

COUNTERING BACKLASH

RECLAIMING
GENDER JUSTICE

WORKING PAPER 3

ANTI-GENDER BACKLASH: WHERE IS PHILANTHROPY?

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ABOUT

Countering Backlash aims to create much needed new knowledge around the complex phenomena of patriarchal backlash and identifying opportunities for women's rights organisations and other gender justice defenders, to address the erosion of gender objectives within development and counter gender backlash. The programme's main countries of focus are Bangladesh, Brazil, India, Kenya, Lebanon, and Uganda.

Led by the Institute of Development Studies, Countering Backlash is being implemented by a consortium which includes: Advocates for Social Change Kenya, the Arab Institute for Women at the Lebanese American University, BRAC Institute of Governance and Development, BRAC James P Grant School of Public Health, Centre for Basic Research, Centre for Health and Social Justice, Gender at Work, Nucleus of Interdisciplinary Women's Studies of the Federal University of Bahia, Refugee Law Project, and Women of Uganda Network. The programme is funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACLJ	American Center for Law and Justice
ADF	Alliance Defending Freedom
AGI	Anti-Gender Initiative
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AWDF	African Women's Development Foundation
AWID	The Association for Women's Rights in Development
BUILD	Building Institutions and Networks Programme
CB	Countering Backlash, Reclaiming Gender Justice
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women
DAFs	Donor Advised Funds
FGHR	Fund for Global Human Rights
FICS	Funders Initiative for International Civil Society
FJS	Foundation for Just Society
GPP	Global Philanthropy Project
IM-D	Iniciativa Mesoamericana de Mujeres Defensoras de Derechos Humanos (Mesoamerican Initiative for Women Human Rights Defenders)
JASS	Just Associates
LGBTQI+	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (or those questioning their gender identity or sexual orientation), and intersex
LSE	London School of Economics
MRAs	Men's Rights Associations
NCF	National Christian Foundation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OSF	Open Society Foundations
RAGI	Responding to Anti-Gender Initiatives
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
UAF	Urgent Action Fund
UN	United Nations
WHRDs	Women Human Rights Defenders
WLUM	Women Living Under Muslim Law

INTRODUCTION



My biggest worry is that we're watching the erosion of rights without a bigger sense of alarm [among donors] as if it's just the political weather of the moment, and it's normal. (Source: US-based collaborative fund staff)

Any feminist or LGBTQI+ activist will tell you that backlash is basically the cost of doing business. Commenting on the very non-linear nature of feminist organising, a group of activists I was working with in 2012 concluded that: 'it's not arithmetic. It's physics'. In other words, changing gender and other social norms that form the bedrock of systemic inequality, from the family to the UN, will naturally generate conflict.

Since the late 1990s, women's rights activists with whom I worked closely began tracking the more organised forms of backlash described as 'religious fundamentalisms'.¹ Conservative religious leaders and institutions from all religions were more visibly taking firm political stands against advances in women's and LGBTQI+ rights, and against specific issues like HIV/AIDs and the perennial question of reproductive rights. In the early 2000s, I was at the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) when many of us took notice of the joint lobbying team for the Vatican and Muslim Brotherhood working to 'bracket' and neutralise women's rights language in international human rights frameworks. Within a short time, we realised this was not your usual resistance to change, but a bigger, more intentional political strategy.

Fast forward to 2016 with the election of Trump along with a wave of extreme right and authoritarian-oriented leaders. Bolsonaro, Duterte, Orbán and their friends in the global corporate media world were the frontmen for the global trend referred to as 'rising authoritarianism' which openly challenged the viability and value of democratic governance. Though the term 'rising authoritarianism' was known in academic and policy circles, especially among those tracking the far-right,

many human rights organisers were piecing together adjacent patterns but naming them as 'closing civic space' and an 'anti-rights agenda'. 'Democratic backsliding' was happening in places like India, the United States, and Uganda, but progressives weren't really connecting the dots. Attacks against human rights defenders and civic space over here, backlash against women's rights and LGBTQI+ rights over there, attacks on environmental defenders in another box.

By the time the Covid-19 pandemic paralysed the world in 2020, the crisis of democracy, with autocrats using the tools of the liberal state to erode rights and freedoms, close civic space, and dismantle democratic structures, was in full swing. Though unfolding all along in select contexts, backlash against women's rights and gender justice was more visible due to increasingly bold, successful moves to dismantle and reverse hard-fought women's and LGBTQI+ rights, including draconian anti-LGBTQI+ laws in Uganda (Mwiine et al. 2023) and the US Supreme Court's overturning of the 52-year-old right to abortion in 2022 (Nazneen and Lewin 2022).

In tracing this history, one might say that those of us who care about human rights weren't paying enough attention to the continued organising efforts of actors and interests behind the reversal of rights and their broader sustained agenda to consolidate economic and political power. Maybe gender-specific and abortion rights were the canary in the coal mine, losing political oxygen to attempts to reverse and block them



The goal is not just to roll back rights secured by feminists and LGBTQ people, but to replace a democratic world order with a racialized, patriarchal, transphobic, homophobic, and authoritarian governance model and consolidate a top-down economic model for the benefit of a few. (Source: large private foundation staff member)

¹ See Vaggioni (2008) that drew on insights and analysis from feminists in all regions and helped birth the collaboration involving the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), Catholics for a Free Choice, Women Living Under Muslim Law (WLUM), Musawah (a Muslim women's network) and others; see also [AWID's subsequent reports](#) and its ['Facing Fundamentalisms' newsletter series](#) (2011-2015) to trace that history. The collaboration evolved into a programme aimed at challenging anti-gender backlash called ['Advancing Universal Rights and Justice'](#). The campaign video, ['Your Voice is Fundamental Against Fundamentalisms'](#) (2013) produced by the Articulación Feminista Marcosur (Marcosur Feminist Network), Uruguay, in collaboration with [Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir](#) (Catholic Women for the Right to Decide) - México and AWID, was part of that endeavour.

for years. Today, the well-financed and coordinated anti-rights, anti-gender, and anti-democratic backlash has targeted women's and LGBTQI+ rights but it's finally clear that there is a playbook and a well-financed network behind it. And they have a multi-pronged authoritarian agenda that is fundamentally about the consolidation of political and economic power, where 'anti-gender ideology' is a primary pillar of a broader political agenda (Ramos and Straus 2018).

Progressive movements and civil society organisations have mobilised powerfully to block, resist, and defend against the dismantling of rights and attacks on activists, organisations, and dissent. Despite the challenges, funding and collaboration from progressive donors have been a lifeline to human rights, feminist, and LGBTQI+ organisations in this struggle. Yet none of these distinct efforts thus far seem to be a match for the global anti-gender backlash juggernaut in a full-swing assault on advances regarding racial, gender, and reproductive justice and rights – and the backlash doesn't seem to be stopping there, as environmental defenders are increasingly being criminalised too.

This working paper explores how philanthropic institutions with a history of supporting women's and LGBTQI+ rights and democracy are seeing and responding to the anti-gender backlash, and the background dynamics shaping the struggle. It is based on a scan commissioned by **Countering Backlash, Reclaiming Gender Justice** (CB), a collaborative based at the Institute for Development Studies that supports research, analysis and strategy with research partners in Bangladesh, Brazil, India, Kenya, Lebanon, and Uganda, and smaller research grants in India, Pakistan, Serbia, and Turkey. Over the past four years, the collaboration has tracked the dynamics of patriarchal backlash at national, regional, and global levels, and published related frameworks, tools, and analysis (see for example, Edström et al. 2023; Lewin 2021; Nazneen and Okech 2021).

This paper seeks to contribute to that analysis by looking at the perspectives and priorities of the private philanthropic institutions on which many of the groups and initiatives affected by and challenging anti-gender backlash depend for their survival.

Following the introduction, the paper is divided into five sections. They are:

Section 1: Background and Methodology – explains how the scan was carried out and the sources of information used, including what's left out and biases.

Section 2: How Philanthropy is Organised – describes and categorises the funders who were included in the scan, as a sample of gender justice-related philanthropy.

Section 3: The Problem of Multiple Frames – discusses some of the debates and questions raised during the interviews conducted for this scan about how to frame 'backlash'.

Section 4: Findings – reviews how philanthropic institutions included in the scan see the problem of anti-gender backlash and how they are responding.

Section 5: Conclusions – summarises major findings and questions about what is to be done.



Despite the challenges, funding and collaboration from progressive donors have been a lifeline to human rights, feminist, and LGBTQI+ organisations in this struggle.

1 BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

1.1 WHO AND WHY?

This study is informed by interviews and relevant conversations with 18 donors, 5 philanthropic advisors, 6 grantee partners, and a desk review of various reports produced by and for the donors. These interviews were carried out both under the auspices of this inquiry, and through related projects that I'm involved in with philanthropic advisors and grantee partners working on anti-gender backlash. This research paralleled an in-depth process led by a close colleague working within a large private foundation to develop a more comprehensive study on anti-gender backlash to inform the foundation's scaled-up response. It benefitted greatly from her interviews and analysis, as well as the brainstorming sessions we convened with a circle of collaborators who work closely in and with philanthropy.

Although anti-gender backlash has been visible and building for many years, donor attention to the backlash is uneven, emergent, and evolving. Many new philanthropic initiatives have rolled out in 2023, including important reports and efforts made public in September and October 2023 after I completed this scan.

The mapping included a span of different types of philanthropic institutions and initiatives concerned about questions on anti-gender backlash. These ranged from large private foundations and other funding sources which, for historical and other reasons, are based primarily in the US; to regional and country-based funds in the global South. However, there are important omissions of donors who are playing an increasingly critical and influential role, like the Black Feminist Fund, UHAI (meaning 'life' or 'alive' in Swahili), the Children's Investment Fund Foundation, Bloomberg, Arcus Foundation, and Luminate. Omissions are partly due to time constraints.

