



POLARIZATION & EXTREMISM
RESEARCH & INNOVATION LAB

SCHOOL *of* PUBLIC AFFAIRS

PUBLIC POLICY: PUBLIC HEALTH AND PREVENTION

Polarization & Extremism

Research & Innovation Lab (PERIL)

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Executive Summary

PERIL, the Polarization and Extremism Research & Innovation Lab, employs a public health approach to design, test, and scale-up evidence-based tools and strategies that effectively reduce the threat of radicalization, as well as susceptibility to supremacist ideologies, conspiracy theories, mis/disinformation, misogynist thought, and propaganda. Our work empowers individuals and communities to intervene and interrupt early radicalization, and supports their efforts to build resilience.

In order to advance our mission—and in keeping with the thinking, research, and strategy detailed in the remainder of this document—we recommend pursuing the following policies that reduce the potential for polarization and build communal health:

- **Invest in a holistic, community-based, public-health approach to preventing pathways to violence, including:**
 - **Fund the testing of innovative upstream prevention strategies**
 - **Ensure adequate funding** for existing government initiatives and public-private partnerships
- **Support the creation of inter-agency task forces and networks beyond the security sector** for improving community wellness and resilience
- **Create a central, national, nonpartisan center for extremism prevention**
- **Incentivize, prioritize, and attach rigorous impact assessment** and evaluation frameworks for all programs and policies
- **Ensure personal liberties are safeguarded**, refraining from interference with any individual's freedom of speech, conscience, or association
- **Work with the tech sector** to remove harmful and dangerous content
- **Keep communities in the conversation**



The Problem of Polarization

Scope and Scale: A Nation in Need

It is evident we suffer from a national crisis of polarization.¹ Societal divisions are constant discussion topics on news programs and podcasts; table talk with friends and family has been dominated either by conversations about polarization, or constrained by perceived extreme positions adopted by families and friends. Since our founding in 2020, PERIL has fielded a constant stream of requests from all across the country from individuals and groups asking for help in confronting the impacts of disinformation, propaganda, and polarization in their lives. From Michigan, a grandfather and military Veteran wrote to ask what he could do about his grandson who had joined an armed militia. In Texas, faith leaders convened to seek ways to support pastors whose congregations are being torn apart by partisan polarization and conspiracy theories. In Washington State, a local government needed training for city employees about online manipulation to stem the tide of polarization. In Vermont, an entrepreneur asked if his school system could do more to ensure that his future employees—most of whom he hired straight from the local high school—would stop sharing propaganda, which was becoming a big business problem. A local mom wanted help with her middle school son, who during the pandemic had consumed so much online misogyny that he said because she is a woman, he did not need to respect her authority as a parent.

These stories illustrate what research evidence has also demonstrated: we face a national crisis. Polarization is pulling people apart from each other and is sundering communities. America is *not* healthy right now. Our societal illness is manifest in the many troubling headlines we encounter. We read of individuals falling prey to hostile foreign influence operations, strategically organized by those who manipulate Americans either for profit or to disrupt our democratic process². We hear of teenagers sharing intimate details of their lives with people online who they think are friends their own age, but who are not³; we learn of seniors giving bank information to scammers pretending to be from the IRS⁴. The most notorious of these news stories are about those individuals who—after going down rabbit holes of



antisemitic conspiracies, or falling victim to canards about the orchestrated replacement of white people—come to believe propaganda, and are lured by disinformation into what they think is heroic violent action to save their racial or ethnic group. But that front-page extremist violence is just the horrifying tip of the massive iceberg of American polarization.

