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# Illicit Political Finance and Anti-Gender Movements

Analysis and Recommendations for Open Society  
Foundations for Strategic Research and Action

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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**Claire** is an investigative journalist and non-profit media innovator; **Nana** is an African feminist activist and storyteller; and **Justin** is a journalism researcher and professor. This research similarly brought together insights, skills, and networks from the IJSC's three key ecosystems (journalism, activism, and academia). Its production was also supported by IJSC research assistant **Jerry Richardson** and **Doris Nana Esi Dede Odoi**, who served as a rapporteur at the in-person convening in Accra in September 2023.

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*Note: this paper in its entirety may not reflect all these individuals' views.*

# Key Terms



## Illicit Financial Flows

Financial flows that are deliberately obscured, either for reasons of illegality or a desire to avoid scrutiny/publicity. Note: includes legal and illegal funds.<sup>1</sup>



## Illicit Political Finance

Illicit financial flows that influence politics and undermine democracy, including those financing politicians, parties, political campaigns, and other activities, including those targeting public opinion. Note: AKA 'dark money.' It also includes both legal and illegal funds.



## Anti-Gender Movements/Actors

Civil society actors, including non-profits, political parties, think tanks, and foundations which have engaged in activism against 'gender ideology' and sexual and reproductive rights, and for 'traditional' and 'natural' gender roles and family structures. Note: often religious.



## Anti-Rights Movements/Actors

This category includes the above anti-gender movements/actors, but it is more expansive and also includes, for instance, movements/actors against sex workers' rights and others opposing women's and LGBTQI rights, regardless of their broader focus on 'traditional' gender roles or religion.



## Feminism

Feminism is the belief in full social, economic, and political equality for cisgender and transgender women, girls, and nonbinary people. To achieve meaningful gender equality, feminism seeks to shift power to those who resist exploitation or oppression based on their gender, sexual orientation, race, religion, nationality, class, caste, ability, or ethnicity.<sup>2</sup>



## Feminist Movements

Feminist movements are organizations, leaders, and networks working together to challenge and change power structures reinforcing gender inequality. They are almost always led by people with lived experience of the gender power imbalance and often other injustices as well.<sup>3</sup>



## Intersectionality

Intersectionality is an analytical tool for understanding how multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, ableism, ageism, and classism) compound each other in the lives of individuals and groups. Kimberlé Crenshaw initially developed the theory to delineate how "race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women's employment experiences" and to highlight the race, class, and gender dimensions of violence against women of color.<sup>4</sup>



## Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)

Sexual and reproductive health is related to multiple human rights, including the right to life, the right to be free from torture, the right to health, the right to privacy, the right to education, and the prohibition of discrimination. As recognized by UN committees, this means that States have obligations to respect, protect, and fulfill rights related to sexual and reproductive health. SRHR topics include abortion, contraception, and LGBTQI rights.

1 This definition comes from "Defending democracy from illicit finance and kleptocrats: a scoping paper for transformative funding opportunities". Transparency & Accountability Initiative, (2023)

2 This definition comes from the report "Lighting the Way: a Report for Philanthropy on the Power & Promise of Feminist Movements". Shake the Table, (2022)

3 This definition comes from the report "Lighting the Way: a Report for Philanthropy on the Power & Promise of Feminist Movements". Shake the Table, (2022)

4 This definition comes from the report "Lighting the Way: a Report for Philanthropy on the Power & Promise of Feminist Movements". Shake the Table, (2022)

5 This definition is drawn from: "Sexual and reproductive health and rights," United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights

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# 1. Executive Summary

Around the world – from Brazil under Bolsonaro, who targeted abortion rights, to Uganda under Museveni, who has recently signed one of the harshest anti-LGBTQI bills that include the death penalty – authoritarian political leaders have weaponized gender and attacked reproductive and sexual rights.<sup>6</sup> They are supported in this agenda and these attacks by strategic non-state actors, including transnationally connected and funded ‘anti-gender’ movements. These movements bring together various actors and oppose (as examples) comprehensive sexuality education, trans rights, contraception, domestic violence legislation, and other things they claim harm ‘traditional families,’ which they want to see centered in all laws, policies, and other aspects of public life.

**Feminist and queer activists, journalists, and researchers have been on the frontlines of documenting and resisting anti-gender movements and their connections to political as well as economic elites – while continuing to build more intersectionality just societies amidst their attacks.** As a result of these efforts, there is a growing amount of evidence and understanding of how anti-gender movements pursue anti-democratic goals (seeking to shift power away from democratic and public institutions and towards churches and ‘traditional families’) using anti-democratic means (from financial secrecy to covert attempts to influence elections). There is also a growing number of examples of research and other interventions in this area that have been led by impact goals and/or have led to impacts that can be learned from and

scaled up. We are now at a moment where it is possible, and possibly game-changing, to build on this work and progress and connect different strands of work for greater impact.

Confronting anti-gender movements and their threats to rights and democracy is critical for accountability and equitable development. This includes but also goes beyond intersections between these movements and illicit finance. To be successful, efforts in this area require careful consideration and coordination between the dual goals of resisting threats to rights and continuing to advance intersectional justice amidst them.

This is an approach described in this paper as ‘block and build’ that requires interrogating the potential unintended consequences of research and other actions.

**This paper is the result of a mixed-method research exercise to help the Open Society Foundations understand, analyze, and assess strategic opportunities for countering illicit political financing that supports anti-rights and anti-gender movements and actors.** It takes stock of what is currently known about such financing for these movements – including via a survey of the current literature from journalists, academics, activists, and other sources – and explores promising avenues for further strategic research and action, informed in particular by interdisciplinary feminist perspectives.

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<sup>6</sup> Other examples include Trump in the United States, Orban in Hungary, Meloni in Italy

## 2. Introduction

Recent anti-gender victories include the reversal of *Roe v. Wade* in the US and the introduction of a new anti-homosexuality law in Uganda, which includes the death penalty. These were the result of long-term work by anti-rights and anti-democratic movements, which are well-funded and well-connected across borders. **Along with authoritarian governments, these movements have benefited from global systems of finance, influence, and economic interests as they seek to block progress on women's and LGBTQI rights, roll back victories already won, and undermine rights and democracy.**

These actors' strategic battlegrounds include courts, education and healthcare systems, elections, and the media. They exist nationally and transnationally, and they've raised or secured money from multiple sources, including conservative foundations and individual donors, public budgets – such as those dedicated to international development, corporate donations – and illicit finance (dark and dirty money).

An illustrative example of these anti-gender groups is Alliance Defending Freedom, which is headquartered in the US but active internationally. It has gone to the US Supreme Court to defend donor secrecy while boldly describing itself on its website as “pursuing generational wins” against sexual and reproductive rights that change law and culture “for a generation” and are “sustained by deliberate action so that the victory endures for future generations.” This group also has offices in Europe, including in London, near Parliament, where it has been involved in lobbying MPs and trying to oppose so-called ‘buffer zones’ around abortion clinics, which are intended to protect women from abuse by anti-abortion protestors.<sup>7</sup> Its 990 filings (which are required of US non-profits) disclose spending around the world (including increasing amounts in Africa), though they provide no detail on how these funds were spent.

The Transparency and Accountability Initiative (TAI) noted – in their accompanying scoping paper for transformative funding opportunities to defend democracy from illicit finance and

kleptocrats – that “in the past decade, through investigations, campaigns, legislative scrutiny, and political will, much progress has been made to expose the damage associated with illicit finance and the provision of services to authoritarian and kleptocratic regimes.”<sup>8</sup> Similarly, but more particularly over the last five years, ‘anti-gender’ movements have received growing attention, thanks to new work by journalists, activists, and researchers – including on how anti-rights strategies and funds move across borders and the role of anti-rights groups in the US and Europe in funding and supporting anti-rights activities in the Global South. Much of this work has been pioneered by feminists and LGBTQI rights defenders across disciplines, though it has also reached mainstream audiences and institutional actors internationally.

*“Over the last five years, ‘anti-gender’ movements have received growing attention, thanks to new work by journalists, activists and researchers”*

7 Another US anti-gender ‘lawfare’ group that is active internationally is the American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ), led by Jay Sekulow, who was also Trump’s personal lawyer. Its European branch has, for example, provided legal arguments at the European Court of Human Rights defending Italy’s lack of marriage equality for LGBTQI people, as well as new restrictions on abortion in Poland.

8 Andrew Clarke, “Defending democracy from illicit finance and kleptocrats: a scoping paper for transformative funding opportunities”. Transparency & Accountability Initiative, (August 2023)

This work has also produced greater knowledge of the transnational funding flows that support strategies to roll back human rights, gender justice, and democracy. Yet there still remain significant gaps in information and analysis on illicit and dark money flows powering anti-gender and anti-democratic forces – gaps that must be addressed in order to build our capacity to respond effectively. Though some promising approaches can be identified, scaled up, and built on, this is still a nascent field in many ways. There is an emergent need for significant and sustained investment to both ‘block and build’ – to confront these movements and continue to advance intersectional justice amidst their threats.

