



Capital Rivals: Koch Brothers vs. George Soros

By [Spencer MacColl](#) on September 21, 2010 4:14 PM

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Ever since Jane Mayer's recent *New Yorker* [piece](#) earlier this month, much of the media has risen to debate how much influence conservative and libertarian-leaning businessmen David and Charles Koch, the owners of [Koch Industries](#), have in American politics.

Some critics of the article [argue](#) that the media cries foul over the Koch brothers, yet largely ignores liberal

George Soros, the Hungarian-American currency speculator and stock investor, who has spent millions of dollars on liberal and nonpartisan causes ([including](#) the Center for Responsive Politics).

[OpenSecrets Blog](#) is here to investigate the numbers behind these bold-faced names in our new feature, **Capital Rivals**.

For starters, both Soros and the brothers Koch (pronounced "coke") are incredibly rich. And their political endeavors are numerous.

Koch Industries, an oil refiner, is the nation's second largest private company with about \$100 billion in annual revenue. Soros is chairman of [Soros Fund Management](#), a highly successful hedge fund that has provided financial and investment strategies to a variety of funds. As of June 30, 2009, the hedge fund had holdings valued at \$4.2 billion.

David and Charles Koch are tied at [No. 24](#) on *Forbes* top billionaires list with a personal fortunes of \$17.5 billion each. Soros is [No. 35](#) on the list with a net worth of \$14 billion.

The Koch brothers, Soros and their respective companies have spent millions of dollars on politics, ranging from federal lobbying to candidate support to bankrolling political committees, according to a [Center for Responsive Politics](#) review of their political activity.

The Kochs and Soros have also funded think tanks, foundations and political organizations -- money that is sometimes notoriously difficult to track.

These individuals aren't exactly flying under the radar as the Kochs hold leadership positions and are featured on the websites for the [Cato Institute](#), [Reason Foundation](#) and the [Mercatus Center](#) among others. Soros also runs the [Open Society Institute](#) - website [Soros.org](#) -- as well as the recently created [Institute for New Economic Thinking](#).

Still these individuals have provided major funding to groups that aren't particularly transparent, such as [Soros-backed Democracy Alliance](#), which doesn't provide information on the projects it funds.

[David Koch's Americans for Prosperity Foundation](#) has a more detailed website, but it is unclear why Koch is seemingly uninvolved in the similar organization, [Americans for Prosperity](#). David Koch [contends](#) that no Koch foundations have provided funding to Americans for Prosperity, the citizen advocacy group organizing Tea Party events around the country. A *Washington Post* [article](#) from January of this year connects the Kochs with the Tea Party movement, citing records of their foundation giving \$3.1 million to Americans for Prosperity, but according to the Kochs, this is false, as the money only went to the Americans for Prosperity *Foundation*.

Below is the [Center for Responsive Politics](#)' analysis federal political activity by Soros and the Kochs. Note that while direct political donations are relatively easily to track, it's difficult to create a full compilation of the political groups that these

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individuals are connected with due to secondary and indirect affiliations. Therefore, the groups listed at the end of the are the most well-known organizations linked to these three individuals.

Organization-Driven Political Activity

The Koch brothers' company, Koch Industries, has been a big player in both campaign donations and lobbying. Koch Industries [currently leads](#) the oil and gas industry as the top contributor to federal candidates and parties, and is the [fifth highest lobbying spender](#) in the industry this year. Soros' hedge fund, [Soros Fund Management](#), has also lobbied at the federal level, but employees have not made campaign donations through a Soros-sponsored political action committee. Because of the notable lobbying involvement of a Soros-funded think tank, the [Open Society Policy Center](#), this group's data is also included for the purpose of this comparison:

Political Action Committee Spending (1989 to 2010)

[Koch Industries](#): \$5,938,993 (83 percent going to Republicans)

Soros Fund Management: \$0

527 Group Contributions (2001 to 2010)

Koch Industries: \$574,998

- \$186,598 – [Democratic Governors Association](#)
- \$150,000 – [Republican State Leadership Committee](#)
- \$103,400 – [Republican Governors Association](#)

