



**Building Sustainable Peace and Preventing Violence in the United States**  
*Recommendations for the Biden-Harris Administration*

The effects of the unprecedented violence and deadly attack in the U.S. Capitol on January 6th are reverberating throughout the country and around the world. The new Administration’s [foreign policy vision for the United States](#) clearly aims to restore dignified leadership and ensure our policies at home and abroad are deeply connected. President-elect Biden also stated he will advance the security, prosperity, and values of the US by taking immediate steps to renew our own democracy, rebuild our alliances, protect our economic future, to restore America’s credibility and leadership so we can partner once again with our allies to address the most urgent global challenges. However, this global leadership will only be credible if our values and actions are matched at home. ***To do so, the US must urgently develop and implement a bold strategy that is matched by a commitment of significant resources to address the causes of conflict, violence, and extremism, prevent violence, and “build back better” all formal and informal democratic institutions at the local, state, and federal levels.***

America, the most [heavily armed nation](#) in the world, has seen its ranking steadily decline in the [Global Peace Index](#). Stepping back from the brink of widespread violence and tempering conflict dynamics requires an acknowledgment of the escalating risk of violence and holding people accountable to the rule of law, while also addressing grievances and building trust at all levels of society. [Toxic polarization](#), surges in violent hate crimes and membership in [extremist groups](#), [proliferation](#) of dis/misinformation, an increasing [urban and rural divide](#), [dangerous rhetoric](#) inciting violence by elected leaders, continued police brutality and systemic racial injustice, [diminishing trust](#) in government institutions, and the recent deadly attack in the U.S. Capitol are symptoms of a rapid deterioration in the health of U.S. democracy. While the economic prosperity of the US has been the measure of success in the past, [the relational health of the country is significantly declining](#). The [growing economic inequality](#) is being exacerbated by the global pandemic and the government’s failure to stem its spread. Additionally, a significant driver of conflict for white people is the fear of status loss, influence, and power and this grievance is [fostering anti-democratic sentiments](#).

While other democracies are seeing serious cracks in their institutions and heightened polarization, a recent [study](#) found the U.S. is polarizing faster than other democracies, which is fueling [a historic crisis](#). While every country has conflict driven by real and perceived grievances, it is the [legitimacy and effectiveness of informal and formal institutions](#)—and the leaders of those institutions—that dictate governments’ ability to manage grievances in a way that prevents groups from resorting to violence. The Economist Intelligence Unit now characterizes the U.S. as a “[flawed democracy](#)”. Overall, public trust in government is at [historic lows](#), according to the Pew Research Center, and no country saw steeper declines in trust in government between 2017 and 2018. According to a new [Pew Research Center report](#), Americans see declining levels of trust in the country, whether it is their confidence in the federal government and elected officials or their trust of each other. Additionally, the report finds that white older Americans with higher education degrees and income levels have an elevated level of trust in institutions compared to non-white Americans with less education and income.



## Alliance for Peacebuilding

The [Alliance for Peacebuilding](#) (AfP) and its members have been [increasingly concerned](#) about the growing [violence](#), polarization, and extremism in the US, but are greatly encouraged by the commitment by the Biden-Harris-elect Administration and [courageous peacebuilders](#) working to build peace and prevent violence in the country. President-elect Biden has called on a deeply divided nation to come together to unite and heal. AfP believes the deadly attack in the U.S. Capitol can spark a much-needed national and local peacebuilding and conflict prevention movement that will work to restore our democratic institutions and address long-standing grievances. Now is the time to tackle the causes of our country's instability to create a truly equitable, just, fair and peaceful society for all Americans.

AfP and its members are already working to [mobilize against oppression](#), [undo institutionalized racism](#), [advance criminal justice reform across political divides](#), [reduce toxic polarization](#), [prevent violence within communities](#), call for [comprehensive policy responses](#) on issues ranging from law enforcement to education, offer [trauma healing](#) to communities in need, and reduce political and community violence through the [Trust Network](#). This work is vital, yet insufficient. Just as we advocate for taking a comprehensive approach that includes funding for programs to prevent violent conflict and build peace abroad, AfP is firm in its conviction that we need to do the same at home. In December 2019, the U.S. adopted the [Global Fragility Act](#), which is a significant step forward in U.S. government planning and operations to promote the prevention of violent conflict in conflict-affected and fragile states. This law provides us with a powerful model based on decades of knowledge and understanding within our foreign assistance programming that we can apply to tackle instability and worsening conflict dynamics in the US.

