

# RIGHTS at RISK

Time for Action

Observatory on the Universality of Rights Trends Report

2021





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## Chapter 4: Anti-Rights Actors

### CitizenGo

– Naureen Shameem  
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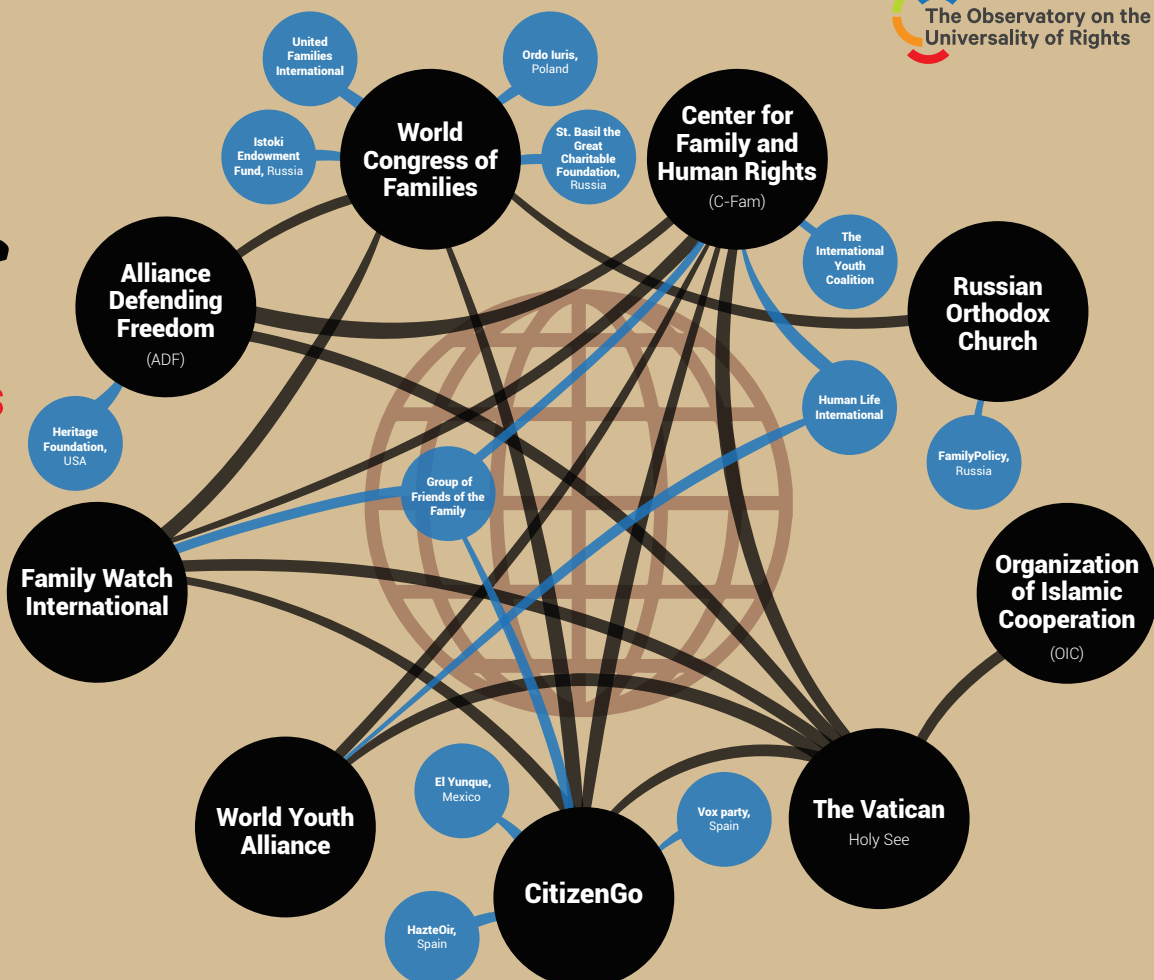
#### Mission and History

Founded in August 2013 and headquartered in Spain,<sup>221</sup> CitizenGo is an anti-rights platform active in multiple regions worldwide. It describes itself as a “community of active citizens who work together, using online petitions and action alerts as a resource, to defend and promote life, family and liberty.”<sup>222</sup> It also claims that it works to ensure respect for “human dignity and individuals’ rights.”<sup>223</sup>

### Anti-Rights Actors Across the Globe and their vast web of connections

Anti-rights actors engage in tactical alliance building across lines of nationality, religion, and issue, creating a transnational network of state and non-state actors undermining rights related to gender and sexuality. This visual represents only a small portion of the global anti-rights lobby.

[oursplatform.org](https://oursplatform.org)



According to CitizenGo, its core aim is to foster citizen participation and it describes the internet and information technology as vital tools to achieve this goal.<sup>224</sup>

The organization – avowedly “working from a Christian perspective”<sup>225</sup> – calls for respect for the right to life “from the moment of conception to its natural end”; the right to religious freedom; the right to marriage “understood as the union between one man and one woman”; the right to educate one’s own children; and the right to work and to “economic initiative and the ownership of private property.”<sup>226</sup>

CitizenGo is intimately linked to HazteOir, a Spanish organization founded in 2001 by Ignacio Arsuaga, the President of CitizenGo. They share a common founder, address, multiple board members, and tactics – with HazteOir more frequently working on the national level, and CitizenGo transnationally. Arsuaga, a lawyer, was drawn into internet advocacy in the 1990s, including during his time at Fordham Law School in New York City. There he “became familiar with the American [US] grassroots movements and studied specifically their lobbying activities and the tools they used for citizen involvement in politics and the public arena.”<sup>227</sup> He was inspired by MoveOn.org to create HazteOir and CitizenGo.<sup>228</sup>

HazteOir became particularly visible in 2010 with the group’s well-publicized “Right to Life”<sup>229</sup> campaign and mobilization – bringing hundreds of thousands of protestors to the

streets of Madrid – against a Spanish bill to liberalize abortion laws.<sup>230</sup> The group’s full name on its web site reads, “Make yourself heard, victims of the gender ideology.” This underlines the common stance of both organizations.

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### **CITIZENGO IS INTIMATELY LINKED TO HAZTEOIR, A SPANISH ORGANIZATION**

Notably, the Spanish Ministry of the Interior withdrew HazteOir’s declaration of public interest – its charity status first instituted in May 2013 – in February 2019<sup>231</sup> after the Spanish government ruled that the organization had taken actions that had had the “effect of denigrating or undervaluing other conceptions about the family, gender identity, childhood education” and that could be considered “attacks against certain people, groups and entities.”<sup>232</sup> Among other examples, the verdict referred to one of HazteOir’s many anti-rights campaigns – a bus touring Spain featuring a portrait of Adolf Hitler wearing a cap with a “feminist symbol” and the hashtag #StopFeminazis, alongside the slogan “repeal the gender laws.”<sup>233</sup>

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### **Budget, Board Members, and Size**

CitizenGo’s budget in 2018 and 2019 was around \$2.6 – 2.7 million USD. In both years, the largest portion of the organization’s budget was spent on campaigns.

Year	Revenue (USD)	Expenses (USD)
2018	\$2,658,071.20 <sup>234</sup>	\$2,947,072.29 <sup>235</sup>
2019	\$2,709,525 <sup>236</sup>	\$2,649,216.68 <sup>237</sup>

CitizenGo functions as a membership platform and claims to have over 9 million members.<sup>238</sup> It is largely funded by online donations from its members, estimated at tens of thousands of Euros per month.<sup>239</sup>

**Among CitizenGo and HazteOir’s donors are executives of companies such as IBM, Eulen, and Nestle,<sup>240</sup> alongside billionaire Esther Koplowitz and the founder of El Corte Inglés, the biggest department store group in Europe, Isidoro Álvarez.<sup>241</sup>** While CitizenGo frames its donation model as “small donations” from individual members, sources indicate the amount donated by Eulen was 20,000 Euros, while those of Koplowitz and Alvarez each amounted to 10,000 Euros.<sup>242</sup> During an investigation by openDemocracy, founder Ignacio Arsuaga reportedly told an undercover reporter that Patrick Slim, son of the Mexican oligarch Carlos Slim, donated 40,000 Euros to CitizenGo.<sup>243</sup> The same investigation reported that **a senior Vox official compared CitizenGo to a “Super PAC”** for the party,<sup>244</sup> Arsuaga also talked to the undercover reporter about how to get around campaign finance laws.<sup>245</sup>

HazteOir has approximately 40 employees and 50 volunteers,<sup>246</sup> while CitizenGo has multiple country and regional liaisons and employees, such as Ann Kioko, Campaigns Director for CitizenGo Africa.<sup>247</sup> CitizenGo’s board members include Ignacio Arsuaga (founder

and president), Blanca Escobar, Luca Volonte, Brian Brown, Gualberto Garcia, Alexey Komov, Alejandro Bermudez and Carlos Polo,<sup>248</sup> while the CEO of the organization is Alvaro Zulueta.<sup>249</sup> The majority are well-networked within anti-rights circles and organizations worldwide, as described below.

### AMONG CITIZENGO AND HAZTEOIR’S DONORS ARE EXECUTIVES OF COMPANIES SUCH AS IBM, EULEN, AND NESTLE

#### Thematic Focus

CitizenGo hosts campaigns on popular themes in the anti-rights universe, with a particular interest in abortion (employing a misleading “right to life” discourse<sup>250</sup>); surrogacy; freedom of religion;<sup>251</sup> “the family”;<sup>252</sup> education (particularly comprehensive sex education,<sup>253</sup> homeschooling and “parents’ rights”<sup>254</sup>); and anti-LGBTQI activities.

#### Abortion

CitizenGo and HazteOir have a significant emphasis on undermining reproductive justice, with abortion as a central preoccupation. The platform has hosted online petitions and offline actions and campaigns to attack rights and access to abortion in a number of countries – including Spain, Italy, Malawi, Kenya, Nigeria, Mexico – and in global multilateral spaces, such as the UN’s Commission on the Status of Women (CSW);<sup>255</sup> the UN’s Commission on

Population and Development;<sup>256</sup> and the Human Rights Committee.<sup>257</sup>

### **CITIZENGO AND HAZTEOIR HAVE A SIGNIFICANT EMPHASIS ON UNDERMINING REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE, WITH ABORTION AS A CENTRAL PREOCCUPATION**

#### **Surrogacy**

CitizenGo also works to erode reproductive rights and to push its monolithic and heteronormative conception of “the traditional family” by focusing on the practice of surrogacy, which it describes as “offensive to human dignity,” and “rob[bing] children of a natural family.”<sup>258</sup> The platform’s petitions similarly advocate against access to in vitro fertilization (IVF) – or “test tube babies”<sup>259</sup> – and access to contraceptives.<sup>260</sup> CitizenGo has hosted petitions and actions on this theme in several countries, including Kenya, Canada, and Cambodia.<sup>261</sup>

#### **Religious Freedom**

Employing another common anti-rights discourse, CitizenGo appeals to freedom of religion and describes it as under threat. As discussed in the previous OURs human rights trends report,<sup>262</sup> a number of anti-rights actors in human rights spaces have taken up this discourse of religious freedom in order to justify violations of rights related to gender and sexuality, and violations of the universality of rights.

Notably, CitizenGo and other ultra-conservative actors attempt to appropriate and redefine religious freedom in a way that directly and radically contradicts the purpose of the right – they suggest that the right to freedom of religion is intended to protect a *religion* rather than those *persons* who are free to hold or not hold different religious beliefs. They then go on to suggest that religious liberty is threatened and undermined by outside forces and other human rights (particularly those related to gender, sexuality and reproduction).

