

# Trauma-Informed and Restorative Justice-Informed Approach to the Global Rise of Far-Right Extremism: A Case Study on the United States

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***Abstract:** Americans and citizens of ineffective countries have increasingly felt abandoned by their governments, turning to extremist groups for a sense of community, power, and dignity. This article will draw from global deradicalization and reintegration case studies as well as restorative justice practices, to develop an in-depth case study examining the rise of Far-Right extremism in the United States and argue for the need for a trauma-informed and restorative-justice informed approach. This article argues that we should not assume that the United States is immune from the problems that have affected communities abroad and encourages a whole-of-society approach to (trauma-informed) deradicalization of American Far-Right extremists willing to achieve their goals through violence or non-democratic means. Additionally, this article recommends prioritizing a restorative/ rehabilitative approach instead of a punitive approach to extremists both in the United States and worldwide because imprisonment does not heal societies or deal with extremism's root causes. A restorative justice approach through local reconciliation commissions can begin the process of national and individual healing. While this article focuses specifically on American Far-Right extremists, many of the strategies have been used for Far-Right extremists and white supremacists globally and can continue to apply to other global contexts.*

***Keywords:** Far-Right Extremism, Deradicalization, Disengagement, Rehabilitation, Reintegration, Trauma-Informed Care, Reconciliation, Restorative Justice*

## 1. Introduction

In 2021, Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) Director Christopher Wray pointed out that the number of Far-Right extremists' have tripled since 2017, alongside the growth of the Make America Great Again (MAGA) cause. The number of Far-Right extremists has also grown exponentially globally.<sup>1</sup> The shift in political identity manifesting in the growth of the National

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Rally in France and the Sweden Democrats, the January 6<sup>th</sup> coup, and the election of the Brothers of Italy political party, results from many grievances based on real or perceived societal trends. Many White Americans and Europeans feel increasingly abandoned by the government, view job opportunities as dwindling for their identity group, and fear losing racial and social status.<sup>2</sup> Simultaneously, the wide dissemination of extremist content on the Internet, and its consequent echo chambers, have resulted in an increase in numbers of Far-Right extremists.<sup>3</sup> Far-Right extremist groups, like other radical political movements, provide a sense of community, power, and a comprehensive counter-culture in the face of perceived exclusion.<sup>4</sup> When people feel excluded and feel like their dignity is not being recognized, they often feel more connected to their in-group and what anthropologist Scott Atran and political scientist Robert Axelrod call “sacred values.”<sup>5</sup> These are core values that inspire high willingness to die in their defense when violated.<sup>6</sup>

The importance of sacred values shows that the lenses of trauma and psychology prove useful to help understand the ‘us-vs-them’ worldview that characterizes extremism. For example, studies show that many Far-Right extremists exhibit signs of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).<sup>7</sup> Thus, trauma-informed care is critical to confronting Far-Right extremism and bridging

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<sup>1</sup> Anne Speckhard and Molly Ellenberg, “White Supremacists Speak: Recruitment, Radicalization & Experiences of Engaging and Disengaging from Hate Groups,” *International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism* (2021): 2.

<sup>2</sup> Dalibor Rohac, Liz Kennedy, and Vikram Singh, “Drivers of Authoritarian Populism in the United States,” *Center for American Progress and American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research* (2018): 4-13.

<sup>3</sup> Marc Sageman, “How People Become Terrorists,” New America Foundation, March 1, 2017, YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AsFolJd-n08&t=3875s>.

<sup>4</sup> Speckhard and Ellenberg, 21.

<sup>5</sup> Nafees Hamid, “I Studied the Brains of Potential Terrorists. Here's What I Learned. | NYT Opinion,” New York Times, March 3, 2020, YouTube video, 5:34, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FDAq69OEP44>.

<sup>6</sup> Scott Atran, “Sacred Values,” Fuuse, June 29, 2018, YouTube video, 6:26, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hWLUbHPggKI&t=220s>; Clara Pretus et al., “Neural and Behavioral Correlates of Sacred Values and Vulnerability to Violent Extremism,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 9 (2018): 1. These values even operate on different neural networks from standard cognition, resulting in inhibited logic on these issues which can even lead to extremism

<sup>7</sup> “Trainings 1 and 2,” *International Center for Religion and Diplomacy* (2021): 28.

the gaps between divergent elements of polarized societies. Widespread training in trauma-informed care principles, including for government and non-profit workers, mental health professionals, and family and friends of extremists, can potentially create a trauma-informed society where everyone is aware of how trauma and exclusion can lead to extremism if left untreated.

The main argument of this policy paper is that the United States needs to draw from global counterterrorism, trauma-informed care, and restorative justice practices to decrease Far-Right extremism. We should not assume that the United States is immune from the problems that have affected communities abroad. The habitual temptation of most governments is to deal with crimes, such as extremism, through retributive justice by imprisoning extremists and not dealing with extremism's underlying grievances. However, societies with a large Far-Right presence, including the United States, should not focus on imprisoning everyone with different views because, as political scientist Dr. Kelebogile Zvobgo states: "this process doesn't transform societies."<sup>8</sup> We know from experiences countering Islamist terrorism, for instance, that recidivism rates are lowest for jihadists and inmates who return home with employment, housing, and family connections; thus, we should be willing to recognize those same needs for Far-Right extremists through social and economic reintegration instead of opt for incarceration.<sup>9</sup> To transform societies and their grievances, we should engage with this community based on good faith, especially because the recidivism rate among extremists is incredibly low.<sup>10</sup> For

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<sup>8</sup> Sarah Souli, "Does America Need a Truth and Reconciliation Commission?" Politico, August 16, 2020, <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/08/16/does-america-need-a-truth-and-reconciliation-commission-395332>.

<sup>9</sup> Ryan Shanahan and Sandra Villalobos Agudelo, "The family and recidivism," American Jails, American Jail Association, September-October 2012, <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/scans/vera/the-family-and-recidivism.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> "Trainings 1 and 2," 11.

example, this article recommends implementing local reconciliation commissions based on previous international restorative justice dialogues.

This article will apply global lessons from deradicalization, trauma-informed care, and restorative justice to inform a case study on Far-Right extremists willing to engage in violence or non-democratic means in the United States. It will encourage a whole-of-society approach to (trauma-informed) deradicalization of American Far-Right extremists willing to achieve their goals through violence or non-democratic means. The research subjects will be those deemed to be Far-Right terrorists (those who have moved through the phases of radicalization, from fence-sitters to supporters, and have used or are likely to use violence or other non-democratic means).<sup>11</sup> While this article focuses specifically on American Far-Right extremists, it has larger implications for moderating white supremacists and the Far-Right globally. Additionally, these lessons could also be applied to Far-Left extremism worldwide, but this article focuses on the Far-Right extremism due to its' growing relevance in recent years in the United States.

This policy paper builds on our understanding of the relationship between trauma-informed care, deradicalization and reintegration. Each section will begin with global lessons in global literature and practices while contextualizing to the United States. The sources range from the realm of (political) psychology and sociology, to peacebuilding, to violent extremism literature, as well as global and American case studies. Two of the primary sources will also be trauma-informed care training manuals and workshops developed by myself and Dr. Juncal Fernandez-Garayzabal among other team members while working at the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy (ICRD). Interviews have been conducted with experts such as Dr. Fernandez-Garayzabal from ICRD, Executive Director of the non-governmental organization

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 10.

