LARGER US

CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF BIBLE & VIOLENCE

BETTER STORY

Christianity and the Far Right in the UK

A strategy paper for funders

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Foreword

The rate of change in our political scene over the last few years has been dizzying. As someone who has been studying the use of Christian symbols and imagery by political movements on the far right (definition in the report below) for just four years, I've felt this acutely. When I started working in this field in 2022, most people were telling me 'this isn't an issue in our country'. Today we are seeing paramilitary-styled vigilantes on our streets chanting 'Christ is King'.

The British church's response to the issue, especially since the 2025 Unite the Kingdom rally, has been extraordinary, resembling the sort of rapid pivot and creativity that we saw during the Covid years. This response has come from church leaders, theologians, sociologists, activists, community organisers, interfaith practitioners, and many more. Initiatives have been local, national and polycentric. But the combination of a rapidly changing scene and a rapidly-emerging and highly organic set of responses means that it can be hard to get a good overview of what is happening and where the points of challenge are.

And this is why I welcome the publication of two significant reports this month. Just a few days ago at the time of writing, the think tank Theos published the first analysis from its multi-year research project.[1] Theos surveyed 1,765 people in the United Kingdom, and used Latent Class Analysis to map the range of opinions on 'Britishness' and 'Christianity' in British society.

Almost simultaneously, Larger Us and Better Story have produced this extremely valuable piece of qualitative analysis, which emerges from in-depth interviews with practitioners and theorists who are working in these areas. What we have here represents the consolidated wisdom from a wide range of expert perspectives. As I read the report, I could detect echoes of my own voice, and at the same time, could hear ideas that I wouldn't have considered and perspectives that I couldn't have seen.

The presence of paramilitary-styled vigilantes on our streets suggests that the issue isn't going away any time soon. We will continue to need all our collective wisdom, ingenuity, and experience to meet the moment. I thank God for his Spirit who is brooding over our churning chaos, and for the evidence of his work in this report. I commend it for a wide readership.

Helen Paynter

Executive Director, Centre for the Study of Bible and Violence

1 – Spencer N. and Huang Y. (2026), Beyond "Christian nationalism": Measuring attitudes to Christianity and Britishness today. London: Theos. Available at https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/cmsfiles/Beyond-Christian-Nationalism.pdf

Executive Summary

The far right has been gaining ground across Britain for several years, and funders working to counter it have grown increasingly concerned about the sources of its energy and organisation. One thread within that picture that has drawn particular attention is the use of Christian symbols, language and identity by parts of the far right.

Prayers and Christian imagery featured prominently at the Unite the Kingdom rally in September 2025; Reform UK and Restore Britain have increasingly drawn on the language of Christian heritage; and recent protests in Dover and Portsmouth have seen men chanting “Christ is King” and wearing t-shirts with the same slogan alongside explicitly nationalist and anti-migrant messages. Whether this represents a deep or a shallow phenomenon, and how seriously funders working against the far right should take it, has become a live and largely unanswered question.

This paper is about how funders can make sense of what is happening, and what they can do about it.

There is already valuable work responding to this trend, in areas including bridge-building, community organising, and theological pushback - but it is scattered, small-scale, and chronically underfunded relative to the scale of what it faces. This raises the question for funders already investing in countering the far right of whether more should be directed specifically at this strand - and if so, where.

This project exists because of a chicken-and-egg problem underlying that question. Funders will not scale up funding to counter Christian engagement with the far right without a map of who is doing what, what is working and where the gaps are. But at the same time, nobody working in the space has the time or resources to produce that map for them. This paper hence tries to set out a first sketch of that map, with uncertainties highlighted rather than smoothed over.

Methodology

Between July and September 2026, Larger Us and Better Story conducted around thirty in-depth and anonymous interviews with researchers, theologians, community organisers, funders, journalists, and leaders at both denominational and grassroots level, alongside a scoping convening in July and a review of published and grey literature.

Terminology

We use "far right" in the political scientist Cas Mudde's sense, as an umbrella term covering both the radical right (which works within democracy while opposing core liberal-democratic norms such as minority rights) and the extreme right (which rejects democracy itself).[2] On that definition, the UK far right spans actors with very different relationships to democracy and to one another: Reform UK, a populist radical right party with a mass electorate; smaller parties still further to its right, such as Restore Britain and UKIP; and street mobilisations such as Unite the Kingdom and Raise the Colours, which bring together organised far right activists and many others. Placing a party or movement on the far right is not the same as saying that everyone who votes for it or turns up at its events is far right, and many are not. We do not treat these actors as a single bloc.



Throughout this paper, "the Christianised far right" refers to the whole overlap between Christianity and far right politics we investigated, across all four of the forms set out below (Conviction, Christianism, Convenience, and Cultural). We reserve "Christian nationalism" for the “Conviction” strand specifically - genuine theological commitment that produces a nationalist political theology - since using it more loosely would blur a distinction that we think is key to understanding the phenomenon as a whole.

2 – See Mudde C. (2019). *The Far Right Today*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Key takeaways

Diagnosis

The overlap between Christianity and the far right in the UK is real, visible - and mostly not happening in churches. It is extra-congregational and opportunistic at its base, and theologically grounded only within a small (and currently fringe) strand that we call Conviction (see below), found mostly among leaders.

While it is connected to the United States at elite level, these links are much less significant at the level of congregational infrastructure, given that Britain lacks the network of primed congregations that helped to make American Christian nationalism so potent. Nationally, identifying as Christian in survey data predicts surprisingly little about someone's views on Islam and immigration beyond the population average, and regular practice appears if anything to be protective; to the extent that the phenomenon does exist in churches, it concentrates sharply within specific independent congregations and breakaway Anglican churches.