The data on America’s crisis is clear. The pace, scope, and scale of violent extremism have increased and are escalating rapidly. The Anti-Defamation League reports that white supremacist propaganda efforts are at the highest level they have ever recorded, jumping 38% above 2021 levels to 6,751 reported cases in 2022.² These incidents include distribution of racist, antisemitic, and anti-LGBTQIA+ fliers, graffiti and posters, stickers, banners, and laser projections that have heavily targeted houses of worship and other community institutions. Since the Hamas attacks on October 7th, 2023 there has also been a sharp increase in antisemitic incidents in the US, increasing by as much as 360%.⁵

Violence is a clear repercussion of such widespread circulation of propaganda, conspiracy theories, and disinformation. Between 2013 and 2021, the number of open domestic terrorism-related cases in the U.S. jumped 357% to 9,049 cases, with the most violent incidents being committed by racially or ethnically-motivated violent extremists during the same years⁶. **Of the 444 people killed by extremism** in the U.S. between 2013 and 2022, the significant majority of deaths were at the hands of right-wing extremists (335 deaths, or 75%)⁷. Of those right-wing extremists who committed murder in 2021, 73% were affiliated with white supremacy, 5% with incel/toxic masculinity extremism, and 17% with anti-government extremism⁸. Two widely-known tragedies—the 2018 shooting at Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, and the 2022 racist shooting that killed 10 people in a grocery store in a predominantly Black neighborhood in Buffalo--were both motivated by the false Great Replacement conspiracy theory, and stand as painful reminders of the murderous effects of white supremacy⁹.

Pervasive polarization also manifests in non-lethal attacks, which are also on the rise. More than 50 bomb threats were made to HBCUs (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) and



predominantly Black churches in 2022. These types of incidents extend well beyond white supremacist extremism¹⁰: Antisemitism, conspiracy theories, anti-LGBTQ+ hate, and misogynistic content has spiked across online platforms. Before he was banned from social media platforms in mid 2022, violent and deeply misogynistic videos from one content creator were viewed 12 billion times on TikTok alone¹¹. Violent outcomes often show a toxic mix of ideological hatred. In May 2023, eight people lost their lives at a Texas shopping mall at the hands of a man with a swastika tattoo who had posted both violent misogynistic and neo-Nazi content online¹².

Polarization and extremism, in the many forms that they take shape, are perhaps our most serious domestic threat. In October 2020, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security under President Trump issued a threat assessment report that declared domestic violent extremism in general, and white supremacist extremists in particular, the, “most persistent and lethal threat in the Homeland.”¹³ The Biden administration issued a similar assessment in spring 2021¹⁴, followed by the first-ever national strategy to counter domestic terrorism, which noted the rising threat from white supremacist extremism, and anti-government and unlawful militias that threaten civilians, elected officials, and democratic institutions¹⁵. Much of this violence is motivated by disinformation, propaganda, and conspiracy theories. According to the Global Terrorism Database, terrorist attacks motivated by conspiracy theorists were responsible for 119 attacks in 2020¹⁶—a jump from 6 attacks the year before—in Australia, New Zealand, the United States, Canada, United Kingdom and Germany. There is a through line from polarization that leads to violent extremism: **in 2024, the Council on Foreign Relations categorized political polarization at the highest level of priority for worldwide conflicts¹⁷**; at that same time, hate crimes in the U.S. are at the highest level in decades, despite persistent underreporting¹⁸. In sum, the U.S. and our allies have seen rising hate, violent extremism, and political violence fueled by antisemitism, conspiracy theories, propaganda, disinformation, and other harmful online content as a pattern of violence that has been escalating for years. There is no doubt polarization is a major problem for our country, and our world. But there are many questions regarding what we, as a society, can do about it.



What Doesn't Work to Prevent Polarization

For decades, the U.S. has pursued almost exclusively a carceral approach to the problems of domestic terrorism and extremism. **Carceral approaches to addressing extremism do not address the roots of the problem, and by failing to do so they actually lay the foundation for future violence.** The carceral crackdown on Timothy McVeigh and the militia movement of the 90's following the deadly and horrific Oklahoma City Bombing not only failed to prevent future violence, but played into the conspiracy narrative of a "New World Order" coming to control white families. This is not to say that extremists and those who commit acts of violence should not face consequences, but tragedies such as the Oklahoma City Bombing and Charlottesville are clear illustrations of why additional approaches are required to effectively prevent future violence.

