

SOLIDARITY LOOM

Weaving a Global Network of Engaged Creatives

in a world of rising authoritarianism

virtual series January-June 2026



**ARTS, CULTURE,
DEMOCRACY:
UNDERSTANDING GLOBAL
AUTHORITARIANISM**

February 26, 2026

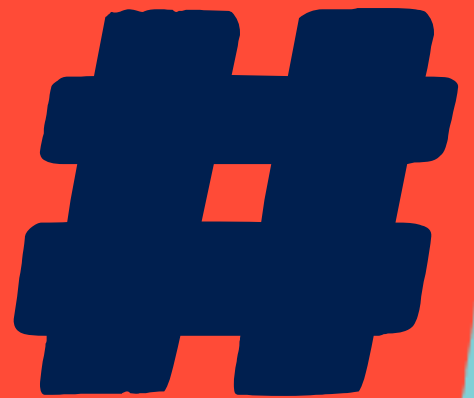


PRE PORT

March 2026

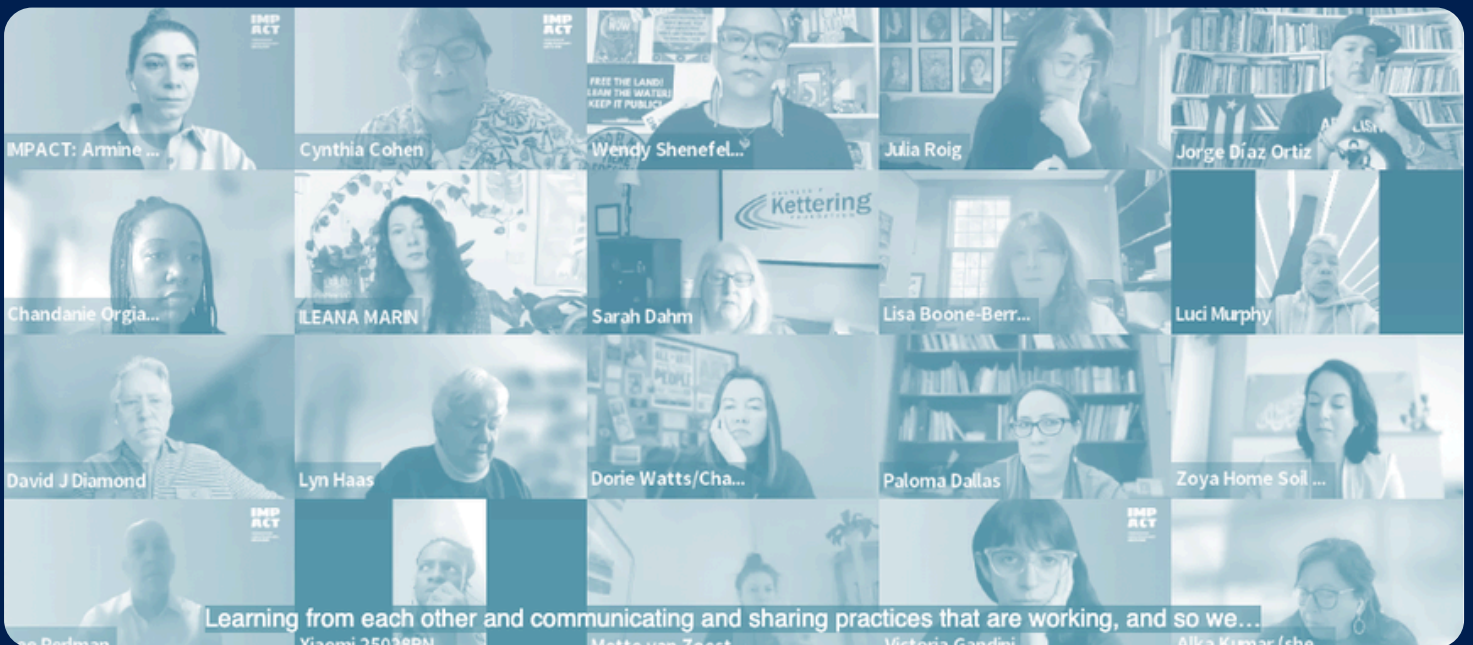
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INTRODUCTION

