

The Danger of a Constitutional Convention

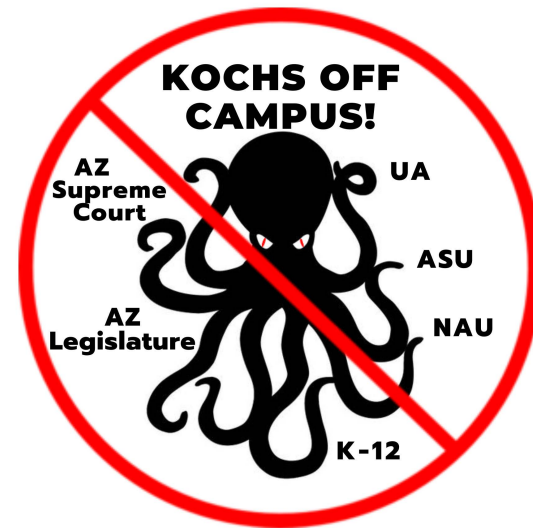
How might American institutions be “changed?” One route, the gradual one that the Koch donor network has so far pursued, is by replacing or turning existing elites, who then work to change our laws. But there is another route, much quicker, much more drastic. The Constitution allows a constitutional convention to be called by two-thirds of the states. Twenty-nine of the necessary thirty-four states, including Arizona, have so far adopted resolutions calling for such a convention. This leaves five to go.

Meanwhile, tactics like making it harder and harder for less-privileged people to vote, as well as precision gerrymandering of voting districts, have served to make elected officialdom a funhouse mirror version of the will of the electorate. Perhaps a runaway constitutional convention will not be needed, after all. Perhaps gradual, incremental erosion of our political rights will do, as night slowly descends on what remains of American democracy. The struggle goes on, and its outcome is up to us.

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THE KOCH DONOR NETWORK, ENEMIES OF THE VOTER

Did you know that you’re a “hooligan,” or maybe a “hobbit?” Those are the two categories to which Jason Brennan, author of the 2017 book *Against Democracy* (yes, that’s the title), relegates most American voters. Brennan has been a Research Professor at the so-called UA “Freedom Center,” which is one of hundreds of academic centers the Koch brothers instigated on American campuses. He thinks we need an “epistocracy,” where people who pass a written test about political knowledge get to vote, and the rest of the electorate is partly or totally disenfranchised.

Outrageous? Yes, but Brennan was only saying openly what the Kochs and their right-wing libertarian crowd had been thinking (and saying to each other) for decades.

Koch Network Efforts to Run Candidates Failed

Meanwhile, the Koch network has been busy with more than just talk. Voter suppression has been much in the news lately. The network has been spending some of its billions on it. You see, for them, we ordinary people are exploiters of the rich; we're the "takers" that Mitt Romney talked about in 2012—the year that the Kochs and a few hundred of their fellow plutocrats spent over \$400 million trying to get Romney elected. That effort failed, and so did the Kochs' foray into Libertarian Party electoral politics back in 1980, when the Party's presidential slate (with David Koch as the vice-presidential candidate) got only 1% of the national vote.

What the Koch Network Learned from Their Failures

The 1980 failure taught them—taught especially Charles Koch—that success could only be achieved by stealth and deceit. American voters were not going to support them? Then American voters were a rock in the road, and the Kochs would have to hide their true aims—which, as Jane Mayer puts it in *Dark Money* (pg 58), are the effective repeal of "virtually every major political reform passed during the twentieth century" and the reduction of government to "the protection of individual and property rights." Their focus would have to be on capturing the "commanding heights" of American society by creating disciplined cadre who would become lawyers, judges, academics, politicians, and opinion-makers—in short, a new elite of loyal servants of wealth.

Why the Koch Network Is Restricting Voters' Rights

As Ocasio-Cortez has put it, "they have the money, but we have the people." For the Kochs and their allies, this regrettable fact means that steps must be taken to reduce voting by minorities, women, and any other groups who tend to vote the wrong way. And indeed, steps have been taken—for instance, in 2011, over 180 bills were introduced in state legislatures restricting voters' rights, many of them crafted by the Koch-backed American Legislative Exchange Council. The last decade has seen much more of the same.

But even this might not be enough. So, as Tyler Cowen of the Mercatus Center at George Mason University (the jewel in the Kochs' academic crown) puts it, "if American political institutions render market-oriented reforms too difficult to achieve, then perhaps those institutions should be changed." One of those "institutions" is the right to vote that all American citizens, rich or poor, credentialed or not, now enjoy equally. And, as Brennan's book illustrates, the right to vote is no longer sacred, at least not for the Libertarian right.

