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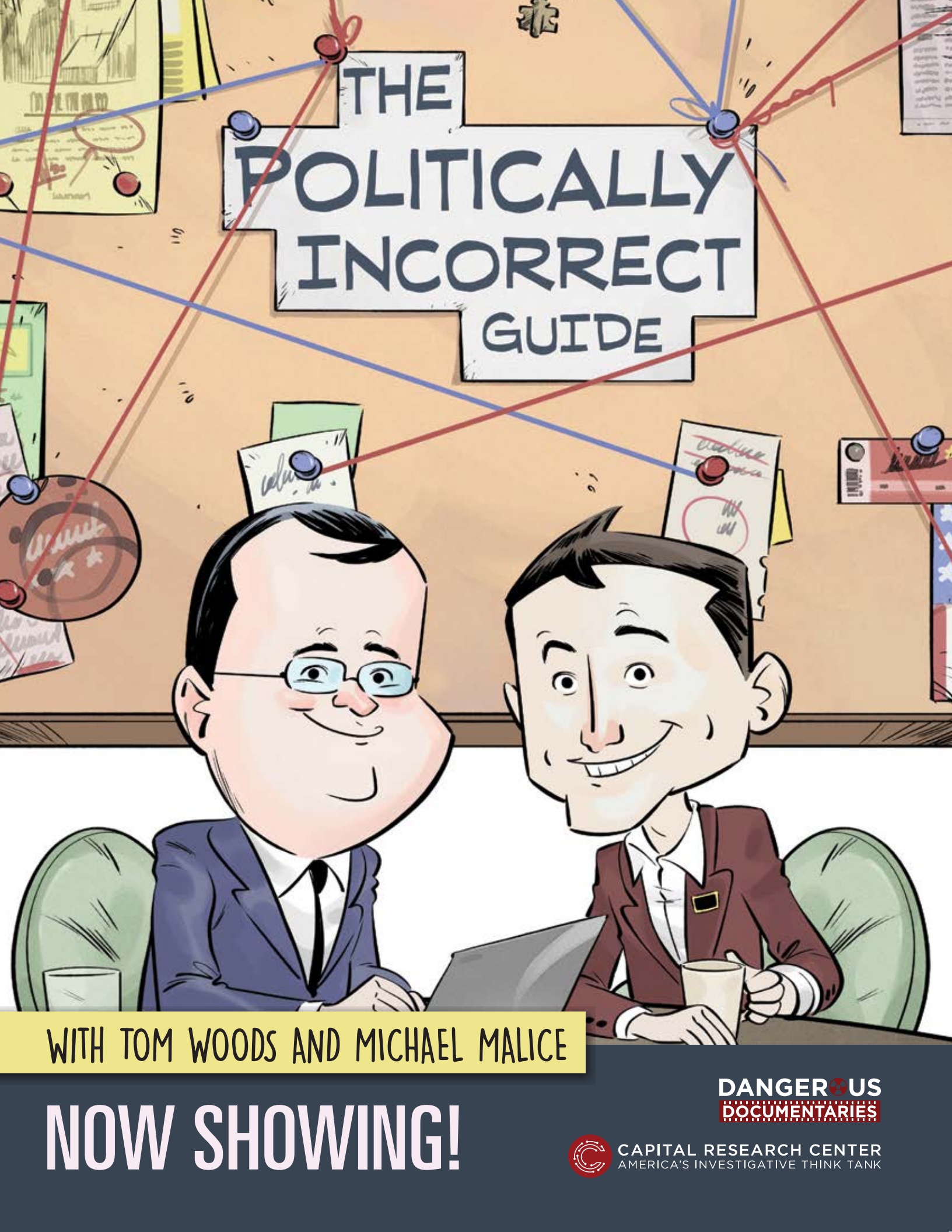
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CAPITAL RESEARCH CENTER

1513 16th Street NW
Washington, DC 20036
202.483.6900

CapitalResearch.org

Contact@CapitalResearch.org

Internship inquiries are welcome.

Publisher, Scott Walter
Editor-in-Chief, Kristen Eastlick
Editor, Jon Rodeback
Photo Editor, Gayle Yiotis

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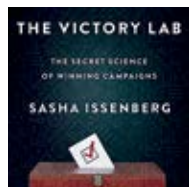


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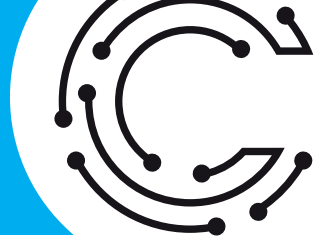
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Left-wing activists understand the power of nonprofit advocacy groups as agents of social change. To empower the Left, its donors and activists have quietly built a vast network of allied PACs, voter registration nonprofits, litigation organizations, and Census “get out the count” groups to win battleground states. If successful, this will help the movement implement many of its socialist policies—from the Green New Deal to Medicare for All to the union-backed PRO Act.

This report examines the ways in which the Left, armed with torrents of mostly 501(c)(3) cash, has increased the Census count of traditionally left-leaning constituencies, attempted to win left-wing majorities in state legislatures, and tried to control the 2021 redistricting process to draw congressional maps favoring the Left.

Read The Left's Voting Machine at <https://capitalresearch.org/publication/the-lefts-voting-machine/>.



DEMOCRATIC DONORS' DISINFORMATION OPS

By Scott Walter

The Left really misses the good old days, when all major news outlets in print, radio, and TV could be counted on to spout the approved narratives. Nowadays, many Americans get their news from upstarts like the Daily Caller, Breitbart websites, Fox News on TV, and radio show hosts like Mark Levin.

Even worse, from the Left's perspective, social media lets Americans talk to each other. You can see why all this uncontrolled passing of information must be stopped if the Left's info hegemony is to be restored.

Suppressing Unapproved Narratives

The first step is to call any information not under the Left's control "misinformation" or "disinformation" and then demand that this bad info be suppressed by any business that touches it. The Left's leaders are blunt about this. Vanita Gupta, when she was running the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, bragged to *Time* about browbeating tech titans. Here's how she's quoted in an amazing article about the Left's "conspiracy" in the 2020 election:

In November 2019, [Facebook CEO] Mark Zuckerberg invited nine civil rights leaders to dinner at his home, where they warned him about the danger of the election-related falsehoods that were already spreading unchecked. "It took pushing, urging, conversations, brainstorming, all of that to get to a place where we ended up with more rigorous rules and enforcement," says Vanita Gupta, . . . who attended the dinner and also met with Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey and others.

Gupta was rewarded for this work by the Biden administration, which has named her U.S. Associate Attorney General. That's the kind of partisan success that control of information flows permits.



Credit: teachingforchange. License: <https://bit.ly/3doOieR>.

*Vanita Gupta, when she was running the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, bragged to *Time* about browbeating tech titans.*

Donor-Funded Disinformation

The Left has another, more subtle way to deal with unregulated information than outright censorship. It consists of mega-donors simultaneously denouncing disinformation in public and then privately funding the most sophisticated digital firehoses of, ahem, disinformation.

Two examples recently appeared with some prominence. First, the *New York Times* reported how left-wing billionaire Hansjörg Wyss wanted to buy the *Chicago Tribune*,

Scott Walter is president of Capital Research Center.



The Left has another, more subtle way to deal with unregulated information than outright censorship.

because the newspaper could get “truth” to Americans, yet secretly he was financing the Hub Project, “a sophisticated political operation to advance progressive policy initiatives and the Democrats who support them,” as the *Times* put it. Wyss also poured big money into States Newsroom, the *Times* noted, adding that this little disinformation venture had been “bought by people with a political agenda,” according to NewsGuard, a media watchdog.

Another left-wing donor was exposed for this hypocrisy in a *Free Beacon* report on Reid Hoffman, billionaire founder of LinkedIn. The *Beacon*’s Chuck Ross observed that, on the one hand, the left-wing agitation group Indivisible recently announced the launch of a Truth Brigade with the righteous mission of combating the online disinformation that “is threatening our democracy, and even our lives.” On the other hand, Indivisible is backed by Hoffman via his Investing in US fund, which has also sent cash into one of the most notorious disinfo ops in recent years: the creation of fake social media accounts that pretended to be Republicans but actually were leftists aiming to hurt a Republican Senate candidate in Alabama.

The *New York Times* reported, “As Russia’s online election machinations came to light last year, a group of Democratic tech experts decided to try out similarly deceptive tactics in the fiercely contested Alabama Senate race.”

But Hoffman’s disinfo hypocrisy doesn’t stop there. He has also backed another fake news operation with the hilarious name News for Democracy. As the Associated Press reported, “Facebook is investigating News for Democracy, an organization backed by liberal megadonor Reid Hoffman, over misleading news pages the group operated prior to the 2018 midterm elections.”

Murdoch Money

A third left-wing mega-donor who’s also guilty of disinformation hypocrisy has received far less press notice, which is ironic, given her connection to a famous press institution: Kathryn Murdoch is the wife of James Murdoch, who long worked in his father Rupert Murdoch’s media empire. James left in a huff last July, citing “disagreements over certain editorial content published by the Company’s news outlets” and “certain other strategic decisions.”



Credit: METRICS. License: <https://stanford.io/2TcV3JK>

Kathryn Murdoch, daughter-in-law of Rupert Murdoch, is a left-wing mega-donor who’s guilty of disinformation hypocrisy that has received far less press notice, which is ironic, given her connection to a famous press institution.

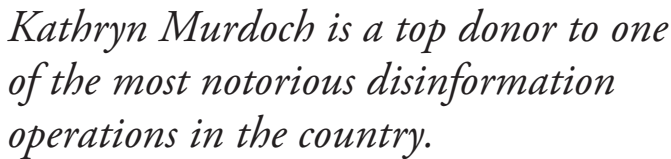
The “disagreements” were understood to be criticism of Fox News’s conservative leanings, and the most important “other strategic decision” was understood to be the elevation of his brother Lachlan over him in the company hierarchy.

Both James and wife Kathryn have complained over the years about Fox’s failure to toe the left-wing line on climate claims, and in October and January, the Murdochs repeatedly attacked the network’s supposed role in spreading “disinformation.”

But guess what? Kathryn Murdoch is a top donor to one of the most notorious disinformation operations in the country.

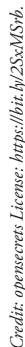
In July and August of last year, just as her husband was leaving his father’s media company and the elections were heating up, Kathryn donated half a million dollars to PACRONYM, which is part of an elaborate left-wing influence operation. PACRONYM is a political action committee, but it’s closely tied to the 501(c)(4) social advocacy group ACRONYM, which in turn funds and controls Courier Newsroom, one of America’s most sophisticated disinfo machines working to elect Democrats.

Don’t take my word for it. Here’s how the left-leaning OpenSecrets describes it: “ACRONYM is behind Courier



OpenSecrets explains how the scam works: “Websites affiliated with Courier Newsroom that appear to be free-standing local news outlets are actually part of a coordinated effort with deep ties to Democratic political operatives.”

OpenSecrets made a chart showing how the scheme works, and don't miss the big dollar figures in it:



Unsurprisingly, Reid Hoffman's Investing in US is also a significant donor to ACRONYM, and the group has received major cash from New Venture Fund, which is

Disinformation Hypocrisy

They reported that McGowan, a Democratic operative, had a simple reason for wanting to build a web of fake news sites. As she puts it in her memo,

Her whole memo is fascinating, but I recommend you read it not at VICE, but in the complaint to the Federal Election Commission made by Americans for Public Trust, who included every word of the memo as part of its argument that Courier is actually a political action committee, not a news organization.

That means that on top of their hypocrisy about “disinformation,” these left-wing donors are also hypocrites about campaign finance “reform.”

*Read previous articles from the Commentary series online
at <https://capitalresearch.org/category/commentary/>.*

The background of the entire page is a dark, blue-toned photograph showing the silhouettes of several people in a meeting. One person is standing in the background, while others are seated or standing in the foreground, some looking at documents. The scene is dimly lit, with light coming from the side, creating strong shadows.

BIG MONEY IN DARK SHADOWS

Arabella Advisors' Half-billion-dollar
"Dark Money" Network

Hayden R. Ludwig

According to media personalities and politicians, nameless, faceless donors wield outsized influence over the American political process due to the so-called "dark money" they use to fund think tanks and advocacy groups. But that's far from the whole story. "Dark money" exists on both sides of the aisle. In fact, the Left seems to have deeper and darker pockets of cash than anyone suspected.

Learn more about liberal "dark money" in CRC's original report.



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ORGANIZATION TRENDS



NONPROFITS AND JOURNALISM: AN UPDATE

By Michael Watson

Summary: In early 2019, we surveyed the media landscape with a focus on the role of liberal-backed but nominally nonpartisan not-for-profit news outlets like ProPublica and Center for Public Integrity, which have a notable impact on the creation of news narratives. Since then, the media landscape has evolved substantially. Cable ratings for liberal networks are tanking. Belligerent workplace purges enabled by organized labor at major outlets are becoming commonplace. New, more aggressively right-wing or pro–Donald Trump outlets are taking shape on the conservative side. “Woke capital” is applying greater pressure in the technology industry against political views they oppose. And two major right-of-center outlets, the Rush Limbaugh Program and the Drudge Report, have experienced big changes. Meanwhile, the nonprofit news sector has seen a nominally right-leaning outlet move to the hard left in alignment with its funders. Openly ideological liberal “news-rooms” rise, major liberal donors try to take over newspaper chains, and Big Philanthropy fund an effort to “redefine” America’s founding as based on enslavement and racism.

They might have hated him, but Donald Trump and his presidency were good for the liberal media. Major newspapers like the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* raked in tens of thousands of new subscriptions from members of the “Resistance,” while ratings for both longtime openly progressive MSNBC and newly proud, Democratic partisan CNN surged. Millions of dollars in support from liberal Big Philanthropy flowed to reporting outlets like ProPublica and Center for Public Integrity that attacked the Trump administration.

Then, as quickly as it had started, it was over. But the intervening four years—even the two years since Capital Research Center took a deep look at the world of media—brought disruption and chaos to the media industry from all sides and from diverse actors. The rise of “woke” ideology has seen labor unions assist in organized purges of metropolitan newspaper staff found insufficiently committed to social liberalism and a public square closed to its opponents.

Meanwhile on the right, the 800-pound gorilla of Fox News faces new rivals perceived as more aligned with right-wing



Credit: MyEyeSees. License: <https://bit.ly/35QjDU3>.

They might have hated him, but Donald Trump and his presidency were good for the liberal media. Major newspapers like the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* raked in tens of thousands of new subscriptions.

populism or the personal interests of former President Trump. Big technology conglomerates have taken a more aggressive approach to suppressing content that conflicts with the immediate political advantage of “current year” progressivism. And two giants of the right-leaning media scene—Rush Limbaugh, who died in 2021, and Matt Drudge, whose website the Drudge Report has swung inexplicably into alignment with the Left—have exited.

The nonprofit news media have also seen changes over the intervening period. The Bulwark, a website that originally sought to stake out a Trump-hostile but still conservative ground, has moved into alignment to the orthodox progres-

Michael Watson is Capital Research Center’s research director and managing editor for InfluenceWatch.



The “1619 Project” is a nominally journalistic effort that seeks to recenter the American founding on the first landing of enslaved Africans in British North America.

sivism of its major funders. Conservatives have created the Center Square, a nonprofit news project focused on statehouse reporting, while liberals have promoted the Newsroom Network, a liberal statehouse reporting outfit that grew out of the Arabella Advisors “dark money” network, and Courier Newsroom, an openly ideological “news” source closely aligned with the political consultancy network of Tara McGowan, the founder of the advocacy group ACRONYM. Perhaps most prominently, liberal Big Philanthropy partnered with the *New York Times Magazine* to promote a fundamental restructuring of American history education through the “1619 Project,” a nominally journalistic effort that seeks to recenter the American founding on the first landing of enslaved Africans in British North America.

The Media State of Play

As President Joe Biden took office in January 2021, the liberal press immediately faced a quandary: Having achieved its political aim, its audience collapsed. CNN spent the Trump administration aggressively shifting from a moderate-liberal, fact-based position to little more than regurgitating press releases from the Democratic National Committee, and it saw its ratings fall by half after President Biden’s inauguration. MSNBC, traditionally the liberal cable news network of choice, saw its ratings fall by one-third.

