



POLITICS

Nonprofit financed by billionaire George Soros quietly donated \$140 million to political causes in 2021

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KEY POINTS

George Soros' backed nonprofit invested at least \$140 million into politically charged nonprofits just one year before the midterm elections.

Those donations are on top of the more than \$170 million Soros personally contributed during the 2022 midterm election cycle to help Democratic campaigns and political action committees.

The Soros nonprofit separately donated approximately \$60 million to charitable 501(c)(3)s which are prohibited from participating in politics.





Hungarian-born US investor and philanthropist George Soros answers to questions after delivering a speech on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum (WEF) annual meeting in Davos on May 24, 2022.

Fabrice Coffrini | AFP | Getty Images

A nonprofit financed by billionaire George Soros quietly donated \$140 million to advocacy organizations and ballot initiatives in 2021, plus another \$60 million to like-minded charities.

Soros, who personally donated \$170 million during the 2022 midterms to Democratic candidates and campaigns on top of that, spread the additional largess through the Open Society Policy Center — a 501(c)(4) nonprofit that falls under the Soros-funded Open Society Foundations network, according to a copy of its 2021 tax filing, which was obtained by CNBC and is the most recent data available. The Open Society Policy Center also doled out \$138 million to advocacy groups and causes in 2020. Two of Soros' children sit on its board, the tax filings and its website show.

The donations bring Soros' contributions to political campaigns and causes since January 2020 to roughly half a billion dollars — at the least — most of it steered through dark money nonprofit groups and going largely toward political causes aligned with the Democratic Party.

Soros' nonprofit donations don't always go directly to political causes. The funds sometimes flow from one of his nonprofits, then to another, before being spent on the advertising, organizing and



sway the midterm elections, according to the foundation's website. At the same time, Tom Watson, an editorial director at the Open Society Foundations, conceded in an email to CNBC that "there are definitely some OSPC grants that went to organizations working to combat voter suppression, support voter registration and expand civic participation." Those are all core Democratic principles.

Complex network of nonprofits

The foundation network includes several affiliated 501(c)(4) groups, a type of nonprofit under the U.S. tax code that's allowed to engage in political activities, as well as more traditional 501(c)(3) charitable organizations, its website and tax filing show.

All of the nonprofits fall under Soros' Open Society Foundations network, which spans the globe. It describes itself as "the world's largest private funder of independent groups working for justice, democratic governance, and human rights," and it has dozens of offices in the U.S., Europe, Asia, Latin America, Africa and the Middle East.

It additionally runs the Open Society University Network, which includes more than two dozen colleges across the world, sponsoring research projects through its Democracy Institute, among other initiatives. While not illegal, the complex network of related nonprofits, research funding and charities financed by Soros obfuscates the original origin of the donations.

Through the network, Soros has donated more than \$32 billion over the years, according to its website. It says it gives "thousands of grants every year toward building inclusive and vibrant democracies," with active projects in more than 120 countries.

Wealthy special interests

"Wealthy special interests and individuals try to hide their influence in elections, including by funding politically active nonprofits, because they know that the messenger matters," Aaron McKean, an attorney at the nonpartisan Campaign Legal Center, said. "Voters have a right to know who is trying to influence elections so that they can make informed choices when filling out their ballot."

The Open Society Policy Center's budget in 2021 was funded by a single \$196 million donation from the Open Society Foundation network, according to foundation officials. An affiliated

[by the billionaire businessman.](#)

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In the U.S., the Open Society Policy Center donated to a variety of politically active groups and causes since the start of the 2020 election cycle, including \$4.5 million in September to Reproductive Freedom for All, according to data from the nonpartisan watchdog OpenSecrets. The campaign backed [Michigan's successful](#) ballot initiative called Proposition 3 that [enshrined abortion rights](#) into the state's constitution.

The group also gave \$1 million in 2020 toward a campaign that supported an Oklahoma prison sentencing ballot measure titled Yes on 805. The ballot initiative would have ended repeat sentence penalties for nonviolent offenses in the state; it [failed to pass](#) during the 2020 election.

Helping Democrats

The vast majority of Soros' personal donations during the 2022 cycle went to two super PACs: Democracy PAC and Democracy PAC II, according to Federal Election Commission filings. Both of those groups are run by the billionaire's son Alexander Soros who also sits on the boards of the Open Society Institute and Open Society Policy Center. Politico [reported](#) that these PACs were meant to help Democratic candidates and groups in 2022, and in future election cycles.

Records show that the Democracy PACs, which by law can raise and spend an unlimited amount of money, donated millions of dollars in the midterms to organizations that actively helped Democrats running for office, including support for the Senate Majority PAC and the House Majority PAC.

The Open Society Policy Center's other donations listed on its 2021 990:

- **America Votes:** \$16.9 million
A voting rights group focused on educating people on how to vote by mail.
- **Demand Justice:** \$4.5 million
A liberal judicial advocacy group. It recently raised just under \$6 million, according to a tax return [acquired](#) by Politico. Demand Justice [announced](#) a \$1 million ad buy this year supporting Supreme Court Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson's nomination.
- **Equis Labs:** \$6.48 million
A group dedicated to increasing Latino voting.

- **Future Forward USA Action:** \$5.5 million



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the Build Back Together legislative package and a global vaccine campaign.” A pared-back version of the bill was renamed the Inflation Reduction Act; it passed and was signed into law in August.

- **Sixteen Thirty Fund:** \$23.9 million

The group acts as a “dark” money fund for “progressive changemakers” and groups that often align with the Democratic Party. It provides operational support, like HR and legal resources, to progressive organizations. It recently raised more than \$189 million and made \$107 million in grants.

Emerson Morrow, a spokesman for America Votes, told CNBC that funding from the Open Society Policy Center “has provided critical support for America Votes’ mission.” The group says it took on “voter suppression and engaged new and hard-to-reach voters” in 2021, focusing on expanding voting access in the key states of Nevada, Michigan and Wisconsin. The Open Society Policy Center’s website lists a single donation of \$23.9 million to the group in 2021 to “support nonpartisan voter engagement in multiple states,” according to its website.

America Votes, a 501(c)(4), raised more than \$245 million and doled out over \$170 million in grants from July 2020 through June 2021, according to its most recent tax disclosure. Its top contributions included a \$14 million donation to Family Friendly Action PAC, a super PAC that spent \$7.2 million backing Democratic candidates running for Congress during the 2022 election cycle, according to OpenSecrets. It also donated \$9.7 million toward Black PAC, a super PAC that spent \$9.5 million during the recent midterms supporting Democrats.

Empowering advocates

Amy Kurtz, president of the Sixteen Thirty Fund, pointed to the Open Society Foundations website for more information on its donations from the Soros-backed groups. The Sixteen Thirty Fund raised over \$189 million in 2021, according to its latest 990 disclosure.

“At a time when the extreme right wing is better funded than ever and threatening our rights and democratic institutions like never before, Sixteen Thirty Fund is meeting these threats head on,” Kurtz said in an email. “As a fiscal sponsor, Sixteen Thirty Fund empowers advocates and philanthropists to quickly and efficiently launch campaigns to tackle today’s toughest challenges. The administrative, legal, and HR support we offer is critical so public-interest efforts can focus on working to improve the lives of all Americans.”



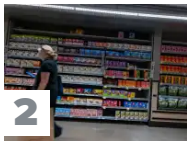
Policy Center did not return a request for comment.

Correction: The headline and two references in the story were updated to correct the year in which the donations were made. They were made in 2021.

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5



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