

NATIONAL

## Pro-Palestinian protesters are backed by a surprising source: Biden’s biggest donors

Some of the most outspoken groups against Biden and Israel get funding from foundations attached to some of the biggest names in Democratic circles.



About 40 students at Washburn University stage a protest expressing support for Palestinians in Gaza and calling for a cease-fire in the war there on May 3, 2024, in Topeka, Kansas. | John Hanna/AP

By SHIA KAPOS  
05/05/2024 07:00 AM EDT  
Updated: 05/06/2024 05:04 PM EDT



President Joe Biden has been dogged for months by pro-Palestinian protesters calling him “Genocide Joe” — but some of the groups behind the demonstrations receive financial backing from philanthropists pushing hard for his reelection.

The donors include some of the biggest names in Democratic circles: Soros, Rockefeller and Pritzker, according to a POLITICO analysis.

Advertisement

Two of the organizers supporting the protests at Columbia University and on other campuses are Jewish Voice for Peace and IfNotNow. Both are supported by the Tides Foundation, which is seeded by Democratic megadonor George Soros and was previously supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Soros declined to comment, but a spokesperson with the Open Society Foundations, of which Soros is the founder and chairman, said in a statement that it “has funded a broad spectrum of US groups that have advocated for the rights of Palestinians and Israelis and for peaceful resolution to the conflict in Israel.” The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which has previously funded the Tides Foundation and other groups, said it no longer has active grants to Tides. It also does not support Jewish Voice for Peace or IfNotNow.

Another notable Democratic donor whose philanthropy has helped fund the protest movement is David Rockefeller Jr., who sits on the board of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. It has given nearly \$500,000 directly to Jewish Voice for Peace, which explicitly describes itself as anti-Zionist, over the [past five years](#). Rockefeller Brothers has separately given grants to both the Tides Foundation and the Tides Center.

Several other groups involved in pro-Palestinian protests are backed by a foundation funded by Susan and Nick Pritzker, heir to the Hyatt Hotel empire — and supporters of Biden and numerous Democratic campaigns, [including \\$6,600 to the Biden Victory Fund](#) a few months ago and more than \$300,000 during the 2020 campaign.

The trail of donations shows a series of blurred lines when it comes to liberal causes and Democratic politics. The money is sometimes, but not always, directed toward specific issues — even if it is, it contributes to an organization’s larger pool of funds, which could go toward opposing causes. Often, missions between the donors and nonprofits are aligned, but they also sometimes have different and — particularly when it comes to Gaza — conflicting agendas and tactics. And a small group of wealthy heavyweights are often playing an outside role funding many of them.

But as protester tactics have grown more intense, like taking over university buildings and shouting antisemitic remarks, the groups behind them are now attracting criticism from prominent donors on the left.

“Why [is the Rockefeller Fund] giving significant grants to Jewish Voice for Peace, [which] blamed the horrific Oct. 7 attacks on Israel and the United States rather than Hamas?” said Elisha Wiesel, a Democratic donor who chairs the Elie Wiesel Foundation, an organization that supports anti-genocide work.

AD

Jewish Voice for Peace, which did not return a request for comment, has been a leader in disruptive protests against Biden, including [shouting “genocide supporter” at his glitzy fundraiser at Radio City Music Hall](#) in New York in March. It protests on campuses across the country, and [its statement immediately following the Oct. 7 attacks](#) said that “the source of all this violence” was “Israeli apartheid and occupation — and United States complicity in that oppression.”

The complex funding system in the nonprofit space sometimes means that groups are funded by grants — or even subgrants — from a larger organization that isn’t involved in granular, day-to-day management of an activist group’s

work. In a statement to POLITICO, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund noted it cannot support political activity or campaigns and is not involved in the personal political giving of trustees.

“Our grantees in all three portfolios support a broad range of policy ideas—some align with the Biden administration’s agenda and others conflict. This complexity is part and parcel of our nonpartisan work,” said Sarah Edkins, the fund’s communications director, in a statement.

Some advisers to left-leaning causes say that’s just part of the way things work when it comes to philanthropic giving.

“There may be times where a donor may give to an organization or candidate that sometimes does something that clashes with their personal view,” said Kevin Conlon, who has been a bundler for Biden as well as for Democratic presidential candidates Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, and now advises nonprofits.

Still, some donors say they feel conflicted as they watch the protests unfold.

“We’re hearing from folks who want to make sure that their dollars aren’t supporting people who are supporting Hamas and shouting antisemitic things,” said Daniel Goldwin, public affairs executive director of the Jewish United Fund in Chicago, which issues grants to small local nonprofits and to larger national nonprofits. “If it’s an organization they’ve been giving to for a long time, we encourage them to call and communicate their concerns.”

Biden is struggling to regain support from young people, who went overwhelmingly for him in 2020, and the protests may complicate that effort. As Israel faces increasing criticism from around the world amid the high numbers of civilian casualties in Gaza, demonstrations in the United States are only growing more intense. Those at Columbia University, in particular, have emerged as a thorn in the side of Biden, who finally weighed in on them on Thursday.

