Twitter Thread by David Frum



David Frum
@davidfrum

On October 16 2020, a secondary school teacher named Samuel Paty was beheaded with a meat cleaver in the street of a small town 20 miles down the Seine from Paris. 1/x

Paty's murderer, a young Chechen refugee, had never met the teacher. The killer was incited to the crime by a multi-day campaign of defamation and disinformation on French social media. 2/x

For 5 years, Paty had taught his classes a unit on free speech and its limits in a democratic society. As part of the discussion, he showed his students some of the famous Charlie Hebdo cartoons - after inviting those who might be offended to leave and then rejoin the class. 3/x

One parent of one student - not the student herself - then set in motion a campaign of denunciation against Paty. And the result was a crime that shocked France and pulled tens of thousands to vigils and protests. 4/x

France has suffered terrible crimes in the name of religion before the Paty killing. We're only 5 years from the horrifying nightclub attacks that killed 130 in November 2015. But past attacks caught France by surprise. This murder announced itself in advance. 5/x

President Macron has announced a program of actions to combat radicalization and extremism in France. Who knows whether these measures will work. https://t.co/trC00ozNvQ But from across the Atlantic, this thought ... 6/x

Like the Paty killing, the January 6 attacks on the US Capitol were advertised in advance, publicized by media, and even prefigured by previous attacks on state capitols. The assailants were pro-Trump radicals, acting in the name of loyalty to the president. 7/x

For 20 years, US conservatives have focused on extremism and violence as something that supposedly attacks the US only from the outside. It's time to awake to the truth - and to the responsibilities that come from that truth. 8/x

The most important institutions in French Islam have worked with Macron to define a French Islam. France is a different society with different traditions - of course. But the US needs at least the same *spirit* from right-wing organizations in this country. 9/x

We need the conservative community in this country to step up in the way that French Muslims are stepping up - to disavow not only violence, but the extremism and conspiracism that enable violence. To self-police, not in fear, but in loyalty and public spirit. 10/x

This second impeachment trial of Donald Trump offers a chance for conservatives to repudiate the drumbeat of incitement. Quit pretending the violence came from nowhere, that conservatives are victims, that concerns about right-wing extremism are "censorship." Take responsibility.

Almost everybody - French Muslims, American conservatives - condemns violence. But in the social media age, we can all witness in real time the emergence of the extremism and conspiracism that enable violence. A free state cannot do much about *those* evils. Communities can. 12/x

The first step is to admit a problem, as Senator Sasse did in @TheAtlantic a few days ago. https://t.co/ZnQXsr6CJ2

@TheAtlantic But that's only a first step. There's more to do. I'll be thinking and writing about that "more" in the days ahead. END