As examples of the growing interest in anti-gender movements, including from institutional actors: In 2021, the European Parliament organized hearings and produced briefings on anti-LGBTQI and anti-choice movements, including their finances. One of these briefings argued: “The EU should consider ways to hinder financial support to individuals and groups that spread disinformation and hate speech, in much the same way as support to terrorism organizations is curtailed.”<sup>9</sup>

MEP Evelyn Regner, chair of the European Parliament’s committee on women’s rights and gender equality, said: “We need more and better rules to reduce these dark money in-flows from abroad.”<sup>10</sup> USAID has also said that it is considering supporting “work on

understanding and disrupting the links between illicit finance and anti-gender equality movements.”<sup>11</sup> However, it appears that even policymakers who are concerned about anti-gender threats are not always sure what their policy options may be.

***“We need more and better rules to reduce these dark money in-flows from abroad”***  
– Evelyn Regner, MEP

The Illicit Political Financing exploratory project at OSF’s global programs seeks to understand and define approaches and tools to tackle the growing sophistication and adaptation of authoritarian and kleptocratic regimes in weaponizing corruption to harm democracy and that of illiberal forces to weaponize illicit finance to undermine minority rights through targeted policies, litigation, and practices. In part, this is about democracy and the defense of open society values within and outside existing and emerging democracies at national, regional, and global levels. It is also about tackling the negative influence of money in politics and development and human rights accountability without the limitations of thematic or professional silos. Key progressive national, regional, and international actors and activists on anti-corruption, democracy, political integrity, and rights mostly remain siloed when tackling this

problem comprehensively, and thus, this project explores multi-dimensional, multi-level, and multi-disciplinary approaches.

This briefing seeks to inform this exploratory project by addressing the intersection of illicit finance and anti-human rights and anti-gender agenda and forces to explore how illicit finance supports state and non-state actors that attack and undermine democracy and human rights in support of anti-gender, anti-minority, anti-human rights movements, and politics locally and globally. It includes analysis from a literature review of more than 350 media, academic, civil society, and other sources, explores gaps and opportunities, and presents recommendations on fighting these forces internationally. Along with secondary sources, it is informed by an interdisciplinary convening held in Accra, Ghana, which brought together leading feminist activists, researchers, and journalists from across Africa. For certain sections, some primary source material, including financial filings from anti-gender groups, was also consulted.

The following sections of this document provide an overview of the results of this research, highlighting specific themes and learnings that inform our recommendations for the development process of OSF’s larger multi-year strategy on countering illicit political financing, focused on connections with anti-rights agendas and movements.

9 C. Strand & J. Svennson, “Disinformation campaigns about LGBTIQ+ people in the EU and foreign influence”, European Parliament, p.22. (2021)

10 “European Parliament conducts Public Hearing on “Financing of anti-choice organizations”, European Parliament Forum for Sexual & Reproductive Rights, (2021)

11 “USAID Anti-Corruption Policy”, p.30. (December 2022)

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## 3. Analysis

The central question from OSF that this section addresses is: ***How does transnational illicit and dark money flow transnationally by state and non-state conduits, to be weaponized by illiberal forces, to attack and undermine democracy and human rights in support of anti-gender, anti-minority, anti-human rights movements, and politics globally?***

The accompanying scoping paper from TAI noted that ‘The role of illicit finance in supporting authoritarian and kleptocratic governments has received increasing media, public and political attention over the last fifteen years’.<sup>12</sup> More recently, there has been growing attention and awareness of ‘anti-gender’ actors, including the US Christian Right, which spends money around the world, and transnational networks such as the World Congress of Families. This has produced a growing number of sources on which the following analysis is based.

### a. Authoritarianism and anti-gender movements

As described by the global feminist organization Noor at an

internal OSF roundtable in July 2023 attended by IJSC:

Feminist movements across contexts have been at the forefront in identifying and analyzing growing authoritarianism and fundamentalisms, as the targeting of the human rights of women, LGBTIQ communities, and minorities continue to be early and landmark tactics of such movements and parties. They are often driven by patriarchal ideologies – such as evoking the central myth of ‘restoration’ to the past, returning to male authority and ‘traditional’ families. Further, autocratic actors often mobilize around issues of gender and sexuality tactically to increase political and economic power and control. For instance, in several regions, the narrative of ‘gender ideology’ has been employed to incite moral panics and to increase support for authoritarian forces.

“In several regions, the narrative of ‘gender ideology’ has been employed to incite moral panics and to increase support for authoritarian forces” – Noor, Global Feminist Organization

A London School of Economics research project explains:

**“Right-wing agendas have consistently identified feminism, gender equality, and anti-racism as a problem, and have used ‘anti-gender,’ anti-feminist, and anti-migrant feeling as a way of garnering support for nationalist, cultural, religious or political agendas.”<sup>13</sup>**

Pamela Shifman from the Democracy Alliance in the US has similarly stated: “The authoritarian playbook the world over is scarily similar. Chip away at personal freedom. Reject pluralism in all forms. Restrict the rights of women and LGBTQI people. Defend ‘traditional family values’...This is the playbook that Trump deployed when he took office, and the ramifications are still being felt today.”<sup>14</sup>

***“This is the playbook that Trump deployed when he took office, and the ramifications are still being felt today”***

*– Pamela Shifman, Democracy Alliance*

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<sup>12</sup> Andrew Clarke, “Defending democracy from illicit finance and kleptocrats: a scoping paper for transformative funding opportunities”. Transparency & Accountability Initiative, (2023)

<sup>13</sup> “Transnational ‘Anti-Gender’ Movements and Resistance: Narratives and Interventions”. The London School of Economics and Political Science

<sup>14</sup> P. Shifman, “A global anti-gender movement is coming for our democracy – here’s how we fight back”. The Hill



## Case study:

### C-FAM (Center for Family and Human Rights)

Shifman gave as an example how, in 2017, under the Trump administration, the official US government delegation to that year's UN Commission on the Status of Women meetings in New York included Lisa Correnti, executive vice president of the Center for Family and Human Rights (C-FAM).<sup>15</sup> C-FAM is an anti-LGBTQ 'hate group,' according to the Southern Poverty Law Centre.<sup>16</sup> It also lobbied the US Supreme Court for years to overturn *Roe v. Wade*.<sup>17</sup>

C-FAM is another example of an anti-gender actor that is registered (in the US) as a charitable and tax-exempt 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Its latest available financial filing for the year ending December 2021 shows that its revenue increased by about 40% over the previous year (from \$1.2 to \$1.7 million). Over the five years from 2017–2021, it mobilized almost

\$7 million for its activities.<sup>18</sup> Apart from disclosures of six-figure salary payments to its president, however, and the receipt of some (unspecified) government grants, there is almost no detail provided about where its money comes from or goes<sup>19</sup>.

Separately, this group's website shows that it accepts donations online in multiple currencies<sup>20</sup> – all via Paypal – to help it “defend life and family at international institutions and to publicize the debate day in and day out.”

This example reflects the significant challenges in following anti-gender financing even when there is public disclosure of some information and when they claim to receive public money along with tax exemptions. It is also an example of such a group using a large financial services provider – Paypal – which has pledged to support LGBTQI and women's rights.<sup>21</sup>

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15 “U.S. Delegation to the 61st Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women”. U.S. Embassy and Consulates in Russia, (2017)

16 Hatewatch Staff, “ANTI-LGBTQ HATE GROUPS CO-SPONSOR UNITED NATIONS EVENT”. The Southern Poverty Law Center, (2019)

17 C-Fam Staff, “Press Release: C-Fam Asks Supreme Court to Declare Abortion is Not an International Right”. Center for Family & Human Rights, (2021)

18 “C Fam Inc: Full text of “Full Filing” for fiscal year ending Dec. 2021”. Pro Republica

19 However its 2017 filing did include some categories of spending including “translator” (no languages specified), “speaker expense” (no names provided), “consultants/writers”, and “licences, fees & permits”. [https://projects.propublica.org/nonprofits/display\\_990/133964076/02\\_2019\\_prefixes\\_11-13%2F133964076\\_201712\\_990\\_2019021416097084](https://projects.propublica.org/nonprofits/display_990/133964076/02_2019_prefixes_11-13%2F133964076_201712_990_2019021416097084)

20 US as well as Australian, Canadian and New Zealand dollars, Euros, Pounds, Pesos

21 See for example: “Celebrating Pride Month and Standing With the LGBTQ+ Community”, Paypal, (2021) and “Advancing Economic Equity for Women and Girls: How PayPal is Helping to Create a More Inclusive Future”, Paypal, (2023)

Many other contemporary examples illustrate the connections between anti-gender movements and authoritarianism. For instance:

- These movements supported and applauded Hungary's Viktor Orbán's demonization of LGBTQI communities as part of his nationalistic narrative: the country is the last holdout in Europe against 'godless' Western liberals.
- In the US, the Human Rights Campaign put together a timeline of anti-LGBT attacks by Trump and the Republican party from January 2017 to January 2021.
- The ACLU has mapped attacks on LGBT rights in US State legislatures.<sup>22</sup>
- ILGA Europe created a detailed timeline on anti-LGBT hate in Poland spanning from 2018–2021, where far-right president Andrzej Duda prominently fearmongered about 'LGBT ideology'.<sup>23</sup>
- LSE has begun collating and sharing news reports from around the world related to 'anti-gender' movements.<sup>24</sup>

## b. Illicit finance and anti-gender movements

***“Dark money; money laundering; fraud; tax evasion. Anti-gender movements that oppose sexual and reproductive rights have been associated with all of these”***

'Dark money'; money laundering; fraud; tax evasion. Anti-gender movements that oppose sexual and reproductive rights have been associated with all of these. They also use money to covertly influence elections and public opinion. However, they have also weaponized financial claims against gender justice movements. **Actions by state, law enforcement, and intelligence agencies against illicit finance can have unintended negative consequences for these movements and their goals.** There also appear to be significant divisions within anti-gender groups and the audiences they target in terms of their perspectives on issues such as taxation,

transparency, and following the law. This complex terrain requires learning and collaboration across disciplines and experimentation with alternative narratives and approaches that can reach wide audiences and create impacts without causing harm (even inadvertently).