While all of this makes for a measured assessment now, it is also an argument for acting before it changes. And it means churches are unusually well placed to respond: present in every community, able to speak to the losses underneath the grievance, and positioned to bring together people who currently see each other as opponents.

(Note: This analysis is England-weighted. Scottish and Northern Irish dynamics differ in important ways, which we note where possible, and we found no interview material bearing specifically on Wales.)

Trajectory

Right now, the wider far right is fracturing rather than consolidating: the split between Reform UK and Restore has made it more extreme at the edges but less coherent overall. One well-placed interviewee asked whether we had passed the 'peak' of the Christianised far right, before answering his own question by pointing at recent street mobilisations. A useful early-warning indicator we heard is whether a recognised, mainstream evangelical or denominational figure ever breaks ranks toward the movement. That has not yet happened, and the interviewee who suggested it treated it as the threshold that would change his own assessment of how serious this is.

Scale

The overlap between Christian identity and far right support is broad, but we found little evidence that Christianity is doing the driving. Several of the best-placed people we interviewed see Christianity itself as a relatively minor driver of the far right, with Islamophobia the more significant one. On this view, Christian language and symbols mostly legitimate anti-Muslim sentiment, rather than that sentiment originating in Christian doctrine: the "them" has long been defined as a Muslim religious other, and now the "us" is being defined in religious terms too. We think the minor-driver view is probably right today, but it might be wrong within five years, and we argue below why a modest, well-targeted bet is justified anyway.

Response

Interfaith solidarity is our highest-confidence finding, but not our top recommended funding priority: we think organising and bridge-building should come first, since they address root causes more directly and don't carry interfaith's reach problem with the more conservative constituencies this paper argues are most important to reach.

The order of the workstreams below reflects how they're discussed in the paper, not how we'd prioritise funding them; each workstream section opens with our view of its priority.

- **Election-facing work** attracted the most caution from the people we consulted.
- **Bridge-building and community organising** have credible delivery partners who are chronically underfunded, and are our two top priorities.
- **Interfaith solidarity** emerged as a high-potential area for work, but also one that's currently under-resourced (especially in terms of national-level connective tissue).
- **Narrative work** arguably has a poor track record on impact, but there is a clear investable proposition in building messenger infrastructure over several years.
- **Building a leadership pipeline** is a high-potential blank space where almost nothing exists.
- **Congregational formation** addresses a different problem entirely: work in and with ordinary, sincerely believing congregations in traditions with pre-existing theological susceptibility, currently almost entirely unfunded.

Funding

Interviewees were split between those who see a modest threat and those who see an unusual opportunity. Our own view is that a modest, well-targeted investment is justified, concentrated on organising and bridge-building, interfaith infrastructure and a messenger programme.

Part 1:
Diagnosis



A quick typology of the Christianised far right

Most interviewees with a diagnostic view recognised some version of the same underlying categorisation within the Christianised far right, which we tested with them as we went.

Four forms of the Christianised far-right

Conviction
Sincere faith, nationalist politics
1

Christianism
Zeal around a hollowed-out faith
2

Convenience
Christian language as cover
3

4 Cultural
"Christian" as shorthand for Britain as it was

We use 'Christian nationalism' only for Conviction.

1 Conviction

Committed Christians who reach positions of exclusionary nationalism from a theological starting point: working within the Christian tradition and drawing seriously on scripture, even where their theology is far from mainstream and their politics objectionable. One researcher who has interviewed most of the significant UK figures regards many of them as sincere, committed believers: you don't have to agree with them to recognise that they mean it.

2 Christianism

A smaller, more intense phenomenon: genuine zeal and energising belief, heavy use of scripture, imagery and ritual, but organised around a version of the faith whose ethical core, in one anti-extremism researcher's words, has been "hollowed out", replaced with power politics and a militant, "muscular" Christianity.

3 Convenience

People who are not meaningfully Christian at all but use Christian language to launder positions that are otherwise straightforwardly exclusionary or Islamophobic. Convenience also describes a way of using Christian language as a marker of national identity and opposition to Islam, rather than as something flowing from any evident theological commitment.

4 Cultural

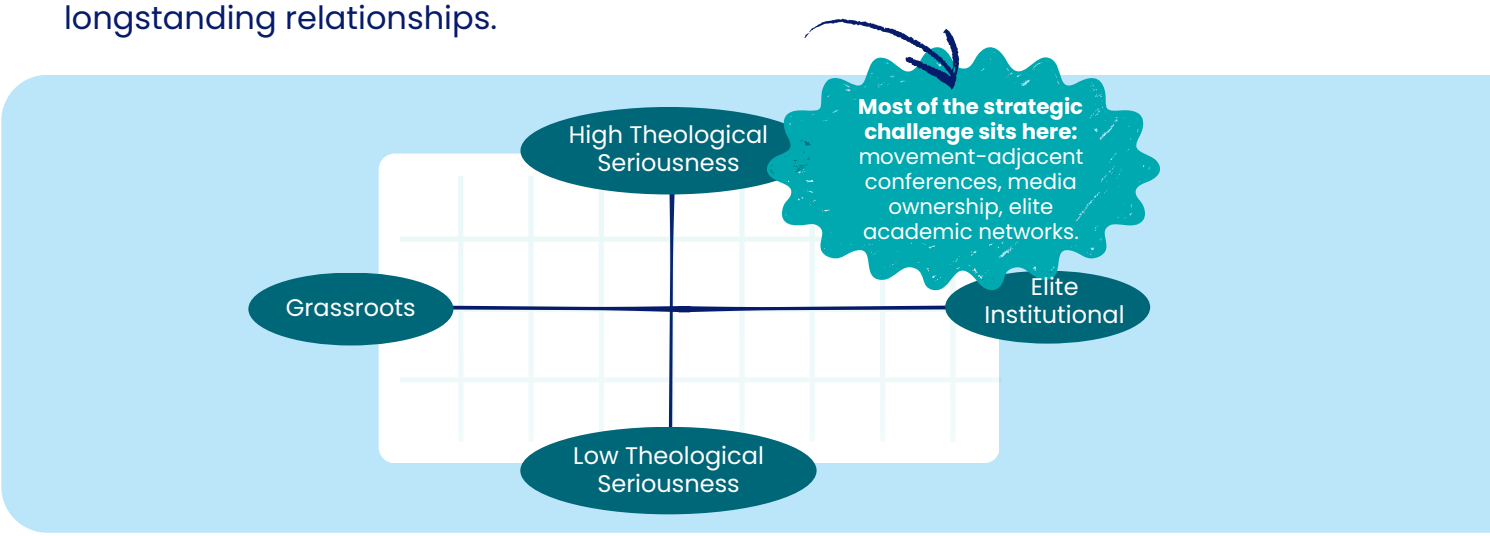
By far the largest group. Not especially observant; motivated by nostalgic attachment; reaching for "Christian" as shorthand for 'Britain as it used to be', heavily inflected by whiteness. (Analysis of the 2001 Census suggested that many people ticked “Christian” partly as an assertion of identity in the face of anxiety about immigration and political Islam: in effect, a way of saying “I’m not Muslim”.)[3]

