Guidance for Reporting on Extremist Groups & Threats

Prepared by Over Zero; January 12, 2021

Following last week's horrific attack of the U.S. Capitol and continued threats of violence fomented by white supremacist groups on- and offline, reporters covering white supremacist activities have a critical role to play in delivering clear and accurate information without unintentionally fueling conflict or providing a platform for violence and hate.

White supremacist groups are not new to American society, and journalists who have covered these issues in the United States and around the globe have developed best practices for reporting on hate groups and their activities. To that end, please find below a set of key considerations and guidelines for responsible and de-escalatory reporting.

Bottom Line

1. Provide clear and accurate information about the threat white supremacist groups pose without amplifying their message or enabling them to use you to shape their narrative.
2. Provide real-time reporting without directly linking to white supremacist messages or inadvertedly advertising their events to the public.
3. Carefully describe white supremacist groups to reflect their ideological motivations. Avoid using alternative labels or descriptors to equate extremists with more general conservative demonstrators or "fraternities."
4. Underscore that violence is not inevitable nor acceptable. Be explicit about the intentionality of planned violence and emphasize the differences between the violent demonstrations and activities of white supremacist groups and other social justice and political demonstrations.

Course Corrections

Don't...	Instead...
Give white supremacists a platform with media interviews or quotes. Do not simply repeat their ideologies, description of themselves (which are often deliberately misleading) or details of planned campaigns or events.	**Avoid direct interviews and paraphrase if you feel you must interview.** Extremists often try to manipulate the media for free "PR". Use third-party researchers or anti-racist organizations as sources.
Report on events that could amplify current white supremacist organizations/ideas when the threat they pose outweighs the benefit of public information.	**Consider "strategic silence."** Consider covering white supremacist organizations without making reference to specific events or ideologies.
Link directly to social media posts or accounts of white supremacist groups. This can inadvertently increase their reach.	**Contextualize posts and social media activity by paraphrasing core messages.** Be mindful of reporting details that serve the

	public interest without amplifying white supremacist ideals or platforms.
Downplay the intentionality of violent actions. White supremacists will often claim that their activities were peaceful gatherings that "got out of hand" or point to previous incidents where violence appeared inevitable.	**Be clear in reporting about how actions are coordinated and orchestrated to cause violence**. Be mindful of victimization narratives for white supremacists and condemn violence. Many actively attempt to portray themselves as peaceful, aligned with law enforcement, and as enforcers of law in order - sometimes by intentionally picking fights then claiming they were acting in self-defense.
Repeat inflammatory rhetoric, especially without context and additional information about condemnation of such rhetoric. Avoid including this rhetoric in headlines.	**Report in ways that center the full humanity of groups targeted by extremist groups.** Extremist rhetoric often paints groups as lacking "warmth" and/or "competence." You can defuse these narratives by not only *not* repeating extremist rhetoric, but showcasing the stories and perspectives of those targeted by them.
Use alternative labels for these groups. Hate groups have normalized their actions by framing themselves as "far right," "alt right," or other terms that minimize their true intentions.	**Be explicit in naming these groups for what they are.** Identify individuals or groups as white supremacists, hate groups, etc. to make the ideology guiding their actions clear It can be helpful to develop a baseline of familiarity with their ideologies versus the public image they are pushing. Many of these groups will claim "platforms" that sanitize their image (e.g. "we care about protecting children".)
Talk about violence without condemning it or highlighting actions taken in response. This can inadvertently help threat narratives gain traction.	**Include information about what is being done to address violence, including condemnations from community leaders of different ideological backgrounds**. Proactively share examples of peaceful demonstrations.

Additional Guidance
For further guidance on reporting on extremist threats, see additional resources developed by:

- Journalist's Resource - 10 Tips for Covering White Supremacy and Far-Right Extremists
- Data & Society Research Institute - The Oxygen of Amplification
- Center for Journalism Ethics - A Guide to Covering Hate Speech without Amplifying It

- [Election SOS](#) - First Aid Kit for Misinformation
- [Election SOS](#) - How to Cover Electoral Conflict
- [Election SOS](#) - Reporting in Contentious Times
- [Free Press](#) - Before and After the Vote: A Journalism Resource Database
- [PEN America](#) - The Reporters Guide to Covering the 2020 Election
- [Election Coverage and Democracy Network](#) - Recommendations for Media Covering the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election
- [National Task Force on Election Crises](#) - Resources
- [National Task Force on Election Crises](#) - Post-Voting Period Toolkit
- [Institute for Constitutional Advocacy and Protection: Protests & Public Safety: A Guide for Cities and Citizens](#)