## Financial secrecy

As with illicit finance for authoritarian actors broadly, an important challenge facing feminist and democracy activists resisting threats to rights is the use of hidden financial channels and services by anti-gender movements. Despite this, we know significantly more than we did five years ago about these finances.

***“An important challenge facing feminist and democracy activists (...) is the use of hidden financial channels and services by anti-gender movements”***

22 "Mapping Attacks on LGBTQ Rights in U.S. State Legislatures". The American Civil Liberties Union, (2023)

23 "POLAND ANTI-LGBTI HATE TIMELINE". Ilga Europe

24 "News Reports: Mapping 'Anti-Gender' Movements & Resistance". London School of Economics and Political Science

# Where the money comes from

Anti-gender movements receive money - of which some is raised and spent domestically, but some crosses borders - from various sources, such as:



**Individual Donations**  
including from elites



**Government  
and public funding**  
including from aid budgets



**Corporate  
donations**



**Conservative  
foundations and  
religious institutions**

In 2020, a journalistic investigation led by IJSC co-director Claire Provost (then at openDemocracy) revealed that 28 US Christian Right groups – including many that were connected to the then-Trump administration and were later involved in the rollback of Roe v. Wade in the US – had spent

**\$280 million**

around the world from 2007 till 2018.<sup>25</sup>

None of these groups revealed their donors; some had fought to defend or further donor secrecy, including at the US Supreme Court.<sup>26</sup>

In 2021, other research expanding on this work from partners at the European Parliamentary Forum on Sexual and Reproductive Rights (led by Neil Datta) looked at all sources of financing for anti-gender movements in Europe specifically. In total, it tracked

**\$707 million**

between 2009-2018

– and found that the top geographic source was Europe itself, followed by Russia, then the US – but said this would only be the ‘tip of the iceberg’ and that true figures are likely higher.<sup>27</sup> It could only identify financial data for 36 European anti-gender actors. It explained that a key challenge is that ‘there is no EU-wide requirement for financial transparency comparable to the US or even the Russian Federation. The result is a fragmentation into national and linguistic siloes of the data which do exist.’<sup>28</sup>

In 2021, a report released by the Global Philanthropy Project built on the research published by openDemocracy, adding an analysis of the Christian Broadcasting Network’s international spending, which it found amounted to more than

**\$986 million**

from 2008 to 2017.

It calculated that, including this group, the aggregate revenue of US-based organizations associated with the anti-gender movement over that decade was \$6.2 billion.<sup>29</sup>

Research in this area is also constrained by the limited financial disclosure required from churches in the US as well as other countries. A number of US anti-gender actors have changed their registrations in recent years from non-profits that have to disclose some financial information to churches or associations of churches that do not.

Examples:

- The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association: its spokesperson said they did this to avoid the “onerous” work of filing<sup>30</sup>
- Focus on the Family: says it decided to apply for reclassification as a church to protect the identities of its donors.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>25</sup> According to this data, these organizations spent more money in Europe (almost \$90m) than anywhere else outside the US, followed by Africa and Asia.

<sup>26</sup> Nandini Archer and Claire Provost, “Revealed: \$280m ‘dark money’ spent by US Christian Right groups globally”. openDemocracy, (2020)

<sup>27</sup> “Tip of the Iceberg: Religious Extremist Funders against Human Rights for Sexuality & Reproductive Health in Europe”. European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual & Reproductive Rights, (2021)

<sup>28</sup> “Tip of the Iceberg: Religious Extremist Funders against Human Rights for Sexuality & Reproductive Health in Europe”. European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual & Reproductive Rights, (2021)

<sup>29</sup> “MEET THE MOMENT: A Call for Progressive Philanthropic Response to the Anti-Gender Movement”. Global Philanthropy Project, (2020)

<sup>30</sup> “Why Billy Graham Evangelistic Association Asked for IRS Status Change”. The Christian Broadcasting Network, (2016)

<sup>31</sup> Michael Gryboski, “Focus on the Family Defends IRS Classification as a ‘Church,’ Says It’s Meant to Protect Donors”. The Christian Post, (2019)

In the Transparency & Accountability Initiative report “Defending democracy from illicit finance and kleptocrats: a scoping paper for transformative funding opportunities,” the authors noted how religious organizations might benefit from “various financial reporting loopholes,” and because of this, they can be “ideal vehicles for both transferring illicit wealth across borders but also influencing and undermining democratic societies, such as the channeling of ‘dark money’ and campaign finance.”<sup>32</sup>

*“Various financial reporting loopholes (are) ideal vehicles for both transferring illicit wealth across borders and also influencing and undermining democratic societies, such as the channeling of ‘dark money’ and campaign finance”*

## US anti-gender groups with little or no financial disclosure<sup>33</sup>

	<b>Billy Graham Evangelistic Association</b> US - North Carolina
	<b>Liberty Counsel</b> US - Florida
	<b>International House of Prayer</b> US - Missouri
	<b>United Families International</b> US - Arizona
	<b>Christian Council International</b> US and The Netherlands
	<b>Courage International</b> US - Connecticut
	<b>Abiding Truth Ministry</b> US - Kansas
	<b>US Conference of Catholic Bishops</b> US - Washington DC
	<b>Westboro Baptist Church</b> US - Kansas

<sup>32</sup> Andrew Clarke, “Defending democracy from illicit finance and kleptocrats: a scoping paper for transformative funding opportunities,” Transparency & Accountability Initiative, (August 2023)

<sup>33</sup> Compiled by IJSC for this report

## European and Russian anti-gender actors with little or no financial disclosure<sup>34</sup>



**Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund**

Russia



**International Agency for Sovereign Development**

Russia



**Rossotrudnichestvo**

Russia



**Russkiy Mir Foundation**

Russia



**Barankovics István Foundation**

Hungary



**European Family Foundation**

Germany



**Fundación Francisco Franco**

Spain



**Fundación Valores y Sociedad**

Spain



**Fundacja Nasze Dzieci**

Poland



**Fundacja Rodziny Witaszków**

Poland



**Stiftung Ja zum Leben**

Germany



**Stiftung für Familienwerte**

Germany



**Turnauer Stiftung**

Austria

<sup>34</sup> From Tip of the Iceberg, European Parliamentary Forum on Sexual and Reproductive Rights

## Where money goes

There is not only limited transparency in anti-gender groups' funding but also in their spending. Successful research to date has largely required triangulation of multiple sources to connect the dots and understand the consequences of this spending.

This research has shown, as examples, how these groups have targeted:



**Delivery of and access to health services**, such as abortion and contraception – in various ways (from protests at clinics to organized misinformation campaigns, including online).<sup>35</sup>



**Education systems and services**, including access to comprehensive sexuality education that doesn't discriminate against LGBTQI people and talks about rights and bodily autonomy.<sup>36</sup>



**Elections and referenda**, including the abortion referendum in Ireland,<sup>37</sup> which saw attempts to influence it from foreign and 'alt-right' activists, and the European elections in 2019, when US and European Christian right groups sought to push voters to the far right, including via an informal, unregulated 'Super-PAC.' The latter example also included disclosures from the leader of the anti-gender group CitizenGo, talking to an undercover reporter about how to get around campaign finance laws to support the far-right party Vox in Spain.<sup>38</sup>

**Culture**, including through attacks on bookstores, cinemas, Disney, and organized efforts to influence media and entertainment.<sup>39</sup>



35 "How openDemocracy is tracking anti-abortion misinformation around the world". openDemocracy

36 Kerry Cullinan, Zarina Geloo and Tuyeimo Haidula. "US Christian right group hosts anti-LGBT training for African politicians". openDemocracy, (2020)

37 Claire Provost and Lara Whyte, "Foreign and 'alt-Right' activists target Irish voters on Facebook ahead of abortion referendum". openDemocracy, (2018)

38 Adam Ramsay and Claire Provost, "Revealed: the Trump-linked 'Super PAC' working behind the scenes to drive Europe's voters to the far Right". openDemocracy, (2019)

39 'Claire Provost, "This is how anti-abortion propaganda gets into US cinemas". openDemocracy, (2018)

## Financial crime and corruption

However, it is not always easy or possible to follow how money is spent by anti-gender actors. Secrecy and anonymity are key features of many anti-gender movements, and they have been picked up and signaled as key challenges by people monitoring them for years. For instance, an earlier piece of research from the European Parliamentary Forum on Sexual and Reproductive Rights, released in 2018, looked at an anti-gender network called Agenda Europe, which it said “meets in secret, keeps its anonymous manifesto from public view, and administers stern instructions to members not to communicate about the gatherings or the common agenda” opposing all sexual and reproductive rights.<sup>40</sup>