(NGO) Parallel Networks (PN), and Program Manager at the Counter Extremism Project (CEP); Chris Bosley, Director of the United States Institute of Peace Violent Extremism Team; Emma Jouenne, Director of Parents for Peace, and two disengaged Far-Right extremists: Ryan LoRee and Matt Heimbach.

## **2. Far-Right Extremism and the (de-)Radicalization Process**

### **a. Defining Far-Right Extremism globally and in the United States**

One global definition of extremism is an outlet or reflection of anger and resentment, which can have the psychosocial pull of addiction.<sup>12</sup> The Southern Poverty Law Center defines the Far-Right as:

*A set of far-right ideologies, groups and individuals whose core belief is that ‘white identity’ is under attack by ‘multicultural forces’ using ‘political correctness’ and ‘social justice’ to undermine white people and their civilization. Characterized by a heavy use of social media and online memes, Alt-Righters eschew ‘establishment conservatives,’ skew young and embrace white ethnonationalism as a ‘fundamental value.’<sup>13</sup>*

While nearly all Far-Right extremists believe white culture is under threat from immigrants, religious, and racial diversity, sacred values differ slightly between Far-Right groups.

In the American context, the sacred values driving Far-Right extremism, “that ‘white identity’ is under attack by ‘multicultural forces’ using ‘political correctness’ and ‘social justice’ to undermine white people and their civilization,” have gained some saliency among mainstream American conservatism.<sup>14</sup> However, the Far-Right is not a monolith, and there are subtle nuances that need to be understood before any practitioner engages in deradicalization work. Being fiscally or socially conservative is not the same as being Far-Right. Far-Right *non*-extremists also still believe in changing the status quo to recognize white grievances through elections and

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>13</sup> Jesse Morton, “Two Sides of the Same Coin: Far Right and Jihadist Extremism,” Light Upon Light, accessed February 3, 2022, <http://www.lightuponlight.online/two-sides-of-the-same-coin/>.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Dr. Juncal Fernandez-Garayzabal (CVE practitioner), in discussion with the author, March 2022.

politics. Far-Right extremists pose a different problem; they believe non-democratic means or violence are the only paths toward systemic change.<sup>15</sup> Yet, just how after 9/11 all Muslims were deemed to be jihadists, there is a general tendency to deem all conservatives or all Trump supporters as extremists. That only risks radicalizing people further and pushing people further down the "extremist continuum" - thus increasing the risks of radicalization and violence.<sup>16</sup>

### **b. The Radicalization Process**

Radicalization can be described as “a process of personal change that involves not just a change in worldview but also a change in emotions.”<sup>17</sup> Individuals who search for belonging, affiliation, self-esteem, dignity, meaning, and/or purpose become exposed to initial influencers such as friends, family, recruiters, and extremist material.<sup>18</sup> Extremist material that seems to provide answers to all of an individuals’ questions and grievances results in an epiphany, causing individuals to reassess their identity.<sup>19</sup> This epiphany, often called a “cognitive opening,” results in first perceptible changes, then behavioral adjustments, culminating into a total identity transformation.<sup>20</sup> Upon total identity transformation, Far-Right networks demand complete behavioral and ideological loyalty from their members, isolating them from the out-group and any dissenting opinions, developing a resentment echo chamber.<sup>21</sup>

Radicalization is a highly social phenomenon.<sup>22</sup> Hence, confronting radicalization requires analyzing both individual factors and community grievances because, as mentioned

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> “Trainings 1 and 2,” 6.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 10-12.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>20</sup> Pete Simi et al., “Addicted to Hate: Identity Residual among Former White Supremacists.” *American Sociological Review* 82, no. 6 (2017): 1175.

<sup>21</sup> Speckhard and Ellenberg, 4.

<sup>22</sup> Michael Jensen and Gary LaFree, “Empirical Assessment of Domestic Radicalization (EADR),” National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, Dec. 2016, <https://www.start.umd.edu/research-projects/empirical-assessment-domestic-radicalization->



Community grievances leading to extremism include numerous political, economic, and social factors which Far-Right propagandists, including politicians, have translated into “chosen traumas” that are used to rally Far-Right extremists against minority groups.<sup>31</sup> A chosen trauma refers to perceived or real injustices experienced by an identity group (ranging from genocide to socioeconomic and political disenfranchisement of a minority by a government) that are often manipulated or politicized by government or extremist actors.<sup>32</sup> Chosen traumas for American Far-Right extremists include the Confederacy’s loss of the Civil War as well as the ongoing struggles of the outsourcing of jobs, fear of losing status, the opioid epidemic, and increasing polarized rhetoric which entails that white people and Republicans are villains for the legacy of American slavery and institutional racism. This rhetoric results in an “entitlement ideology” that white people are being unfairly prosecuted.<sup>33</sup> To decrease chosen traumas’ impacts and reverse the radicalization process, it is necessary for Far-Right extremists to undergo disengagement and deradicalization.

### **c. Definitions of Disengagement and Deradicalization**

The disengagement and deradicalization process depends on the individual, but these definitions are generally consistent worldwide. Disengagement can be defined as behavioral changes, such as cutting ties with a group but not necessarily abandoning the ideology.<sup>34</sup> There are many reasons why individuals disengage, such as unmet expectations, disillusionment with terrorist groups’ strategy, actions, or personnel, the inability to cope with the physiological/psychological effects of violence, burnout, positive interactions with moderates, desire to marry,

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<sup>31</sup> Vamik Volkan, “Large-Group Identity, Who Are We Now? Leader-Follower Relationships and Societal-Political Divisions,” *The American Journal of Psychoanalysis* 79 (2019): 143.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 143.

<sup>33</sup> I am not referring to chosen trauma in the same sense as Volkan who would see these events as distinguished between chosen traumas and undiagnosed traumas.

<sup>34</sup> Speckhard and Ellenberg, 9.

amnesty, etc.<sup>35</sup> These factors should be taken into account in disengagement and deradicalization efforts.

Leaving extremist groups has also been equated to quitting drugs because, like with substance abuse, people who fail to find a new sense of purpose and a new community to adhere to return to anti-democratic options.<sup>36</sup> Preventing a “relapse” requires looking at the numerous push factors out of prosocial democratic engagement and pull factors into radicalization. The push factors include poverty, poor civic engagement, unemployment, historical injustices, lack of critical thinking skills, and police profiling.<sup>37</sup> In contrast, radicalization’s pull factors include hero worship of extremist leaders, ideological manipulation by recruiters, and, most importantly, promises of belonging and family.<sup>38</sup> Failing to address individual and community needs for those leaving extremist groups, such as unemployment or feelings of loneliness and isolation puts the extremist in a situation similar to the one that caused their radicalization in the first place. For disengagement to be effective and long-term, extremists need to deradicalize (experience cognitive change). Thus, programming must ideally mirror extremist tactics and recreate the conditions that provide the same meaning, significance, and purpose - which is what ultimately causes people to deradicalize.<sup>39</sup> To substitute the previous social networks of extremist groups, effective reintegration and rehabilitation into a community are essential.

#### **d. Definitions of Rehabilitation and Reintegration**

Rehabilitation can be defined as a purposeful, planned intervention, which aims to recreate meaning, significance, and purpose in the lives of extremists to allow individuals to exist

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<sup>35</sup> “Trainings 1 and 2,” 19.

<sup>36</sup> Beth Collinson and David Best, “Promoting Recovery from Substance Misuse through Engagement with Community Assets: Asset Based Community Engagement,” *Substance Abuse: Research and Treatment* 13 (2019): 1; Pete Simi, Kathleen Blee, et al, 1167.