The second session of the Solidarity Loom series brought together artists, organizers, and civic practitioners from diverse geographies to reflect on how solidarity is built, practiced, and sustained in the face of rising authoritarianism and social fragmentation. Grounded in the insights of speakers including Julia Roig, Jorge Díaz Ortiz, and Chandanie Orgias, the conversation wove together perspectives from peacebuilding, popular education, and arts-based civic engagement. Together, they emphasized that solidarity is not an abstract ideal but an intentional, relational practice—one that requires cultivating collective power, engaging across difference, and anchoring action in cultural and community-based ways of knowing. From strategic nonviolent action to the role of arts and culture in mobilizing participation, the session surfaced both the challenges and possibilities of building resilient, multiracial, and participatory democracies.



“Arts, Culture, Democracy: Understanding Global Authoritarianism”

In Numbers

PRESENTERS



REGIONS



PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS



REGISTERED



COUNTRIES



NEW TO IMPACT



PARTICIPATED



Wendy Shenefelt (Alternate Roots) opened the session with an excerpt from Margaret Walker's poem "For My People".

*For my people everywhere,
singing their slave songs repeatedly,
their dirges, their ditties,
their blues and jubilees,
praying their prayers nightly
to an unknown God,
bending their knees humbly
to an unseen power.*

*For my people,
lending their strength to the years—
to the gone years,
the now years,
and the maybe years.*

*Washing, ironing, cooking, scrubbing,
sewing, mending, hawking, plowing,
digging, planting, pruning, patching,
dragging along, never gaining,
never reaping, never knowing,
and never understanding.*

*For my playmates
in the clay and dust and sand
of Alabama backyards,
playing, baptizing, and preaching,
playing doctor, in jail, and soldier,
in school, and mama, in cooking,
in playhouse, in concert, in store,
in hair, and company.*

*For the cramped, bewildered years
we went to school
to learn to know the reasons why,
the answers too—
and the people who,
the places where,
in the days when—
In memory of the bitter hours
when we discovered
we were Black, and poor,
and small, and different,
and nobody cared,
and nobody wondered,
and nobody understood.*

*Let a new earth rise.
Let another world be born.
Let a bloody peace
be written in the sky.
Let a second generation
full of courage issue forth.
Let a people-loving freedom
come to growth.
Let a beauty full of healing
and strength of final clenching
be the pulsing in our spirits
and our blood.
Let the martial songs be written.
Let the dirges disappear.
Let a race of people now rise
and take control.*



JULIA ROIG (HORIZONS PROJECT)

1. WE ARE IN A MOMENT OF ACCELERATED AUTHORITARIAN CONSOLIDATION GLOBALLY

- The U.S. is not an exception, authoritarianism has historical roots in this country (e.g., racialized one-party rule in the South).
- What is different now is speed: “It’s happening over months in the United States right now.”
- The current system resembles an “anocracy” (hybrid regime), which is inherently unstable.

2. POLARIZATION IS NOT ACCIDENTAL- IT IS STRATEGIC

- Division is actively produced and exploited:
 - Political actors and companies benefit from it
 - “Othering” is a deliberate tactic of control
- Scapegoating (immigrants, LGBTQ+ communities, political opponents) fuels fear and group isolation.

3. AUTHORITARIANISM OPERATES THROUGH A RECOGNIZABLE “PLAYBOOK”

- Key mechanisms:
 - Divide and rule
 - Scapegoating and dehumanization
 - Institutional erosion (e.g., weakening checks and balances)
 - Executive overreach
- These patterns are globally consistent, but locally adapted.