Soros Fund Management: \$0

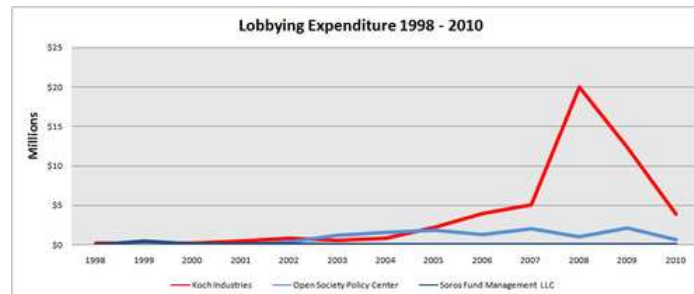
Lobbying Expenditures (1998 to 2010)

[Koch Industries](#): \$50,972,700

[Soros Fund Management](#): \$860,000

[Open Society Policy Center](#) (Soros-Funded): \$11,930,000

According to federal [lobbying reports](#), Koch Industries' top issues include energy, environmental, tax and homeland security policies. The Open Society Policy Center has [mainly lobbied](#) on issues relating to foreign relations, civil rights, and law enforcement policy. The graph below outlines these organizations lobbying history since 1998 (click on graph for full size):



VERDICT: When it comes to the combination of institutional lobbying, 527 group donations and PAC expenditures, Koch Industries far out-spends Soros' hedge fund and think tank, \$57.4 million to \$12.8 million. Most of this money is attributable to lobbying expenditures.

Individual-Funded Political Activity

Soros and the Koch brothers have all donated to federal political campaigns and committees. While Soros has far out-spent the Koch brothers in donating to 527 groups, especially when considering his incredible \$26.2 million in donations to the groups between 2003 and 2004, the Koch brothers have donated more money to federal candidates and committees.


The Koch brothers give almost exclusively to Republicans just as Soros donates predominately to Democrats and Democratic organizations. Overall, Soros has spent \$36.74 million and the Kochs have spent \$4.06 million. (Note: This study only covers donations to federal candidates - to see donations to state candidates, go to [Followthemoney.org](#) and search for Soros and Koch. For example, as Ben Smith of *Politico* [wrote recently](#), David Koch and his wife have given \$74,000 to a Democrat, Andrew Cuomo, New York's State Attorney General.)

Individual donations to federal candidates, parties and political action committees (1989 to 2010)

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OpenSecrets.org: Tracking Money In Politics Center for Responsive Politics Executive Director Sheila Krumholz talks with CBS News about the money behind television advertisements during the 2010 midterm elections. (September 2010).




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Koch Brothers: \$2.58 million
George Soros: \$1.74 million

David Koch: \$2,224,170

- \$667,500 – [National Republican Congressional Committee](#)
- \$555,000 – [Republican National Committee](#)
- \$191,400 – [National Republican Senatorial Committee](#)

Charles G. Koch: \$363,100

- \$58,900 – [National Republican Senatorial Committee](#)
- \$50,000 – [Republican National Committee](#)

George Soros: \$1,748,627

- \$252,670 – [Democratic National Committee](#)
- \$147,216 – [Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee](#)
- \$259,716 – [Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee](#)

David Koch's Favorite congressional members:

\$17,100 – [Todd Tiahrt](#) (R-Kan.)
\$7,600 – [Elizabeth Dole](#) (R-N.C.)
\$7,200 – [Mark Foley](#) (R-Fla.)
\$6,600 – [James Inhofe](#) (R-Okla.)
\$5,000 – [Sam Brownback](#) (R-Kan.)

George Soros' favorite congressional members:

\$6,500 – [Hillary Clinton](#) (D-N.Y.)
\$6,200 – [Jon Cranley](#) (D-Ohio)
\$6,000 – [Ken Salazar](#) (D-Colo.)
\$6,000 – [Dan Maffei](#) (D-N.Y.)
\$5,500 – [Tom Perriello](#) (D-Va.)

Individual donations to 527 organizations (2001 to 2010)

George Soros: \$35 million
Koch Brothers: \$1.5 million

So-called 527 groups are non-profit, tax-exempt organizations that are allowed to raise money for political activities including voter mobilization efforts, issue advocacy and other actions. They are allowed to raise unlimited amounts of money from individuals, corporations and unions. Until earlier this year, they could not use these unlimited contributions to expressly advocate for the election or defeat of a federal candidate. Federal court rulings -- including *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* and *SpeechNow.org v. Federal Election Commission* -- have broken down that restriction. For more information go [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

As mentioned previously, Soros spent \$26 million in under two years and did so in his determination to defeat George W. Bush in 2004. He told the *Washington Post* in November 2003, "America under Bush, is a danger to the world. I'm willing to put my money where my mouth is." Since December 2008, Soros has only donated \$4,000 to these types of groups. On June 30th of this year, David Koch made a \$1 million donation to the Republican Governors Association, his largest one-time donation to date.

