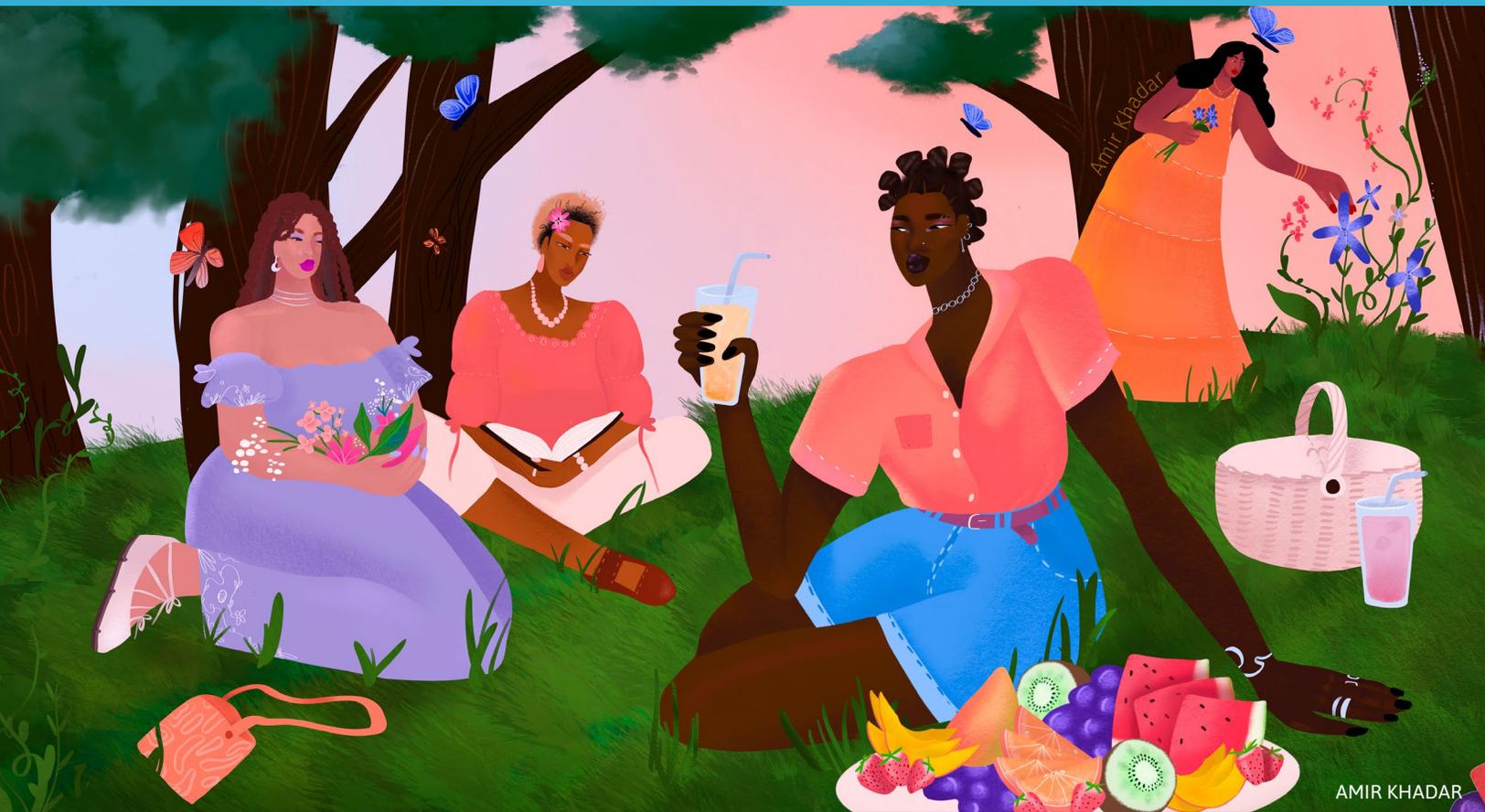


# Toward Care and Bodily Autonomy: Forward Together's Cultural Strategy and Movement Building Approach



*Progressive social movements do not simply produce statistics and narratives of oppression; rather, the best ones do what great poetry often does: transport us to another place, compel us to relive horrors and, more importantly, enable us to imagine a new society.*

— ROBIN D. G. KELLEY, FREEDOM DREAMS: THE BLACK RADICAL IMAGINATION

## WHO WE ARE



AMIR KHADAR IN COLLABORATION WITH BLACK ALLIANCE FOR JUST IMMIGRATION

Forward Together is a national reproductive justice organization that centers peoples, families, and communities who experience reproductive oppression. We prioritize queer, trans, Black, Indigenous, and other peoples of color. We utilize a cultural strategy to shift the ways we think about family and build movements grounded in our lived experiences, histories, theories and struggles for reproductive justice.