### **CITIZENGO ATTEMPT TO APPROPRIATE AND REDEFINE RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN A WAY THAT RADICALLY CONTRADICTS THE PURPOSE OF THE RIGHT**

In this way the anti-rights narrative around freedom of religion aims to co-opt human rights language, to shift the subject of rights, endowing already powerful institutions, states, and ideologies with even more power. By flipping this discourse, anti-rights actors aim to shift the right to religious freedom from a “shield against religious imposition” into a “sword of right-wing Christian hegemony.”<sup>263</sup>



Read more on the **co-optation of freedom of religion** in the first edition of this report

As anti-rights actors are increasingly doing at the national level, CitizenGo often seeks to use this redefined discourse of religious freedom to attack the rights of people whose sexuality and gender identity and/or expression are non-conforming. For instance, a campaign in support of a UK-based conversion therapy organization, framed around “respect for freedom of religion.”<sup>264</sup> They also advocate for new mechanisms and officials at the multilateral level to espouse and institutionalize their interpretation of religious freedom, such as a new Special Rapporteur for Religious Freedom at the European Parliament.<sup>265</sup>

### **DISCOURSE ON THE FAMILY PERPETUATES MULTIPLE PATRIARCHAL AND HETERONORMATIVE ANTI-RIGHTS POSITIONS**

Employing a victimization framing is popular amongst anti-rights and far-right movements. CitizenGo espoused this when it asked “how the EU will protect Christians” as “Christians are the main victims of religious persecution” in Europe.<sup>266</sup> This strategy is underlined by the organization’s online action against the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion in 2020. Following his report to the Human Rights Council on gender equality and religious freedom in which he emphasized that freedom of religion and non-discrimination are mutually reinforcing rights, CitizenGo described the UN mandate on religious freedom as an attack on religious freedom.<sup>267</sup>

### **The Family**

Alongside “life and freedom,” CitizenGo includes “the family” as one of its central foci. Indeed, at the World Congress of Families, founder Ignacio Arsuaga was awarded the title: “Man of the year in defense of the natural family.”<sup>268</sup>

In recent years, anti-rights actors have pivoted to language on the family, or the “natural” or “traditional family.”<sup>269</sup> The discourse on the family functions as a seemingly innocuous and secular umbrella term that actually houses and perpetuates multiple patriarchal and heteronormative anti-rights positions. The US Christian Right’s focus on the “traditional family” has enabled it to forge global alliances with other fundamentalist movements. An alliance of 25 states launched the Group of Friends of the Family in 2015 and is devoted to mainstreaming this restrictive conception of family in the UN.<sup>270</sup>

### **Education**

CitizenGo’s campaigns and actions also frequently revolve around themes of education – in opposition to comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) and in favour of religious homeschooling, with reference to what they describe as “parental rights.” However, the notion of “parental rights” has no support in existing human rights standards; it is a new category that anti-rights actors like CitizenGo are attempting to construct.<sup>271</sup>

The Holy See and Christian Right are opposed to children’s rights, as protected in binding



legal standards like the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as they perceive them as threatening to their hierarchical and traditional concept of the family. Under this view, children's rights and autonomy undermine the "natural" role of parents, and thus **CitizenGo and others push out a faux narrative of "parental rights" to justify the violation of children's rights under international law.**

### **CITIZENGO AND OTHERS PUSH OUT A FAUX NARRATIVE OF "PARENTAL RIGHTS" TO JUSTIFY THE VIOLATION OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS**

For CitizenGo, a main focus here is blocking CSE, placed in opposition to parents' rights to be the first educators of children. The platform has hosted online petitions and campaigns opposing access to CSE both at the global level – directed at UN bodies – and in multiple countries, including South Africa<sup>272</sup> and Kenya,<sup>273</sup> where the campaigns manager described CSE as "more destructive than Boko Haram or Al-Shabaab."<sup>274</sup> Another petition, directed at Kenyan Ambassador Amina Mohamed,<sup>275</sup> seeks to stop implementation of a CSE curriculum on the grounds that it "encourages acceptance and exploration of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities," "promotes abortion" and "disrespect for parents and religious and cultural values," trains children to advocate for their sexual rights, and promotes sexual counselling, information or services to minors without parental consent.<sup>276</sup>

### **Rights of LGBTQI People**

CitizenGo has employed several shock tactics to further their anti-LGBTQI agenda. In March 2017, the organization parked a "freedom bus" in front of UN headquarters during the CSW,<sup>277</sup> an action that was described by them as "a reaction to the LGBT world."<sup>278</sup> The bus was covered with the slogan: "It's biology: boys are boys, and always will be. Girls are girls, and always will be. You can't change sex." After launching at the CSW, it then toured – accompanied in many cases by protests – in several countries over the next year, including Chile, Germany, France, and Italy. As part of its campaign opposing a proposed law in Spain against discrimination based on sexual orientation in August 2017, CitizenGo also flew a bright orange plane declaring its opposition.<sup>279</sup> Even the children's show Sesame Street was the target of a boycott action by the group for "trying to indoctrinate its fans...with toxic views of sexuality" and for "pander[ing] to the forceful voices of the LGBT lobby."<sup>280</sup>

### **Regions and Religious Affiliation**

As highlighted above, both CitizenGo and HazteOir were founded in Spain – HazteOir in 2001 and CitizenGo in 2013. CitizenGo aims to work internationally. The platform hosts campaigns in 12 languages,<sup>281</sup> claims to influence institutions, governments, and organizations in 50 countries, and has team members located in 15 cities on three continents.<sup>282</sup>



Most frequently, the platform hosts its activities in Europe, Africa, and Latin America, and in global and regional multilateral spaces like the United Nations, the Organization of American States (OAS), the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, and the European Union. In Latin America, CitizenGo has been involved in online petitions against abortion decriminalization, CSE and LGBTQI rights. The bus tour mentioned above stopped in Colombia,<sup>283</sup> Chile<sup>284</sup> and Mexico.<sup>285</sup> It has also organized an anti-LGBT march in Mexico, bringing together ultra-conservative Catholic groups,<sup>286</sup> and participates regularly at the OAS General Assembly.

In Africa, CitizenGo's activities have increased since 2018. It has co-sponsored an anti-abortion March for Life in Kenya and an event on "the family" at Christian University in Uganda. They have also put up billboards defending parental authority in Nairobi<sup>287</sup> and coordinated attacks against LGBTQI and SRHR civil society organizations in Eswatini (formerly Swaziland)<sup>288</sup> and Kenya.<sup>289</sup> They led an anti-abortion campaign against Marie Stopes International in Kenya<sup>290</sup> and Malawi<sup>291</sup> and launched a petition against "promotion of the LGBT agenda" at the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights.<sup>292</sup>



Read more on anti-rights actors in regional human rights systems in Chapter 6

HazteOir and CitizenGo have links to the far-right Mexican group El Yunque.<sup>293</sup> CEO Alvaro Zulueta is reportedly an El Yunque member<sup>294</sup>, and until mid-2019, board member Luca Volonte was chairman of the ultra-Catholic think tank Dignitatis Humanae Institute.<sup>295</sup>

## Tactics

### Online Petitions and Harassment

Online petitions are a core tactic of CitizenGo and HazteOir – as highlighted above, founder Ignacio Arsuaga was inspired by the progressive petition platform MoveOn.org. Most petitions are directed at one or more public officials, and in those cases the platform is set up to send all signatures – frequently numbering in the thousands or tens of thousands – directly to the targeted parties via email.<sup>296</sup> This mode of action is similar to that of other anti-rights actors, such as Family Watch International, whose less frequent online petitions are also automatically sent directly to officials. Petitions that are deemed potential "global priorities" by the platform are translated into seven languages for maximum reach.<sup>297</sup>

In 2019, CitizenGo – working with the Kenya Christian Professionals Forum and the Kenya Christian Doctors Association – created an online petition targeting the Kenya National Board of Statistics<sup>298</sup> to mobilize against a new census recognition of intersex individuals. Calling on insidious anti-rights discourses, the petition claims that this move would "deconstruct the Kenyan social fabric ... in order to introduce the deviant ideologies

of transgenderism and homosexuality” and goes on to claim that intersex persons are individuals living with a disability who must be recognized as either male or female.<sup>299</sup>

In 2018, CitizenGo coordinated with other anti-rights groups – including the *Coaliția pentru Familie*, an association of about 30 Romanian non-governmental organizations – who organized to push for a referendum in Romania to ban same-sex marriage. The platform hosted a petition calling on the “people of Romania” to support the referendum to “protect man-woman marriage, the natural family, children and the common good of society.”<sup>300</sup> The petition received 36,768 signatures, and 93 percent of those participating in the referendum voted yes<sup>301</sup> – however, due in part to the efforts of activists to organize a boycott of the referendum, the anti-rights effort failed, as the referendum was held invalid upon not reaching the 30 percent turnout needed.

In June 2020, CitizenGo hosted a petition directed at the Ambassador of Spain to the United States, criticizing Black Lives Matter (BLM) activists’ removal of public statues, such as that of Christopher Columbus.<sup>302</sup> The petition described BLM as advancing “cultural Marxism” and seeking “to erase the Hispanic footprint in the United States.”<sup>303</sup>

Another example of CitizenGo’s use of the petition tactic took place in late 2019 when CitizenGo Africa started a petition to ban the distribution of a textbook included in the

CSE curriculum in Kenyan schools. It argued that the book encouraged an “indoctrination agenda” and rape culture, and that it has “also been associated with gay activists whose agenda is very clear.”<sup>304</sup> After the online petition gathered approximately 5,000 signatures, the group then hand-delivered the petition to the Ministry of Education in Nairobi. In response to the petition, the publishers recalled the book and apologized.

### **CITIZENGO HAS BEEN ACCUSED OF HARASSMENT LINKED TO ITS PETITIONS**

In a significant escalation of its tactics, CitizenGo has also been accused of harassment linked to its petitions.<sup>305</sup> At the 2019 CSW, the group came under the spotlight for targeting Deputy Ambassador Koki Muli Grignon, the CSW session facilitator. In an attempt to block inclusion of rights related to gender and sexuality in the CSW Agreed Conclusions, CitizenGo hosted a petition which reached 161,425 signatures.<sup>306</sup> As a result of a feature which enabled the petition’s signatories to send an automated message to Grignon’s personal cell phone, the facilitator then received thousands of anti-abortion messages in 12 languages during the CSW, and was forced to suspend negotiations and leave the UN building in New York City to obtain a new phone number.<sup>307</sup> This harassment was condemned by various civil society groups and several member states. Muli Grignon told news sources that this harassment made

it “totally impossible to work,” and that “the UN should be a safe space – nobody should be intimidated.”<sup>308</sup> She later reported the harassment to the UN’s security office and the US mission to the UN.<sup>309</sup> Remarkably, CitizenGo followed up on their harassment by putting up another petition two months later to attack Muli Grignon for speaking out, calling for her to be removed from her position as Deputy Ambassador.<sup>310</sup>

### Campaigns and Mobilization

CitizenGo and HazteOir emphasize online-to-offline actions to boost impact. It is common practice for them to hand-deliver online petitions and lists of signatures to targeted officials, often accompanied by a press conference, as with the CSE petition in Kenya. As their Global Campaign manager highlights, CitizenGo ultimately aims to use petition signatures as a lobbying tool to meet with targets to convince them of the petition’s message and impress upon them the alleged people power they demonstrate.<sup>311</sup> They also communicate with members about offline actions to further the goals of their petitions and to foster a sense of community.<sup>312</sup>

### **CITIZENGO REPORTEDLY STATED THAT IT WAS WORKING TO DRIVE VOTERS TOWARDS FAR-RIGHT PARTIES LIKE VOX**

In 2016, CitizenGo and HazteOir – together with the Instituto de Política Familiar, a civil organization whose stated mission is to “promote and defend the family” – co-

organized an anti-gay march in Mexico City together with the Instituto de Política Familiar in 2016.<sup>313</sup> Earlier that year, CitizenGo bussed supporters across the border from Spain to France when its ally organization, La Manif Pour Tous, organized large protests against a marriage equality bill.<sup>314</sup>

### **IN KENYA, CITIZENGO KICKED OFF A CAMPAIGN AGAINST MARIE STOPES INTERNATIONAL**

Ahead of European Parliament elections and Spain’s national elections in 2019, CitizenGo reportedly told openDemocracy that it was working to drive voters towards far-right parties like Vox.<sup>315</sup> Describing posters and advertisements developed by CitizenGo later that year, founder Arsuaga stated, “this is something we haven’t made public, but in Spain we’re going to launch a campaign before the general elections” where CitizenGo would “show bad things that have been said...in favour of abortion or in favour of LGBT laws” by the leaders of parties that Vox was running against.<sup>316</sup>

The group has organized a number of anti-abortion campaigns. In Kenya in 2017, for instance, CitizenGo kicked off a campaign against Marie Stopes International, calling on the Ministry of Health to curtail the organization’s advertising and ban their activities in the country.<sup>317</sup> After 5,000 signatures were collected, and other lobbying undertaken, Marie Stopes was

banned from providing any services related to abortion in November 2018.<sup>318</sup> The ban was lifted the next month after feminist groups campaigned against the ban, arguing that it was unconstitutional.<sup>319</sup> CitizenGo also claimed credit for similar raids on Marie Stopes clinics in Malawi, Niger, Tanzania, and Nigeria in 2019.<sup>320</sup> In Nigeria, feminist organizations responded with a social media campaign under the hashtag #EndWarOnNigerianWomen. Also in 2019, CitizenGo launched an anti-abortion campaign in Poland – its largest action in the country thus far.<sup>321</sup>

### Spectacle and Shock Tactics

“What we do is confront – confront the radical left, confront politicians, confront anyone who is against our values.”<sup>322</sup>

Echoing global trends in the far right, shock and spectacle are core tactics for CitizenGo and HazteOir. The aim is media coverage, attention, and wider dissemination of their messaging and disinformation. As they state, “the more they talk in the media about what we do, the more power they give to us.”<sup>323</sup> Discussing its longstanding “freedom bus” campaign, CitizenGo claimed:

“We wanted to start a reaction... provoking some sort of reaction, this is the way to highlight the reality.”<sup>324</sup>

Their goals in employing spectacle are double: the initial rash of publicity and attention is often followed by protest, counter-actions,

and critique by feminist and other progressive movements. CitizenGo seeks to then repackage the critique<sup>325</sup> – with mixed results – into a victimization narrative in an attempt to win sympathy and members. Primarily, the group looks to boost attention for its campaigns with large and preferably mobile photo ops – buses, planes, and billboards featuring bright colours and provocative imagery and language.

