

# Converging Futures: Where Gender Justice, Democracy, and Faith Meet

## Convening Report



Lisbon, Portugal  
24-26 March 2026

Hosted by:



**Research & Analysis by UUSC and PRA**

**Produced by UUSC, Faith in Democracy, and PRA**

**Convening Co-Design and Facilitation by Angelika Arutyunova**

**Lead Project Advisors: Jabulani Pereira, Jennifer Butler**

**Convening Advisors: Rev. Toni Kruger-Ayebazibwe, Bishop Joseph Tolton, Heidi Beirich, Katrina Anderson, Ronilso Pacheco, Heather Benjamin,**

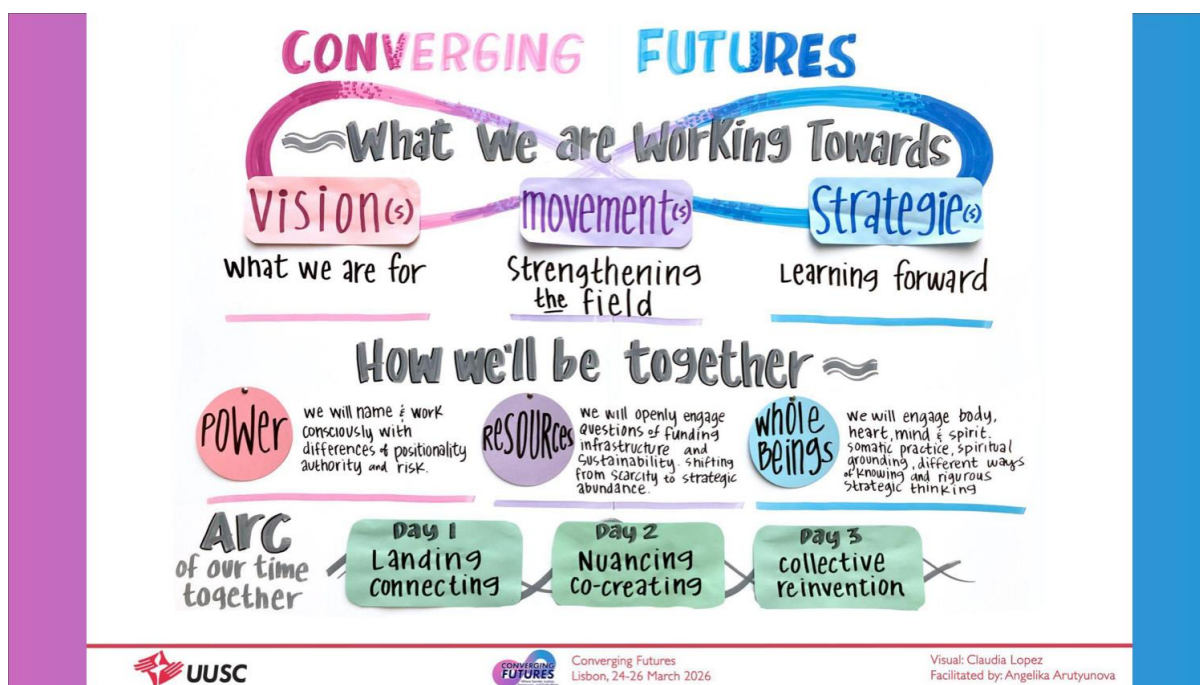
**Visuals by Claudia Lopez**

**June 2026**

## Part I: Analysis and Synthesis

### Converging Futures Convening: Purpose, Outcome, & Process

This report comes out of a three-day convening held in Lisbon, Portugal, on March 24–26, 2026, called *Converging Futures: Where Gender Justice, Democracy, and Faith Meet*. It was convened by the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC) in partnership with Faith in Democracy, with the support of a global team of advisors representing different positions and experiences at the intersections of gender justice, democracy, and faith leadership. The convening brought together approximately 50 faith leaders, movement organizers, researchers, and funders from more than a dozen countries across the global north and south. Participants worked across Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, and secular traditions, and across feminist, LGBTQI+, racial justice, democracy, and human rights sectors.



The convening was designed around the shared premise that **the intersection of faith, gender justice, and democracy is one of the most strategically important and most underinvested fronts in the global struggle against authoritarianism**—and that this intersection itself still has to be built. Currently, the relevant actors work largely in separate silos (faith, gender justice, democracy), with real but incidental overlap, and very few operate in a genuinely intersectional way. Connecting them into a coherent, resourced, and visible field is itself central work before us.

This report provides convening participants and their organizational partners with a synthesis of what was surfaced, analyzed, proposed, and committed to. It also provides our broader community of funders, movement leaders, and policy actors with analysis, recommendations, and an action plan for engaging with and supporting this emerging work in this field, necessary for ensuring that it has the resources and support needed to realize its potential and scale up.

Part I below presents the convening's analytical contributions. Part II offers guidance organized by sector. Part III sets out a concrete action plan with timelines and budgets where they are known. A separate section, "From Five Buckets to Seven Threads," appears at the end of Part I and traces the structural shift that took place during the convening itself, from the pre-planned strategy categories to the work streams that participants actually organized around.

The Lisbon convening was not the first gathering to name the threat of anti-gender authoritarianism, nor the first to call for progressive faith engagement. But what it did offer was a deep and unique—and for many, a *first* encounter—at the intersection of gender justice, faith leaders, academics/researchers, and philanthropy; and it surfaced the potential and promise of what is possible when organizing and actions converge at this intersection. The range of the room (the range of faith traditions, geographies, sectors, and strategic orientations represented) made for rich (and rare) cross-sectoral discussion, and the directness with which participants confronted both the external threat and the internal fractures that have kept progressive responses fragmented created an opportunity for grappling genuinely and productively through these tensions to land on what is possible and how we might get there together.

This section synthesizes the convening's core analytical contributions, draws on post-convening reflections and proposals from participants, and identifies the strategic implications for the movement and the funders who would support it.

## **1. Anti-Gender Politics as Authoritarian Infrastructure**

The convening's Common Denominator guiding document, circulated to participants in advance as a shared analytical baseline, framed the stakes clearly: "We are not only facing a backlash against gender justice. We are witnessing the emergence of a broader political and economic order that seeks to replace the post-World War human rights and democratic framework with something more nationalist, extractive, corporate, racialized, and openly hierarchical."

The convening confirmed and deepened this analysis through practitioner testimony from more than a dozen countries. The weaponization of gender serves several

functions simultaneously: It provides a mass mobilization vehicle rooted in intimate fears about family, sexuality, and social order. It offers moral justification for the concentration of power. It creates wedge issues that fracture progressive coalitions. And it generates the affective conditions, including fear, disgust, and moral panic, on which authoritarian consolidation depends. As Judith Butler guided us during the convening, the thing called "gender" is attributed enormous destructive power by its opponents: the capacity to destroy nations, families, biblical authority, nature itself. The strategic question is not how to deflect these fears with reason but how to engage people at the level of their desires, hopes, and values—faith leaders' home sphere of influence.