We know the transformations our communities need don't begin or end with electoral cycles and legislative sessions. Forward Together's 2023–2028 strategic plan marks the growth of our cultural strategy and movement building work—because culture is power, and **“social movements pull politicians and political movements toward them, not the other way around.”**<sup>1</sup>

# WHAT THE RIGHT KNOWS

## Three faces of power

Legislative attacks against [reproductive freedom](#)<sup>2</sup> and [trans and queer people](#)<sup>3</sup> are hallmarks of a larger conservative worldview and movement—one progressives will never defeat if focused on any single issue or strategy. Opposition to reproductive, sexual, and gender rights are fundamental to authoritarian politics around the world; in the United States, the attacks are coordinated by the [same organizations](#),<sup>4</sup> and their toolbox includes more than legislation. Movement coalitions and cultural institutions—from media to education to religious organizations—help solidify reactionary views into policy. While the right has robust strategies for [all three faces of power](#),<sup>5</sup> progressive funding primarily flows toward electoral and policy fights. Without attention to the cultural and movement-building factors shaping our crisis, we'll fail to sustain any long-term wins toward care and bodily autonomy for all.

In the United States, the Christian right, white nationalists, and the libertarian right have formed [a coalition](#)<sup>6</sup> to protect minority power through the politics of fear and resentment. Protecting a way of life informed by [dominionism](#),<sup>7</sup> supremacy, and extractive economics, these forces have mobilized millions around anti-abortion,



anti-trans, anti-queer, anti-migrant, anti-Black sentiment and more. They've gained [new allies](#),<sup>8</sup> and through powerful cultural strategies, their sentiments become the very air we breathe, with [inflammatory rhetoric](#)<sup>9</sup> and [misinformation](#)<sup>10</sup> dominating the [mainstream](#)<sup>11</sup> and permeating our progressive movements. Named enemies in their [culture war](#),<sup>12</sup> our communities languish without the rights, resources, and protection we need. Forced into crises and wedged apart, our movements splinter, stuck in perpetual defense.

## RECASTING THE FAMILY

One of the most potent symbols and cultural practices of the far-right is the nuclear family. Focus on the Family, the Family Research Council, and the Family Policy Alliance are prominent organizations within the Christian right **leading both anti-abortion and anti-trans campaigns**.<sup>13</sup> This symbol, touted as the model of stability and care, is used to destabilize and deny care to those who refuse its frame. Beyond its reproduction of patriarchal domination, cisheterosexism, and adultism, “traditional family values” as implied by the right encourages a privatization, individualism, and order that’s at odds with a truly democratic society.

Those who fall outside of the nuclear family system are cast as failures and deviants—trans and queer people, single parents, unmarried adults, adults without children, non-biological care relationships, non-monogamous people, and more. And practices that bypass a cultural obligation to perform static, binary gender roles related to care and reproduction—from valuing domestic labor to abortion and trans healthcare—become battle zones.