While Convenience and Cultural overlap with each other, they are also different: Cultural attachment is a mass phenomenon and mostly not cynical, while Convenience is a mode of political speech, deployed by elite tacticians and thereafter available to anyone in a crowd. Comments under online content about faith-based responses to the far right give ordinary grassroots examples of this, such as people reaching for "the Christian mandate to get Islam out of the country" or replacement narratives in ways that are Convenience, not Conviction, despite coming from people who are not in leadership roles. **Conviction is more consistently a trait of leaders; Convenience shows up at every level.**

Cultural attachment matters too because of its scale: it can be the soil in which the other three forms grow. Nor is it confined to people outside churches. Recent survey research published by Theos found that even the group most attached to Christianity as national heritage attends church weekly at slightly above the national average (13%, against 11%).[4] We suspect, though our evidence cannot measure it, that the overlap between Cultural Christianity and ordinary congregations is significant, perhaps especially in mainly white Church of England parishes. This does not contradict the finding below that the phenomenon is mostly not happening in churches: in the pews, Cultural attachment is largely latent rather than mobilised, which is why congregational formation matters (see workstream 7).

3 – Bruce S. and Voas D. (2004), “The 2001 Census and Christian identification in Britain”, *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 19(1): 23-28.
4 – Spencer N. and Huang Y. (2026), op.cit.

Crossing high versus low theological seriousness against elite-institutional versus grassroots produces a useful 2x2 grid. Most of the strategic challenge lives in one quadrant: theologically serious and institutionally powerful, where high-prestige conferences, major media proprietors and elite academic networks sit, and where many mainstream Christian organisations have longstanding relationships.



This is mostly not happening in churches

This conclusion was independently supported by multiple different experts we spoke to:

- **Anti-extremism researchers** describe engagement at rallies as surface-level, denominationally indifferent, and openly hostile to mainstream religious institutions including the Church of England (hence "Christ is King" placards carried by people who are not part of church communities).
- **A theologian researching Christian involvement in the far right** argues that the most overt promotion is happening outside churches, largely online, through influencers and platforms that monetise the content. (The same theologian adds that churches bear some responsibility for a sometimes comfortable, individualistic faith that can leave people poorly equipped to recognise or resist these ideas when they arrive, a view several other theologians we spoke to share; see workstream 7.)
- **An academic studying online extremism** locates the main engine in the 'platform economy' (influencers and platforms whose business model rewards whatever holds attention, regardless of its truth or effect): something "happening in the UK without really being a UK thing. It's a web thing."
- **A campaigner with a decade of frontline experience** organising against local anti-asylum mobilisation could not identify a single instance, in their own casework, of that specific activity being driven by a Christianised far right narrative, outside the Robinson-adjacent set pieces. (Their casework does not however cover explicitly Christian-branded groups and parties, such as Restore Britain.)

Survey evidence points the same way. Polling of more than 45,000 people for Hope not Hate finds that Christians who both attend services regularly and say that Christian teaching strongly shapes their lives are significantly less likely to vote Reform UK, while the Christians most inclined towards Reform identify as Christian but rarely practise or feel influenced by Christian values.[5] Church attendance may in fact be protective for many Christians, depending on the church they attend. A separate Theos survey of 1,765 adults, published in October 2026, likewise finds Christianity increasingly invoked as a marker of British identity rather than as a lived faith.[6]

One priest and organiser draws a parallel from research on Islamist radicalisation, where recruiters seek to separate targets from the mosque rather than approaching them through it, because functioning congregations notice when someone drifts. It is isolation from institutions, not the institutions themselves, that enables radicalisation.

The result is that the people with the most intense views are often out of reach of churches, devotional platforms and religious argument. Church-facing work is hence best understood as two complementary things: prevention and formation within congregations, and mobilising churches outward into their communities, through organising and bridge-building, to address the losses and grievances that make people susceptible in the first place. Workstreams 2 and 3 set out what the second half of that looks like in practice.

Where it *does* happen in churches

Where the phenomenon does show up in church life, interviewees suggest, it is largely grounded in independent congregations outside denominational accountability structures, together with breakaway Anglicans positioned against the Church of England specifically.

Mainstream denominations have largely stayed clear, at times with the effect that leaderships and parts of their base are diverging. One key evangelical body, whose membership reaches well into independent and charismatic churches, took a clear public stance against the Christianised far right, at some risk of opening up a gap between its leadership and parts of its base. Some interviewees see a similar gap in parts of the charismatic and Pentecostal world, where leaderships have engaged seriously while some members, often working-class and not all white, are drawn to the politics; others caution against stereotyping these congregations. Independent churches remain the clearer pattern in our data, as they are in the US, where susceptibility concentrates in megachurches and other congregations outside denominational structures.