This analysis carries direct strategic consequences. **Gender justice is not one issue among many to be "added" to a democracy agenda; rather, it is constitutive of that agenda.** Any defense of democratic governance that does not engage the gender dimension will be outflanked by opponents who have already understood this. The actors who understand gender weaponization most intimately, including feminist movements, LGBTQ+ organizations, and progressive faith leaders working on sexuality and reproduction, hold strategic knowledge that democracy movements need but have not yet adequately sought out or resourced.

In many contexts, progressive faith leaders support a shared horizon, guiding constellations, and even a moral compass for collective organizing to support values that undergird gender justice advocacy and power building. For funders working on democracy and civic space, the implication is clear and urgent. A democracy portfolio that does not include serious investment in gender justice and in the faith actors who

shape how gender is politically interpreted is a portfolio that risks not matching our opponents' own theory of how political power is built and lost.



## 2. The Transnational Ecosystem: Complex, Adaptive, and Multidirectional

The convening produced a more nuanced analysis of how anti-gender politics travels than is typically available in either academic literature or advocacy materials. The conventional narrative, that anti-gender ideology is "exported" from the US and Russia to the Global South, captures an important dimension. US-based conservative foundations, Russian Orthodox geopolitical strategy, and coordinating bodies like Family Watch International and the New Apostolic Reformation are well-documented nodes of transnational influence. The Strategic Issues and Research Council (SIRC) research (shared with convening participants) has documented approximately \$50 million channeled into anti-rights work in Africa, for example, with over \$270 million flowing through donor-advised funds to groups like Family Watch International and Alliance Defending Freedom.

But participants from India, Brazil, Uganda, Poland, Georgia, and elsewhere also invited a more complex picture into the space. Hindu nationalism's anti-gender dimensions are

rooted in caste hierarchy and have their own century-long institutional history through the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and its affiliates. Sonia Corrêa, a long-time global leader in countering anti-gender movements, traced clerical fascism in Latin American Catholicism back through Salazarismo and integralism to the Inquisition itself, a history of authoritarian Christianity that long predates the contemporary American Christian right. Wahhabist influence in Muslim-majority contexts operates through its own funding and institutional channels. And caste-based gender regulation in South Asia cannot be reduced to a Western import.

Crucially, analysis by participants working on Hindu nationalism and Zionism (Jewish nationalism) revealed that anti-gender campaigns do not function the same way across all ethnonationalist formations. In some cases, the Hindu and Zionist right position themselves as queer- or trans-positive, using "pinkwashing" (performative actions) as a marker of civilizational superiority over Muslim or Arab populations. The gender dimension is present (masculinist populism, patriarchal culture, etc.), but it tends to operate through different mechanisms and requires different strategic responses. As one participant cautioned: "Simplistic analysis leads to simplistic strategies."

What the convening surfaced is an ecosystem in which anti-gender ideology circulates, adapts, and converges, rather than a pipeline with a single origin point—and this has strategic implications for how we respond. These movements learn from one another, share funding and legal strategies, and converge at key sites (the UN, regional bodies, social media platforms). But they also have their own internal logics, their own histories, and their own bases of support. Any strategy that treats this as simply a problem of US or European export risks missing the depth of what our progressive, pro-democracy, and/or gender justice movements confront, and failing to leverage the deep contextual knowledge, tactics, and strategies that movements in the Global South already possess.

This analysis means that we must recognize Global South actors as analysts and strategists whose understanding of their own contexts is most likely to produce effective counter-mobilization. Funding architecture must contend with and be designed to move resources to those actors directly, on their terms, on their timelines, while also attending to the very important recognition that anti-gender actors and authoritarians are contesting, capturing, and/or consolidating power across Europe and the United States and efforts to halt and reverse the consolidation in those contexts has crucial implications for both gender justice and democracy there as well as across the world, including the Global South.

At the same time, a Global North / Global South frame and dichotomy, while useful, is not the whole picture. The convening surfaced an important critique about the predominance of Global North voices, and resourcing Global South actors on their own

terms remains essential. But that frame, when understood as a rigid binary, risks obscuring other structuring forms of power, including class, anti-Blackness, caste, and postcoloniality (as in the Central and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central and North Asia (CECCNA) region, among others), and it should not be taken to imply that South-South relationships are themselves free of these asymmetries. In Brazil, for instance, race and anti-Blackness are central rather than peripheral to how both progressive and anti-gender movements operate. This is an area of both tension and complexity that will require ongoing development as the field builds toward a more global and effective ecosystem, one grounded in feminist and internationalist principles of power analysis rather than geography alone.

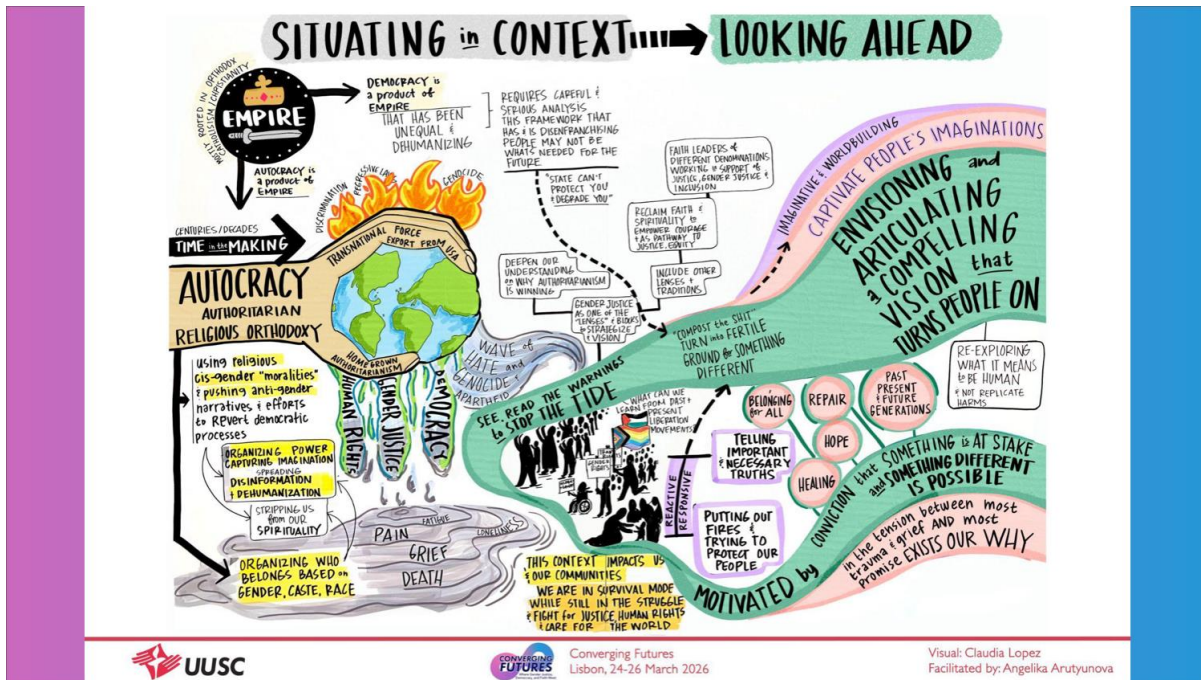
### 3. Race, Caste, and the Racialized Architecture of Anti-Gender Politics

The convening repeatedly returned to a critical analytical point: anti-gender movements are racialized political formations. **Anti-Blackness, caste, anti-Muslim bigotry, and White nationalism are not parallel tracks running alongside gender politics but are structurally interwoven with the mobilization of gender as a political weapon.** The "Great Replacement" theory connects anti-abortion politics to white nationalist demography; Hindu nationalism's gender politics are inseparable from its anti-Muslim and anti-Dalit dimensions; and anti-trans moral panics in the US and Europe are laced with racial anxieties about who counts as a "real" citizen and who is authorized to "reproduce" the nation.