There are strict limits both on what information is available publicly and what can be shared from interviews. I name the institutions, but for the most part am not able to name the people I spoke with who shared their views confidentially. This analysis reflects the views of the gender justice and women's rights staff – usually senior staff – in the organisations listed

in section 2. It should be noted that the views may not fully represent the institutional position on these issues, partly because anti-gender backlash is evolving, and also the interviewees have varying degrees of authority and influence in the final decisions of their institutions.

1.2 GUIDING QUESTIONS

Countering Backlash's overarching questions guiding this scan are:

- What's driving the philanthropic funders' engagement with the issue?
- Which backlash-related problems are they seeking to address?
- What framings of backlash are they subscribing to?
- What do their related funding allocations emphasise (and consequently what previously funded areas are getting de-emphasised)?
- What theories of change underlie their work on the gender backlash?
- What are their implicit assumptions about what's needed (their theory of change)?

These questions were adapted and tailored to the specific characteristics of the donors and their programmatic and geographic focus. For example, collaborative funds (see descriptions in section 2) tend to track and fund in relation to a specific situation or problem. The interview questions (below) served more as a checklist than a rigid research framework.

- 1 How is your organisation looking at and understanding the problem of anti-gender backlash?
 - What/who are the primary drivers, dynamics, and manifestations?
 - What are your primary sources of information and analysis?

- How has this trend impacted your grantees and the regions where you fund? In terms of your organisation?
 - How are you framing the problem to guide responses? (e.g. anti-gender, anti-“gender ideology”, anti-rights, backlash, far-right extremism, etc)
- 2 How have you responded in terms of funding and other strategies? In terms of the public positions or other decisions affecting your organisation?
 - 3 What are the most important needs, gaps, and opportunities in terms of research and action where donors can make an impact with more, better, and different ways of funding?

more toward what to do rather than a deeper level of specifics of the study organisations’ analysis and theories of change. These deeper level details are challenging to pinpoint beyond what is publicly available in their organisational reports and on their websites – some of which is challenged by their approaches to backlash.

My perspective is also shaped by my direct organising and movement-support experiences on gender and other social justice and rights issues in Latin America, Asia, and Africa as well as globally, over many decades and in the face of various forms of backlash (VeneKlasen 2019). I am currently located in the US, and despite my long history working in and with groups from the global South, it is hard to escape the US influence.

1.3 MY POSITIONALITY

I bring my own bias and orientation to this scan. As a feminist strategist working closely with donors and movements on addressing social, gender, and climate justice, my analysis leans

2 HOW PHILANTHROPY IS ORGANISED

The philanthropic ecosystem that supports human rights, democracy, LGBTQI+ rights, gender justice, and women's rights includes a diverse range of organisations and individuals. Their size, longevity, staffing, location, source of funding, scope, mission, and many other factors determine their willingness and capacity to respond to new trends, and their relative influence on what is prioritised and resourced. Some broad categories are helpful in getting a sense of the landscape and orientation.² The donors listed here are only a fraction of the groups involved in democracy, human rights, and LGBTQI+ and women's rights. For example, the philanthropic institutions that fund reproductive health and abortion rights include many more foundations. This scan's focus is primarily on funders, highlighted below, who have a track record on women's rights and gender justice, and who are more likely to respond quickly to anti-gender backlash. The ones *highlighted and in italics* were interviewed directly for this study or were engaged through other related processes where they shared an analysis that shaped the content of this paper.

It is important to note that the constellation of US donors and large private foundations support groups and programmes responding to their institutional priorities, but also provide crucial resources for collaborative funds focused on critical agendas and for intermediary groups, including regional and country-specific funds and initiatives in the global South. Most of the large private foundations are the primary source of funding for a vast network of regional and country-based women's and human rights funds throughout the global South who track anti-gender trends and support local initiatives.

2.1 LARGE PRIVATE FOUNDATIONS

Open Society Foundations (OSF), *Ford Foundation*, Children's Investment Fund Foundation, MacArthur, Gates, Packard, Hewlett, etc, largely based in the US and Europe; some, like Ford and OSF, have offices around the world.

Founded by George Soros, OSF is the world's largest private independent foundation working on democracy, human rights, and justice, including gender and women's rights. It is currently in the

midst of a massive reorganisation process that has paused most funding and programming, although it funds some intermediary and collaborative funds in, and focused on, the global South.

When it comes to gender-racial justice and women's rights, Ford is the most influential large donor because of the scale and longevity of the foundation, and its mostly continuous commitment over several decades. It is a primary source of funding for many of the intermediaries and collaborative funds involved in anti-gender backlash. Currently it is in the process of mobilising a multi-million dollar strategy to increase its long-term investment in countering anti-gender backlash within a broader agenda of supporting justice and democracy.

2.2 FAMILY FOUNDATIONS

Oak Foundation, *Foundation for Just Society* (FJS), Arcus, Luminate, the Wallace Global Fund, Sigrid Rausing Trust, etc are all private foundations governed partially by the family members who created them and who are involved in decision-making mostly at a macro level. The Oak Foundation is based in Switzerland and both Oak and FJS are leading foundations in support of women's funds and gender justice, LGBTQI+ rights, and feminist organising.



Most of the large private foundations are the primary source of funding for a vast network of regional and country-based women's and human rights funds throughout the global South who track anti-gender trends and support local initiatives.

² See Arutyunova and Clark (2013). These categories come from reports from AWID's programme on 'Where's the Money for Feminist Organizing?'.

2.3 DONOR ADVISED FUNDS (DAFS)

Wellspring Advisors and Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors are good examples of DAFs, where expert staff distribute funding from anonymous sources who have specific interests. Wellspring is an important donor in addressing anti-gender backlash, providing critical support for feminists and LGBTQI+ organisations.

2.4 INTERMEDIARIES (ALSO CALLED PUBLIC FUNDS)

These are resourced by grants from individual, bilateral, and private donors including many of the large private and family foundations. These include *Urgent Action Fund (UAF)-Africa*, *UAF-Latin America*, *UAF-Asia*, UAF-Global, *Central American Women's Fund*, *Elas (Brazilian Women's Fund)*, Mama Cash (Netherlands), *Fund for Global Human Rights (FGHR)*, *Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice*, *African Women's Development Foundation (AWDF)*, *the Numun Foundation*, American Jewish World Service, Black Feminist Fund, and the Global Fund for Women. The *highlighted and italicised* funds (those interviewed or otherwise included in this scan) are located and governed in the global South. UHAJ – East and Southern Africa is the largest global South based LGBTQI+ funder, but unfortunately is not included in this scan.

2.5 COLLABORATIVE FUNDS AND NETWORKS

These collaborative funds are joint funding mechanisms that draw resources from many philanthropic sources, bilateral donors, and individuals with a mission to address a specific problem or situation. The institutions included in this scan are the *Collaborative Fund for Gender and Reproductive Equity*, *Nebula Fund*, *Global Philanthropy Project (GPP)*, and *Funders Initiative for International Civil Society (FICS)*.

The donor networks convene their members to learn together and explore key new topics; they play a pro-active role in educating and influencing their members' funding strategies. Important networks include Gender Co-lab, Human Rights Funder's Network, Ariadne (European Funders for Social Change), and the *Alliance for Feminist Movements*, which is the only one I interviewed for this scan. The Alliance for Feminist Movements, an initiative co-founded by AWID with several donors and private foundations, brings together very diverse donors including bilateral donors and private foundations to explore what it means to support feminist movements.

2.6 CORPORATE AND INVESTOR-FOUNDED FOUNDATIONS

Bloomberg, Chanel Foundation, the London-based Baring Foundation, etc.

2.7 PHILANTHROPIC ADVISORS AND NETWORKS

Shake the Table and Bridgespan work closely with philanthropy on key trends and on how to make philanthropy more effective and responsive. Shake the Table is a feminist advisory organisation committed to helping philanthropic institutions fund feminist movements and understand why and how to support gender and racial justice. Bridgespan is a consulting group supporting philanthropic organisations on a wide variety of organisational, management, and social and political issues, including gender.

3 THE PROBLEM OF MULTIPLE FRAMES

How we frame the current moment and dynamics both exposes and reinforces some analytical confusion and political differences, privileging some viewpoints and diminishing others while also hindering the kind of coordination and convergence essential to match the scale of the anti-gender effort. These differences are also easily exploited by the anti-gender movement to polarise gender justice movements, as in the case of anti-trans perspectives within feminist movements (Abbas and Sardá-Chandiramani 2023). The distinct frames donors use include: fundamentalist backlash, democratic backsliding, rising authoritarianism, anti-gender, anti-feminist, anti-“gender ideology”, anti-rights, anti-abortion, anti-democracy, the far-right, religious nationalism, and the opposition.

Is it a movement and an opposition force? Is it a tactic? Is it a narrative? Is it a pillar of a larger, more coordinated power grab? These distinct characterisations of the problem matter for strategy.

The differences conveyed by these terms are magnified by historical, cultural, and contextual differences. In addition to being politically divisive and contentious, in Ghana, India, Uganda, and the US, for example, there are donors who face legal repercussions associated with the words used to describe a group’s work or mission. Some donors have had their offices closed in the global South, as the anti-democracy, anti-rights trends dovetail with anti-Western and anti-US sentiment.

These distinct and sometimes competing frames are reinforced by the tendency of philanthropy to frame problems from a policy or legal perspective (e.g. anti-rights or closing civic space) and to silo grantmaking according to specific issues, a problem discussed further below. As one feminist donor pointed out: ‘I go to one meeting about anti-trans. Then an anti-gender meeting. Then a discussion about anti-rights’. She pointed out that this kind of narrow issue focus encourages cherry picking, prevents a more systemic analysis of the problem, fuels competition, and prevents collaboration (source: feminist donor advisor). This often leads to unintentionally marginalising one issue or group in favour of another. What are classified as anti-rights movements can be highly misleading since such efforts can support rights for certain groups while denying rights to others. It all depends on whose rights are being advanced or attacked. To understand the full meaning of anti-rights efforts, the role played by

patriarchy, race, class, and other forms of discrimination and power needs to be made visible.