<sup>37</sup> “Trainings 1 and 2,” 8.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

in society socially, psychologically, and economically without resorting to non-democratic means.<sup>40</sup> Meaning, significance, and purpose are also often culturally contextual and may differ based on the country. Rehabilitation is often combined with reintegration, which is defined “as a safe transition to the community, by which the individual proceeds to live a law-abiding life following his or her release.”<sup>41</sup> While most projects focus disproportionately on disengagement and deradicalization, it is necessary to spend significant time on reintegration and rehabilitation.<sup>42</sup> Also, as mentioned earlier, rehabilitation is a critical component of this article’s approach because it moves away from the punitive focus of terrorism. Because radicalization is a social phenomenon, the social components of reverting the engagement and radicalization process through reintegration and rehabilitation often requires several years to complete.<sup>43</sup> Reintegration and rehabilitation often takes longer as well in countries with low social capital, such as the United States, so planning for the disengagement to rehabilitation process should take this into account.<sup>44</sup>

The process to reintegration and rehabilitation is multi-layered, so the following section will discuss how psychosocial support, social reintegration, and economic reintegration all track well with creating new prosocial forms of meaning and identity. Furthermore, disengagement, deradicalization, reintegration, and rehabilitation will henceforth be referred to as DDRR.

### **3. The Nexus of Trauma-Informed Care and DDRR**

#### **a. Definitions of Trauma and Trauma-Informed Care**

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 18-19.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>42</sup> Altier.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> “Trainings 1 and 2,” 10.

Trauma can be defined as a conscious or unconscious membrane to view the past or a significant response to an emotional event experienced.<sup>45</sup> A trauma-informed approach shifts the perspective away from “what’s wrong with you” to “what happened to you.”<sup>46</sup> It is a lens that tracks well with the current understanding of the complexities of (de)radicalization, as it seeks to include structural, and inter, and intra-personal factors.<sup>47</sup> Trauma-informed approaches to extremism have been used worldwide from the Maldives to Central Asia, and this section will continue to follow the model established in the last section to contextualize these concepts for American Far-Right extremists.

## **b. A Trauma-Informed Approach to DDDR**

### **i. Establishing the Conditions for Reintegration**

The first step of understanding the complexities of (de)radicalization through a trauma-informed approach is taking into consideration *who* is reintegrating into *what* and *where*. Who meaning: what individual? The ‘what’ being their circumstances and the situations that led them to engage in extremism in the first place. It also considers why they are leaving.<sup>48</sup> In the case of the Far-Right, the answers to who and why are above. However, the question of where individuals are reintegrating into is often more complicated. When possible, trauma-informed practitioners recommend establishing National Reintegration Centers to offer a transitional space before reentering society, such as the National Reintegration Center in the Maldives.<sup>49</sup> In contrast, the United States has neither formal, in-prison recidivism reduction programs, nor a fully-realized post-release initiative for re-entry and reintegration of terrorism-related

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<sup>45</sup> Oliver Mains, “Psychology and Politics of Trauma and Victimhood,” *INAF 631: Politics of Resentment* (Georgetown University Lecture, January 26, 2022).

<sup>46</sup> “Trainings 1 and 2,” 31.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 24.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 20.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Dr. Juncal Fernandez-Garayzabal.

offenders.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) suggested adopting a whole-of-society approach in the United States in 2019 by working with domestic and foreign governments, communities, mental health professionals, and NGOs to reduce extremist recidivism both in prisons and in communities.<sup>51</sup> DHS subsequently funded the non-profits PN and CEP to develop Alternative Pathways, a training program that guarantees every actor tasked with supervising extremist offenders in-prison in the United States has evidence-based knowledge to support their work.<sup>52</sup> DHS also funded PN and CEP's Radicalization, Rehabilitation, Reintegration, and Recidivism (4R) Network to facilitate a whole-of-society approach for extremism-related offenders coming back to the community to have post-release support.<sup>53</sup> However, because Alternative Pathways and 4R exist only in certain prisons and communities, this policy paper will suggest expanding the training throughout the United States, especially those communities prone to extremism which are not being reached.

## **ii. Physical, Mental, and Psychosocial Support**

Trauma-informed care also requires developing psychosocial support mechanisms for extremists to ensure continued trust and decrease the isolation that was key in the radicalization process.<sup>54</sup> The ICRD intervention Dr. Fernandez-Garayzabal and I worked on with Islamic State Maldivian foreign fighters focused heavily on physical, mental, and psychological levels of trauma. For example, we encouraged government employees and social workers in the Maldives

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<sup>50</sup> Jesse Morton and Mitchell D. Silber, "When Terrorists Come Home: The Need for Rehabilitating and Reintegrating America's Convicted Jihadists," Counter Extremism Project, Counter Extremism Project, December 6, 2018, [https://www.counterextremism.com/sites/default/files/CEP%20Report\\_When%20Terrorists%20Come%20Home\\_120618.pdf](https://www.counterextremism.com/sites/default/files/CEP%20Report_When%20Terrorists%20Come%20Home_120618.pdf).

<sup>51</sup> Department of Homeland Security, "Department of Homeland Security Strategic Framework for Countering Terrorism and Targeted Violence," *U.S. Department of Homeland Security*, September 2019, 1, 6, [https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/19\\_0920\\_plcy\\_strategic-framework-countering-terrorism-targeted-violence.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/19_0920_plcy_strategic-framework-countering-terrorism-targeted-violence.pdf).

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Dr. Juncal Fernandez-Garayzabal.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> "Trainings 1 and 2," 7.

to look at the impact of trauma on the cognitive level (memory, concentration, learning, and focus), the physical level (possible heart disease, obesity, diabetes, addiction, etc.), the emotional level (ability to self-soothe), the worldview, and trauma impacts the traumatized person's relationship with their friends, family, and their community. Through a train the trainer model, the first people who received these trainings in the Maldives would receive the training documents and pass on the principles of trauma-informed care to anyone interacting with extremists, especially families, policymakers, and service providers.

The physical, mental, and psychosocial effects of trauma should be considered in every intervention with traumatized populations, especially extremists, and there is some existing work on this topic already with NGOs and American Far-Right extremists. Currently, organizations like PN and Parents for Peace offer psychosocial support by operating a hotline for extremists whom they refer, as well as their families, to clinician experts on deradicalization and trauma-informed therapy. These clinician experts provide them a toolbox of resources and activities to deal with their trauma.<sup>55</sup> As applied in the Maldives above, it is further recommended that PN, CEP, and Parents for Peace, use their transdisciplinary team of mental health and countering violent extremism (CVE) practitioners to administer training on trauma-informed care to anyone interacting with extremists, especially families, policymakers, and service providers who are currently not beneficiaries of the 4R network. This would help these individuals to better understand how trauma can result in radicalization, how their roles can inhibit or promote deradicalization, how can and why should they promote a rehabilitative approach rather than a

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<sup>55</sup> Interview with Emma Jouenne (Program Director at Parents for Peace), in discussion with the author, April 2022.

retributive approach, and the impact of deep societal distrust towards Far-Right extremist groups including their own.<sup>56</sup>

After recognizing their own biases, PN, CEP, and Beyond Conflict should carry out narrative therapies or story-editing techniques and utilize asset-based interventions to return ownership and empowerment to extremists. Beyond Conflict, an NGO that focuses on psychosocial and scientific approaches to extremism and in the humanitarian sphere, has significant experience in narrative therapy globally using their Field Guide for Barefoot Psychology,<sup>57</sup> as do PN and CEP, so they could lead the effort on narrative therapies for Far-Right extremists. Asset-based interventions also help promote ownership by focusing on former extremists' strengths rather than their deficits, recognizing underlying individual risk factors for potential re-mobilization or recidivism and diminishing societal stigmatization.<sup>58</sup>

To deal with the shortage of psychologists, psychotherapists, and social workers with expertise in this milieu, and the prevalence of stigma even among mental health staff, PN and CEP's 4R network, Parents for Peace, Beyond Conflict, and their social worker and government partners will ensure that former extremists receive individualized one-on-one mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services that deal with individual needs.<sup>59</sup> Although there may not be sufficient staff, even across the many organizations mentioned in this article, a vital principle of trauma-informed care is that one doesn't need to be a therapist to be therapeutic.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> However, choosing non-American practitioners may help to improve the neutrality of the project as they are not personally impacted by American societal divisions.