**“Secrecy and anonymity are key features of many anti-gender movements”**



40 Neil Datta, “Restoring the Natural Order”, the European Parliamentary Forum on Population & Development, (2018)

41 The 'Azerbaijani laundromat' scandal was also mentioned in the accompanying Transparency and Accountability Initiative scoping paper by Andrew Clarke



# Religious conservative and anti-gender media platforms

have published numerous news reports of financial impropriety among conservatives and from conservative perspectives, including articles headlined:



**"French Archdiocese gives money to build large mosque"**<sup>42</sup>



**"Homosexual Priest stole \$1.3 Million for male escorts, etc"**<sup>43</sup>



**"Toronto lockdown czar's husband has 'financial ties' to Pfizer, AstraZeneca"**<sup>44</sup>



**"Vatican Secretary of State implicated in financial scandal around London investment property"**<sup>45</sup>



**"Bible College and Christian Publisher convicted of \$35m fraud scheme"**<sup>46</sup>



**"US pastor admits stealing £796,990 from his congregants and church"**<sup>47</sup>



**"Millionaire African preacher faces fraud charges"**<sup>48</sup>



**"The kind of shopping that would embarrass a Kardashian: Australian MP accuses Hillsong of financial crimes"**<sup>49</sup>



**"American priest charged with fraud and tax evasion."**<sup>50</sup>

There seems to be considerable interest in the illegal and unethical aspects of illicit finance, particularly among some of the same audiences that anti-gender movements target or regard as core supporters. This opens up the possibility of reaching these audiences with the results of further investigative research into 'dirty money' for anti-gender movements, though such engagement requires careful consideration, including which frames to use as well as how to measure success.

42 J. Smits, "French archdiocese gives money to build large mosque". LifeSite, (2021)

43 "Homosexual Priest Stole \$1.3 Million for Male Escorts, Etc.". LifeSite, (2010)

44 C. McGovern, "Toronto lockdown czar's husband has 'financial ties' to Pfizer, AstraZeneca. LifeSite, (2021)

45 D. C. McLean, "Vatican Secretary of State implicated in financial scandal around London investment property". LifeSite, (2021)

46 H. Preston, "Bible College and Christian publisher convicted of \$35m fraud scheme". Premier Christian News, (2020)

47 A. Collett, "US pastor admits stealing £796,990 from his congregants and church". Premier Christian News, (2022)

48 "Millionaire African preacher faces fraud charges". Premier Christian News, (2019)

49 S. Drew, "The kind of shopping that would embarrass a Kardashian: Australian MP accuses Hillsong of financial crimes". Premier Christian News, (2023)

50 "American priest charged with fraud and tax evasion". Premier Christian News, (2015)

## Box:

### Is illicit finance a potential wedge issue for religious audiences?

"Dark money has corrupted the political process."

Progressive movements that support rights and equality are often seen as leading this argument and calling for change. However, this quote comes from an opinion article entitled "Deliver us from evil," published by the National Catholic Reporter in May 2023. "Jesus warns his disciples," the author continues, "that their mission [...] will be resisted at every step by those who benefit from inequality and exploitation."<sup>51</sup> This publication describes itself as "a religious news source" that "provides avenues for expression of diverse perspectives." It has published follow-the-money investigations as well as commentary about conservative money in politics,<sup>52</sup> including how conservative Catholic philanthropists and pro-life leaders have been key players behind efforts to limit voter access in a number of US states,<sup>53</sup> and how right-wing Catholic causes have received millions of dollars from a "dark money ATM" that also funded some of those involved in the attack on the Capitol in January 2021.<sup>54</sup>

Some religious conservatives have published defenses for evading taxes, for instance, because they might pay for reproductive healthcare; others have dismissed concerns about dark money in politics.<sup>55</sup> However, our literature review also found numerous examples of content produced for religious and conservative audiences that suggest their opinions on these issues may vary significantly. While some US anti-gender groups have filed briefs in US Supreme Court cases challenging donor disclosure rules and defending secrecy instead (including Alliance Defending Freedom and the American Center for Law and Justice),<sup>56</sup> others (including the Acton Institute, which combines anti-gender and free-market ideologies) have published articles arguing that "Graft and bribery are big government's byproducts."<sup>57</sup> A Christian Broadcasting Network article argues: "We are responsible to God in all things, but we must be obedient to the powers that be in things civil and national... Watch out when ordinary, prudent discretion crosses the line into "cloak and dagger" activities like wiring small amounts repeatedly, moving cash, or using way stations in moving money."<sup>58</sup> Meanwhile, The Billy

Graham Evangelistic Association's website warns its followers that: "The Bible says, 'Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes... Cheating on our taxes is a form of stealing.'"<sup>59</sup>

**This suggests there may be openings to reach some of the same audiences that anti-gender movements target, with new information about illicit finance related to (lacks in) transparency, adherence to the law, and ethical behavior.** Identifying such potential methods to engage and connect with some audiences 'on the right' could be strategic priorities and key measures of impact.

This requires not just gathering evidence but also carefully designing and delivering effective and targeted outreach and media campaigns. In this case, exposing and highlighting unethical funding practices of anti-gender groups to conservative audiences could be a key lever in creating pressure for change, including through new coalition-building with transparency and accountability advocates and, potentially, with individuals at conservative and religious media outlets who are also on beats 'following the money.'

51 P. Marrin, "Deliver us from evil". National Catholic Reporter, (2023)

52 T. Roberts, "Koch, Turkson speak at Catholic University's 'Good Profit' conference". National Catholic Reporter, (2017)

T. Roberts, "Conservative donors aim to shape Catholic narrative for the wider culture". National Catholic Reporter, (2017)

53 C. White, "Major Catholic funders and power brokers spearhead voter suppression efforts". National Catholic Reporter, (2021)

54 B. Fraga, "Right-wing Catholic causes got millions from group that funded some Capitol rioters". National Catholic Reporter, (2022)

55 S. Ciancio & American Life League, "Debunking 5 more myths about the pro-life movement spread by abortion advocates". LifeSite, (2022)

56 "Thomas More Law Center v. Bonta". Alliance Defending Freedom, (2021) <https://adflegal.org/case/thomas-more-law-center-v-bonta>

L. Hernandez, "ACLU Files Brief Urging Supreme Court To Extend Greater Protection Against the Threat To First Amendment Rights From "Cancel Culture", The American Center for Law & Justice, (2021)

57 Rev. B. Johnson, "Graft and bribery are big government's byproducts: EU studies". Acton Institute, (2016)

58 S. G. Scalici, "Christian Advice on Paying Your Taxes". The Christian Broadcasting Network, (2022)

59 B. Graham, "Answers: My uncle cheats on his taxes...". Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, (2007)

Exposing and highlighting unethical funding practices of anti-gender groups to conservative audiences could be a key lever in creating pressure for change, including through new coalition-building with:

*transparency and accountability advocates*

*individuals at conservative and religious media outlets on 'following the money' beats*

## Transnational dimensions

When it comes to the transnational connections and finances of anti-gender movements, there has been impactful work done, including on the role of groups registered in Northern jurisdictions supporting and funding anti-gender organizations and attacks in the Global South, as mentioned in Transparency & Accountability Initiative scoping paper.<sup>60</sup> Yet, the work that has been done is, in most cases, already out of date.

There also remain significant gaps.

- Compared to US Christian Right spending internationally, less has been done on the role of anti-gender actors registered in the UK, which could be of interest to OSF given its recent focused funding on tackling London's role in facilitating dirty money.<sup>61</sup>

## Weaponisation against progressives

Journalist and Nobel laureate Maria Ressa has faced charges of tax evasion and allegedly failing to file accurate tax returns in the Philippines, leveled against her by the regime of former President Rodrigo Duterte.<sup>62</sup> The American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ) participated in what it called "a massive fraud case against Planned Parenthood Affiliates" in California, accused of violating "the federal False Claims Act (FCA), which forbids government contractors from submitting false or fraudulent claims for payment."<sup>63</sup> Its European affiliate has

targeted pro-choice UN experts for "dark money and conflicts of interest."<sup>64</sup>

**"State and non-state anti-gender actors have also weaponized claims of dark and dirty money against progressives"**

These are just examples of how state and non-state anti-gender actors have also weaponized claims of dark and dirty money against progressives. Others, from their publications, include claims that US Democratic politicians have been "funded by dark money"<sup>65</sup> and that "the Left isn't just trying to cheat at elections -- they're also playing dirty in how to finance them.",<sup>66</sup> an 'exposé' of anonymous donations to Planned Parenthood from the Susan Thompson Buffett Foundation;<sup>67</sup> and complaints filed with the IRS asking them to investigate opponents of religious fundamentalism and anti-gender activities.<sup>68</sup>

60 Andrew Clarke, "Defending democracy from illicit finance and kleptocrats: a scoping paper for transformative funding opportunities". Transparency & Accountability Initiative, (August 2023)

61 As mentioned in TAI's scoping paper

62 "RSF and the Hold The Line Coalition welcome acquittal of Maria Ressa and Rappler, call for all remaining cases to be dropped". Reporters Without Borders

63 J. Sekulow, "ACLJ Files Appeal Brief in Federal Appeals Court in Massive Fraud Case Against Planned Parenthood Affiliates in CA". The American Center for Law & Justice, (2021)