All of this matters for delivery: the leaderships closest to these congregations have recognised the problem, but remain under-resourced and largely unfunded by philanthropy, which historically prefers projects to networks.

5 – Focaldata for Hope not Hate, 1 August - 11 September 2025, n=45,335. See https://www.focaldata.com/blog/hope-not-hate-reform-segmentation
6 – Spencer N. and Huang Y. (2026), op. cit.

Four nations, not one

Our research was UK-wide in scope but England-weighted in practice (and we found no interview material bearing specifically on Wales). One interviewee who grew up outside England argues that English nationalism is distinctive precisely because England, unlike the other three nations, has never settled on an account of its own identity, and that the Christianised far right is filling that vacuum.

Scotland is the clearest divergence. Since the 2014 referendum, Scottish nationalism has partly defined itself in contrast to England, including by presenting itself as more open on migration. Recent anti-migrant protests in Falkirk and Glasgow have tried to claim the Saltire alongside the Union flag, which one researcher reads as an attempt to build a nativist Scottish nationalism. Whether it can work is unclear. In west-central Scotland especially, flags remain bound up with the Protestant-Catholic divide and its football rivalries (the Union flag carries strong loyalist and Rangers associations), so a single nativist identity would have to bridge one of Scotland's oldest fault lines.

The networks behind these protests appear to be the same ones behind Portsmouth and Dover. Concern in the Scottish church is live: the Church of Scotland publicly opposed the use of Christian imagery at Unite the Kingdom, and ministers report existing congregation members, not only newcomers, picking up the rhetoric.

In Northern Ireland, one researcher sees Catholics and Protestants setting aside the historic divide to join forces in anti-migrant protests, and reads this as evidence of the framing's unifying power - though accounts of the Belfast rioting differ on how far it was a cross-community phenomenon.

Funders should treat the four nations as needing separate analysis, rather than assuming read-across from England.

The US question

The question of the role of American theology and networks was one of the most contested questions in our research, but we think a reasonably clear picture emerges.

Many theologically serious UK figures we spoke to downplay American influence. One researcher who has interviewed many of them reports that the US barely came up across the set, and does not think this is concealment, since the interviews were otherwise candid; what shows up instead is a self-conscious Englishness. A senior evangelical leader, meanwhile, reports to us that he went looking for a credible theologian making the intellectual case for Christian nationalism in Britain, and could not find one: instead, he argues, the field consists of fringe figures with no serious theological standing, which he considers the main thing distinguishing Britain from the US.

On the other hand, elite-level links are real and publicly documented. Recent Financial Times reporting sets out over £500,000 flowing from Viktor Orbán's Mathias Corvinus Collegium to the Roger Scruton Legacy Foundation (almost all of its income); a Cambridge student society founded as a replicable template and intended to spread across the UK and Europe; and James Orr described as building a staffing pipeline toward a future Reform UK administration, with close links to Peter Thiel, JD Vance and Orbán's circle.[7] Paul Marshall, meanwhile - both a major funder of the most influential charismatic Christian grouping in the UK, Holy Trinity Brompton, and proprietor or major investor across The Spectator, UnHerd, GB News and ARC - is described by one senior journalist we spoke to as among the most adept strategists in the modern media space.

The synthesis, we think, is that American software is being imported at elite and media level, but the congregational hardware that ran it in America does not exist here. US Christian nationalism was turbocharged by buildings full of people who met weekly and were already primed. Britain has no equivalent, and no counterpart to Christian Reconstructionism (a 20th-century American movement, associated with R.J. Rushdoony, that seeks to order society according to biblical law), which is a large part of why the British version is thinner.[8] One key implication is that the UK movement rests on a strikingly small cast, with Reform UK, and Farage personally, as the main bridge between this elite network and electoral politics.

Even so, the cultural markers are crossing faster than the infrastructure. Researchers monitoring the UK far right report that it increasingly casts itself not only as Christians opposing Islam but as Christians opposing progressive politics more broadly, with talk of "ungodly lifestyles" aimed at LGBTQ+ people, and "Christian family values" used to carry openly sexist positions. That is a culture-war borrowing from the US, and it is distinct from conservative Christian views on sexuality as such, which are not in themselves far right (see Left-coding under *Risks and handling*, below).

7 – Warrell H. and Hodgson R. (2026). "James Orr and the gospel of the new British right". Financial Times, 3 September 2026. Accessed at: https://www.ft.com/content/c2d02f83-a5a0-4c46-adad-1bd8b70b7ea1?syn-25a6b1a6=1

8 – One interviewee offers a more granular reading: the Christianised far right as a whole is a convergence of three distinct strands, reconstructionism, "Israelism" (the belief that a nation holds a chosen or special status before God), and a more recent "apostolic" movement organised around modern-day prophetic authority. He argues Britain lacks reconstructionism but does culturally carry a weaker version of Israelism, and is now seeing an apostolic strand emerge through both mainstream charismatic denominations and fringe figures. We note this as one interviewee's own framework rather than something independently corroborated elsewhere in our research.

Islam and immigration

We began this work with a hypothesis that cultural Christianity functions partly as a respectable vehicle for anti-Muslim sentiment. That holds for the Cultural and Convenience forms described above - but not for Christians as a whole. Practitioners at protest sites and in specific churches do encounter Christians who lead with hostility to Islam, yet wider survey evidence suggests that Christians overall sit close to the national average in their view of Islam's compatibility with British life and on immigration, with regular practice if anything protective.

