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Conflicts of interest: Facebook's "independent oversight board"

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18 of 20 original members of Facebook's "independent oversight board" collaborated with or are tied to groups that have received funding from George Soros' Open Society Foundations.

The following is a reprint of my investigation for RealClearInvestigations about the Facebook independent oversight board.

In announcing the formation of an independent oversight board with authority to allow or remove content from Facebook and Instagram, the board's four co-chairs stressed the body's diversity.

The progressive organization, heavily represented on Facebook's oversight board, says Soros has given away more than \$32 billion of his personal fortune to fund its work around the world. Open Society Foundations/Wikimedia

“The board members come from different professional, cultural and religious backgrounds and have various political viewpoints,” they wrote in a New York Times op-ed on May 6. “Some of us have been publicly critical of Facebook; some of us haven't.”

Contemporaneous news articles reinforced this message, reporting that the board's ideologically and geographically diverse members criss-cross the ideological spectrum.

A closer look, however, reveals that 18 of its 20 members collaborated with or are tied to groups that have received funding from George Soros' Open Society Foundations – which is one of the most well-funded and influential progressive organizations in the country.

Open Society's reach is so vast that simply receiving support from the institution is not a proxy for political leanings – one member has received support from Soros and the Charles Koch

Foundation. But the fact that 90% of the board's members have ties to that progressive group raises questions in an environment where conservatives complain about big-tech bias and internet censorship.

Here's a list of the oversight board's members:

- Afia Asantewaa Asare-Kyei: A program manager at Soros' Open Society Foundations in West Africa.
- Evelyn Aswad (University of Oklahoma): U.S. law professor. Recipient of a grant from Knight Foundation, which has partnered with Soros' Open Society Foundations. Aswad says corporations should align their "speech codes with international human rights law" and be guided by "international law on freedom of expression."
- Endy Bayuni: Jakarta Post editor. On the board of the Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict in Jakarta, headed by a "George Soros visiting practitioner chair" who previously worked at a Soros-founded group.
- Catalina Botero-Marino (co-chair): Dean of a Colombian law school that received \$1.3 million over two years from Soros' Open Society Foundations. Serves on an expert panel of Inter-American Dialogue, funded in part by Soros' Open Society Foundations. Also serves as an expert for Columbia University's Global Freedom of Expression Project, funded in part by Open Society Foundations. Served as a board member of Article 19, which received \$1.7 million from Open Society Foundations over two years.
- Katherine Chen: Academic professor, journalist. Often retweets material critical of Donald Trump and supportive of Barack Obama.
- Nighat Dad: Founder and executive director of the Digital Rights Foundation, which receives money from Soros' Open Society Foundations, and is a project of Artists at Risk Connection, a project of Pen America, which is sponsored in part by Soros' Open Society Foundations. Served on the board of the Soros-funded Dangerous Speech Project. Adviser on Amnesty International's Technology and Human Rights Counsel, funded in part by Soros' Open Society Foundations.
- Jamal Greene (co-chair): Columbia University law school professor. (The Soros family and Foundations are well known funders of and partners with Columbia.) Recently served as aide to California Sen. Kamala Harris, who counts Soros among her donors. His Twitter account shows that he has sided firmly against President Trump.
- Pamela Karlan: Stanford University Law professor. Member of the Soros founded and funded American Constitution Society, which takes a "progressive" view of the U.S. Constitution. Supported Trump impeachment and has contributed to Democratic candidates, including Hillary Clinton and Elizabeth Warren.
- Tawakkol Karman: Her organization, "Women Journalists Without Chains," receives funds from Soros' Open Society Foundations. She serves on the advisory council of Transparency International, which also receives funds from Soros' group.

- Maina Kiai: Director of Human Rights Watch's Alliances and Partnerships Initiative, which received \$100 million from Open Society Foundations. She was founding leader of the Kenya Human Rights Commission, which received \$615,000 from Soros over two years.
- Sudhir Krishnaswamy: Law school vice chancellor. Co-founder of progressive nonprofit Centre for Law and Policy Research, which receives major funding from Soros-funded Center for Reproductive Rights, and the lesbian rights group Astrea; editor of the International Journal of Communications Law & Policy (IJCLP), which received grants from Open Society Foundations. Also connected to the Soros-supported Committee on Global Thought at Columbia University.
- Ronaldo Lemos: Brazilian law professor. Co-founder of the Soros-supported Institute for Technology and Society. Serves on the board of the Open Society-funded Mozilla Foundation. Was board member at Soros-funded Access Now.
- Michael McConnell (co-chair): Stanford University law professor. Head of the Constitutional Law Center, funded by the Soros Open Society Foundations-funded American Constitution Society.
- Julie Owono (Stanford University, Harvard University): Head of Internet Sans Frontieres, a member of the Soros-funded Global Network Initiative.
- Emi Palmor: Former head of the Israeli Ministry of Justice.
- Alan Rusbridger: Former editor in chief of The Guardian. On board of the Open Society Foundations-funded Committee to Protect Journalists.
- Andas Sajo: Professor. One of the founders of Soros' Central European University. Formerly on board of Soros' Open Society Justice Initiative in New York. Former judge of European Court of Human Rights, criticized for its alleged conflicts of interests and Soros ties. (An investigation found that nearly all the judges on the court received funding from Soros' Open Society Foundations.)
- John Samples: Founder of Libertarian Cato Institute's Center for Representative Government, founded by former Congressman Lee Hamilton (D) who was head of Woodrow Wilson Center, which is funded, in part, by Soros' Open Society Foundations. Cato opposes Trump's positions on illegal immigration and sees eye to eye on the issue with Soros, who has contributed to Cato through Open Society Foundations. Cato is also funded by Google, Ford Foundation, and the libertarian Koch interests, who also favor more open borders.
- Nicolas Suzor: Law professor at Queensland University of Technology, which collaborated and co-funded projects with Soros' Open Society Foundations.
- Helle Thorning-Schmidt (co-chair): Denmark's socialist former prime minister who advocates "rethinking" democracy. On board of the Open Society Foundations-funded European Council of Foreign Relations. Trustee at the Open Society Foundations-funded International Crisis Group where George and Alexander Soros sit on the board. Advisory board member of Open Society Foundations-funded Atlantic Council. Also sits on the Atlantic Council's International Advisory Board, which received approximately \$325,000 from the Open Society Foundations-funded Center for Global Development.

Facebook did not respond to an emailed request for an interview with CEO Mark Zuckerberg or a representative.