Feminists in philanthropic institutions wonder whether the failure to mention gender and opt for an anti-rights frame reflects a deeper longstanding undercurrent of resistance to feminism, and specifically to abortion rights even though that has thawed somewhat since the US Supreme Court ended abortion rights. One donor pointed out, ‘there’s progress and then there’s retrenchment on these issues. We need to take on a political project of making clear how imposing the gender hierarchy is an essential part of the authoritarian agenda. How do we get ahead of the rollback when we’re struggling to have a common narrative?’ (source: collaborative fund staff).

Some feel that anti-gender is a frame that’s misleading as it may sideline reproductive rights and, at times, the broader concerns advanced by women’s movements. ‘It should really be anti-“gender ideology”’, one large private foundation source said, mirroring the phrase “gender ideology” coined by the anti-gender movement which takes in all rights related to gender, sexuality, reproductive rights, and women. This source argued that a shared understanding of the terms should not be assumed and can lead to divisions and conflict if not clarified. Several feminists in the US-based donor community prefer anti-democracy as a more comprehensive frame, as long as the analysis includes patriarchal backlash as a key pillar. In this sense, activists are fighting the power of authoritarianism grounded in patriarchy, race, class, gender, and other forces and narratives of exclusion and domination. Several feminists in donor institutions say that too few human rights and democracy donors understand or recognise how patriarchy and gender are critical to the forces characterised by rising authoritarianism.



What are classified as anti-rights movements can be highly misleading since such efforts can support rights for certain groups while denying rights to others.



Clear inclusive framing becomes crucial to the ability to create and sustain effective cross-movement strategies and collaboration strong enough to counter the tactics, discourse, and strategy of the opposition and movements promoting authoritarianism and targeting gender justice activists and their agendas.

A series of global South dialogues among feminists and gender justice activists convened by a transnational network working on reproductive rights uncovered scepticism about the framing of 'anti-gender backlash' as a trend, particularly among feminist activists in the Middle East and parts of Asia. These activists felt that anti-gender backlash is nothing new, and that the new framing feels like a Western export by Northern donors who only now are grasping the full extent of the problem. As one donor advisor involved in these global South dialogues reported, 'they point out that their work has always generated resistance. They ask, how is this different?' (source: donor advisor). While this suggests that contextual differences are not sufficiently recognised by Northern donors, one of the findings highlighted by facilitators of the dialogues is that the information that many donors have about the anti-gender movement is simply not reaching feminist activists and movement organisations, and vice versa.

A report published in September 2023 from the Astraea Lesbian Fund for Justice, 'Global Resistance to Anti-Gender Opposition' (Abbas and Sardá-Chandiramani 2023), explores further how context shapes terminology and framing, and recommends that donors' responses 'keep it simple' (e.g. use words like 'conservative' or 'fundamentalist') to help forge a shared narrative and communicate to the general public. The authors point out that 'in North America, Latin America, and Western Europe, anti-gender is widely understood as a construct created to undermine transgender, intersex, and cisgender women's rights, autonomy, and self-determination' (Abbas and Sardá-Chandiramani 2023: 8). In contrast, in Colombia, Peru, and Kenya, 'religious fundamentalist terminology resonates most, but less so in Serbia where nationalism and fascism are the ways in which opposition forces manifest' (Ibid: 8).

Then there's the question of the term 'backlash'. A few years back, as part of the collaborative efforts to study the challenge of fundamentalisms and the universality of rights led by AWID (see footnote 1), feminists felt that backlash tended to depoliticise and even normalise a more serious power struggle that couldn't be reduced to the implicit dynamic of action and reaction. The 2019 London School of Economics (LSE) blog, 'Backlash: A Misleading Narrative' (2020) by David Paternotte, was widely circulated and affirmed this point. He argues that the term 'offers a misleading narrative because it is conceptually flawed, empirically weak and politically problematic'. He points to three problems: 1) it 'isolates gender and sexuality from the rest of society'; 2) it can prevent cross-issue collaboration; 3) it can lead to self-censorship, reinforcing a logic that if you avoid controversy, there will be less conflict.

Framing shapes our shared discourse about what we are up against and our narratives about what we are for. It demands a deeper political discussion between donors and activists that involves space for a sharper analysis centring gender, trans, feminists, and abortion, and all the other issues that shape the violence and narrative of authoritarian movements currently so powerful. As one foundation staff member put it, 'gender is the canary in the coalmine. Attacks against women and LGBTQI+ people and rights are in the service of a larger agenda', that includes attacks on ethnic and racial minorities, immigrants, and anyone working in defence of the environment. 'The goal is not just to roll back rights secured by feminists and LGBTQI+ people, but to replace a democratic world order with a racialised, patriarchal, transphobic, homophobic, and authoritarian governance model' and consolidate a top-down economic model for the benefit of a few (source: large private foundation staff member). It's not just the democracy agenda. As one leading donor on backlash explained, 'an emergent idea that came out of an 'On the Right Track'³ meeting recently was to fund research that connects anti-gender, anti-democracy, and authoritarianism explicitly. I think there are pro-democracy funders we can bring to our side' (referring to the gender justice agenda) (source: family foundation donor). Clear inclusive framing becomes crucial to the ability to create and sustain effective cross-movement strategies and collaboration strong enough to counter the tactics, discourse, and strategy of the opposition and movements promoting authoritarianism and targeting gender justice activists and their agendas.

³'On the Right Track' is a collaborative effort among women's funds in Latin America and Europe 'to protect the values of freedom, democracy and diversity in Europe and Latin America from fundamentalisms and far-right's attacks' that includes joint research and analysis.

4 FINDINGS

This section is divided into two parts.

- How philanthropic actors understand the problem: I discuss how different philanthropic organisations concerned about gender and women's rights are analysing anti-gender backlash. In some cases, I discuss their responses because this helps to elucidate their analysis.
- How philanthropic actors are pushing back: I look at how they are responding, and discuss some of the emergent initiatives, strategies and approaches underway to confront anti-gender backlash at a bigger scale.

4.1 HOW PHILANTHROPIC ACTORS UNDERSTAND THE PROBLEM

Local funds and intermediaries: regional and national women's funds

I begin with regional intermediary funds focused on women's rights, gender justice, and LGBTQI+ rights that often work more closely with the activists, organisations, and movements they fund than the larger private funds do. These regional and national women's funds throughout the global South⁴ are staffed and governed by people from the regions where they fund; many have tracked and responded to anti-gender backlash in its different iterations since their founding. Among these are the UAFs in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, founded in the early 2000s along with the AWDF and Central America Women's Fund.

The UAFs (four different funds working in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and globally) are separate philanthropic organisations designed to support groups and their agendas when attacked or under threat, providing them with context-specific rapid response, security, and collective protection grants. In response to the intensification of attacks on defenders and legal rights over the last two years, the UAFs have included grants for time-sensitive advocacy efforts to block or expose efforts to reverse legislation related to women's and LGBTQI+ rights. Varying from country to country but in all regions, the UAFs have identified a range of attacks playing out in legislatures and on social media, and their specific impacts on the security and wellbeing of defenders. The targeted issues are contraception,

abortion access, trans identities, same sex marriage, LGBTQI+ rights, and protections against domestic violence.

In 2017, the UAFs jointly commissioned an analysis of increased attacks and reversals against feminist and LGBTQI+ agendas and activists (Okech et al. 2017). The report, based on interviews with women human rights defenders (WHRDs) in all UAF regions, did not frame the problem as anti-gender backlash specifically. Rather, it named how conservative politics and 'the collusion between fundamentalist religious groups and the state' (Okech et al. 2017: 12) contribute to the threats and violence directed at women and non-gender conforming people that only a few years later would be characterised as 'anti-gender ideology' or 'anti-gender backlash'.

Latin America, for example, remains the deadliest region for transgender populations, though the rise in these deaths worldwide is 'alarming'. Since the equality and justice work of women, sexual minorities and gender non-conforming groups have historically challenged not only the actions of the state but its very male-centric and nationalist foundation, these groups are subject to inordinate institutionalized violence. This violence is manifest in a variety of intersecting ways. (Okech et al. 2017: 12)

According to UAF staff in different regions, since 2020, the level of global coordination and private US-based financing behind attacks on "gender ideology" are more apparent. One source at UAF-Asia explained how her understanding of backlash has evolved over the last five years:

A couple of years ago I was doing this work looking at anti-rights discourse on the internet. At that time, we took a different approach. We called it Men's Rights Associations (MRAs) which is what it looked like online. After the US, India was the biggest hub of MRAs. There were clear links to US movements. The same choice of language...some opposition to domestic violence laws. Two-three years ago, that was the biggest fight. Anytime there was progressive content on gender and sexuality, the same set of people posted at the same time to push for their issues and views. But now we see that as much more. (Source: UAF-Asia staff member)

⁴For example, Women's Fund Asia, Central American Women's Fund, Elas - the Brazilian Women's Fund, AWDF, Femfund-Poland, Calala Women's Fund - Spain, Reconstruction Women's Fund - Bulgaria. See the complete list of 47 member funds of the Prospera International Network of Women's Funds throughout the world, the vast majority of which are in the global South: <https://prospera-inwf.org/member-funds/>.

As other sources from UAFs in Africa and Latin America point out, until recently, it has been challenging to distinguish between anti-gender and broader anti-rights efforts, and some donors have been slow to grasp how gender backlash is connected to the authoritarian agenda. Both UAF-Africa and AWDF see clear connections between religious institutions and political parties promoting an anti-gender agenda across the African continent where, in some countries, evangelical and pentecostal churches have multiplied. The political-religious alliances are particularly activated during elections.

UAF-Asia staff explain how they see a strong connection to patriarchy and nation-building playing out. 'It's family values and tradition, and very tied to nationhood, with clear ties to authoritarian regimes, and impunity for men. The actors are different [in different places] but the playbook is the same' (source: UAF-Asia staff). UAF-Asia staff say that cases of anti-gender and anti-rights backlash characterised most of the threats and attacks defenders sought rapid response funding for in 2022 and 2023. 'Activists are seen as the impediment to nation-building and need to be criminalised. Authoritarians are using anti-rights as a vehicle for building their narrative' (source: UAF-Asia staff).