Convening participants drew direct historical lines from colonial-era gender regimes that imposed binary categories on colonized peoples, through eugenics movements that linked racial purity to reproductive control, to the present moment in which authoritarian actors mobilize gender as a proxy for racial and civilizational boundary-policing. For example, UUSC Board Member Jorge Rodríguez's work on "theological genocide," the deliberate destruction of indigenous spiritual and gender systems through missionary colonization, offered a framework for understanding how deeply the current anti-gender project is rooted in colonial history. As he pointed out, the trans community's search for spiritual home is inseparable from this history of theological erasure.

This analysis carries a dual strategic imperative. First, any counter-strategy must attend to the racial and caste dimensions of anti-gender movements, not as an afterthought but as a core element of diagnosis and response. Movements that fight gender-based authoritarianism without confronting its racial architecture will reproduce blind spots that weaken them. Second, the specific mechanisms through which gender is weaponized, including the targeting of trans lives, the instrumentalization of family and reproduction, and the moral panic around sexuality, require their own strategic attention. Gender is

not merely a symptom of other oppressions, but a distinct site of political control with its own affective power, its own institutional infrastructure, and its own strategic logic.



#### 4. Faith as a Strategic Asset and Geopolitical Diversity

Perhaps the convening's most consequential finding for the funder community was also its most straightforward—the consensus that **progressive movements cannot win without faith**. Religious institutions are, in social movement theorist Gene Sharp's framework (offered by and for convening participants) pillars of support for any government, with significant power to provide or withdraw legitimacy. As convening participants pointed out, the religious Right understood this decades ago and invested accordingly. Progressive movements, for a complex set of reasons including secularism, trauma from religious harm, the conflation of religion with conservatism, and in the US context, deliberate disruption of faith-based organizing, have largely ceded this ground.

Faith leaders told stories of what reclaiming this looks like in practice, in their own work: A rabbi trained other rabbis in using moral courage and blocking political appointments; a Muslim leader trained 3,400 imams across five countries on egalitarian values; a Hindu panelist shared her experience of receiving spiritual guidance by a queer Hindu

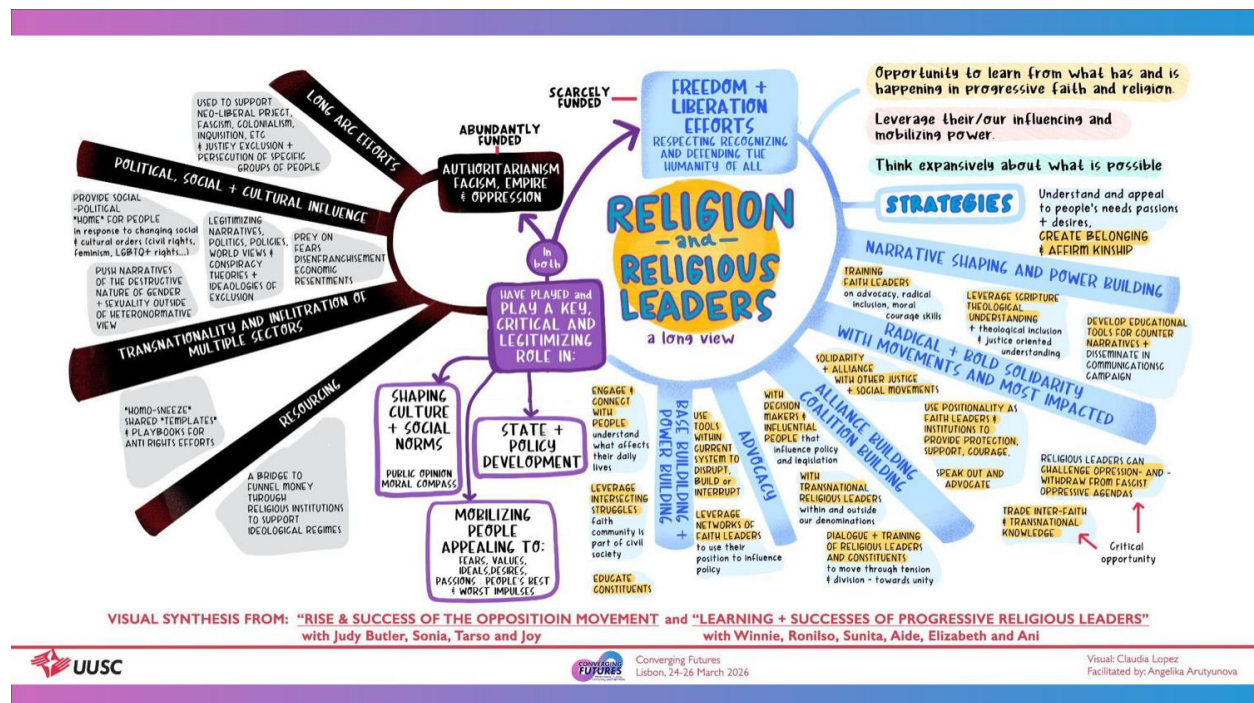
priestess who performs same-sex weddings and challenges established patriarchal religious practice; a Catholic feminist in Mexico reassured Latin American legislators on matters of conscience, helping them reconcile a progressive voting record with the doctrinal expectations of their faith; and a UU minister told of leading faith communities in providing protection for migrant organizers in Arizona. Throughout the convening, others told of digital storytelling that makes queer Muslim existence visible and undeniable, and in Uganda, one participant shared that their research confirms that inclusive faith leaders exist across the country, but that they lack structured spaces to convene, reflect, and organize collectively, which ultimately weakens their ability to respond to coordinated anti-gender efforts.

A related finding concerns the strategic role of Black faith, diaspora, and Pan-African religious leadership. Anti-gender and authoritarian actors are actively contesting African, Afro-diasporic, and Black church spaces, often through racialized narratives of sovereignty, family, sexuality, and Western imposition. Progressive Black faith leaders and theologians bring deep experience organizing across race, sexuality, theology, and democracy, and are lead architects of this work

Another finding that emerged from the convening is that the secular/faith divide is geographically specific, which also carries implications for strategy and the need to recognize that different regional histories have produced different configurations of how religion and politics (or the state) interact. As multiple participants observed, skepticism about whether faith belongs in social movement work may be a primarily US-based concern and/or Global North particular phenomenon. Even this is uneven; progressive faith has been a central engine of democratic transformation within the Global North in many instances too, from Black faith traditions in the US from the Civil Rights Movement to contemporary voter-mobilization and democracy organizing—a reminder that progressive faith engagement here is not absent but unevenly recognized, often sidelined and under-resourced. In much of the Global South, across Africa, Latin America, and South Asia, participants from these regions surfaced, faith is often already an integral part of social justice organizing. The implication of this is significant: funder education work and the narrative reclamation of faith is context dependent; those who

are already bridging this divide need resources and coordination infrastructure to scale what they are *already* doing.