Within 90 minutes of the bombing at the Alfred P. Murrah Federal building in Oklahoma City, Timothy McVeigh was tracked down and arrested¹⁹. Three accomplices were also subsequently arrested, and the courtroom proceedings resulted in the death penalty for McVeigh, life without parole for Terry Nichols, and a reduced sentence for Michael Fortier (with a dismissal of charges for his wife, Lori) in exchange for testimony²⁰. In addition to these arrests, trials, incarceration, and capital punishment, Congress responded by passing two laws: the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996 and the Victim Allocation Clarification Act²¹, each of which dealt with, respectively, penalties and settings for courtroom proceedings. The responses to the Oklahoma City bombing were, exclusively, of law enforcement: arrests, trials, punishments, and new legislation clarifying details of punishments and trials.

Reacting to acts of violent extremism cannot be equated with preventing it. All of the responses to the Oklahoma bombing were focused only in *post hoc* fashion: not a single advance was made to work upstream, **to prevent the radical extremism that led to the bombing.** Upon arresting McVeigh and Nichols, copies of white supremacist materials, like *The Turner Diaries* and *Hunter*, were discovered in their homes²². These publications indicated participation in the larger, national, circles of the white power



movement in America, as well as familiarity with Louis Beam’s strategy of “leaderless resistance,” which disguises the organized activities of the white power movement as purported “lone wolf” actions²³. However, elected officials and law enforcement failed to enact any preventative measures that might have kept these conspiracies from deepening and expanding their roots. The state of Oklahoma did not even include the 1995 bombing into its state’s civic curriculum until 2010²⁴. **As a result of this failure to respond to the root causes of the violence in Oklahoma City, *The Turner Diaries* and *Hunter* have gone on to inspire many more extremists both within the US and abroad,** and “leaderless resistance” has become the norm for domestic terrorism as evidenced by more recent attacks in places like Buffalo, NY and Charleston, SC. One notable result of this national turning of a blind eye to decades of recruitment efforts by polarizing groups was how these themes—and the people united by them—surfaced at 2017’s Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville²⁵.

Strategies solely focused on arresting individuals after they commit crimes has remained the standard for countering the crisis of polarization. Following the attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001, the Department of Homeland Security was created²⁶. It was under the umbrella of DHS that the work of Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism [P/CVE] has been housed at the federal level²⁷. Its preventative measures, the “P” of the P/CVE, have mostly been limited to restrictions around travel (enforced by TSA) and to securitized solutions to immigration concerns. Other post-9/11 policies put Muslims and Arabs in their crosshairs, which led to two troubling outcomes: turning entire ethnicities into targets of suspicion, and ignoring the expansion of domestic terrorism. Furthermore, even when P/CVE efforts successfully arrest, try, and incarcerate individuals, the carceral system into which these people are placed do not provide off-ramps to deradicalize them; in fact, prisons are places that mostly have the potential to further radicalize extremists, as hate groups and conspiracy theories are incredibly common in that world²⁸. **The focus of P/CVE on carceral interventions, from 2010-2021, did not prevent the spread of violent extremism. Instead, this decade saw 231 domestic terrorist attacks in the US, over two-thirds of which were motivated by either anti-government or racist sentiment²⁹.**



There is every reason to arrest, to try, and to incarcerate those who commit violence based on their extremist views. **The security sector is an essential *post hoc* response to hate crimes and terrorist events. However, the decades since the Oklahoma City bombing have demonstrated that securitized solutions to extremism are not sufficient:** the number and impact of these horrific events only grows year to year. An argument can even be made that successful arrests and punishments—like that of Timothy McVeigh—insidiously serve to inspire future death and destruction³⁰. Securitized solutions, on their own, react to the manifestations of hate: they do not prevent the spread of hate.