UAF-Africa describes a similar accelerated evolution in their own understanding of anti-gender backlash. Prior to 2017, UAF-Africa viewed backlash in a 'siloed way without recognising the global nature of anti-rights and anti-gender decades-long organising' (communication with UAF-Africa). Resistance to women's, gender, and sexual rights is justified as a necessary defence of African traditional family values and self-determination against Western interference.

Informed by other donor-led research initiatives and convenings (including the GPPs described on page 17), UAF-Africa explains that they now see 'the anti-gender movement as a transnational coalition of conservative organisations working to undermine political and social gains made by feminists and LGBTQI+ groups, as a way to consolidate economic and political power' (source: UAF-Africa staff). UAF-Africa actively tracks these trends in the region to inform its rapid response work and growing advocacy, 'through careful research and monitoring, there is clear proof that conservative organisations outside the African continent are funding and training parliamentarians and other leaders to advance an anti-rights agenda' (source: UAF-Africa staff).

UAF-Africa names David Bahati and Asuman Basalirwa in Uganda and Honourable Sam George in Ghana as examples. Advances by the anti-gender movement in Ghana, Uganda, Malawi, Namibia, and Zimbabwe, 'parallel the increase in authoritarian leaders extending their grip on power'. It has become apparent in recent years that 'anti-rights movements have become increasingly active in many African policy and NGO spaces opposing sexual

and reproductive rights, challenging the rule of law, restricting civic space and advocating for the death penalty' (source: UAF-Africa staff).

Simultaneously with these developments, attacks and violations against LGBTQI+ rights, WHRDs working on gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and feminist activists have increased. These range from 'verbal attacks offline and online, to abductions, forced exile and the killing of feminist and queer activists' (source: UAF-Africa staff). According to UAF-Africa, women's organisations and movements are not immune from the disinformation and polarising tactics impacting the broader political climate. These get played out across generational and other difference, exacerbated by religious beliefs on sexuality and specifically, focused on trans rights, and more recently, Gaza-Israel.

In Central America, analysis of anti-gender backlash connects it to the rise of authoritarian politics and political repression against all forms of dissent driven by a mix of corrupt political leaders, right-wing political groups, the conservative wing of the Catholic Church, oligarchs, and organised criminal networks (source: conversations with staff from the Central American Women's Fund and UAF-Latin America and their close allies, the Mesoamerican Women Human Rights Defenders Initiative). The analysis emphasises the economic interests behind the political convergences between distinct state and non-state actors. This is playing out with the consolidation of repressive dictatorships in Nicaragua and El Salvador that have led to the detention and exile of feminist and gender activists, and the closure of offices (e.g. Central American Women's Fund in 2020). Authoritarian politics remains an active part of the political fabric in many countries of the broader Latin America region, even where more progressive governments have come to power (e.g. Brazil, Colombia, Chile).

Regional and national women's fund staff believe that the legal and electoral successes and growing influence across the Americas of progressive agendas are the product of long-term cross-movement organising strategies and a new generation that connects indigenous, labour, economic, and human rights and feminist agendas against corruption. They identify key



'It's family values and tradition, and very tied to nationhood, with clear ties to authoritarian regimes, and impunity for men. The actors are different [in different places] but the playbook is the same' (source: UAF-Asia staff).

factors such as the 'Green Wave' (the abortion rights movement initiated in Argentina) and the unexpected, though fragile, electoral victories of democratically-oriented presidencies in Honduras, Guatemala, Colombia, Chile, and Brazil. They also acknowledge divisions and fractures within feminist movements around trans rights, 'exploited by the right' that can be directly traced to the anti-gender movement (source: conversations with staff from the Central American Women's Fund and UAF-Latin America and their close allies, the Mesoamerican Women Human Rights Defenders Initiative).

The Astraea Lesbian Fund for Justice, another important intermediary fund based in the US with international reach, has tracked and responded to attacks against gender non-conforming people and violence against lesbians and lesbian activists. Through its international fund, it gives core support grants that range from USD 7,000-20,000 to LGBTQI+ organisations. Astraea works closely with other donors to ensure that LGBTQI+ rights and freedoms are protected.

As its recent research on anti-gender backlash demonstrates (Abbas and Sardá-Chandiramani 2023), Astraea consistently brings an analysis of patriarchy, gender, and power to understanding the anti-gender movement's attack on LGBTQI+ rights, recognising how attacks on abortion rights and LGBTQI+ rights are interconnected. 'These are key tactics in the playbook of the right because they are a cultural wedge in society but also in our movements' (source: Astraea staff). Astraea staff point out that in the past gay rights organisations left out specific women's rights like abortion, because 'they were not part of the male experience'. The anti-trans agenda is a challenge both inside and outside movements 'because [transgender identity] challenges the gender binary' which is fundamental to the social order promoted by the right (source: Astraea staff). Astraea has centred trans and intersex rights for many years and plays a key role in bringing a feminist and gender perspective to other philanthropic organisations concerned with gay rights. It supports efforts focused on anti-criminalisation and freedom from violence, anti-discrimination protections, trans human rights, economic justice, migrant justice, economic justice, intersex rights, and art and cultural change.

FGHR is another intermediary fund that was an early responder to the anti-rights agenda. It is US-based and directed by regionally-based staff in the global South where it funds, including Africa, Latin America, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. Much like the UAFs, FGHR's analysis and approach to increased attacks against defenders was initially explored by stretching

the framing of closing civic space as understood by the human rights community. In close collaboration with various organisations including Just Associates (JASS),⁵ FGHR has centred a power, gender, and feminist analysis which recognises how the dynamics of violence, threats, and silencing have played out in public and in families and other private spaces, and have tapped into existing social divisions around race and gender. Today, it continues to play an influential role in shaping how philanthropy understands and responds to anti-gender and anti-rights backlash with a focus on discourse and funding long-term collaborative narrative strategies to counter backlash.

FGHR collaborates closely with the London-based FICS, whose groundbreaking analysis in 2019, '**Rethinking Civic Space in an Age of Intersectional Crises**' (Hayes and Joshi 2019), challenged the prevailing assumptions that have shaped human rights approaches and the narrow framing of civic space. This report has been cited by several organisations included in this scan. Based on dozens of interviews across the world, the report provides an in-depth historical interpretation of the economic, technological, and political trends that created the fertile conditions for the anti-rights and anti-gender movement today. It focuses on how anti-terrorism laws, securitisation, unregulated technology, and corporate capture feed into the anti-rights/authoritarian agenda and shape lives, politics, and the fractures and vulnerabilities easily exploited by far-right narratives. They describe what's driving authoritarian politics with its anti-gender agenda as:

a near perfect storm of monumental, intersectional and in some cases existential crises: intensifying economic and social inequality, rising populism and authoritarianism, a growing ecological crisis with the prospect of irreversible climate change, and the proliferation of new technologies including "artificial intelligence" (AI) that are being controlled or abused by malign actors. All of these trends appear to be nearing a "tipping point". (Hayes and Joshi 2019: 8)

In 2020, FICS transitioned from a donor affinity group to becoming a think tank that engages in and supports collaborative learning, research, and grantmaking for experimental efforts carried out jointly by donors and select civil society groups. In 2023, it launched Civic Futures with FGHR to better understand the 'security playbook of tactics with a particular focus on discourse and narratives' (source: FICS website). In 2023, FICS, FGHR, and others launched the Global Narrative Hive (see page 23).

⁵ Between 2015 and 2020, JASS and FGHR collaborated on a multi-country project aimed at convening diverse activists from different movements with donors for a power and gender analysis of the forces contributing to the violence against defenders. See JASS and FGHR (2020).

Numun Foundation, a newer addition to support for digital and narrative strategies, is a global South-led feminist fund established in 2021 to support women and non-gender-conforming led organisations working on information technology, digital security, data activism, digitally-networked organising and skills sharing, and strategic communications. Explicitly focused on the development of feminist tech infrastructure, its goal is to support the defence of feminist and LGBTQI+ groups against disinformation and surveillance, and support feminist digital strategies to shape discourse.

Collaborative Funds, Networks, and Philanthropic Advisors

GPP, a collaborative fund founded in 2009, is probably the informational source on anti-gender backlash most often mentioned by the donors included in this scan. GPP is dedicated to increasing funding to LGBTQI+ organisations in the global South through strategic research, convenings, and shaping the field. Among its 23 members are some of the larger private foundations and women's funds that are the primary supporters of women's rights, gender justice, and LGBTQI+ rights. These include the Oak Foundation, Ford Foundation, Global Fund for Women, Mama Cash, etc, as well as most of the foundations and funds supporting LGBTQI+ rights exclusively, like Arcus Foundation, Astraea Foundation, The Baring Foundation, International Trans Foundation, and Horizons (LGBTQ) Foundation. GPP works closely with a range of research and advocacy organisations to produce information to educate and motivate donors to invest in the infrastructure needed to defend against and defeat the organised forces of the right. As part of their donor education work, GPP hosts convenings and regular off-the-record conversations with both private and multilateral/bilateral donors.

GPP's pivotal 2020 report, '**Meet the Moment: A Call for Progressive Philanthropic Response to the Anti-Gender Movement**' maps the funding of the global anti-"gender-ideology" or anti-gender movement, and progressive philanthropic responses; it is often mentioned by donors included in this scan as 'a wakeup call'. One donor referred to GPP's influential work as 'heroic'.⁶ GPP researchers draw from multiple sources including feminist and human rights groups as well as US and European-based think tanks doing research on the far-right, to compile statistics and track trends. These reports are biennial and are in addition to the analysis GPP publishes on specific related topics like their report on intersex and trans funding (GPP 2022).