Where Christians do stand out is in being noticeably more susceptible to conspiratorial framings, such as population-replacement narratives and no-go-zone myths. And sitting close to the average is not in itself reassuring: it says more about how widespread these attitudes are in Britain than about Christians specifically.[9]

Deeper drivers



Erosion of associational life

Churches, unions and other institutions that once formed people as citizens capable of negotiating difference have thinned out and lost members over successive decades. One interviewee offered the image of sinkholes, where erosion happens invisibly underground long before the tarmac collapses, and repairing the tarmac without addressing what eroded beneath achieves nothing. Recent polling cited in Gordon Brown's book The Future Starts With Us links this "civic recession" directly to polarisation and susceptibility to the far right.[10]



Identity, loss and economic insecurity

England lacks a settled account of its own identity, and the centre-left has failed to come up with a positive way to talk about nationhood without sounding bigoted. Grievances - over housing, high streets, public services, a sense of being ignored - frequently predate migration, with the far right simply the actor showing up and listening. Much of that loss is material: more than a decade of austerity and flat wages, which are felt most sharply in many of the places where far right narratives travel furthest.

9 – Focaldata (2025), *op. cit.*
10 – Brown G. (2026). The Future Starts With Us. London: Simon & Schuster. See https://drive.google.com/file/d/1dPm69WiWN4IoXHUCftXScx-fN06oFMeX/view for underlying data.



A strategic communications specialist observes that a charity chief executive “who went to Oxbridge and lives in Islington” is not a well-placed messenger for people in those places who are drawn to the far right, whereas a working-class local vicar might land very differently.

This is complicated by the fact that several of the far right's own most effective communicators, Farage among them, are not working-class in tone at all, and if anything closer to aristocratic, whatever the studied photo-ops in pubs with a pint may suggest.

One reading is that messenger authenticity matters less than message substance, and that offering a clear, confident answer to the underlying grievance beats matching the audience's own class register. We think both are probably true to some degree, and the paper's messenger recommendations (see workstream 5) should be read as necessary rather than sufficient: credibility buys a hearing, but it doesn't replace having something worth saying once you get it.

One of our own researchers reports a related, more specific mechanism: naming himself as a Christian, rather than as a secular anti-racism campaigner, has repeatedly opened conversations with people at Unite the Kingdom that would otherwise have closed the moment he was read as “woke". In-group signalling, not just tonal authenticity, appears to matter significantly here.



→ Institutional failure and backlash

Some church-side interviewees observe that the church's own failure to articulate its positions - for instance on matters like women’s ordination, LGBTQ inclusion, and its handling of safeguarding failures, together with its perceived selective wokeness - creates a vacuum that "we will take family seriously" fills.

Some of the energy behind the Christianised far right is also backlash against liberalism itself. As one interviewee in conservative Christian circles puts it, many of those now rallying behind Christian symbols did not mind when Christianity was being deconstructed, but mind very much now that liberalism is. In their view, the religious illiteracy of progressive liberals is part of the problem, leaving the tribalists as the only people speaking a register that feels intuitive to much of their audience. We read this as a case for religious literacy, not for claiming God for any side.

Part 2:
Seven Workstreams



Seven workstreams

Our interviews organised naturally into seven areas of possible response. We present them separately because they have different theories of change, timelines, evidence bases and risk profiles. They should be seen and funded as separable options, not as a package.

Some funders will find some of these workstreams more natural territory than others. Elections and organising may sit comfortably in many secular funders' existing civic and democracy portfolios; interfaith work, congregational formation and the leadership pipeline may feel more familiar to funders already working with faith institutions; bridge-building and narrative work could sit in either. Each section opens with our view of its priority.

1 Elections and electoral analysis

Funding priority: low. Fund research products only.

What it is

The electoral landscape is unprecedentedly volatile, with a five-to-seven-party system, enormous turnout gaps, huge vote-switching, and over a hundred seats likely to be decided by margins of under 5%. A small, motivated, organised bloc - of politically engaged Christians, for instance - could matter in ways it could not a generation ago.

Why it matters

Part of our starting hypothesis for this workstream was that overlaying data on Reform UK's and Restore's target seats against Christianised far right concentration could tell funders where to focus - for instance where to deploy field organisers. If that data existed and could be built, it would be one of the more actionable things in this paper. The most experienced faith-sector voices we spoke to are nonetheless sceptical, ranking this workstream lowest of the options we put to them, on the grounds that it is reactive, short-term and politicising, and that it corrodes the honest-broker standing that every other workstream in this paper depends on.

Evidence

The data challenges are daunting. Even establishing the far right's own target seats is difficult given multi-way marginals, and the Christianised far right itself resists geographic mapping, since it is mostly extra-congregational and not tied to identifiable local infrastructure. More fundamentally, interviewees who work on electoral organising elsewhere point to the challenge that organisations that fight electoral battles directly find it harder to convene broadly afterwards.

Gaps

We think two narrower, cheaper research products are nonetheless buildable and worth funding: anonymous polling on voting intention within actual congregations, and overlaying religiosity onto existing far right voter segmentation, which researchers in this space have offered to do. Both fall well short of the original ambition, but both are achievable, and would serve every other workstream in this paper, not just this one.

2 Bridge-building

Funding priority: highest. Powerful, but chronically underfunded.

What it is

Direct relational work with people drawn toward the far right - e.g. through curious conversations or bringing together groups who disagree in order to enable reframing and finding common ground. Churches already hold considerable expertise in reducing community tension and managing difference, but this is rarely applied beyond church structures, and so rarely reaches the people who most need it. Methodologies vary: Citizens UK's weaving trust approach brings divided communities together for short one-to-one conversations; Better Story's peace chaplaincy places groups of Christians at persistent anti-migrant protests to create space for dialogue and reduce community tension.