*The Biden-Harris Administration must act swiftly to develop a bold coordinated multi-sectoral, evidence-based strategy, programs, and funding mechanisms to address the drivers of violent conflict and extremism, build trust in democratic institutions at the local, state, and national levels and prevent and reduce violent conflict by:*

### **Immediately Elevating and Strengthening the U.S. Government's Domestic Policy Structures**

- **Reshape, strengthen, and enlarge the Domestic Policy Council (DPC) under the Executive Office of the President to mimic the form and function of the National Security Council.** The DPC's budget and staffing must be significantly increased to effectively develop and coordinate policy across many different federal agencies. An office of Conflict and Violence Prevention should be established within the DPC and led by a senior staff-member, at a level equivalent to a Senior Director, with particular responsibility for interagency coordination and engagement with federal, state, and municipal governments and civil society on efforts to counter the threats of domestic violent extremism, reduce violent crime and gun deaths, and eradicate polarization and build social cohesion. AfP applauds the appointment of Ambassador Susan Rice as the new head of the DPC and appointments of Senior Directors to focus on related domestic issues, such as democracy, human rights, and racial justice.



## **Promoting U.S. Democracy Initiatives**

- **Propose and request funding for a bold and new Democracy Fund for the US, modeled after the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), specifically designed to renew and support democratic initiatives in the US.** Americans have long worked abroad to promote democratic practices and institutions. [Now, more than ever, those lessons must be applied at home.](#) NED was launched in the early 1980s by President Regan on the idea that American assistance on behalf of democracy efforts abroad would benefit both for the U.S. and for those struggling around the world for freedom and self-determination. NED, though non-governmental, is funded primarily through annual appropriations and subject to congressional oversight. Its executive board consists of a broad cross-section of participants in American politics and foreign policy, as well as bipartisan, private, non-profit corporations. NED acts as a grant-making foundation, distributing funds to non-governmental organizations to promote democracy abroad, often using competitive grants schemes to encourage innovation and supporting smaller, local, and non-traditional partners.

To renew and rebuild our struggling and flawed democracy, the Biden Administration must immediately propose and request that Congress fund an independent, bipartisan, and robust Democracy Fund for the US under an independent board of directors with the mission to renew and support our own democracy by providing competitive grants to non-profit and civic organizations for programs that build bridges across political, racial, religious, and regional divisions; reform and increase opportunities for civic education; break down information silos; and increase literacy and awareness of misinformation.

- **Use the platform of the Summit of Democracies to foster learning across democracies.** Authoritarian governments around the world are using recent events in the US to advance alternative worldviews and undermine America’s leadership in promoting open societies. The Biden Administration should seize the opportunity of the Summit of Democracies to embrace its role as a democracy innovator, adapt in the face of extremism and polarization in building social cohesion to redress historic injustices and profound inequality. The Summit offers an opportunity to move beyond past rhetoric that framed American democracy as a static “city on a hill” to be emulated and admired abroad, and embrace its role as navigator of the same choppy seas as its friends and allies. The Summit of Democracies should include a robust program of civil society side and feature events and discussions highlighting efforts and struggles across nations to forge safer, healthier, and more just systems.

## **Preventing Violent Extremism**

- **Support significant new funding to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Office of Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention (OVTVP) and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to address the surge in hate crimes and homegrown violent extremism threats in the US based on evidence of what works domestically and internationally.** Under the Obama-Biden Administration, DHS adopted the countering violent extremism (CVE) paradigm



## Alliance for Peacebuilding

initiated in 2011, led by the Office of Community Partnerships. During President Trump's tenure, DHS transitioned to a terrorism prevention framework and, in late 2019, released a [new strategy](#) from the OTVTP. In FY2020, DHS announced \$10 million dollars for an array of organizations, institutions, and law enforcement agencies to advance the OTVTP's terrorism prevention framework, which concentrates on building whole-of-society approaches and the development of noncriminal interventions outside of the formal justice system. In FY 2021, with bipartisan Congressional support, OTVTP will release \$20 million in similar grants. However, with rising polarization, hate, and radicalization threatening our national security, the Biden-Harris Administration must immediately move to understand the interrelationships between political and socio-economic polarization, cognitive radicalization, and violent extremist behavior. To do so, the Biden-Harris Administration should dramatically increase funding for the DHS's OTVTP and its Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention grants program to \$200 million. Additionally, it must conduct a robust evaluation of the Homeland Security Grant Program funding priorities and their appropriateness to the current challenges that America faces incorporating input from the state and local agencies involved, as well as members of particularly at-risk communities.