“We have more than two decades of trends of the decline of democracy all over the world.”

“We are polarized on purpose. People are benefiting from us being polarized.”

-- Julia Roig--

JULIA ROIG (HORIZONS PROJECT)

4. THERE IS ALSO A PROVEN “PLAYBOOK” FOR DEMOCRATIC RESISTANCE

- Broad, diverse participation (not just numbers, but diversity)
- Sustained engagement over time (not one-off protests)
- Multiple nonviolent tactics (boycotts, arts, humor, etc.)
- Maintaining nonviolent discipline, even under repression
- Strategic goal: shift loyalties of regime supporters

5. MOVEMENTS MUST FUNCTION AS “A MOVEMENT OF MOVEMENTS”

- No single approach is sufficient
- Success depends on strong connective tissue across sectors and strategies
- Different actors enter through different pathways

6. THE BLOCK-BRIDGE-BUILD FRAMEWORK (CORE STRATEGIC LENS)

BLOCK (DISRUPT & PROTECT)

- Confront harm and injustice directly
- Raise urgency and disrupt complacency
- Protests, direct action
- Community care (mutual aid, protection)

BRIDGE (ENGAGE & EXPAND)

- Build relationships across difference
- Lower polarization and bring in new actors
- Dialogue, mediation
- Engagement with unlikely allies (business, faith communities)

BUILD (CREATE ALTERNATIVES)

- Develop long-term democratic futures
- Focus on vision, systems, and innovation
- Citizen assemblies
- New governance models

“We have to build the new systems while we’re confronting the current systems.”

“We can fall into the shadow sides... when we think one approach is THE approach.”

-- Julia Roig--

JULIA ROIG (HORIZONS PROJECT)

7. EVERY STRATEGY HAS A “SHADOW SIDE”

- Block → can become reactive or dehumanizing
- Bridge → can become passive or avoid conflict
- Build → can ignore urgent harm

8. POWER LIES IN “PILLARS OF SUPPORT”

- Regimes depend on cooperation from key sectors: business, media, bureaucracy, security forces, culture, etc.
- Strategy = shift or withdraw that support
- Key leverage points:
 - Workers, consumers, managers - not just top leaders
 - Small “cracks” in support can destabilize power.

9. CHANGE DOES NOT REQUIRE CONVERTING EVERYONE

- Focus is not only on hardcore supporters
- Critical shifts include:
 - Active supporters → passive
 - Passive → neutral
 - Neutral → speaking out
- Even weak or symbolic shifts can have real impact

10. COLLECTIVE ACTION IS THE DECISIVE FORCE

- The scale of the challenge (state + corporate power) requires:
 - Coordination
 - Cross-sector alliances
 - Sustained participation

“Power flows from people implementing the policies of a regime.”

“Getting people who are passively allowing things to happen to just be neutral... matters.”

“We are powerful when we come together, collectively.”

-- Julia Roig --

CHANDANIE ORGIAS (EVERYDAY DEMOCRACY)

1. DEMOCRACY AS PRACTICE: BUILDING POWER THROUGH PARTICIPATION

- Democracy is not static; it is something we actively do and sustain.
- Everyday Democracy's mission centers on building power across individuals, communities, and institutions toward a participatory, multiracial democracy.
- Emphasis on collective power, not just individual engagement.

2. ARTS & CULTURE AS STRATEGIC CIVIC INFRASTRUCTURE

- Arts and culture are core tools for civic engagement and organizing.
- They function as “superpowers” because they:
 - Speak to emotion, embodiment, and creativity (not just logic)
 - Move people across the spectrum of engagement (especially the “neutral middle”)
 - Enable deeper, more sustained participation

3. CIVIC IMAGINATION & “FREEDOM DREAMING” AS POLITICAL PRACTICE

- Imagining alternative futures is itself a form of civic action.
- Rooted in:
 - Civic imagination frameworks
 - Black radical tradition (“freedom dreaming”)
- This practice:
 - Restores hope in eroding democracies
 - Positions individuals as agents of change
 - Creates shared visions of justice



“Democracy isn't something that you have, it's something that you do.”