Why it matters

Real grief often sits beneath grievance politics, and our research consistently finds that it has to be heard before anyone attempts to correct or mobilise. Mutual incomprehension between progressive actors and people drawn to the far right means the two routinely talk past each other, leaving the underlying concerns unaddressed. Several interviewees warned against a slide toward US-style entrenchment, where relationships across the divide simply stop being attempted; one interviewee's "friendship as a theory of change" - sustained, sometimes costly relationship-building even where it disappoints one's own side - is offered as the clearest available antidote to that drift.

Evidence

There is plenty of historical evidence that conversations across difference drive values change and broaden movements.[11] More recently, several men who had travelled to London for the Unite the Kingdom rally attended an East London church the following morning, intending to leave early, and stayed because the preacher, working-class and local, came across to them as one of their own. One is now a regular member of the church. (This is as much a point about messengers as about bridge-building: see workstream 5.) At a peace chaplaincy event, a church worker brokered a conversation between an anti-migrant protester and an asylum seeker; the protester said he had never spoken to a refugee before, and valued it.

Gaps

The work demands high practitioner skill, is emotionally costly, and carries real risk, with organisers reporting threats, intimidation and abuse. It is also incremental: each conversation is a drop in a large ocean, so it works best alongside broader efforts rather than as a stand-alone strategy. In its most demanding forms, it depends on a small number of unusually capable people, and little of what they have learned is written down in a form others can use.

11 – Melloh L. (2026). *Let's Talk: the evidence for the power of conversations to bring about social change.* Leeds: Larger Us. Available at https://www.letstalkclimate.net/report

3 Community organising and agency-building

Funding priority: highest. Powerful, but chronically underfunded.

What it is

Building durable community power and a felt sense of agency, as a general antidote to the grievance dynamics that make far right framings attractive. Distinct from bridge-building: the aim is not direct engagement with people already drawn to the far right, but strengthening the communities around them. One funder we spoke to distinguishes three theories of change that organising can serve: electoral persuasion; long-term civic power building; and containment of the violent, non-persuadable end of the far right. These require different partners, timelines and measures of success, and the field repeatedly makes the error of funding a decades-long civic project against a two-year electoral metric.

Why it matters

Churches have strong local relationships, access to a wide range of institutions, and a desire to be visibly active in their communities, which makes them well placed for civic power and trust building. Yet few are actively involved in organising, and most lack the capacity to start. Where they are absent, far right movements are often the ones organising locally, and offering people agency and belonging.

Evidence

In a recent four-site organising pilot run by the Civic Power Fund and Warm Welcome, the two most successful sites, the Centre for Theology and Community in London and Thrive Together Birmingham, were both church-based, largely because of the diversity and relationships those churches already held. The pilot nonetheless lost continuation funding. Elsewhere, a priest and community organiser describes individuals joining housing campaigns who began with views like "we need to make sure Christians get housing before Muslims do", but shifted views through the experience of standing alongside Muslim neighbours against the same housing association, and of winning campaigns together.

Gaps

Physical space: community groups struggle to find rooms that are not prohibitively expensive, while churches often hold unused space. Embedded organisers: most church-based organising is led by organisations from outside the community rather than people within it. Aggregation: good place-based organising exists - for instance Grapevine in Coventry, Hastings Commons, or LOGIC in Grimsby and Cleethorpes - but is rarely funded to connect across localities or scale. Pentecostal churches: inner-city Pentecostal congregations already organising alongside neighbours of other faiths face a double disadvantage: no denominational funding of the kind Anglican, Catholic, Methodist or URC churches can draw on, and suspicion from secular funders worried about proselytism, even where a church has a long and trusted record of local social action. One organiser describes them as having almost no access to grant funding.

4 Interfaith solidarity

Funding priority: high. Our highest-confidence finding; small money, large marginal value.

What it is

Convening and relationship-building between Christian, Muslim, Jewish and other leaders and congregations, oriented specifically toward countering the far right rather than interfaith work in general. This was not one of our original workstreams, but emerged strongly enough that we treat it as one.

Why it matters

Three senior interviewees raised this theme independently and unprompted.

- **A faith-engagement specialist** would fund infrastructure for relationships between Christian and Muslim leaders, within a wider faith stream from the outset, noting that Muslim leaders have thought about faith, nation and extremism far longer than most Christian institutions.
- **A campaigner with deep interfaith experience** raises it from the Jewish side: he is troubled that much of the Jewish community does not yet see the far right as a threat, despite the far right's long history of antisemitism.
- **A senior journalist** argues that a senior Christian and a senior imam jointly calling population-replacement theory nonsense would carry real weight.

Practitioners also stress that the most substantive change often comes from grassroots, women-led work rather than leaders' summits, particularly in Muslim communities, where women's leadership is significant but largely invisible.

Evidence

In the North West, practitioners describe children growing up minutes from diverse city centres without knowingly meeting a Muslim, and point to early-contact work such as Hello Buddy in Greater Manchester.

Gaps

National interfaith infrastructure lost government funding several years ago, and nothing has replaced it. The old criticism of interfaith work (all talk and no action) has inverted: what interfaith action should look like has rarely been clearer, but nobody is resourced to do it. A campaigner with deep interfaith experience also warns against treating the Christianised far right as a problem for Christians alone to solve.

Interfaith work is often assumed to appeal only to progressives, but practices such as scriptural reasoning, in which people read texts together without setting aside their own convictions, have engaged theological conservatives. Research on social contact also suggests that equal status and a shared task matter more than the interfaith label.[12]

That points to two complementary routes: leader-level relationship infrastructure, where the national gap lies, and shared work within organising, the likelier route to congregations wary of anything branded "interfaith". Community organising's principle of "roots down, walls down" lets conservative congregations act alongside other faiths without diluting their convictions.

12 – Allport G. (1954). *The Nature of Prejudice.* London: Basic Books.