<sup>57</sup> "The Field Guide for Barefoot Psychology," Beyond Conflict, Beyond Conflict, accessed March 29, 2021, <https://beyondconflictint.org/what-we-do/curent-intitatives/migrant-and-refugee-crisis/the-field-guide-for-barefoot-psychologists/>.

<sup>58</sup> "Comparison Between Asset and Deficit Based Approaches," University of Memphis, University of Memphis, accessed March 4, 2022, <https://www.memphis.edu/ess/module4/page3.php>.

<sup>59</sup> "TOC Final PowerPoint," *International Center for Religion and Diplomacy* (2021).

<sup>60</sup> "Trainings 1 and 2," 55.

Therefore, training those working with extremists, and ultimately the larger society, can result in healing conversations in social, professional, and administrative interactions.

Recommendations for psychosocial support include:

- **Provide individual, culturally sensitive services for one-on-one care, tailored to specific needs, interests, and risk and protective factors, that tackle physical health concerns and facilitate trauma-informed mental health care.**

Cultural sensitivity helps programs move past stereotypes and biases by recognizing how people's specific needs are influenced by their gender, cultural background, or both, and ensures equal access to services.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, because extremist groups already tailor themselves to people's individual needs to provide a holistic counter-cultural worldview, deradicalization efforts need to do the same. PN, CEP, and Parents for Peace can tailor the interventions to the needs and radicalization cycle of each individual based on their context and existing resources. These individual services should be based on empowerment and asset-based approaches to avoid disempowerment and the retraumatization that could result in recidivism.

- **Educate Far-Right extremists and families, as well as policymakers, social workers, parole officers, and others who work with extremists, on trauma-informed care.** To ensure a societal impact broadening the understanding of trauma and radicalization nationally, local, state, and national governments, as well as civil society groups, should hire groups like PN, CEP, and Parents for Peace to train their workers who engage with extremists. This would allow their

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 34.

workers to prevent the increased spread of extremism and retraumatization and work towards a whole-of-society approach.

- **Offer narrative therapies for Far-Right extremists and focus on prosocial counter-narratives as alternatives to extremism.** Retelling life stories within a therapeutic community treatment environment can help Far-Right extremists reconstruct their identities outside of an extremist paradigm, develop a new sense of self by reinterpreting past actions and provide credible reasons for deradicalization.<sup>62</sup> Narrative therapies can help create feelings of ownership and control over lives outside of the totalization of extremism. Beyond Conflict and PN can integrate Far-Right extremists into their existing humanitarian projects with the consent of other members.
- **Assess experiences of discrimination, or perceived or internalized stigma, and of extremists' attitudes and/or practices towards citizenry.** During the initial stages of risk and needs assessments, Parents for Peace's and PN's local social workers and psychologists should assess the level of discrimination to establish the potential challenges that may be associated with social reintegration.

### iii. Social Reintegration

Improving Far-Right extremists' feelings of meaning, dignity, purpose, and empowerment is contingent upon social reintegration, defined as a local open-ended process to seek acceptance by family, peers, and neighbors.<sup>63</sup> Global trauma-informed studies show that the

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<sup>62</sup> A. D. Irving, "Life story narratives of recovery from dependent drug and alcohol use: a tool for identity reconstruction within a therapeutic community," *Therapeutic Communities: The International Journal of Therapeutic Communities* 32, no. 3 (2011): 185.

<sup>63</sup> Walt Kilroy and Helen SA Basini, "Social Capital Made Explicit: The Role of Norms, Networks, and Trust in Reintegrating Ex-Combatants and Peacebuilding in Liberia," *International Peacekeeping* 25, no. 3 (2018): 367.

effective processing and transitioning of traumatic circumstances is highly dependent on whether those traumatized, especially extremists and inmates at-large, held strong social bonds to family, friends, or community organizations as these individuals are often the most likely to help deal with their most immediate concerns, including housing, financial assistance and/or securing employment, transportation needs, and child-rearing responsibilities.<sup>64</sup> Although there have not previously been comprehensive social reintegration studies for Far-Right extremists, it is expected that Far-Right extremists also would rely on these bonds. When talking about social reintegration, however, it is also essential to talk about stigma. Creating an awareness of stigma and working to transform this stigma plays a necessary role in creating a rehabilitative daily environment. Practitioners need to take into consideration the acceptance that Far-Right extremists may or may not have from friends, families, and their communities because that will impact the success of their rehabilitation. Furthermore, because they have even more stigma than other inmates, extremists may not even be able to rely on their family and friends.

Social reintegration for Far-Right extremists should ensure family inclusion, following an expansive definition of the family to recognize the importance of informal social attachments and controls such as extended family, peer, and interrelated community influences. These informal relationships provide the best opportunities for pro-social and democratic engagement.<sup>65</sup> For example, the German Institute of Radicalization and De-Radicalization

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<sup>64</sup> Rebecca L. Naser and Christy A. Visher, "Family Members' Experiences with Incarceration and Reentry," *Western Criminology Review* 7, no. 2 (2006): 21.

<sup>65</sup> Hirschi's social control theory describes how social norms promoted by a definition of family that also includes the community, and society in general, inhibit youth from engaging in violence and can buffer the increased risk for violence that is associated with trauma and severe adversity. When an individual's family and social bonds are strong, so is their motivation to abide by social norms and eschew violence. See: B. Heidi Ellis et al., "Trauma and Openness to Legal and Illegal Activism among Somali Refugees," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 27, No. 05, (2014): 857-883, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2013.867849>.

Studies has offered phonline programs for the families of both neo-Nazi groups and Islamist groups to learn how to help their children deradicalize and reintegrate.<sup>66</sup>

The United States can also learn from the example of Pakistan's Sabaoon Center for Rehabilitation and the Monitoring Centre (SWaT), which provided a safe space and social support to reintegrate males from the extremist group Tehrik-e-Taliban from 2009-2017.<sup>67</sup> During this period, 192 out of 200 reintegrations were successful, meaning that SWaT supported former violent extremists in rebuilding their identities and helped them reintegrate into society.<sup>68</sup> Thus, state partners and funders such as DHS or the Department of Defense (DoD) should offer funding, so the United States can aim in the long-term to offer a transitional space for Far-Right extremists to provide psychosocial support before extremists reintegrate into society.

