



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on November 20, 2015

Democrat Strategy to Take Back the Senate: Attack the Koch Brothers

Upon learning that the Koch brothers, Charles (shown) and David, and their network of conservative donors, [were planning on spending](#) upwards of \$750 million over the next two election cycles, Harry Reid, the Senate minority leader and harsh critic of the Kochs, enlisted the help of two hard-left political strategists to respond. David Brock, the founder of Media Matters in 2004 and the super-PAC American Bridge in 2010, joined with Geoff Garin, president of Hart Research Associates, to build a plan for Democrats to take back the Senate in 2016.



Brock investigates strategy via focus groups while Garin digs up dirt on Republican opponents. Combined with lots of money, attack ads then are constructed to sway low-information voters in Democrats' direction.

The task of taking back the Senate in 2016 is manageable for the Democrats: 34 Senate seats are up for reelection and Democrats need only four or five victories to return control to their party. By tying the 24 Republican candidates to the Kochs, Reid, Brock, and Garin are predicting success.

For Reid, it's personal. He repeatedly excoriated the Koch's influence on the floor of the Senate, with attacks like this one:

We've proven in the long run that [the Koch brothers] are interested in one thing: their bottom line. They're trying to buy the country. They want to be America's oligarchs.

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For Brock and Garin, it's redemption. Attack ads attempting to tie Republicans to Koch money failed almost completely in 2014, with only one contested seat going to the Democrats while nine others went Republican. But they say that their strategy is long-term, that results from focus groups show the strategy works, and that last year's victory in Michigan proves it.

First, the focus groups. Six of them were held around the country in August, where "swing" voters were exposed to anti-Koch rhetoric for an hour and then asked if any of them had made up their minds about whom they would support next November. The rhetoric included "evidence" that the brothers want to cut Pell grants and reduce environmental regulations. The implication was that the brothers were anti-student and pro-pollution, implying that the Kochs wanted more freedom to pollute the air and water in order to help their bottom line.

By the time the brainwashing sessions were complete, so was the transformation of these swing voters into rabid anti-Koch activists. Some of them, following the sessions, called the brothers "whores," "bullies," and "Nazis." Said one: "They're rich white guys who want rich white guys to succeed." Said



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another: “Anyone who spends that much money to get somebody elected wants something back what that person is elected.”

Senator Heidi Heitkamp, a Democrat senator from North Dakota whose seat isn't up until 2018, disagreed that the strategy will necessarily work: “When you start making [the Kochs] front and center, you are losing sight of what you need to do. We need to be more mindful of what the message is, not who the messengers are and who's paying for them.”

Brock and Garin are touting their success in destroying the Republican candidate in the contest for Senator Carl Levin's seat in Michigan last year. According to Guy Molyneux of Hart Research, their exposure of Terri Lynn Land's Koch brothers funding did her in, by 14 percentage points, when she lost to now-Senator Gary Peters.

A closer look reveals that the victory was not nearly that simple. First, the race would have been tough for any Republican to win because Republicans haven't elected a U.S. senator in Michigan in 20 years.

Second, Land was the runt of the Republican litter. After Representatives Dave Camp and Mike Rogers bowed out of the contest, Land was the only one left. Even Republicans admitted they had a weak candidate, one who lacked sufficient public persona or panache to carry the day. In its review of Land's cratering, Chris Gautz, in *Crain's Detroit Business*, wrote:

Poor decisions included the near-invisible nature of Land's campaign.... [It] rarely, if ever, announced where it would be ahead of time. Land only did a handful of appearances with statewide media, and declined to debate Peters.

The few times she did talk with reporters, her lack of a grasp on national issues was apparent.

The focus groups upon which Reid, Brock, and Garin are relying also show that the strategy might be flawed. In one focus group/brainwashing session that gathered middle-aged Latinos in Las Vegas, some of them said that Democrats were equally guilty of the Koch's alleged sins, with many of them mentioning one name repeatedly: George Soros. Said a bartender after the session: “The only difference between him [Soros] and them [the Koch brothers] is that they [the brothers] are out there. [Soros] is more of a behind-the-scenes puppet master, like the Wizard of Oz.”

Said another coming up for air after one of the sessions: “They all do it. They're all going to ask for money from someone, some billionaire. Just like the Koch brothers have all this negative stuff, so do a bunch of other ones.”

Aside from Soros, would some of those “other ones” include John Tyson, chairman of Tyson Foods, who has been helping to fund Hillary Clinton's campaigns for years? What about David Stevens, the CEO of the Mortgage Bankers Association? Or Richard Parsons, former chairman of Citigroup and Time Warner? Or how about Goldman Sachs, which, between 1999 and 2016, has given \$711,000 to Clinton? Or JPMorgan Chase, with gifts of \$620,000? Or Morgan Stanley, unloading \$543,000 into Clinton's coffers? Or Time Warner — \$411,000?

If Reid, Brock, and Garin are relying on these focus group results and electoral “victories” to win the necessary four to five Senate seats in November for the Democrats, it is, as Alex Roarty, writing in the *National Journal*, expressed it, “a strategy that Democrats will have to repeat several million times over if they want to succeed.”

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