

Future Proofing:

The Professionalization of an Anti-Rights Youth Generation



Image: Protesters at the anti-abortion March for Life, Washington, DC (2019). Tessa Rampersad.

Executive Summary

Anti-rights actors have long understood that young people are key to consolidating power. For decades, conservative movements have invested in young people to advance their political agendas—particularly against sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and LGBTQI+ rights. These efforts have produced new generations of politically engaged, well-networked youth leaders who are today responsible for driving much of the anti-rights movement, from the national to the global level.

Conservative youth networks, and the powerbrokers who support them, are a sophisticated, coordinated force intent on future-proofing the anti-rights movement and shaping social and political landscapes with damaging ramifications for human rights and democratic frameworks.

To effectively counter this formidable block of anti-rights youth movements, progressive actors must not only understand this long-term strategy built by conservative and regressive movements but how it continues to evolve and broaden influence and appeal among young people. The report, *Future-Proofing: The Professionalization of an Anti-Rights Youth Generation*, examines the recruitment, funding, coordination, and mobilization of young people within anti-rights movements.

It provides a historical analysis of youth mobilization strategies used to entrench conservative ideals among younger generations and drive policy change not only domestically but also in international and regional human rights spaces. Much of today's global anti-rights youth organizing is rooted in US-based models developed by evangelical and church-based networks during the mid-20th century, particularly around anti-abortion activism. These models have since broadened their focus beyond abortion and have adapted and integrated broader conservative policies into educational institutions, legal societies, religious networks, and youth-led political organizations operating transnationally.

Key findings

Using examples from the United States, Europe, Latin America, and Sub-Saharan Africa, the 80 page report documents how anti-rights individuals, organizations, political parties, and billionaire donors have successfully scaled these strategies, with grave implications for universal human rights. To show how the professionalization of young people has evolved from local student groups to the halls of power, the report draws on primary sources, secondary literature, and open-source intelligence, with research conducted between June and September 2025.

Our findings

Ideological youth recruitment models have a long history

Youth recruitment models rooted in US mid-20th century organizing, have gone global, targeting schools and universities to indoctrinate young people, largely through anti-abortion mobilizing efforts, like marches and student associations, that serve as ideological training grounds, and prepare them to lead as future advocates, politicians, influencers, and leaders.

Conservative legal societies build professional networks

Conservative legal societies groom students for careers in law, politics, and media, providing support through educational and political infrastructures.

Right-wing billionaires and think tanks play the long game

Right-wing billionaires and think tanks are investing in schools, curricula, and training programs to shape future conservative leadership and channel anti-rights youth to positions of power.

Anti-rights groups invest in youth training

Anti-rights groups invest in youth training for legal advocacy, communications, and policy to influence regional and global human rights bodies, including at the United Nations, the European Union, and the Organization of American States.

Social media-savvy far-right youth leaders are gaining ground

Social media-savvy far-right youth leaders from countries like Brazil, the United States, and France are national figureheads who broadcast their anti-rights worldviews to millions of followers.

Far-right narratives are amplified by anti-rights youth influencers

Far-right narratives are amplified by other anti rights youth influencers and digital platforms that glamorize conservative youth leaders and target disillusioned young people—including young men through the ‘manosphere’ and young women through the ‘womanosphere’—with curated messaging and disinformation in online spaces that are anti-feminist, misogynistic and promote harmful gender roles.

Youth anti-rights and far-right individuals and groups are highly networked

Youth anti-rights individuals and groups are highly networked through established anti-rights organizations and far-right parties in transnational spaces, rightwing conferences, and coordinated events from Europe and Latin America to the United States and Africa.

Conclusions

By building pipelines through education, legal training, political mentorship and organizing, young leaders are positioned to shape public discourse, influence legislation, and normalize far-right ideologies.

These efforts are reinforced by right-wing media ecosystems and amplified by far-right influencers on social media. Ironically, the movement simultaneously recruits youth while dismantling their own rights. This is particularly the case for rights related to SRHR, bodily autonomy, gender equality and access to information. It is often done under the guise of “parental rights” to attack public education systems and reshape both curricula and the minds of children and young people.

The anti-rights movement excels in cultivating intergenerational continuity through recruiting and training the next generation of leaders and disciples. This moment is ripe for the reception of anti-rights narratives, particularly online, as they resonate with young people who feel alienated or underserved by existing systems.

By contrast, many progressive movements do not have long-term strategies or investment in young people, youth development or youth organizing, and instead engage in short-term action, responding to political and funding crises. Progressive and rights-based actors must adapt. They must rethink tactics, strengthen alliances and support youth leadership to future-proof progressive, human rights-centered movements to ensure future generations inherit a world that values rights, dignity, equality and justice for all.

Key recommendations

This crisis requires deliberate responses that include planning beyond short-term policy wins. It demands intentional investment in youth-led leadership, infrastructures of care, and intergenerational solidarity to ensure that human rights advocacy remains resilient, inclusive, and visionary in the face of organized and increasingly younger opposition.

With the support and input from young human rights activists, the report makes the following recommendations:

- ▶ Invest in youth-led movement building and leadership pipelines.
- ▶ Monitor anti-rights legal advocacy networks.
- ▶ Support alternative narratives and inclusive spaces.
- ▶ Enhance digital counter-messaging strategies for youth.
- ▶ Foster progressive interfaith and ecumenical alliances to counter religious extremist ideology.
- ▶ Defend democratic norms through international coordination and accountability.
- ▶ Fund education and media literacy programs that foster critical thinking
- ▶ Halt public funding to anti-rights youth organizations that contravene human rights frameworks.

- ▶ Maintain long-term engagement and support to youth organizing.
- ▶ Protect youth human rights defenders from legal, online, and physical reprisals.

Progressive forces must urgently reconsider how they meaningfully engage and support youth leadership—not as a symbolic and tokenistic gesture but as a foundational strategy. It further necessitates a critical reflection on existing strategies at a time when younger generations are aligning with and finding a ‘home’ among anti-rights organizations and networks. Commitments and actions must be coordinated across geographies and issue-areas as the expansion of anti-rights youth is occurring alongside the shrinking of civil society space and funding globally. Without long-term, intergenerational investment, the risk of losing ground on gender justice, SRHR, and democratic values will only intensify.



To explore the full findings and recommendations, scan the QR code to access the report.



Image: People attending the March for Life rally, Dublin, Ireland (2018). Flickr.