

U.S. Domestic Political Violence Mitigation in Select Localities

PROJECT REPORT

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The Carter Center
Conflict Resolution Program
453 John Lewis Freedom Parkway
Atlanta, Georgia 30307

I Executive Summary

From September 2020 through January 2021, The Carter Center (the Center), in partnership with Princeton University's Bridging Divides Initiative (BDI) and Cure Violence Global (CVG), implemented a pilot project that attempted to mitigate violence surrounding the November election in a select number of U.S. communities. This project complemented and was reinforced by a parallel Carter Center project designed to bolster confidence in the U.S. electoral process.

The Center began the violence mitigation project by working with an experienced data analyst to aggregate a variety of quantitative datasets — from socio-economic indicators to incidence of protest and past election results — to help understand which communities might be at risk of unrest surrounding the Nov. 3, 2020, election. By early October, the Center had identified 27 counties around the country as being at higher risk. Working with project partners, the Center consulted and shared these findings with a dozen national networks with the potential to direct violence prevention resources to these communities. In addition, the Center zeroed in on four metro areas and their surrounding regions, where the Center engaged directly to reach local organizations, understand how they viewed conflict dynamics in their communities, and help build local conflict resilience mechanisms.

By mid- to late October, the Center had identified and convened dozens of community influencers, via three Zoom workshops, in Pittsburgh; Raleigh, North Carolina; and Charlotte, North Carolina. The purpose of these sessions was to equip key stakeholders in these communities with targeted messages designed to reinforce confidence in the electoral process and push back against violence. In Atlanta, the Center conducted a range of community consultations and convened a high-profile event, together with the King Center and the Georgia Secretary of State, designed to disseminate information to voters and reinforce confidence in the electoral process. Throughout this period, Cure Violence and the Center hosted a series of weekly conflict analysis sessions, bringing together activists and experts in key hotspot cities. CVG also delivered regular violence de-escalation trainings. Overall, during the life of the project, CVG led the delivery of 11 violence de-escalation trainings to over 450 participants.

After the presidential election, with Georgia's U.S. Senate runoff elections looming, the Center shifted to focus almost exclusively on that state. The Center was concerned by the toxic combination of violent rhetoric and former President Trump's effort to undermine the credibility of the presidential election result in Georgia and nationally. The Center convened dozens of faith leaders in two workshops in December 2020. These sessions were used to disseminate anti-violence

Working with these same organizations, the Center

In January 2021, The Carter Center sent a short survey to a limited number of the project's most active community stakeholders in Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and Georgia. The responses

majority of the summer 2020 racial justice protests were peaceful. For the purpose of this analysis, protests with prior violence were singled out to help narrow down the number of at-risk counties and zero in on those with a recent history of violent activity. From that subset of selected counties, the data team then layered on additional indicators to assess relative risk of violence — everything from militia activity and police shootings to data on voting patterns and population density.

The second assessment model looked at right-of-center mobilization, that is, mobilization by former President Trump’s supporters and right-of-center activists — with the assumption that this mobilization also could attract counterdemonstrators. This model was not based on an analysis of racial justice protests or the Women’s March, since participants in those protests tended to be opponents of President Trump and his policies. Rather, the Center sought to analyze protests that were likely to draw more conservative activists. Therefore the right mobilization model was

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III Qualitative Conflict Analysis and Stakeholder Outreach

Starting in September, as The Carter Center and project partners were building the national risk-assessment model, staff also began reaching out to local community stakeholders, particularly in communities that were already known to be at high risk. The Center began this effort with a series of conversations with activists, academics, and policy analysts in Portland and other parts of Oregon because of the ongoing violence there. Consultations of this nature, also including faith leaders, civil rights organizations, and voting rights activists, continued throughout the project. Carter Center personnel met with over 75 individuals, in some cases repeatedly. These discussions helped the Center understand local conflict dynamics in the states targeted by the project. More fundamentally, project staff were

November election, the Center was forced to condense this analysis of all six target communities into a couple of weeks. While acknowledging the limitations of this analysis, it should be noted that the Center did not identify pre-existing, cross-partisan conflict resilience networks in any of the six locales examined. Regardless, final decisions on where the Center ultimately engaged were largely a function of the ability to quickly identify local stakeholders interested in collaborating.

IV Enhancing Local Conflict Resilience

The Carter Center was able to connect with several local leaders in Charlotte, Raleigh-Durham, and Pittsburgh, all of whom were concerned about possible violence during the election and were interested in working with the Center

voting and voter access. The CEOs of The Carter Center and the King Center were able to share key messages warning of the communally contagious nature of violence.

V Faith Leader Mobilization and Messaging Support

Throughout the project, the Carter Center was intentional about engaging faith leaders from a variety of traditions. Since the 1970s, trust in major American institutions — from the media to government to business — has been declining. According to Gallup, the portion of Americans who express “a great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence in “the church or organized religion” declined from 65% in 1973 to 42% in 2020. While that is a steep drop, almost all other institutions have fallen much further, and those results suggest that, in American life today, faith institutions remain significantly more trusted than almost any other institution, save the U.S. military. In addition, at a time when American social networks tend to be siloed into liberal or conservative communities, faith leaders are more likely to have access to religious communities with differing politics.