### CITIZENGO CLAIMED CREDIT FOR RAIDS ON MARIE STOPES CLINICS IN MALAWI, NIGER, TANZANIA, AND NIGERIA

CitizenGo’s bright orange bus featuring slogans like “boys have penises, girls have vulvas, don’t be fooled”<sup>326</sup> first toured Spain. The slogan was designed to appeal to the public to deny the existence of transgender and intersex people. Such tactics reinforce ignorance and position transphobia as “common sense,” making the public space hostile for trans and intersex people. The bus was ultimately banned in Barcelona, Madrid, and Pamplona by city authorities.<sup>327</sup> The bus also toured countries in Latin America. In Guadalajara,<sup>328</sup> activists draped the bus in rainbows and tried to halt the progress of the vehicle in Santiago.<sup>329</sup> CitizenGo then toured the bus in multiple cities in the United States – including in New York City in front of United Nations headquarters – where it was met with protests led by feminist, queer and trans rights activists.<sup>330</sup> CitizenGo then launched

a black bus featuring an image of Hitler in lipstick to travel the streets of Madrid as part of a campaign “against gender ideology.” This iteration was covered with the slogan: “It is not gender violence, it’s domestic violence. Gender laws discriminate against men.”<sup>331</sup> At the CSW in 2019, CitizenGo parked another bus in front of the UNICEF building. This bus featured a large orange fetus and the words: “Let me live!”<sup>332</sup>

CitizenGo employs similar shock tactics via their use of billboards. In one instance, the group put up a series of billboards in Rome with a black and white image of a pregnant woman’s stomach, declaring: “abortion is the prime cause of femicide in the world.”<sup>333</sup> The billboards were posted in advance of a “March for Life” planned in Rome around the 40th anniversary of abortion being made legal in Italy.

### Media Engagement

Media engagement is central to CitizenGo’s tactics, as one can see from their focus on courting media attention with the spectacle and shock value of their public actions. In the words of a staff member: “[if] you control the media, you have the power – you control the culture of the next generation.”<sup>334</sup>

In addition, CitizenGo frequently plans press conferences around the in-person delivery of their petitions. In 2015, the founder of CitizenGo and HazteOir also became editor of *Actuall*, a media site whose mission is “to promote the participation of citizens in the

defense of human rights, from conception to natural death.”<sup>335</sup> In this way, CitizenGo can directly disseminate media content for anti-rights organizations and activists.

### Trainings

CitizenGo co-organizes and participates in the training of anti-rights activists together with partners such as the US right-wing cadre school Leadership Institute, which teaches “conservatives of all ages how to succeed in politics, government, and the media.”<sup>336</sup> In July 2017, CitizenGo worked with the Leadership Institute to organize anti-rights training camps in Europe, bringing together 140 individuals from Mexico, Nigeria, the UK, the US, Kenya, and several European countries.<sup>337</sup>

### CITIZENGO SEEKS TO REPACKAGE CRITIQUE INTO A VICTIMIZATION NARRATIVE, IN AN ATTEMPT TO WIN SYMPATHY AND MEMBERS

CitizenGo also organized a four-day training in Rome in July 2018 to help local anti-rights groups support “the natural family, life, and liberty.”<sup>338</sup> Key topics included “gender ideology, attacks against marriage and the family, the persecution of Christians in the East” and “the violation of freedom of opinion in the West.” In 2019, CitizenGo organized a training for delegates in advance of the CSW and coordinated a joint leadership summit, again including the Leadership Institute, to workshop strategies and campaigns on “how to influence the public process.”

## Engagement at the UN and other Multilateral Spaces

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**“In politics there are no empty spaces – if you’re not there, somebody else will be.”<sup>339</sup>**

CitizenGo has become increasingly visible and engaged at the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) in Geneva over the past three years, and now has a regular spokesperson<sup>340</sup> and presence there. HazteOir has held ECOSOC civil society consultative status at the UN since 2013, which means that it can attend UN sessions, hold side events, make statements,<sup>341</sup> attend member state negotiations, and interact regularly with state delegates.

In 2019, for instance, CitizenGo/HazteOir made a number of oral statements espousing anti-rights positions in both the March session of the interactive dialogue for the UN Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Religion and the June/July session of the interactive dialogue for the UN Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI). They focused on their reinterpretation of the right to freedom of religion and belief, on the purported threat of “gender ideology,” and claimed that individuals opposing the rights of LGBTQI people are being “harassed.”

They make statements through the Universal Periodic Review process<sup>342</sup> where different states are reviewed on human rights grounds on a rotating basis to challenge abortion, “gender ideology” and the rights of LGBTQI+

communities. CitizenGo has made statements during the reviews of Spain, El Salvador, and Chile – among others.

The organization also looks to make statements, where possible, during negotiations. When civil society was invited to provide input during negotiations on the 2019 HRC resolution on child, early and forced marriage, their spokesperson took the opportunity to push CitizenGo’s anti-abortion agenda, calling for the resolution sponsors to “take into account the right to life of everyone, born or unborn.”

### **HAZTEOIR HAS HELD ECOSOC CIVIL SOCIETY CONSULTATIVE STATUS AT THE UN SINCE 2013**

Their regular presence in Geneva enables them to engage in lobbying efforts with UN treaty monitoring bodies, such as the Human Rights Committee.<sup>343</sup> For instance, CitizenGo/HazteOir worked with a number of other anti-rights actors to advocate for the inclusion of an anti-abortion reframing of the right to life in the Committee’s General Comment 36 on the Right to Life.<sup>344</sup> Their efforts were ultimately unsuccessful.

CitizenGo, along with anti-rights allies like Family Watch International,<sup>345</sup> participates in lobbying activities at the CSW. They coordinate with delegations to urge states to block language on CSE, sexual and reproductive rights and health, abortion,



and sexual orientation and identity.<sup>346</sup> At the CSW, CitizenGo shifts its approach, using new tactics to shock, intimidate, harass, and pressure delegates and officials, as well as feminist and progressive civil society. Foremost amongst those are the large anti-trans and anti-abortion tour buses<sup>347</sup> parked outside of the UN. CitizenGo links these actions with petitions targeting CSW negotiations. In 2019, the bus included a link to a CitizenGo petition – which gathered 161,427 signatures.<sup>348</sup> After the Agreed Conclusions were finalized, the group claimed “victory” at the UN, as the final document made no reference to the right to abortion. Alongside other anti-rights actors like FWI and C-Fam,<sup>349</sup> CitizenGo also organizes side events and film screenings at the CSW to more widely broadcast their discourses.

CitizenGo looks to influence decision-making in several other UN spaces as well. In April 2019, after US President Donald Trump’s announcement that the country would stop funding the World Health Organization amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the platform hosted a “defund the WHO” petition, calling on other leaders of G20 states to do the same.<sup>350</sup> CitizenGo is now also targeting the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion,<sup>351</sup> and in May 2020, the platform focused in on the UN Commission on Population and Development (CPD) with a petition to “defeat the pro-abortion lobby’s agenda” at the session.<sup>352</sup>

CitizenGo first attempted to participate at the UN International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) summit in 2019 in

Nairobi.<sup>353</sup> This was the 25th anniversary of the first ICPD in Cairo and its Programme of Action.<sup>354</sup> CitizenGo then worked with anti-rights allies like the World Youth Alliance<sup>355</sup> and Family Watch International to plan a counter “pro-family summit.” While conference attendance was poor, they did garner some media attention around their actions.<sup>356</sup>

CitizenGo is also engaged at the European Parliament, where they worked to appoint a Special Rapporteur for Religious Freedom that they support. In addition, they campaigned to oppose the introduction of the “Estrela report,”<sup>357</sup> which requires member states to provide CSE in schools and to ensure access to safe abortions. CitizenGo is also highly active in the Inter-American regional system.



Read more about **anti-rights actors in regional human rights spaces** in Chapter 6

### Coordination and Links with other Anti-rights Actors

CitizenGo is extensively networked with a number of anti-rights actors around the world. They work alongside the US-based **Family Watch International** and **C-Fam** at the UN, with the **Leadership Institute** in its trainings, and with local organizations through their campaign work. A closer look at the organization’s board members maps out a number of additional anti-rights connections:



## Ignacio Arsuaga

- Founder of CitizenGo and HazteOir
- Board member of the **Political Network for Values**, a global alliance that promotes cooperation on anti-rights values and agendas among legislators and other political actors from countries around the world<sup>358</sup>
- Serves an advisory role on mass mobilization and crowdfunding for **Agenda Europe**, a professional advocacy network that seeks to roll back human rights in Europe<sup>359</sup>
- Linked with far-right Spanish party **Vox**
  - Publicly endorsed Vox<sup>360</sup> and described them as “my friends”<sup>361</sup>
- Long-time ally of the **World Congress of Families**<sup>362</sup>
  - Received an award at the 7th international WCF conference
  - Speaker at multiple WCF conferences
  - CitizenGo has co-organized several WCF conferences, e.g., the 2019 international conference in Verona, Italy<sup>363</sup>

**CITIZENGO IS EXTENSIVELY NETWORKED WITH ANTI-RIGHTS ACTORS AROUND THE WORLD**

## Brian Brown

- Board member of CitizenGo
- President of the **International Organization for the Family**,<sup>364</sup> now the parent organization for the **World Congress of Families**<sup>365</sup>
- Founder and president of the US-based **National Organization for Marriage**<sup>366</sup>
- Founder of **ActRight**,<sup>367</sup> an ultra-conservative US-based online platform for crowdfunding and online action

## Luca Volonte

- Board member of CitizenGo
- Former chairman of **Dignitatis Humanae Institute**, a Catholic fundamentalist think tank associated with Steve Bannon, US President Donald Trump’s former top adviser<sup>368</sup>
- Director General of the **Novae Terrae Foundation**, an Italian anti-rights group<sup>369</sup>
- Board member of the **International Association for the Family**<sup>370</sup>

## Gualberto Garcia

- Board member of CitizenGo
- Director of the US-based **International Human Rights Group**,<sup>371</sup> an anti-rights group active in the OAS General Assembly

### Alexey Komov

- CitizenGo board member
- Russian representative of the **World Congress of Families**,<sup>372</sup> organized the Moscow summit
- Close associate of **Konstantin Malofeev**, a billionaire who runs the Russian right-wing *Tsargrad TV* channel associated with the Russian Orthodox Church<sup>373</sup>
- Linked with Matteo Salvini and the far-right **Lega** party in Italy<sup>374</sup>

### Alejandro Bermudez

- CitizenGo board member
- Director of ACI Prensa,<sup>375</sup> a Catholic media company based in Peru

### Carlos Polo

- CitizenGo board member
- Latin America Director of the anti-rights **Population Research Institute**<sup>376</sup>

### Alvaro Zulueta

- CEO of CitizenGo
- Reportedly a member of **El Yunque**,<sup>377</sup> a secretive far-right Catholic sect based in Mexico
- Also linked to Crusaders of Christ the King, a fundamentalist fraternity associated with El Yunque<sup>378</sup>

CitizenGo and HazteOir are members of **Agenda Europe** and the pan-European anti-abortion initiative **One of Us**.<sup>379</sup> The group also receives advice on fundraising and technology from a member of ActRight with links to the Trump campaign and the US Tea Party movement.<sup>380</sup>