The NewsGuild’s Woke War

Labor unions historically protect workers from being fired, and they often pride themselves on protecting workers’ political advocacy against management retaliation. But in recent years media unions—notably the NewsGuild, the union of journalists affiliated with the aggressively left-wing Communications Workers of America—have organized or supported purges against workers not sufficiently committed to current-year social liberalism, especially on matters of race and criminal justice.

Even before Biden’s inauguration, the “woke” progressive ideology rising in metropolitan newsrooms generated a wave of purges tacitly or even explicitly endorsed by the

labor unions that represent journalists at major newspapers. In June 2020, the *New York Times* published an op-ed by Sen. Tom Cotton (R-AR) that called for the use of military force to put down riots and disorder. The newsroom staff revolted, pressuring the paper to denounce the op-ed. Reporting indicated that the NewsGuild of New York, the local union that organizes *Times* journalists, had coached the Jacobin faction of staffers to couch their protest in terms of workplace safety.

NewsGuild’s Chicago local, which represents journalists at the *Chicago Tribune*, drafted an open letter attacking law-and-order commentator John Kass for *accurately* reporting that controversial Cook County State’s Attorney Kim Foxx (D) had taken campaign support from liberal billionaire and critic of law enforcement George Soros.

Biden’s inauguration did not quiet the restive “internal mob.” In February 2021, the *New York Times* pressured science writer Donald McNeil to resign over his utterance of a racial slur in identifying the word. Longtime union activist Steven Greenhouse, formerly the *Times*’s labor-beat reporter and a writer on labor topics for the left-leaning *The Guardian*, protested that the NewsGuild had not taken action on McNeil’s behalf, reportedly writing on a *Times* staff-and-alumni message-board, “What ever happened to the notion of worker solidarity . . . to giving a fellow worker the benefit of the doubt?”

Into the Tank: The Right’s Competitors to Fox

Meanwhile on the right, Fox News and the related entities owned by Rupert Murdoch’s corporate empire continue to be the largest players in the space by far, but new challengers are approaching. Fox’s election analysis team projected that Trump would lose Arizona early on election night, contrary to other election analysts who waited for reporting of much of the late-counted ballots (which were far less Democratic-leaning than Fox projected) before projecting that Biden won the state. Fox blew its call on the House of Representatives, projecting Nancy Pelosi’s Democrats would expand their majorities when Republicans had in fact cut them to the narrowest since the turn of the millennium.

These apparent acts of rooting for the Democratic Party outraged a faction of Republicans most supportive of former President Trump, and they migrated from Fox to Newsmax and One America News Network (OANN), two upstart cable channels more “in the tank” for Trump. For his part, Trump—who is reportedly a personal friend of Newsmax



Left-wing activists in both the for-profit and nonprofit sectors are seeking to de-platform the right-of-center networks and to silence right-of-center reporting.

chief Christopher Ruddy—promoted both OANN and Newsmax throughout the campaign and post-election period. In December 2020, the unthinkable even briefly happened: A Newsmax program outdrew a Fox program in the “key demo” of viewers 25–54 years of age.

While Newsmax’s Ruddy has committed to journalistic standards, OANN has faced criticism for publishing stories aligned with conspiracy theories allegedly directed by the network’s founder, Robert Herring Sr.

According to a survey by Republican pollster Tony Fabrizio, while nearly half of Republican voters watched Fox News at least weekly, the two factions he identified as closest to former President Trump and the right-wing fringe viewed the two smaller upstarts almost as much if not more than Fox.

But while the upstarts have made headlines, Fox still leads in the ratings according to reports compiled by the *Deseret News*. The network had 3.6 million nightly viewers in 2020, compared to Newsmax’s peak of 495,000 in the month of the 2020 elections.

Liberal Cancellation Movements

As the for-profit right-of-center media are embroiled in turmoil, left-wing activists in both the for-profit and nonprofit sectors are seeking to de-platform the right-of-center networks and to silence right-of-center reporting. Perhaps the most prominent action before the 2020 election was the major social media companies’ effort to prevent the circulation of *New York Post* reporting on the contents of a laptop computer allegedly belonging to Democratic nominee Joe Biden’s son Hunter that appeared to implicate both Bidens in possibly corrupt activities.

Earlier in the year, NBC News’s News Verification Unit pushed a campaign by the British nonprofit Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH) targeting the right-leaning news and commentary website the Federalist. CCDH’s “Stop Funding Fake News” project had targeted the Federalist and other right-of-center and far-right outlets for reporting and commentary critical of Black Lives Matter and demonstrations following the death of George Floyd in police custody (later determined by a Minnesota jury to have constituted unintentional murder). Google

issued a warning threatening to remove the Federalist from its advertising platform. After criticism, Google declared that the Federalist’s comments section had placed it in violation of its terms of service, and Google allowed the site to continue advertising after the comments section was temporarily removed.

Liberal cancellation efforts surged in the wake of the demonstration in Washington, DC, addressed by then-President Trump and the subsequent riot at the U.S. Capitol during the counting of Electoral College votes on January 6, 2021. MSNBC commentator and Aspen Institute fellow Anand Giridharadas openly asked in a now-deleted Tweet, “Should Fox News be allowed to exist?” PolitiFact co-founder Bill Adair proposed a “bipartisan commission to investigate the problem of misinformation.” New America strategist Peter W. Singer analogized online speech to open warfare. By April 2021, liberal groups including the Center for American Progress, Common Cause, Electronic Frontier Foundation, and Voto Latino had sent a letter to the Biden administration calling for the creation of a federal task force to issue “a comprehensive set of principles and overall policy, funding, and



Rush Limbaugh had essentially created the modern conservative talk radio ecosystem in the wake of the repeal of the Fairness Doctrine in the late 1980s, in addition to being its public face.

Credit: Gage Skidmore. License: <https://bit.ly/3daVgIq>.

legislative recommendations for addressing disinformation,” while purporting to consider “protection of free expression.”

Oliver Darcy and Brian Stelter, CNN’s in-house critics of right-leaning media, have called on cable carriers to drop One America News Network and Newsmax. Other commentators echoing Giridharadas have called for similar action against Fox. Media Matters for America, which has a long-standing campaign against Fox News, has continued to push for cable providers to cut Fox News from their offerings and to demand that advertisers stop buying ads on the channel.

Big Changes on the Right

While Fox News and the other Murdoch properties are the largest voices on the right, other independent voices like Rush Limbaugh and Matt Drudge have also contributed. However, for different reasons, those two particular voices are no longer part of the media landscape in the ways they once were.

Limbaugh, of course, succumbed to a years-long battle with cancer in early 2021. Limbaugh had essentially created the modern conservative talk radio ecosystem in the wake of the repeal of the Fairness Doctrine in the late 1980s, in addition to being its public face. His passing marked “the end of the 1990s Right” to some, with Limbaugh among the last of a set of figures who defined conservative advocacy and politics in the age of the Gingrich Revolution to exit the scene amid the 2020 election season. Others warned of the drawbacks of Limbaugh’s style, warning that “to the extent that the populists like Limbaugh and [his personal friend President] Donald Trump have become the face of conservative politics, they have driven away people who are otherwise conservative but cannot imagine trucking along with people who say ‘Feminazis.’”

More mysterious is what has become of Matt Drudge’s Drudge Report website, once a titan of the right-of-center internet media. Noting the site’s drift from oppositional populist-leaning conservatism to orthodox current-year progres-

sivism, the Tablet reported on speculation by former associates of Matt Drudge who suggested he may have relinquished control of the website or sold it. Tablet reported that Lucianne Goldberg, a onetime associate of Drudge who worked with him in breaking the Monica Lewinsky scandal, believed that “It’s a totally different publication” and “It’s just so obvious that he’s not interested, that somebody else is doing it,” though Goldberg had not spoken to Drudge in a half-decade.

Ultimately, Tablet’s reporter could not conclusively determine what had happened at the website amid a total change in tone, a potential for genuine disappointment in the Trump administration’s inability to deliver on Matt Drudge’s immigration restrictionist preferences, or the complicated and opaque world of online advertising. The reporter con-



Credit: Penn State. License: <https://bit.ly/3d4Ktn>.

The 1619 Project, was an effort by New York Times Magazine writer and 2016 MacArthur Foundation fellow Nikole Hannah-Jones to redefine the American founding—from the Revolutionary period to the first importation of enslaved Africans to what would become the original 13 states—with a stated policy aim of securing governmental “reparations” payments to African Americans.

Revenue in the Nonprofit News Sector

Nonprofit News Outlet	Revenue				
	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016
ProPublica	\$35,696,000	\$39,246,884	\$26,685,933	\$43,574,038	\$14,545,521
Center for Public Integrity	N/A	\$5,315,614	\$4,227,953	\$9,994,978	\$4,908,712
Center for Investigative Reporting	N/A	\$9,385,119	\$8,672,994	\$13,561,450	\$10,133,430

Source: For years 2016–2019, organizations’ IRS Form 990. For ProPublica 2020, estimate from the ProPublica Annual Report, p. 29, <https://assets-c3.propublica.org/pdf/reports/propublica-2020-annual-report.pdf>.

cluded: “Whether through a payday, political apathy, or a newfound slackerdome, Drudge might have actually pulled off everyone’s dream: making bank and then logging off.”

Developments in the Nonprofit News Sector

The nonprofit news sector that we profiled in 2019 has also evolved. Through 2019–2020, the “Trump bump”—a surge in revenue to the major left-leaning nonprofit news outlets, largely from foundation sources—dissipated somewhat. Of the three major nonprofit news gatherers profiled in our 2019 piece, only ProPublica maintained most of its increased Trump-era revenue.

The nonprofit news sector nearly received a major cash infusion in April 2021, when controversial Swiss environmentalist and liberal billionaire Hansjorg Wyss unsuccessfully attempted to buy Tribune Company, the publisher of (among other properties) the *Baltimore Sun* and *Chicago Tribune*. Wyss had previously supported the Hub Project, a nonprofit “communications hub” associated with the Arabella Advisors network of liberal “dark money” that liberal outlets credited with doing “remarkable damage” to Republican standing in the electorally crucial midwestern states.

The Pulitzer Center and the 1619 Project

Perhaps the most prominent ostensibly journalistic endeavor since our last review of the media landscape was the 1619 Project, an effort by controversial *New York Times Magazine* writer and 2016 MacArthur Foundation fellow Nikole Hannah-Jones to redefine the American founding—from the Revolutionary period to the first importation of enslaved Africans to what would become the original 13 states—with a stated policy aim of securing governmental “reparations” payments to African Americans.

Historians with specializations in America’s Revolutionary and Early Republic periods, including several with left-leaning to radical-left politics, criticized the 1619 Project and especially Hannah-Jones’s framing essay. Despite the criticisms, Hannah-Jones was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Commentary.

Assisting *Times Magazine* and Hannah-Jones with the project was the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting (not to be confused with the Pulitzer Prizes, which are awarded by Columbia University). The Pulitzer Center—which is heavily funded by major liberal foundations including the Wallace Global Fund II, Omidyar Network Fund, and Kendeda Fund—was responsible for developing a curriculum to bring the 1619 Project ideology into public school

classrooms. For its part, the MacArthur Foundation’s tax returns showed the foundation provided the Pulitzer Center with \$650,000 that may align with 1619 Project-like initiatives. For its part, the Pulitzer Center took in revenue of over \$13 million in 2018, approximately doubling its usual annual revenues of \$5 million to \$8 million. From 2016 through 2019, the organization’s net assets more than doubled from \$8.5 million to over \$22 million.

The Bulwark Follows Its Money

In 2019, it still appeared that the Bulwark—a media project of the Pierre Omidyar-funded nonprofit Republic Affairs (then known as Defending Democracy Together Institute) fronted by ex-Republican commentators Bill Kristol and Charlie Sykes—might evolve into something more than a repository of MSNBC-contributing former Republicans for rent, who seemingly existed solely to support whatever the liberalism of the moment demanded. That has not proven to be the case. Despite ostensibly being created to “conserve conservatism” in the face of the rising populist faction led by Donald Trump, the Bulwark marked its public debut by seeking a puff piece in the liberal *The Atlantic* and sending left-wing and pro-abortion-feminist scion Molly Jong-Fast to “cover” the Conservative Political Action Conference by, among other things, deriding pro-life activists.

The website now runs pieces by former staffers for conspiracy-minded Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) promoting the Left’s radical and likely unconstitutional H.R. 1 election administration overhaul. Its board chair endorsed the unsuccessful nomination of Center for American Progress head Neera Tanden for a senior position in the Biden administration. To cap it all off, it publishes calls to abolish the Senate filibuster so Democrats can enact the most radical parts of their agenda, such as the labor union–empowering PRO Act. The Bulwark also promotes the historically unsubstantiated



In 2019, it still appeared that the Bulwark—a media project fronted by ex-Republican commentators Bill Kristol and Charlie Sykes—might evolve into something more than a repository of MSNBC-contributing former Republicans for rent.

idea that the Republican Party “has no prospect for regaining majority status” despite its sub-presidential strength.

This is what some predicted as soon as Republic Affairs’ funding became publicly known: How could an institution funded by prominent liberals like Pierre Omidyar, institutional liberal funders like the Hewlett Foundation, and even arms of the Arabella Advisors “dark money” network become anything other than a Democratic mouthpiece? Conservatives skeptical of Trump-like populism but not prepared to become outright liberals are instead left with the “broken promise” of what Bill Kristol and company’s dissenting website might have been. One hopes the (for-profit and funding-undetermined) project of Jonah Goldberg and Steve Hayes at the Dispatch does not follow the same path.

The Rise of Ideologically Aligned “Newsrooms”

As we noted in our 2019 survey of the nonprofit media landscape, the openly partisan press is as old as the American republic, with Alexander Hamilton’s *Federalist Gazette of the United States* battling Thomas Jefferson’s old Republican *National Gazette*. In recent years, liberal activists have launched two major partisan or ideological media efforts aimed at state and local coverage, while conservatives have responded by building out and rebranding their own state-house reporting network.

Most controversial of these efforts has been Courier Newsroom, an openly partisan project of the ACRONYM network of Democratic-aligned political committees best known for its association with the creators of the phone-voting application that crashed during the Iowa Democratic Party presidential nominating caucuses in 2020. The left-leaning media watchdog NewsGuard characterized Courier Newsroom as a “clandestine political operation” and noted the \$25 million commitment the ACRONYM network had made in Courier and its affiliated ostensibly “local” news websites.

ACRONYM is known to have taken funding from both the New Venture Fund, part of the Arabella Advisors network of liberal “dark money,” and Democratic activist and LinkedIn founder Reid Hoffman. For its part, the Sixteen Thirty Fund—the Arabella network’s electoral advocacy arm—commissioned its own Facebook ad buys, which created what the left-leaning Center for Responsive Politics called “the impression of multiple free-standing local news outlets

with unique names and disclaimers” but recirculated identical, national-level talking points.

The Arabella network also seeded States Newsroom (formerly the Newsroom Network), a number of left-of-center media outlets that cover state-level politics and policy. Among the publications in the States Newsroom network are the Arizona Mirror, Maine Beacon, Colorado Independent, Florida Phoenix, Maryland Matters, Michigan Advance, North Carolina Policy Watch, Nevada Current, Pennsylvania Capital-Star, and Virginia Mercury. The publications and States Newsroom itself have extensive ties to the Left.

Responses from the Center and Right

Developments in the corporate media, the left-wing labor union–dominated newsroom culture, and openly ideological left-wing advocacy press have yielded responses from independent journalists and organizations outside the left-progressive current-year “consensus.”

Self-Publishing: The Substack Dissenters. The other notable development occurred outside the nonprofit sphere and provoked harsh condemnation from the self-appointed guardians of the journalistic profession: the rise of the online newsletter, most prominently on the Substack platform. Substack allows writers to sell their writing as electronic newsletters directly to individual subscribers.

Two of the most prominent journalists to depart major outlets for self-published Substack are both dissenters on the political Left: neoliberal Zionist Bari Weiss, who left the *New York Times* amid the NewsGuild–backed effort to purge the editors responsible for the Tom Cotton op-ed, and socialist and longtime critic of Western foreign policy (and Israel) Glenn Greenwald, who departed the Intercept, the Pierre Omidyar–backed left-wing online news outlet that Greenwald co-founded.

Both had, from different perspectives, become critics of core left-progressive priorities during the Trump years. Weiss, in addition to her increasingly lonely support of Israel from the center-left, became a critic of aggressive “woke” social policy, an opposition that she has expounded from her new, independent post.

