

# Not just the Koch brothers: New study reveals funders behind the climate change denial effort

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Dr. Robert J. Brulle is a professor of sociology and environmental science at Drexel University in Philadelphia. Credit: CASBS

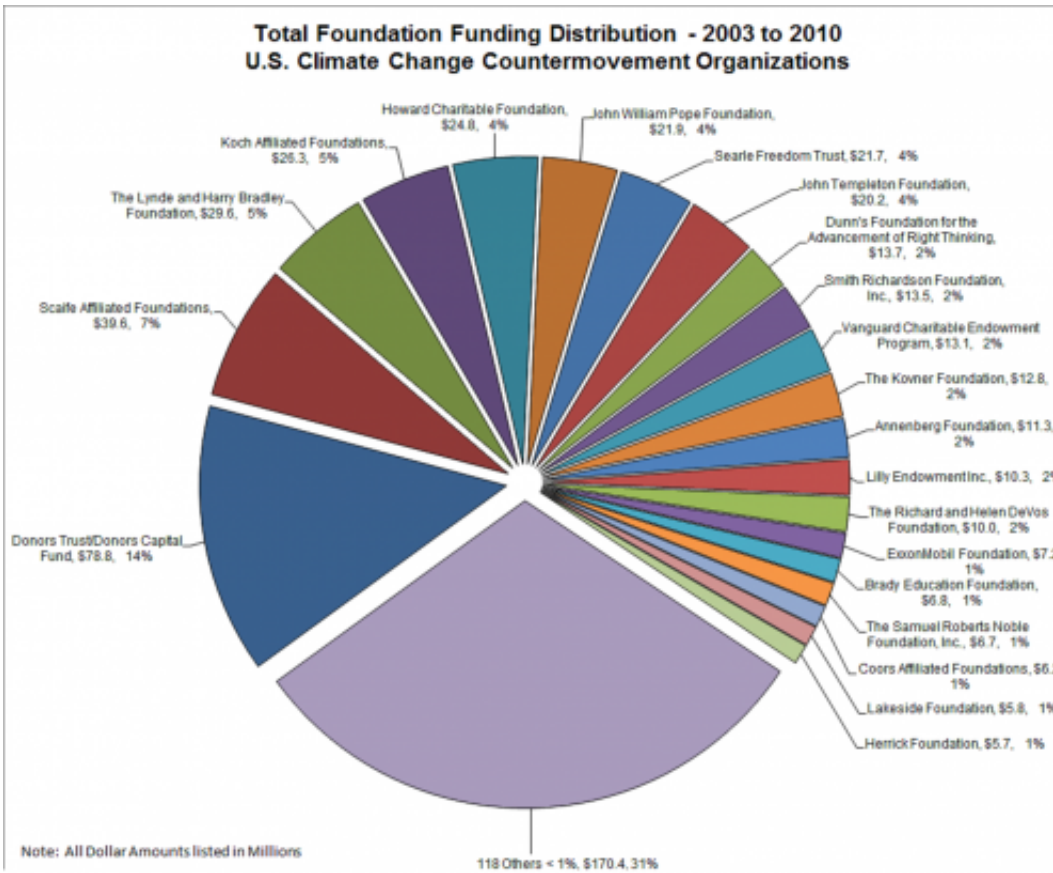
A new study conducted by Drexel University's environmental sociologist Robert J. Brulle, PhD, exposes the organizational underpinnings and funding behind the powerful climate change countermovement. This study marks the first peer-reviewed, comprehensive analysis ever

conducted of the sources of funding that maintain the denial effort.

Through an analysis of the financial structure of the organizations that constitute the core of the countermovement and their sources of monetary support, Brulle found that, while the largest and most consistent funders behind the countermovement are a number of well-known conservative foundations, the majority of donations are "dark money," or concealed funding.

The data also indicates that Koch Industries and ExxonMobil, two of the largest supporters of climate science denial, have recently pulled back from publicly funding countermovement organizations. Coinciding with the decline in traceable funding, the amount of funding given to countermovement organizations through third party pass-through foundations like Donors Trust and Donors Capital, whose funders cannot be traced, has risen dramatically.

Brulle, a professor of sociology and environmental science in Drexel's College of Arts and Sciences, conducted the study during a year-long fellowship at Stanford University's Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences. The study was published today in *Climatic Change*, one of the top 10 climate science journals in the world.



The climate change countermovement is a well-funded and organized effort to undermine public faith in climate science and block action by the U.S. government to regulate emissions. This countermovement involves a large number of organizations, including conservative think tanks, advocacy groups, trade associations and conservative foundations, with strong links to sympathetic media outlets and conservative politicians.

"The climate change countermovement has had a real political and ecological impact on the failure of the world to act on the issue of global warming," said Brulle. "Like a play on Broadway, the countermovement

has stars in the spotlight – often prominent contrarian scientists or conservative politicians – but behind the stars is an organizational structure of directors, script writers and producers, in the form of conservative foundations. If you want to understand what's driving this movement, you have to look at what's going on behind the scenes."

To uncover how the countermovement was built and maintained, Brulle developed a listing of 118 important climate denial organizations in the U.S. He then coded data on philanthropic funding for each organization, combining information from the Foundation Center with financial data submitted by organizations to the Internal Revenue Service. The final sample for analysis consisted of 140 foundations making 5,299 grants totaling \$558 million to 91 organizations from 2003 to 2010.

Key findings include:

- Conservative foundations have bank-rolled denial. The largest and most consistent funders of organizations orchestrating climate change denial are a number of well-known conservative foundations, such as the Searle Freedom Trust, the John William Pope Foundation, the Howard Charitable Foundation and the Sarah Scaife Foundation. These foundations promote ultra-free-market ideas in many realms.
- Koch and ExxonMobil have recently pulled back from publicly visible funding. From 2003 to 2007, the Koch Affiliated Foundations and the ExxonMobil Foundation were heavily involved in funding climate-change denial organizations. But since 2008, they are no longer making publicly traceable contributions.
- Funding has shifted to pass through untraceable sources. Coinciding with the decline in traceable funding, the amount of funding given to denial organizations by the Donors Trust has risen dramatically. Donors Trust is a donor-directed foundation

whose funders cannot be traced. This one foundation now provides about 25% of all traceable foundation funding used by organizations engaged in promoting systematic denial of climate change.

- Most funding for denial efforts is untraceable. Despite extensive data compilation and analyses, only a fraction of the hundreds of millions in contributions to climate change denying organizations can be specifically accounted for from public records. Approximately 75% of the income of these organizations comes from unidentifiable sources.

"The real issue here is one of democracy. Without a free flow of accurate information, democratic politics and government accountability become impossible," said Brulle. "Money amplifies certain voices above others and, in effect, gives them a megaphone in the public square. Powerful funders are supporting the campaign to deny scientific findings about global warming and raise public doubts about the roots and remedies of this massive global threat. At the very least, American voters deserve to know who is behind these efforts."

This study is part one of a three-part project by Brulle to examine the climate movement in the U.S. at the national level. The next step in the project is to examine the environmental movement or the [climate change](#) movement. Brulle will then compare the whole [funding](#) flow to the entire range of organizations on both sides of the debate.

**More information:** Full paper: [www.drexel.edu/~media/Files/n ... s/Institutionalizing%20Delay%20-%20Climatic%20Change.ashx](http://www.drexel.edu/~media/Files/n...s/Institutionalizing%20Delay%20-%20Climatic%20Change.ashx)

Provided by Drexel University

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