CitizenGo appears to have multiple links with far-right parties in Europe. In addition to Arsuaga publicly endorsing Spain's **Vox**, he has said that CitizenGo met with the party's senior officials to share campaign plans.<sup>381</sup> The platform subsequently put out posters and advertisements against candidates from other parties.<sup>382</sup> A Vox official also told an undercover reporter that supporting CitizenGo financially could help Vox "indirectly," stating that "we are actually currently totally aligned."<sup>383</sup> Arsuaga has also said that CitizenGo is in contact with far-right parties Fidesz in Hungary and Lega in Italy, along with "some contact" with the far-right AfD in Germany, and that CitizenGo informs these parties of its campaign strategies.<sup>384</sup>

## Alliance Defending Freedom

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– Naureen Shameem  
AWID

### Mission and History

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“Alliance Defending Freedom seeks to recover the robust Christendemic theology of the 3rd, 4th, and 5th centuries. This is ... desperately crucial for cultural renewal.”<sup>385</sup>

Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) is a powerful anti-rights actor. Founded in the United States, but now active in multiple regions, it has been described as the “800-pound gorilla of the Christian right.”<sup>386</sup> Since 2016, ADF has been designated a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC).<sup>387</sup>

**TODAY ADF IS THE LARGEST ANTI-RIGHTS LEGAL FORCE IN THE US. THEIR GLOBAL INITIATIVE HAS THE AIM OF “OBTAINING THE SAME KIND OF LEGAL SUCCESSES INTERNATIONALLY”**

According to its mission statement, ADF “exists to keep the doors open for the Gospel by advocating for religious liberty, the sanctity of human life, freedom of speech, and marriage and family.”<sup>388</sup> The group describes itself as a faith-based legal advocacy organization.<sup>389</sup> In its statement of faith,<sup>390</sup> ADF holds that:

“we believe God creates each person with an immutable biological sex – male or female,” that “God designed marriage as a unique conjugal relationship joining one man and one woman in a single, exclusive life-long union, and God intends sexual intimacy only to occur within that relationship,” and that all human life must be respected and protected “from conception to natural death.”

ADF was founded in 1994 by a group of ultra-conservative Evangelical Christian leaders linked to a number of domestic anti-rights groups including: James Dobson of Focus on the Family; Bill Bright of the Campus Crusade for Christ; Don Wildmon, founder of the American Family Association; Larry Burkett of Crown Financial Ministries; Merlin Maddoux of the *Point of View* radio program; and James Kennedy of Coral Ridge Ministries.<sup>391</sup>

In large part, its founders created ADF to oppose the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU),<sup>392</sup> a progressive impact litigation group working across the United States. In his book, *The ACLU vs America*, ADF’s co-founder and past president Alan Sears<sup>393</sup> claimed that the ACLU “has used its huge war chest over the years” to “bully public officials into removing any vestige of America’s traditional Judeo-Christian heritage.”<sup>394</sup> **Today ADF is the largest anti-rights legal force in the US, and in 2010 they launched their Global Initiative with the aim of “obtaining the same kind of legal successes internationally.”**<sup>395</sup>

Its impact in the US has been significant. Some argue that the group is chiefly responsible for the country's rightward jurisprudential shift around religion in the public sphere.<sup>396</sup> ADF supported the criminalization of same-sex sexual conduct in the landmark *Lawrence v Texas* case,<sup>397</sup> the judgment of which ultimately ruled such laws unconstitutional. ADF has pressed school districts to adopt its model policies prohibiting trans students from using facilities in accordance with their gender identities,<sup>398</sup> and is well known for litigating to oppose abortion and LGBTQI rights, and support homeschooling, "parental rights" and "the family."

ADF has also been involved with several recent landmark Supreme Court cases undermining rights and entrenching anti-rights conceptions of religious freedom. For example, *Burwell v Hobby Lobby*,<sup>399</sup> which allowed corporations to opt out of contraceptive coverage for women on the basis of religious belief; *Masterpiece Cakeshop v Colorado Civil Rights Commission*,<sup>400</sup> which found in favour of a baker who refused to sell a cake to a same sex-couple; and *NIFLA v Becerra*,<sup>401</sup> which found that deceptive "crisis-pregnancy centres" are not required to supply women with information on abortion. ADF claims that it has played a part in 60 "victories" at the US Supreme Court.<sup>402</sup>

ADF International<sup>403</sup> has been engaged in several countries and regional and global fora since 2010. That year, for instance, ADF International assisted with the *A, B and C*

*v Ireland*<sup>404</sup> case at the European Court for Human Rights (ECHR) focusing on the right to abortion.<sup>405</sup> In 2011, ADF International again intervened at the ECHR in the high-profile secularism *Lautsi v Italy*<sup>406</sup> case, where the court ruled for Italy, finding that states can place religious symbols (like the cross) in public school classrooms, and that this does not constitute indoctrination in a particular faith. And in 2018, ADF International lobbied the Senate in Argentina, providing "expert testimony"<sup>407</sup> against the proposed bill to legalize abortion.

### ADF INTERNATIONAL HAS EXPANDED SIGNIFICANTLY OVER THE PAST DECADE

**ADF International has expanded significantly over the past decade.** In 2012, the organization opened its headquarters in Vienna, Austria.<sup>408</sup> This was followed in 2015 by offices in Geneva, Switzerland, to further the organization's work at the UN Human Rights Council and Brussels, Belgium, to support the group's work at the European Union. In 2016, ADF International opened an office in Strasbourg, France, to deepen its work at the ECHR and at the Council of Europe. It went on to open another office in London, United Kingdom, in 2017.<sup>409</sup>

## Budget, Board Members, and Size

**Skyrocketing from its budget of \$14 million USD in 2002,**<sup>410</sup> ADF now has substantial resources at their disposal:

Year	Revenue (USD)	Expenses (USD)
2018 <sup>411</sup>	\$55,187,996	\$54,685,295
2019 <sup>412</sup>	\$60,949,232	\$57,262,574

As of 2017, ADF International also had an advocacy and operations budget of €3,754,822 (around \$4.4 million USD).<sup>413</sup> Data from publicly available annual financial filings in the US show **ADF's spending in Europe has greatly increased over the past decade** as well – going from \$321,302 USD in 2010 to \$2,629,632 USD in 2016, for instance.<sup>414</sup> **It also spends hundreds of thousands of euros on lobbying EU officials** – with its annual EU lobbying budget sitting around €200,000-€299,000 in the period 2017-2020.<sup>415</sup>

**ADF ESTIMATES THAT ITS ALLIED ATTORNEYS HAVE CONTRIBUTED THE EQUIVALENT OF \$224 MILLION USD IN PRO BONO (FREE) SERVICES**

While ADF also makes grants to further legal advocacy and campaigns in multiple jurisdictions, it benefits significantly at the same time from its network of over 3,300 allied attorneys.<sup>416</sup> **ADF estimates that its allied attorneys have contributed the equivalent of \$224 million USD in pro bono (free) services.**<sup>417</sup>

In its 2017 Annual Report, ADF International stated that it has 580 “ongoing legal matters” in 51 countries and 50 team members in eight countries.<sup>418</sup> The organization also expands its influence and reach through the over 2,400 law students that it has trained since 2000 at its Blackstone Legal Fellowship.<sup>419</sup>

Michael P. Farris is the current President and CEO of ADF and ADF International,<sup>420</sup> and Paul Coleman is the Executive Director of ADF International.<sup>421</sup> Farris was previously head of Jerry Falwell’s Moral Majority in Washington State and founded the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA). The HSLDA’s mission states that it relies on “parental rights” and religious freedom<sup>422</sup> and works to counter regulations around homeschooling. It has also promoted constitutional amendments to ban marriage equality.<sup>423</sup> Farris also founded the evangelical Patrick Henry College.

ADF’s board members include:

**Terry Schlossberg**<sup>424</sup>

- Previously Executive Director of **Presbyterians Pro-Life**, a nonprofit corporation made up of members and pastors of the Presbyterian Church
- States that she has “been an ardent pro-life advocate for decades”

**Seth Morgan**<sup>425</sup>

- Board member of the Ohio family policy council for **Focus on the Family**

### Mark Maddoux<sup>426</sup>

- One of the original founders of ADF
- Vice-President and CFO for **International Christian Media**

### John Rogers<sup>427</sup>

- Director of Operations for US **Campus Crusade for Christ**

### Ruth Ross<sup>428</sup>

- Serves on several Canadian boards, including the **Billy Graham Evangelistic Association**
- Former Executive Director of **Christian Legal Fellowship of Canada**

### Scott Scharpen<sup>429</sup>

- President and founder of the **Scharpen Foundation**, whose primary work is operating a “pro-life mobile pregnancy clinic”
- The clinic was a party to the recent US Supreme Court case<sup>430</sup> on crisis pregnancy clinics contesting the requirement to advise women on free and low-cost abortion services<sup>431</sup> litigated by ADF
- Previously served as board chairman of **parentalrights.org**<sup>432</sup>

### Michael Whitehead<sup>433</sup>

- Has volunteered as an allied attorney for ADF on several occasions, for instance filing an amicus brief to the US

Supreme Court in *Masterpiece CakeShop* (mentioned above)

## Thematic Focus

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### Religious Freedom

A central theme for ADF is the right to religious freedom. While ADF International highlights violence against Christian minorities<sup>434</sup> and the issue of blasphemy laws and their implementation,<sup>435</sup> their discourse is misleading, misappropriating the right to freedom of religion to justify violations of rights related to gender and sexuality and the universality of rights and belief, and overlooking the rights of non-Christian religious minorities. This is a common discourse amongst anti-rights actors.<sup>436</sup> One element of this narrative is to misleadingly suggest that the right is intended to protect a religion rather than **protect people, who are free to hold or not hold different religious beliefs**. As the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and belief has expressed on multiple occasions, the right protects *believers*, not *beliefs*.<sup>437</sup>

**ADF DISCOURSE IS MISLEADING, MISAPPROPRIATING THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF RELIGION TO JUSTIFY VIOLATIONS OF RIGHTS**

This anti-rights reinterpretation of the right to freedom of religion and belief sets aside the provision that the freedom to manifest one’s religion is subject to limitations, including those



that are necessary to protect the “fundamental rights and freedoms of others.”<sup>438</sup> It also puts aside that the right may not be relied upon to justify discrimination against women, as stated in the Human Rights Committee’s General Comment 28.<sup>439</sup>

Earlier in briefs opposing marriage equality, as in the aforementioned *Lawrence v Texas* case, ADF counsel used arguments supporting continued criminalization of same-sex sexual conduct stating that “it clearly is” reasonable “to believe that same-sex sodomy is a distinct health problem”<sup>440</sup> as well as a number of arguments depicting LGBTQI people as promiscuous and unfit to parent.<sup>441</sup> Today, when it comes to themes of sexual rights and marriage equality, ADF has now strategically pivoted to anti-rights arguments around the rights to freedom of religion (or speech), as in *Masterpiece Cakeshop*.

A number of ADF briefs now construct a legal narrative that asserts that Christians are under threat of persecution from the advance of rights related to gender, sexuality and reproduction,<sup>442</sup> and that attempt to justify “religious exceptions” which allow impunity for discrimination. Here again, the anti-rights discourse on freedom of religion adopts a familiar tactic – co-opting rights language to shift the subject of rights and endow already powerful ideologies with more power.

ADF International continues this trend of misusing the right to religious freedom. For instance, in its white paper entitled: “The

UN’s Failure to Promote and Protect Religious Freedom,” ADF critiques UN bodies such as the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) for its work combatting discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.<sup>443</sup> It claims that the OHCHR “has chosen to focus massive resources” on “‘rights’ that are not recognized” rather than the right to freedom of religion, and calling on states to cease funding OHCHR initiatives “until it returns to its core obligations.”<sup>444</sup>

## Abortion

ADF has a substantial focus on abortion and restricting access to reproductive justice. To illustrate, ADF International has at least 60 submissions and lobbying documents devoted to the subject, including over 50 submissions to the UN Human Rights Council’s Universal Periodic Review (UPR) for numerous countries.<sup>445</sup> It frequently frames its anti-abortion efforts around a few core discourses, such as the “right to life from conception to natural death,”<sup>446</sup> as well as by promoting the “conscientious objection” of health professionals to abortion services, and co-opting progressive critiques of sex-selective abortion.