Greenwald, a longtime critic of American national security policy, who is perhaps best known for assisting Edward Snowden’s disclosures of classified information about the National Security Agency’s activities, emerged as a staunch critic of national security bureaucracies’ behavior during



Right-of-center interests have expanded their state-level reporting networks, at least somewhat in response to the rise of the liberal States Newsroom and Democratic-aligned Courier Newsroom.

the investigations into alleged connections between Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign and the Russian government. Greenwald has also criticized major technology companies' decisions to bar former President Trump from their platforms, earning him more "strange new respect" from those on the political right.

The rise of Substack as a home for ideological dissidents like Weiss, Greenwald, and even some conservatives provoked backlash from the guardians of institutional journalism. The further creation of the social media platform Clubhouse, which facilitates online voice chatrooms, drew criticism from left-wing guardians of journalism who complained that the site's non-retention of conversations would lead to "unfettered conversations" and lacked a "path to accountability"—one presumes, a "path" to cancel those whose conversations became too "unfettered" in objecting to current-year progressive sacred cows.

New Policy Reporting. Self-publication has also come to issue-level policy reporting. Steven Gutowski, a firearms journalist then at the *Washington Free Beacon* whom we mentioned as one of the right's "outnumbered [issue] beat reporters," formed his own for-profit website the Reload to provide coverage of firearms policy. Since debuting the site in late April 2021, the Reload has covered the National Rifle Association bankruptcy trial and leadership controversies, the Supreme Court's decision to hear a challenge to New York's strict concealed-carry regulations, and the Biden administration's draft proposal to regulate so-called "ghost guns."

For their part, right-of-center interests have expanded their state-level reporting networks, at least somewhat in response to the rise of the liberal States Newsroom and Democratic-aligned Courier Newsroom. The Franklin News Foundation, aligned with the network of public policy groups surrounding the Illinois Policy Institute, took over what was the Franklin Center for Government and Public Integrity and the folded Watchdog.org website. It created the Center Square, a state-policy reporting network to replace Watchdog.

The financial dynamics we noted in our last survey, in which the Left had a strong advantage, remain even in the narrow

world of new statehouse efforts. In its 2019 tax year, the only year for which information is available at time of publication, the liberal States Newsroom reported \$6,982,113 in revenue, more than triple Franklin News Foundation's \$1,713,981 from its most recent publicly available tax year of 2018.

Conclusion

The Trump years brought sea changes to the media, as a motivated woke-liberal audience flowed in alongside millions of dollars in nonprofit and for-profit money. Alongside that audience influx came the rise of the "internal mob," enforcing a strict ideological line among journalists at metropolitan newspapers with the support of the labor unions, which ostensibly exist to protect journalists from arbitrary firing, among other labor practices. The rise of internal and external "cancel culture" drove some writers to platforms over which they maintained more personal control, while right-of-center outlets tried to walk the line between reporting accurately on the state of politics and irritating a now former president of the United States and his supporters.

In the nonprofit world, the "Trump bump" for (liberal) investigative reporting outlets receded even before their nemesis left office, but it was replaced with a new ideological effort to advance radical racial theories under the guise of history with the backing of one of America's largest grant-makers. Ideologically aligned statehouse reporting picked up, with a continuing advantage for the Left in resources.

As the Biden administration proceeds, it remains to be seen what will happen to the media, both for-profit and not-for-profit. Will the realities of opposition yield further investment from right-of-center donors to hold the administration to account? Will continued labor union-orchestrated ideological purges in major newsrooms weaken them further? Will progressive activists and donors, who spent the Trump administration pouring resources into liberal media, continue to do so, now that their nemesis has departed the center political stage? Only time will tell. ■

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ADDRESSING BIG TECH CENSORSHIP

By Richard Berman

Summary: *The recent avalanche of censorship from Big Tech companies has been shocking. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and other social media platforms silenced a sitting president. Apple, Amazon, and Google decided within a single weekend to eliminate Parler, a competing social media platform. Yet this should not have been a surprise, Big Tech censorship has been building for years. While Congress hasn't had the stomach to address Big Tech censorship yet, rumblings are growing on both sides of the aisle about how to rein in these massive corporations.*

The recent avalanche of censorship from Big Tech companies has been shocking.

Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and several other social media platforms silenced a sitting president. Apple, Amazon, and Google all decided—within a single weekend—to remove the up-and-coming social media platform Parler from their app stores and web server, rendering Parler unreachable for weeks.

More recently, YouTube, a product of Google, pulled a page out of the Chinese Communist Party's playbook. It made a video featuring Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis (R) and four doctors disappear, apparently because the conversation was “violating YouTube's Community Guidelines” by discussing why Florida opposed lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic. The video had 500,000 views until YouTube decided it should not exist.

These acts of censorship were unprecedented, but Americans shouldn't have been surprised. The snowball that is Big Tech censorship has been rolling and getting larger for a long time. To understand how we got here, we need to understand how it started.

CC — *Unlike the government, private companies are not beholden to the First Amendment, and they can limit the speech of their customers.*



Credit: Sgt. Nicole Mejia, Public Domain.

YouTube, a product of Google, pulled a page out of the Chinese Communist Party's playbook by making a video featuring Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis (R) and four doctors disappear, apparently because they were “violating YouTube's Community Guidelines” by discussing why Florida opposed lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Censorship Timeline

As private companies, entities like Facebook, Alphabet, Twitter, Apple, and Amazon are free to censor anyone they choose. Unlike the government, private companies are not beholden to the First Amendment, and they can limit the speech of their customers.

Censorship online started with small steps that nearly everyone supported—and encouraged. In 2014, Twitter and Facebook both began suspending accounts tied to ISIS terrorists. The terrorists were using these accounts to recruit vulnerable Americans to carry out violent acts. The content was indefensible, and social media platforms were praised for removing thousands of accounts used by extremists.

Richard Berman is the executive director of the American Security Institute, which runs ChallengeCensorship.com.

As Big Tech companies grew, the line at which content was considered indefensible began to blur. Facebook and Twitter moved beyond censoring ISIS terrorists to censoring conspiracy theorists and provocateurs such as Milo Yiannopolous and Alex Jones. It became clear that Big Tech companies were interested in more than stopping violence; they wanted to stop ideas.

Soon, the social media censorship bar dropped much lower. Twitter permanently suspended Canadian journalist Meghan Murphy for tweeting “men aren’t women.” Actor James Woods was suspended for joking that Democrats did not want white men to vote.

Prominent politicians began getting caught in the censorship net. Twitter removed an advertisement from Sen. Marsha Blackburn (R-TN) because she stated her opposition to Planned Parenthood while Facebook blocked Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) from posting an advertisement calling for Big Tech companies to be broken up. Google blocked campaign advertisements from Democratic presidential contender Tulsi Gabbard (D-HI) during a debate in which she was the most-searched primary candidate.

Along the way, Big Tech suppressed several accounts only to later claim the censorship was an internal mistake. Twitter suspended conservative commentator Candace Owens for quoting a tweet a *New York Times* columnist wrote about white people. Facebook declared parts of the Declaration of Independence to be “hate speech.” A “rogue” Twitter employee temporarily suspended President Donald Trump’s account. Republican lawmakers began to question why most of Big Tech’s “mistakes” seemed to harm only conservatives.

While these bans played out before the public, internal leaks and investigative reports began to reveal more censorship behind the scenes. A whistleblower leaked an internal meeting at Google revealing that the company was working to censor content in its search algorithm. Google fired engineer James Damore for suggesting that the hiring disparity between male and female engineers was not a result of sexism. Twitter, meanwhile, was found to be “shadow banning” conservative accounts. Shadow banning is the process of suppressing a user’s content without notifying the user. The user believes the content has been posted as usual, but followers cannot see the content and the content is blocked from appearing in search results on the website.

The Big Tech companies were making the censorship decisions, but outside corporations have influenced and continue to influence some of the censorship. In 2017, YouTube suffered an “Adpocalypse” after several corporate advertisers, including Coca-Cola and Amazon, pulled advertisements

from the platform and refused to return until they could be sure their advertisements would not appear before videos that contained “hate speech.”

YouTube responded by purging thousands of videos and starting the process of “demonetizing” videos with controversial content. When a video is demonetized, it runs without an advertisement, preventing the video’s creator from earning revenue from the video on YouTube. Demonetization became a tool for YouTube to punish users who posted controversial content. YouTube has demonetized and suppressed conservative creators PragerU and Stephen Crowder.

All these steps laid the groundwork for the onslaught of Big Tech censorship that followed the 2020 election and the Capitol riots on January 6.

Election Fallout Sends Big Tech’s Censorship into Overdrive

Before the election on November 3, Big Tech firms were already scheming how to respond if anything they considered to be misinformation began to spread about the election or election results.

Americans got a preview of the censorship plans after the *New York Post* published a story about Hunter Biden’s laptop. Facebook suppressed the story, and Twitter blocked users from sharing it on Twitter. And Twitter shut down *New York Post*’s Twitter account for weeks. Both tech companies claimed the story was Russian disinformation, but the investigation into Hunter Biden and the legitimacy of the laptop were both confirmed in the following weeks.

As it became clear Joe Biden won the 2020 election, Twitter and Facebook became bolder with their censorship of President Trump. Every tweet he posted highlighting his concerns about the election was flagged as untrue, and users were required to read a warning before viewing the tweet.



While Twitter and Facebook maintained that they would not censor a sitting president throughout Trump’s presidency, the riots at the U.S. Capitol on January 6 gave them the green-light they were seeking. On the evening of January 6, Twitter



Credit: Techlearn easy. License: <https://bit.ly/35Qcdno>

[Google CEO Sundar Pichai] Google struck first. On January 8, Google removed Parler from its Play Store rendering the app unreachable on any Android phone. Google claimed Parler lacked “moderation policies and enforcement that removes egregious content like posts that incite violence.”

temporarily suspended Trump’s account. On January 8, Twitter announced that the suspension would be permanent. Facebook quickly followed suit, as did YouTube, Snapchat, Twitch, Shopify, and Reddit.

Having just watched the censorship of a sitting president, millions of Americans turned to Parler. They downloaded the app in search of an alternative platform. Parler, similar in format to Twitter, quickly became the number one app in the world, setting the stage for an extreme and unprecedented instance of Big Tech censorship.

Big Tech Purges Parler

Between January 8 and January 10, three Big Tech companies systematically wiped Parler from existence.

Google struck first. On January 8, a Friday night, Google removed Parler from its Play Store rendering the app

unreachable on any Android phone. Google claimed Parler lacked “moderation policies and enforcement that removes egregious content like posts that incite violence.”

Apple followed Google’s lead on the morning of January 9, a Saturday. Apple announced Parler’s removal from the App Store stating:

We have always supported diverse points of view being represented on the App Store, but there is no place on our platform for threats of violence and illegal activity. Parler has not taken adequate measures to address the proliferation of these threats to people’s safety.

Following Apple’s decision, Parler became unreachable by anyone using an Apple phone.

More than 99 percent of Americans use an Apple or Android phone. Two companies unilaterally decided the number one app in the world should not exist. Several months later, in mid-April, Apple reversed its decision and reinstated Parler’s app, but the damage was done.

Amazon completed the censorship trifecta. They notified Parler that it would be removed from its web servers on Sunday, January 10. Amazon web servers are home to 40 percent of the internet’s websites. After Amazon removed it, Parler was left completely unreachable via app or internet browser.

Over a single weekend, the executives of Apple, Amazon, and Google—along with all of their attorneys and public relations officials—supposedly decided independently of each other that Parler should not exist and its 15 million users should be silenced.

The Double Standard

Americans were justifiably jarred by the riots on January 6, and Big Tech executives were eager to place blame on Parler.

Facebook chief operating officer Sheryl Sandberg downplayed her company’s role in the riots and quickly blamed Parler: “I think these events were largely organized on



Over a single weekend, Apple, Amazon, and Google supposedly decided independently of each other that Parler should not exist and its 15 million users should be silenced.

platforms that don't have our abilities to stop hate and don't have our standards and don't have our transparency."

Sandberg made her statement before much was known about the riot or how it was organized. Apple, Google, and Amazon also made their decisions to remove Parler before they knew anything about the riots. The House Committee on Oversight and Reform launched an investigation into Parler for its role in the riots, without considering Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, or any other social media platform that may have been home to the rioters.

By February, the picture of the riots was becoming clear. The Justice Department had made dozens of arrests and conducted preliminary interviews with many of the alleged rioters. According to an analysis of the charging documents by *Forbes*, Parler was mentioned eight times by the rioters. Facebook was mentioned 73 times. YouTube, a product of Google, was mentioned 24 times. Instagram, a product of Facebook, was mentioned 20 times.

Further investigation into the Justice Department's records by Parler's legal team revealed that Facebook was referenced in 54 percent of the charging documents, Twitter in 13 percent of the charging documents, and Instagram in 13 percent of the charging documents. Parler was mentioned in just 5 percent of the charging documents.

Facebook, Twitter, and Google were far more culpable than Parler.

In a letter to Congress as part of the House Oversight Committee's investigation, Parler highlighted the records from the Justice Department and noted that it had been in direct contact with the FBI ahead of the riots. Parler had warned the FBI more than 50 times prior to January 6 that users were discussing a possible attack on the U.S. Capitol.

Why then was Parler purged from the Internet when Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram were left unquestioned? Why did Parler warrant a congressional investigation, but other social media platforms didn't?



Credit: TechCrunch. License: <https://bit.ly/35XDcy>

[YouTube CEO Susan Wojcicki] In 2017, YouTube suffered an "Adpocalypse" after several corporate advertisers, including Coca-Cola and Amazon, pulled advertisements from the platform and refused to return until they could be sure their advertisements would not appear before videos that contained "hate speech."

The corporations and politicians who maligned Parler had two main motivations. Liberal politicians wanted to silence Parler because it became the obvious home for conservatives who had suffered years of censorship on Twitter and Facebook. Big Tech executives wanted to silence Parler because it was quickly growing into a major player in the social media industry. Parler's competitive edge was one Facebook and Twitter had proven they couldn't tolerate: uncensored speech.

To be clear, rioters planned and bragged about their destruction online, including on Parler. But it's hardly unique for criminals to misuse social media platforms. Last summer, criminals exploited the Black Lives Matter movement to coordinate rioting and looting on Facebook in response to the death of George Floyd. YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter have all faced criticism for allowing pedophiles to abuse their platforms while preying on children.

As Sandberg said after the Capitol riots, Facebook, Google, Twitter, and others have resources and focus-grouped policies to stop this violence, but they haven't been able to succeed. Now, Parler, a start-up with fewer than 50 employees, is being held to a higher standard by both the media and Congress.

Big Tech's Friends in Washington

Looking at the fallout Parler faced following the riots, it's easy to wonder why a start-up was squashed while Facebook and its Big Tech peers remain unscathed. The difference between Parler and these other companies—besides several billion dollars—is that Big Tech firms have friends in high places.

Big Tech's protection in Washington began under President Barack Obama. In 2012, staffers in Bureau of Competition at the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) delivered an extensive report to top FTC officials detailing Google's anti-competitive behavior. The Obama appointees running the commission had the opportunity—and the evidence—to



Whether it was indifference or inbreeding, the Obama administration had no interest in reining in Big Tech.

rein in Google, but they declined. The European Union hit Google with billions of dollars in fines for anti-competitive behavior, but U.S. officials allowed Google to continue to dominate the industry.

Similarly, Facebook was allowed significant growth in 2012 when the FTC declined to block a merger between Facebook and Instagram despite an unnamed executive blatantly stating that Facebook intended to buy Instagram to eliminate a competitor.

During Obama's presidency, Google representatives had meetings in the White House on weekly basis, and the White House even requested talking points from Google while the administration was conducting an FTC investigation. Google hired more than 250 former White House employees during Obama's tenure. And after Obama's term ended, his staff flooded Big Tech firms. Lisa Jackson, Obama's head of the Environmental Protection Agency, went to Apple. Jay Carney, Obama's former press secretary, went to Amazon. Anne Wall, an Obama legislative staffer, went to Google.

Whether it was indifference or inbreeding, the Obama administration had no interest in reining in Big Tech. And despite Trump's bluster about opposing Big Tech, he did little to stop any of these monopolistic corporations.

The tech industry knows how to keep Washington buttered up. Big Tech firms have donated \$379,000 since 2016 to members of the antitrust subcommittees in both the House and the Senate.

