



Election 2020 Guide

Guidance for Place-Based Funders to Address Political Violence Before and After the 2020 Election

There is escalating concern about the threat of political violence around the United States election in 2020. Research on international violence and peacebuilding reveal that a great deal can be done to prevent (and, if necessary, de-escalate) violence and increase resilience — if leaders with influence and resources are ready to face these challenges squarely now. This guide is designed to help local place-based funders invest quickly in leaders and organizations who've been preparing for this moment for years.

The threat isn't new, and the past predicts the present.

We know from global experience of political violence that past fault lines are the best predictors of future ones. For years, Black, brown, indigenous, feminist, LGBT and non-Christian communities have sounded the alarm about violence, hateful rhetoric, and trampling of legal and constitutional norms. Local funders have a special resource to draw on that national actors may not -- relationships with local communities who know the fault lines and history of their own localities -- even when many other residents may not.

Violence flows from the top down. Responses have to blend top-down and bottom-up approaches.

Our stereotype of political violence often includes out-of-control local mobs. But in fact, the "mobs" are usually incited, if not directed, by national actors who have concluded that violence serves their purposes. Local funders have a special ability to support the communities on which violence is being visited and, in some cases, to exercise trusted relationships with local leaders to counter or limit the impact of incitement coming from elsewhere.

Responses to violence stem out of strong communications within communities as well as between them.

Countries and communities that have halted, reversed and recovered from violence have several common threads. The diminishment of strong religious and cultural identities is not one of them. Instead, community leaders speak to their own followers, and re-shape group identities against violence. Initiatives that try to build cross-group communication without doing the groundwork often fail and sometimes wind up doing more harm than good.

Militarized law enforcement approaches are not likely to be sufficient—and international terrorism experts are the first to say so.

Faced with political violence there is a temptation to respond by buttressing law enforcement initiatives and nothing more. However, we've seen how that instinct can in fact exacerbate divisions and amplify tensions. Practitioners with backgrounds in counter-terrorism and law enforcement have been among the first to say that the force-heavy approaches the U.S. has used overseas won't be sufficient, or even desirable.

Here are four other ways you could use your dollars, expertise, and voices right now:

1. Supporting communities under siege.

Black, indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) communities and BIPOC-led coalitions and alliances remain on the frontline and we're now witnessing one of the largest social movements of our lifetimes. They are organizing and mobilizing, infusing protests with de-escalation tactics, and transforming our collective consciousness about systemic racism and police violence. It's critical to support their leadership and those communities upon which violence is being committed.

Sample grants include:

- Black Visions Collective in Minnesota - <https://www.blackvisionsmn.org>
- Western States Center in Oregon - <https://www.westernstatescenter.org/>
- Liberate MKE in Wisconsin - <https://www.liberatemke.com/>

2. Reinforcing in-group norms of Non-violence.

Support the leadership of diverse allies and influencers, such faith leaders, veterans, business leaders, and state and local government officials who can speak out against violence and have influence within their networks. Supporting a constellation of actors to reinforce norms of non-violence, in concert with supporting communities under siege, can decrease the social acceptability of violence that's being provoked and incited.

Sample Grants Include:

- Millions of Conversations in Tennessee - <https://millionsofconversations.com>
- Faith in Public Life with chapters focused in Ohio, Georgia, Florida, and North Carolina - <https://www.faithinpubliclife.org/>
- Business Forward Foundation - <https://www.businessfwd.org/issue/diversity-inclusion/>

3. Media coverage that pacifies instead of paralyzes.

It's critical for journalists and media organizations to be aware of the risk factors for accelerating political violence. Support trainings on best practices for reporting on polarization that doesn't exacerbate divisions, on election mis/disinformation, and on actors and events that are intentionally stoking violence (e.g. QAnon and militia members).

Sample Grants Include:

- Resolve Philly Reframe Project in Pennsylvania - <https://resolvephilly.org/reframe/>
- Institute for Social Policy and Understanding Covering American Muslims Training - <https://www.ispu.org/covering-american-muslims/>
- Press On which works across the South - <https://www.presson.media/freedomways/>

4. Laying out the groundwork for coordinated responses.

Supporting and strengthening early warning and response systems across the United States is critical. This is how existing local networks of leaders and communities facing threats can be connected with national partners, and how national partners can help strengthen their responses.

Sample grants include:

- Bridging Divides Initiative - is working with the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) on a US Crisis Monitor to provide real-time data and analysis on demonstrations and political violence - <https://bridgingdivides.princeton.edu/>
- Institute for Constitutional Advocacy and Protection – has developed [fact sheets](#) for all 50 states about unlawful militia activity at the polls - <https://www.law.georgetown.edu/icap/>
- More in Common - that launched [Democracy for President](#) to help communities bolster confidence in the integrity of the 2020 election - <https://www.moreincommon.com/where-we-work/more-in-common-us/>
- Over Zero – that launched a toolkit for civil society partners who are already thinking about preventing political violence and working with local city leaders around the country - <https://projectoverzero.org/>

This guidance is based on the report “[Building U.S. Resilience to Political Violence: A \(Globally-Informed\) Framework for Analysis and Action](#)” by Dr. Nichole Argo Ben Itzhak, Rachel Brown, Heather Hurlburt, Laura Livingston, and Samantha Owens.

For more information or discuss opportunities to support work like this nationally or in your region contact Nadia Firozvi (nfirozvi@democracyfund.org) or Josh Stearns (jstearns@democracyfund.org)