64 G. Puppink, "New ECLJ Report Exposes Radical Pro-Abortion UN Experts 'Bought' and Paid For by Radical Leftist George Soros". The American Center for Law & Justice, (2021)

65 A. Sadler, "Dark money, voter apathy threaten Oklahoma pro-life GOP governor's re-election: report". Life Site, (2022)

66 T. Perkins, "Shining Light on the Left's Dark Money". Family Research Council, (2022)

67 A. Johnson, "EXPOSED: The billionaire Planned Parenthood donor who wants his donations kept very, very secret". LifeSite, (2015)

68 "IRS Asked to Investigate Tax Status of Americans United for Separation of Church and State". Liberty Counsel, (2009)

"SPLC Sends Millions of Cash to Tax Haven Accounts". Liberty Counsel, (2017)

Restrictions on online and mobile money payments can meanwhile make it more difficult for progressive activists and marginalized groups to move money.<sup>69</sup> Concerns have also been raised about how increasingly extensive anti-money laundering infrastructure limits pregnant peoples' privacy options. For instance, a 2022 report from the Surveillance Technology Oversight Project (STOP) – which was supported in part by an OSF grant – noted, about privacy practices for pregnant people in the US after the overturn of abortion rights, that:

Almost all electronic payments are readily traced and identified by law enforcement. Decades of anti-money-laundering infrastructure have built up a sprawling surveillance infrastructure for nearly any non-cash payment. Increasingly, police can track large volumes of cryptocurrency transactions, identifying parties even years after the fact. For sensitive transactions, cash remains the most privacy-protective option.<sup>70</sup>

**“Increasingly extensive anti-money laundering infrastructure limits pregnant peoples' privacy options”**

69 Internal notes from OSF Internal Thematic Roundtable III: Understanding the Financing Architectures of Anti-rights and Anti-gender Movements, co-organised with Noor, 13 July, 2023

70 “Pregnancy Panopticon: Abortion Surveillance After Roe.”, Surveillance Technology Oversight Project (STOP), (May 2022)

## Box:

### Gaps in the research and an immediate response

Our literature review on connections between illicit finance and anti-gender movements used various keywords to collect more than 350 media, civil society, academic, and other sources (including synonyms and associated terms, such as money laundering, tax evasion, anti-abortion, and anti-LGBT movements). All of these searches were performed in English, although some non-English sources were picked up in the process (20% of the total), which is a limitation of this review.

This literature review was informative regarding what it contained and reflected and what it didn't. It was, for instance, dominated by information about anti-gender groups from the US and Europe. While such groups and their finances are involved in threatening rights internationally, and there are examples of cross-border work resisting these threats, we responded to a gap in the literature by adding an in-person convening of interdisciplinary African feminists to our research methodology. Held in Accra in September 2023, our event brought together feminists with expertise in law, economics, and journalism from across the continent. Over two days facilitated by Hakima Abbas of the Black Feminist Fund, they discussed our findings and recommendations for further research and action. They critiqued 'dark money' framings as reflecting/reinforcing white supremacist associations of negativity with darkness and called for more research on anti-gender finances in Africa – led by Africans – and impact strategies to reach wide African audiences, which would also be strengthened by additional research into public opinion and narratives.

## Other issues for consideration

This research identified several related issues worth considering alongside the interconnections between illicit finance and anti-gender movements.

## Other financial flows for anti-gender movements

There is currently no ongoing observatory of anti-gender finances that include illicit finance as well as other sources of revenue. However, there have been a growing number of investigations into these finances, which suggest avenues for further research and collaborations to support action.

### Aid budgets

Anti-LGBTQI religious groups in Uganda were named in dozens of aid-funded projects – involving total values of more than **\$75 million** over the last decade (at least **\$40 million** of which appears to have been directly transferred to these groups). Several of these projects even unexpectedly coded as support for women's rights and said they were focused on gender equality. There was a shockingly long list of donor governments involved (all of which are also members of the global Equal Rights Coalition), as well as UN agencies.

Some of this money came from governments with officially feminist foreign policies. Some money from the IKEA Foundation also went, via Oxfam, to one of these anti-LGBTQI groups. These were key findings of an IJSC investigation released in April 2023 that was picked up across the global media and led to swift action from some of the donors implicated.<sup>71</sup>

- *In response to that investigation, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden wrote to the UNDP (in Sweden's case, as well as the UNFPA) to say that none of their money in the future could go to activities involving these groups.<sup>72</sup>*
- *Finland and the IKEA Foundation promised to investigate these flows.*

This project followed a previous investigation by IJSC co-directors, published with CNN in December 2022 that revealed aid funding benefiting anti-LGBTQI groups in Ghana.<sup>73</sup> This demonstrates that the findings in Uganda were not an isolated incident. Additional cross-border and cross-disciplinary work is required to fully investigate the extent to which the international aid infrastructure has been accessed by, and has financially supported, anti-gender actors in the Global South – as well as to understand how that has happened (for example, through lacking due diligence procedures that can be addressed, or through strategic and potentially duplicitous fundraising efforts by anti-gender groups), and how to stem it. This was agreed upon at the Accra convening as a promising avenue for impact within the next five years, particularly when it comes to donors with official 'feminist' policies and holding them accountable for those commitments.

## Other public funding

Research from the European Parliamentary Forum on Sexual and Reproductive Rights also identified other examples of how "religious extremists have tapped into public funding." It described several channels for such actors to receive state funding, including:

- *'Services' (which have included those via 'crisis pregnancy centers' that promote misinformation about abortion, as well as 'alternative' sex education that falls short of international recommendations);*
- *Support for anti-gender Christian political activism;*
- *Conservative civil society organizations that support illiberal governments.<sup>74</sup>*

It also noted how another "unexpected source of public funding" for anti-gender actors has been agricultural subsidies from the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), whose beneficiaries have included the aristocratic von Thurn und Taxis family, which is connected to the World Congress of Families and received €1.6 million from 2007-2013.<sup>75</sup>

## Corporate funding

In 2019, ahead of the European Parliament elections, a Prosecco exporter and a major cheese company were revealed as sponsors of the anti-gender World Congress of Families summit in Verona,

71 Claire Provost, "Progressive cash for the anti-LGBTQI backlash?". The Institute for Journalism and Social Change, (2023)

72 "Progressive cash for the anti-LGBTQI backlash?: Donor/development partners responses to our findings". The Institute for Journalism and Social Change, (2023)

73 Claire Provost and Nana Darko Sekyiamah, "Millions in Western aid flowed to churches in Ghana despite years of campaigning against LGBTQI+ rights". CNN, (2022)

74 "Tip of the Iceberg: Religious Extremist Funders against Human Rights for Sexuality & Reproductive Health in Europe". the European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual and Reproductive Rights

75 Tip of the Iceberg: Religious Extremist Funders against Human Rights for Sexuality & Reproductive Health in Europe". the European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual and Reproductive Rights

Italy. The event featured far-right politicians, including Giorgia Meloni, as speakers. Investigative journalists exposed these sponsorships, sparking calls for boycotts, notably from a prominent British restaurant critic.<sup>76</sup>

Research from the European Parliamentary Forum on Sexual and Reproductive Rights also identified other examples of corporate support to anti-gender actors among the funders of the Spanish anti-abortion organization Red Madre, which include the Carrefour supermarket chain and La Caixa (banking and insurance).<sup>77</sup>

At the Accra convening for this research, a participant shared another example of the subsidiary of a multinational corporation supporting anti-gender actors in Kenya. This is a relatively underexplored area of research. However, that was also identified at the Accra convening as a promising area for future investment and investigations to inform campaigns

## Intermediaries and enabling services

The TAI scoping paper included a focus on relatively under-scrutinized enabling services and institutions that are relevant

to the funding of anti-gender movements. These services include mainstream platforms such as PayPal, which have committed to supporting women's and LGBTQI rights yet are still used by anti-gender groups such as C-FAM (described in the box above). Other 'professional enablers' include marketing and communications firms and other financial services that serve or service these groups. Many of these are transnational/global, with headquarters in Northern jurisdictions.