“Destroying property is not a peaceful protest, it’s against the law,” Biden said. “Vandalism, trespassing, breaking windows, shutting down campuses, forcing the cancellation of classes and graduation, none of this is a peaceful protest.”

Some Democrats are downplaying the protests as a problem for Biden.

“Elections aren’t determined on foreign policy issues,” said Jill Zipin, co-founder and chair of Democratic Jewish Outreach Pennsylvania, a political action committee that works to elect Democrats in Pennsylvania. “The protest movement and the encampments probably won’t be an issue in November, but it’s really hard to say because things can change quickly.”

The liability for Biden could be more pronounced if the protests continue throughout the summer and fall, as the election draws closer.

“If it continues through November, then yes, it’s likely to be more salient,” said Omar Wasow, a scholar who studies protest movements and their political effects. “And if it somehow winds down, you see Americans don’t care a lot about foreign policy, and it’s likely to not to play out in the election.”

Many of the nonprofits that receive grants that are now involved in the protests also have missions that are mostly unrelated to foreign policy. But as the conflict in the Middle East takes up a greater space at the center of the nation’s political debates, nonprofits with other missions have been drawn to the cause.

“A lot of our members are supporting actions that are trying to hold Biden accountable, which is not the same thing as opposing Biden. It’s saying we desperately don’t want the alternative,” said Barni Qaasim, a spokesperson for Solidaire Action, a group that funds social justice movements.

Solidaire has received financial support from the Pritzkers, who also founded the Libra Foundation, which funds smaller nonprofits that address criminal justice, environmental and gender justice issues. Susan Pritzker declined to comment for this story. Some of the groups funded by Libra have also been involved in protests against Israel’s response to the Oct. 7 attack by Hamas.

For instance, The Climate Justice Alliance took part in pro-Palestinian marches that have used the phrase “Genocide Joe.” Black Organizing for Leadership and Dignity, another group backed by the Libra Foundation, promotes pro-Palestinian demonstrations on its website. And a third, the Immigrant Defense

Project, was part of a protest in Washington that saw [13 activists arrested by Capitol police](#) after demanding a permanent cease-fire in Gaza.

The Tides Foundation, funded by the Prizkers, has also supported the Adalah Justice Project, which has also been [part of protests](#) at Columbia University. The group [wrote on X, formerly Twitter](#), that “universities are hedge funds, deeply embedded with weapons manufacturers.” Tides also supports Palestine Legal, a legal defense fund that is offers legal assistance to “students mobilizing

AD

The Tides Foundation issued a statement about funding groups that protest, saying it is “committed to advancing social justice,” adding that its “community of fiscally sponsored projects, donors, and grantees represent a wide range of perspectives on what social justice looks like.”

Palestine Legal has been a fiscally sponsored project of the Tides Center since 2013, and Adalah Justice Project since 2016, according to a spokesperson. Jewish Voice for Peace and IfNotNow “are grantee partners.”

Some donors may use this moment to reevaluate where their money goes, something that Conlon, the Democratic bundler, acknowledged.

“They might be less inclined to give [in the future] if they feel strongly about it. Inevitably, there will be conflicts,” he said. “You’re not going to sync perfectly all the time.”

---

*CORRECTION: An earlier version of this report misstated that The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation seeds the Tides Foundation's work. It no longer has active grants to Tides. It also said POLITICO contacted Gates. POLITICO contacted an agency that has represented the Gates Foundation but did not reach out directly to Gates. It said IfNotNow was one of two of the main organizations behind the protests. IfNotNow is supporting protests, but students are leading them. And it misstated the year Rockefeller Brothers Fund donated to Tides and that the donations to Jewish Voice for Peace went through an intermediary. The donations to Tides took place prior to 2022, and the Fund directly contributed to Jewish Voice for Peace.*

---

# Playbook

The unofficial guide to official Washington, every morning and weekday afternoons.



## EMAIL

Your Email

## EMPLOYER

Employer

## JOB TITLE

Job Title

By signing up, you acknowledge and agree to our [Privacy Policy](#) and [Terms of Service](#). You may unsubscribe at any time by following the directions at the bottom of the email or by contacting us here. This site is protected by reCAPTCHA and the Google Privacy Policy and Terms of Service apply.

[SIGN UP](#)

## SPONSORED CONTENT

Recommended by Outbrain



### Blood Sugar? Endocrinologist...

#1 at Walmart, Over 2 Million Sold Since 2008, Premium...

[glucocil.com](http://glucocil.com)



### District Of Columbia Residents Get Huge...

[ExpertsInSavings | Home](#)



### See how Betterment makes your money...

Betterment is the automated investing and savings app...

[Betterment - Investing involve...](#)



### How Can Social Security Benefits...

[SmartAsset](#)



### Neuropathy is not from Low vitamin B. Meet...

[neuropathy.pro](http://neuropathy.pro)

[About Us](#)

[Advertising](#)

[Breaking News Alerts](#)

[Careers](#)

[Credit Card Payments](#)

[Digital Edition](#)

[FAQ](#)

[Feedback](#)

[Headlines](#)

[Photos](#)

[Press](#)

[Print Subscriptions](#)

[Request A Correction](#)

[Write For Us](#)

[RSS](#)

[Site Map](#)

[Terms of Service](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)