In the United States, there are already a few groups involved in social reintegration, some which include formal family networks but rarely informal networks. Many of these programs also build off phone applications like those of the German Institute on Radicalized and De-Radicalization Studies. As mentioned above, PN is very involved in reintegration and has supported the development of a 12-step program phone application at Boston University for people deradicalizing from extremism based off of the alcohol addiction model, connecting deradicalizing extremists and their families with sponsors.<sup>69</sup> PN also has a 24/7 hotline, called the SHIFT-Hate Helpline, for extremists of all types to reach out to former extremists and interventionists to provide a sense of meaning, purpose, and control in vulnerable moments when

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<sup>66</sup> Audie Cornish and Daniel Koehler, "German Programs Helps Families De-Radicalize Members Prone to Extremism," All Things Considered, NPR, March 13, 2015, <https://www.npr.org/2015/03/13/392845800/german-program-helps-families-de-radicalize-members-prone-to-extremism>.

<sup>67</sup> Raafia Rafees Khan and Ferha Peracha, "Deradicalizing, Rehabilitating, and Reintegrating Violent Extremists," *United States Institute of Peace Brief* 238 (2017): 4.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>69</sup> Interview with Ryan LoRee.

people are considering recidivism.<sup>70</sup> Outside of PN, Life After Hate is an NGO committed to helping people leave the Far-Right that also provides resources for their (formal) family members.<sup>71</sup> Life After Hate uses a multidisciplinary team model combining former Far-Right extremists and mental health practitioners.<sup>72</sup> Since their founding, they have helped more than 500 individuals and families, including more than 220 in the past year.<sup>73</sup> They also help individuals find a sense of belonging outside of the movement through engaging with identity in positive settings and activities.<sup>74</sup>

Recommendations for social reintegration include:

- **Evaluate each program participant for family counseling appropriateness and engage in family counseling where viable. Formulate awareness of a healthy role for extended family members and how they might provide support or serve as a hindrance to the reintegration process.** When conducting initial risks and needs assessments, include family members, and assess their roles as well. PN can train all formal and informal family members in trauma-informed care, so they may also understand if they played a role in passing down trauma intergenerationally<sup>75</sup> and help to empower their family members going forwards to best prepare for the future.
- **Establish safe and trusted locations with access to MHPSS for Far-Right extremists who cannot enter formal education or employment centers in**

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> “Our Impact,” Life After Hate, Life After Hate, accessed April 1, 2022, <https://www.lifeafterhate.org/our-impact>.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> “2021 Impact Report,” *Life After Hate* (2021): 2.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>75</sup> Intergenerational trauma is the passing down of traumatic memories across generations, either through genetics or socialization of family members. Intergenerational trauma can result in tasks to avenge a past also being passed down among descendants. See: Vamik Volkan, “Trauma, Identity and Search for a Solution in Cyprus,” *Insight Turkey* 10, no. 4 (2008): 102.

**communities where people exiting violent extremist conflict are concentrated.**

With funding from the DoD or DHS, PN can work with halfway houses for formerly incarcerated individuals as these create the pre-conditions to create safe and trusted locations for former Far-Right extremists. PN can also establish connections with members of trauma-informed communities who offer housing as well for people who are not able to return to their previous homes because of high concentration of extremist belief or if they have no family relations, among other reasons. These trusted locations or pre-release centers can also serve as locations for people to receive documentation for work and a photo ID, job assistance, help applying for Medicaid, mental health assessment and connections with clinics, connections to representatives from community-based programs, and help involving their family, thus also collaborating to achieve economic reintegration.<sup>76</sup>

- **Implement community-based projects to engage Far-Right extremists with their community.** Community-based projects promote personal investment on behalf of or from extremists, which can foster the creation of a sense of meaning, significance, and purpose that fills the gap offered by radical engagement. Community projects also build positive connections with other community members.<sup>77</sup> These projects can also tie into the reconciliation projects in Section 3.

**iv. Economic Reintegration**

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<sup>76</sup>Marta Nelson, Perry Deess, et al., "The First Month Out: Post-incarceration Experiences in New York City," *Federal Sentencing Reporter* 24, no. 1 (2011): 35.

<sup>77</sup> "Trainings 1 and 2," 21.

Another way of creating meaning and purpose is through economic reintegration of Far-Right extremists. One of the driving factors for recidivism among global extremists, which includes political militants, is the lack of viable alternative sources of income.<sup>78</sup> In the Maldives, the whole-of-society approach built relationships with possible government, private sector, and civil society partners who could potentially offer employment or training in the future. PN and CEP should also pull from the whole-of-society approach implemented in the 4R Network to reach out to their private and public sector partners who can help provide vocational and employment services. Offering economic alternatives to extremism with trusted partners who work through their stigma also offers a chance to re-engage meaningfully within society and organizations, encouraging rehabilitation rather than punishing them by preventing them from ever getting a job again.

Recommendations for economic reintegration include:

- **Coordinate with colleges, universities, government agencies, hospitals, small businesses, vocational & educational programs, the private sector, etc. to establish the market needs and opportunities for vocational training. Then provide skill building based on individualized plans for the market and based on available skills of extremists.** Through the media plan detailed below, PN and CEP should use their connections with companies and organizations listed above and establish where organizations' greatest needs are and what types of qualifications are necessary for these positions. Individualized plans for the market should include, where appropriate, offering remedial education programs and schools to enable those extremists who require it to enter the education

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<sup>78</sup> "TOC Final PowerPoint."

system. PN and CEP, with their partners, should also assess the possibility for scholarships to attend schools.

- **Build a database of potential educational & employment opportunities.** PN and CEP should use the companies in their 4R Network to create a database of jobs. The companies can then connect with probation officers within the network to learn about opportunities for employment or training open to Far-Right extremists working to disengage and reintegrate.
- **Develop realistic vocational plans (for both extremists and/or adult family members) with career counselors.** PN and CEP should allocate some of their funding to paying career counselors involved in the 4R network to help create individualized employment plans for Far-Right extremists. Thus, extremists can see the economic alternatives to disengagement despite societal stigma.

Furthermore, trauma-informed care, especially social and economic reintegration, relies on the coordination with, and healing of, the community, so reconciliation is also necessary.

#### **4. Reconciliation and Political Reintegration**

As many grievances causing extremism and feelings of social and economic exclusion relate to state dysfunction, it is essential to prioritize national-driven reconciliation and extremist political reintegration.<sup>79</sup> Reconciliation processes, which have occurred worldwide since the 1980s, require acknowledging and atoning for wrongs, asking for victims' forgiveness while

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<sup>79</sup> "A Trauma-Informed Approach to Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism," Parallel Network, February 3, 2020, YouTube video, 2:03:47, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jN9wKZe588Q&t=2s>.

resolving never to repeat the wrongs, and working to restore their victims to full humanity as fellow citizens.<sup>80</sup>

Hence, this article recommends setting up local reconciliation commissions to begin this process in America. In the case of the United States, wrongs refer to those of the politicians who perpetuate polarization and of Far-Right extremists. Politicians' wrongs range from propping up the bank industry in 2008-2009 instead of supporting lower-income individuals, outsourcing and automating traditionally working-class white jobs, not working to solve the opioid crisis or worsening political unresponsiveness. These commissions will likely focus on the individual politicians' roles in the grievances brought up by Far-Right extremist participants. Far-Right extremist wrongs include participating in the January 6th attacks, murders, lynching, hate speech, perpetuating structural systems of oppression for queer people, Jews, people of color, and more. These commissions cannot overcome all wrongs, as these programs exist on a scale larger than just a few individuals, but reconciliation can open the space for dialogue and past political unresponsiveness and violence to begin making change. Reconciliation can help to expose the different sides of each story and possibly vow nonrecurrence or nonjudicial retribution across all parties, serving as well as a measure of accountability and the foundation for rule of law.<sup>81</sup> Hence, reconciliation can also expose the stories beyond the binary of just Far-Right extremists as perpetrators and people of color as victims, but it also needs to recognize there are legitimate Far-Right grievances that deserve societal and political attention and that politicians have also been perpetrators.