5 Narrative, messengers and the information ecosystem

Funding priority: high. Start now, as it needs the longest lead time.

What it is

Contesting the far right's use of Christian language and symbols in the public conversation, across content, messengers, and platforms.

Why it matters

The weakest link is not messages but *messengers*. There is no bench of identified, trained and supported spokespeople contesting this space, while the Christianised far right has built exactly that. One journalist put the priority order as people, then ideas, then machines, arguing that message will be the easy part once the right people exist. Recruiting them means recruiting for credibility with constituencies rather than agreement with our own views - including where that credibility comes from being closer to the problem than we are. Some of the strongest messengers are likely to emerge through local leadership and organising rather than communications recruitment, with credibility rooted in relationships and lived experience. This is where workstreams 3, 5 and 6 meet.

Evidence

One interviewee with long experience of countering the far right is blunt that the narrative-change field has talked a better game than it has delivered for a decade, with persuasive presentations but few examples of campaigns that demonstrably shifted anything. Another, a funder with direct experience running strategic communications, argues that progressive communicators spend weeks producing a single polished piece of content (in his words "the Fabergé egg"), while the far right floods the zone with fast, cheap, constantly-iterated volume, with social media algorithms rewarding exactly the fear and anger the latter approach trades in.

Senior conservative-evangelical interviewees separately observe that the messengers who actually land in Pentecostal and charismatic spaces are their own leaders, several of whom are already engaging through denominational podcasts, internal conference sessions and sold-out festival seminars on exactly this topic, in ways largely invisible to progressive observers who assume nothing is happening there.

Gaps

The best precedent for building a messenger bench in adjacent territory, the New Economy Organisers Network (NEON), took roughly four years to move from a handful of media bookings to real scale, with most of that growth concentrated late rather than spread evenly. While meaningful reach within the next three years is plausible, the transformative impacts are a longer-term return, and funders need to be willing to play a longer game than seeing this purely in terms of impact on the next election.

6 Leadership pipeline

Funding priority: medium. Patient capital, best started soon.

What it is

Identifying, developing and platforming future Christian leaders, as a counter to the pipeline the Christianised far right has built.

Why it matters

The Christianised far right has built a functioning pipeline, with high-prestige convenings that assemble podcasters, church figures, funders and politicians; an elite academic operation that recruits, houses and places talented young people with the stated ambition of staffing a future administration; and, in the US, fellowship programmes that have become career credentials. The offer is attractive: people want to be part of something that matters, and this ecosystem offers them just that, with invitations and jobs attached. Nobody we interviewed could name a comparable pathway for those working to counter it, or for Christians outside it.

Evidence

The pull is not always ideological. A newer leadership-development programme in this same ecosystem has reportedly attracted a number of Christians with strong social-justice commitments, less because of its politics than because it offers access: invitations into rooms with MPs, funders and entrepreneurs. Several interviewees could not name a comparable programme for Christians who want to shape public life from a different starting point.

Gaps

Leadership programmes for Christians do exist, among them CTC's Buxton Leadership Programme and CARE's leadership programme, alongside multi-faith schemes such as Parliamentors. What none of them does is what the ecosystem described above does together: identify talented people early, convene them with power and place them, with a clear political purpose in view.

7 Congregational formation

Funding priority: medium. Almost entirely unfunded, so even small grants to practitioners would make a difference.

What it is

Theological and pastoral resourcing aimed not at future leaders but at existing, ordinary congregations, particularly in traditions with what one theologian calls latent “potentialities": pre-existing doctrinal emphases on issues like sex, birth, family and national identity, that make some congregations more susceptible to far right-adjacent framing even without any active preaching of it.

Why it matters

This is a different problem from leadership capture. Interviewees pointed to specific denominational patterns: parts of the independent charismatic and Pentecostal world, where some think members are more exposed than their leaderships; a strand within Anglo-Catholic and traditionalist Catholic communities; and some Black-majority churches, where the driver is less far right politics than a wider theological conservatism that far right messaging can piggyback on. In each case the theology is sincerely held, which makes this harder to address: hostility to a particular group may register not as drift from faith, but as a faithful expression of it.

Several theologians think mainstream Christians are poorly equipped too: churches teaching a comfortable, individualistic faith with little political theology or discipleship leave congregations unable to recognise the Christianised far right as a departure from their own tradition. The aim, in one interviewee's phrase, is congregations that "can smell a rat": not primed with counter-arguments on immigration, but formed well enough on the fundamentals that when something is wrong, it registers quickly.

Since cultural Christianity overlaps with ordinary congregations, mainstream parishes are part of the audience too, including predominantly white Church of England ones, though the work there is harder to target and measure.

Evidence

Existing daily devotional platforms like prayer apps, some already reaching hundreds of thousands of people, already carry some of this material and could be a low-cost route to carrying more of it. There is clear appetite for this: a recent webinar on the topic, run for a single diocese by the Centre for the Study of Bible and Violence, drew around six hundred registrations.[13]

Gaps

This work is currently almost entirely unfunded, perhaps because it doesn't fit neatly into either "counter-extremism" or "faith formation" funding categories as they're usually defined.

13 – CSBV reviewed an earlier draft of this paper and is co-publishing it.

Why invest in this, and how?

Opportunity Costs

What else could the same money buy?

Direct anti-Islamophobia work addresses a larger, better-evidenced driver, though the two are not fully separable: Christian framing forms part of the legitimating meta-narrative ("this is a Christian nation, therefore exclusion is justified"), which then makes Islamophobic organising easier, so work on one plausibly reinforces the other rather than substituting for it.

Online and digital work addresses a key mechanism that underlies everything else. General civic-infrastructure funding would address the upstream contextual risk, providing a more constructive outlet for grievances by building a shared sense of agency.