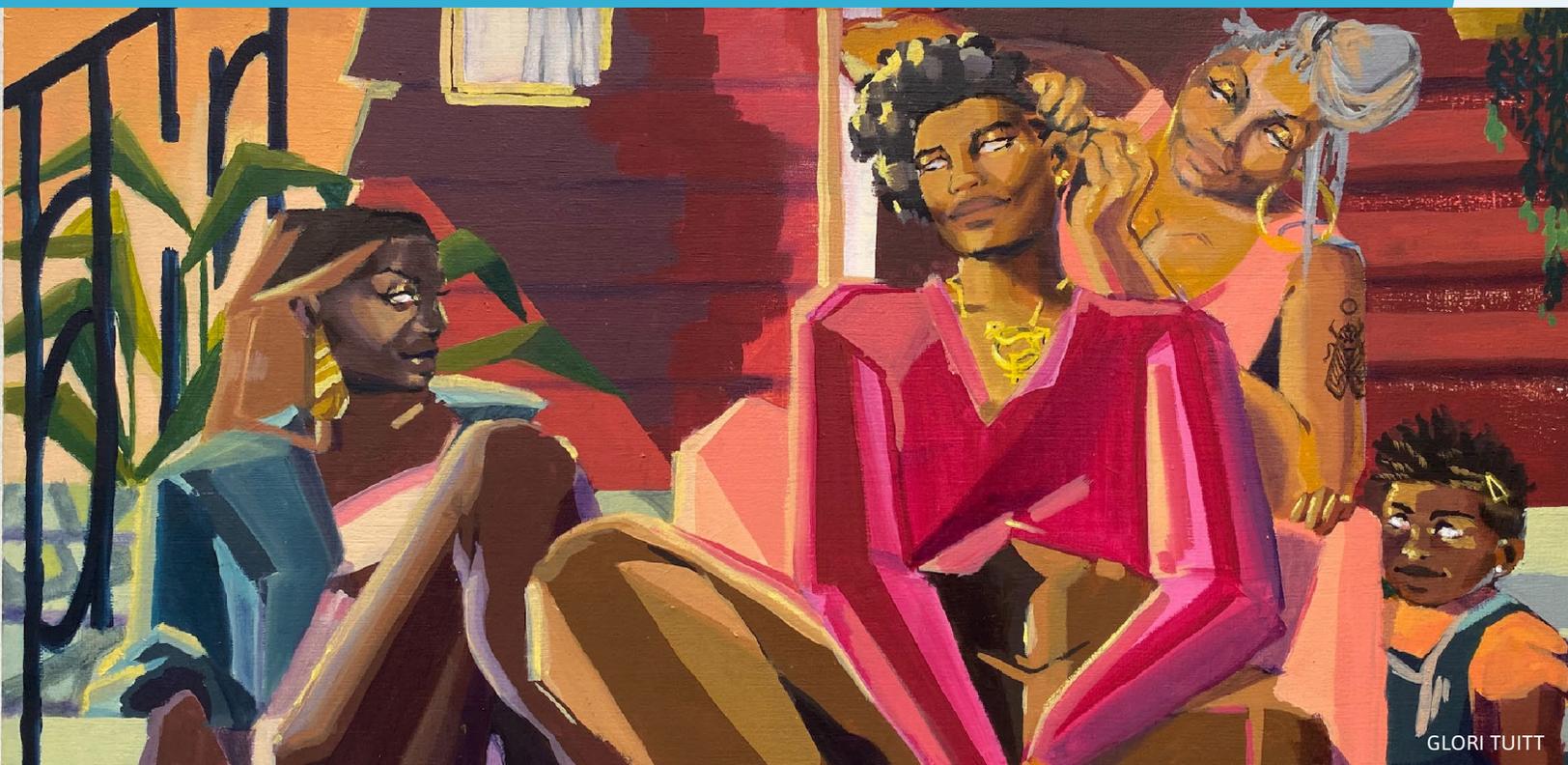
Support for elders, children, and women falls short in nuclear families without independent wealth. It’s not enough to hold our care



needs, and it fails even those who believe in its sanctity—but it still holds a critical weight in dominant worldviews, movements, and policies. While there’s a growing **cultural skepticism**<sup>14</sup> around this particular family formation, there are limited rights, resources, and shared imagination for alternate care structures—despite their existence across time and cultures.

Combating shame, stigma, and misinformation around our various family formations—while building practices that support their continued creation and protection—becomes a critical intervention in the fight for reproductive freedom and trans and queer liberation.