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<sup>80</sup> Olufemi Taiwo, "The Best Way to Respond to Our History of Racism? A Truth and Reconciliation Commission." *The Washington Post*, June 30, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/06/30/best-way-respond-our-history-racism-truth-reconciliation-commission/>.

<sup>81</sup> Robert M. Sapolsky, *Behave: The biology of humans at our best and worst* (New York: Penguin, 2017): 639.

However, reconciliation is admittedly hard because of the lack of political will, incentives, and buy-in from politicians at the national level. This section will analyze both how to empower moderate voices within radicalized communities (building ‘minority influence’) and trust, and how to engage in reconciliation. Although there are no comprehensive solutions, there are principles that can make political reintegration and reconciliation between Far-Right extremists, moderate communities, including victims of extremism, and politicians who have perpetrated Far-Right grievances more likely.<sup>82</sup>

#### **a) Media Strategy to Create Political Reintegration and Political Will**

To implement political reintegration and reconciliation, the crucial ingredients necessary are political will and funding to ensure that the project will be carried to fruition, which can best be acquired through a media strategy. First, building political will requires establishing a ripe moment for action where parties perceive themselves to be in a mutually hurting stalemate, which forces them to engage the resources to adopt a trauma and reconciliation-informed approach to Far-Right extremism.<sup>83</sup> A media strategy can portray the January 6<sup>th</sup> attack (wherein hundreds of Far-Right extremists who supported Trump stormed the U.S. Capitol to prevent the transfer of power to President Biden through democratic means) and the results of the January 6<sup>th</sup> commission as a ripe moment where both Democrats and Republicans are hurting, and the country is turning to violence and other non-democratic means, including against the government, to spark inspiration for this project.<sup>84</sup> Strong political leadership which goes beyond the political polarization and gridlock is necessary to defeat this societal emergency. The media

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<sup>82</sup> Ezra Klein, *Why We're Polarized* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2020) 250.

<sup>83</sup> Valerie Barbara Rosoux, "National identity in France and Germany: From mutual exclusion to negotiation," *International Negotiation* 6, no. 2 (2001): 189.

<sup>84</sup> Participants in the January 6<sup>th</sup> attack would be considered under the category of Far-Right extremists because they are resorting to non-democratic means to deal with their grievances.

strategy could be run by PN which already runs a counter-narrative social media campaign called *Ctrl+Alt+Del-Hate* to recognize extremist grievances and that everyone has a role to play in tackling hate (*Del*).<sup>85</sup> PN can posts throughout traditional media, social media, as well as media utilized most by extremists such as Telegram to bring awareness to the need for reconciliation to the general population as well as possible Far-Right extremist and political participants.

To build political buy-in and funding, the media strategy should also adopt Moscovici's theory of minority influence. The minority influence technique relies on consistent and confident messaging, opportunities to question superficial thinking in discussions, featuring supporters that match our target audience, and celebrating smaller wins.<sup>86</sup> Minority influence theory has influenced the success of many global movements, such as the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. This theory can help to get mainstream conservatives- the larger identity community where the Far-Right is situated, to recognize and respond to Far-Right extremism as a threat to society as a whole and dedicate political and economic resources to the cause.<sup>87</sup> To implement the first principle of consistency, the media strategy should deliver a clear and consistent messaged focused most specifically on how extremism derives from a lack of belonging and purpose associated with trauma as well as feelings of economic and social abandonment to gain support for trauma and reconciliation-informed care rather than a sole imprisonment strategy.<sup>88</sup>

As mentioned above, the second principle of Moscovici's theory is the creation of opportunities to question superficial thinking, and the third principle involves having speakers and supporters from target groups demonstrate the desirability of engagement. In the case of the

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<sup>85</sup> "Ctrl+Alt+Del-Hate," Light Upon Light, Light Upon Light, accessed November 1, 2021, <https://www.lightuponlight.online/ctrl-alt-del-hate>.

<sup>86</sup> "Minority Influence: Four Things Required for Change," Practical Psychology, April 3, 2021, YouTube Video, 7:53, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AfUk2gQYIY>.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

United States, PN would occasionally bring on conservative politicians as well as former extremists to discuss the benefits of restorative justice dialogues targeting other local and national politicians, the general public, and Far-Right extremists.<sup>89</sup> Especially given the polarization of American society with many believing Far-Right (albeit not extremist) values, calling for the healing of the Far-Right will no doubt be very divisive, many will need to engage in discussions. These discussions could take the form of local panels in the areas most targeted by Far-Right extremist plots where reconciliation commissions will later take place. 146 Congressional representatives already support House Concurrent Resolution 19, which urges the establishment of a United States Commission on Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation as well as the 7 Democrats and 2 Republicans on the January 6th commission. These members could be potential speakers or repost messages of the media strategy.<sup>90</sup> Although the House Concurrent Resolution 19 suggests a racial healing Truth and Reconciliation Commission which goes beyond the focus on Far-Right extremists proposed in this article, representatives would likely be a willing audience to support healing Far-Right extremism as well. These Congressional representatives as well as local representatives from within the conservative community and other moderate supportive voices could also hold community roundtables for their constituencies to explore the type of issues that are important on more local or regional levels, and experts on trauma-informed care and reconciliation could attend as well to lend their expertise.

In addition, the social media posts could argue that since extremism is caused by a failure of governance to represent all citizens, it is necessary that Far-Right extremists find representative channels to enter politics beyond extremist groups. Additionally, PN could post

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Souli.

about the need to avoid blaming all Far-Right extremists rather than the actions of a few, punishing extremist language, or using egregious aggression against Far-Right members because it fuels resentment by treating them all as the same.<sup>91</sup> Politicians who support this program could also model this behavior by not blaming whole groups in their own political speech or advocating for imprisonment instead of reconciliation as well. Instead, they could stress the importance of engaging Far-Right challengers in the political arena and listening to grievances to prevent the escalation of the feeling of exclusion. PN can also make posts offering additional information about the importance of psychosocial care and economic, social, and political reintegration without further stigmatizing conservatives of the Far-Right extremist community. This would help people see alternatives to extremist groups within mainstream society who share significant beliefs and can offer an alternative political community. Additionally, local community groups and grassroots organizations advocating with their existing members for the need for reconciliation to tackle extremism could help increase the legitimacy of these types of processes. Although a potential concern could be that portraying Far-Right extremism as a trauma response may seem to dismiss political motivations for non-democratic actions, PN can also host Facebook Lives or other question and answer sessions about how this larger strategy recognizes political grievances and works to solve them. A trauma-focused lens will also be more likely to appeal to skeptical conservatives who are worried that any reconciliation initiative will characterize them as criminals or terrorists.