While Big Tech keeps its friends close in Washington, that doesn't mean Big Tech firms don't have time to charm foreign leaders as well. Google went as far as developing a censored search engine for the Chinese government so it could remove content the Communist Party didn't like. Google eventually pulled the plug on the

project after backlash for helping a foreign government that routinely violates human rights.

What Now?

Within two decades, Facebook, Alphabet, Google, and Apple have grown more powerful than anyone could have imagined. They can control the flow of information and limit which news stories Americans see. They can kill competitive start-ups like Parler. They can silence sitting presidents and governors. And while Congress hasn't had the stomach to address Big Tech censorship yet, rumblings are growing on both sides of the aisle about how to rein in these massive corporations.

Members of Congress are considering two strategies.

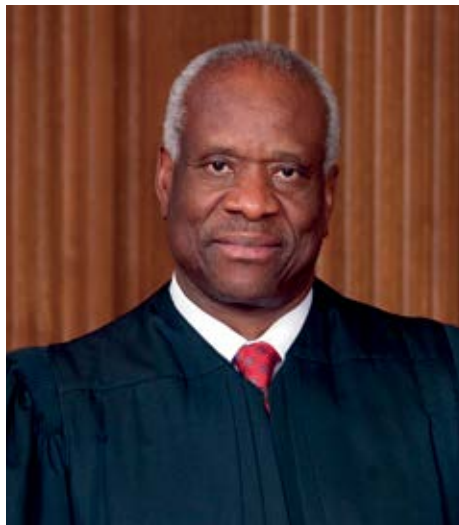
The first is to split up Big Tech using existing antitrust laws. The Obama administration may have declined to strike when it had the chance, but many lawmakers want to break up Big Tech firms into smaller, less powerful entities. This

effort to break up Big Tech companies is supported by liberal lawmakers including Sen. Warren. Facebook, Google, Apple, and Amazon are all facing antitrust investigations in the United States and Europe that aim to expose any anti-competitive behaviors the companies are demonstrating.

While liberals like Warren love the idea of breaking up Big Tech, too much government interference makes some conservatives queasy.

The second method is changing how these entities operate within existing law. This could happen in two ways. The first, as proposed by Sen. Josh Hawley (R-MO), would revoke liability protections for Big Tech companies who censor certain political viewpoints.

Under Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act of 1996, service providers cannot be held



Public Domain.

In a recent opinion, Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas argued that social media platforms should be classified as common carriers. He argued online platforms are essential for free speech and noted that the government will need to address the issue of censorship in the future.

liable for crimes that occur over their platforms. Verizon, for example, cannot be held liable for a threat made during a cell phone call. Similarly, Facebook and Twitter cannot currently be held liable for any criminal conduct posted on their platforms.

Section 230 protections do not apply to publishers, however. A newspaper is not protected if it chooses to publish libelous content. Hawley argues that Facebook, Google, Twitter, and others are acting as publishers by deciding to censor some content while allowing other postings. If Hawley's proposal became law, social media platforms would have to either stop moderating political content or open themselves up to countless lawsuits.

Similarly, some conservatives have proposed that Big Tech must be considered utilities, like water or electricity. Utilities are managed by private companies, but the government has significant say over what they can charge and which customers they must serve. If social media platforms were utilities, they may not be allowed to choose which accounts to shut down.

In a recent opinion, Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas argued that social media platforms should be classified as common carriers. He argued online platforms are essential for free speech and noted that the government will need to address the issue of censorship in the future:

Today's digital platforms provide avenues for historically unprecedented amounts of speech, including speech by government actors. Also unprecedented, however, is control of so much speech in the hands of a few private parties. We will soon have no choice but to address how our legal doctrines apply to highly concentrated, privately owned information infrastructure such as digital platforms.

It's not clear which path Congress will choose, but concern over the immense power Big Tech companies have accrued over the past two decades appears to be one of the few bipartisan beliefs left in Washington. ■

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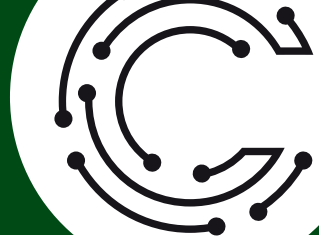


CLIMATE DOLLARS

HOW ONE FLAWED STUDY FOOLED THE MEDIA AND
POISONED THE DEBATE ON CLIMATE CHANGE

In a widely cited 2014 study, sociologist Robert Brulle purportedly exposed a “climate change counter-movement” of center-right groups “distort[ing] the public’s understanding of climate change.” He calculated that from 2003 to 2010, these nonprofits recorded revenues averaging “just over \$900 million” annually—a number that led to media claims that, “Conservative groups spend \$1bn a year to fight action on climate change.”

A Capital Research Center study cuts Mr. Brulle’s calculations down to size: Not only is Brulle’s assessment off by 93 percent, the resources of environmentalist groups and government agencies overwhelmingly dwarf those of skeptics. To learn more about the climate debate, visit www.ClimateDollars.org.



THE BIG FOUNDATIONS BEHIND PENNSYLVANIA'S "GREEN" ACTIVISTS

By Hayden Ludwig and Kevin Mooney

Summary: *Pennsylvania is the main battlefield in the environmental Left's effort to "green" the country with radical policies that promise to raise the cost of electricity, household appliances, and grocery bills—all in servitude of a far-left ideology. In this deep dive we expose the major funders behind Pennsylvania's biggest environmental activists and their campaigns to push the Keystone State into a left-wing cap-and-trade scheme, ban fracking, and end its dominance as America's energy powerhouse.*

Pennsylvania is ground zero for the environmental Left's increasingly radical climate agenda. As America's eastern-most powerhouse state, a victory for "green" special interests here would ripple throughout the country—spiking Americans' electricity bills, threatening their way of life, and undermining hard-earned energy independence brought on by natural gas.

Liberal politicians are battling to force the Keystone State into the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI), a pact of largely northeastern and largely Democratic-run states created to replace fossil fuels with expensive and unreliable renewable energy. In March, Republican lawmakers reintroduced legislation to block Gov. Tom Wolf (D) from imposing RGGI's carbon taxes without the legislature's approval. Wolf plans to have Pennsylvania join the compact next year. The resolution to this ongoing debate will ultimately hinge on whether RGGI's impositions should be considered fees or taxes, because taxes require legislative approval.

Pressuring lawmakers to damn the torpedoes and rush into RGGI is a host of well-funded activist groups, including the Environmental Defense Fund and Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC). They argue that Gov. Tom Wolf (D) has the unilateral authority to submit Pennsylvania to RGGI's cap-and-trade system over and against the Republican-controlled legislature. NRDC-aligned lawyers, for instance, opined in September that Wolf's Department of Environmental Protection has constitutional authority to regulate carbon dioxide limits, no legislature needed.



Credit: Tom Wolf. License: <https://bit.ly/3bd2SHn>.

In March, PennEnvironment lauded Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolf (D) for announcing the largest push for solar power in Pennsylvania history, providing almost 50 percent of the electricity in a slate of counties after construction finishes in 2023.

But if Pennsylvania doesn't join RGGI, argues the Sierra Club's Pennsylvania chapter, the state's corn and dairy industries will "see major losses," winter sports "will likely disappear entirely," and "extreme rainstorms . . . and summer heat waves will threaten more lives"—all debunked pseudoscientific claims that nevertheless drive home how much the far-Left is willing to lie to get its way. CERES, a nonprofit that coerces manufacturers and retailers into towing the environmental line, even claims that global warming could "reduce the value of global financial assets by as much as \$24 trillion"—one-third of the world's GDP, eclipsing the 2008 economic collapse.

Hayden Ludwig is a senior research analyst at CRC. Kevin Mooney is an investigative reporter with The Daily Signal who also writes and reports for several national publications including National Review, the Daily Caller, American Spectator and the Washington Examiner.

Then there's the campaign to ban fracking, or hydraulic fracturing, a process in which a high-powered solution of water and chemicals is injected to break up the massive oil and natural gas formations, which are found beneath much of Pennsylvania. President Joe Biden resisted pressure from left-ist groups to call for a nationwide fracking ban on the 2020 campaign trail. But his platform includes transitioning the economy to 100 percent "clean energy" (read: renewables) in a few decades, which leaves no room even for natural gas. Upon taking office in January 2021, he ordered a moratorium on new oil and gas leases on federal lands and waters.

We've traced the leading groups pushing this extreme agenda, highlighting their goals and exposing their funders. Put together it reveals a vast web of activist groups and special interests waging war on abundant and affordable energy.

Pennsylvania's Big Funders

Funding this web is a surprisingly small collection of foundations: the Heinz Endowments, William Penn Foundation, and the Woodtiger Fund.

The Heinz Endowments was originally formed from the estate of ketchup inventor Henry J. Heinz in Pittsburgh. today it's more famous as the philanthropy of environmentalist and former Vice President John Kerry, whose wife,



License: Public Domain.

Teresa Heinz, inherited the family fortune after her *first* husband, Sen. John Heinz (R-PA), died in a 1991 plane crash.

In 1990, Teresa Heinz met Kerry at an Earth Day event. Two years later, she was made a delegate to the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, which created the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which governs today's U.N. global warming agenda.

In 1990, Teresa Heinz met Kerry at an Earth Day event. Two years later, she was made a delegate to the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, which created the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which governs today's U.N. global warming agenda.

In 2017, Heinz joined Al Gore to "recruit and train climate change activists" in Pittsburgh prior to the release of his second global warming documentary, *An Inconvenient Sequel: Truth to Power*. (In his 2006 alarmist documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*, Gore predicted that the Earth's climate would reach a "point of no return" by 2016.)

In 2019, the Heinz Endowments (2019 assets: \$1.2 billion) paid out grants totaling \$59 million. While the foundation supports many philanthropic causes—such as public libraries and the arts—at least \$12 million of that money benefited political groups that aim to wipe out coal production, "clean air" groups that support stricter emissions regulations, and "environmental justice" activists. Even some of its grants to universities such as Carnegie Mellon University are meant to promote environmental ideology, such as a \$370,000 grant "to visualize air quality impacts and engage communities in the region."

In 2019 alone, Heinz supported a host of national and local environmental groups:

- \$375,000 to the Clean Air Task Force, an anti-oil think tank;
- \$590,000 to the Clean Air Council, a Philadelphia-based nonprofit created in 1967 to file environmental lawsuits;
- \$1.1 million to Sustainable Pittsburgh, a renewable energy group;
- \$375,000 to the Group Against Smog and Pollution "to advocate for improved air quality in the region" of Pittsburgh;
- \$60,000 to Mothers Out Front "to engage mothers and families to promote a sustainable region and to protect communities from fossil energy development";
- \$300,000 to the Mountain Watershed Association, a Pennsylvania conservation group, "to protect the public and environment from fossil fuel development impacts";
- \$475,000 to Pittsburgh United, an environmentalist-union coalition backed by the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and Sierra Club, to support multiple "clean water and air" advocacy and organizing campaigns, much of it to "invest in [its] staff, board, and operations"; and
- \$90,000 to the Sierra Club "to protect the region from impacts from fossil fuel use and development."

To a lesser degree Heinz also funds activist groups involved in other issues in Pennsylvania and elsewhere. In 2019 alone, it granted:

- \$250,000 to the Keystone Research Center “to increase the **effectiveness of Pennsylvania state government by attracting top quality candidates** for administration positions and creating a training and capacity building program” (emphasis added);
- \$170,000 to the Fair Elections Center, an anti-voter ID litigation group incubated by the “dark money” network run by Arabella Advisors;
- \$75,000 to Arabella Advisors’ New Venture Fund to support its 2020 Census Project “in achieving a full and accurate count of the U.S. population,” which in reality targeted Democratic-leaning cities;
- \$350,000 to Pennsylvania Voice, part of the national leftist get-out-the-vote group State Voices, to “build a coordinated field plan to ensure a fair and accurate 2020 Census”; and
- \$250,000 to Planned Parenthood of Western Pennsylvania to “establish a DeFund fund to offset the Title X gag rule” and “reduc[e] dependency on federal funding,” referring to the Trump administration’s 2019 decision to block federal funding through Title X for abortions.

The William Penn Foundation is another key donor to environmentalist causes in Pennsylvania. While the foundation is named for William Penn, the Quaker founder of Pennsylvania, it was endowed by Otto Haas, the late billionaire founder of the Rohm and Haas Company, a major chemical manufacturer that was acquired by Dow Chemical in 2009.

The Penn Foundation has paid out over \$1 billion in grants to other groups since 2000. While much of that money has benefited charitable causes—such as the Philadelphia Orchestra and city libraries—it has also heavily supported environmental organizations. Since 2000, those grants have included:

- \$10 million to Open Space Conservancy, which acquires land to halt development and construction;
- \$7.1 million to National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, a federally funded conservation group that makes grants to left-leaning conservation organizations such as Trout Unlimited and the Delaware Riverkeeper Network; and

- \$2 million to the Delaware Riverkeeper Network, an activist group that regularly sues the federal government over environmental issues, such as construction of a liquefied natural gas terminal on the Delaware River in April 2020.

Meet the Activists

PennFuture and Conservation Voters of Pennsylvania form a 501(c)(3)-501(c)(4) pair of activist nonprofits that aim to totally wipe out the state’s reliance on coal, natural gas, and oil, which they refer to as “dirty fuels.”

PennFuture (formerly Citizens for Pennsylvania’s Future) focuses primarily on litigation. The group’s web-site lists dozens of past lawsuits conducted with other activist-litigation groups such as Clean Air Council, Earthjustice, and the Sierra Club. One such lawsuit filed in June 2020 targeted Trump administration Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) administrator Andrew Wheeler, accusing the agency of “improperly regulating coke ovens” involved in steel production under the Clean Air Act. Past PennFuture lawsuits targeted coal-burning power plants, coal mines, and natural gas wells in Pennsylvania.

According to its latest IRS Form 990 filing, PennFuture’s priorities ultimately include implementing “carbon pricing policies,” referring to either a carbon tax or cap-and-trade system such as that imposed by RGGI. Either would devastate Pennsylvania, needlessly sacrificing the state’s powerful energy independence and jacking up electricity costs, which would be felt across the economy as skyrocketing grocery bills and gasoline prices—all to pursue a destructive ideology. So who’s funding this “green” campaign to impoverish Pennsylvanians?

PennFuture, the 501(c)(3) arm, has received at least \$15 million from Heinz Endowments since 2000, including \$375,000 in 2019 alone. Since 2000, it has received another \$10.6 million from the William Penn



PennFuture and Conservation Voters of Pennsylvania aim to totally wipe out the state’s reliance on coal, natural gas, and oil, which they refer to as “dirty fuels.”