Near the start of the project, in September, Center staff addressed a virtual meeting of the Multi-Faith Neighbors Network, including dozens of Christian, Jewish, and Muslim faith leaders with congregations around the U.S. The Center’s Conflict Resolution Program director explained the project and sought suggestions for collaboration. Participants expressed interest in sharing core anti-violence/pro-democracy messages with the members of their religious communities and using their pulpits to urge nonviolent responses to electoral grievances.

The Center and Cure Violence organized workshops and trainings for Imam Malik Mujahid’s Sound Vision network, which has thousands of Muslim members nationwide. The project also engaged leadership at the National Council of Churches, the North Carolina Council of Churches, and the Florida Council of Churches.



Figure 4. Social media "card" developed by the Carter Center

After the presidential election, with Trump refusing to concede and the Jan. 5, 2021, Senate runoff elections looming in Georgia, The Carter Center shifted most project efforts toward violence mitigation in the state. In particular, the Center was concerned about the rising tide of threats being levied against activists, election workers, churches, and elected officials. In

response, Center staff ramped up engagement with faith leaders in the state. On Dec. 3 and then again on Dec. 10, together with partners CVG and BDI, the Center hosted two meetings of Georgia-based faith leaders, bringing together about 50 participants. The sessions allowed the Center to hear their concerns about the political environment, and the risk of violence, in the run-up to the January Senate elections. The Center also shared, and solicited feedback on, draft anti-violence messaging (similar to those found in Annex A).

The Center used the meetings to encourage faith leaders to proactively issue anti-violence messaging. Faith leaders have unique influence and are one of the few remaining segments of U.S. society that possesses some degree of moral authority that could be leveraged constructively to push back against political violence. For those whose faith traditions typically maintain a strict separation between religion and politics, Center staff suggested that faith leaders should have space to speak out in support of underlying principles, including democracy, truth, and nonviolence — and that these principles should not be cast as political.

As a follow-up to these workshops, on Dec. 17 the Center shared a series of five social media “cards.” The cards mixed curated Georgia-themed images with some of the Center’s key anti-violence and pro-democracy messages. The images were customized for display on different social media platforms and were downloadad ial om w

VI Violence De-escalation Training and Violence Mitigation Dialogues

Carter Center partner Cure Violence Global led the delivery of 11 violence de-escalation trainings to more than 450 participants. The trainings were staggered

Georgia Beverage Association, the Georgia Greater Black Chamber of Commerce, and the Atlanta Black Chambers.

VIII Lessons Learned and Recommendations

The Carter Center decided to engage in the 2020 U.S. elections based on an analysis of the growing threat of political violence. Further, as an institution committed to human rights worldwide, there was a sense of obligation to contribute to protecting democracy at home, given the risk of democratic backsliding in the U.S. and the negative implications for human rights norms abroad. Events surrounding the election demonstrated that these concerns were well-founded.

Despite the risks of working in a hyper-polarized environment, the Carter Center successfully navigated a nonpartisan course, basing activities explicitly on democratic principles and international standards. In the course of this work, the Center found few if any organizations with this ability to link engagement with local, state, and national actors. This pilot project also demonstrated that the Center's capacity to use data analysis to guide programming, to convene a wide array of stakeholders, and to work proactively and flexibly to prevent conflict — all staples of the Center's international work — applied we92 reW*14600560003}TJETQ.00000912 0 612 792 reW*nBT/E

the international perspective the Center provides, combined with technical expertise on elections. This suggests a strong potential to broaden these community-based networks.

3. ***Build scalability into future programming.*** This initiative was an experimental pilot project. The Carter Center understood that the short timeline before the presidential election would limit direct conflict resilience interventions to a handful of communities. Going forward, the Center should build on the work this project began in these same communities, broadening the conflict resilience networks established in this first phase. Future programming should

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Annex B — News article: Clergy use News article:

This is one of a series of graphic messages being shared by local clergy urging calm and patience amid vote-counting.(Christian Associates of Southwest Pennsylvania)

Other messages, which organizers hope they never need to use, urge calm in the event of post-election violence.

Organizing an effort among Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Muslim and other partners is both building on longstanding relationships and developing new ones. Christian clergy involved represent a range of liberal to conservative traditions, which often line up on opposite sides of partisan lines.

“We are so fortunate here in Pittsburgh, because for decades people of different communities

Annex C —Carter Center Anti-Violence Social Media Messages

Annex D — Faith Leaders United for Peaceful Elections in Georgia

Faith Leaders United for Peaceful Elections in Georgia

As faith leaders from throughout Georgia, we come together across religious and political differences to express our support for fair and peaceful elections. With early voting for the Senate runoffs underway, we are deeply concerned by the hateful rhetoric and threats that have been levied against election workers, activists, supporters of the candidates, public officials, and even houses of worship.

On October 23, 2020, hundreds of faith leaders from around the U.S. issued a public call to “officials, civic leaders, and all people in a position of power across the country.” In the Faith Leaders United statement they insisted that:

- Our leaders must ensure a free and fair election in which all eligible Americans can safely cast their votes without interference, suppression, or fear of intimidation.
- Leaders and election officials must count every vote in accordance with applicable laws before the election is decided, even if the process takes a longer time because of precautions in place due to COVID-19.
- Leaders should share timely, accurate information about the election results and resist and avoid spreading misinformation.
- Leaders must actively and publicly support a peaceful transition of power or continuation of leadership based on legitimate election results.

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