*"Platforms such as PayPal, which have committed to supporting women's and LGBTQI rights (...) are still used by anti-gender groups such as C-FAM"*

The existing literature includes, for instance, investigative reporting documenting other enablers of financing for anti-

gender movements, including Amazon<sup>78</sup> as well as major US banks like Goldman Sachs and Bank of America,<sup>79</sup> in contrast to their pledges to support equality and rights, including news coverage of instances of 'de-banking' of anti-gender actors.<sup>80</sup> At the Accra convening, the M-PESA mobile money service was also mentioned as a platform that anti-gender groups in Africa have used to receive donations. **The full financial infrastructure that enables financial flows to anti-gender movements, including illicit finance, has, however, not been mapped out.**

## Cryptocurrencies

Significantly, several anti-rights groups have openly accepted anonymized donations, as well as cryptocurrency, non-cash and in-kind donations. Human Life International, for example, states on its website that its donors "may request and receive

76 Adam Ramsay et al, "Prosecco firm slammed for sponsoring summit of 'racists, bigots and ultra nationalists'", openDemocracy, (2019)

77 Tip of the Iceberg: Religious Extremist Funders against Human Rights for Sexuality & Reproductive Health in Europe", the European Parliamentary Forum on Sexual and Reproductive Rights

78 L. Ferreira & C. Provost, "Dozens of anti-LGBT groups fundraising on Amazon despite equality pledges", openDemocracy, (2020)

79 L. Ferreira & K. S. Wepukhulu, "Revealed: Major US banks are funding anti-LGBTIQ groups", openDemocracy

80 J. Wareham, "Barclays Close Christian Charity Bank Account Offering LGBT Conversion Therapy", Forbes, (2020)

R. Comerford, "Brexiters and gender-critical vicar have bank accounts pulled", The Telegraph, (2023)

anonymity.”<sup>81</sup> The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) explains that it also accepts non-cash gifts: vehicles, assets including stock and mutual funds, “precious metal bullion,” “grain commodities,” and cryptocurrency.<sup>82</sup> Liberty Counsel is another example of a prominent US anti-rights group that accepts Bitcoin donations. Little work has been done so far in this area. As the TAI scoping paper also noted: “While there is considerable attention to cryptocurrencies as a tool for organized crime, it is unclear whether initiatives exist to scrutinize or campaign on cryptocurrencies’ emerging role...[in] illicit political finance.”<sup>83</sup>

## Underresourced feminist alternatives

Funders on the right have helped these anti-gender movements grow – with support for research as well as specific projects and operations. They seem to have successfully practiced values-driven, mission-aligned, trust-based philanthropy to the benefit of anti-rights groups and the detriment of the rest of us. Billionaire donor Charles Koch, for example, has argued that philanthropists should stop dreaming

up sweeping fixes for society’s big problems. Instead, he has argued that funders should trust people who have first-hand experience dealing with those problems.<sup>84</sup>

*“It’s time to marshal a new wave of resources, including from philanthropy to counter funding for anti-gender and white supremacist movements”*  
– The Bridgespan Group and Shake the Table

As The Bridgespan Group and Shake the Table argued in a recent report, it’s time to marshal a new wave of resources, including from philanthropy to counter funding for anti-gender and white supremacist movements, so that more resources flow to women — especially Black women and other women of color — and LGBTQ activists, describing their fight for their rights as the existential fight for our democracy. They called for resources for feminist movements to dramatically increase to reach \$1.5 billion per year as a minimum baseline.<sup>85</sup>

## Strategic research for action

The TAI scoping paper noted: “Whilst data collection and exposure of bad actors are crucial steps, greater efforts should be made to understand the policy implications and opportunities that such investigations reveal.”<sup>86</sup> This is also true when it comes to anti-gender movements and their illicit and other financing. New revelations don’t always lead to change.

The IJSC’s investigation revealing aid funding for anti-LGBTQI groups in Uganda was impactful and was led by impact goals from the beginning. Conversations with Ugandan and African feminist and queer activists informed the decision and scope of research, as well as the timing of its release and how it was disseminated. It was released not with a single media partner but as a report sent to many journalists and with a launch event co-organized with the Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy, attended by hundreds of people. Some impacts were achieved quickly, with some donors announcing changes to their funding practices. But not all did, so follow-up work on this continues (by the IJSC and by activists who have taken up the findings in their own advocacy).

81 “St. Gianna Beretta Molla Guild”. Human Life International

82 “Non-Cash Gifts”. Billy Graham Evangelistic Association

83 Andrew Clarke, “Defending democracy from illicit finance and kleptocrats: a scoping paper for transformative funding opportunities”. Transparency & Accountability Initiative, (August 2023)

84 Alex Daniels, “Charles Koch’s Book Urges ‘Bottom-Up’ Approach to Philanthropy”. The Chronicle of Philanthropy, (2020)

85 “Lighting the Way: a Report for Philanthropy on the Power & Promise of Feminist Movements”. Shake the Table, (2022)

86 Andrew Clarke, “Defending democracy from illicit finance and kleptocrats: a scoping paper for transformative funding opportunities”. Transparency & Accountability Initiative, (August 2023)

Not all investigative research has the same pathways to impact (which may differ, for instance, between problems related to state and corporate funding flows). However, the impact should be considered in the early stages of any such research. This requires mapping out and consulting with ecosystems of relevant actors who can inform impact planning and strategies, as well as make use of the research outputs. Focusing on research questions that have clear, defined, and realistic pathways to impact can be an effective use of resources and opportunities to pilot ideas for larger investigations that require more investment.

*"Impact should be considered at the early stages of any such research."*

## Box: Challenging anti-gender actors' registration and non-profit status

There have been a number of attempts in the US and other places to challenge anti-gender actors' secrecy and alleged abuse of their non-profit status.<sup>87</sup> The Campaign for Accountability, for instance, has complained to the IRS that anti-abortion group Susan B Anthony List was "failing to disclose payments to firms owned by its corporate directors."<sup>88</sup> It also complained that another anti-abortion group, Human Life International, had politically campaigned in the Philippines (against restrictions on such activities by registered non-profits) by "advocating to retain laws prohibiting abortion in the country and to elect candidates who share this goal."<sup>89</sup>

In some cases, states have taken action against these groups. In Canada, for instance, anti-abortion groups, including Human Life International and an abstinence-only youth organization, had their status revoked or denied.<sup>90</sup> In Australia, a church lost its tax exemption over its affiliation with the conservative Christian

political party Rise Up Australia.<sup>91</sup> However, anti-gender groups have also challenged the non-profit statuses of gender justice groups – and they have targeted the regulatory system, including prohibitions on endorsing or opposing political candidates.<sup>92</sup>

Recent investigative research has also looked at the use of donor-advised funds by contributors to anti-gender groups in the US.<sup>93</sup> In some cases, these actors may also use fiscal hosts, making following the money harder. However, gender justice groups may also use fiscal hosts and receive funding from donor-advised funds.

This is a complex terrain on which to challenge anti-gender groups without also casting suspicion on progressive organizations or providing ammunition for hypocrisy claims. It shows how investigative research in this area can have unintended consequences without interdisciplinary collaboration and consultation about what to focus on and where the wrongdoing is. There is now, however, significant experience across borders that could be shared and learned from. This should include space for critical appraisals of interventions that did not 'succeed,' as well as those that did.

87 "National Organization for Marriage Withholding Key Financial Documents in Violation of Federal Law". Human Rights Watch, (2013)

88 "Watchdog Calls on IRS to Investigate Anti-Choice Group Susan B. Anthony List for Enriching its Directors and Lying to Federal Officials". Campaign for Accountability, (2019)

89 "Watchdog Files IRS Complaint Against 'World's Largest' Anti-Choice Group for Engaging in Political Activity". Campaign for Accountability, (2019)

90 "Abstinence-Only Youth Group's Charity Status in Supreme Court's Hands". LifeSite, (2000)

91 "Australia Revokes Tax Exemption for Politically Active Church". The Christian Broadcasting Network, (2017)

92 F. Schubert, "EXCLUSIVE: IRS threatens to revoke tax-exempt status of black pastors group". International Family News, (2020)

93 Lydia Namubiru, "Charity loophole lets US donors give far-right groups \$272m in secret". openDemocracy, (2023)



## Coalitions and threats to them

This area requires coalitions and collaborations across borders and disciplines, including between feminist movements and those for financial transparency, integrity, and more just economic systems. This requires trust and building relationships among people and networks that may not overlap. Caution should be exercised if new coalition opportunities can threaten others. In particular, while it is significant that anti-gender financing has registered increasingly prominently on policy-making agendas in recent years, our literature review also unearthed concern (as noted above) over state-led responses and approaches that may rely on or involve national security infrastructure, including law enforcement and intelligence agencies. For feminists with anti-militarist perspectives, such collaborations could be red lines, while pursuing work on anti-gender movements without them could be counterproductive and a bad strategy, given their expertise in this area.

*“Caution should be exercised if new coalition opportunities can threaten others”*

## 5. Recommendations for OSF

Many of the new initiatives that have emerged to counter anti-gender threats have been supported financially and non-financially by philanthropy, with OSF playing a leading role. This support must continue and expand, including but also beyond how it connects to work on illicit political financing.

It is encouraging to see anti-gender movements and responses to them gaining greater prominence on donor agendas. These developments signal a growing recognition of the importance of tackling anti-gender movements at both national and international levels.

### For instance:

- *The topic was featured in a dedicated session at the Philea Forum 2023, a significant gathering of European foundations.*
- *The Ford Foundation is actively developing its strategy to address these issues further.*

- *A coalition of donors has joined forces to support the newly established Nebula Fund.*
- *USAID has announced plans to explore initiatives focused on “understanding and disrupting the links between illicit finance and anti-gender equality movements.”*

OSF's thought leadership and partnerships in this space have been crucial and can be built upon for a more significant impact. As a result of this work, it is well-respected in the field and well-placed to engage in and/or (co)lead donor coordination efforts. This could include contributing to the Nebula Fund, as well as working to bring other donors into this space (foundations but also high net-worth individuals or networks that coordinate them, including the Shake the Table initiative). Along with this ecosystem role, OSF should consider supporting:

## a. Blocking and building strategies

Anti-gender movements that seek to block or roll back progress on rights and that are working over the long term towards boldly anti-democratic goals demand proactive as well as reactive responses to challenge them effectively. This means continuing to build more intersectionally just societies, movements, and institutions while working to resist threats to these goals. Such support could include, among other things:

**Advancing the leadership of feminists and LGBTQI rights advocates within the media, the public sector, and other key battlegrounds for anti-gender actors:** This is not what anti-gender actors would like to see. They benefit from ongoing institutional biases against diverse women and LGBTQI people and their exclusion from decision-making and agenda-setting. There is still a long way to go to make these spaces more inclusive. In the media, for instance, the Reuters Institute at Oxford found that only 22% of top editors were women in an international study of hundreds of outlets from a dozen countries on five continents.<sup>94</sup> As was reflected at the Accra convening, there are feminists across disciplines, including law, policy, economics, and the media, and work in this area should not make the assumption that you have to go 'beyond feminists' to bring in diverse skill sets and areas of expertise

**Feminist movement building:** These movements have been and are still at the frontline of identifying and responding to anti-gender attacks. They have called for increased as well as improved support. This includes long-term and flexible funding; additional emergency funds (without donors dictating what constitutes an emergency); and monitoring and evaluation programs that center movements' goals (including, for instance, extra learning funds for all grantees) rather than being led by donor bureaucracy.