Their 2020 report offers a vivid analysis of the key organisations involved in, and providing funding to anti-gender backlash from the lens of 'where's the money?':

Aggregate revenue of U.S.-based organizations associated with the anti-gender movement during the ten-year span of 2008 to 2017 was \$6.2 billion USD. In that same time period, eleven United States organizations associated with the anti-gender movement funneled at least \$1 billion into countries across the globe. This amount is surely an undercount of the movement's global funding for a number of reasons explored in this document. Among them, many aligned U.S. religious institutions are not required to report their funding activities. In addition to the U.S.-based funding, the global anti-gender movement and its regional campaigns receive additional support from local and regional entities including a number of significant European funders... our research looking at field philanthropic responses focused on anti-gender movements, we found that the majority of progressive funders did not yet have a focused strategy for this work, and the overall field development in this area is nascent. (GPP 2020: 3)

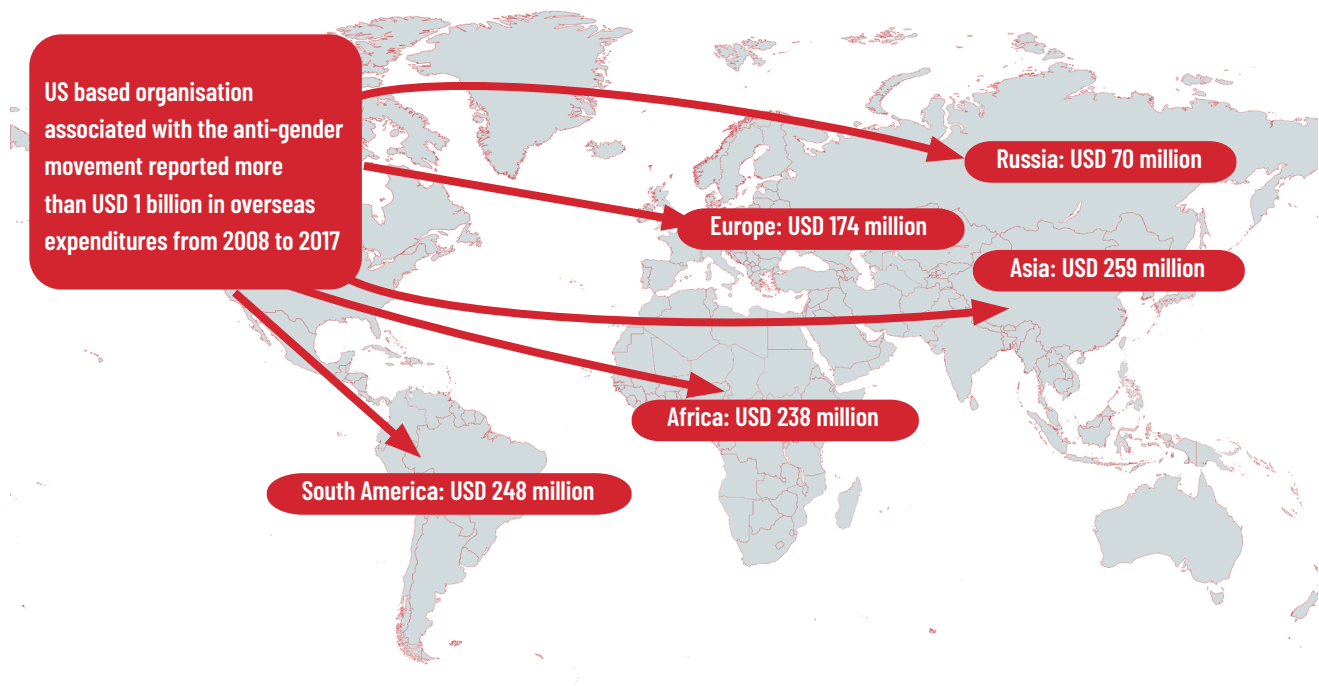
GPP describes the financing and network as:

an enormous financial architecture...associated with the anti-gender movement in the United States...funding is primarily delivered through donations from private individuals, contributions from non-profit charitable foundations including wealthy family foundations and donor-advised funds, and financial support from religiously affiliated organizations, including financial support from churches of various denominations (primarily from the Catholic Church and evangelical Protestant denominations). Some of the biggest institutions in this network include The National Christian Foundation (NCF), and The Christian Community Foundation (branded as WaterStone). For example, in 2017 NCF reported more than \$1.5 billion in revenue and awarded \$1.3 billion in grants to organizations associated with the anti-gender movement. Major recipients of this funding include groups such as Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF), American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ) and the Christian Broadcasting Network. (GPP 2020: 7)

The report describes the global distribution of funding to associations working with the anti-gender movement between 2008-2019, illustrated in Figure 4.1. GPP continuously updates the analysis in ongoing dialogue with other donors about how and

⁶ Some donors also cite '**Manufacturing Moral Panic: Weaponizing Children to Undermine Gender Justice and Human Rights**' (Martínez et al. 2021), a subsequent report co-developed by Elevate Children Funders Group and GPP. The research explores how gender-restrictive groups use child protection rhetoric to manufacture moral panic and mobilise against human rights, and how this strengthens the politics currently undermining democracies.

Figure 4.1 Global distribution of funding to associations working with the anti-gender movement between 2008-2019



Source: Global Philanthropy Project (2020) 'Meet the Moment: A Call for Progressive Philanthropic Response to the Anti-Gender Movement', Oakland, CA: GPP, p 8, CC-BY-NC-SA. Redrawn using MapChart

where to respond. Both GPP's lead researchers and Executive Director expressed concern regarding new players, geographic fronts, and ever-evolving tactics that donors and activists are slow to respond to, referring to the recent passage of repressive anti-gay laws in Uganda and Ghana in particular. Actors in the UK are now a 'key producer and exporter of anti-gender narratives' and Russia is increasing its funding for anti-gender opposition throughout Europe as part of a larger far-right political agenda funded by individual donations from wealthy elites (e.g. in the US). This is cause for alarm as recent elections in several European countries have favoured the right. The extent of coordination by these new actors with US-based groups is unclear.

Since 2020, GPP has collaborated with different organisations on specific issues, including prominent international abortion rights groups. They co-produced an analysis focused on anti-abortion and anti-reproductive rights strategies in several countries with the Ipas Impact Network and International Planned Parenthood Federation. Ipas also runs a collaborative fund as part of its abortion rights and care network. GPP has partnered with several donors to increase funding to support trans-rights groups and strategies that counter new attacks on trans rights.

While the anti-gender movement is always evolving, GPP researchers feel that more analysis should focus on connecting

the different issues, strands, and patterns of convergence between the anti-rights and anti-gender agendas, and exploring what to do about it in a coordinated, well-resourced joint effort. As a senior GPP researcher points out:

This post-truth reality ... affects us all differently but it's not as easy as it should be to connect different strands of research and analysis. Like the anti-science agenda that connects people denying climate change with anti-vaxxers. We are all together facing conspiracy theories but... each is a universe in itself - but we're still in reactive mode.

“ Actors in the UK are now a 'key producer and exporter of anti-gender narratives' and Russia is increasing its funding for anti-gender opposition throughout Europe as part of a larger far-right political agenda funded by individual donations from wealthy elites (e.g. in the US). ”



While many foundations and funds have tracked the anti-rights and anti-democracy trends, many have been slow to integrate gender meaningfully into their grantmaking, and not all have recognised how central anti-gender backlash is to the broader trend of rising authoritarianism.

GPP's **Shimmering Solidarity Summit** in 2021 launched their findings and was a turning point for many in the progressive philanthropic community. Consisting of a series of in-person and virtual events attended by more than 800 participants including donors and civil society, it led to the establishment of the 'Responding to Anti-Gender Initiatives' (RAGI) task force that seeks to energise and coordinate donor responses. It is co-chaired by the Oak Foundation's 'Issues Affecting Women' programme, and FJS, two of the private foundations dedicated to supporting gender justice and feminist movements globally and playing a leadership role in responding (discussed on page 20). According to GPP staff, the 2020 report and summit led to a significant increase in funding to LGBTQI+ groups and improved coordination. GPP continues to be a critical strategic influence in shaping donor responses and new collaborative initiatives among donors, researchers, and advocates.

The Nebula Fund, a new collaborative fund inspired partly by the GPP report and summit, aims to:

strengthen the narrative power of movements advancing gender justice to cultivate a transformative vision of the future that is inclusive, just, and hopeful...to shift social norms and policies, realize civil and political rights, and ... improve material conditions (<https://nebulafund.org>).

The Nebula analysis recognises anti-gender backlash as a key pillar and tactic of a well-ordered set of organisations with a long history in the pursuit of economic and political power. The context of rising inequality and the failure of neoliberalism to provide for people's needs are specifically part of their analysis and theory of change. Echoing the feminist analysis shared by women's funds in particular, Nebula seeks to address the specific problem of gender justice efforts being systematically underfunded and fragmented by siloed funding. Its approach

focuses on 'building cross-movement narrative infrastructure' through a combination of grants, strategic accompaniment, convening, and learning.

While many foundations and funds have tracked the anti-rights and anti-democracy trends, many have been slow to integrate gender meaningfully into their grantmaking, and not all have recognised how central anti-gender backlash is to the broader trend of rising authoritarianism. Prominent feminists in the US-based donor community, which includes most of the large private foundations, have played an influential role in injecting a feminist or anti-patriarchal analysis, as well an international lens, to donors who have come to the anti-rights agenda from a more US-lens since the election of Trump in 2016. Pamela Shifman, currently the head of the US-focused Democracy Alliance and formerly the head of the Novo Foundation,⁷ co-authored an opinion piece in *Chronicles of Philanthropy* that argues:

the Supreme Court's decision to overturn Roe vs Wade, coupled with rising attacks on America's democratic institutions, is a five-alarm fire for donors working to advance gender justice and democracy... Autonomy over one's body is fundamental to every other freedom – and is a pillar of a thriving democracy... It is not a coincidence that when abortion access goes down, authoritarianism goes up. They are interdependent. It's why reproductive rights are under attack in countries such as Brazil and Poland. (Kelly-Green and Shifman 2022)

In 2023, Shifman says that many donors continue to treat women's rights as tangential and fail to see the connection between democracy and abortion rights, a key target of anti-gender politics. Shifman founded Shake the Table in 2020 with other feminists working within and with philanthropy to more effectively understand gender, and support feminist and queer movements. They provide advice, strategic support, and research to influence the flow of money from foundations, individuals, and governments to economic, gender, and racial justice movements. Co-published with Bridgespan, their 2022 report, '**Lighting the Way: A Report for Philanthropy on the Power and Promise of Funding Feminist Movements**', calls out the systematic underfunding of feminist organisations, and makes the case for increasing flexible funding to feminist movements.