“It's not always facts and logic that move us... it speaks to our emotions.”

-- Chandanie Orgias--

CHANDANIE ORGIAS (EVERYDAY DEMOCRACY)

4. EVERYDAY SPACES AS CIVIC SPACES (“THIRD SPACES”)

- Civic life doesn’t only happen in formal institutions.
- Homes, gardens, libraries, meals, art venues become sites of:
 - Dialogue
 - Storytelling
 - Relationship-building
- Examples:
 - Community gardens
 - Shared meals
 - Post-performance conversations
 - Museums, libraries, local gatherings

5. CULTURAL ORGANIZING AS A BRIDGE IN POLARIZED CONTEXTS

- In response to authoritarianism and polarization, the focus is on:
 - Trust-building
 - Bridging across difference
 - Deep listening & perspective-taking
 - Inclusive narratives of interdependence
- Positions their work primarily in the “bridging space” (vs. only mobilizing the already-aligned)

6. STORYTELLING + FOOD + ART = RELATIONAL ENTRY POINTS

- Multiple modalities used to convene people:
 - Art-based labs (exhibitions, poetry, performance)
 - Shared meals as storytelling spaces
- These create:
 - Accessible entry points
 - Relational trust before political action

7. FROM IMAGINATION → EMBODIMENT → COLLECTIVE ACTION

- Key progression in their methodology:
 - Imagine (future visioning, storytelling)
 - Embody (art-making, shared experiences)
 - Act (collective civic engagement)
- Important design principle:
 - Every gathering should include a clear pathway to action.

CHANDANIE ORGIAS (EVERYDAY DEMOCRACY)

8. DESIGNING FOR COLLECTIVE ACTION

- Individual actions matter, but must connect to collective organizing to build real power.
- Tools include call-to-action cards
- Pathways to:
 - Local governance participation
 - Volunteering
 - Existing organizing efforts

9. JOY, CARE, AND MATERIAL WELLBEING AS DEMOCRATIC INDICATORS

- The imagined future centers not just rights, but lived conditions:
 - No trade-offs between rent, food, healthcare
 - Intergenerational exchange (elders teaching youth)
 - Accessible, culturally relevant food
 - Ease, dignity, connection

10. STRATEGIC MOMENT: 250TH ANNIVERSARY AS CIVIC ACTIVATION OPPORTUNITY

- The 2026 U.S. milestone (Declaration of Independence) is leveraged as:
 - A national reflection point
 - A catalyst for local gatherings rooted in arts, storytelling, and imagination
- Move from reflection → connection → collective civic action

“Imagining alternatives... so that we can imagine our shared justice.”

“If you're just doing individual actions... it may not be adding to that collective power.”

-- Chandanie Orgias--

JORGE DÍAZ ORTIZ, AGITARTE (PUERTO RICO)

1. SOLIDARITY IS THE ORGANIZATION'S CORE FRAMEWORK

- AgitArte's work is rooted in working-class solidarity.
- Solidarity is not a temporary strategy but the organization's long-term political and cultural foundation.
- Solidarity is framed through Puerto Rico's colonial reality and a commitment to liberation-oriented cultural practice.

2. PUERTO RICO'S COLONIAL CONDITION SHAPES BOTH THE ANALYSIS AND THE WORK

- AgitArte's work is contextualized in Puerto Rico as a militarily and economically occupied territory of the United States,
- Colonial domination is not historical only, but ongoing. This political condition informs both repression and resistance.