# TOWARDS A CULTURE OF CARE



GLORI TUITT

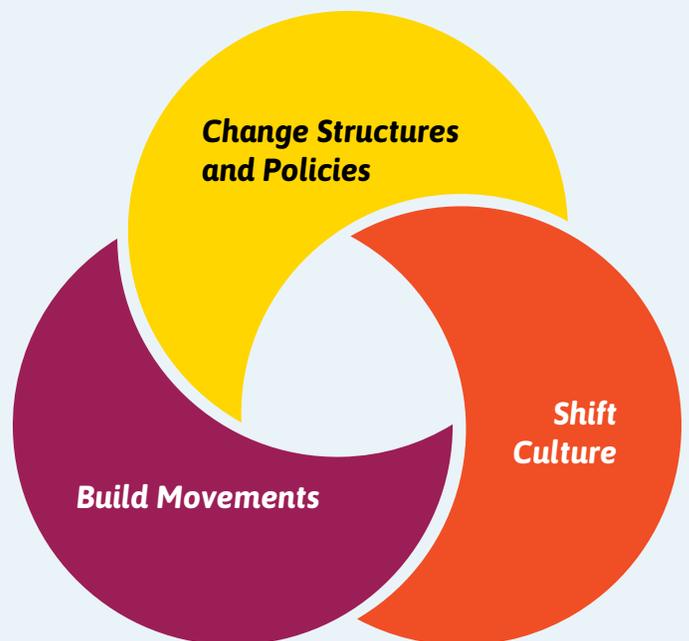
We live in a culture of domination, otherness, individualism, and extraction. What would it take to build a culture of bodily autonomy, belonging, interdependence and care? As the Haas Institute shares in their report [Notes on a Cultural Strategy for Belonging](#),<sup>15</sup> “Shifts in worldview are not enough alone, because these shifts will not be sticky unless also reflected in economic, political, and social changes.” The primary objective is not to win the culture war, but to unravel stories full of misinformation and fear, share a more compelling vision of the future, identify solutions that meet people’s material needs, and build the power to make them real for everyone.

This is long-term work dedicated to protecting those most often cut out of short-term political plays and legislative protections. We need an entire ecosystem of changemakers to tackle today’s barriers to reproductive freedom and trans and queer liberation. Grounded in a long-term commitment to trans and queer reproductive liberation, and with the family as our frame, Forward Together will spend the next five years developing a cultural and movement building strategy for care and bodily autonomy. We aim to create resources, frameworks, and relationship-building opportunities that will directly support LGBTQ families while growing a multi-issue, multi-strategy network committed to their protection.

# OUR APPROACH



Forward Together has always harnessed the power of culture to build courage, create connections, and make change—from our work on family definition with Family Values @ Work and the [Family Justice Network](#)<sup>16</sup> to our [Mamas Day and TDOR projects](#);<sup>17</sup> from our [critical media](#)<sup>18</sup> and [education](#)<sup>19</sup> interventions to our [groundbreaking thought leadership](#).<sup>20</sup> This work is part of our DNA—and it's never been more necessary. As anti-abortion and anti-trans wedges threaten to split reproductive justice and LGBTQ movements, our approach can create greater solidarity, bring in more people power, and lift up solutions for and by those most marginalized.



## OUR APPROACH CONTINUED

### **We shift culture.**

We transform shared beliefs and practices around family, care, and bodily autonomy. By collaborating deeply with cultural workers—artists, storytellers, educators, and more—we create meaningful opportunities for individuals to connect, learn, imagine new futures, and act toward building them together. Through visionary projects like Trans Day of Resilience focused on iteration, shareability, grassroots activation, strategic dissemination and memorable experiences, we create the cultural conditions for long-term change.

### **We build movements.**

We grow the people-power of our movements by activating individuals, weaving them into our networks, and strengthening connections between organizations. We build across strategies and issue areas, creating opportunities for collaboration and shared learning while lifting up the leadership of cultural workers. We incubate new projects and organizations—from comprehensive healthcare clinics in New Mexico and Oregon to the birth-worker led Queerception—to build movement infrastructure.

### **We change structures and policies.**

We support structures and policies that remove barriers, advance bodily autonomy, and increase care for trans and queer people experiencing reproductive oppression. With our network of leaders, organizations, and cultural workers, we identify proactive policies, candidates, campaigns, and other structural and cultural interventions to make through both our C3 and C4. In New Mexico, we have passed reproductive healthcare and healthcare for all policies while supporting candidates and campaigns that secure bodily autonomy and access to care.

