

## Identity politics

# Billionaire George Soros has ties to more than 50 'partners' of the Women's March on Washington

What is the link between one of Hillary Clinton's largest donors and the Women's March? Turns out, it's quite significant

BY ASRA Q. NOMANI | 01.20.17



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BILLIONAIRE INVESTOR GEORGE SOROS. (PHOTO BY SEAN GALLUP/GETTY IMAGES)

In the pre-dawn darkness of today's presidential inauguration day, I faced a choice, as a lifelong liberal feminist who voted for Donald Trump for president: lace up my pink Nike sneakers to step forward and take the DC Metro into the nation's capital for the inauguration of America's new president, or wait and go tomorrow to the after-party, dubbed the "Women's March on Washington"?

The Guardian has touted the "Women's March on Washington" as a "spontaneous" action for women's rights. Another liberal media outlet, Vox, talks about the "huge, spontaneous groundswell" behind the march. On its

website, organizers of the march are promoting their work as “a grassroots effort” with “independent” organizers. Even my local yoga studio, Beloved Yoga, is renting a bus and offering seats for \$35. The march’s manifesto says magnificently, “The Rise of the Woman = The Rise of the Nation.”

It’s an idea that I, a liberal feminist, would embrace. But I know — and most of America knows — that the organizers of the march haven’t put into their manifesto: the march really isn’t a “women’s march.” It’s a march for women who are anti-Trump.

As someone who voted for Trump, I don’t feel welcome, nor do many other women who reject the liberal identity-politics that is the core underpinnings of the march, so far, making white women feel unwelcome, nixing women who oppose abortion and hijacking the agenda.

To understand the march better, I stayed up through the nights this week, studying the funding, politics and talking points of the some 403 groups that are “partners” of the march. Is this a non-partisan “Women’s March”?

Roy Speckhardt, executive director of the American Humanist Association, a march “partner,” told me his organization was “nonpartisan” but has “many concerns about the incoming Trump administration that include what we see as a misogynist approach to women.” Nick Fish, national program director of the American Atheists, another march partner, told me, “This is not a ‘partisan’ event.” Dennis Wiley, pastor of Covenant Baptist United Church of Christ, another march “partner,” returned my call and said, “This is not a partisan march.”

Really? UnitedWomen.org, another partner, features videos with the hashtags #ImWithHer, #DemsInPhily and #ThanksObama. Following the money, I poured through documents of billionaire George Soros and his Open Society philanthropy, because I wondered: What is the link between one of Hillary Clinton’s largest donors and the “Women’s March”?

I found out: plenty.

By my draft research, which I’m opening up for crowd-sourcing on GoogleDocs, Soros has funded, or has close relationships with, at least 56 of the march’s “partners,” including “key partners” Planned Parenthood, which opposes Trump’s anti-abortion policy, and the National Resource Defense Council, which opposes Trump’s environmental policies. The other Soros ties with “Women’s March” organizations include the partisan MoveOn.org (which was fiercely pro-Clinton), the National Action Network (which has a former executive director lauded by Obama senior advisor Valerie Jarrett as “a leader of tomorrow” as a march co-chair and another official as “the head of logistics”). Other Soros grantees who are “partners” in the march are the American Civil Liberties Union, Center for Constitutional Rights, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. March organizers and the organizations identified here haven’t yet returned queries for comment.

On the issues I care about as a Muslim, the “Women’s March,” unfortunately, has taken a stand on the side of partisan politics that has obfuscated the issues of Islamic extremism over the eight years of the Obama administration. “Women’s March” partners include the Council on American-Islamic Relations, which has not only deflected on issues of Islamic extremism post-9/11, but opposes Muslim reforms that would allow women to be prayer leaders and pray in the front of mosques, without wearing headscarves as symbols of chastity. Partners also include the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), which wrongly designated Maajid Nawaz, a Muslim reformer, an “anti-Muslim extremist” in a biased report released before the election. The SPLC confirmed to me that Soros funded its “anti-Muslim extremists” report targeting Nawaz. (Ironically, CAIR also opposes abortions, but its leader still has a key speaking role.)

Another Soros grantee and march “partner” is the Arab-American Association of New York, whose executive director, Linda Sarsour, is a march co-chair. When I co-wrote a piece, arguing that Muslim women don’t have to wear headscarves as a symbol of “modesty,” she attacked the coauthor and me as “fringe.”

Earlier, at least 33 of the 100 “women of color,” who initially protested the Trump election in street protests, worked at organizations that receive Soros funding, in part for “black-brown” activism. Of course, Soros is an

“ideological philanthropist,” whose interests align with many of these groups, but he is also a significant political donor. In Davos, he told reporters that Trump is a “would-be dictator.”

A spokeswoman for Soros’s Open Society Foundations, said in a statement, “There have been many false reports about George Soros and the Open Society Foundations funding protests in the wake of the U.S. presidential elections. There is no truth to these reports.” She added, “We support a wide range of organizations — including those that support women and minorities who have historically been denied equal rights. Many of whom are concerned about what policy changes may lie ahead. We are proud of their work. We of course support the right of all Americans to peaceably assemble and petition their government—a vital, and constitutionally safeguarded, pillar of a functioning democracy.”

Much like post-election protests, which included a sign, “Kill Trump,” were not “spontaneous,” as reported by some media outlets, the “Women’s March” is an extension of strategic identity politics that has so fractured America today, from campuses to communities. On the left or the right, it’s wrong. But, with the inauguration, we know the politics. With the march, “women” have been appropriated for a clearly anti-Trump day. When I shared my thoughts with her, my yoga studio owner said it was “sad” the march’s organizers masked their politics. “I want love for everyone,” she said.

The left’s fierce identity politics and its failure on Islamic extremism lost my vote this past election, and so, as the dawn’s first light breaks through the darkness of the morning as I write, I make my decision: I’ll lace up my pink Nikes and head to the inauguration, skipping the “Women’s March” that doesn’t have a place for women like me.

*EDITOR’S NOTE: This story has been updated to include a statement from the Open Society Foundations.*

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