As discussed in the first OURs human rights trends report,<sup>447</sup> a number of anti-rights actors seek to appropriate the human right to life in service of an anti-abortion mission. This framing is misleading and a strategic site from which to ground an anti-abortion norm. Evoking threats to life elicits a strong emotive reaction and in international human



rights law the right to life is a binding legal standard and cannot be violated under any circumstances.<sup>448</sup>

As part of an overall tactical shift over several years, arguments opposing rights related to reproduction, gender, and sexuality have moved from explicitly religious to ostensibly “secular.”<sup>449</sup> The Vatican and allies like ADF seek to couple the right to life set out in human rights law with its own doctrinal caveat that life begins at the moment of conception – which ADF mirrors in its own statement of faith above. But the notion that the human right to life begins at conception has no support outside of some doctrinal texts and Christian Right talking points. No universal human rights instrument has provided that a right to life applies before birth.<sup>450</sup>

For example, ADF International joined with a number of anti-rights organizations to try to influence the UN Human Rights Committee, the body which oversees the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to change the interpretation of the right to life included in the treaty through its General Comment 36.<sup>451</sup> Their efforts were unsuccessful, as the Committee’s final text of General Comment 36 affirmed that the right to life is applicable from birth, not earlier.

ADF also tries to cloak its anti-abortion agenda by co-opting feminist and progressive concerns around sex-selective abortion. Rather than addressing the structural and systemic issues which contribute to the

preference for boys and the stigma around girls, the organization seeks to limit access to abortion. Towards this end, ADF launched the “Vanishing Girls” campaign in India<sup>452</sup> in 2018.

### **ARGUMENTS OPPOSING RIGHTS RELATED TO REPRODUCTION, GENDER, AND SEXUALITY HAVE MOVED FROM EXPLICITLY RELIGIOUS TO OSTENSIBLY “SECULAR”**

ADF also seeks to restrict access to reproductive rights and health through the misleading argument – and series of cases – of “conscientious objection” of health care providers in a number of countries, including Norway.<sup>453</sup>

The group has also used the trope of describing abortion as “genocide,”<sup>454</sup> supporting the defense of a German activist who compared abortion to the Holocaust and accused specific doctors of murder,<sup>455</sup> and opposing a rape survivor’s appeal on the post-20-week abortion ban in India.<sup>456</sup>

### **“Parental Rights”**

ADF also seeks to propagate the misleading discourse of “parental rights” to justify its advocacy against comprehensive sex education (CSE) and in favour of religious homeschooling. As discussed in the first OURs human rights trends report,<sup>457</sup> a number of anti-rights actors are attempting to construct a new category of “parental rights” to justify the control of children and violation of their

rights under international law, but which has no support in existing human rights standards.

**ADF SEEKS TO PROPAGATE THE MISLEADING DISCOURSE OF “PARENTAL RIGHTS” TO JUSTIFY ADVOCACY AGAINST COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION AND IN FAVOUR OF RELIGIOUS HOMESCHOOLING**

For example, ADF International took a German case supporting homeschooling – restricted in Germany – to exercise the litigants’ “parental right to raise their children in line” with “their religious convictions” to the European Court of Human Rights in 2017.<sup>458</sup> The group also engaged in substantial communications around the case, including factsheets and a video.<sup>459</sup> ADF’s ostensible advocacy on behalf of parents stands in contrast to their efforts to harm parents and families that differ from a patriarchal heteronormative model. The group has argued on multiple occasions that same-sex parents are unfit. Citing flawed research that claims children with same-sex parents have emotional problems,<sup>460</sup> they have described such children as “all hav[ing] one thing in common – they craved the love and presence of their missing mother or father.” They have also claimed that children with a lesbian or gay parent are more likely to be raped than are those with heterosexual parents.<sup>461</sup>

**Surrogacy**

Recently, another focus for ADF is in opposing surrogacy, an area increasingly of interest for several anti-rights actors. Here, anti-rights groups seek to instrumentalize feminist critiques – around issues like economic marginalization, reproductive labour in a globalized market, and bodily autonomy and integrity – towards their anti-reproductive rights agenda. As can also be seen with their opposition to such practices as in vitro fertilization and same-sex parenting, the real objective behind this focus is to restrict families to their vision of the heterosexual, “traditional,” “biological” family.

**IN OPPOSING SURROGACY, ANTI-RIGHTS GROUPS INSTRUMENTALIZE FEMINIST CRITIQUES - AROUND ECONOMIC MARGINALIZATION, BODILY AUTONOMY AND INTEGRITY - TOWARDS THEIR ANTI-REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS AGENDA**

In this vein, ADF International has sponsored side events on the theme of surrogacy at the UN. At a side event at the Human Rights council in 2019,<sup>462</sup> ADF International partnered with La Manif Pour Tous, a French organization that opposes same-sex marriage and “gender theory,” and claims to defend the “traditional family.” In the same year, ADF International also produced a lobbying brief entitled “Surrogacy: the commoditization of children and women.”<sup>463</sup>

## Opposition to LGBTQI rights

In line with the anti-rights focus on religious control over human sexuality and reproduction, ADF has a significant interest in restricting sexual rights around the world – although it increasingly seeks to cloak this strategically in language of freedom of religion or freedom of speech.

ADF Founder Alan Sears co-authored *The Homosexual Agenda: Exposing the Principal Threat to Religious Freedom Today*<sup>464</sup> which argued that eliminating anti-sodomy laws would lead to the overturning of “laws against pedophilia, sex between close relatives, polygamy, bestiality and all other distortions and violations of God’s plan.” The ADF authors also claimed that the “radical homosexual activist community has adopted many of the techniques used in Nazi Germany,” including waging “a war of propaganda, just as Hitler did so masterfully.”<sup>465</sup> Speaking at the 2012 World Congress of Families conference, Sears also stated, “in the course of the now hundreds of cases the ADF has now fought involving this homosexual agenda, one thing is certain: there is no room for compromise with those who would call evil ‘good’.”<sup>466</sup>

After ADF’s advocacy was unsuccessful in the *Lawrence v Texas* case,<sup>467</sup> mentioned above, which sought the criminalization of same-sex sexual conduct, the group’s “Foreign Threats” website page urged supporters to contribute to ADF’s international efforts to “help stop devastating rulings” like *Lawrence* worldwide.<sup>468</sup>

## ADF DELINEATES A SUBSET OF HUMAN RIGHTS AS TRULY FUNDAMENTAL, WHILST OTHERS ARE FRAMED AS “NEW” OR SUBJECT TO STATE DISCRETION

In 2013, ADF published a memo in support of Russia’s “gay propaganda” law, which legalized discrimination based on sexual orientation, claiming that it would protect “the psychological or physical well-being of minors.”<sup>469</sup> In 2016, the organization filed legal arguments before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in *Alberto Duque v Colombia*, opposing a partners’ claim to the pension of his deceased (same-sex) partner.<sup>470</sup> The court, however, ruled in favour of Duque.

In 2017, ADF also intervened in a case at the European Court of Human Rights<sup>471</sup> that challenged European laws requiring the sterilization of transgender citizens seeking recognition of their preferred gender, *A.P., Garçon and Nicot v. France*. ADF argued against the three transgender petitioners, stating “equal dignity does not mean that every sexual orientation warrants equal respect,” and citing “human rights imperialism” in this French case.<sup>472</sup> Here the court also ruled in favour of the petitioners. ADF was also previously involved in the Belize Supreme Court case on the decriminalization of same-sex sexual conduct. Belize Action, a local anti-rights organization stated that lawyers supplied by ADF (as well as C-Fam) were

assisting them in their opposition to striking down the colonial-era law,<sup>473</sup> which carried a sentence of 10 years.

At the UN, ADF frequently advocates against rights related to gender and sexuality, where they commonly resort to a misleading anti-rights discourse on “fundamental freedoms.” Increasingly, anti-rights actors attempt to use the language of the universality of rights to subvert its principles.<sup>474</sup> They use references to “universal” or “fundamental” rights not to describe the entirety of indivisible and interrelated human rights to be treated equally and with the same emphasis,<sup>475</sup> but (in a reversal) to delineate and describe a *subset* of human rights as truly fundamental, whilst other rights – generally rights related to gender and sexuality – are framed as “new,” optional or subject to state discretion. ADF’s lobbying documents argue, for example that the UN’s “focus on SOGI distracts from promoting universally agreed, fundamental rights and violates state sovereignty,”<sup>476</sup> and argues that UN bodies have “drifted...to the promotion of unrecognized ‘rights’.”<sup>477</sup>

### Regions and Religious Affiliation

ADF was founded in the United States by Alan Sears; it has four offices in the country, with its headquarters located in Scottsdale, Arizona.<sup>478</sup> ADF International has offices in Switzerland, Mexico, Austria, Belgium, France, and the UK,<sup>479</sup> and “ADF India” works with allied lawyers in New Delhi.<sup>480</sup> They also claim to work “alongside a large network of

allied lawyers throughout Asia, Africa and Oceania.”<sup>481</sup>

According to ADF International, as of 2017 it had 580 “ongoing legal matters” in 51 countries.<sup>482</sup> They work at the UN, where they have held ECOSOC accreditation since 2010; and at the OAS; the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights (IACHR); the EU; the European Court for Human Rights (ECHR); and at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and previously the Council of Europe.<sup>483</sup>

ADF has been involved in Slovakia, where it worked in support of an anti-same sex marriage referendum.<sup>484</sup> ADF also supported a referendum opposing same-sex marriage in Romania.<sup>485</sup> It has intervened in a Costa Rican IACHR case on marriage and gender identity,<sup>486</sup> and engaged in activities in Ireland, Italy, Argentina, India, Belize, Germany, Norway, France, Russia, and Colombia, among others.

ADF defines itself as a Christian organization, clearly highlighted in its statement of faith,<sup>487</sup> and states that it was founded by 30 Christian leaders.<sup>488</sup> The organization has overwhelmingly represented Christian clients,<sup>489</sup> and is historically associated with the Evangelical movement, but also includes Catholic representation.<sup>490</sup>

## Tactics

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### Strategic Litigation

As ADF states, the foundational objective of its strategy is to “impact and reshape our culture” by promoting “key changes in the worldwide legal culture.”<sup>491</sup> Using strategic litigation – also called impact litigation – the organization’s goal goes beyond winning the case at hand and obtaining remedies for the client. Instead, the key objective is to create broader changes in society by focusing on one case exemplifying a wider trend. Individual cases are selected towards that goal – to change legislation, policies, and practice; raise public awareness of an issue and give it a bigger platform; and set legal precedents which will shape law going forward.<sup>492</sup> In keeping with these goals, strategic litigation is usually accompanied by media engagement, communications, and public outreach materials to signal-boost. In the series of cases previously described – and beyond – **ADF’s ultimate goal is to promote lasting anti-rights shifts in paradigms, cultural narratives, laws and policies in countries and multilateral bodies all over the world.**

**ADF’S ULTIMATE GOAL IS TO PROMOTE LASTING ANTI-RIGHTS SHIFTS IN PARADIGMS, LAWS, AND POLICIES IN COUNTRIES AND MULTILATERAL BODIES ALL OVER THE WORLD**

### Lobbying and Model Legislation

Lobbying and direct involvement with the development of legislation are another core tactic for ADF, both at the national level and in global and regional multilateral spaces. As noted above, ADF’s lobbying budget is substantial.<sup>493</sup>

It produces lobbying briefs and white papers on its areas of focus, including one critiquing the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention),<sup>494</sup> as well as briefs on surrogacy,<sup>495</sup> freedom of religion,<sup>496</sup> critiquing hate speech laws,<sup>497</sup> and on “protecting religious freedom in times of COVID-19.”<sup>498</sup> Its materials also include sustained critiques of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)<sup>499</sup> and IPPF,<sup>500</sup> and “The Rise of Faux Rights.”<sup>501</sup>

ADF has regular staff working to lobby at the UN Human Rights Council, the EU, the OAS, and other multilateral bodies. It is particularly involved in the UN Human Rights Council’s Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process, where it makes submissions for a substantial number of countries, including Rwanda, Nepal, Myanmar, Lebanon, Georgia, the Maldives, Malawi, Libya, Belarus, Turkey, Lesotho, Kyrgyzstan, the Gambia, El Salvador, Malaysia, Egypt, Tuvalu and many others.<sup>502</sup> This can be particularly harmful where there is limited capacity amongst national civil society to produce UPR reports, as ADF’s submission can carry undue weight in the absence of other reports. Their submissions focus largely



on their thematic areas, highlighted above, particularly opposing abortion<sup>503</sup> and CSE<sup>504</sup> and promoting the status of churches.<sup>505</sup>

ADF also drafts and promotes anti-rights model legislation on issues like the rights of trans people. In 2017, ADF sent its model “physical privacy policy,” which advocated against the right of transgender students to use bathroom facilities that align with their gender identity, to school districts across the US.<sup>506</sup> As so-called “bathroom bills” surged in numbers through the year, **one report found that at least 10 of 28 anti-trans state “bathroom bills” introduced or active in 2017 had language resembling ADF’s model policy – and that at least two school district policies also had language mirroring ADF’s.**<sup>507</sup>

### Campaigning and Communications

ADF also engages in campaigning and communications. In 2018, for instance, the organization launched its “I’m Human, Right?” campaign around the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.<sup>508</sup> The campaign included events in NYC, Brussels, Geneva, and New Delhi, a campaign video,<sup>509</sup> social media engagement, a photo campaign, and an open letter to the UN’s Secretary-General promoting the “Geneva Statement” – a text which aims to co-opt the concept of universality to narrow down the scope of human rights.