This trend does not necessarily fall along a clean regional split. The secular/faith divide also runs through the Global South: in Latin America it can be sharp, shaped by traditions of *laicidad* (secularism) and the contested role of the Catholic Church in relation to the state, a dynamic that some groups named directly and have built programs to purposefully bridge. Europe's slowness to engage faith and comparable tensions in the CECCNA region are versions of the same dynamic. Read alongside the progressive faith traditions that persist in the Global North, this points to a divide that may be better understood to cut across regions rather than along a North/South line.



Generalizing in either direction risks flattening the real differences and variations *within* each region.

The convening also wrestled honestly with why faith remains contested within progressive movements. Participants who have experienced religious harm carry justified distrust. That harm is not only past injury but ongoing exclusion: some spoke of being rejected and cast out of their faith communities, and of grieving the loss of a community and a place to worship. To deny queer people a home in the church strips them of faith spaces that were also theirs, and it diminishes those communities too, denying them the diversity and the beauty of loving the other that their own traditions profess.

The intra-faith work of making progressive religious communities genuinely accountable on gender, race, and colonialism is incomplete. But experienced practitioners at the convening were clear: this work is relational, slow, iterative, and cannot be reduced to a communications strategy. As one South African faith leader put it: "If you don't have relationship with faith leaders, you won't get anywhere, and it is a tedious process. But you have to keep at it." The results of that persistence, in the form of changed parishes, shifted denominational policies, growing congregational membership, and protection for vulnerable communities, are very real. But the relationship cannot run in only one direction. If movements and queer communities are asked to keep reaching toward faith leaders, faith communities are called to the reciprocal work of reaching toward, and repairing with, the people they have excluded. That repair is inseparable from the same work.

## 5. The Democracy Question: Sharpening What We Defend

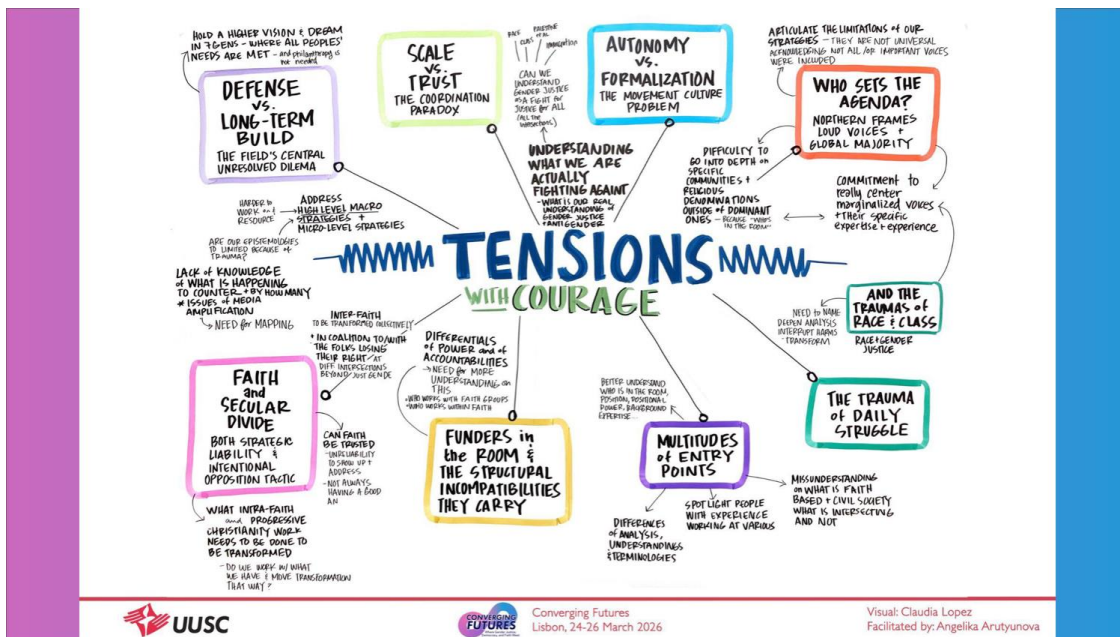
The convening surfaced an important diversity of perspectives on the concept of democracy. Participants from the Global South, particularly from contexts where democratic institutions have served as instruments of dispossession or where the language of democracy has been imposed by colonial powers, pushed the room to interrogate what democracy means and for whom it has functioned.

This is not a question the movement can afford to leave unresolved. Anti-gender actors have successfully exploited democratic mechanisms, including referenda, parliamentary majorities, elections, and judicial appointments, to roll back rights. At the same time, the authoritarian alternative is unambiguously worse for every community represented in the room. As the convening advisory team affirmed, we must "not *abandon* democracy but *reimagine* it."

What the convening pointed toward is not an abandonment of democratic commitment but a sharpening of it. While debate yielded multiple viewpoints, there was significant support for refusing to concede the term and to instead ensure a common understanding of what democracy means—an arrangement where power is shared—that we may have never yet achieved but that is worth fighting for, and that is constitutive of pluralism and justice in all its forms, including along the lines of faith and gender.

The democracy that progressive faith and gender justice movements are calling for is not what imperial powers have built in its name. Whether one reads colonial rule, dispossession, and nation-building as a hollow, procedural democracy that coexists with domination, or refuses them the name of democracy altogether, none of it is a democracy these movements would recognize. What they are calling for is something

more demanding: a **pluralist, multiracial, feminist democracy** (to use the language of the Block and Build coalition) in which the full participation and dignity of all people is the measure of the system's legitimacy itself. The convening's Common Denominator document's own working definition already pointed in this direction: "Democracy is a system of accountable, pluralistic self-government in which people have a meaningful voice, rights are protected, and power is constrained and shared."



requires distinguishing between political strategy (we are fighting for democratic governance) and mobilization strategy (we may need to meet people with language other than "democracy" to bring them into this fight). These are complementary, not contradictory, tasks. Our movements need shared language that is honest about democracy's failures without ceding the concept to those who would replace it with theocracy or ethnonationalism; especially given that our opponents are specifically and strategically tapping into disillusionment around the failures of democratic systems to deliver both materially and morally to cultivate support for their authoritarian "fix."

## 6. The Funding Gap as a Strategic Crisis

The convening's funders session produced an analysis that participants across sectors recognized as urgent: **the current philanthropic landscape is structurally misaligned with the needs of this movement.** Convening participants raised, for example, that funding is often short-term in a struggle that operates on generational timelines, noting that the religious Right has long seen itself in a decades long, if not millennial, struggle. They also noted that funding architecture is often siloed by issue in

a fight that is fundamentally intersectional, and that it is concentrated in the Global North (both the actual resources and the decisions made about those resources) for work that must be global. And it can tend to systematically undervalue faith-based organizing, either because funders are uncomfortable with religion, because they do not see faith work as "real" political strategy, or because the metrics of relational, community-level transformation do not fit standard grantmaking frameworks.