All are real alternatives, and we don't think funders already active in them should be diverted. But we think the case for investing in work to counter the Christianised far right specifically rests on three arguments:

Institutional

Authoritarian consolidation historically requires capturing or neutralising the institutions that could resist it; churches and unions are two obvious candidates outside business; the far right is visibly working on both; a captured or silent church is a strategic loss whose legitimating effects far exceed its membership numbers.

Opportunity

The Church of England already offers a way of talking about British national belonging that doesn't depend on ancestry, since it runs through participation and incorporation rather than blood, but almost nobody countering the Christianised far right is currently using it.

Fragility

The UK movement is a small cast, heavily dependent on a handful of figures; fracturing between far right parties is already happening; there's minimal congregational infrastructure, and no credible theologians (yet). It may be more disruptable now than it will ever be again.

Suggested approach

Don't fund this as one bet. The workstreams have different theories of change and it makes sense to keep them separate and let funders lean into specific options; e.g. a funder who "doesn't do faith" might still fund the organising or the interfaith infrastructure.

Don't build a new re-granter. Experienced funders we spoke to agree the field is saturated and the lift is larger than it looks. Portfolio initiatives within existing funding institutions will generally make more sense.

Fund networks that already have the reach. The denominational and network structures closest to the exposed congregations are engaged, credible in their own constituencies, and chronically unattractive to philanthropy, which prefers projects to networks. That preference works against us here, and we need more flexibility on both sides.

Be realistic about measurement too. Funders should expect grantees to state plainly what they don't yet know; to cite existing evidence rather than commission weak bespoke research from small organisations unused to evaluating this kind of work; and to track feasible proxies, such as volume and reach around known set-piece moments, rather than claiming causal impact on the phenomenon itself.

Risks and handling

Legitimation. Publicising the scale of the Christianised far right can reinforce the overall narrative frame it depends on, and several well-placed interviewees warn independently against giving it more oxygen than it deserves, especially as the movement fractures. Everything recommended here can be framed positively, as building the church's and civil society's capacity for cohesion, without a single overarching deficit-framed campaign.

Left-coding. If this work reads as the progressive wing of Christianity mobilising, it will fail. This risk is already materialising inside constituencies that matter: the most visible commentators are middle-class, university-educated and come across as 'the liberal elite', however unfairly. To offset this, messengers and partners from conservative, Pentecostal, working-class and Black-church constituencies need to be foregrounded as a design principle, not an afterthought, alongside accepting the discomfort of alliance with people who hold conservative views on other questions.

The contested middle. The most strategically ambiguous space in the field is the well-funded, theologically serious, institutionally connected middle, especially the conference ecosystem and its orbit, where sincerely faithful mainstream figures share platforms with movement ideologues, and where many potential partners and funders have relationships.

Interviewees split between treating engagement there as legitimation and treating absence as unilateral disarmament; the strongest version of the second view came with the observation that these platforms already have prime ministers and party leaders, so presence doesn't give them anything they don't already have. The engagement case is strengthened by this paper's own analysis: if the Christianised far right has not yet broken through into UK churches, the contested middle is exactly where any breach would happen first, and preventing one would be far easier than reversing it. The dilemmas remain real, though, and we don't have a neat resolution to them.

Enablement. Some organisations working in this space sit within the same funding ecosystem as the figures named earlier in this paper. That reflects how concentrated funding is across British Christian institutions, so we argue it should not be a disqualification, but that funders should ask grantees about it directly rather than treat it as unspeakable.

One-way ratcheting? US experience offers few if any clear examples of congregations being brought back once they have shifted. If that transfers to the UK, then prevention deserves nearly all the weight and cure very little, which is how this paper has weighted it. Some British practitioners are less fatalistic, though, citing individual-level shifts through relationship and organising. Both can be true: institutions ratchet, individuals move.

Extraction. Communities at the sharp end have seen many researchers and campaigners arrive, take, and leave. Everything funded here should build capacity that remains, and should be designed with, not for, the constituencies concerned.



Summary of recommendations

1 Prioritise organising and bridge-building

These come closest to addressing the root causes, the loss of agency and community power that makes people susceptible in the first place, and don't carry interfaith's reach problem with more conservative constituencies.

2 Embed organisers in local churches

Multi-year funding for church-based organisers in places where far right narratives run strongest, drawn from the communities themselves rather than brought in from outside, with a dedicated strand for Pentecostal and other independent churches.

3 Fund bridge-building practitioners directly

Multi-year core funding for existing frontline organisations, alongside peer learning and documentation of method, since almost none of this practice is currently written down in a transferable form.

4 Fund interfaith infrastructure

Our highest-confidence finding, raised independently by several sources, and a high priority too. We place it after organising and bridge-building only because it less easily reaches the theologically conservative constituencies this paper argues matter most.

5 Start the messenger programme now

Embedded in existing infrastructure, recruited for in-constituency credibility rather than for agreement, planned as a four-year build.

Continues

6 Resource congregational formation directly

Denomination-specific pastoral and preaching resources, developed with rather than for the traditions concerned, plus clergy training in the specific doctrinal areas where susceptibility runs. Currently almost entirely unfunded.

7 Invest in the leadership pipeline separately

Ordination-track talent development and a commissioned theology-of-nations project, aimed at elite, cross-tradition credibility rather than at ordinary congregations.

8 Cover the unglamorous costs

Venues, supervision, safety, travel. Systematically unfunded, but disproportionately enabling.

9 Commission the two cheap research products

Congregational voting-intention polling; religiosity overlaid on existing far right segmentation.

10 Revisit the map

Fund a light-touch repeat of this scoping exercise in 18 to 24 months, tracking the early-warning indicators set out above, above all whether a mainstream evangelical or denominational figure breaks ranks toward the movement.

11 Do not fund electoral organising on the current evidence base

12 See the workstreams as parallel options, not a package

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