The photo campaign featured a number of young people – who appear to be members of ADF’s training programs – each holding up

“I’m Human, Right?” signs with their name and statements such as, “I believe marriage is the lifelong union of one man and one woman” and “I believe it’s wrong to force someone to do something they think is morally wrong.”<sup>510</sup>

As highlighted above, ADF has also been involved with campaigns to support referenda against same-sex marriage in countries like Romania and Slovakia. The group frequently produces press releases, videos, and explainer briefs to support its strategic litigation and campaigns, and engage the media. Their “media reference guide”<sup>511</sup> includes a list of “use” and “don’t use” terms – such as “abortion, infanticide and killing of the innocent” instead of “termination of pregnancy”; “cross-dressing, sexually confused” instead of “transgender”; “pro-life, pro-family, pro-children” instead of “anti-abortion, anti-reproductive rights”; “advocating/promoting promiscuity/immorality” rather than “safe education, safe sex, responsible sex”; and “sexually mutilated male/female, self-proclaimed male/female, biological male/female” instead of “intersex person.” ADF also has a content partnership with the Brussels-based *Euroactiv* media site.<sup>512</sup>

### Training

Training is a central tactic for ADF, as it allows them to significantly increase their reach and impact by growing and strengthening a large cadre of affiliated lawyers and advocates. Through their programs, ADF claims that it is “transforming the legal system by equipping Christian attorneys and law students to defend religious freedom.”<sup>513</sup>

At the international level, ADF runs the Areté Academy, a one-week training program that includes “biblical worldview training.”<sup>514</sup> The organization states that its European Leadership Academy includes training in “strategic cultural engagement and spiritual formation” alongside professional development and “substantive legal and political instruction.”<sup>515</sup> ADF holds sessions of the academy in multiple regions – in 2021, Areté Academy Asia will be held in Bangkok, Thailand; Areté Academy Europe in Vienna, Austria; and Areté Academy Latin America in Santiago, Chile.

Additionally, ADF International offers the Veritas Scholarship, a year-long fellowship program which promises “full immersion” into the ADF International team in Europe.<sup>516</sup> Alliance Defending Freedom also hosts the ADF Summit on Religious Liberty for “Christian attorneys around the globe...to equip attendees to effectively advocate for religious liberty, the sanctity of life, and marriage and family.”<sup>517</sup> The organization claims that more than 2,000 lawyers from nearly 50 countries have participated in the summit.

ADF also holds the Young Lawyers Academy for recent law school graduates and new lawyers,<sup>518</sup> and targets college students with its Law School Prep Academy for students preparing to start law school.<sup>519</sup> Finally, its Blackstone Legal Fellowship,<sup>520</sup> which ADF claims has trained more than 2,400 students from law schools in 21 countries, trains law students and then places them in internships

with law firms, government bodies, and think tanks. The program includes seminars and talks from senior staffers from anti-rights organizations like Focus on the Family and the Family Research Council,<sup>521</sup> and one testimonial from a former Blackstone Fellow stated that the program “unveiled the scale of the attack against truth and... also gave the battle plan and weapons necessary to fight back.”<sup>522</sup>

### **ADF-TRAINED AND AFFILIATED LAWYERS ALSO FREQUENTLY GO ON TO GOVERNMENT, JUDICIAL, AND OTHER POSITIONS OF POWER**

ADF itself benefits substantially from this network of training cohorts and its allied attorneys mentioned above, estimating over a million pro bono hours. ADF-trained and affiliated lawyers also frequently go on to government, judicial, and other positions of power.

#### **Grants**

ADF started with the goal to fund work congruent with its anti-rights foci, and it continues to do so. The organization claims that it has provided lawyers with more than \$52 million USD<sup>523</sup> in grant awards, funding them to take up cases, amicus work and “advocacy-related projects” around “religious freedom, the sanctity of life, or marriage and family.”<sup>524</sup>



## Engagement at the UN and other Multilateral Spaces

ADF is active at the UN, carrying out a number of lobbying activities. The group has held ECOSOC civil society consultative status there since 2010. In recent years, it has become especially visible at the Human Rights Council in Geneva.

**ADF IS ENGAGED IN A DOUBLE STRATEGY AT THE UN – IT WORKS INCREASINGLY IN THESE SPACES AND AT THE SAME TIME SEEKS TO UNDERMINE OR DEFUND MANY UN MECHANISMS**

At the 34th session of the HRC in 2017, for instance, ADF's then representative made a statement at the Interactive Dialogue for the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion to promote their misleading discourse on freedom of religion – in support of “religious exemptions” for bakers, florists, photographers and venue providers who refuse services for same-sex couples.<sup>525</sup> ADF International also holds side events with partners at the Council. For example, at the 41st session in 2019, it co-organized a side event on religious violence with the Permanent Missions of Brazil, Poland, Iraq, Nigeria, the Holy See, and others.<sup>526</sup> And as highlighted above, it submits a large number of country submissions for states around the world in the UPR process.

ADF International has a regular presence at the HRC, with two Geneva-based UN officers<sup>527</sup> and London and New York-based staff also attending Council sessions.<sup>528</sup> Their ongoing presence in Geneva also allows them to engage in lobbying activities targeting UN treaty monitoring bodies like the Human Rights Committee.

ADF has also become more deeply embedded in UN mechanisms of late. It is involved in the NGO Committees on Freedom of Religion and Belief (FoRB) in Geneva and New York, and it now holds the position of chair of the New York NGO Committee on FoRB. It has long been involved in lobbying at the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), where ADF states they are committed to preserving “protections for pro-life states” and to “encouraging countries to rollback abortion references in UN documents.”<sup>529</sup> ADF also hosts side events with anti-rights allies at the CSW, such as an event in 2020 entitled: “The Many Harms Coming from Abortion after Cairo and Beijing,” with the Holy See, C-Fam, and the Heritage Foundation.<sup>530</sup> Together with national-level partners, ADF also typically submits statements<sup>531</sup> at the CSW.

ADF is engaged in a double strategy at the UN – it works actively and increasingly in these spaces and encourages other anti-rights groups not to “abandon the institutions of power.”<sup>532</sup> At the same time it seeks to undermine, limit and/or defund many UN mechanisms, such as the OHCHR,<sup>533</sup> treaty monitoring bodies, UN Special Procedures,<sup>534</sup>

and UNFPA.<sup>535</sup> It also attempts to reshape the human rights system and norms to promote an anti-rights agenda that furthers impunity, undermines equality, and makes human rights the province of the few rather than all.

ADF International is also active in cases before regional bodies like the ECHR and the IACHR and has become highly involved in the OAS General Assembly. It has several staff members registered at the EU,<sup>536</sup> and was also engaged at the Council of Europe. Recently, however, given ADF's widespread advocacy opposing the Istanbul Convention Against Gender-based Violence,<sup>537</sup> the Council of Europe removed ADF from its NGO group.<sup>538</sup>

## Funding of Anti-rights Actors

– Naureen Shameem  
AWID

### Anti-rights Funding Trends

The significant growth in the budgets of groups like CitizenGo and ADF point to the vast resources made available for anti-rights actors. Yet, the sheer size of their budgets is not enough to guarantee the success of their agendas. Rather, it paints a complex context in which advancements in feminism and human rights are often won against extremely well-funded and powerful opposition.

**ADVANCEMENTS IN FEMINISM AND HUMAN RIGHTS ARE OFTEN WON AGAINST EXTREMELY WELL-FUNDED AND POWERFUL OPPOSITION**

Key funding sources for anti-rights agendas include: 1) ultra-conservative grant-makers and private donors; 2) religious institutions; 3) businesses and corporations; and 4) funding from other organizations.

#### Ultra-conservative Grant-makers and Private Donors

In many jurisdictions, private donors to anti-rights organizations are allowed a high degree of anonymity. **The amounts of money fueling anti-rights agendas without any transparency is a major issue in its own right.** For instance, US-based organizations

who define themselves as non-profits are not required to disclose the names of private donors in their public filings – and in a major loophole, those **groups who register themselves as “churches” do not need to file even the limited funding disclosures required of other organizations.**

**THE AMOUNTS OF MONEY FUELING ANTI-RIGHTS AGENDAS WITHOUT ANY TRANSPARENCY IS A MAJOR ISSUE IN ITS OWN RIGHT**

Donations from private donors and ultra-conservative grant-makers are a substantial part of the resources of anti-rights groups. The **Qatar Foundation**, which belongs to the royal family of Qatar, finances the Doha International Institute for Family and Development, as an example.<sup>539</sup> Two major ultra-conservative foundations in Russia are the **Istoki Endowment fund**, which is led by the Russian businessman Vladimir I. Yakunin,<sup>540</sup> and the **St. Basil the Great Charitable Foundation**, created by businessman Konstantin Malofeev.<sup>541</sup> Both foundations finance projects that aim to promote “traditional values,” a common discourse of the Russian Orthodox Church,<sup>542</sup> and have links to the World Congress of Families.<sup>543</sup> In the US, anti-LGBTQI work has been funded by the **Witherspoon Institute** and the **Bradley Foundation**.<sup>544</sup>

A key space in which ultra-conservative donors make decisions about their support

to anti-rights organizations and projects is **The Gathering**.<sup>545</sup> The Gathering is an annual donors conference<sup>546</sup> that meets every September and dates back to the 1980s. The largest donor player in The Gathering is the **National Christian Foundation (NCF)**.

The evangelical NCF, the eighth-largest charity in the US, claims that it has given out more than \$13 billion USD in grant money since 1982<sup>547</sup> – in 2015, for example, it gave out \$960 million in grants.<sup>548</sup> Between 2015 and 2017, the NCF donated at least \$56.1 million to 23 groups identified by the SPLC as hate groups, including Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) and the Family Research Council.<sup>549</sup> Inside Philanthropy lists the Heritage Foundation, Campus Crusade for Christ, and Focus on the Family as other recipients of NCF funds and describes NCF as “probably the single biggest source of (US) money fueling the pro-life and anti-LGBT movements over the past 15 years.”<sup>550</sup>

NCF is a donor-advised fund – donors can recommend that the fund disperse money to the groups of their choice, and are able to donate to the NCF anonymously. A few of NCF’s donors include **David Green**,<sup>551</sup> the billionaire founder of the **Hobby Lobby** chain of crafts stores – the corporation who took their refusal to cover contraceptive coverage for their employees to the Supreme Court. Other major NCF donors include the **Maclellan Foundation**, which has donated over \$100 million to NCF; the **Bolthouse Foundation** (who donated \$9.6 million in

2017); the family foundation of Republican donor **Foster Friess** (donated \$2.5 million in 2017); the **Free Family Foundation** (donated \$1.5 million in 2017) and the **JSC Foundation**, run by heirs of the Coors beer company.<sup>552</sup>

### Businesses and Corporations

We can see fiscal links between corporations and anti-rights organizations above, namely Hobby Lobby and the JSC Foundation, linked to the **Coors** beer company. Recently, one of Italy’s leading prosecco companies has also been linked to anti-rights agendas; in 2019, **Villa Sandi** was a sponsor of the World Congress of Families event in Verona, Italy.<sup>553</sup> WCF, an anti-rights group,<sup>554</sup> hosted far-right politicians in Verona from Italy’s Lega party along with representatives from France’s National Rally, Hungary’s Fidesz, and Germany’s AfD.<sup>555</sup>

**Brazzale**, an Italian dairy company, also sponsored the 2019 WCF conference – its chief executive has spoken at previous anti-abortion events such as the 2018 Festival of Life in Verona, and the 2017 March for Life in Rome.<sup>556</sup> **Shamrock Foods**, a US based dairy company, has also previously acted as a corporate sponsor for WCF,<sup>557</sup> as has the Polish oil company **Orlen**.<sup>558</sup>

