

Good afternoon. My name is Lecia Brooks, and I serve as the chief of staff and culture at the Southern Poverty Law Center, located in Montgomery, Alabama — the Deep South of the United States. I am deeply honored to speak with you today at the UN Forum on Minority Issues, especially given the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the UN Declaration on Minority Rights. I want to thank the Special Rapporteur, the Tom Lantos Institute, and all of you for your service in building a world that is more just, equitable, and compassionate for all people.

In the three decades since the adoption of the Declaration, this body has affirmed the necessity of honoring the human rights of all people. You have shed light on abuses of those rights in minority communities across the globe. But even as we acknowledge these achievements, we must also reflect on a painful truth. We're gathering in a moment of crisis unparalleled in modern times. The influence of hate and extremism — particularly white supremacist and white nationalist ideologies — is growing, and it's threatening minority communities worldwide.

The Southern Poverty Law Center was founded in 1971 to ensure that the promise of the modern American Civil Rights Movement became a reality for all. For more than 50 years, we've been monitoring the purveyors of hate and extremism in the United States. What we're seeing today is alarming: While white supremacist and other extremist groups have not grown in number, they have grown in influence. Why this trend? Our research finds that many ideologies motivated by hate have become increasingly accepted in mainstream politics. Adherents to these ideologies don't need to look far to find like-minded people, nor to be among those who espouse and advance extremist views. Those who might've shared these views but were once unwilling to join an extremist group are now more likely to get involved — and to spread hate.

This rise in hate takes many forms. Disinformation. The scapegoating and blaming of minority communities for societal problems. Barriers to voting and political participation. Violence.

This constant barrage of messaging laced with hateful words and conspiracy theories, and the growing acceptance of those messages, dehumanizes minority communities. It makes them targets for further harm. And what's particularly troublesome is how far these seeds of hate have been sown.

In partnership with Tulchin Research, the Southern Poverty Law Center conducted a recent poll in the United States showing that nearly 70 percent of people who identified as Republican voters believe, at least to some extent, in the “great replacement theory,” which holds that demographic changes are being deliberately engineered to minimize white voting power and rob white people of control. And, the poll identified a disturbing amount of support for the idea that political violence is sometimes necessary and justified.

These findings are mirrored in our lived reality. Earlier this month, on Transgender Day of Remembrance, we mourned a tragedy in Colorado Springs after a gunman, driven by hate, opened fire at a LGBTQ nightclub and killed five people and injured many others. The attack was not isolated, but part of a broader constellation of attacks against the LGBTQ community, including a swelling of hate speech and discriminatory legislation across states designed to demonize and erase the humanity of LGBTQ people, children, and families. We applaud the recommendation from the recent Americas Regional Forum that any new treaty for the protection of minorities include sexual orientation and gender identity.

As the influence of extremist ideologies continues to rise, so too does the violence they incite. And it is often driven by young people who have been radicalized online. Last year, the FBI reported that hate crimes in the United States had surged to their [highest level in 12 years](#). And we know that data is incomplete. This represents just a snapshot — the real numbers are far greater.

The spread of extremist ideologies is not only a threat in the United States, but in many countries around the world — particularly as white supremacists can more easily connect and coordinate in the internet age. Right-wing extremists, including white supremacist and neo-Nazi groups, are resurgent in Europe, where the great replacement theory was born. While much of the hateful rhetoric and violence in the United States is targeted toward migrants from Central and South America and the Caribbean, racism also has deep roots in those countries where enslavement was once widespread and helps to fuel extremist nationalist views.

As these ideologies gain mainstream acceptance, and as their adherents ascend to positions of political authority, their power grows. All too rapidly, they are weakening protections for minority communities.

There is an urgent need for states to work together, in partnership with civil society and international organizations, to effectively rein in the growth of extremist influence and to protect the rights, freedoms, and safety of minority groups. Until now, states and international organizations have focused heavily on law enforcement, military, and security responses. We have devoted too little attention and resources to the vital need to prevent extremism by identifying and addressing what pulls people into its oppressive grip.

Efforts to develop social cohesion and resilience, and to empower people and communities to recognize and respond to warning signs long before hate crimes take place, must be prioritized.

We're up against daunting opposition. But as we've learned from centuries of activists around the world who risked everything for their human rights, change *is* possible. A better future *is* possible. And I am confident we can achieve it, together. Thank you.