Foundation. Many of the grant descriptions indicate “green” advocacy:

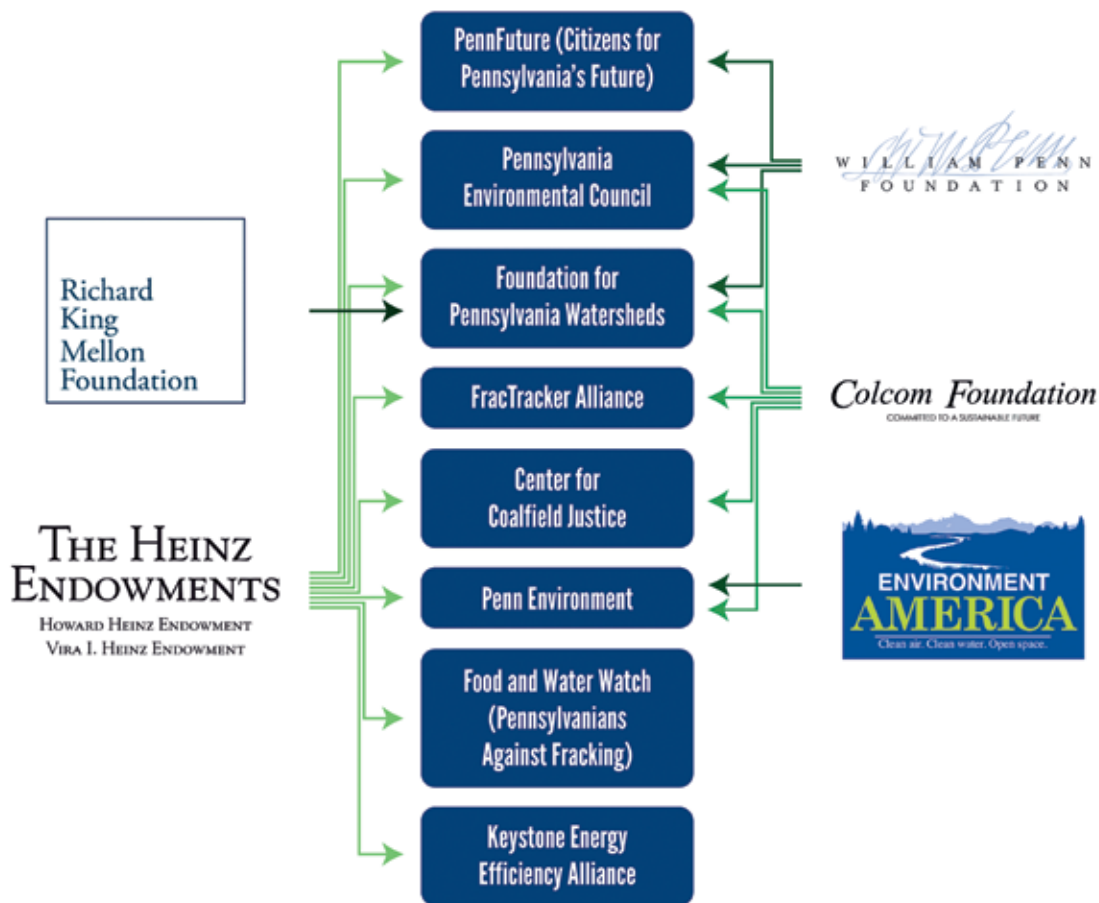
“For the Mid-Atlantic **renewable energy campaign**”

“To provide professional media training and support for Western Pennsylvania **public interest organizations**”

“To support the creation of a **comprehensive solar energy program** in Allegheny county”

“To provide **legal support** for citizens seeking to protect public health and safety and the environment in their communities”

FOUNDATIONS FUNDING ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVIST GROUPS



Credit: Capital Research Center

Heinz Endowment:

\$15 million to PennFuture
 \$1.2 million to Pennsylvania Environmental Council
 \$235,000 to PennEnvironment
 \$160,000 to Food and Water Watch (Pennsylvanians Against Fracking)
 \$1.5 million to Center for Coalfield Justice
 \$50,000 to Keystone Energy Efficiency Alliance
 \$3.1 million to Foundation for Pennsylvania Watersheds
 \$1.4 million to FracTracker Alliance

Penn Foundation:

\$10.6 million to PennFuture
 \$10.6 million to Pennsylvania Environmental Council
 \$815,000 to Foundation for Pennsylvania Watersheds

Colcom Foundation:

\$4.9 million to Pennsylvania Environmental Council
 \$1 million to PennEnvironment
 \$80,000 to Center for Coalfield Justice
 \$2.1 million to Foundation for Pennsylvania Watersheds
 \$108,000 to FracTracker Alliance

Environment America:

\$773,000 to PennEnvironment

Richard King Mellon Foundation:

\$4.3 million to Foundation for Pennsylvania Watersheds

“For support of the Western Pennsylvania Environmental Communications Resource Center and **campaign for land use and sustainable transportation** in southwestern Pennsylvania”

“**To reduce impact of natural gas development** on public health and environment and to **promote Pennsylvania’s shift to renewable energy**” (emphasis added)

PennFuture’s 501(c)(4) advocacy affiliate, Conservation Voters of Pennsylvania, (CVP) is also the state affiliate of the left-wing League of Conservation Voters (LCV), which the left-leaning Center for Public Integrity has called a “dark money heavyweight.”

Like the LCV, CVP supports politicians running for office who advocate for left-wing energy policies—which in practice means Democrats. The LCV political action committee (PAC), for instance, spent roughly \$910,000 in the 2020 election, 98.69 percent of which went to Democrats. Of the remainder, 0.23 percent (\$2,125) went to a single Republican: Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick (PA-01), who supports liberal environmental policies including a national carbon tax.

CVP’s super PAC spent close to \$856,000 in independent expenditures in 2020, outside spending in support of candidates that isn’t coordinated with that candidate’s campaign. In October 2020, the group’s executive director bragged that CVP aimed to flip 22 Republican-held state legislative districts, half of them outside of Philadelphia in what it called the “largest state electoral campaign by environmental group[s] in Commonwealth history.”

In fact, the group spent money in 25 districts, including the state’s attorney general race. Using data provided by the Pennsylvania Secretary of State, we traced CVP’s “success”:

Across the United States, 2020 was largely a bad election year for Democrats. In Pennsylvania, Republicans picked up four state house seats and maintained their 28-seat majority in the state senate. Far from sweeping the field, CVP-backed Democrats lost in 23 of the 25 legislative races targeted by the group. In one district covering Bucks County (HD-143) the CVP-backed *incumbent* actually lost to her Republican

challenger, despite CVP spending nearly \$91,000 supporting her reelection. In Dauphin and Perry Counties, CVP spent almost \$88,000 to support Democrat George Scott (\$1.32 per Democratic vote), only for him to lose to the Republican incumbent by more than 3 percentage points (4,487 votes).

CVP’s two legislative victories were both in Democratic-held districts in Chester County, southwest of Philadelphia: House District 156, where the incumbent won election to the state senate in a safe Democratic district (SD-19, just west of Philadelphia) and so did not appear on the 2020 ballot, and House District 158, where the incumbent Democrat narrowly won reelection by a scant 508 votes.

CVP is heavily funded by national environmental groups. To date, known donations include:

- \$1,160,757 from the League of Conservation Voters and LCV Education Fund,
- \$10,000 from the Energy Foundation and another \$10,000 from its 501(c)(4) Energy Action Fund,
- \$20,756 from the Federation of State Conservation Voter Leagues,
- \$41,500 from the Natural Resources Defense Council Action Fund, and
- \$45,024 from the Alaska Wilderness League Action.

The **Pennsylvania Environmental Council** (PEC) is a lobbying group with roots in the radical environmental movement of the early 1970s. The group was founded in 1970 to combat “the ravages of litter, air and water pollution, chemical waste”—and “overpopulation.” A memoir by some of the group’s founders in 2020 recalls the influence of Rachel Carson’s infamous 1969 book *Silent Spring*—whose wild claims about the toxicity of DDT have been blamed by conservatives and leftists alike for costing the lives of millions of people in developing countries—and *The Population Bomb*, a 1968 book that predicted the world would end from overpopulation and starvation in 1985.



In Rachel Carson’s 1969 book Silent Spring, the wild claims about the toxicity of DDT have been blamed by conservatives and leftists alike for costing the lives of millions of people in developing countries.

PEC aims to totally replace “fossil fuels” with renewable energy sources—what it calls “deep decarbonization”—and creating a carbon pricing scheme by formally entering Pennsylvania into RGGI. Its senior vice president, John Walliser, urged the state legislature to join the pact in 2019 legislative testimony. The group’s ultimate goal is “100% zero-carbon electricity supply” by 2050, a sheer impossibility using wind and solar sources (although interestingly PEC supports the expansion of nuclear power plants, a rarity on the Left).

PEC also wants the government to promote electric vehicles (EVs) and EV charging stations. In this it cites Driving PA Forward, a left-wing coalition of pro-illegal immigration and “social justice” groups. Driving PA Forward was created in 2018 using funding from Pennsylvania’s \$118.5 million settlement with Volkswagen, after the automobile manufacturer was caught cheating in EPA emissions tests for some of its vehicles.

PEC is also connected to PennFuture and Conservation Voters of PA. In the months before the 2020 election, they formed a joint organizing group to “empower” Pennsylvanians to “advocate for sustainable policies” (read: vote Democratic).

The Penn Foundation is the biggest known donor to PEC, giving at least \$10.6 million since 2001. The Heinz Endowments has gifted PEC roughly \$1.2 million since 2003. The foundation has also received nearly \$6.4 million between 1999 and 2020 from the Richard King Mellon Foundation, a Ligonier-based funder that supports a host of philanthropic causes as well as left-leaning groups such as the Society of Environmental Journalists. The Colcom Foundation—a Pittsburgh-based grantmaker that supports environmentalist, population control, and pro-abortion groups—has given PEC \$4.9 million since 2000.

PennEnvironment and **PennEnvironment Research and Policy Center** form a 501(c)(4) and 501(c)(3) pair of local affiliates for a massive, multi-million-dollar activist nexus in Washington, DC: the Public Interest Network. The inner workings of the Public Interest Network are obscure; it consists of roughly 100 left-wing nonprofits and for-profit companies that specialize in fake “grassroots” campaigns for *other* left-wing groups, hiring out poorly paid activists to solicit donations on street corners for groups such as Planned Parenthood and the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC). Its labor practices that have earned it a reputation on the Left as a “liberal sweatshop.” In 2019, CRC charted the vast network, revealing two pillars that together control most of its activism: the Public Interest Research Groups

(PIRGs), dating back to the antiwar activism of the 1960s, and Environment America.

Environment America is the puppet master of PennEnvironment and PennEnvironment Research and Policy Center. It also controls similar paired affiliates across the country that act as local branches of the master group. Environment America and its minions advocate for a host of left-wing environmental policies, including 100 percent renewable energy, banning fracking and offshore drilling, and halting construction of the Keystone XL pipeline (something President Biden ordered almost immediately upon taking office). In March, PennEnvironment lauded Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolf (D) for announcing the largest push for solar power in Pennsylvania history, providing almost 50 percent of the electricity in a slate of counties after construction finishes in 2023.

PennEnvironment’s known donors include the Energy Foundation, a major San Francisco-based pass-through funder to environmental causes, and its associated Energy Action Fund; the Foundation for Pennsylvania Watersheds, which funds local “green” activism; and the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) Action Fund. PennEnvironment is also one of the top-funded groups by Environment America, which gave it close to \$773,000 between 2015 and 2018.

PennEnvironment Research and Policy Center, the 501(c)(3) arm, has received \$1 million from the Colcom Foundation since 2008, \$767,000 from the Penn Foundation since 2006, \$235,000 from Heinz Endowments since 2010, and \$245,000 from the Energy Foundation since 2018. The Claneil Foundation—a grantmaker based in Montgomery County, Maryland, that funds groups addressing food waste and conservation—has gifted the group \$323,000 since 2006.

Pennsylvanians Against Fracking is a front for the far-left Food and Water Watch (FWW), one of the country’s leading anti-fracking groups. FWW zealously opposes all forms of carbon-based fuels. Its website states that “we must end fossil fuels” and “a national ban on fracking is key.” FWW practices a kind of environmental fundamentalism, warring on “fake climate solutions” put forward by Democratic politicians and corporations who pay lip service to global warming. Most recently, the group attacked California Gov. Gavin Newsom (D), a leftist luminary, for supposedly shilling for Big Oil because his executive order banning future sales of gasoline-burning cars by 2035 *didn’t go far enough*.



Pennsylvanians Against Fracking attacked California Gov. Gavin Newsom (D) for supposedly shilling for Big Oil because his executive order banning future sales of gasoline-burning cars by 2035 didn't go far enough.

This sometimes has the amusing effect of putting FWW at odds with the larger environmental activist movement, with the group calling cap-and-trade a “drastic and ineffective” “scheme” for putting a price on carbon that’s “ultimately paid by consumers.” FWW has pressured Biden to “keep his public lands fracking ban promise,” issuing a March 2021 press release noting that “On the campaign trail, Joe Biden was crystal clear about ending fracking on public lands.” This clashes with repeated reassurances from many on the professional Left and the media that the Biden administration isn’t interested in banning fracking on federally owned lands and Biden’s own campaign promises that he wouldn’t push for such a policy.

Naturally, Pennsylvanians Against Fracking (PAF) has goals that are just as radical as the national organization: a ban on all new oil and gas wells and a statewide moratorium on fracking.

It accomplished the first goal in 2015, when the newly elected Gov. Wolf banned new oil and gas leases on state-owned lands almost immediately after taking office in January. Wolf has so far resisted issuing a moratorium on fracking despite protests from PAF and FWW. A spokesman for his 2014 campaign said that Wolf opposes a blanket fracking ban, but in 2019 he announced that he supported a complete fracking ban in the Delaware River basin. That ban was imposed in February 2021 by the Delaware River Basin Commission, which oversees the watershed and whose commissioners include the governors of New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware.

Because PAF isn’t a standalone non-profit but a website owned and operated by FWW, it doesn’t file its own IRS Form 990 report. Donations to the group are directed toward its parent and individual donors are impossible to identify, although a number of major grantors to FWW

have been identified. Among them is Heinz Endowments, which isn’t a major donor to FWW but granted it \$160,000 in 2019 “to strengthen community protections from shale development.” FWW’s top donors over the last two decades include:

- \$33 million from the Greater Kansas Community Foundation;
- \$30 million from the Columbus Foundation, an Ohio-based funder of environmental groups;
- \$15 million from the Silicon Valley Community Foundation;
- \$6 million from the Jewish Communal Fund;
- \$4.3 million from Schwab Charitable Fund, a donor-advised fund provider (a kind of charitable savings account for anonymous donors);
- \$2.4 million from Fidelity Investments Charitable Gift Fund, a donor-advised fund provider; and
- \$1.6 million from the Park Foundation, an anti-natural gas fund



The dozens of smaller eco-activist groups riddling Pennsylvania deserve mention, especially since nearly all of them are funded by Heinz Endowments.

No Shortage of Smaller Groups

The dozens of smaller eco-activist groups riddling Pennsylvania deserve mention, especially since nearly all of them are funded by Heinz Endowments.

The Pennsylvania Environmental Defense Foundation is a tiny litigation nonprofit (2019 revenues: \$29,000) that irregularly engages in lawsuits on groundwater pollution, erosion damage, and chemical runoff. In 2017 it sued the Wolf administration alleging that \$61 million of the state appropriations bill for the year derived from gas revenues are unconstitutional.

The Center for Coalfield Justice (2019 revenues: \$919,000) is a far-left group in southwestern Pennsylvania that seeks a ban on fracking and coal ash disposal sites, a niche issue pursued by a handful of national litigation groups including Earthjustice, a Sierra Club spin-off. The center has received over \$1.5 million Heinz Endowments since 2002, including an \$80,000 grant in 2019, making Heinz its top identified donor. The Colcom Foundation has gifted the center at least \$375,000 since 2008.

The Keystone Energy Efficiency Alliance (2018 revenues: \$160,000) is a left-leaning pro-RGGI group associated with the Energy Efficiency Alliance, a northeastern 501(c)(6) trade association that represents renewables companies, construction firms, appliance manufacturers, and the leftist Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC). The association received \$50,000 from Heinz Endowments in 2019 “to support clean energy education and advocacy in western Pennsylvania.”

The Foundation for Pennsylvania Watersheds (2019 revenues: \$1.4 million), despite its name, is a pass-through 501(c)(3) public charity that supports environmentalist groups and counties in western Pennsylvania. Much of its funding goes to research into clean water initiatives, but it also pushes renewables. For example, Heinz Endowments gave the foundation a \$215,000 grant in 2019 to “to improve water quality, restore communities, and promote a just transition in western Pennsylvania.” In total, Heinz has given the group at least \$3.1 million since 2007. It has also been funded by the Richard King Mellon Foundation (\$4.3 million since 2007), Colcom Foundation (\$1.2 million since 2013), and William Penn Foundation (\$815,000 since 2010).

FracTracker Alliance is an anti-fracking group that originated as a website (FracTracker.org) run by the University of Pittsburgh from 2010 to 2012. While not an activist group *per se*, FracTracker provides research and maps of drilling operations across the country for use by other left-wing

groups. The original project was heavily financed by Heinz Endowments, which gifted it at least \$564,000 through two pass-throughs: the Community Foundation of Greater Johnstown and the Foundation for Pennsylvania Watersheds.

After FracTracker became a standalone 501(c)(3) nonprofit in 2012, Heinz continued to fund the group, gifting it at least \$1.4 million between 2014 and 2019. Other donors since 2012 include the Colcom Foundation (\$108,000) and Schmidt Family Foundation (\$400,000), the personal philanthropy of former Google chairman Eric Schmidt.