A report by Popular Information, together with Progressive Shopper, also examined donations from corporations to politicians espousing anti-sexual rights positions and policies. Between 2017 and 2018, they estimate that **AT&T** donated \$2,755,000 USD

to this end; **UPS** donated \$2,366,122 USD; **Comcast** donated \$2,116,500 USD; **Home Depot** donated \$1,825,500 USD; **General Electric** donated \$1,380,500 USD; **FedEx** donated \$1,261,500 USD; **USB Corporation** donated \$1,094,750 USD; **Verizon** donated \$1,022,803 USD; and **Pfizer** donated \$959,263 USD.<sup>559</sup>

**Several religious institutions who have been linked to anti-rights agendas also own their own businesses, which may fund anti-rights work.** The Catholic Church, for instance, owns the **Institute for the Works of Religion** (i.e. the “Vatican bank”), which manages funds for approximately €7,000 million.<sup>560</sup> Locally, the Church administers a series of businesses such as private Catholic schools or properties which it rents for commercial purposes. In Chile, the **episcopate of the Catholic Church** declared an annual income of almost \$16 million USD in 2016, with 22 percent of this coming from real estate rents.<sup>561</sup> The **Russian Orthodox Church** has state permission to generate and manage its own businesses.<sup>562</sup> It owns the Sofrino plant, one of the largest production sites in the country where they make everything from candles to icons, books and church utensils. Churches also run businesses linked to telecommunications in some countries. For example, in Brazil, Christian churches have bought and administered television and broadcasting channels for several years, and in Russia, the Orthodox Church has owned the Spas television channel since 2007.<sup>563</sup>

## Public and State Financing

Anti-rights actors access public funds and state support in different ways. **In some cases, they are employed by state-funded institutions (as in the case of religious institutions). In other cases, anti-rights groups may present themselves as neutral organizations who provide aid or relief to marginalized communities.** For instance, the ultra-conservative group Portal de Belen – one of the main organizations who mobilized against the legalization of same-sex marriage in Argentina in 2010 – has been granted funds by the government of the province of Córdoba for their “pregnancy-support” shelters. These service low-income pregnant women with the objective of preventing them from obtaining abortions.<sup>564</sup>

**ANTI-RIGHTS GROUPS MAY PRESENT THEMSELVES AS NEUTRAL ORGANIZATIONS WHO PROVIDE AID OR RELIEF TO MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES**

The European Christian Political Movement (ECPM) receives funding from the European Parliament, and anti-rights groups in Poland receive state funding. In 2017, the National Foundation for Civil Society Development in Croatia granted a three-year institutional development grant of approximately €55,000 to In the Name of the Family, the anti-rights group who led the referendum against marriage equality.<sup>565</sup> In another example, the US federal government funded Obria, a chain

of anti-abortion “crisis pregnancy centres,” sending them \$5.1 million USD in 2019.<sup>566</sup>

### Inter-organizational Funding

International transfers between ultra-conservative organizations around the world is another major trend in the anti-rights funding landscape. Financial support from Russia<sup>567</sup> has been identified in Eastern and Central European countries with large Orthodox churches, such as Romania, Bulgaria and Serbia; or countries with strong political links, such as Hungary, Slovakia, Latvia, Lithuania and the Czech Republic.<sup>568</sup> Anti-rights organizations in the US also offer funding to churches to oppose sexual rights in Uganda,<sup>569</sup> Kenya, and Nigeria,<sup>570</sup> often disguised as humanitarian or development-related aid,<sup>571</sup> or through direct donations to key religious leaders.<sup>572</sup>

#### Case Study: Anti-rights Funding in Europe

As openDemocracy has documented,<sup>573</sup> in the past decade anti-rights groups based in the United States have significantly increased their spending in Europe, pouring at least \$50 million USD towards regressive agendas in the continent.<sup>574</sup>

The top three groups, based on public filings between 2008 and 2018, are the **Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA)**,<sup>575</sup> the **American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ)**<sup>576</sup> – whose affiliate, the European Center for Law and Justice, is highly active in anti-rights strategic litigation

across Europe;<sup>577</sup> and **ADF**.<sup>578</sup> In this period, BGEA channeled at least \$23.3 million USD to support work in Europe, while the spending of ACLJ – founded by televangelist Pat Roberson in 1990 – was \$13.5 million USD, and ADF’s disclosed spending in Europe was \$15.3 million USD.<sup>579</sup>

The anti-abortion **Human Life International**, which describes itself as the “largest international pro-life organization in the world,” was also a major spender in Europe, sending at least \$2.8 million USD in this period,<sup>580</sup> including in Austria, Croatia, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Ukraine. The **Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty**, which brings together anti-rights and neoliberal activists, has received hundreds of thousands of dollars from **Koch family foundations**<sup>581</sup> and spent at least \$2.1 million USD in the region over this period.<sup>582</sup> The Acton Institute has an office in Rome and has collaborated in Italy with the Dignitatis Humanae Institute – linked to CitizenGo, and of which Steve Bannon is a trustee.

Other US-based groups transferring funds into Europe include **Heartbeat International**, which supports anti-abortion “crisis pregnancy centres,” and who spent at least \$191,000 USD in this period.<sup>583</sup> Heartbeat International’s latest filings say it funds activities in Croatia, Spain, and Italy, where it works with the Movimento per la Vita. The **Leadership Institute**, linked to CitizenGo,<sup>584</sup> has also spent more in Europe than in any other region – more than \$804,000 USD.<sup>585</sup>



Also amongst the key spenders is the US branch of **Tradition, Family and Property (TFP)**, an ultra-conservative transnational Catholic movement that describes itself as “on the front lines of the Culture War...defending the values of tradition, family, and private ownership.”<sup>586</sup> The movement has spent over \$100,000 USD in Europe since 2010 and has been linked to a group in Poland that has helped the far-right Law and Justice party develop policies.<sup>587</sup>

Amongst a number of other anti-rights activities, the funding from this set of actors has funded a network of “grassroots” anti-abortion campaigns in Italy and Spain and supported campaigns against sexual rights in the Czech Republic<sup>588</sup> and Romania.<sup>589</sup> **Focus on the Family**, the **Home School Legal Defense Association**, the **Population Research Institute**, the **International House of Prayer**, and **Family Watch International** are amongst the other anti-rights groups engaged in transcontinental funding flows.<sup>590</sup>

A cross-party group of over 40 Members of the European Parliament also called on the European Commissioner on regulation and transparency to look into the influence of “US Christian fundamentalists...with the greatest urgency” in 2019.<sup>591</sup> However, these groups are not required to disclose the names of their overseas recipients under US law, nor the identities of their own funders, or the details of the activities they fund. Thus, the \$50 million USD figure is likely an underestimate of the resources that anti-rights actors

have transferred into the region in recent years. Groups like **Liberty Counsel**, which supported a campaign for an anti-same-sex marriage referendum in Romania,<sup>592</sup> has registered as a “church auxiliary” and thus no longer discloses information on major international contributions. Similarly, Focus on the Family has declared itself a church, avoiding disclosure requirements<sup>593</sup> like the largest funder above, BGEA – which re-registered as an “association of churches” in 2015.

A review of the lobbying of a number of groups at the European Parliament and European Commission highlights the considerable budgets that European anti-rights groups are devoting to influence these multilateral spaces. According to the EU transparency register, 21 anti-rights think tanks, NGOs and other entities – most of which are from Poland, Austria, Belgium, France, Spain, or Switzerland – currently spend €2.1 to 3.1 million per year lobbying the EU.<sup>594</sup>

**The Vatican** is the largest individual spender in this group – one of its units, the **Commission of the Episcopates of the EU (Comece)** spends €1.25 million per year to influence EU institutions.<sup>595</sup> The Swiss-based **International Organization for the Right to Education and Freedom of Education (OIDEF)**, with close links with European and US anti-abortion groups, also spends €200,000 to 300,000 per year, and the anti-abortion umbrella group **One of Us** spends €100,000 to 200,000 per year in lobbying the EU.<sup>596</sup> Also, **Ordo Iuris**,



whose mission is the “protection of human life from conception until natural death,” and the “protection of the identity of marriage and family,” spends €25,000 to 50,000 per year.<sup>597</sup>

As highlighted in the section on CitizenGo, sources also indicate that some European anti-rights groups are also “trying to import a controversial US-style ‘Super PAC’ model of political campaigning,” which can allow for unregulated flows of funding to influence elections and support extremist parties.<sup>598</sup> For instance, an official from the far-right Vox party told an undercover reporter that supporting CitizenGo financially could help Vox “indirectly.”<sup>599</sup>

#### Alliance Defending Freedom: Funding Flows

##### Funding of ADF

ADF is able to keep its own funding sources under wraps using the same legal disclosure loopholes mentioned above. As a 501(c)(3) non-profit<sup>600</sup> registered in the US, it is not required to disclose the names of its funders, its overseas recipients, or details of the activities they fund in their tax filings. Indeed, on its website, ADF explicitly promises its donors secrecy, stating that the group will never “make available your name or information related to your gifts.”<sup>601</sup>

Its tax filings list several multi-million-dollar contributions – approximately \$60 million USD between 2012 and 2017 – that seem to come from individuals, but with names withheld.<sup>602</sup> In

addition to individual donations, ADF receives funding from charitable foundations, which must be disclosed on donors’ tax returns.

Prominent ADF donors include the **family of Betsy DeVos**, the former US Secretary of Education,<sup>603</sup> including her brother **Erik Prince**, founder of the mercenary military firm, Blackwater.<sup>604</sup> The **Edgar and Elsa Prince Foundation**, which lists DeVos as vice-president, has donated more than \$1 million USD to ADF since 2002.<sup>605</sup> The group also receives significant funds from the **Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation**.<sup>606</sup> Another donor is **Greg Gianforte**, a US Congressman from Montana, infamous for being elected despite his pre-election assault on a reporter.<sup>607</sup>

A significant amount of ADF’s funding comes from the National Christian Foundation (NCF) – mentioned above. NCF’s status as a donor-advised fund allows for less transparency, as contributors to the Foundation can shield their identities from public view. Between 2008 and 2015, ADF received \$77.6 million USD from NCF,<sup>608</sup> and from 2015 to 2017, it took in an additional \$49.2 million USD from the Foundation.<sup>609</sup> NCF’s own donors include David Green of Hobby Lobby, the Maclellan Foundation, the Bolthouse Foundation, Foster Friess, the JSC Foundation, and the Free Family Foundation.