What Does Work to Prevent Polarization

There is a growing body of evidence about what works to intervene in pathways to violent extremism. **These approaches equip the public with tools that shore up their capacity and resilience.** Importantly, these approaches protect the right to free speech and reduce the need for security-based responses. These methods, many of which have been pioneered overseas and are now being brought to the States, focus on community-based programs that can be broadened, coordinated, and sustained by State and Federal commitments to collaboration and funding. **These methods focus on primary methods of intervention, with the goal of building resilience against polarization, radicalization, and their correlates on the individual, communal, state, and federal levels.** The best of these approaches can be brought under the umbrella of a “public health” strategy to address these issues.

The public health model asks us to think about societal polarization preventatively and **holistically**. There are numerous examples within the medical field wherein the public health model helped to address widespread problems. From addressing the connection between smoking and lung cancer, to identifying the risks and deadly impacts of drunk driving, public health campaigns have helped change laws and shift social norms when we realize that a behavior is dangerous or destructive. Taking lung cancer as an example, we knew that there were different ways one gets lung cancer, and different environments that raise risk profiles. Without knowing *every* cause of lung cancer, we now know that smoking raises one’s risk



considerably³¹. That's why the United States launched public health campaigns decades ago to address the root of the problem: our government funded smoking cessation programs and implemented regulations to limit carcinogens in existing products³². **We paid for PSAs on children's television. The result? After these policies were adopted, incidents of lung cancer began to reduce steadily, and continue to do so today³³.**

Public health anti-smoking campaigns made our country healthier. **This same approach will work for polarization. Reducing rates of radicalization might involve public education campaigns in arenas like media literacy, civic engagement clubs for kids, and regulations to reduce the spread of mis- and disinformation.** What's better is that these programs do not put either communities or law enforcement at risk. Instead, this public health approach builds robust, resilient, and healthy communities. Building trust is the primary element of creating widespread resilience: people care about what happens in their community. Working hyper-locally to build trust and interest in these programs and projects is crucial. This is especially important since, in the post-9/11 world, there remains a general distrust of law enforcement by communities that are historically targeted. Law enforcement plays a needed role in protecting communities, but it does not have to serve as the primary provider of prevention services, especially if community trust is to be built and sustained.

Trust needs to be built by active, consistent networking and programming with a sustainable presence. This means working with community leaders across all racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds to create shared social capital; it also means building long-term funding opportunities so communities don't have to be worried that services will be "unplugged" with changes in government administrations³⁴. Traditional interventions typically focus on those susceptible to being radicalized, and fail to acknowledge the trauma and damage caused by hate, bias, discrimination and harassment faced by those on the receiving end. While working with those susceptible to radicalization is important, successful prevention programs will acknowledge these impacts and include therapeutic, educational and financial support available for these individuals affected. Such an approach ensures equity in the prevention space by



building supports for members of historically targeted and marginalized communities, as well as those who are victim-survivors of hate. **Supporting marginalized communities, building democratic resilience, and early intervention are essential elements of mainstream prevention work³⁵.**

Even with this focus on early interventions, building democratic resilience, and prevention in the mainstream, we also need to be thinking about the components of extremism itself: supremacist ideologies, conspiracy theories, mis- and disinformation, misogyny, and propaganda. It is not just that these are the primary manifestations of extremism in our time; by focusing on these individual components, the P/CVE field can work to be more specific in its methods of prevention and intervention. Such a specialized, tailored, approach connects to the importance of rigorous evaluation of programs and projects in the field. Evaluating project and program efficacy is critical to any long-term success. Emerging program models need to include iterative feedback streams; they need to continually improve using constructive feedback from data analysis, community members, and all involved in decision-making. **There is a critical need for evaluation measures to be developed for prevention programs, and also for those measures to be agreed upon and used uniformly across the P/CVE field (domestically and internationally) so that projects and programs can be adequately compared, and the most effective strategies can be identified.**

