

Southern Poverty Law Center



Response to Call for Input on the solutions to promote digital education  
for young people and to ensure their protection from online threats

Submitted 16 February 2024

**The Southern Poverty Law Center** was founded in 1971 with the purpose of ensuring that the goals of the US civil rights movement would be realized for everyone. SPLC seeks to achieve its purpose through litigation, policy advocacy, education and community organizing, and is a catalyst for racial justice in the Southern US and beyond.

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

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

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

The first-published resource, *A Parents & Caregivers Guide to Online Radicalization*,<sup>ii</sup> was released in June 2020. This guide helps adults who care for and closely interact with young people to understand how online radicalization can happen and how to recognize the signs and offers productive strategies for intervening. In November 2022, we published *A Community Guide to Online Radicalization*,<sup>iii</sup> which aims to empower adults in young people’s broader social networks to also recognize and help to interrupt the process of radicalization. All of these resources are available in English, German, Portuguese and Spanish. Three separate assessments conducted since their release have demonstrated that these guides are highly effective tools for assisting their target audiences to intervene against extremist radicalization.<sup>iv</sup>

Accompanying these resources are supplemental guides specifically geared towards the important roles of educators,<sup>v</sup> counselors,<sup>vi</sup> and coaches and other mentors.<sup>vii</sup> In addition, the suite of resources includes a separate guide touching on special topics, including male supremacy, elections and other times of national stress, migration, conflict and climate-related crises.<sup>viii</sup>

In July 2023, in partnership with PERIL and Everytown for Gun Safety, SPLC released a report detailing the early results of a study of youth attitudes around gun ownership, usage and violence. We asked more than 4,100 young people in the US between the ages of 14 and 30 questions about their access to guns, how safe they feel, their experiences with gun violence, their political views, media they consume and how they think about male supremacy, racial resentment and the Second Amendment to the US Constitution.<sup>ix</sup> Among the findings was that the stronger a respondent’s belief in being “safer with guns than without,” the higher they scored on both male supremacy and racial resentment.<sup>x</sup> Pointing up the need for early intervention to prevent adoption of extremist views that can fuel violence, the report’s authors concluded that “[f]or many, guns and gun ownership have come to symbolize the preservation of a certain type of Americanness: one based

on the primacy of the white, cisgender and heteronormative nuclear family to the detriment of Black, Indigenous, Asian and Asian American, Latinx/a/o, Pacific Islander people and LGBTQ people.”<sup>xi</sup>

The international community must break out of siloed responses to race-based hate and extremism occurring in countries around the world and work together to develop and implement effective responses that curb radicalization before it leads to violence. SPLC is currently partnering with PERIL in a two-year pilot program to develop Community Advisory, Resource and Education (CARE) Centers. The CARE Centers, which take a public health approach and are modeled on German mobile advisory centers, will provide on-site trainings, assessments, referrals, and other resources to those impacted and affected by hate, discrimination, and supremacist ideologies as well as those susceptible to radicalization. The first two centers will be located in the states of Georgia and Michigan.

The State of Washington is also taking a public health approach to the prevention of domestic extremism. Earlier this year, it began a process to establish a domestic violent extremism commission<sup>xii</sup> to work on efforts to prevent and interrupt radicalization. It is an excellent first step, but far more needs to be done, and soon.

Finally, the international community should encourage media and digital literacy programs that help young people build resilience against manipulative ideologies while providing them with the skills to navigate a rapidly changing online landscape. In an effort to bolster those skills and awareness, SPLC is engaged in a multi-year partnership with the International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX) to adapt its Learn2Discern<sup>xiii</sup> program to American middle school contexts. The curriculum has proven successful in helping young people improve their ability to discern fact from fiction. When considered alongside SPLC’s Learning for Justice’s<sup>xiv</sup> educational approaches that are grounded in anti-bias, social justice and inclusion, these resources provide a systematic approach to media, information and civic literacy that governments should promote in schools.

In testimony provided to the New York City Council’s Committee on Civil and Human Rights in November 2020,<sup>xv</sup> the SPLC Action Fund outlined seven key areas in which students need support in developing digital and civic literacy skills.

Those seven areas are as follows:

- Students can locate and verify reliable sources of information.
- Students understand how digital information comes to them.
- Students can constructively engage in digital communities.
- Students understand how online communication affects privacy and security.
- Students understand that they are producers of information.
- Students understand their role as customers in an online marketplace.
- Students can evaluate the value of the internet as a mechanism of civic action.

This testimony also highlights strategies developed in Finland and Denmark that have shown promising results in addressing the harms of disinformation and detecting and de-escalating

radicalization. These strategies provide valuable models for government intervention before radicalization leads to violence.

- 
- <sup>i</sup> [Preventing Youth Radicalization: Building Resilient, Inclusive Communities](#), Southern Poverty Law Center.
- <sup>ii</sup> [A Parents & Caregiver's Guide to Online Radicalization](#), Southern Poverty Law Center and Polarization and Extremism Research and Innovation Lab, June 2020.
- <sup>iii</sup> [A Community Guide to Online Radicalization](#), SPLC and PERIL, November 2022.
- <sup>iv</sup> [Assessment & Impact](#), SPLC and PERIL.
- <sup>v</sup> [Educators' Supplement](#), SPLC and PERIL.
- <sup>vi</sup> [Counselors' Supplement](#), SPLC and PERIL.
- <sup>vii</sup> [Coaches' & Mentors' Supplement](#), SPLC and PERIL.
- <sup>viii</sup> [Special Topics in Online Youth Radicalization](#), SPLC and PERIL.
- <sup>ix</sup> [US Youth Attitudes on Guns: Quantitative Survey Findings Report and Preliminary Qualitative Focus Group Findings](#), Everytown for Gun Safety, American University Polarization & Extremism Research and Innovation Lab, and Southern Poverty Law Center, July 2023.
- <sup>x</sup> *Id.* at 9.
- <sup>xi</sup> *Id.* at 10.
- <sup>xii</sup> [How a Washington state plan to fight domestic extremism could be a model for the nation](#), PBS News, 25 January 2023.
- <sup>xiii</sup> <https://www.irex.org/project/learn-discern>.
- <sup>xiv</sup> <https://www.learningforjustice.org/>
- <sup>xv</sup> [Addressing Online Hate and Radicalization: Hearings Before the Committee on Civil and Human Rights, New York City Council](#), SPLC Action Fund, 16 November, 2020.