3. CULTURAL WORK IS A TOOL TO CONTEST HEGEMONY AND IMAGINE ALTERNATIVES

- Jorge defined AgitArte's practice as cultural solidarity aimed at contesting U.S. colonial and cultural hegemony while proposing alternatives to oppressive systems.
- Their methods include storytelling, media, trainings, performance, murals, puppetry, and accompaniment of social movements.



“We belong to and not a part of, of the United States.”

“As a cultural organization, we realized that all work produces culture.”

– Jorge Díaz Ortiz –

JORGE DÍAZ ORTIZ, AGITARTE (PUERTO RICO)

4. MUTUAL AID TRANSFORMED AND DEEPENED THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF CULTURAL PRACTICE

- A major turning point came after Hurricane Maria, when AgitArte realized that all work produces culture.
- In response to crisis, they shifted more fully into mutual aid, not as a departure from cultural work, but as an expansion of it.

5. ART BECOMES A COMMUNITY ENTRY POINT FOR ORGANIZING AND STRATEGY

- Art and culture offer accessible entry points into struggle.
- Murals, workshops, mask-making, puppetry, and performance help gather people, open political conversations, and build collective analysis around displacement, austerity, gentrification, and repression.

6. AGITARTE'S PRACTICE IS MOVEMENT-ACCOMPANYING

- AgitArte accompanies ongoing struggles—student strikes, anti-gentrification campaigns, teachers' unions, reproductive rights movements, anti-austerity mobilizations, and mutual aid networks.

7. POLITICAL EDUCATION AND PERFORMANCE ARE CLOSELY LINKED

- Their performances and visual art are explicitly tied to popular education, helping communities understand histories of violence and domination, such as the mass sterilization of Puerto Rican women under U.S. rule.
- Art is a vehicle to recover memory and politicize public space.

“We take a struggle that’s already happening and bring the art component in to maximize the visual of it, and also to organize through it.”

-- Jorge Díaz Ortiz -

JORGE DÍAZ ORTIZ, AGITARTE (PUERTO RICO)

8. THEIR CULTURAL SPACE MODELS AN EXPANSIVE ECOSYSTEM OF LIBERATION

- AgitArte’s physical space supports a wide range of programming: local music and dance traditions, food growing, agitational art, trainings, and community gathering.
- This suggests a broad vision of culture that includes survival, heritage, organizing, and joy.

9. AUSTERITY, PRIVATIZATION, AND DISPLACEMENT ARE CENTRAL THREATS

- Puerto Rico’s current crisis is connected to the fiscal control board, austerity policies, privatization, school closures, infrastructure collapse, and mass displacement.
- These are not isolated policy failures but a part of a broader colonial logic of depopulation and dispossession.

10. THE ORGANIZATION ADAPTS TACTICALLY WHILE HOLDING FIRM TO ITS VALUES

- AgitArte has had to pivot repeatedly in response to changing material conditions—hurricanes, earthquakes, uprisings, water shortages, repression—while maintaining its political core.

11. FUNDING CONSTRAINTS ARE POLITICAL, NOT MERELY LOGISTICAL

- Work which is openly aligned with oppressed peoples is often “not very fundable” within nonprofit structures.
- AgitArte’s persistence as an ethical achievement: they have continued without sacrificing their ideals.

“We have been able to do all the work without sacrificing our ideals.”

– Jorge Díaz Ortiz –

POPULAR EDUCATION & PERFORMANCE PROGRAM (PEPP)



SEED PLANTING WORKSHOP



BOMBA WORKSHOP



Santurce, Puerto Rico
SANTURCE NO SE VENDE & AGITARTE
2005



Images from
AgitArte's Work

KEY THEMES & INSIGHTS FROM Q&A

ART AS ESSENTIAL TO MUTUAL AID

- Mutual aid is not only about meeting needs. It is also about care, dignity, and connection
- Integrating art, music, and creative expression:
 - Strengthens relationships
 - Supports emotional resilience
 - Creates space for collective meaning-making

“AGITATIONAL ART” AS POLITICAL PRACTICE

- Rooted in agit-prop traditions, agitational art combines:
 - Art + political clarity + popular education
- It is:
 - Context-driven
 - Explicit in its values
 - Designed to provoke awareness and mobilize action

AUTHORITARIANISM AS POWER CONCENTRATION

- Not tied to a single ideology (left or right)
- Defined by:
 - Loss of voice and self-governance
 - Centralization of power

MUTUAL AID → POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

- Meeting basic needs enables participation and creativity
- Mutual aid spaces can also:
 - Spark critical reflection
 - Build collective awareness and action.