As in all community-based work, no “one size fits all” intervention (or project or program) will work in every location. Flexibility and adaptability, especially in response to the voices of community members, need to serve as the basis of prevention “success”. Such a localized approach must strike a balance between top-down guidance and local input. **This requires both determining community-specific criteria for evaluating success, and also a robust national support structure³⁶.** Those larger support structures include: registries that can more accurately provide statistics and information on instances of bias, harassment and discrimination; databases of resources that can be linked across agencies and sectors; working groups and councils for technical issues and joint standards; national certification standards for counseling and training; and a national hotline infrastructure for rapid response to instances of



polarization³⁷. Germany, which has been engaged in this kind of P/CVE work for over two decades, has important lessons to teach us about both scope of programming and national commitment to building resilience.

There is evidence that these localized, preventative approaches to polarization have real impact. We have found that **it only takes 7-12 minutes of reading one of our intervention guides for its audience to be significantly better informed** about harmful online content and the risks of radicalization to violence; to feel more empowered and confident about intervening; to build their own capability to intervene; and to know where to get more help. This is the case across our research with parents and caregivers, including grandparents, uncles, and cousins; with educators and youth mentors; with local governments and small businesses, and more. **For example, in just 12 minutes of reading one of our intervention tools, 85% of our participants understood the process by which youth become radicalized, and 83% felt that they knew where to get help if they suspect a young person to be engaging in extremist ideas.**

There is also strong emerging evidence that lasting impact on local communities can stem from even the shortest of interventions. We are currently studying a group of 1500 parents and caregivers in three-month intervals for a full year after reading our intervention tool. Three months after reading our guide for parents and caregivers, over 11% (135 individuals) of respondents said that after the intervention, they either joined or created a group that discusses issues of youth radicalization and extremism. Six percent of our participants, or about 75 people, told us that within the three months after reading our guide, they used what they learned to take direct action to prevent youth from radicalizing further or being recruited through additional online manipulation. **Overall, three months after reading our guide, parents and caregiver retained the vast majority of the knowledge and skills they had learned. Seventy five percent of participants reported understanding the process by which youth become radicalized online - a 23% increase from the initial survey - and 70% felt prepared to talk with youth about online extremism - only a 5% drop from the initial survey.** Over a third of participants told us they had shared or used the



information with their biological children, while nearly 13% shared it with other young people in their family, including grandchildren, nephews and nieces, and cousins. This evidence from these studies points us strongly in the direction of expanding the field of upstream prevention work.

Taken together, our evidence shows that it is possible to provide communities with tools to be safer, whether in community with others or in online spaces. Parents, grandparents, teachers, coaches, mental health professionals, and others deserve help confronting an unprecedented amount of harmful online content and being more confident and capable to keep their families safe and protected from harmful online content. All communities need information and tangible action steps for how to help their loved ones resist manipulative rhetoric, propaganda, conspiracy theories, and disinformation they are exposed to online and offline in ways that help them make better choices while avoiding censorship, surveillance, monitoring, or other security-based approaches. Creating community-based, trust-focused programs that work upstream to counter polarization will help rebuild our fractured society and make us more resilient.



PERIL and Policy: A Public Health Approach

PERIL posits that the crisis of polarization—here in America and throughout our world—is a societal sickness that can be effectively addressed by applying previous lessons learned from the broader field of Public Health. A healthy policy should have room for broad difference of opinion, tolerate calm and informed discussion, seek the welfare and engagement of all its citizens, and remain unified regardless of group distinctions. The state of any union that does not have these characteristics is clear: such a country is ill. **A focus on restoring that society to full vibrant health must be the goal. PERIL’s predominant focus is on building resilient communities and individuals.** Polarization and targeted violence are more likely to occur in highly-fractured societies; individuals need skills to protect them from manipulation, misinformation, conspiracy theories, propaganda, and other tools of polarization. Victims of violence require response, rehabilitation, and healthy communities that can support them. Parents and caregivers, coaches and clergy need to learn how to foster inclusive and equitable communities. **Bringing a complete society and whole-of-government approach is what will make our country healthy again.**