The Right has no such confusion, as we have both observed and documented in research. Conservative foundations invest in faith infrastructure as a core political strategy, fund across decades, and coordinate their giving (and their movement infrastructure). SIRC's research (shared with convening participants) documents how anti-rights groups in Africa have achieved devastating impact with remarkably small investments. In one case SIRC documented, \$16,000 was sufficient to inflict significant harm across multiple countries using online platforms and media. Meanwhile, progressive organizations working at this intersection struggle to pay their staff.

As SIRC's Community of Practice further articulated: "Philanthropy must shift from being data-rich but insight-poor toward bold, flexible, and justice-centered resourcing, treating funding as a political act." The Converging Futures convening's call is not simply for "more funding," in other words, but for a structural reorientation—investing in faith leaders as democracy infrastructure, extending timelines, breaking issue silos, creating intermediary structures for coordinated grantmaking, and trusting Global South leaders to set their own agendas.

Convening participants shared evidence that this approach can be very impactful. When UUSC funded 65 faith leaders to travel to Minnesota, existing faith infrastructure made them immediately effective. They did not consume the resources of impacted community organizers because the infrastructure was already in place. One participant from Uganda requested \$15,000 to convene 60 inclusive faith leaders for three days of shared analysis and strategy development. While we *do* need to increase funding to both meet demand and achieve long-term sustainability and stability, we can also do significant work with small sums. Our limitations are not only cost but also imagination; and the absence of intermediary structures equipped to move money quickly into this kind of work.

## **7. Investing in and Expanding Existing Infrastructure**

Another finding with particular relevance for funders who are considering how to enter and/or deepen their engagement and impact in this space, is that the progressive faith and gender justice infrastructure is not absent—but it does tend to be fragmented, under-resourced, and largely invisible to many funders and movement actors.

For example, in Africa, movement organizations have grown significantly over the past several years, developing interconnected networks to gather and share information and convene annually to integrate strategy, healing, creativity, and funder engagement. In South Africa, a collective of feminist and LGBTQI+ organizations has been organizing to hold a strategic workshop to anticipate the impact of planned anti-rights convenings in 2027 and organize progressive faith leadership in response.

Based in the US but working globally, the Alliance of Inclusive Muslims has trained 3,400 imams across five countries. The Queer Muslim Project has built one of the largest online networks of queer Muslims. Hindus for Human Rights is the only Hindu organization fighting both caste and Hindu nationalism. Catholics for the Right to Decide has built a Latin American network operating in multiple countries. The Global Interfaith Network, the Forum of European LGBTI+ Christian Groups, and the Global Network of Rainbow Catholics are real, operating networks with real constituencies. These convening participants represent some of this work.

In this regard, the Latin American region requires more explicit attention in subsequent phases of this work. The region has long been a laboratory for both authoritarian religious politics and transformative faith-rooted resistance, from Catholic integralist and evangelical anti-rights organizing to feminist, Indigenous, liberationist, and LGBTQI+-affirming religious movements. Partners such as Otros Cruces and allied Latin American faith networks bring essential contextual knowledge about how anti-gender politics travels through churches, parties, media, and regional policy spaces—and how progressive faith actors can respond with credibility. Latin America should therefore be treated as a core regional lane in the emerging ecosystem, not simply as an illustrative example.

In sum, what these networks lack is not vision or commitment but resources, coordination, and visibility. As our convening advisor Bishop Joseph Tolton put it: "I hope we are not trying to build one coalition but an ecosystem. Keeping this and intentionally nurturing it." This ecosystem approach will require intentionality about power and a distributed leadership model that recognizes different kinds of expertise: Global South movement leadership; faith-rooted theological and pastoral leadership; regional strategy in Africa, Latin America, Europe, and South/Central Asia; funder education and field-building capacity; and policy access in multilateral and national arenas.

Rather than creating a new superstructure, our task is to resource and connect what already exists: filling the gaps, building the bridges, and providing the coordination capacity that allows these dispersed actors to function as a coherent field. For funders,

this means that there is a groundwork laid to build upon: these efforts do exist, the strategy exists but must be refined and coordinated, and the moment(um) is there.

## 8. Emergent Strategies: Five Strategy Buckets to Seven Work Streams

A note on what changed during the convening itself, since this shift is itself a finding worth reporting. The convening was designed around five pre-identified strategy areas, developed through six months of advisor consultations, survey responses, and field scanning. These were the categories participants were asked to sign up for on Day 2:

1. **Building Power from the Ground Up:** community organizing, grassroots leadership, and the long game.
2. **Narrative, Theology, and the Moral Imagination:** reclaiming faith, building the "larger we," and competing for hearts.
3. **Transnational Coordination and Counter-Movement Infrastructure:** moving from isolated networks to a coherent global field.
4. **Law, Policy, and Institutional Power:** courts, parliaments, and the fight for legal terrain.
5. **Resourcing Movements on Our Own Terms:** philanthropic transformation, mutual aid, and sustainable infrastructure.

**Strategy:**

**Building Power  
from the Ground Up**  
Community organizing, grassroots leadership & the long game

Power built where people live, worship, and vote – not borrowed from institutions, but grown from within communities. This space brings together community organizing, grassroots leadership development, proactive advocacy, and the long work of reaching grassroots and grassroots alike. It starts from the premise that lasting change happens at the community level, not through elite advocacy alone.

Central question: How do we build durable political and cultural power from congregations, territories, and communities outward?

Strategy:

## Narrative, Theology & the Moral Imagination

Reclaiming faith, building the "larger we," and competing for hearts

Anti-rights movements win in part because they hold a story – emotionally resonant, morally clear, and oriented toward a future people want to inhabit. This space works on our counter-story: affirmative, faith-rooted, compelling enough to move people who are not yet with us. It brings together theological grounding, narrative strategy, and the question of how that message travels beyond our existing circles.

Central question: What is our affirmative, compelling story – rooted in faith and dignity – that can move beyond our existing circles? How do we effectively disseminate that message to the world?

Strategy:

## Transnational Coordination & Counter-Movement

From isolated networks to a coherent global field

The movement's most urgent strategic gap: we are not losing because our values are wrong. We are losing in part because anti-rights forces coordinate transnationally – sharing playbooks, aligning timing, and moving resources across borders – in ways we have not yet matched. This space addresses the infrastructure question directly: what would it take to build a coherent global field, not just a network of good intentions?

Central question: How do we move from parallel isolated efforts to a coordinated transnational field with shared intelligence, aligned timing, and mutual support?

Strategy:

## Law, Policy & Institutional Power

Courts, parliaments, and the fight for legal terrain

Litigation, electoral organizing, parliamentary engagement, and international advocacy – the terrain of courts, legislatures, and global institutions. The movement has done important defensive work here. This space asks what a proactive legal and policy strategy looks like: using legal terrain to advance gender justice, not only to hold ground. Crucially, this work must stay connected to community power – legal wins held by organized communities, not litigated in isolation.

Central question: How do we use courts, legislatures, and international bodies proactively – not just defensively – to advance gender justice?