The fourth and final principle of accepting small wins can be accomplished by starting with small local forums educating on a trauma and reconciliation-informed approach as wins, which may help this approach gain traction within skeptical communities.<sup>92</sup> There have been

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<sup>91</sup> Hamid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

notable small wins through the numerous local Truth and Reconciliation Commissions such as the Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Oakland Restorative Justice for Youth (RJOY), and the Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission.<sup>93</sup> For example, through restorative justice programming, RJOY eliminated violence and expulsions and reduced suspension rates by 87% in West Oakland Middle School, and expanded into three other school sites.<sup>94</sup> The Maryland Truth and Reconciliation Commission has also successfully brought together descendants of slaves and descendants of slaveowners to collect oral histories and confront Maryland's 42 lynchings of Black people by Far-Right extremists since 2020, although the long-term impact between communities has not yet been studied.<sup>95</sup> A media strategy could promote the work of these different organizations and recognize their successes, bringing together the perpetrators and victims of Far-Right extremism to promote additional local commissions as well as a larger-scale nationwide commission.

Recommendations for building political will and trust include:

- **Generate community buy-in and reduce social stigma by engaging community leaders, public dialogue institutions, and media outlets to socialize the need for rehabilitation and reintegration programs to minimize risks.** PN, with guest appearances and reposting from the 146 Congressional representatives who support House Concurrent Resolution 19 and the 9 Congressional representatives on the January 6th committee, could run a media strategy through email and social media to spread the key tenets of a trauma-

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<sup>93</sup> Souli.

<sup>94</sup> Although this is not an example of restorative justice between Far-Right extremists, it shows how restorative justice has proven results in the United States as well. Source: "Our History," RJOY, RJOY, accessed August 1, 2022, <https://rjoyoakland.org/about-us/>.

<sup>95</sup> Ovetta Wiggins, "Landmark Commission Begins Tackling 'Uncomfortable Truth' of Racially Motivated Lynchings In Maryland," Washington Post, September 18, 2020, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/md-politics/maryland-lynching-report/2020/09/18/ba8655e8-f8fa-11ea-a275-1a2c2d36e1f1\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/md-politics/maryland-lynching-report/2020/09/18/ba8655e8-f8fa-11ea-a275-1a2c2d36e1f1_story.html).

informed approach consistently and clearly. The media strategy can also function to seek out additional social and economic partners as well, to widen the whole-of-society network.

**b) Reconciliation (The Tree Model)**

Reconciliation commissions will include moderate, democracy-respecting citizens, politicians, and Far-Right extremists. Because of the deep societal divisions between Far-Right extremists, politicians, and moderate, democracy-respecting citizens, societal healing is also necessary beyond purely individual healing. The moderate, democracy-respecting citizens should be chosen based on a broad representation of society, including key victims of Far-Right extremists. Additionally, further Truth and Reconciliation commissions outside of the scope of this paper should likely occur to specifically address racism and the history of slavery in the United States while this article focuses on reconciliation to heal non-democratic and democratic communities mentioned above. There are several limitations to reconciliation programs, such as there are no clear qualifications for what constitutes a successful dialogue, it can be difficult to attract long-term donors, and working at the grassroots level is not and cannot be a substitute for working at the national decision-making level.<sup>96</sup>

That said, involving Far-Right extremists as well as policymakers in reconciliation processes based on psychoanalyst Vamik Volkan's "Tree Model" can help build accountability, create local ownership, deal with the harm created from radicalization, and start a new process of positive identity formation rather than imprison extremists without challenging the root causes of their extremism.<sup>97</sup> The Tree Model suggests conducting workshops of four-day meetings three

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<sup>96</sup> Margaret LaPre, "Scaling Up Community-Level Dialogue," *Capstone Paper, INAF 631-02: Diplomacy & the Politics of Resentment*, April 3, 2022.

<sup>97</sup> "Trainings 1 and 2," 53.

times per year over periods of at least two to three years with the same (30-40) participants each time in a neutral site as short-term reconciliation projects often lack a long-lasting impact such as the transformation of community relations.<sup>98</sup> The participants should be individuals influential within their respective circles and willing to participate in an unofficial capacity.<sup>99</sup> The Tree Model builds an ecosystem of actors by developing an interdisciplinary facilitator team of neutral psychoanalysts, psychiatrists, former diplomats, historians, and other social and behavioral scientists that can investigate both conscious and unconscious factors resulting in conflict.<sup>100</sup> This model is also based on the same foundation that group identity issues are involved in every aspect of psychological, political, economic, and social, etc. relationships between large groups, so responses must consider all these elements and all types of practitioners must be involved.<sup>101</sup>

The United States can draw from the successful example of the Tree Model implemented in Estonia. Volkan and the Center for the Study of Mind and Human Interaction (CSHMI) implemented the Tree Model between ethnic Estonian nationals and Russian Estonians from 1999-2001 to reduce ethnic tensions. During this period, most of the Estonian nationals could not openly express their angry feelings towards the Russians, still feeling targeted by ethnic Russians as if they were a symbol of the Soviet regime.<sup>102</sup> The CSHMI then proceeded to collect data of Estonian nationals and Russian Estonians through open-ended psychological interviews, formulating a psychopolitical diagnosis, compiling a list of all the conscious and unconscious tensions for each group, and breaking down the tensions through practical projects. Through this

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<sup>98</sup> Vamik Volkan, "The Tree Model: A Comprehensive Psychopolitical Approach to Unofficial Diplomacy and The Reduction of Ethnic Tension," *Mind and Human Interaction* 10 (1999): 22.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*, 24.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*, 67.

process, and especially implementing grassroots community-building models between ethnic Estonians and Russians, Estonians, Russians, and Russian-speakers living in Estonia were able to speak with each other freely, and Estonian Russians turned more towards the Estonian government than the Russian government.<sup>103</sup> These projects also demonstrated sustainability by continuing after CSHMI's involvement ended.<sup>104</sup>

To conduct the Tree Model with American Far-Right extremists, facilitators will have to follow the several steps listed above in the Estonian case with the partners mentioned subsequently. In the case of Far-Right extremism in the United States, PN alongside the International Dialogue Initiative (IDI) and the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) should provide examples of the most credible, politically independent actors to engage in an interdisciplinary manner with reconciliation. Furthermore, ICTJ is the leading world actor in transitional justice, having already supported local reconciliation efforts in the United States, as well as in 60 cases abroad. PN, IDI and Parents for Peace would be useful as they already engage individuals who work in countering violent extremism and psychology, including previously engaged extremists and survivors of extremism. Therefore, these actors already have credibility, neutrality, and the intersectional background to apply as facilitators to the Tree Model.

First, Parents for Peace, IDI, and a selected group of neutral historians should study the history of both Far-Right extremism through opt-in open-ended psychological interviews with Far-Right extremists, politicians, moderate communities, and victims of extremism, especially in conflict-ridden locations, such as places where extremism is higher. For example, the Southern Poverty Law Center designated Montana, Tennessee, Nebraska, Arkansas, New Hampshire, Alabama, Virginia, South Carolina, Idaho, and Nevada as the states with the most Far-Right

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 67- 68.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 67.

extremist groups per capita.<sup>105</sup> After the collection and review of assessment data, Parents for Peace and IDI should formulate an overall psychopolitical diagnosis and compile a list of all the conscious and unspoken tensions for each group.<sup>106</sup> Finally, PN and ICTJ should develop practical projects and sustainable institutions for beyond the program length to continue the reconciliation progress which potentially can promote economic and social reintegration for Far-Right extremists.<sup>107</sup> These projects can also include reparations to atone for past injuries, such as rebuilding locations destroyed by extremism, or these projects can revolve around creating a new shared American identity.