PERIL advocates for a holistic public-health mode of prevention that consists of investments at all levels of intervention. P/CVE experts categorize such work according to three tiers of intervention: Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary prevention levels. Primary prevention refers to efforts to address radicalization before it takes root, and includes broad civic education and media literacy focused on helping the public build resilience. Importantly, for a P/CVE field that has a history of targeting marginalized communities with stringent surveillance—or adopting security-based approaches that surveil, monitor, censor, or ban content—these primary modes of intervention do not infringe on anyone’s right to free speech or free association. Primary interventions seek to create communal health, to build public resilience.

Secondary prevention is crucial as well, namely efforts to mitigate the impacts of already radicalized people and groups. These secondary efforts usually occur through surveillance, monitoring, arrests, and interruption of plots; however, they also involve providing support to communities and



individuals confronting polarized people in their lives. Ultimately, we arrive at the final stage of intervention, tertiary prevention, which attempts to rehabilitate already-radicalized individuals. This *post hoc* level of intervention focuses on deradicalization efforts, which includes many idiosyncratic—and often untested—programs that restore extremists to common society.

An effective public health approach to countering disinformation builds prevention and intervention across all three of these levels—with the majority of efforts and resources on the primary prevention side. All such efforts should keep four things in mind:

1. **Efforts must be nimble and responsive** to communities' needs depending on regional areas of concern.
2. **The work must be holistic and whole-of-community in ways that broaden engagement** with a wide range of government offices, agencies, and organizations beyond the security and law enforcement sectors, such as the education, health and human services, and mental health sectors. This would include primary prevention efforts through the arts, community organizations, faith communities, or other community-based non-profits.
3. **An effective public-health prevention model relies on evidence at all levels of intervention.** This requires moving beyond evaluations that describe only outputs, such as the numbers of people trained, the numbers of downloads of a particular tool, or other descriptive metrics that do not actually provide evidence of impact. Evaluation should move towards a serious and rigorous system of outcome impact assessment and evaluation.
4. **A holistic public health approach builds resilient systems as well as resilient individuals.** Resilience to propaganda and disinformation is not merely a technical skill. It is rooted in national and community values. In other words, a public health approach understands that commitment to an inclusive democracy must be reinforced, emphasized, and modeled in all aspects of civic life. The aim is to reduce the fertile ground in which disinformation, propaganda, hate and anti-democratic ideas thrive.



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This is a vision of a public health-style prevention system that works to prevent violence and counter harm while simultaneously promoting concrete steps toward inclusive equity, respect, coexistence, and celebration of difference. Such a prevention system gives us the best chance of building community social cohesion, reducing violent outcomes, and strengthening our democracies.



PERIL Policy Recommendations

1. **Invest in a holistic, community-based, public-health approach** to preventing pathways to violence that address past harms and center the needs of the community. This investment needs both to initiate new programs and to stabilize already-existing systems that have proven effective:
 - a. **Fund the testing of innovative upstream prevention strategies**, specifically in arenas beyond the security sector, including:
 - i. **Digital Literacy curricula.** Young people are highly susceptible to online misinformation without proper digital literacy training. Nearly one-in-five parents of a child younger than 12 in the US say their child has a smartphone. At the same time, children under 12 are prime targets for false information campaigns and fake news. By combining elements of both Social Emotional Learning and up-to-date digital literacy, we can help reduce reactive or impulsive behaviors, cultivate awareness of one's mental processes, reinforce individual responsibility for information consumption and communication, and increase self-awareness, self-confidence, and self-efficacy.
 - ii. **Widespread Civic Education campaigns.** Resilience takes root in communities that are connected and educated. Coordinated campaigns can build civic bonds, and can also work to mitigate the influence of conspiracy-thinking as well as misinformation techniques. Policy at all levels can fund and scale such efforts to keep the community informed and educated on issues of polarization and extremism.
 - iii. **Pilot Testing of innovative intervention approaches**, and, as appropriate and proven by research, bring to proper scale:
 - **Community Advisory, Resource, and Education CARE Centers:** PERIL has launched a multi-year initiative to establish the first CARE centers in the United States. This network of CARE Centers will provide resources