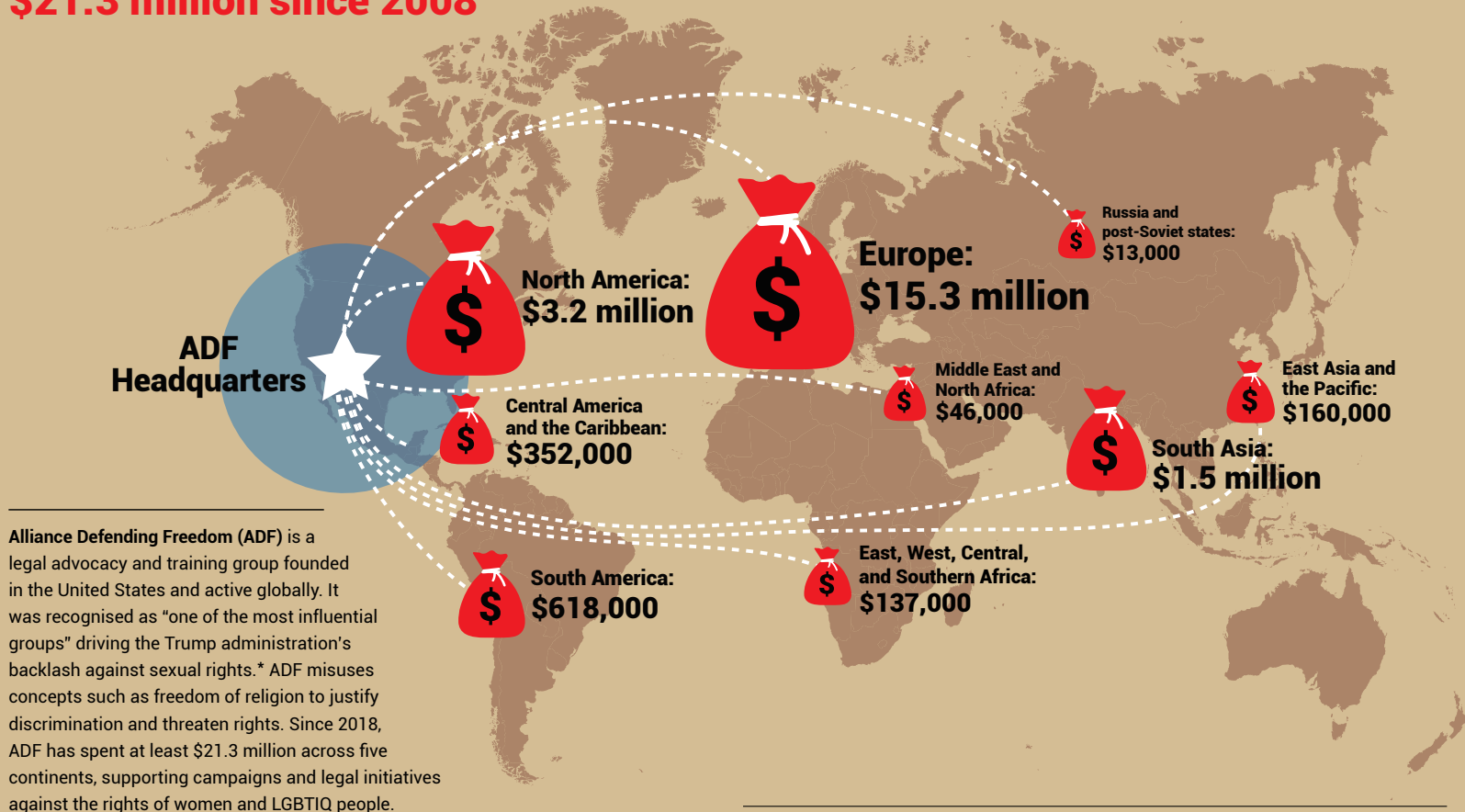
Several other donor-advised funds are big ADF funders. For instance, the largest charity in the US, the **Fidelity Charitable Gift Fund**,<sup>610</sup>

together with the **Schwab Charitable Fund**<sup>611</sup> and the **Vanguard Charitable Endowment Fund**,<sup>612</sup> gave nearly \$2.7 million USD to ADF over 2016 through 2018.<sup>613</sup> It was also funded in this period by the **Silicon Valley Community Foundation**.<sup>614</sup>

**ANTI-RIGHTS ACTORS MAY ENJOY LACK OF TRANSPARENCY AND LEGAL LOOPHOLES, BUT THEIR FUNDING CAN AND HAS BEEN CHALLENGED**

Anti-rights actors may enjoy lack of transparency and legal loopholes, but their funding can and has been challenged. ADF previously received funding – in the region of \$1 million USD – through the sales of specialty license plates,<sup>615</sup> and through Amazon’s AmazonSmile online charitable giving program,<sup>616</sup> before the state of Arizona and Amazon removed the group from its programs after activist exposure and pressure.

## ADF: Global Expansion of the U.S. Christian Right ‘Legal Army’ \$21.3 million since 2008



Source: Figures are taken from publicly available US financial records of ADF from the years 2008-2018, as compiled by openDemocracy 50.50, and reported on at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/trump-us-christian-spending-global-revealed/>  
\* <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/alliance-defending-freedom>

### ADF's Funding of other Anti-rights Actors

As one of the key funders of anti-rights activities in Europe, in the years 2008 to 2018, according to openDemocracy, ADF transferred at least \$15,294,738 USD towards activities in Europe.<sup>617</sup> The group also reportedly provides a significant amount of funding towards anti-rights activities in other regions: it channeled at least \$3,220,427 USD into Canada and Mexico in this period;<sup>618</sup> \$352,144 USD into Central America and the Caribbean;<sup>619</sup> \$617,800 USD into South America;<sup>620</sup> \$12,600 USD into Russia and post-Soviet states;<sup>621</sup> \$46,300 USD into the Middle East and North Africa;<sup>622</sup> \$137,284 USD into East, West, Central, and Southern Africa;<sup>623</sup> \$1,497,303 USD into South Asia;<sup>624</sup> and \$159,955 USD into East Asia and the Pacific.<sup>625</sup>

A large proportion of its international spending is listed as “legal advocacy and training” services and “grants to foreign recipients,” as well as a number of grants labeled “cash scholarships for law school” for unnamed recipients. ADF has also provided donations to groups such as the Home School Foundation; Morality in Media; the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, which also focuses on anti-rights strategic litigation; and the Claremont Institute, an ultra-conservative think tank.<sup>626</sup>

## The Links Between Anti-trans Feminists and Christian Fundamentalists

– Inna Michaeli & Fenya Fischler  
AWID

In recent decades, feminist and transfeminist scholarship and activism have transformed and radically expanded society's understanding of gender and of the freedom to live in one's body and identity without violence and discrimination.<sup>627</sup>

Today, the human rights of transgender and gender non-conforming people are under threat – not only from fascists and fundamentalists opposed to gender equality and sexual rights overall, but also certain individuals and groups associated with feminism and women's rights. While the attacks on trans people and their rights in the name of feminism date to the late 1970s,<sup>628</sup> in recent years this discourse has gained traction, particularly in the UK, North America, and Australia, as well as in some countries in Latin America and Europe, and in international spaces.<sup>629</sup>

These actors question the very identity of trans people, present the rights of trans people as contradictory to the rights of cisgender women, and lobby against legislation that would secure their human rights. They are often part of campaigns that rely on sensationalism and fearmongering, and the harassment of trans people, particularly those who are in the public eye.

One core argument of this discourse is that women are oppressed on the basis of sex, not gender, hence some such feminists identifying themselves as “gender critical.” This argument disregards the complexity of what makes up gender identity and mimics the patriarchal reduction of women to biological reproductive functions. It ignores feminist scholarship on sex as *assigned* and as more complex and diverse in biological reality than a male/female binary. It also erases the diverse gendered and sexual identities found in many indigenous cultures and pre-colonial societies, obscuring the fact that masculinity/femininity are themselves colonial constructs.<sup>630</sup>

The situation in the United Kingdom is of particular note in terms of the destructive impact this trend can have. Though they tend to be relatively small in size, anti-trans feminist groups and public figures in the UK enjoy a disproportionate amount of media coverage and influence over public discourse and policy.<sup>631</sup>

Two clear recent examples of this are the reform process surrounding the Gender Recognition Act 2004 (GRA) and the December 2020 High Court decision concerning access to puberty blockers for trans youth. The proposed GRA reforms looked at simplifying the process through which trans people obtain Gender Recognition Certificates (GRC).<sup>632</sup> Conservative Christian actors and trans-exclusionary feminist groups represented the bulk of pushback to the GRA reforms.<sup>633</sup> The government ultimately decided not to go ahead with the proposed

reforms and implemented only small administrative changes. This was despite the results of the public consultation showing a strong majority in support of the reforms, the depathologization of the process, and self-identification for trans people.<sup>634</sup>

The December 2020 *Bell v Tavistock* case ruling has restricted the access of trans adolescents to puberty blockers, severely impacting the right to bodily autonomy for young trans people, as well as undermining the principle of consent and right to bodily autonomy for young people more broadly.<sup>635</sup> It is important to note that anti-trans lobby group Transgender Trend was invited to intervene in the case, while no trans-led organization was allowed to do so.<sup>636</sup> Transgender Trend is an organization claiming to have no religious or political affiliation, yet is organizing against the “harms of gender ideology for children and young people,”<sup>637</sup> a stance almost identical to religious fundamentalists.<sup>638</sup> The group is most well-known for distributing resource packs on trans issues to schools, which have been criticized as factually inaccurate and deeply damaging by the Director of Education and Youth of prominent LGBTQI charity Stonewall.<sup>639</sup> Furthermore, Dr. Paul Hruz was cited multiple times in the final judgement.<sup>640</sup> Dr Hruz is a paediatric diabetes specialist who has no expertise in transgender health.<sup>641</sup>

Anti-trans feminist discourses and actors have a two-fold connection to fundamentalist and far right forces, particularly the Christian Right, even though some of the actors

identify as liberal or Left. Firstly, they produce scholarship that lays the intellectual and cultural foundation on which fundamentalists and the far right build in order to advance anti-rights agendas.<sup>642</sup> Secondly, they form political alliances and coalitions to undermine and block progress on trans rights.

Such alliances are most visible in the United States. The conservative Heritage Foundation, which advocates against LGBTQI rights, hosted Julia Beck, a self-defined lesbian radical feminist<sup>643</sup> in January 2018, as well as members of Women’s Liberation Front, or WoLF.<sup>644</sup> WoLF also has connections with Focus on the Family, a fundamentalist Christian organization.<sup>645</sup> In 2017 Focus on the Family and WoLF sent a joint Amicus Brief<sup>646</sup> to the Supreme Court intervening in a case about a transgender student wanting to access bathrooms matching his gender identity. WoLF’s board member Kara Dansky also received \$15,000 USD in funding from ADF.<sup>647</sup>

Another example is Hands Across the Aisle which brings together women who identify as radical feminists with conservative Christians who openly advocate against LGBTQI rights around their common goal to fight against what they term “gender ideology.”<sup>648</sup> Similarly to WoLF, Hands Across the Aisle submitted an Amicus Brief in a different case concerning access to bathrooms.<sup>649</sup> These examples are not an exception, and the alliances between women who identify as feminists and fundamentalist anti-rights actors are a concerning trend to monitor and watch out for.

## Let's Map the Landscape

### Question

In this chapter, and in the first OURs Trends Report, *Rights at Risk*, we shared detailed information about key anti-rights actors operating in global spaces.

- What does the mapping of anti-rights actors reveal? How could you use this information to strengthen your responses to anti-rights agendas in your context?
- Who are the main anti-rights actors in your context? Are some of them the same as the actors in these two reports, or are they working with them? What are their strategies?

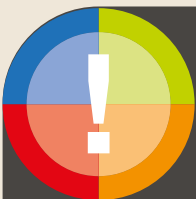


### Resources

Check out the amazing tools at [LittleSis.org](https://littlesis.org) if you are interested in doing more comprehensive mapping of the anti-rights actors in your context.



### We want to hear what you found out!



Please share your reflections with us at [rightsatrisk@awid.org](mailto:rightsatrisk@awid.org) or via OURs members' social media platforms using **#RightsAtRisk**



## Movement Resistance Stories

### Catolicadas, a Powerful Communication Tool to Promote Gender Equality and Sexual and Reproductive Rights

– Lola Guerra and Paula Sánchez-Mejorada  
CDD-Mexico

In 2012, Catholics for the Right to Decide – Mexico (CDD – Mexico) created a new communication methodology based on storytelling called *Catolicadas*. *Catolicadas* is an animated series which aims to promote reflection and social debate around ethical dilemmas faced by Catholic parishioners – especially young people – from a feminist, human rights, and secular ethics perspective. **Through cartoons, *Catolicadas* presents short stories using simple language and a touch of humour.** The series centres around two main characters: Sister Juana, a progressive nun, and Father Beto, a conservative priest.

*Catolicadas* has been broadcast on social networks since 2012 and, as of the end of 2019, its 113 episodes had **more than five million complete views on CDD's YouTube channel** and its Facebook page had more than 350,000 followers. On both platforms, young people between the ages of 13 and 24 make up half of the audience.

CDD's experience shows the transformative value in building narratives based on faith. Taking up feminist theology and liberating

interpretations helps redefine the value and role of women, LGBTQI people, as well as the body, sexuality, and choices about whether or not to become a parent. From this perspective, *Catolicadas* has been a powerful tool to dispute and deconstruct the messages conservative groups attribute to concepts such as family, life, sex education, and sexual orientation. **It also promotes a liberating, pluralistic, and inclusive vision of the Catholic religion and spirituality.**

Strategic research and systematic evaluation of *Catolicadas*, throughout its 10 seasons, have allowed CDD-Mexico to recognize the diversity of audiences and identify their needs in order to develop appropriate content for each. It also demonstrates the effect their messages have had on the beliefs, values, attitudes and practices of the series' followers.

The data obtained from the last evaluation of *Catolicadas* (2019) shows that because of the series, 78 percent of respondents, identify with the message "God loves us equally regardless of sexual orientation"; 70 percent state that they have defended a person from the LGBTQI community who was being discriminated against; 57 percent stopped participating in Church-organized activities against abortion or same-sex marriage; 53 percent decided to use contraception to have safer sex; and 53 percent now recognize that the Church cannot discriminate against anyone because of what they think, express, and decide.

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