Adapting the Tree Model to the United States, with reconciliation taking place between Far-Right extremists, moderate communities, and politicians that incite violence and polarization on all sides will be admittedly very difficult due to the intergenerational violence between groups. Stanford neurologist Robert Sapolsky provides numerous mechanisms to lessen the hostility of group conversations about topics like intergenerational group violence. His ideas suggest that when establishing a commission for reconciliation, facilitators should choose an equal number of people per group so that all experience equal treatment, work towards the shared goal of truth-telling or sharing about their experiences to create a more cohesive American national community, and select locations for the reconciliation commission(s) should be in a place where there has not been significant violent history between groups.<sup>108</sup>

#### Recommendations for Reconciliation:

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<sup>105</sup> Christian Spencer, "The 10 US States With the Most Hate Groups," The Hill, October 26, 2021, <https://thehill.com/changing-america/respect/578513-the-10-us-states-with-the-most-hate-groups>.

<sup>106</sup> Volkan, "The Tree Model," 20.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>108</sup> Sapolsky, 627.

- **Conduct local and regional community reconciliation forums to explore the potential for community acceptance of extremists and families.** When implementing the initial investigations of both the conscious and unconscious factors resulting in conflict, PN, IDI, and Parents for Peace should also assess the opinions on reconciliation of extremists on the local and national level, likely through polls or semi-structured interviews.
- **Apply the Tree Model of reconciliation to the U.S. context.** Work with PN, IDI, and Parents for Peace to create an interdisciplinary facilitating team of neutral psychologists, psychiatrists, former diplomats, historians, and other social scientists that can investigate both conscious and unconscious factors resulting in conflict. These experts should be allocated based on their varying credibilities to conduct open-ended psychological interviews with equal numbers of Far-Right extremists, moderate citizens consisting of key victim communities, and extreme politicians. Then have the equal members of communities in yearly workshops in a neutral setting establish the best means for forgiveness and accountability such as reparations. These workshops can also serve as opportunities for Far-Right extremists to perform community service projects and internships to repent for what they have done in the past and help rebuild the community. Admittedly, there is an enormous amount of Far-Right extremism that has happened across U.S. history, so choosing the best people to represent the whole weight of history will be daunting. Therefore, celebrating small wins and local sessions, as mentioned in the political will session, can help first deal with more local wrongs. The Tree Model can also be an important tool for recognizing the fraught histories

of these groups and work towards more constructive national and group identity formation.

### **i) Identity Formation**

A significant part of sustainable reconciliation is also transforming identities engaging in identity-based conflict in a durable and gradual manner.<sup>109</sup> Identity transformation is especially pivotal among extremists who begin to see their group identity as greater than themselves, making it difficult to reconcile with society. According to international relations professor Valerie-Barbara Rosoux, identities (such as those of former extremists) should evolve to no longer be based on hatred towards an out-group and view the out-group as individuals.<sup>110</sup> To establish a new identity, Rosoux suggests a “work of memory” or “a process of combining conflicting positions into a common position, under a decision rule of unanimity.” A work of memory enables all parties to accept comprehensive views of the past without exaggeration or underestimation.<sup>111</sup> For example, France and Germany, the inspiration behind the idea of a work of memory, met through informal encounters among representatives of the various parties, discussed interpretation of events, and merged interpretations of the past. France and Germany successfully transformed their national identities from mutual enmity and difference to create a common representation of the past based on similar collective sufferings.<sup>112</sup>

The steps of identity transformation exemplified by the French-German example also coincide well with the Tree Model perspective listed above. The workshops of the Tree Model approach can also occur as meetings with the facilitator team, as well as the 1619 project, where

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<sup>109</sup> Rosoux, 175.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid, 175.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, 187.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 181, 190-193, 195.

each party can be called on to describe their interpretation of events of the past.<sup>113</sup> The 1619 project, led by historians and journalists such as Nikole Hannah-Jones, rewrites the American understanding of history through its focus on the legacy of slavery.<sup>114</sup> As the workshops persist, the 1619 project can aim to help Far-Right extremists, moderate democracy respecting citizens, and other U.S. groups who have been victims of identity-based conflict to go beyond the opposing interpretations of events and their descriptions. Transforming the identities of the Far-Right and other identity groups, such as politicians, requires interaction between all parties, common interests, and an objective of a mutually acceptable solution to reconcile their competing versions of the past to decrease violence and identity divisions.<sup>115</sup> They can then work towards recognizing the plurality of views in the past, also encouraging listening and emphasizing with the others' experience.<sup>116</sup> At the end of the two to three years of workshops, the parties will hopefully agree upon a common language and representation of American history, including elements from all groups about how extremism arose.<sup>117</sup> Nevertheless, the effectiveness of this new memory narrative may vary based on whether Americans, especially Far-Right Americans, can recognize themselves in the official narration of the past.<sup>118</sup>

Incorporating a sacred values lens, in a recent experiment by Dr. Michael Pasek at the New School and Dr. Samantha Moore-Berg at the University of Pennsylvania, Americans of all different political groups and races agree upon norms, such as fraud-free elections, equal rights, abuse of power by government officials, and protections from political interference in law

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 191.

<sup>114</sup> "1619 books," 1619 Books, 1619 Books, accessed April 20, 2022, <https://1619books.com/>.

<sup>115</sup> Rosoux, 188.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 191.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 193.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 196.

enforcement investigation.<sup>119</sup> These kinds of sacred values should hold the core of any new identity transformation. By consolidating identity around these shared values, Far-Right Americans may be able to feel represented in the political process which has been reframed around identity issues without recognizing Far-Right grievances in either party. A shared sacred values lens that includes Far-Right Americans can help create an alternative political community for Far-Right extremists.

#### Recommendation for Identity Formation:

- **Incorporate a lens about the history of identity formation within the Tree Model.** The 1619 project and IDI can ensure individuals within the workshops share their competing versions of American history, so the stories of all groups are told and healing can begin. With all stories on the table, all the groups can collaborate to decide what a new American history and identity that encompasses all past injustices would look like.
- **Integrate a shared sacred value lens to create a new American identity.** In workshops, continue to explore what other shared sacred values exist between communities and adapt these into the media strategy to support new American national identity formation.

## 5. Conclusion

Preventing the deepening of Far-Right extremism in the United States requires both the healing of individual Far-Right extremists and the restructuring of American society, which will

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<sup>119</sup> “Healing U.S. Democracy Starts with Understanding Our Values, Norms, and Narratives,” Alliance for Peacebuilding, May 10, 2021, <https://afpeacebuilding.medium.com/healing-u-s-democracy-starts-with-understanding-our-values-norms-and-narratives-8bdcfb631da2>.

deter the type of societal divisions that reignite identity-based conflict. To heal Far-Right extremists on an individual level on a global scale as well, countries must work to embed extremists in a community receiving psychosocial support as well as opportunities for social and economic reintegration. Because trauma is the root of much extremism, criminalizing or excluding extremists, or responding with retributive justice will merely aggravate their grievances; instead, trauma-informed reconciliation processes can help to heal the divisions without imprisonment. This approach would make Far-Right extremists less likely to revert to non-democratic means or re-engage in extremist groups.

However, Far-Right extremists do not exist in a vacuum, so recognizing how Far-Right extremists have historically created injustices against other groups such as people of African descent, other people of color, Muslims, Jewish people, and LGBTQ+ people, among others, will be essential for future projects moving forward. By discussing the histories of structural, cultural, and direct violence which have happened across groups worldwide using the Tree Model of reconciliation and Moscovici's theory of minority influence, a New American identity can hopefully be constructed, in which Far-Right extremists along with other marginalized groups can feel represented.