to prevent and counter political and hate-fueled violence in strategic states. Modeled after the 23 year-old German mobile advisory centers, CARE Centers will provide on-site support, workshops, trainings, support groups, and other resources to those impacted and affected by hate, discrimination, and supremacist ideologies as well as those susceptible to radicalization. CARE Centers will build local networks of practitioners and experts to address community needs and serve affected and concerned community members.

- The creation of new programs to recognize and “offramp” individuals persuaded by disinformation and propaganda from further radicalization to violence. Such programs currently exist in many forms and require rigorous analysis to test for effectiveness and scalability.

B. Ensure adequate funding for government initiatives and public-private partnerships. This includes making evergreen already-existing state and federal allocations, and creating sustainability for projects initiated by philanthropy.

2. Support the creation of inter-agency task forces and networks beyond the security sector that include civil society institutions like schools, mental health professionals, NGOs and advocacy groups improving community wellness.

3. Create a central, national, nonpartisan center for extremism prevention to provide federal, state and local governments and all local communities with tools, resources, training, capacity-building, and evidence of what works. Such a center could, in keeping with the United Nations International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights, serve as a “national human rights institution” as called for in the Paris Principles. Furthermore, this central hub could take the form of a public-private partnership.

4. Incentivize, prioritize, and attach rigorous impact assessment and evaluation frameworks within policies to ensure that programs are implemented as intended and are effective. Research is imperative in the



emerging field of primary prevention, where too often anecdotal stories of success mask ineffective programs³⁸. As an applied research lab intentionally affiliated with an institute of higher learning, we believe rigorous research is an essential aspect of scaling any program. This approach has ramifications both in the quality and transparency of impact assessments:

- a. Research methods should blend quantitative and qualitative analysis, and attain the highest standards of academic rigor.
- b. Evaluation frameworks and results funded with public dollars should be made publicly available to ensure transparency and to eliminate redundancy of projects.

5. Ensure personal liberties are safeguarded. Prevention initiatives must focus on equipping the public with better tools for their own decision-making, while not interfering with any individual's freedom of speech, conscience, or association. We cannot repeat the mistakes of historical civil liberties violations or promote censorship as a solution to disinformation and propaganda.

6. Continue to work with the tech sector to remove harmful and dangerous content. The problem of disinformation and propaganda must begin with upstream prevention that reduces both the supply and demand of harmful content. The tech sector also has a role to play in promoting civic education and. The tech sector should be held to public account to live up to those responsibilities.

7. Keep community in the conversation. The public health approach must be community-driven, and therefore reflective of the voices of the community. For elected officials, the following are best practices for engaging their constituents in the work of mitigating polarization and extremism:

- a. **Listen to constituents, and local and state policymakers.** Hold public town halls to learn more about how groups are impacted, and how you can provide support. Seek out historically marginalized groups and ask them specifically about the challenges they face as well as the opportunities they perceive.



- b. **Update constituents** on what is being done nationally and in their district. Sharing news of effective, evidence-proven, solutions helps the electorate to see that polarization can be overcome, and provides people a roadmap for their participation.
- c. **Share evidence about what works**, as well as extant resources and opportunities, into order to provide support to those affected and impacted.
- d. **Create local avenues of engagement**, to motivate citizens to positive action, offer resources to support their learning, and make a difference in their families' and communities' wellbeing.



ENDNOTES

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