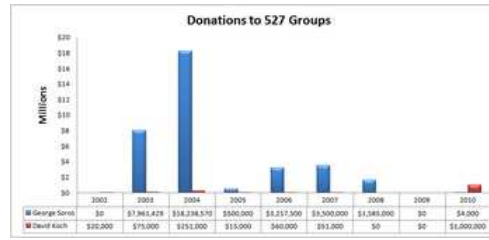
David Koch: \$1,472,000

- \$1,352,000 – [Republican Governors Association](#)
- \$100,000 – [Americans for Better Government](#)

George Soros: \$35,006,500

- \$12.05 million – [Joint Victory Campaign 2004](#)
- \$7.5 million – [America Coming Together](#)
- \$5 million – [MoveOn.org](#) (Note: Soros donated \$2.5 million to MoveOn.org's 527 group and \$2.5 million to the MoveOn.org Voter Fund, which is a PAC.)
- \$3.65 million – [America Votes](#)
- \$3.5 million – [The Fund for America](#)
- \$150,000 – Win Back Respect
- \$120,000 – [Majority Action](#)
- \$100,000 – [Campaign Money Watch](#)

Soros certainly wins the 527 group spending battle, beating the Koch brothers \$35 million to \$1.5 million. A graph below show the history these donations (click on graph for full size):



VERDICT: Soros rules this category, having poured more than \$36.7 million into political channels, compared to \$4.06 million for the Koch brothers.

Think Tanks and Political Organizations

In addition to donating directly to political candidates, parties and committees, the Kochs and Soros have funded numerous political think tanks and advocacy groups. These groups are not required to reveal their donors, therefore making it hard to come up with a comprehensive list of organizations that have financial ties to these individuals. The institutions mentioned are those most well-connected with the Koch brothers and George Soros.

Charles Koch [co-founded](#) the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, along with Edward Crane in 1977. Charles and David Koch, along with Richard Fink and Jay Humphries, [co-founded](#) the Citizens for a Sound Economy in 1984. In 2004, CSE broke off into two groups: Koch-linked [Americans for Prosperity](#) and [FreedomWorks](#), headed by former congressman [Dick Armey](#). According to its [website](#), Americans for Prosperity "is committed to educating citizens about economic policy and a return of the federal government to its Constitutional limits." In addition to those mentioned above, Charles Koch has [helped to build](#) the [Institute for Humane Studies](#), the [Bill of Rights Institute](#) and the [Market-Based Management Institute](#).

David Koch is currently on the board of directors at Cato, as well as the [Mercatus Center](#) at George Mason University, a research center dedicated to "market-oriented ideas." He is a [trustee](#) at the libertarian [Reason Foundation](#) whose goal is to advance "free minds and free markets."

George Soros founded the [Open Society Institute](#) which is his primary philanthropy organization. According to the website, "The Open Society Foundations fund a range of programs around the world, from public health to education to business development." While the foundation spends much of its resources on democratic causes around the world, OSI has also [contributed](#) to political advocacy groups such as the [Tides Foundation](#). In 2004, Soros pledged [\\$3 million](#) to the progressive think tank, [Center for American Progress](#). Soros is also a major [financial](#) backer of the [Democracy Alliance](#), an organization committed to drive progressive activist funding and the recently formed [Institute for New Economic Thinking](#), which was jump started by a [\\$50 million](#) pledge from Soros.

Both the Koch brothers and Soros have given generously to nonpartisan charitable organizations. David Koch, who is still receiving treatment for [prostate cancer](#) has donated \$120 million to cancer research at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, \$40 million to Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, \$100 million to [renovating](#) New York City Ballet and Opera Theater, and \$20 million to the American Museum of Natural History, among other donations. Soros recently [pledged](#) \$100 million to Human Rights Watch, and he has made many other charitable donations such as [\\$50 million](#) for the [Millennium Promise](#) initiative to eradicate extreme poverty in Africa. In 2003, [PBS estimated](#) Soros had donated more than \$4 billion since the 1980s.

VERDICT: Given the difficulty in tracking donations to nonprofits and charitable organizations, it's almost impossible to quantify whether the Koch brothers or Soros dominate this political realm. That said, both the Kochs and Soros have spent incredible riches and this area with no sign of stopping.

Capital Rivals is [OpenSecrets Blog's](#) ongoing series that plays political foes against one another on the playing field of money in politics.

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