## MORE RESOURCES

- [Reimagining the World: An Introduction to Forward Together's Cultural Strategy](#)<sup>21</sup>
- [How to Reimagine the World: Collaborative Principles for Artists and Social Justice Organizations](#)<sup>22</sup>

# Endnotes

1. Chip Berlet, "Social movements need an infrastructure to survive," Political Research Associates, November 14, 2016. <https://politicalresearch.org/2016/11/14/social-movements-need-an-infrastructure-to-survive>.
2. Guttmacher Institute, "State Legislation Tracker: Major Developments in Sexual & Reproductive Health," July 15, 2023. <https://www.guttmacher.org/state-legislation-tracker>.
3. Alexandra Martinez, "Republicans have introduced over 120 anti-LGBTQIA+ bills in the new year," Prism, February 6th, 2023. <https://prismreports.org/2023/02/06/republicans-introduced-120-anti-lgbtq-bills-january>.
4. Amy Littlefield and Heron Greenesmith, "Fresh Off Victory Against Roe, the Religious Right Is Pushing a Record Number of Anti-Trans Bills," The Nation, January 31, 2023. <https://www.thenation.com/article/society/transgender-abortion-rights-attacks>.
5. Richard Healey and Sandra Hinson, "Three Faces of Power," Grassroots Policy Project, November 14, 2016. [https://grassrootspowerproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/2\\_GPP\\_3FacesOfPower.pdf](https://grassrootspowerproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/2_GPP_3FacesOfPower.pdf).
6. Political Research Associates, "Embodying White Christian Supremacy: From Deputizing Citizens to Flying the Blue Lives Matter Flag," February 3, 2023. <https://politicalresearch.org/2023/02/03/embodying-white-christian-supremacy-deputizing-citizens-flying-blue-lives-matter-flag>.
7. Frederick Clarkson, "101: Dominionism," Political Research Associates, November 4, 2022. <https://politicalresearch.org/2022/11/04/101-dominionism>.
8. Katelyn Burns, "The rise of anti-trans "radical" feminists, explained," Vox, September 5, 2019. <https://www.vox.com/identities/2019/9/5/20840101/terfs-radical-feminists-gender-critical>.
9. Ishena Robinson, "How woke went from black to bad," Legal Defense Fund, August 26, 2022. <https://www.naacpldf.org/woke-black-bad>.
10. Center for Countering Digital Hate and Human Rights Campaign, "Digital Hate: Social Media's Role In Amplifying Dangerous Lies About LGBTQ+ People," November 14, 2016. <https://hrc-prod-requests.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/CCDH-HRC-Digital-Hate-Report-2022-single-pages.pdf>.
11. New York Times, "Nearly 1,000 contributors protest New York Times' coverage of trans people," February 18, 2023. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/feb/17/new-york-times-contributors-open-letter-protest-anti-trans-coverage>.
12. Independent Media Institute, "Behold, the New GOP Culture Wars," April 2, 2023. <https://www.pressenza.com/2023/02/behold-the-new-gop-culture-wars>.
13. Amy Littlefield and Heron Greenesmith, "Fresh Off Victory Against Roe, the Religious Right Is Pushing a Record Number of Anti-Trans Bills," The Nation, January 31, 2023. <https://www.thenation.com/article/society/transgender-abortion-rights-attacks>.
14. David Brooks, "The nuclear family was a mistake," The Atlantic, March 2020. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/03/the-nuclear-family-was-a-mistake/605536>.
15. Evan Bissell, "Notes on a Cultural Strategy for Belonging," Othering and Belonging Institute, October 23, 2019. <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/notesonaculturalstrategy>.
16. A Better Balance, Family Values @ Work, Forward Together and 9to5, "Recognizing All Families to Expand Our Movements: Insights from the Family Justice Network." <https://forwardtogether.org/tools/recognizing-all-families-to-expand-our-movements>.
17. Forward Together, "Art as Power." <https://forwardtogether.org/programs/art-as-power>.
18. Forward Together, "Reproductive Justice Media Reference Guide." <https://forwardtogether.org/tools/rj-media-guide-2014>.
19. Forward Together, "A new vision for advancing our movement for reproductive health, reproductive rights and reproductive justice," 2005. <https://forwardtogether.org/tools/a-new-vision>.
20. Sex Ed the City: More than Just Protection, "Let's Get On It: Oakland's Youth New Vision for Sex Ed." <https://forwardtogether.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Lets-Get-It-On-Summary.pdf>.
21. Forward Together, "Reimagining the World: An Introduction to Forward Together's Cultural Strategy," 2020. <https://app.box.com/file/671647310173?s=aw6cem0e4a728g50e6l1fxzs1iexnu3g>.
22. Micah Bazant, Forward Together, and Culture Strike, "How to Reimagine the World: Collaboration Principles for Artists & Social Justice Organizers." <https://forwardtogether.org/tools/how-to-reimagine-the-world>.