For US-based progressive and human rights foundations, the 2016 election of Trump and the Supreme Court's 2022 decision to overturn a 50-year-old right to abortion have been a 'wake up call', as Shifman points out. These events seemed to break

⁷ Novo Foundation is the private family foundation created by Peter Buffett. Under Shifman, the foundation was one of the most significant and influential funders of feminist movements in the US and internationally until its focus changed in 2018.



The anti-gender movement was not just a threat to women’s and LGBTQI+ rights, but a threat to all human rights investments and the very mission of many foundations.

through the reluctance by some donors to fully embrace the full range of reproductive rights, and shift their funding to feminist, women’s rights and reproductive justice work. The Green Wave, the Argentina-initiated Latin American feminist movement working in several countries has been credited with a series of legal wins to decriminalise abortion (Kumar 2022), which has inspired donors to increase funding for transnational strategies and for the global South. Feminists working inside philanthropy believe that the Green Wave has helped several donors recognise that responding to anti-gender backlash will demand international strategies.

Another feminist working with a US-based collaborative gender and reproductive justice fund co-founded by the Packard Foundation and pooling funds from the JPB Foundation, Charles and Lynn Schusterman, Acton Family Fund, Ford, and FJS, acknowledges that many donors have ‘come a long way in recognising’ the anti-gender threat since Trump’s election. This source shares Shifman’s concern that donors have not fully understood the anti-gender component of larger threats to democracy:

My biggest worry is that we’re watching the erosion of rights without a bigger sense of alarm [among donors] as if it’s just the political weather of the moment and it’s normal. There’s still such ... a lack of full awareness of how the same [right-wing] players are doing the exact same thing domestically and globally. (Source: feminist in collaborative fund)

Echoing the views of other feminists in philanthropic organisations, she stresses how donors need to understand the transnational and organised nature of anti-gender backlash and to recognise the potential of feminist movements and organisations to defeat the right. She is concerned that US domestic and international funding and donor strategies have not adequately connected:

The research I haven’t seen is what does it mean to challenge and un-do patriarchy? We need to explain why patriarchy is an existential threat to the planet and democracy, and one of the greatest threats of our time. We need to explain how it works, what it is, how it’s infected our institutions, mindsets, and wellbeing. And to demonstrate what feminist governing power means. (Source: feminist in collaborative fund)

Large Private and Family Foundations

FJS and the Oak Foundation are leading donors (both in scope and funding amounts) in supporting feminist movements, LGBTQI+ rights, and women’s funds in the global South, and recognising the threat of the anti-gender movement. The Oak Foundation was a first responder to the GPP analysis and convenings in 2020. It co-chairs the GPP-AGI (anti-gender initiative) task force to drive increased coordination, funding and investments into the creation of the Nebula Fund among other funding strategies. Oak has funded organisations to respond to some form of anti-gender backlash for more than ten years. They were an early funder of Open Democracy’s Tracking the Backlash because Clare Provost, who led the initiative, was ‘connecting the dots between the legal and messaging strategies’ of the anti-abortion movement from Eastern and Central Europe to Central America.

GPP’s report and the Shimmering Solidarity Summit were an ‘Aha!’ moment for Oak to fully understand how seemingly disparate trends in different places were part of a well-coordinated, well financed political agenda driven by a handful of US-based conservative political and religious groups with a larger agenda. ‘We felt that we had to do something more. We can’t react piecemeal and have to respond at scale’ (source: Oak staff). The anti-gender movement was not just a threat to women’s and LGBTQI+ rights, but a threat to all human rights investments and the very mission of many foundations.

FJS is another prominent private family foundation advocating for a bigger, more coordinated philanthropic response to anti-gender backlash through support to feminist and gender justice movements in the global South. Since 2019, and increasing in 2021 in response to GPP’s report, FJS funds initiatives and organisations aimed at tracking, blocking, and countering anti-gender and anti-feminist backlash, as well as influencing other donors to increase their dedicated funding to LGBTQI+ and feminist organisations and agendas.⁸ FJS leadership observed that:

⁸ See Shifman et al. (2021). Core funding (as opposed to relatively short-term project funding with specified deliverables attached to it) has been a demand for decades. See **‘Watering the Leaves, Starving the Roots’** (Arutyunova and Clark 2013) and other publications from AWID’s programme, Where’s the Money for Feminist Organizing. FJS, as well as women’s funds, are vocal advocates for more and flexible funding to underfunded feminist organisations.

Since the Roe reversal, we're seeing amazing shifts in funders that did not have a clear commitment to gender. Like Bloomberg Fund staff now have a daily briefing internally on what's happening with abortion rights and access, and other reproductive justice issues to be able to support feminists and gender justice groups more effectively. This is a big surprise.

FJS has a feminist analysis of anti-gender backlash, seeing it as both a core ideological pillar and a tactic of the right to manipulate racial and gender-specific social divisions to polarise people and organisations. Like other long-time feminist funders, FJS believes that lack of adequate funding to feminist and LGBTQI+ organisations makes them vulnerable to attack and undermines their response. Countering backlash is a primary agenda, although FJS are in search of fresh strategies, players, and solutions that would ramp up collective and coordinated efforts. For now, two big areas of focus for their funding are strengthening collective protection and digital security, and building strategic communications capacity among grantees to 'ramp up narrative work', that is, the work of identifying, modifying, and challenging the dominant narratives of the backlash.

The Ford Foundation has been tracking and navigating the anti-rights and anti-gender movement across its programmes and country offices for several years. It has played a significant funding role in supporting various initiatives in the global South and North to defend rights and address inequality. Tracking and countering backlash and other anti-rights trends happens in different ways across all Ford's six thematic areas, particularly their Civic Engagement and Governance, and Gender, Ethnic, and Racial Justice programmes, as well as the US programme. In response to some soul-searching regarding inconsistencies in relation to gender within the foundation as well as the scale and threat of the anti-gender movement, in 2023 Ford launched an organisation-wide strategy called Centering Gender (see Pennington 2022). In 2023, Hilary Pennington, Vice-President for Programmes and Jessica Horn, Director, East Africa described some of the impacts of anti-gender backlash in a blog entitled 'Fair Play: Why Centering Gender is the Only Way to End Inequality':

We believe gender equality is the unfinished business of the 21st century. The fight for equality is at a critical moment, with issues of gender at its core. We can no longer afford to look at gender in isolation when it's actually woven into every aspect of inequality. (Pennington and Horn 2023)

With this new strategy, Ford affirms that power and gender are central to all forms of inequality which is at the root of anti-gender backlash and other threats to democracy and human rights. With Centering Gender they commit to analysing power from an intersectional gender lens in the internal workings, and external programming, and grantmaking of the foundation. As part of this strategy, the foundation commissioned a mapping of how different foundations and organisations are responding to the anti-gender movement to determine how to invest some USD 40 million for the necessary infrastructure and capacity-building to counter anti-gender backlash. That strategy is designed to strengthen an ecosystem of grantees countering anti-gender ideology. The strategy is currently in development with plans to make an initial round of grants early in 2024.

The initial analysis coming out of the Ford mapping integrates much of what other donors say. It situates anti-gender backlash as part of, and exacerbated by, other trends including 'rising authoritarianism, neoliberalism and widening inequality, climate change and forced migration, and religious and cultural fundamentalisms' (source: donor advisor). It recognises how attacks on feminist, women's and LGBTQI+ rights and agendas intersect with attacks across a range of sectors from labour rights to climate justice, driven by a diverse set of actors with overlapping interests to consolidate economic, political, and cultural power. The strategy will take a network approach that supports work across several nodes, predominantly based in or focused on the global South, and working at the regional and global levels. The nodes include research, advocacy, movement building, narrative, and technology. Ford will award funds through the Building Institutions and Networks (BUILD) programme to provide core and flexible funding over a five-year period, which aims to develop the infrastructure for a coordinated response.

Across the board, the donors included in this scan are self-critical about how grantmaking works as a key part of the problem, contributing to the fragmentation of civil society efforts and the inability to finance a robust, coordinated strategy to scale. Critiques of the philanthropic response to the anti-gender movement can be summarised as follows:

- Despite convenings and conversations, progressive donors still lack a coordinated funding strategy to address the anti-gender backlash,
- The scale of funding does not match the urgency or the scale of the threat,
- Too few rights-oriented philanthropic institutions prioritise or recognise anti-gender backlash as a threat to democratic governance and other human rights or understand patriarchy and gender,

- Donors are more oriented toward short-term results than the long-term funding essential for addressing the structural drivers of problems,
- Issue-specific and siloed grantmaking prevents a shared analysis of the problem and the necessary collaboration to scale a response; it also fuels competition among civil society organisations (CSOs) and can exacerbate divisions within movements,
- Donors need to take care not to unintentionally fund groups working against rights⁹ and,
- Institutions attend to legal, financial, and reputational risks without fully weighing the risk of inaction (Eddens and Kroeger 2022).

In other words, while the commitment to confronting and countering anti-gender movements and backlash is growing among philanthropic institutions, many donors also recognise that their own ways of funding and operating undermine their response.



Most of the key funders and advisors supporting feminist and gender justice organisations and women’s funds continue to argue for more significant, long-term, and core funding as critical to enabling organisations with knowledge about gender, sexuality, and women’s rights to ramp up their efforts (Aleman and Bofu-Tawamba 2023; Porticus 2022; Shifman et al. 2021).