*"If the flood is coming, the builder becomes the blocker" - Participant Accra convening*

### **Blocking and building: recommendations from the Accra convening**

Africans were trying to 'build' post-independence but were 'blocked.' We must build bigger and faster than the opposition to rights and justice. If we achieve that, we'll be more resilient and less susceptible to attacks. 'Blocking' and 'building' are not mutually exclusive, either. As one participant said, "If the flood is coming, the builder becomes the blocker." There needs to be a nimble and flexible approach, which requires an

understanding of that entire continuum of strategy so that even when you are a 'builder,' you know what the 'blocker' is up to and how you work together. That is where silos are reduced, and resources/capacities are strategically placed/shared.

Participants also raised: the need for greater coordination among funders and grantees; for learning to be encouraged structurally by providing dedicated additional learning funds for all grantees, and for funders to 'take cues from movements,' support activists who are taking risks, and allow for spaciousness in emergency funds without imposing 'your own definitions of emergency.' In terms of what funders should not do, they said: Do not throw activists in the deep end of issues without ample support and safety nets or reduce long-term funding.

*"Do not throw activists in the deep end of issues without ample support and safety nets, or reduce long-term funding" - Participant Accra convening*

<sup>94</sup> "Women and leadership in the news media 2023: evidence from 12 markets". The Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, (2023)

## b. Research for action

As the TAI scoping paper noted: “Whilst data collection and exposure of bad actors are crucial steps, greater efforts should be made to understand the policy implications and opportunities that such investigations reveal.”<sup>95</sup> Significantly, these efforts should not wait until after information is collected and revealed. Rather, to be effective, they should be incorporated into the research process from the start. Such impact-led research could be supported by, and could include:

**The establishment of an ongoing transnational observatory on anti-gender finances** serves the different ecosystems of actors desiring up-to-date information, including journalists, activists, and researchers across borders. This observatory could also help bring together these actors and connect research to action, including by coordinating collaborative projects on particular themes, including illicit finance, as well as funding from corporations and aid budgets.

**New action-oriented research and collaborations focused on the international role of UK-based anti-gender groups**, complementing and building on OSF’s recent focused funding on tackling London’s role in facilitating dirty money, as was also mentioned in the TAI scoping paper.

**Further analysis of potential fault lines within anti-gender movements and their key constituencies regarding illicit finance**, building on the insights in this paper. Audiences targeted by anti-gender movements do not appear aligned on these issues, and there may thus be opportunities to also reach them with new information about illicit finance and these movements. This could require engagement with some of the conservative and religious media outlets serving these audiences (or with specific individuals at these outlets where aligned interests are identified).

**European secrecy laws vs registrations of anti-gender groups**: A concrete research project could investigate and challenge European financial secrecy that may be interfering with further research and action on the international activities of anti-gender groups located in countries such as Austria and Germany. This project would focus on anti-gender actors who have been left out of previous analyses because of their lack of financial disclosure.

**Impact planning capacity**: Effective impact planning takes time and skill that not all actors in this space currently have. This work should be embedded within project design and also guide the selection of projects themselves. The specifics of what’s required will depend on the project, but it will typically require diverse sets of expertise and collaborations with other organizations.

### **Feminist participatory research methods**

There is a growing body of knowledge on feminist participatory methods for research affecting women and other people who are negotiating social injustice and marginalization.<sup>96</sup> These methods support, for instance, the development of shared ownership over the research process and its outcomes and aim “to empower oppressed people to participate in the social investigation and take collective actions for social change.”<sup>97</sup>

There are guides to such methods for researchers and academics, while the IJSC is in the process of developing a Feminist Investigative Journalism Handbook for media workers and those who collaborate with them. Such knowledge and methodologies should, however, be much more widely shared, including with groups from other progressive movements (including those for tax justice and transparency), for instance, in workshops supporting new coalitions/collaborations.

95 Andrew Clarke, “Defending democracy from illicit finance and kleptocrats: a scoping paper for transformative funding opportunities”. Transparency & Accountability Initiative, (August 2023)

96 Nour Shimeï and Maya Lavie-Ajayi, “Four practices for conducting feminist participatory action research with young women”. Action Research, (2022)

97 “Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) Academy”. FPAR Academy

### **Information and coordination: recommendations from the Accra convening**

"You can't be effective in making change in society if you do not have this type of information that is being presented to us," said one participant. Another stressed: "There needs to be a multi-disciplinary approach. It has to be intersectional...But how do these things come together? When are we checking in again? We need to stop the knee-jerk reaction when there is a problem. How do we continue these conversations?"

They warned: "If no one is taking this issue as their 'bread and butter' or their mandate, then even in five to ten years, we are still going to say that there is not enough literature. Not enough information. To be able to come up with meaningful strategies and interventions, which is what the research is trying to do, we need to start to understand the scope, the depth, and all those aspects. But I think it goes beyond money. It also goes to narratives. What is the long game they are playing? Who is connected to who? What are they planning?"<sup>98</sup>

*"It goes beyond money. It also goes to narratives. What is the long game they are playing? Who is connected to who? What are they planning?"*  
- Participant Accra convening

### **c. Scaling up success**

Participants in the Accra convening said we should also share and celebrate successes in confronting anti-gender threats and building gender justice amidst them. While this can still be considered a nascent field in need of further investment, there are promising approaches to specific projects as well as ways of working that can be scaled up. In this area, OSF could usefully support:

**Replication and expansion of existing research:** There are now a number of successful projects that can be considered pilots for larger investigations. These include the research led by the Columbia Journalism School looking at money laundering through churches in Latin America, as well as the IJSC's research investigating connections between aid donors and anti-gender groups in Africa. These methodologies could also be applied for impact in other regions. Their significant findings should also be followed up.

**Leverage progress and opportunities:** Strategic research for action looks for opportunities for impact and where conditions in relevant ecosystems facilitate that. For instance, the IJSC's recent work on aid flows leveraged progress that has been made on publishing to the International Aid Transparency Initiative, the global media's attention to the crisis in Uganda, and already existing networks and structures coordinating international solidarity.

**Sharing and learning from experience:** OSF could usefully support more documentation and sharing of lessons from experiences across borders and disciplines investigating and confronting anti-gender threats, including their finances and related issues, such as secrecy and the use of anti-democratic tactics. It was suggested by a speaker at the OSF roundtable in July 2023, co-organized with Noor, that there are potential lessons to be shared from colleagues who focus on radical Islam on how to confront Christian fundamentalism, from those who work on modern slavery and supply chains (as money for anti-gender actors also often travels through intermediaries); and from those who have done other work on 'enablers' including online and mobile financial services platforms, as well as cryptocurrency. This can help provide inspiration and learning to help identify and scale up successful campaigns and build more diverse spaces of dialogue.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>98</sup> Joy Ansira, SIRC

<sup>99</sup> Notes from OSF IPF Roundtable 3, July 2023, co-organised by Noor

## Narratives and public opinion

There are both anti-democratic narratives and frames, and those that support intersectional justice require more research and activities, including better understanding and tracking shifts in public opinion. Support from OSF in this area could usefully include:

**Develop and test new narratives and frames** tailored to specific contexts and target audiences, and avoid 'dark money' terms associating negativity with darkness. This should include new public opinion research that can also test and help select narratives that resonate the most and can be most impactful. It is not necessary, and perhaps unlikely, that these narratives be the same across contexts (for instance, participants in the Accra convening explained how they might be different in contexts of economic crisis where churches may also be providing essential services and in contexts where people who are already struggling feel that they are being unfairly hit by government drives to increase tax revenue). However, lessons from the development and testing of different frames could still be beneficially shared and learned across borders and issues.

**Avoid narratives that cast as pernicious** all foreign funding, or the use of vehicles such as donor-advised funds and fiscal hosts, recognizing that progressive civil society may have/use these too, and such claims have also been weaponized against them.

**Experiment and support creativity in narratives and activities to engage the public** by groups confronting anti-gender threats. As a participant in the Accra convening explained: "The way that fundamentalists and feminists organize is so different. And there is such a demand for perfection if you identify as a feminist that there is no room to fail. So then, we are not fun. It almost then becomes an orthodoxy. So you are scared to go there and say the wrong thing." Advocacy on issues such as tax justice and transparency can also appear inaccessible or uninteresting for broader audiences and could also benefit from experimentation and creativity in these areas.