START LOCAL TO COUNTER OVERWHELM

- Large-scale crises can feel paralyzing
- Local, collective action:
 - Builds agency
 - Creates visible change
 - Sustains engagement

JOY, BURNOUT & THE LONG ARC

- Joy is part of the work, not separate from it
- Creative practice can counter fatigue and numbness
- This is long-term, intergenerational work:
 - Not everything must be solved now
 - Requires grace, shared responsibility, and sustained commitment

ARTS ACROSS “BLOCK, BRIDGE, BUILD”

- Block: Disrupt power (e.g., satire, comedy)
- Bridge: Build empathy (e.g., storytelling, theater)
- Build: Imagine alternatives (e.g., poetry, film)
- Artists also foster:
 - Non-linear thinking
 - A “yes, and” collaborative mindset

INSIGHTS FROM THE BREAKOUT ROOMS

- A shared global playbook of authoritarianism exists, but experiences differ; solidarity must hold both commonality and difference.
- Arts offer solace and expression beyond words, enabling embodied and emotional solidarity.
- Solidarity is often practiced amid shared precarity, not stability.
- Art can accompany communities while justice is delayed, offering presence and repair.
- Solidarity centers on listening, trust, and being together—a relational practice.
- Embodied forms (movement, presence) express solidarity beyond language.
- Arts and culture provide care and connection in contexts of numbness and strain.
- Overall, solidarity is relational, embodied, and care-centered, sustained through arts and culture.

- Solidarity operates both as networked practice and intentional learning framework.
- It is shaped by curiosity and ongoing questioning, not fixed definitions
- Tensions between inclusion and diversity complicate how solidarity is understood.
- Ethical solidarity requires listening, self-awareness, and not overpowering others' voices.
- Solidarity exists between embodied (in-person) and virtual forms, each offering different value.
- The arts (e.g. music, photography) enable immediate, emotional connection to solidarity.
- Solidarity is a continuous practice, not a performative stance.

- Solidarity is needed in everyday, intimate spaces (family, workplace) to both survive and thrive.
- It requires a balance between holding differences and finding common ground.
- Solidarity can emerge from unexpected people and moments.
- Relational networks enable creative forms of resistance.
- Change depends on sustained, ongoing action, not one-off efforts.
- Effective solidarity and peacebuilding are reflected in their beauty and creativity.

ABOUT IMPACT

IMPACT is a diverse global organization, advocating for arts and culture to transform conflict and build more creative and just societies. IMPACT is governed by a diverse and dynamic board comprised of artists, scholars and practitioners in the field of arts, culture and conflict transformation from around the globe, including Argentina, Belgium, Canada, Israel, Kenya, Japan, Serbia, and the Philippines.



JOIN THE IMPACT COMMUNITY

- Partner with Us: we are looking for like-minded individuals, networks and organizations to work collaboratively with in the space of arts, culture and conflict transformation
- Take part in our upcoming events: sign up to our newsletter to receive news about our in-depth event series on the key themes from IMPACT: Creating Hope Together
- Join the IMPACT community: sign up to our newsletter, follow us on social media: @impactartorg
- Find out more about our programs: read our report and check out the videos on our YouTube channel
- Donate to IMPACT, so that we can support our growing IMPACT community by advocating to policymakers, funders and leaders for arts, culture and conflict transformation
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