

Another Round on the Koch Brothers

by Pejman Yousefzadeh on March 16, 2011

David Bernstein [completely schools](#) Jonathan Chait:

Responding to a [post of mine](#) regarding “progressive” demonization of the libertarian billionaire Koch brothers, [TNR’s Chait expresses bafflement](#) at libertarians’ “hypersensitivity” regarding criticism of the Kochs’ “great deal of influence over the political system.”

The problem, dear Jonathan, is that while you and others consistently assert that the Kochs have such influence, you don’t ever demonstrate it. Let’s review: It seems undisputed that the Kochs total spending on political and ideological causes is somewhere around 10–15 million dollars per year. How big a role does this money play in the American political system?

Let’s start with ideological/intellectual causes. The liberal Ford Foundation spends over \$400 million a year. The liberal MacArthur Foundation spends about \$140 million a year. Liberal billionaire George Soros spends about \$150 million a year. Liberals control the vast majority of academic positions in almost every humanities and social science department in every major university in the country, with total budgets in the tens of billions.

Even in the libertarians’ tiny corner of the ideological universe, 10 million dollars would only keep the Cato Institute running from January to April this year, and leave nothing left for any other libertarian cause or organization. So the idea that the Kochs are having some huge influence on American politics through their ideological philanthropy is grossly exaggerated, at best.

Even more absurd is the notion that the Kochs’ political contributions are distorting American politics. The Obama campaign spent hundreds of million of dollars on the 2008 election. The 2010 midterm elections [cost about \\$4 billion](#). The Koch’s relative spending is like pissing in an ocean. Such spending, of course, can under the right conditions win an interest group some narrow favors, but that’s a far cry from suggesting that it can buy “a great deal of influence over the political system” in general.

There’s more. Read on. I’d love to believe that at some point soon, the effort to make the Koch brothers into political bogeymen will fall apart. There is no intellectual justification whatsoever behind this demonization effort.