4.2 HOW PHILANTHROPIC ACTORS ARE RESPONDING

Feminist and LGBTQI+ funders have made supporting resistance and countering anti-gender backlash an expanding priority. For example, FJS has made countering backlash central to its funding strategy over the next four years, focusing on security and collective protection, and ‘ramping up narrative strategies’ through support for strategic communications capacity-building and other efforts. Like many donors, it is in search of fresh strategies, organisations, and alliances that would ramp up the collective and coordinated efforts, and recognise that many key feminist and gender justice groups are ‘still regrouping as they recover from the pandemic’ (source: FJS staff).

Most of the key funders and advisors supporting feminist and gender justice organisations and women’s funds continue to argue for more significant, long-term, and core funding as critical to enabling organisations with knowledge about gender, sexuality, and women’s rights to ramp up their efforts (Aleman and Bofu-Tawamba 2023; Porticus 2022; Shifman et al. 2021). Donors are increasing their funding overall and pursuing collaborative and coordinated efforts with other donors for a bigger impact. The following are some¹⁰ of the grantmaking priorities that philanthropic organisations included in this scan consistently mentioned:

- 1 **Digital strategies, infrastructure, and security.** Recognising the central role of digital technology in the anti-gender movement’s strategy, donors are interested in and are supporting initiatives aimed at building digital infrastructure, tools, and capacities to counter disinformation and to expose the misuse of security policies for the surveillance of activists and dissent. This includes improving digital security.
- 2 **Self- and collective protection and security.** Many donors are dedicating more funding to the safety and protection of defenders working on gender justice and feminist agendas (as well as defenders working on environmental and labour rights and on freedom of expression). This includes significant investments in physical security for organisations, drawing on expertise in the field of human rights protection. Collective self-care and healing are more prevalent among explicitly feminist and LGBTQI+ donors like FJS and the women’s funds in response to feminist movements. Oak, the

⁹ Some donors interviewed mentioned Clare Provost’s analysis that uncovered how funding from progressive donors in Uganda was supporting anti-rights organisations behind the anti-LGBTQI+ legislation, and underscored the need for more scrutiny. See Provost (2023).

¹⁰ This list does not include all the funding dedicated to protecting abortion rights and reproductive justice globally, although the reversal of abortion rights is a core agenda of the anti-gender backlash. Many of the donors with a long history in this area support health and abortion services, where funding and attention is growing exponentially, including for more transnational strategies and networks connecting efforts in Latin America and the US.

Ford Foundation, and OSF also support wellbeing strategies to deal with trauma and burn out due to attacks, and stress related to dealing with crises, as well as digital security and collective protection.

The UAFs are leaders in this area, working closely with and financing WHRD networks for collective protection in different regions. For example, UAF-Africa has launched a special pan-African project aimed at establishing a centre and providing regular support for 'the integration of healing and wellbeing' into the work of feminist, women's rights, and LGBTQI+ partners. Named the Feminist Republik, it is partly inspired by the *Iniciativa Mesoamericana de Mujeres Defensoras de Derechos Humanos* (Mesoamerican Initiative for Women Human Rights Defenders - IM-D). UAF-Latin America and the IM-D – seen as the pioneers in this area – are reconceptualising wellbeing and collective protection as an alternative social safety net in response to the failure of states to protect the rights, security, and wellbeing of their citizens, and due to the fact that states are complicit in the attacks and violence defenders experience.

Evolving feminist approaches to security and safety are also central and expanding among LGBTQI+ donors. As a member of the *Astraea* leadership described:

In the imagination of security, we think of bolts on the door. If you're in an oppositional stance, you'll always be at risk. This changes the boundaries of what you're protecting. In China, for example, you feel that you protect your family by not telling them about your activism.

A couple of donors included in this scan voiced reservations about what they perceive as an over-generalised emphasis on healing and self-care, which they distinguish from the movement-oriented approaches to collective safety and security. 'Not all organisations are on the frontline. Risks and stresses are different if you're juggling deadlines in an office', said one African-based donor. These sceptical funders felt the focus on self-care in the last five years is sometimes 'delinked from' and 'out of proportion' to what each individual organisation is doing and where it is situated. 'Given the limited resources and the urgency of what we're up against, why not be directive and say only 20 per cent for self-care for some groups. We need to be much more strategic to de-platform this work', said another funder, while also recognising how 'controversial' this perspective might be.

3 Recapturing discourse and narrative strategies. There are distinct interpretations of the concept of narratives among donors. Some lean toward supporting capacity-building for better messaging, marketing, and communication, while others focus on longer-term context-specific collaborative efforts to build a shared narrative informed by a power analysis and more oriented toward ideology, movement-building, and consciousness raising (see for example, Knipe 2023). This latter approach is offered by the Narrative Hive, 'a global community' seeded and supported by the Nebula Fund, FICS, and FGHR, who have all prioritised narrative strategies:

Narratives are a form of 'invisible power': they allow power to recreate itself, shape whose voices and stories we assume are worth listening to, and lead people to think that the world is the way it's supposed to be. (<https://medium.com/global-hive>)

Founded by donors and narrative practitioners in 2023, the Narrative Hive is a 'global ecosystem of activists and campaigners, communications workers, researchers, artists, journalists, and others who are using narratives to advance their visions of a more just world' (<https://www.fundersinitiativeforcivilsociety.org/global-narrative-hive/>).

The creation of the Nebula Fund is one of the outgrowths of the GPP-hosted Shimmering Solidarity convenings that motivated many donors. Nebula emphasises global South 'solidarity-driven approaches' to narrative strategies explicitly focused on advancing gender justice and countering backlash. According to conversations with Nebula, these approaches rely on creating the strategic opportunities necessary among diverse groups who don't normally work together to be able to find common ground and generate a shared narrative that speaks to the deeper values that connect people to each other and shape culture. Nebula's funding will specifically focus on 'context-driven cross-movement collaboration in the development of narratives' that connect 'democracy and gender rights' in the global South (source: Nebula staff). As Nebula points out:

Concepts around narrative change are definitely coming more from the global North, and that's not really the approach we're after. Narratives are so deeply contextual, but activists and others working in the same context on different related issues need space and flexibility to learn from each other. (Source: Nebula staff)



Several donors are increasing their funding to support journalists and media organisations to pursue investigative stories to expose the deeper interests and plans of the anti-gender movement, and to support strategies to gain mainstream media coverage.

As opposed to the idea of a 'counter-narrative' which can unintentionally reinforce the anti-rights agenda, Nebula supports collaborative localised efforts that develop new narratives that resonate with a broad cross-section of people and create 'more hopeful pathways for a more just future.' Nebula is also supporting: a) time-sensitive actions to 'disrupt and expose' the 'opposition', including litigation and specialised counter-lobbying efforts; b) trans-led narrative work; and c) developing a community of artists, influencers, cultural advocates, journalists, etc. to provide technical assistance to groups focused on gender justice and feminist agendas.

FGHR and FICS have also funded and convened strategic conversations with a range of researchers, practitioners, and specialists across the fields of democracy, rights, technology, security, communications, and marketing to incubate more effective narrative strategies. FGHR works closely with the Horizons Project that uses the concept of 'narrative competency' and a range of approaches aimed at finding 'common cause' against the polarisation tactics key to authoritarianism. Horizons co-convened a multi-stakeholder strategy workshop with many donors in 2022, called 'Unlocking Collaboration Across Differences: Exploring Narrative Practices for Broad-base Movement in the Context of Democratic Decline',¹¹ that sought to shape the field and influence philanthropy.

The Numun Foundation is in the process of developing a strategy to support efforts to track, expose, and counter disinformation.

The findings of the comprehensive survey of LGBTQI+ and feminist activists shared in the recent Astraea report reaches interesting conclusions for donors focused on narratives:

While social media plays a big part in resistance globally, none of the respondents from Kenya and India felt that this was an effective site of struggle, whereas globally and in Serbia, Colombia and Peru, social media was considered an effective space of resistance. LGBTQI+ activists have been able to shift public opinion through media, campaigns, and protests to some extent globally...there appears to be a narrow overemphasis among funders on narrative change as the primary tactic of effective resistance for LGBTQI+ movements, which is not mirrored by the wealth of tactics and the need for multipronged transnational strategies as experienced and expressed by activists. (Abbas and Sardá-Chandiramani 2023: 9)

- 4 Culture and media strategies.** Several donors are increasing their funding to support journalists and media organisations to pursue investigative stories to expose the deeper interests and plans of the anti-gender movement, and to support strategies to gain mainstream media coverage. There is also a growing interest in culture strategies that are sometimes grouped with narratives support. Grantmaking in relation to culture includes support for artist collectives and artists' involvement with activists, as well as filmmaking and music, and popular culture.
- 5 Research.** Many donors, including the Ford Foundation, Astraea, Nebula, Oak Foundation, Wellspring and OSF recognise the importance of research to track and analyse anti-gender backlash at the global, national, and regional levels to inform strategy. These donors seem to prioritise global South-led and context specific research to fill what many feel is a knowledge gap on what is happening in different country contexts. Leading donors in this area believe it needs to be more focused, strategic and, geared toward analysing specific actors, their relationships, and their tactics to better anticipate and get ahead of 'the opposition', as many donors more recently refer to the anti-gender movement. GPP is beginning a third comprehensive funding survey to assess where the money is moving and tracking new actors, connections, and tactics of the ever-evolving anti-gender movement. Given the growing interest in research, one of GPP's concerns is duplication of work. They suggested that a clearing house of information and analysis would be useful to avoid duplication.

¹¹ See <https://horizonsproject.us/>

¹² It could be argued that more donors are supporting advocacy efforts than reflected in my conversations, but many US-based donors are cautious on this subject due to the strict legal limits on lobbying that come with the non-profit tax status.