Left-leaning foundations outside Pennsylvania clearly understand how critical the commonwealth is to the oil and gas industry, which explains why they are funding climate change initiatives in the Keystone State that would curtail development of the Marcellus Shale where hydraulic fracturing exercises are now in operation. The Energy Foundation, a San Francisco-based grant maker, stands out as a key player, donating \$78,000 to Citizens for Pennsylvania's Future in 2008 and \$75,000 in 2009—all in the name of climate change. That's just a small part of the whole. The Energy Foundation also donated \$355,000 to Citizens for Pennsylvania's Future in 2017, \$60,000 in 2012, and \$43,000 in 2009 for “Public Engagement.” The Energy Foundation has also donated hundreds of thousands of dollars to Citizens for Pennsylvania's Future on behalf of “renewables.” The other foundation from outside of the state that deserves attention is the Park Foundation based in Ithaca, New York, which gained notoriety funding the propaganda film *Gasland* targeting natural gas development. Since 2009, the Park Foundation has donated tens of thousands to organizations opposed to fracking in Pennsylvania that include FracTracker Alliance, the Delaware Riverkeeper Network, the Clean Air Council, the Community Foundation for the Alleghenies, the Pittsburgh Community Broadcasting Corporation. The Park Foundation has also donated \$62,000 to the Society of Environmental Journalists between 2008 and 2012.

A “Green” Agenda

Few networks are more coordinated than the environmentalist movement. With major funders able to provide a virtually unlimited well of money, these groups are pushing an increasingly radical agenda on Pennsylvania and the country. ■

Read previous articles from the Green Watch series online at CapitalResearch.org/category/green-watch/.



SOCIAL JUSTICE UNIONISM ON THE BALLOT

By Michael Watson

Summary: Perhaps the most consequential misunderstanding of conservatives who hope to reach out to working Americans is the belief that labor unions' economic politics can be separated from their cultural politics. But voters need not look any further than their ballots to see that "social justice unionism" places Big Labor as a core pillar of a seamless cultural and economic agenda on the left. In 2020, labor unions pushed ballot measures seeking to codify racial essentialism and preferences, pushing left-wing "bail reform," challenging expanded gun rights, legalizing marijuana, and expanding mandatory "comprehensive sex education"—all cultural hobbyhorses of the Left that lie far outside labor's supposed "economic core."

Does organized labor consist of "purely industrial or economical class organizations with less hours and more wages for their motto"—to quote legendary American Federation of Labor president Samuel Gompers? Or has it evolved into a pillar of a left-progressive movement interested in far more than "more" for the American worker?

How one answers that question dictates what one makes of the entreaties that some on the right have made toward institutional organized labor. It should be increasingly clear that the labor movement is so permeated by the ideology of "social justice unionism"—aligning closely with the "non-economic" Left to promote a seamless progressive movement—that those entreaties are futile.

The extent of social justice unionism can be seen through the intervention of labor unions, both public-sector *and* private-sector, in ballot-measure campaigns beyond a left-of-center "economic core." It is natural for the union movement to seek to use the state's coercive power to gain "less hours and more wages" for workers, at least some of whom are union members who may have contract provisions tied to legal standards like minimum wages. Likewise, given the extent of powers that the National



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Labor Relations Act gives organized labor, special interest groups will fight tooth and nail to preserve or expand those powers, including in ballot-measure campaigns. And public-sector unions are the principal beneficiaries of tax hikes, making Big Labor's support for just about every tax increase ever proposed academic.

But where is the "economic core" in affirmative action, left-wing "bail reform," restrictions on Second Amendment rights, legalization of marijuana, and expanded "comprehensive sex education"? All five of those questions appeared

Michael Watson is Capital Research Center's research director and managing editor for InfluenceWatch.



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on ballots in California, Montana, New Jersey, and Washington State in 2020, and in all those cases Big Labor came down on the side of the Left, exactly as a “social justice unionism” model of labor union political behavior would predict.

Centering Race in California

California has a long history of ballot-measure campaigning, with voters routinely seeing at least 10 statewide initiative proposals, bond measures, constitutional amendments, or veto referenda on general election ballots. November 2020 was no exception, with 12 measures on the ballot.

Three of the most prominent measures clearly had an economic core: Proposition 15, a giant tax increase on commercial properties; Proposition 21, a massive expansion of rent control; and Proposition 22, a reform to the state’s onerous “AB 5” labor regulations on ride-sharing and similar “gig” work that had been midwived to passage by the California Labor Federation.

But two measures were clear efforts to inculcate social left-progressivism deeper into the state’s law and policy: Proposition 16 would have overturned the state’s prohibition on racial preferences in government contracts and public university admissions, and Proposition 25 would have enacted a New York-style “bail reform” law that would replace monetary bail with “risk assessments.”

Proposition 16 sought to repeal an earlier measure, Proposition 209, that prohibited California state government from explicitly discriminating or granting “preferential treatment to persons on the basis of race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin in public employment, public education, and public contracting.” Opportunity for All Coalition was the Orwellian-titled lead campaign committee, and it raked in over \$21.5 million in contributions in 2020. Much of that funding came from the world of liberal Big Philanthropy and Big Tech. Quinn Delaney, co-founder of the race-focused Akonadi Foundation, contributed \$6.7

million. George Soros’s Open Society Policy Center contributed \$1 million. Microsoft executive Steve Ballmer and his wife Connie contributed \$1 million together. And Patricia Quillin, wife of Netflix chief Reed Hastings, contributed \$1.5 million.

But the number-two contributor to Proposition 16 after Delaney was not from liberal Big Philanthropy or Big Business: It was Big Labor. The California Teachers Association Issues Political Action Committee (PAC), a political committee of the California Teachers Association (CTA) labor union, contributed a combined \$3.5 million toward the enshrinement of racial essentialism in the California constitution. CTA was joined by other labor unions and labor union political committees in providing major contributions to the Proposition 16 campaign, including:

- United Domestic Workers of America Issues PAC;
- American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME);
- SEIU Local 1021;
- AFSCME Local 3299;
- SEIU Local 2015 Issues PAC; and
- SEIU Local 521.

Unions outside the government sector unions also reported making contributions or PAC contributions to Proposition 16:

- National Union of Healthcare Workers, a hospital union;
- Plumbers, Steamfitters, and Refrigeration Fitters Local 393, a construction union;
- IBEW Local 332, a construction union; and
- UAW Region 8, a division of the corrupt United Auto Workers union.

Proposition 25 was a similar story. In 2018, the state passed a left-wing “bail reform” law that replaced cash bail with “risk assessments.” Under the traditional bail scheme, suspects wishing to be released from pretrial detention must deposit a cash surety amount set by the court that is repaid upon completion of their trials, often with the assistance of a commercial bail agency loan for which the detained suspect is not refunded. Left-wing criminal justice advocates have proposed various schemes to replace traditional bail; California’s relied on risk assessments that the legislation did not specify.



Even dark-blue California, however, has lines of leftism its electorate is unwilling to cross, even when Big Labor massively backs crossing them.

Opponents led by the trade group for bail agencies challenged the law in a veto referendum, gaining the support of the ACLU, which attacked the legislation from the left for its use of computer algorithms to make risk assessments. Supporters of the legislation raised over \$14 million to defend it in the referendum. Like Proposition 16, many top supporters came from liberal Big Philanthropy, with John Arnold of Arnold Ventures contributing \$5 million, the Ballmers contributing \$6 million together, and Tom Steyer and Quinn Delaney each contributing \$500,000.

But the other top donor was again Big Labor. Various arms and PACs affiliated with arms of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU)—including the California State Council, Local 2015, Local 1000, and Local 521—provided over \$1 million in monetary and nonmonetary support to the campaign to defend the legislation. A PAC affiliated with the California Federation of Teachers also provided a five-figure donation to the effort.

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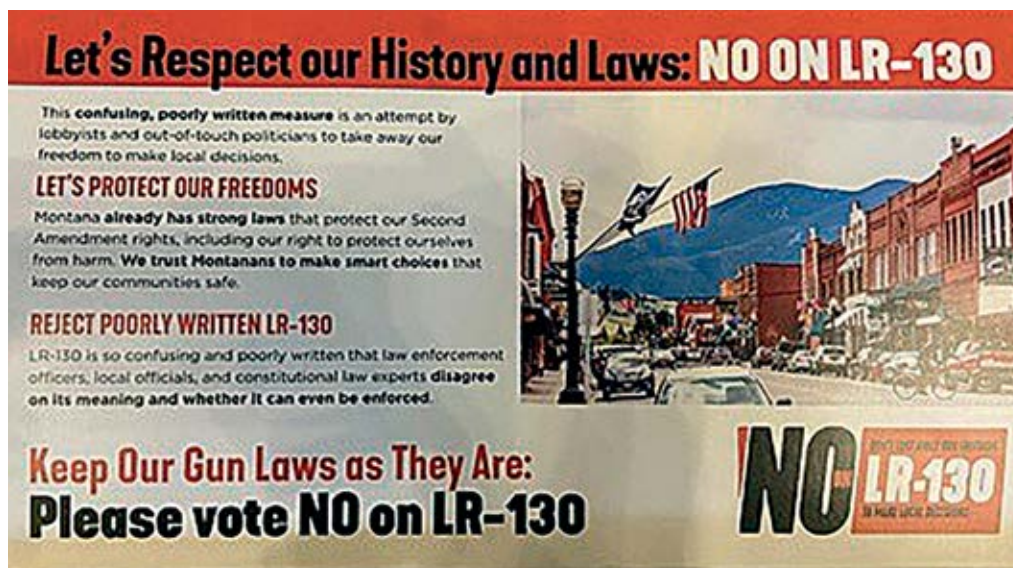
massively backs crossing them. Both Propositions 16 and 25 failed. California voted against the union line on cultural issues, just as it did on economic core issues by defeating the union-backed commercial tax hike Proposition 15 and by overriding portions of the union-drafted AB 5 legislation through Proposition 22.

Pushing Gun Control in Montana

Conservative jurisdictions in liberal states generally cannot enact policy more conservative than their state's liberalism allows, but the structure of governments has allowed liberal jurisdictions in conservative states to enact more liberal local legislation than the state would prefer. This creates a power imbalance wherein the "red" minorities in "blue" states end up with less power to enact preferred policies than the "blue" minorities in "red" states.

In recent years, "pre-emption" legislation protecting conservative red-staters from the liberalism of blue municipalities have gained steam, with labor-law pre-emption prohibiting local wage ordinances or labor regulations being a favorite of Republican legislators. But pre-emption legislation outside the economic core has also been proposed.

In 2019, the Republican legislature in Montana proposed legislation to pre-empt local governments from placing stricter regulations on firearms carry than the state had enacted. Then-Governor Steve Bullock (D) vetoed it. The legislature then passed textually identical legislation as a legislatively referred state statute, which the governor cannot veto if passed by state voters.



Credit: NRA ILA. License: <https://bit.ly/3b67Gn>.

Despite liberal assertions that only the financial power of single-issue groups like the National Rifle Association or gun-industry groups like the National Shooting Sports Foundation keeps gun control from advancing, Montana's LR-130 vote demonstrates the opposite conclusively.



Credit: C-SPAN. License: <https://bit.ly/3ji7kku>.

MFPE is both a general government worker union and a teachers union, created by the 2018 merger of the Montana Public Employees Association and the Montana Education Association-Montana Federation of Teachers. Government worker unions, teachers unions especially, are notably hostile to gun rights. The National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), two of MFPE's parent unions, endorsed and participated in the March for Our Lives gun-control demonstration. MFPE reported receiving over \$1.3 million in financial support from the national NEA in its 2020 fiscal year.

For its part, MFPE has been led since mid-2020 by Amanda Curtis, a former left-wing Democratic state legislator whose 2014 campaign for U.S. Senate was upended by revelations that she campaigned with the radical socialist Industrial Workers of the World and honored a former leader of the Communist Party USA on her Facebook page.

The massive spending advantage provided by MFPE's muscle and the radical-left ideologies of its officers challenged Montana's rural Republican lean and very nearly handed gun-control activists a big win. When all ballots were counted, LR-130 had passed by a margin of just over 1,000 votes.

The Montana Federation of Public Employees has been led since mid-2020 by Amanda Curtis, a former left-wing Democratic state legislator whose 2014 campaign for U.S. Senate was upended by revelations that she campaigned with the radical socialist Industrial Workers of the World and honored a former leader of the Communist Party USA on her Facebook page.

Despite liberal assertions that only the financial power of single-issue groups like the National Rifle Association (NRA) or gun-industry groups like the National Shooting Sports Foundation keeps gun control from advancing, Montana's LR-130 vote demonstrates the opposite conclusively. An NRA political committee contributed \$52,632 to support the law. Opponents of the legislation outspent the gun-rights group 31 to 1.

The appearance of gun-control organizations like the Mike Bloomberg-backed Everytown for Gun Safety on the roll of contributors to the campaign is to be expected, but such single-issue groups were not the lead opponents of LR-130. Instead, the Montana Federation of Public Employees (MFPE), the largest labor union in the state, was by far the largest contributor, outspending the NRA-backed committee 23 to 1 all by itself.

Big Labor's High Times

Since the early 2010s, numerous states have decriminalized or authorized the use and sale of marijuana products under their own state laws, although the drug remains illegal under federal law. In 2020, New Jersey voted by a comfortable margin to join their number in a ballot-measure campaign.

But even lopsided campaigns have to be funded by somebody, so marijuana industry interests and liberal organizations stepped up to the plate. The top funders were industry groups, most notably the Scotts Company, a fertilizer and seed manufacturer that endorsed marijuana legalization and funded the Good Growth Alliance, a 501(c)(4) advocacy group that backed the campaign. Other supporters included the state affiliate of the American Civil



United Food and Commercial Workers also supported an even more expansive Oregon measure to decriminalize the possession or use of almost all drugs in that state.

Liberties Union and WeedMaps, an application that lets users find marijuana retailers.

But also on the list was Big Labor pushing a left-wing social agenda. The national headquarters of the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) chipped in \$125,000 to New Jersey's pot legalization effort. UFCW also supported an even more expansive Oregon measure, providing \$20,000 to the campaign to decriminalize the possession or use of almost all drugs in that state.

Why the UFCW and not, say, the further-left Communications Workers of America (CWA) or National Nurses United (NNU)? That explanation is more cynical: UFCW has experience unionizing the “regulated vice” industries, with state-monopoly liquor store workers organized by the union. This is most prominent in Pennsylvania, where UFCW Local 1776 represents workers in the state's strictly regulated government liquor, wine, and beer stores and has campaigned aggressively against any liberalization of the state's liquor sales laws.

Sure enough, UFCW hopes to unionize state-regulated marijuana retailers across the country. At one point it even created a “cannabis division” for this purpose, though its onetime head, Daniel Rush, was hit with federal charges for allegedly taking kickbacks from California pot businesses he was trying to unionize.

While there is an economic angle to the union backing pot legalization, the core element of Big Labor's support for liberal-left drug policy aligns with Big Labor's broader support for left-wing criminal justice and racial-interest policies, like California's attempt to fundamentally change how bail works. The UFCW provides financial support to a number of broader left-wing groups that intervene in debates over police funding and criminal justice policy. On its 2020 annual report, UFCW reported funding the Democracy Alliance liberal donor collaborative, the Ballot Initiative Strategy Center, and America Votes, among other liberal advocacy coalitions.

Pushing Planned Parenthood's Propaganda

Big Labor's alignment with the non-economic Left is most clearly demonstrated by its support for the Planned Parenthood agenda of maximizing abortion and teaching it to young children. In 2020, the national Communications Workers of America, Unite Here Local 11, and UFCW Local 99—all notionally private-sector unions—contributed directly to Planned Parenthood or its affiliates.



Credit: Gage Skidmore. License: <https://bit.ly/3jkuZP3>.

In 2015, Service Employees International Union president Mary Kay Henry defended Planned Parenthood during the controversy over its alleged sale of aborted fetal remains, arguing her union would “stand united with our allies at Planned Parenthood” and affirming that “efforts in Congress to de-fund Planned Parenthood by anti-women, anti-choice extremists must be stopped.”

Also in 2020, Washington State voters were considering whether to sustain a Democratic and Planned Parenthood-backed proposal to “require public schools to provide comprehensive age-appropriate sexual health education” defined as “age-appropriate instruction in human development and reproduction” starting in kindergarten. The top contributor to the ballot campaign was the regional affiliate of Planned Parenthood Votes, the abortion advocacy group's political arm. The state affiliate of the social-liberal American Civil Liberties Union was the second largest.