These categories gave participants an entry point, structured our “strategy marketplace” on Day 2, and produced rich conversation across all five tracks. But what emerged from those

conversations, and

from the synthesis sessions on Day 3, was a different organizing logic for what comes next. Energy and commitment did not distribute evenly across the five buckets. They clustered around questions, relationships, and proposals that cut across the original categories or pulled new dimensions into focus. The convening organizers and participants subsequently identified seven work streams that more accurately reflect where the movement is positioned to move forward together. Those work streams are:

1. **Global South Network and South-South School.** Mapping, relationship-building, and a possible school model oriented toward the May 2027 Cape Town moment.
2. **Transnational Counter-Movement Infrastructure.** Tracking, mapping, and disrupting the transnational anti-rights architecture, including Russian Orthodox networks, Hindutva, Opus Dei, and evangelical pipelines.
3. **Faith Institutions and Progressive Amplification.** Getting the progressive faith voices that already exist heard, including communications infrastructure, donor education, and theological training.
4. **Narrative and Culture Strategy.** Building shared narrative infrastructure, including reclaiming the family frame and developing storytelling capacity beyond

**Strategy:**

## Resourcing Movements on Our Own Terms

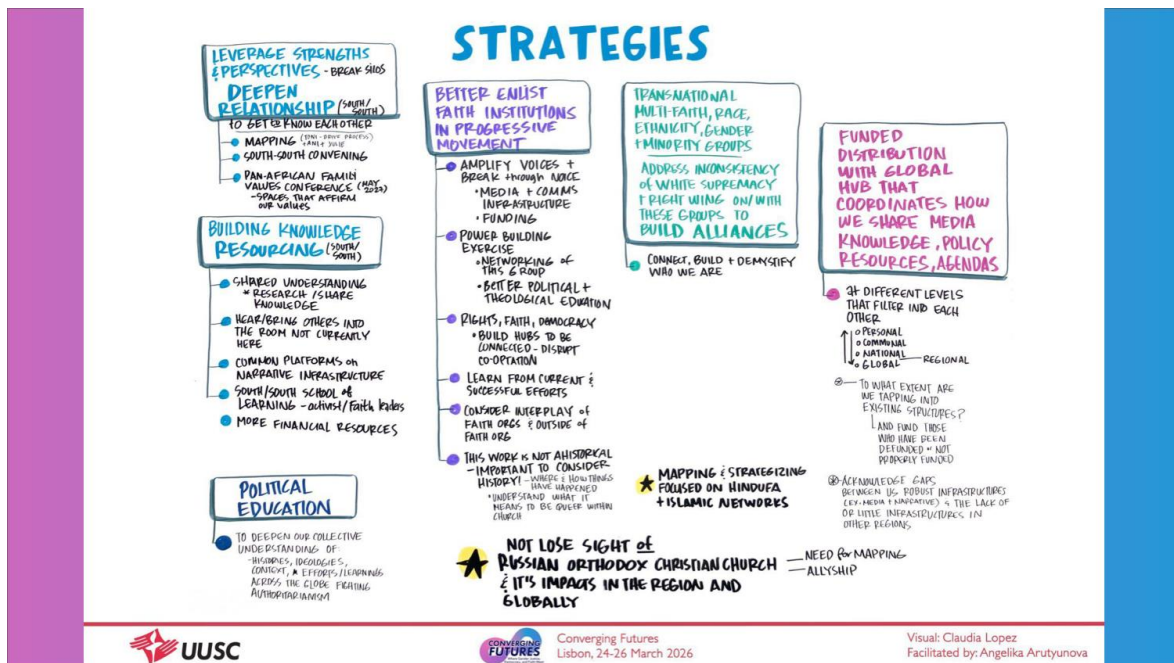
Philanthropic transformation, mutual aid, and sustainable infrastructure

The question is not how do we get funded – it is how do we build economic independence and reshape philanthropy from the inside. This space holds two things in productive tension: an honest structural critique of how traditional philanthropy shapes and constrains movement strategy, and the practical question of what movements can build right now to resource themselves more on their own terms.

**Central question:** What would it look like to resource this movement in a way that matches our values – including building a progressive faith funders network and mutual aid infrastructure?

US-based platforms.

5. **Resourcing and Funder Education.** Moving money toward what is actually working, including funder briefings, education curriculum, and mechanisms for nimble grantmaking.
6. **Multiracial Far-Right Analysis and Response.** Understanding and disrupting the new far-right coalition, particularly within Hindu and Jewish diaspora contexts, with trans justice centered.
7. **Policy and Advocacy Coordination.** Using faith as a lever of power in institutional spaces, with a distributed hub model and concrete near-term targets including conversion therapy and UN engagement.



The shift from five to seven strategic threads represents an expansion of the original strategy frame. Three of the original buckets (Transnational Coordination, Narrative, Resourcing) carry forward almost directly. What changed is that two new work streams emerged that the original frame did not adequately capture: the Global South / South-South thread and the Multiracial Far-Right thread, both of which surfaced as distinct and urgent commitments during the convening itself. In addition, what had been a single bucket on Law, Policy, and Institutional Power refined into a more specific Policy and Advocacy Coordination thread focused on faith access to institutional power, while community-level organizing dispersed into the work streams where it most naturally lives.

For funders considering where and how to engage, the seven work streams represent seven threads of need and possibility. Each has leadership, proposed near-term outputs, and identifiable resource needs, and each represents a *concrete* entry point into a field that is often described in the abstract.

## Part II: Guidance and Recommendations

The convening brought four constituencies into one room: faith leaders, queer and feminist organizers, funders, and researchers. Lisbon was a testing ground for longer-term organizing, and the translation that took place across these constituencies, along with the deeper translation still ahead, is itself one of the convening's central findings. **The intersection of faith, gender justice, and democracy is not something the field achieved in Lisbon but something we established and must build.** The recommendations below are organized by constituency as a practical entry point; but the harder and more decisive work will be the work between them. Building the field at this intersection will require both: what each constituency can do on its own and—even more so—what they can only do together. The following recommendations are derived from the convening's strategy sessions, panel discussions, closing commitments, post-convening survey data, advisor debriefs, and follow-up proposals from participants.

### For Faith Leaders

**Continue to speak publicly and specifically (and grow this muscle!).** Progressive faith leaders are doing extraordinary work in their communities but are often invisible at the national and international level. Our opponents have trained media to seek conservative religious voices. Our progressive faith leader allies must become equally available, media-trained, and willing to speak on contested issues, including trans rights, reproductive justice, and democratic governance. This requires institutional support and, in many contexts, physical protection; as well as ongoing political education and development.

**Lead the intra-faith work.** Progressive faith communities cannot credibly challenge authoritarian religion while harboring unexamined hierarchies of race, gender, caste, and sexuality. This internal work, including formal apologies, reparative action, and genuine power-sharing, is not a distraction from the external fight. It is a precondition for credibility. The example of European Lutheran churches whose formal apologies to LGBTQ communities led to increased donations and engagement shows that this work strengthens rather than weakens institutions.

**Connect locally, coordinate transnationally.** Faith leaders' greatest asset is their rootedness in place. But this asset becomes strategic only when connected to broader

coordination. The networks exist: the Global Interfaith Network, the Alliance of Inclusive Muslims, the Rights Faith and Democracy Collaborative, SIRC's Community of Practice, and the emerging infrastructure from this convening, and more (these are examples not an exhaustive list). Faith leaders should actively seek out and participate in these networks, contribute their contextual knowledge, and draw on the shared intelligence and mutual support they provide.

