2006. In essence, one single day in 1979 became a lens through which to investigate decades of racism, antiunion activity, and KKK activity, as well as the legacy of slavery and the struggle of African Americans in Greensboro and beyond to obtain social and economic justice (*181, 188*). Though the GTRC lacked formal standing, its participants experienced it both as an example of what democracy could accomplish and of how adversaries could be in a room together and envision a different and shared future for themselves (*186-188*).

Conclusion

This paper has proposed a set of priorities for preventing and countering political violence, based on core lessons from global experience. We have cautioned against security-first approaches, whether based in law enforcement or counterterrorism, which often exacerbate rather than heal profound societal divisions. This is because state-based security fails when the state and its institutions are not perceived as legitimate by both the perpetrators and victims of violence, a congruence that is difficult to achieve. Similarly, communication-led strategies to counter violence, which focus on removing words or ideologies from public view but leave the relationships beneath them intact, have also proven disappointing.

"Resilience makes a difference. And the time to implement it is now."

Instead, we propose a resilience-based strategy to counter political violence. Resilience is, by definition, a whole-of-society strategy. It will never produce the media coverage of a strategy that is based on law enforcement or security framing. But in addition to preventing and countering violence, all efforts undertaken toward that end will strengthen our national institutions and civic fabric — the twin pillars of the American experiment. In short, as data from Northern Ireland to Kenya suggest, resilience makes a difference. And the time to implement it is now.

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