But in third and fourth place, one finds—again—the hand of Big Labor. The Washington Education Association (WEA), the state teachers' union, and the Service Employees International Union together chipped in \$223,311 in in-kind and monetary support to the effort. The institutional support of Washington State's dominant Democratic Party, the social-liberal movement, and Big Labor combined to ensure that Planned Parenthood's view of sex education would be taught in every public school in the state, with the measure sustained by a wide margin.

It is important, however, to note that the teachers unions and the SEIU did not opportunistically intervene in the Washington State campaign. Both are institutionally com-

mitted to a sexual revolution agenda. In 2019, the National Education Association, WEA's national parent, formally resolved, "The NEA vigorously opposes all attacks on the right to choose and stands on the fundamental right to abortion under *Roe v. Wade*."

The SEIU plays it coy, claiming to take "a neutral position on abortion," but there is an ironclad case that the militant labor union is firmly on the side of abortion and social-liberal sexual libertinism. In 2015, SEIU president Mary Kay Henry defended Planned Parenthood during the controversy over its alleged sale of aborted fetal remains, arguing her union would "stand united with our allies at Planned Parenthood" and affirming that "efforts in Congress to de-fund Planned Parenthood by anti-women, anti-choice extremists must be stopped."

The SEIU's support for Planned Parenthood's agenda of limitless abortion is not only rhetorical. The SEIU supported a challenge before the Supreme Court to a Louisiana law requiring abortion providers to have hospital admitting privileges. Its regional affiliate in Missouri denounced state officials for impeding a veto referendum targeting proposed abortion restrictions in that state. Its New Hampshire-based Local 1984 targeted Gov. Chris Sununu (R) for vetoing a Democratic-backed bill to require health insurance plans to cover elective abortion. Perhaps most aggressively, SEIU local unions in Massachusetts (alongside the state teachers union) backed the state's expansive Roe Act, which codified a very liberal approach to abortion access in state law in case the Supreme Court ever limits or overturns its abortion jurisprudence.

Given the unions' support for Planned Parenthood and expansive abortion access, it therefore cannot be surprising that Big Labor backed the group's campaign for the power to proselytize five-year-olds.

Conclusion

The ballot campaigns of 2020 demonstrate clearly that organized labor's economic agenda cannot be divorced from its social agenda. In matters as diverse as racial preferences, approaches to bail and pretrial detention, gun control, drug legalization, and sexual libertinism, Big Labor sided with the seamless garment of social justice liberalism, making it indistinct from the left-wing Big Philanthropy and Big Tech-style "woke capital" factions that some hope a revitalized labor movement could balance against.

And note that there is negligible dissension *within the leadership of organized labor* over these aggressively left-wing social stances. It is not the case that the Teamsters lean to the right socially while the SEIU leans left. Both align with the Left. It does not matter the issue; it does not matter the state; it does not matter the likelihood of liberal success: The force of the union movement will come down on the same side as radical environmentalists, Silicon Valley billionaires, and the Democratic Party with rare exceptions caused only by direct economic conflict—and once the direct conflict resolves, the happy house of left-liberalism is restored as if the dispute never happened.

Increasing worker voice without empowering the cultural agenda of Big Labor requires more than just idle speculation about European-style labor law. It would in many ways require uprooting labor unions as we know them, by either a potentially decades-long campaign to take them over from within or an equivalent struggle to replace them from without. Efforts to increase union power that do not come alongside efforts to replace or fundamentally reform the institutions of labor unions themselves will not advance the interests of conservative-inclined workers. Instead, they will empower the political adversaries of all strains of conservative policy, a self-inflicted defeat the Right can ill afford. ■

Read previous articles from the Labor Watch series online at CapitalResearch.org/category/labor-watch/.



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LIBERAL *RIGHT-OF-CENTER*
LEFT WING **CONSERVATIVE**
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FAR LEFT *LIBERTARIAN*
PROGRESSIVE **RIGHT-WING**
LEFT OF CENTER *RIGHT-LEANING*

Political and Policy-Oriented Giving After *Citizens United*: An Update to CRC's 2017 Analysis

CRC's update to the 2017 report found: In the 2018 election cycle, liberal grantmakers increased their public policy 501(c)(3) giving, increasing the imbalance from nearly 3.4 to 1 in 2014 to 3.7 to 1 (\$8.1 billion to \$2.2 billion) in 2018. "Dark money" funding through 501(c)(4) groups flipped from a 3.6 to 1 advantage for conservatives to a nearly 2 to 1 (\$81 million to \$42 million) advantage for liberals.



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THE LEFT'S "SECRET SCIENCE" FOR WINNING ELECTIONS

Review of The Victory Lab: The Secret Science of Winning Campaigns

By Ken Braun

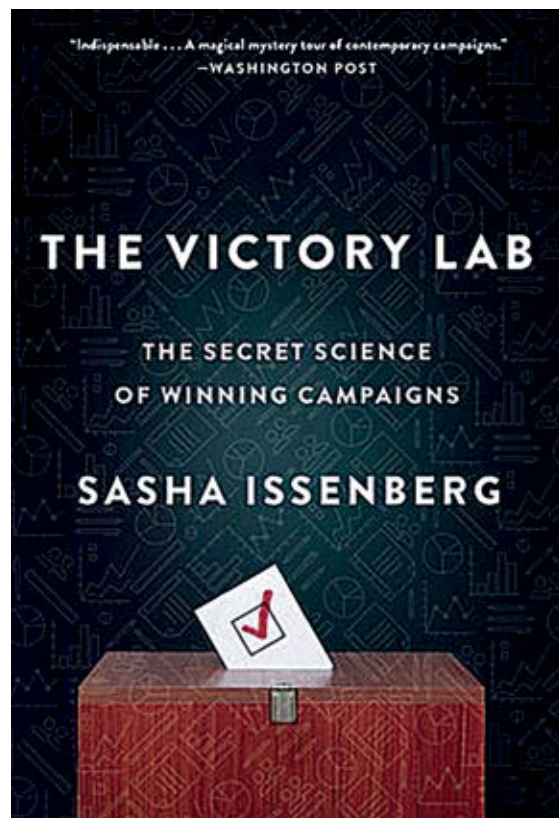
Summary: *The Victory Lab: The Secret Science of Winning Campaigns* by journalist Sasha Issenberg describes the evolving tactics used to turn out voters using sophisticated microtargeting and behavioral science research. The lessons from this important book remain unlearned by nearly all voters, much of the media, and even many candidates. In *Victory Lab* in 2012, Issenberg previewed the machinery deployed by the Left in 2020 to put Joe Biden in the White House.

Decades of political mail from nearly every serious candidate and committee has consisted of full-color brochures sporting high-quality ink on expensive paper. The professional production value often looks sharper than the stuff sent from the local Lincoln dealership. For a campaign to mail anything less would portray an image akin to that of a job applicant wearing pajamas to the interview.

Or so the thinking goes.

A lot of popular wisdom about what influences the outcome of elections should have been upended back in 2012 with the publication of *The Victory Lab: The Secret Science of Winning Campaigns*. Written by journalist Sasha Issenberg, the book described the evolution of voter microtargeting and behavioral science research tactics, and the arms race between high-level Democratic and Republican campaigns to invent new weaponry. The lessons from this important book remain unlearned by nearly all voters, much of the media, and even many candidates.

With a résumé that includes a fellowship at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government and political reporter gigs at the *Boston Globe* and *Slate*, Issenberg's professional pedigree rests comfortably within the traditional media establishment. His book was showered with compliments from these peers when it was released nearly nine years ago. In a *Washington Post* review, grizzled veteran political reporter Jeff Greenfield called it "indispensable" and a "magical mystery tour of contemporary campaigns." Issenberg also made the broadcast interview rounds, including at snooty state-funded media programs such as *NewsHour* on PBS and *Weekend Edition* on NPR.



Credit: Penguin Random House. License: <https://bit.ly/3gkFubn>.

A lot of popular wisdom about what influences the outcome of elections should have been upended back in 2012 with the publication of The Victory Lab: The Secret Science of Winning Campaigns. The lessons from this important book remain unlearned by nearly all voters, much of the media, and even many candidates.

So, this was not the work of a right-of-center political operative intending to sound the alarm—eight years in advance—about the machinery deployed by the Left in 2020 to put Joe Biden in the White House. Yet still, *Victory Lab* repeatedly dropped hints that voter engagement/

Ken Braun is CRC's senior investigative researcher and authors profiles for InfluenceWatch.org and the Capital Research magazine.



Victory Lab repeatedly dropped hints that voter registration programs, supposedly nonpartisan and nonprofit operations, are in fact funded and run by ruthlessly partisan appendages of the Democratic-left machine

registration programs, supposedly nonpartisan and nonprofit (i.e., charitable) operations under the law, are in fact funded and run by ruthlessly partisan appendages of the Democratic-left machine.

This newsworthy revelation didn't tickle the curiosity of the supposed news organizations heaping well-deserved praise on Issenberg's well-reported book. They weren't reading closely.

Winning Ugly

Fast forward to the fall of 2020, when mailboxes in swing states were carpet-bombed more than once per week with cheap, photocopied, 8.5 x 11 sheets of plain white paper, printed with simple black ink script. The clever strategy behind these ugly mailings would have been familiar to anyone who had read *Victory Lab* back in 2012.

Some of the crude mailings promoted partisan messages regarding where the presidential candidates supposedly stood on hot button issues. Others provided absentee ballot applications and encouragements to vote early. "Lowering Prescription Drug Prices" was written in bold lettering on one; Joe Biden's position was identified with a boldface "Yes" and Donald Trump with an equally bold "No."

Anyone with access to a personal computer from the early 1980s or a hand-cranked mimeograph machine from the late 1950s could have quickly produced hundreds of these mailings in their basement. It looked like the work of amateurs. It was everything but that.

The organization at the center of the story was Women's Voices Women Vote, a supposedly nonpartisan organization dedicated to increasing voter participation. But back in 2012 Issenberg outed their real agenda: "Even though the group was officially nonpartisan, for tax purposes, there was no secret that the goal of all its efforts was to generate new votes for Democrats."

The book reports on research explored in 2011 by a Women's Voices consultant affiliated with the Analyst Institute, a for-profit political message testing firm for Democrats. Organizations working with Analyst began exploring the effectiveness of sending primitive political mailings resembling (according to Issenberg) a letter from "the homeowner's association announcing a policy change."

The tests revealed that ugly mailings dramatically outperformed pretty ones. In one example a left-leaning ballot committee in Oregon sent traditional "glossy" mail promotions to some precincts, but to others the pretty stuff was replaced with "voter guides" that consisted of "text heavy" cut-rate flyers. The Oregonians found they could boost their vote tally by 5 percentage points with the dull-looking voter guides.



With a resume that includes a fellowship at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government and political reporter gigs at the Boston Globe and Slate, Sasha Issenberg's professional pedigree rests comfortably within the traditional media establishment.

The same Women's Voices profiled by Issenberg in 2012 is the parent organization responsible for the plain black and white, cheap paper mailers that hit swing state voters in 2020. The subsidiaries sending the 2020 mailings were the Voter Participation Center (VPC), a 501(c)(4) nonprofit political organization that is legally required to be nonparti-

Credit: Canada 2020. License: <https://bit.ly/3deBMOU>.

san, and the Center for Voter Information (CVI), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that is also supposed to be nonpartisan.

The not-so-nonpartisan CVI was responsible for the “prescription drug prices” mailing noted above. FoundationSearch, a recordkeeping service for charitable donations, lists several large left-leaning foundations and left-wing environmental organizations as past supporters of CVI, including the Sierra Club, the Tides Foundation, and the MacArthur Foundation. A comprehensive and up-to-date profile of its support is not available: The Center for Responsive Politics (OpenSecrets.org) describes CVI as an “outside spending group” that “does NOT disclose its donors to the FEC.”

Although organizationally a sibling of CVI, the VPC’s 501(c)(3) tax status requires it to steer clear of partisan attempts to influence elections. But as Issenberg reported, this group is happy to skirt the law as it works to “generate new votes for Democrats.”

According to FoundationSearch, since 2018, VPC has received its largest identifiable donations from foundations with a history of funding left-of-center causes, such as the Enlight Foundation (\$1.5 million) and the Proteus Fund (\$900,000). Singer and film star Barbara Streisand has also made VPC part of her act: Her foundation gave a \$15,000 grant in 2018.

The grant description from the famously partisan Hollywood Democrat’s foundation said the 15 large was to be used to “promote free and equal opportunities to voting for all.”

In a February 2021 postmortem on the 2020 election, *Time* magazine credited VPC with sending 15 million vote-by-mail ballot applications to “people in key states.” The *Time* account didn’t specify what was meant by the revealing phrase “key states,” nor mention at all the partisan agenda of VPC supporters.

Instead, praising VPC for its election work during the pandemic, *Time* stated blandly that “in a normal year” the VPC “would have supported local groups deploying canvassers door-to-door to get out the vote.” The accidentally ironic headline of the *Time* article was “The Secret History of the Shadow Campaign That Saved the 2020 Election.”

But readers of *Victory Lab* knew the secret *Time* was keeping in the shadows from its readers: No matter the year, VPC’s agenda has always been to use its supposedly nonpartisan, nonprofit status to increase the number of partisan Democratic voters in states key to winning the White House.



The Voter Participation Center repeatedly announces its intent to mobilize voters in a so-called “new American majority . . . narrowly defined as “people of color, unmarried women, and young voting eligible Americans.”

Barbara Streisand may have claimed her money would “promote free and equal opportunities to voting for all,” but the webpage of the VPC repeatedly announces its intent to mobilize only voters in a “new American majority.” This is very narrowly defined as “people of color, unmarried women, and young voting eligible Americans.”

If you think—for example—that a rarely voting rural gun enthusiast who attends the local Protestant megachurch is a target of VPC’s “new American majority” outreach, then you are probably still sending your holiday wish lists to the North Pole.

Or believing what you read in *Time* magazine.

Victory on the Margins

As pure entertainment, *Victory Lab* is a well written and fascinating history of the get-out-the-vote (GOTV) and messaging innovations developed by partisan Democrats, partisan Republicans, and academic researchers (also sometimes very partisan—we will get to this in a moment).

But on a more important level, it is almost impossible to overstate the election-changing impact of these innovations, whether brought to life aboveboard by clearly partisan actors or in the shadows by shady partisan tax-exempt nonprofits.

Consider just the Voter Participation Center, which claims to have registered 1.5 million new voters during the 2020 election alone. Leaving aside the possibility that VPC is exaggerating to get more checks from Streisand, it stands to reason that: (1) VPC was at least responsible for getting out hundreds of thousands of new voters who wouldn’t have otherwise gotten to the polls, (2) the vast majority of those voters were in “key states” critical to the outcome of the presidential election; and (3) they likely voted overwhelmingly for Joe Biden.



Credit: Prachatai. License: <https://bit.ly/3gWW7uq>

The combined total margin of victory in Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Ohio was just 77,744 votes. If only half of them had woken up on election day and voted for Hillary Clinton instead of Donald Trump, then Bill Clinton would have once again been placed dangerously close to the White House interns.

The conventional narrative of the 2016 presidential election is well established. Donald Trump won on a famously razor-thin margin in three states: Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Ohio. The combined total margin of victory was just 77,744 votes. If only half of them—38,872 Trump voters in exactly the right places—had woken up on election day and voted for Hillary instead, then Bill Clinton would have once again been placed dangerously close to the White House interns.

Less well publicized: The 2020 election was even closer.

Joe Biden's combined margin of victory in Wisconsin, Arizona, Georgia, and Nebraska's 2nd congressional district was 65,009. If a precisely well-placed 32,505 Biden voters had switched sides, then Trump would have won another term.

The 2000 election was memorably won by George W. Bush by just 537 votes in the state of Florida, meaning 270 people—who could have been reached via a week of door knocking by a persuasive Al Gore volunteer—might have changed the course of history. Bush's 2004 reelection turned on just a 59,301-vote margin in Ohio.

Barack Obama's 2012 reelection, though decisive in the Electoral College margin, hinged on a combined total vote margin of fewer than 482,000 votes in four states. Even in this otherwise convincing victory, just 241,000 voters could have changed the outcome by switching their votes from the Democrat to the Republican.

That is 0.002 percent of the more than 127 million people who participated in the 2012 presidential election.

These examples demonstrate that our biggest elections have been won by the tiniest of victories. It is a huge deal that one organization such as the Voter Participation Center can plausibly claim to have mobilized hundreds of thousands—maybe more than a million—left-leaning swing-state voters to go to the polls.