Figure 4.2 Strategies: A framework for effective and coordinated response



Source: Global Philanthropy Project (2020) 'Meet the Moment: A Call for Progressive Philanthropic Response to the Anti-Gender Movement', Oakland, CA: GPP, p 11, CC-BY-NC-SA (Redrawn)

6 Infrastructure for cross-movement collaboration and coordination. All the donors in this scan expressed an eagerness to support improved collaboration and coordination to build the networked infrastructure necessary for a counterforce against the anti-gender movement. They consistently mention cross-movement, cross-sectoral, cross-border, and building linkages beyond CSOs to a wider constellation of activists, journalists, artists, cultural leaders, filmmakers, business leaders, and influencers, among others. A handful of collaborative funds and joint donor partnerships (e.g. FICS, FGHR, Nebula) are incubating collaborative approaches that bring together donors with CSOs and others to combine funding for individual organisations with joint learning and strategising efforts. Some, like Ford and Oak, plan to convene their grantees themselves to enable sharing and improve connection and collaboration. But face-to-face convenings among CSOs and other allies that are not initiated by donors have been scarce since the pandemic, making it difficult for these groups to build alliances beyond their usual circles.

7 Other key areas. A few donors¹² covered in this scan discussed the urgent need to ramp up, professionalise, and resource targeted lobbying, advocacy, and litigation efforts to better predict and block legal and legislative reversals in different parts of the world. A few donors remarked on the need for advocacy capacity among a new generation of activists more familiar with social media campaigning than

with the precise demands and talking points associated with policy work. Another donor described an initiative in the works to reclaim policy space in the context of the United Nations, particularly at CSW. Policy advocacy and litigation is so central to the funding of most of the donors in this scan that it is fairly certain that this area will receive more resources in relation to the anti-gender movement.

Several donors mentioned the need to expand grantmaking to address the material needs of activists and organisations displaced by attacks and threats. Some also see economic and climate justice strategies connected to gender justice and feminist organising as essential for addressing the structural drivers and crises that create fertile ground for backlash and social conflict. While Astraea has a grantmaking programme that focuses on economic justice, the scan didn't identify any other funding in this area related to anti-gender backlash.

In its 'Meeting the Moment' report, GPP includes a helpful 'framework for effective and coordinated response' (2020: 11) that captures some of the distinct arenas where donors are increasing funding, and which may guide future strategies (see Figure 4.2). It is uncertain, however, whether donors are using it to determine funding strategies.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The current moment seems pivotal for philanthropy in relation to the anti-gender movement and growing authoritarianism. Supported by donor-led research and convenings between 2020 and the present, philanthropic institutions increasingly recognise that they are facing a well-financed global anti-democratic, anti-rights movement with sufficient power to reverse laws and social progress on a range of gender and other basic human rights issues. Intent on exposing and combatting “gender ideology”, anti-gender movement efforts focus on influencing discourse and policy related to sexual and gender identity, trans identity, sex education, contraception, abortion access, same sex marriage and adoption, and protections against domestic violence and sexual harassment. In addition to challenging hard-won legal rights, there is an increase in the intensification of threats to, attacks on, and criminalisation of rights defenders and their organisations.

While some human rights and democracy donors focus on anti-gender as a tactic and a legal threat, those already focused on gender and reproductive rights see the anti-gender effort not just as a lobbying group, but as a movement that brings together far-right political organisations, think tanks, funders, media, and religious organisations who share a desire to control economic and political power. Human rights and democracy donors widely recognise that these far-right organisations are spending billions of dollars in a coordinated effort that has been decades in the making. Those philanthropic institutions most closely tracking the anti-gender movement identify the factors listed here as key to the movement’s success:



While many progressive donors and organisations have mobilised to respond and push back both in individual countries and globally, the counter backlash effort is still underfunded and too fragmented.

- risk-taking with long-term funding and ‘big bets’,
- experimenting and testing, building on successes but willing to fail,
- uniting by supporting transnational connections and multi-disciplinary efforts,
- deceiving by creating moral panic about gender, sexuality, etc. through disinformation and polarising content, and by concealing the identity of leaders and funding sources,
- exploiting wedge issues that divide progressive movements, and by co-opting rights language and discourse at the service of the right, and,
- distracting from or confusing the real issues through fake news, by interfering in elections or restricting civic space. (Various interview sources).

While many progressive donors and organisations have mobilised to respond and push back both in individual countries and globally, the counter backlash effort is still underfunded and too fragmented. For many US-based philanthropic organisations, the election of Trump and the reversal of abortion rights made them more aware of how central gender and women’s rights are to the anti-democratic threat of rising authoritarianism. Women’s funds and feminists in private foundations who are closer to the frontline groups and CSOs working on these issues have tracked and responded to different forms of backlash against women’s and LGBTQI+ rights for decades, and continue to raise awareness across philanthropy. Many progressive donors credit GPP’s research for sounding the alarm and motivating a wider group of donors to step up and fund differently.

Additional and repurposed funding to counter backlash has prioritised six key areas that are approached differently by each institution:

- 1 digital strategies, infrastructure, and security
- 2 collective, organisation, and individual protection and physical security
- 3 the battle around narratives and discourse
- 4 the media, particularly to expose the nature and interests of the anti-gender movement, and culture, including the use of art, music, and popular culture



The question is whether the built-in legal and administrative constraints of funding will allow for the kind of long-term investment and donor coordination that countering backlash demands.

- 5 research that connects different issues that are the target of the opposition and that focuses on tracking the backlash actors, their relationships, tactics, and dynamics at the country and regional level, particularly in the global South
- 6 infrastructure to facilitate collaboration and coordination among CSOs and a range of allies who shape culture, ideas, beliefs, and politics.

Many donors are eager for new and bold ideas to reclaim policy spaces and hold the line on legislative battles and to connect constituency-building, popular culture, and policy work. They are keen to support a more robust multi-pronged transnational response, recognising that context matters, and effective strategies need to be firmly rooted in countries of the global South.

While new collaborative funds and donor partnerships have launched a handful of promising strategies, generally, there is a clear gap between money and strategy. One donor commented specifically, ‘more money is needed but doesn’t necessarily produce strategy’. One gets the sense that donors are in search of big ideas and new strategies. Generally, donors recognise there is no ‘one size fits all’ solution, but many use the word ‘moonshot’ to describe the kinds of solutions they seek. As one donor said, ‘we are still struggling to put together oppositional efforts let alone propositional efforts. That takes short, medium, and long-term investments. But we’re still operating on scarcity. We’re facing the lack of a coordinated implementation ecosystem’. How to align distinct efforts and persuade donors to invest in the long term? As one donor pointed out, ‘the reversal of Roe is the culmination of a coordinated strategy and decades-long attacks on abortion rights in the United States’.

It also seems that strategic responses themselves suffer from the issue siloes that some donors are concerned about: narratives strategies supported by some groups over here, and lobbying supported by other groups over there. The concern is that the strategies are driven more by concerns about organisational specialisation and grand-standing than by a power analysis of actors, interests, and dynamics. While systems thinking is in vogue among the philanthropic sector, it does not appear consistently in their analysis or responses.

In general, responses to anti-gender backlash represented by this scan reflect a shift in funding geared more toward long-term structural change involving challenging and changing power on many fronts – from the arena of culture and beliefs to policy and beyond. From this research, it appears that progressive donors are more comfortable creating collaborative funds for their big bets at this point, rather than ramping up the funding and resourcing for the collaboration of a wide range of CSOs where outcomes and directions are not defined by donors. That seems like a bigger challenge.

It feels like a moment ripe for unusual partnerships and big bets where philanthropy is poised for bolder strategies. The question is whether the built-in legal and administrative constraints of funding will allow for the kind of long-term investment and donor coordination that countering backlash demands. At the same time, philanthropic organisations are not immune from the attacks that defenders and rights organisations face. As the freezing of the Ford Foundation’s funding by the Indian government in 2015 illustrates, direct confrontation can be risky both for the grantees and for philanthropy. Perhaps this is part of the reason for donors creating more funding structures initially as opposed to just ramping up funding for CSOs and movements to draw from their wealth of tactics and strategies, and to allow them to forge their own collaborations. Philanthropic decisions are shaped by the urgency of the moment but also by the calculations of teams of lawyers and reputation managers. The anti-gender movement’s success is radicalising CSOs who are moving from engagement to resistance, whilst also increasing donors’ nervousness around taking risks. Navigating these tensions may prevent the boldness that confronting the anti-gender movement requires (Eddens and Kroeger 2022). As UAF leaders argue:

We often talk about the risks involved in our partners’ activism. But there’s also risk in philanthropy not taking bolder action to meet this moment – the risk of losing our rights, a habitable planet, and so much more. If there was ever a time for funders to drop requirements, be more creative in moving money, resource security and wellbeing, and provide abundant flexible funding to the activists fighting for us all, that time is now. (Eddens and Kroeger 2022)



Being bold may mean getting money to the less visible, the back to basics work of organising that has always proven to build countervailing power.

As a movement-builder in different volatile contexts and historical moments, I know from personal experience that collaboration and coordination, driven by solidarity and shared political analysis, takes a lot of faith, trust, patience, and analytical conversations, to say nothing of what it takes to agree to disagree for the sake of building a larger unified force. The challenges of coming together are magnified by the power dynamics that come with diversity of leadership, access, and approaches. How do we hurry up to meet the moment while also giving ourselves space and time to find common ground and build trust? That will take funding and a big leap of faith on the part of donors more accustomed to tailoring their funding. Being bold may mean getting money to the less visible, the back to basics work of organising that has always proven to build countervailing power.

Amalia Fischer, a long-time Brazilian feminist donor from Elas, describes how the crises of our times, including the anti-gender movement, are inspiring new convergences and tapping new sources of power. Money can make a big difference:

I think in times of hate and fascism and neo-Nazism, like the times of dictatorship before, movements develop new capacities for creativity. After 2018 when Bolsonaro was elected and Mariela Franco was killed, and movements were criminalised, Brazil turned to lessons from the dictatorships from 1960-1980. You have a mix of feminists who fought against dictatorship and young people fighting a new fight with technology and other new tools. Indigenous, quilombolas,¹³ feminists... we have the cumulative knowledge of resistance and its dangers, and are using new sources of power. But fighting for justice, you always need money. (Amalia Fischer, Elas, Brazilian Women's Fund)

¹³ Afro-Brazilian residents of quilombos or communities established in Brazil in the nineteenth century by black slaves who escaped or resisted slavery.

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