**Invest in the next generation.** Young people, including LGBTQ+ Muslim youth in Europe, young Hindu activists in the diaspora, and young evangelicals leaving their traditions, are creating their own alternative faith spaces. Faith leaders should actively nurture, resource, and learn from these emerging leaders rather than expecting them to conform to existing institutional models.

### For Faith-Adjacent Organizations

**Play an ecosystem role.** The convening identified an acute need for organizations that can bridge between faith leaders, movement organizations, funders, and researchers. UUSC is an example of an organization positioned for this with relationships across sectors, institutional credibility with both faith and secular actors, and the organizational capacity to hold infrastructure. As the advisor team concluded, UUSC and other faith-adjacent organizations should lean into the role of bridge-builder, not as top-down coordinators but as connectors and resource-mobilizers that support locally-led work. The model should ideally be an ecosystem rather than a coalition, that nurtures connections across a diverse field rather than imposing a single structure.

**Invest in political education.** The convening revealed a significant gap in shared analytical language across the movement. A year-long political education series, co-hosted by UUSC and PRA and featuring educators from across the movement's traditions and geographies, would pick up on building the shared foundation that where we left off in our three day convening. Content will include the history of leftist Christianity and liberation theology, the architecture of Christian Zionism and the New Apostolic Reformation, the structure of Hindutva, the role of Wahhabism, concept of theological genocide, and key strategies of anti-rights actors, among other topics. This series—especially valuable for funders—would simultaneously serve as funder education, content for broader distribution, and a mechanism for keeping the convening community engaged.

**Produce and disseminate the evidence base.** Funders and policymakers need concrete evidence that investing in faith-based organizing produces democratic outcomes. UUSC and PRA will produce a strategy guide, distinct from this convening report, that provides the focused analytical and strategic framework the convening

identified as necessary but could not produce in three days. This guide will draw on the convening's analysis, the political education series, and additional research to offer a rigorous, actionable assessment of how to counter anti-gender authoritarianism through progressive faith engagement.

**Center faith leader voices.** Several participants noted the importance of ensuring that their analysis and expertise is not filtered through intermediary organizations but platformed directly. Faith-adjacent organizations can prioritize platforming faith leaders directly in publications, at conferences, in funder briefings, and in media and clarify when they are amplifying, convening, funding, or interpreting the work of faith leaders. . . Package stories of impact for funder audiences while supporting practitioners to tell those stories to bolster the visibility, safety, resources, and leadership of those practitioners. Funders can consider pathways for funding faith leader-led projects that can shape culture and successfully compete with (and hopefully displace) influential religious nationalist movements, like the New Apostolic Reformation and Turning Point USA in the United States, for example.

**Respect the leadership of local actors.** Many of the strongest post-convening outcomes are locally led: a South African collective is anchoring all in-country PACFV counter-mobilization efforts while SIRC plays a supportive rather than front-facing role; Support proposals designed and budgeted by the people who will execute them as a standard practice.

## For Gender Justice Movement Organizations

**Consider engaging with faith as a strategic asset, not a problem to manage.** Gender justice movements have often treated religion as an obstacle, a skepticism certainly rooted in real histories and experiences but overapplied and one that risks reinforcing the invisibility of queer people of faith and faith leaders. The convening made clear that this framing cedes enormous strategic ground. Movements that engage faith leaders and communities as partners, not as targets for education or objects of suspicion, gain access to moral authority, relational infrastructure, and mobilization capacity that cannot be built from scratch. This does not require movements to become religious; but it does require us to stop treating faith as *inherently* regressive and calls on us to hold greater complexity.

**Integrate gender analysis into democracy work, and vice versa.** The convening's core analytical contribution is that gender justice and democracy are not separate issues but constitutive of each other. Gender justice organizations should make this case explicitly in their coalitions, their communications, and their funder relationships. At the same time, organizations should ensure their own analysis integrates the racial,

economic, and caste dimensions of anti-gender politics as part of the core diagnosis, not an additional frame.

**Build cross-movement communication infrastructure.** The absence of shared communications networks is a critical vulnerability. Gender justice organizations should invest in joint communications infrastructure, including shared rapid-response protocols, cross-movement media strategies, and collaborative storytelling platforms, that can match the speed and reach of the opposition's messaging apparatus.

**Deepen the analysis of gender across ethnonationalisms.** The convening and post-convening discussions revealed that gender operates differently across different authoritarian formations. The "anti-gender" frame that works for analyzing Christian nationalism does not map neatly onto Hindutva or Zionism, where pinkwashing and other inversions complicate the picture. Gender justice organizations should invest in the analytical work needed to understand these differences, because simplistic analysis leads to simplistic strategies, and this is an area of very underdeveloped analysis despite its major strategy implications.

## For Gender Justice and Democracy Funders

These are central recommendations of this report. They are also put forward with the awareness that many funders reading it were not in the room, and that the case for investing in this intersection has not yet been adequately made within the philanthropic sector. Each recommendation below is paired with concrete examples drawn from the convening and from work already underway.

**Recognize that faith-based organizing is democracy infrastructure.** The single most important shift funders can make is to shift from approaching faith as a niche and to treating engagement with progressive faith actors as a core component of democracy defense. The evidence is documented in political outcomes, policy victories, and sustained community resilience across multiple countries. The AJWS-led organizing of rabbis to defeat the Jeremy Carl nomination is one recent US example surfaced in the convening: faith communities identifying specific access and moral authority, organizing them quickly, and landing a concrete outcome that secular organizations could not have achieved alone. Similar models exist in Latin America (Catholics for the Right to Decide), Africa (SIRC's Community of Practice), and South Asia (Hindus for Human Rights), to name just a few examples. (There are others!)

**Extend timelines.** The Right invests in decades and thinks in millenia. Progressive philanthropy often operates on one-to-three-year grant cycles. Relational organizing within faith communities operates on timelines of years to decades. Funders could create dedicated long-term funding vehicles for faith-based movement infrastructure,

with evaluation frameworks that can capture relational and cultural change rather than only policy wins. SIRC's Community of Practice, for example, is now in its fourth year and has grown from 55 to over 80 participants annually; this is one example—among others—of what sustained investment can produce.

**Break the silos.** Faith-based organizing currently often falls through the cracks of common funding categories: too "religious" for democracy funders, too "political" for theology funders, too "faith" for gender justice funders. Funders have an opportunity to create cross-portfolio convenings, shared funding initiatives, and joint strategy conversations that bring democracy, gender justice, racial justice, and faith funders into the same room. The Block and Build coalition, Human Rights Funders Network, and the Global Philanthropy Project networks are starting points, among others.

**Fund the connective tissue.** The convening identified superconnectors, shared communications infrastructure, mapping, and intelligence-sharing as critical gaps. These are precisely the kinds of infrastructure investments that the right funds generously and that progressive philanthropy undervalues. Funders should dedicate resources to the convenings, the travel funds, the interpretation services, the shared databases, and the coordination capacity that make transnational collaboration possible. The Global South mapping process is currently capable of absorbing sustained funding, for example. The transnational counter-movement intelligence coordination function proposed by convening participants requires modest resources to scope and launch, for example. This coordination is relational rather than transactional and depends on trust built over time, which makes relational infrastructure as important to fund as technical mechanisms.