To prevent and counter violent extremism, [the Administration will need to think outside the Homeland Security box](#) and allocate funding for HHS to enhance the USG's engagement in prevention and CVE-relevant activity to better understand the nexus between mental health/psychosocial support, trauma, and the commission of hate-motivated violence. [A recent report on terrorism prevention](#) highlighted the need for an increased role for HHS in this area as part of a shift to a public health model for CVE efforts in the US. Programs will need to be run and supported by different federal bureaucracies, particularly HHS, which would require intragovernmental coordination and work in partnership with local social, health, and youth workers; local police; and communities more broadly.

- **Allocate \$40 million in funding within the prevention window of the Homeland Security Grants Program to support data and analysis in the US.** To understand trends and respond, the U.S. requires accurate and comprehensive data on these kinds of political violence. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) tracks hate crimes annually and publishes this data, but it is neither comprehensive nor systematic, as submissions of hate crimes are optional and there is no national training or agreement on definitions. Investment in getting accurate FBI data should be paired with support to non-government efforts in academia and non-profits for real-time, national and publicly available data, including organizations like the [Armed Conflict and Location Event Data Project](#) (ACLED), [Bridging Divides Initiatives](#) (BDI) at Princeton University, the [Anti-Defamation League's Hate Crimes Mapping](#), [Communities Against Hate and Stop AAPI Hate initiatives](#), and others.



### Building Social Cohesion

- **Reform core curriculum in the education system.** The inability of Americans to agree on a [true shared history](#) is fueling the current conflict in the US. By aligning peace education with history and civics curricula to help students amass peacebuilding skills, we can change the narrative and empower a new generation to promote peace through action at home and abroad. [NewGen Peacebuilders](#), in partnership with AfP, the Institute for Economics and Peace, and other partners are developing a curriculum to teach peace alongside U.S. history, and expanding to other social studies and civic topics. Other key organizations are working through rigorous historical analysis combined with the study of human behavior. For instance, [Facing History and Ourselves](#) heightens students' understanding of racism, religious intolerance, and prejudice; increases students' ability to relate history to their own lives; and promotes greater understanding of their roles and responsibilities in a democracy. Education can be a driver of conflict that fuels grievances, xenophobia, and other misinformation, or education can contribute to peacebuilding. We need an innovative rethinking of the delivery of history curricula to convey new, more accurate narratives of the past and positively influence citizens' national identity. We can lay the foundation to build peace throughout society in the one place nearly all Americans have in common as they approach adulthood—school, and specifically, U.S. history class. While many education decisions are devolved to the state level, the U.S. federal government can use funding mechanisms, policy directives, and Presidential influence through a White House Commission to shape a new, innovative, and accurate history and civics curriculum.
- **Support and advocate for policies and legislation that address the dissemination of dis/misinformation, hate, and violence incitement through mainstream media and social media platforms.** Election misinformation dropped [73 percent](#) following Trump's suspension from Twitter. The U.S. should [create a commission to determine a comprehensive approach](#) to tackling dis/misinformation and develop policies and laws for tech/media platforms that addresses First Amendment concerns. The U.S. must not only adopt laws and regulations to prevent mass dis/misinformation, but also facilitate public education and media literacy programs at scale. The commission should also [review reinstating the Fairness Doctrine](#), which was adopted in 1949 and required the media to present both sides' opinions when they were not just reporting straight news. A Democrat-controlled Congress passed a bill to reinstate the Fairness Doctrine in 1987 after the FCC abolished it, but it was vetoed by President Reagan.
- **Appropriate \$40 million to revitalize public and private community-based structures to address immediate sources of local conflict, as well as underlying systemic issues of injustice and division.** Recommitment to the Civil Rights Act, in connection with the [John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act](#), is a critical first step for the Biden Administration to revitalize the federal government infrastructure of the Community Relations Services (CRS) at the Department of Justice. The Administration should reconnect the complementary civil society infrastructure of the Community Mediation Centers with groups like the [National Association for Community Mediation](#) serving as the national coordinating body for the 300+ centers across the US. The



platform could be extended to include peacebuilding organizations and institutions through the TRUST Network and provide the support needed by CRS to accomplish its mission as presented in the Civil Rights Act.