Politically Profitable Nonprofits

And the Voter Participation Center is far from the only lefty player on this field.

Victory Lab left little doubt that spiking votes for Democrats was the deceptive point of using these supposedly non-partisan/nonprofit organizations for voter registration and participation programs. Referencing the work of the left-leaning philanthropic foundation known as the Carnegie Corporation, Issenberg described how many of these turnout machines sail close to (or possibly beyond) the edge of the law:

Because the tax code allowed nonprofit organizations to run registration and turnout drives as long as they did not push a particular candidate, organizing “historically disenfranchised” communities (as Carnegie described them) became a backdoor approach to ginning up Democratic votes outside the campaign finance laws that applied to candidates, parties, and political action committees. Major liberal donors got into the GOTV game: Project Vote organized urban areas, Rock the Vote targeted the young, the NAACP National Voter Fund focused on African-Americans.

Those words were published shortly before the 2012 presidential election. African American voters were anything but “disenfranchised” that year. According to the Pew Research Center the 2012 African American voter turnout was 66.6 percent, slightly higher than the white voter turnout and far higher than Asian or Hispanic voter turnout. Black voters were more enfranchised in 2012 than any other racial demographic.

The white turnout rate slightly overtook the African American rate four years later in 2016, but the two were within 6 percentage points of one another: 65.3 percent versus 59.6 percent.

Of course, a charismatic and popular African American president was not on the ballot in 2016, as he had been for the two prior elections. Instead, it was a race between the two most disliked major party presidential candidates in



Dozens of left-leaning organizations engaged in similar activities as right-leaning groups received their IRS clearance within months. But not a single application for a Tea Party group was cleared within that same period.

the history of Gallup's polling. In an election in which both Trump and Clinton were viewed unfavorably by a majority, it is more charitable to the good judgment of black voters to assume that profound disappointment, rather than "historical disenfranchisement," caused many of them to logically refuse to be responsible for whoever won the White House.

Many of the chapters in *Victory Lab* profile the entirely aboveboard work done by partisan Democrats and Republicans to increase turnout among their most likely supporters. This is obviously what political campaigns are meant to do. But when the book addresses voter registration and turnout work provided by the supposedly nonpartisan nonprofits, such as those mentioned to this point, the examples provided are all purpose-built to tilt the scales toward one party: the Democrats.

This is not a fault of the book, its liberal author, or the liberal reviewers who didn't criticize the book for this tilt. It simply reflects the reality of the nonprofit world. It is very difficult (perhaps impossible) to come up with an example that so heavily benefits Republican candidates in the way the Voter Participation Center and the others work to juice Democratic turnout.

Breaking the Law?

There are reasons—not hard to imagine—why this disparity might exist.

During the Obama administration the IRS discriminated against right-of-center organizations, such as local Tea Party groups, that were seeking nonprofit status. During a 27-month stretch, according to *USA Today*, "perhaps dozens" of left-leaning organizations engaged in the "same kinds of activities" as the right-leaning groups received their IRS clearance within months. But not a single application for a Tea Party group was cleared during that more than two-year period that led up to the 2012 presidential election. Note, too, that nearly all the groups the IRS refused to grant tax-exempt status were 501(c)(4) groups—that is, the kind of nonprofit that the law allows far more leeway to engage in elections than the 501(c)(3)

groups, which have much stricter legal limitations, such as the Voter Participation Center and the Carnegie Corporation.

Nobody sane, and certainly not tax-phobic Republicans, wants to risk crossing the IRS. With a history such as this, Republican-leaning donors might reasonably fear they would be prosecuted if they created a supposedly nonpartisan, tax-exempt voter registration program that implicitly benefited Republican candidates.

They would not be the first to worry over such a violation of tax and campaign finance laws.



Credit: UCLA Anderson. License: <https://bit.ly/3gWt2du>

The book also tells the story of the Consortium of Behavioral Scientists, introduced as "a secret society formed by University of California, Los Angeles, psychologist Craig Fox to help Democrats apply cutting-edge academic research to liberal politics."



The history of the development and importance of effective microtargeting was portrayed in Victory Lab as something akin to a race by both parties to invent and deploy a political atomic bomb.

Nudging Voters

Another strength of *Victory Lab* is its lesson regarding the nearly 100-year history of professional academics who have examined and tested voter behavior. Major areas of research have included the reasons why people decide to vote (or not), the social pressures that might nudge them toward voting, and the most persuasive forms of voter communication (e.g., direct mail, door-to-door canvassing, phone banks, television, and so forth).

The book reveals a striking and ironic past where professors working in the field have gone through periods of many years when none of them conducted substantive research into these basic questions of democratic participation. Issenberg cites several factors that contributed to this paucity of real “science” from the political “scientists.”

One of his revealing examples, particularly when contrasted with the behavior of lefty organizations such as the Voter Participation Center, is fear of violating the law: “Campaign finance laws and the universities’ nonprofit tax status made it hard for them to do anything on their own that, even inadvertently, advanced the interests of a specific party or candidate.”

Similarly, Issenberg told the story of a group of political science professors in the late 1950s who developed one of the first computer simulations of likely voter behavior. Using a survey of pre-election polls on a variety of questions given to 130,000 voters, the team created 480 voter types they could use to field-test hypothetical situations and campaign messages.

Hoping to give their experimental creation a test run in a real campaign, the academics found donors willing to fund it for use by Democrats. Issenberg explained: “Because universities would not allow their professors to mingle scholarly business with political money, they organized as a private company that could make its research available for sale.”

John F. Kennedy’s campaign used the firm in the 1960 election to field-test how (or if) he should address the matter of whether Protestants would support a Catholic running for the White House.

The book also tells the story of the Consortium of Behavioral Scientists, introduced as “a secret society formed by University of California, Los Angeles, psychologist Craig Fox to help Democrats apply cutting-edge academic research to liberal politics.” Issenberg writes that in 2004, Fox and a colleague “thought that as psychologists they had insights that could help Democrats” and that Fox began “attending Los Angeles fund-raisers in the hopes of meeting prominent Democrats.”

In 2006 a member of this “secret society” invited one of his former grad students to join. The former student became the first director of the Analyst Institute. Recall that Analyst is the think tank described earlier in this piece that researched the effect of the primitive mailings used by the Voter Participation Center and Center for Voter Information in 2020.

Then-Sen. Hillary Clinton also learned of this sympathetic group of academics in 2006 and invited them to “brief the Democratic Senate leadership.”

Private citizens have a First Amendment right to volunteer for political campaigns. The members of the Consortium of Behavioral Scientists were breaking no laws when they handed over their highly valuable professional insights to be used explicitly for partisan electoral advantage and no discernible academic purpose. Nonetheless, what they knew about voter behavior had grown out of research funded directly by publicly funded universities (such as Fox’s research at UCLA) or indirectly by tax-exempt private research schools that also receive significant government support.

Some of this assistance from academics to Democrats bears the odor of a significant in-kind contribution that should be reported to the Federal Election Commission, the IRS, or the taxpayers. One would think congressional committees would hold hearings with witnesses from those agencies and some of the groups potentially violating the law, except that no Democratic committee chair would want to air this dirty laundry, and no Republican chairman has ever seemed to realize that this whole demimonde of nonprofit electioneering exists.

The Mystery of the Rio Grande

Even as *Victory Lab* portrays the advantage that sketchy partisan turnout machines operating as nonpartisan non-profits might give to the Democratic Left, the book is not a relentless ride into pessimism for right-of-center readers. Instead, it portrays a back-and-forth battle between Republican and Democratic operatives through much of the last century to develop the most cutting-edge technology and research in the usual political (rather than non-profit) channels.

Sometimes Republicans have enjoyed a decisive advantage.

According to Issenberg, “microtargeting” was not used as a political phrase until 2003. He described it as one of history’s “two most radical innovations in political communication”—the ability to merge individual voter information with the massive troves of individual consumer data and other information that corporations have compiled on each of us. Microtargeting allows campaigns “to confidently address individual voters instead of the broader public.”

It is an exaggeration, but not by much, to say that this political superweapon allows a campaign to send a perfectly targeted direct mail shot specifically to only the left-handed, gun-owning, donors to National Public Radio in a particular congressional district. Right-handed, gun hating vegetarians would get a different mailing (or no mailing at all). And better, even before the mailing investments are made, microtargeting allows for field testing of different messages so as to use the most ideal one for each narrow demographic.

The history of effective microtargeting was portrayed in *Victory Lab* as something akin to a race by both parties to invent and deploy a political atomic bomb. By 2003, the Republicans were holding Fat Man and Little Boy and had trapped Democrats on a test site in the New Mexico desert. George W. Bush’s nail-biting narrow reelection in 2004 and other GOP successes of the pre-Obama era are in some major way a product of this advantage.

As with the real atomic secrets, a monopoly on political A-bombs could not last. By 2008 the Obama team had pulled even with and then ahead of the Republicans in microtargeting and much else.

And, just as with military secrets, both sides try to conceal the details of their advantage from the other for as long as possible. A major lesson to be drawn from *Victory Lab* is that the conventional wisdom presented by the media to

the public regarding who will vote in each election and how they will vote will be frequently and significantly wrong. There is no way to account for the newest targeting and turnout strategies being deployed, let alone which secrets used by each side may have the biggest impact.

One bit of hardened conventional wisdom since Donald Trump first announced he would seek the presidency in 2015 was that his behavior and statements about illegal immigrants and border security would do lasting harm to the willingness of Hispanic voters to support Republicans.

But exit polls after the 2016 election showed Trump pulled 29 percent of Hispanic/Latino voters, slightly higher than GOP nominee Mitt Romney’s 27 percent four years earlier. And 2020 exit polls showed Trump increasing his overall Hispanic/Latino support to 32 percent.

Florida exit polls showed nearly half of the state’s Hispanic/Latino voters supporting Trump in 2020, including 30 percent of Puerto Ricans. Trump dramatically boosted his tally from heavily Hispanic Miami-Dade County by almost 200,000 votes over 2016, while Biden received 11,000 fewer Miami-Dade votes than did Clinton.

And the most stunning development of 2020 took place at Ground Zero for what was supposed to be Trump’s biggest liability: the much-maligned border along the Rio Grande Valley in Texas. According to a report in *Politico*, Hillary Clinton carried three “deep-blue” congressional districts along the Mexican border by margins of 17 to 22 points in 2016. But in 2020, Joe Biden held them by what *Politico* noted was “just a few points” after “the largest rightward swings of any Texas congressional districts.”

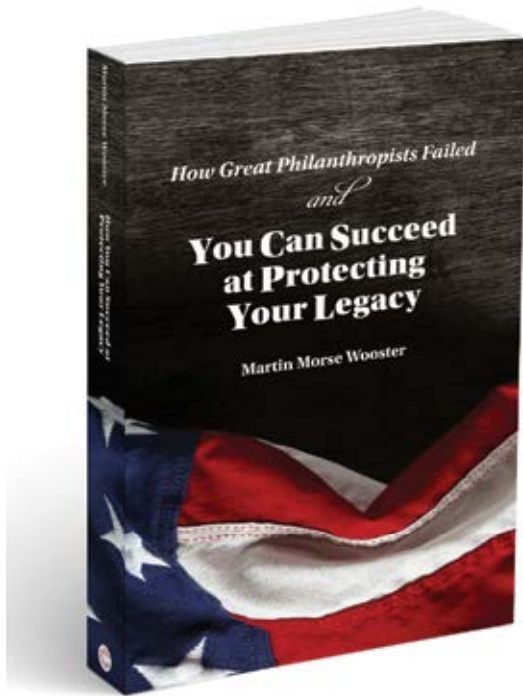
Do those results from Florida and Texas hint that the Republicans may have engineered a new voter targeting/messaging superweapon that wins them Hispanic/Latino support? One that might allow them to blast a devastating hole in one of the most important support bases for the Democratic left?

The subtitle of *Victory Lab* is “*the secret science of winning campaigns*.”

It wouldn’t be a “secret” if we had the answer to the mystery in the Rio Grande Valley. ■

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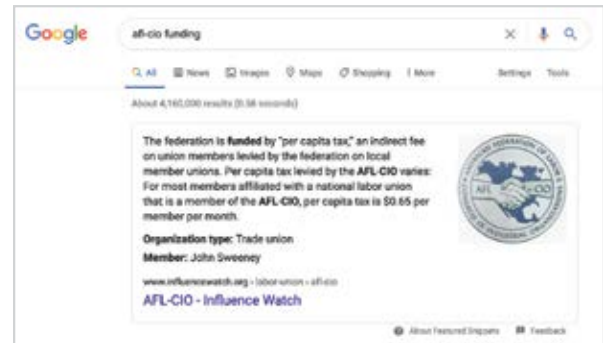
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Check out these select profiles updated since the last issue:

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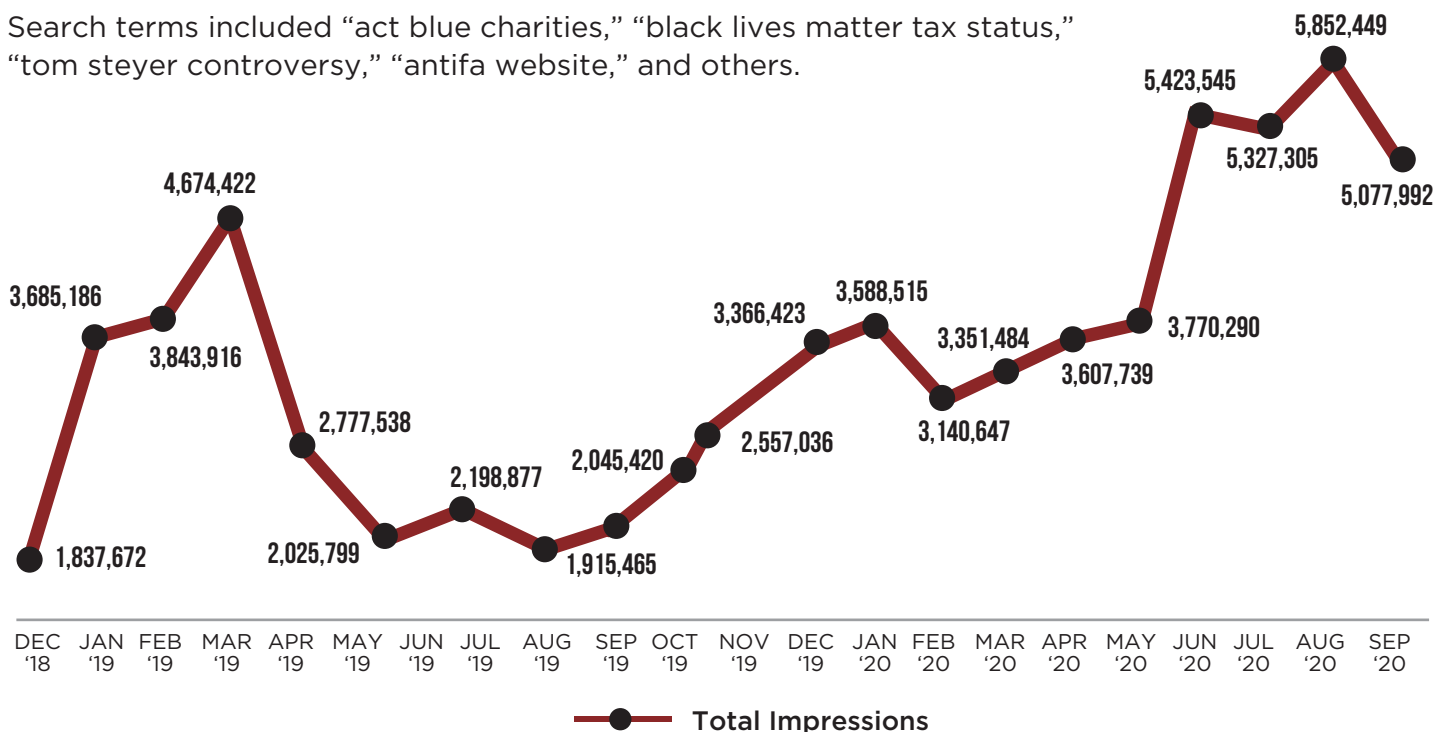
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From January through September 2020, InfluenceWatch profiles appeared nearly 40 million times when people searched Google; nearly 14 million of those results were on the first page.

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