



26 June 2023

Southern Poverty Law Center

Response to Call for Input – Online Hate Speech

The Southern Poverty Law Center, one the largest US civil and human rights organizations, submits this response to the request for input regarding “examples of good practice, demonstrating effective action to prevent, address and punish online hate speech, including through regulatory legislation, policies, education, counter-speech, steps to build societal support for plurality and/or prosecutions.”

SPLC was founded in 1971. Since that time, SPLC’s mission has been to stamp out racism, hate and extremism. Our [Hate Watch](#) and [Intelligence Project](#) divisions conduct the most comprehensive and up-to-date tracking and monitoring of active hate and extremist groups in the US. SPLC is recognized as a national leader on issues of hate and extremism due to its depth of expertise and groundbreaking work.

Every year since 1990, the Southern Poverty Law Center has published its [Year In Hate & Extremism](#) report providing analysis of the nature and magnitude of extremist threats in the US and forward-looking policy recommendations designed to confront violent extremism and protect democratic institutions. In 2022, SPLC documented 1,225 hate and antigovernment extremist groups across the US. The online world allows these groups to coordinate their activities and to recruit and radicalize people toward violent and hateful ideologies.

White nationalism and other forms of far-right extremism present the most serious threat to democracy in many countries around the world, and to the global democratic order. Most governmental resources and political debate devoted to combatting these threats are focused on law enforcement and securitization, such as hardening schools and churches, arming teachers, and increased police presence. For far too long, the urgent need to engage in concerted and sustained prevention efforts has gone largely unaddressed. In many countries, this failure to focus on prevention has allowed reactionary right-wing movements to grow, and to increasingly gain mainstream acceptance.

Fear of changes to the social status quo, in which white people hold a privileged place, has helped fuel the mainstreaming of the myth of the “great replacement” – a term coined by the French author Renaud Camus to identify a conspiracy theory in which white people are being systematically replaced by non-white immigrants at the hands of leftists, “multiculturalists,” Jewish people and others. The myth is central to white supremacist and white nationalist movements and is widespread in Europe and North America. Just since 2018, extremists inspired by the great replacement theory have committed terror attacks in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Christchurch, New Zealand; Escondido and Poway, California; El Paso, Texas; and Buffalo, New York, as well as innumerable other hate crimes. Adherents also fuel anti-immigrant furor that leads to the adoption in democratic states of laws barring migrants fleeing conflicts and disasters in other parts of the world.

The disturbing and dangerous shift toward mainstream acceptance of extremist views is exemplified by the results of a [recent poll](#) of 1500 US residents conducted by SPLC and Tulchin Research – nearly 7 in 10 of those who identified themselves as Republicans agreed at least to some extent that demographic changes in the US are deliberately driven by liberal and progressive politicians to gain political power by “replacing more conservative white voters.” Across the political spectrum, the poll also revealed substantial support for threatening or engaging in violence against perceived political opponents.

As right-wing extremism is increasingly mainstreamed and its adherents attain more numerous and higher public offices, the need to find innovative ways to enable the public – especially young people, parents, and educators – to recognize and be resistant to disinformation and radicalization are more urgent than ever. SPLC, in partnership with American University’s Polarization and Extremism Research and Innovation Lab (PERIL), is working to [develop and disseminate tools](#) to inoculate youth against radicalization and build community resilience through early prevention and non-carceral solutions.

In addition to guides for parents, caregivers and community members to help them to identify and respond effectively to early signs of online radicalization, SPLC is now partnering with PERIL in a two-year pilot program to develop Community Advisory, Resource and Education (CARE) Centers. The CARE Centers, which take a public health approach and are modeled on German mobile advisory centers, will provide on-site trainings, assessments, referrals, and other resources to those impacted and affected by hate, discrimination, and supremacist ideologies as well as those susceptible to radicalization. The first two centers will be located in the states of Georgia and Michigan. The attached two-pager provides details on the operation of the pilot CARE Centers.

The State of Washington is also taking a public health approach to the prevention of domestic extremism. Earlier this year, it began a process to establish a [domestic violent extremism commission](#) to work on efforts to prevent and interrupt radicalization.

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Thank you for the opportunity to provide this input. We would be pleased to answer any questions, or to provide a briefing on these issues and our Year In Hate & Extremism report at your convenience.

With best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lisa W. Borden". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Lisa" being the most prominent.

LISA W. BORDEN
Senior Policy Counsel, International Advocacy

Community Advisory, Resource and Education (CARE) Centers

What are CARE Centers?

The Polarization & Extremism Research & Innovation Lab (PERIL), in strategic partnership with the Southern Poverty Law Center, has launched a two-year pilot initiative to establish Community Advisory, Resource and Education (CARE) Centers.



POLARIZATION & EXTREMISM
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CARE Centers will provide resources to prevent and counter political and hate-fueled violence in Michigan and Georgia, our pilot regions. Modeled after the 22-year-old German mobile advisory centers, CARE centers will provide on-site trainings, assessments, referrals, and other resources to those impacted and affected by hate, discrimination, and supremacist ideologies as well as those susceptible to radicalization.



What will CARE Centers do?

CARE Centers will build local networks of practitioners and community experts to address community needs and help serve affected and concerned community members. Using a public health approach, these centers will work to prevent radicalization and extremist activity through community-based interventions.

CARE Centers will...

1. Equip communities with the tools to recognize warning signs of supremacist radicalization and effectively intervene.
2. Create transparent and accessible workshops, trainings, guidelines and other resources for educators, policymakers, mental health practitioners, and community members.
3. Develop policy suggestions and networks to share insights from applied interventions and better serve community needs.
4. Design interventions that help communities prevent supremacist violence using ethically-vetted and rigorous research methods including statistical pre and post-testing, ethnographic observation, interviews, and focus groups.

Who is CARE for?

CARE Centers are for local community members and practitioners who support those impacted by hate, discrimination, and supremacist ideologies as well as those susceptible to radicalization within the region. CARE Centers aim to be inclusive of the entire community, and provide community members with avenues for action and support. We will collaborate with family members, caregivers, employers, organizers, educators, policymakers, mental health service providers, social service agencies and support organizations, community organizing and advocacy groups, and local and state-level government departments and agencies.

What can CARE do for you and your community?

- Provide resources and tools to support those impacted and affected by hate, discrimination, and supremacist ideologies.
- Provide ways to off-ramp youth susceptible to supremacist radicalization.
- Provide information on how to respond to hate, discrimination, and supremacist ideologies in your community, and on topics such as recognizing warning signs of extremist radicalization.
- Help individuals who wish to address such challenges before harm occurs to better prevent extremism.

How CARE Will Strive for Accessible, Inclusive Interventions?

- CARE Centers will focus on improving responses to support victim-survivors of hate, not just providing guidance for dealing with perpetrators.
- Our services and resources are free and will be rooted in community expertise and needs.
- We will engage community members to develop tools and services that meet local needs, and to ensure communities are not inadvertently harmed when working to prevent extremism.
- CARE Centers will not advocate for solutions that involve incarceration, monitoring, surveillance, censorship, or any other security-based approach.
- PERIL recognizes the harm done to marginalized communities who have been targeted by counterterrorism efforts in the United States. Our community-centered and victim-survivor focused approach is informed by this reality, and we aim to safeguard and enrich the well-being of all community members.

About PERIL

PERIL is an applied research lab at American University's School of Public Affairs preventing radicalization to violent extremism by strengthening community resilience. We design, test, and scale up evidence-based tools and strategies using a public health approach.

If you'd like to learn more about PERIL, our values, and the work that we've done, visit our website here: perilresearch.com