*"There is such a demand for perfection if you identify as a feminist that there is no room to fail"*

*- Participant Accra convening*

**Experiment and support creativity in narratives and activities to engage audiences anti-gender movements also target**, such as conservatives who value transparency, adherence to the law, and ethical behavior. Identifying such potential 'ways' to engage and connect with some audiences 'on the right' could be strategic priorities and key measures of impact. This requires not just the gathering of evidence but also the careful design and delivery of effective and targeted outreach and media campaigns.

**Consider a new, ambitious narrative infrastructure**, which could include a transnational initiative such as a Feminist Broadcasting Network, which would need to be a long-term project. This was a suggestion from the Accra convening.

## d.Coalition building

There may be no one-size-fits-all recipe for coalition building in this area. However, there are key constituencies that have been identified where OSF could usefully support bridge-building and joint work, including:

**Journalists, activists, and researchers:** These are the three key constituencies across borders that the IJSC is working to bring together around a shared focus on the impact in service of inclusive democracy amidst threats, including from anti-gender movements. Our impactful and impact-led publication revealing aid donors' connections to anti-LGBTQI groups in Uganda, described above, is an example of such collaborative work. The team that worked on it included an investigative journalist, a researcher, a technical aid data expert, and Queer and feminist activists, both from Uganda and Africa as well as from several donor countries in Europe. To impactfully release these findings, other partnerships were sought and struck, including with the Center for Feminist Foreign Policy, which added in-kind resources and hosted an online launch event. Rather than working with a single media partner, we sent our findings to many outlets, and dozens around the world picked them up. We also engaged, pre-publication and post-publication, with the donor agencies implicated in the research and continue to do so.

There are other examples in the anti-gender monitoring space of collaborations between journalists, activists, and researchers. However, these are largely informal and based on individual relationships. This speaks to a cross-cutting need – one also expressed by participants at the Accra convening – for more support and investment in coordination and coordinating infrastructure. This should include convenings and other activities to enable sharing experiences, learnings, and impacts from work across borders and disciplines, as well as relationship building to support new collaborations. This can facilitate various advancements, including providing inspiration for replications, adaptations, and cross-border expansions of successful interventions.

**Tax justice movements** should be supported to incorporate feminist and gender justice considerations into work on tax justice and build new coalitions, including with feminist movements, to block threats and build more intersectionally just societies together. At the 2023 World Congress of the Public Services International global public sector trade union federation, Gurchaten Sandhu from ILGA World (and formerly at the International Labour Organization) argued that tax justice could unite these movements, as it can simultaneously reduce resources of elites funding anti-gender movements and increase those for public services for all.

**Transparency movements** are natural potential allies in investigating and challenging the financial secrecy of anti-gender actors. They include the International Aid Transparency Initiative when it comes to aid funding for these actors, as well as other transnational and local monitors of public, charitable (tax-exempt), and corporate financing. This could include work addressing transparency and accountability gaps of religious institutions, which would be an ambitious project requiring its specific scoping research, including an understanding of anti-gender attempts to build alternative financial accountability infrastructures such as the US Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability

**Trade unions** across the private and public sectors are potentially significant coalition partners for confronting anti-gender movements. For example, the 2023 World Congress of the Public Services International (PSI) global trade union federation included sessions on anti-gender threats and how unions can respond. Collaborations with unions could help, for instance, to challenge funding flows from public and other budgets to anti-gender movements. They can also help ‘build’ intersectional justice as well as ‘block’ threats to it. There are many examples of public sector battlegrounds or targets of anti-gender movements, from courts to schools and healthcare systems. Meanwhile, these areas and unions are also under threat from austerity policies. Challenges to coalition-building that were described at the PSI Congress included:

- unions not being invited to feminist and LGBTQI rights meetings
- the need to draw connections between austerity and anti-gender threats
- low rates of trade union participation in places where anti-gender attacks are advancing, such as in African countries and some parts of Latin America.

**Feminist foreign policy advocates and governments:** A growing number of governments have adopted feminist foreign policies, including Sweden, Canada, France, Mexico, Spain, Luxembourg, Germany and Chile.<sup>100</sup> New civil society initiatives have also emerged to advance these policies internationally.<sup>101</sup> These governments have already accepted that gender justice concerns should be integrated into their foreign policies, while their countries are also sources of transnational anti-gender financing (from aid budgets in some cases as well as from tax-exempt and other organizations registered in their jurisdictions but active internationally). These policies need to be monitored, and governments held to account for their commitments; they may also require and be receptive to guidance on how to operationalize pledges in specific areas like this. It was noted by a speaker at the July 2023 OSF roundtable that European policymakers who are concerned about anti-gender threats are unsure of what their policy options are and what precisely they could and should be pushing for. This also speaks to the need for convening space to identify and champion best practices and share experiences across borders.

100 “FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICIES: AN INTRODUCTION”. UN Women

101 Notably the Center for Feminist Foreign Policy, and Feminist Foreign Policy Collaborative.

*“European policymakers who are concerned about anti-gender threats are unsure of what their policy options are and what precisely they could and should be pushing for.”*

**Strategic litigation:** Given OSF’s work and track record of support in this area, it would be opportune to explore collaborations between strategic litigators, journalists, researchers, and activists. This is an area where a pilot project could be usefully designed and also structured as a learning experience with lessons documented and shared. A convening could also be organized to specifically focus on how research can support strategic litigation in service of embattled rights, to introduce and help journalists, researchers, and activists working in this area, who may not have any legal expertise, to understand how and when to engage with strategic litigators.

## e. Risks and due diligence

As mentioned above, including in the analysis section of the report, this is a complex terrain in which progressive funders and organizations must also “get their own house in order,” in the words of one of the participants in the Accra convening, to ensure that their interventions do no harm; and support partners under threat. As these are ecosystem-wide

challenges, it would also be beneficial for this work to be coordinated with lessons shared.

Donor accountability: For progressive funders, there is an urgent imperative to ensure that none of your money winds up in the hands and projects of anti-gender groups, as we saw in our Uganda investigation (which focused on government aid donors but also included the IKEA Foundation). This may require enhanced internal due diligence procedures, which could be produced in a coordinated way by several funders as well as shared with others. The underfunding of feminist movements can also be understood as another ecosystem-wide accountability failure. A participant in the Accra convening said: “Funders, they need to get their house in order and support feminist institutions, and give not just money but change the way that they fund as well so that they are better able to respond to these emerging forces.” This relates to the recommendation above on feminist movement building and funding practices that can support that.

*“Funders need to get their house in order and support feminist institutions. They should not just give money but change the way that they fund.”*  
– Participant Accra convening

Threats to partners: As also mentioned in the TAI scoping paper, there are risks to the safety and wellbeing of partners, including “the misuse of the illicit finance agenda and narrative to close

civic space (e.g., preventing foreign funding for NGOs)” as well as security and legal risks facing journalists and others doing work in this area. These threats include SLAPPs (Strategic Lawsuits Against Political Participation) that have been filed against researchers as well as activists and journalists looking at anti-gender actors, which both threaten to stop important work and deter others from joining it. Funders, including OSF, should support gender justice and other groups that are or might be under attack from anti-gender groups, including with claims of financial/regulatory impropriety weaponized against them, ensuring that they have access to the emergency and legal support they may need.

## Collaborating with state agencies: recommendations from the Accra convening

Such collaborations need to be approached cautiously to ensure that activists “do not feed the hydra that will bite” them. Anti-militarist and abolitionist groups will object to collaborating with states as “you cannot dismantle the master’s house using the master’s tools.” This could fracture or harm coalition-building.

However, not all states are the same, and not all individuals working within their agencies are. Collaborations with like-minded individuals of trusted personal conviction within

certain agencies could be considered as a different and appropriate strategy, depending on the context. There is also a need to be mindful that the rules we ask to govern fundamentalists (including those on greater transparency or scrutiny of transnational funding) can also be applied to us – and potentially more harshly depending on the state/agency involved and their approach to gender justice.

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## 6. Conclusions

The goals of anti-gender movements are ambitious and long-term, and they likely threaten progress in every program area that OSF has had or may have. Whether it is health and education or civic space and democracy, these movements try to block or reverse progress on universal human rights, regardless of gender and sexuality, that underpin inclusive and open societies. They directly threaten feminist movements as well as those for financial transparency, election integrity, and global health and development goals, including the ongoing fight against HIV and AIDS.

These movements deploy anti-democratic strategies, including misinformation, to pursue anti-democratic goals across generations. They seek to block advancements in rights – and roll back previous victories. Networks, including the World Congress of Families, help them to learn and gain support across borders. There is a palpable moment to be seized in

terms of advancements in monitoring and challenging anti-gender movements, which has produced lessons to be shared, learned from, potentially replicated in other areas, or expanded on. These advancements have significantly increased awareness of these movements and their threats. Yet, there are current knowledge and resource gaps across the field, particularly for cross-border and cross-disciplinary work that ‘blocks and builds’ at the same time, directly supporting and strengthening feminist movements and coalitions. The response needs to do several things simultaneously, too – responding to threats while pushing for more inclusive societies. Their urgent threats need urgent responses – and proactive strategies that can advance gender justice in the long term. We must also learn from and support each other across borders and in the struggles for intersectional justice, including economic justice. Thankfully, there are feminists worldwide with the knowledge, experience, and ability to absorb greater investment and reactively respond and proactively build a better future for us all.





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