**Invest in the Global South on Global South terms.** The strongest post-convening proposals are those with transnational support that follow local leadership. A Southern African coalition is already planning a workshop later this year to strategize about the expansion of planned anti-rights activities in the region, while in Eastern Africa a group of 60 inclusive faith leaders will convene to share analysis and develop strategy to develop alternative, inclusive faith communities and narratives in the region. . In the US, a multiracial far-right collaboration between Jewish and Hindu communities is convening to develop joint strategy to counter authoritarian wings of their communities . These proposals are ready, and others are emerging.

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convenings, travel funds, interpretation services, shared databases, communications systems, and coordination capacity that make transnational collaboration possible. This connective tissue should be distributed rather than centralized.

**Learn from the other side's funding model.** We know that anti-rights groups have achieved devastating impact, especially in Africa, with remarkably small investments, often by mastering digital platforms and leveraging existing religious infrastructure. Progressive philanthropy should study these models not to replicate their harm but to understand the asymmetry: flexible, trust-based, rapid-deployment funding achieves outsized impact compared to the rigid, compliance-heavy, project-based models that currently dominate progressive grantmaking. The National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy has a plethora of research on this topic and is a good place to start.

**Consider intermediary structures.** Several proposals from the convening involve creating intermediary funding mechanisms designed to move resources to faith-based and global south organizing more nimbly than direct grantmaking allows. These could include fiscal sponsorship arrangements, rapid response funds, and movement support grants. The gathering's conveners and participants proposed an ecosystem model in which complementary organizations anchor different regional, religious, and strategic lanes: connecting faith leaders to democracy and gender justice movements, translating analysis for funders, developing leadership accelerators, supporting narrative and theological strategy, and helping identify where philanthropic investment could strengthen rather than distort existing movement infrastructure. In this model, grantmaking or faith-adjacent institutions could serve as donor bridges, regranteeing partners, or institutional hosts where appropriate, while ensuring that strategy remains shaped by the practitioners and regional actors closest to the work. A dedicated progressive faith funders network, called for repeatedly during the convening because it does not yet exist but is fundamental to our success, would provide the philanthropic coordination this field currently lacks, but must be robustly supported and funded in order to realize its incredible potential.

### Part III: Strategic Action Plan

A range of specific commitments, proposed initiatives, and next steps have emerged from the convening and post-convening process, some already underway, some in development for near-term initiatives, and some larger and longer term efforts. The most immediate priorities cluster around three imperatives: getting this field's analysis into wider circulation; building the coordination infrastructure that allows dispersed actors to function as a coherent movement; and moving resources toward the specific emergent, locally led initiatives

On the first priority—getting this field's analysis into wider circulation—UUSC is co-developing a political education series to address one consistent finding from the convening: the need for a shared analytical vocabulary for understanding the global anti-gender ecosystem and intersections among inter- and multi-faith gender justice and democracy work. The series will cover the history and architecture of the major religious Right formations, their relationships to colonialism, capitalism, and authoritarianism, from evangelical networks to Hindutva to Islamist anti-gender currents, as well as opportunities—both realized and potential—to counter authoritarianism. The series will serve simultaneously as movement education, funder education, and material for broader public distribution. Convening participants are also developing shared counter-narrative resources, building on existing compilations of rights-affirming religious language to give practitioners across traditions a common foundation to work from without starting from scratch.

On the second priority—building the coordination infrastructure that allows dispersed actors to function as a coherent movement—convening participants are standing up and scaling several structures. A convening participant-led organization has committed to initiating a global south mapping effort to identify progressive faith actors across regions, document their work and networks, and establish the preconditions for genuine south-south connection. Working groups from the convening are establishing ongoing communications channels organized by thematic area. UUSC is designing a funder briefing process to translate the convening's analysis into the language and formats that philanthropic decision-makers need. Several participants are also pursuing new institutional alignments: one convening participant-led organization is planning a high-level convening with a major international faith alliance to build coordinated response to the misuse of religious narratives across governments, academic institutions, philanthropy, and civil society. That same organization is piloting faith leadership accelerators in two countries focused on countering religious nationalism through faith-rooted democratic narratives and organizing.

On the third priority—moving resources toward locally led initiatives that are ready to go right now—convening participants have returned home and commenced this work. In southern Africa, a coalition of feminist and LGBTQI+ organizations is planning to build shared political analysis and a coordinated action plan oriented toward a major 2027 global anti-gender gathering. The coalition has advocated to follow African leadership of all in-country efforts. In East Africa, a convening participant-led organization has proposed a national gathering of 60 inclusive faith leaders, timed to a critical legal moment as Uganda awaits a Supreme Court ruling on anti-LGBTQI+ legislation. In the United States, several convening participants are developing a joint strategy for countering the multiracial far right, specifically the ways anti-gender organizing is taking root in Jewish and Hindu diaspora communities, with a first convening planned for later

this year. A fourth convening participant-led platform, which has brought together African progressive faith actors, researchers, and funders for four years running, is preparing its largest edition yet.

Looking further out, convening participants have identified two medium-term priorities: supporting the 2027 counter-mobilization in southern Africa and building the progressive faith ecosystem—not a single coalition but a set of connected networks, shared intelligence mechanisms, and mutual support structures across regions and religious traditions. UUSC will support the production of a focused strategy guide, grounded in the convening's analysis but going further, as a standalone analytical deliverable over the next six to eighteen months.

The longer horizon calls for sustained investment in the kind of infrastructure this movement does not yet have. Convening participants called repeatedly for a dedicated progressive faith funders network, intermediary funding mechanisms nimble enough to move resources to global south organizing, coordinated engagement at multilateral bodies, and support for the next generation of faith leaders, researchers, and organizers who are already building new institutions and moving forward towards these goals.

## Conclusion

The Lisbon convening did not produce a unified strategy for defeating anti-gender authoritarianism, and it would have been unrealistic to expect one from three days of work among 50 people from a dozen countries and traditions. Rather, it produced a shared analytical framework, a network of relationships, a set of concrete proposals already moving into implementation, and a clear diagnosis of what the field needs next.

The diagnosis is straightforward and clear: progressive faith leaders and communities are already doing this work. They are training imams, mobilizing rabbis, reclaiming Hindu theology, marching with migrants, contesting authoritarian legislation, building queer faith communities, and telling stories that make new futures imaginable. They are doing it in contexts from Arizona to Uganda to Brazil to South Africa, often with minimal resources, often in isolation, and often invisible to the funders and movement organizations that are their greatest potential allies.

What they need is not a new vision or a new analysis, but rather: **resources, coordination, and the recognition that their work is not peripheral to the defense of democracy but central to it.** They need funders who understand that **faith-based organizing is democracy infrastructure** and movement partners **who engage faith as a strategic asset rather than as an obstacle.** They need **coordination mechanisms that connect their dispersed efforts** into a coherent field, not through a

top-down coalition but through **an ecosystem of mutual support, shared intelligence, and aligned and coordinated strategy and action.**