### **Enacting Inclusive Policy and Legal Reform Packages to Address Grievances and Causes of Conflict and Violence**

- **Work with Congress to establish a domestic “Reconciliation and Peacebuilding Act” and/or other legislation to address and prevent conflict in the US.** The Biden Administration should work closely with Congress to introduce and adopt legislation modeled after the Global Fragility Act to apply to the U.S. context. The Act should ensure the first-ever coordinated multi-sectoral conflict prevention and peacebuilding strategy that would address the causes of conflict and violence, including [economic inequality and insecurity](#), and invests in institutions and programs focusing on socio-economic grievances at the federal, state, and local level. Additional requirements of the bill should call for mandatory national service or volunteer initiatives by increasing opportunities for young people through organizations including AmeriCorps and other programs such as YouthBuild, with significant education loan forgiveness incentives to strengthen social cohesion, national security, and democracy.

The proposed [Department of Peacebuilding Act](#) introduced by Representative Barbara Lee, most recently in 2019 with 37 cosponsors, should be reviewed as a potential model to strengthen domestic peacebuilding initiatives. This legislation focuses on peace and peacebuilding as a strategic national policy objective and calls for policy development to promote national and international conflict prevention, nonviolent intervention, mediation, peaceful conflict resolution, and structured conflict mediation. Many of the following recommendations could be stand alone policies or legislation and/or integrated into a larger Act.

- **Support legislation and policies to address systemic racism and injustice.** A resolution sponsored by Representative Lee would establish a [U.S. Commission on Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation](#) “to properly acknowledge, memorialize, and catalyze progress toward jettisoning the belief in a hierarchy of human value, embracing our common humanity, and permanently eliminating persistent racial inequities.” In the 116th Congress, Senator Booker introduced a companion to Representative Lee’s resolution urging the establishment of the commission to complement efforts like the [George Floyd Justice in Policing Act](#) and [Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African-Americans Act](#).
- **Support short-, medium- and long-term criminal justice reform.** Police brutality and the [disproportionate rate of incarceration](#) of African-Americans, and the protests and civil unrest over the murders of Black Americans, are clear manifestations of structural racism. At the federal, state, and local levels, meaningful, evidence-based criminal justice reform is urgently needed to interrupt illegal and deadly police use of force and address the causes of violence, injustice, and mass incarceration. President-elect Biden has already endorsed Congressman Bobby Scott’s [SAFE](#)



[Justice Act](#), an comprehensive bill to reform the U.S. criminal justice system “from front-end sentencing reform to back-end release policies.” The Administration should also support policies that [alleviate practical hurdles](#) in implementing the [Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act](#).

Evidence-based recommendations—such as those developed by [We The Protesters](#), a national organization focused on ending racism and police violence—outline critical first steps in reforming police departments and the criminal justice sector. Since 2015, We The Protesters have built a comprehensive nationwide database recording incidents of police violence and identified effective policy solutions that include: integrating basic protections against violence in [police use of force policies](#); changing [police union contracts](#) to enhance accountability measures; increasing [federal](#) investigations into delinquent police forces to improve accountability; and eliminating federal programs that provide military equipment to law enforcement as part of a broader effort to demilitarize police across the country. Supporting widespread, fundamental police culture change to community policing using approaches such as those developed by [Police2Peace](#), a national nonpartisan nonprofit that delivers programs and policies that unite law enforcement agencies and communities nationwide in ways that uplift and heal them for greater police legitimacy and building public trust using the framework of PEACE OFFICER as opposed to law enforcement officer. Since 2018, Police2Peace has become a trusted source for policing change for departments, municipalities, and civil society, and educates citizens about how to affect local police change using [simple steps to positive policing](#). Implementing [justice reform](#) that is fair, just, and peaceful for all Americans will require local, state, and federal policies to address long-standing structural racism, socio-economic inequality, cultural biases, and punitive policing simultaneously, while reforming law enforcement budgets that incorporate social work, mental health, drug addiction, and other psychosocial initiatives.

### Reallocating Funding Priorities

- **Realign the U.S. military budget to robustly fund the development and conflict prevention programs in the US.** The second-largest item in the U.S. federal budget after Social Security is spending on the military. For FY 2021 the spending for the military is an [estimated \\$934 billion](#), almost 20 percent of the overall budget, whereas the Pentagon is the least accountable part of the federal government. While Americans demonstrate [unwavering trust](#) in the military, there is a significant mismatch between military funding and vital programs needed to address increasing grievances, countering violent extremism, preventing conflict, and building peaceful and fair democratic institutions. The Biden Administration should aim to redirect some military funding towards domestic preventing and countering violent extremism initiatives.