

AMERICANS FOR
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TRUST**



Foreign Influence in U.S. Elections

How Swiss Billionaire Hansjörg Wyss and the Arabella
Advisors Network Uses Foreign Dark Money to Sway
American Politics and Policy

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Key Findings

- Hansjörg Wyss is a Swiss billionaire and foreign national who under federal law is strictly prohibited from directly or indirectly influencing U.S. elections.
- Wyss is influencing American elections and policy through his two nonprofits – the Wyss Foundation and the Berger Action Fund – and has used these two organizations to pump **\$475 million** into the arena of U.S. politics and discourse.
- Wyss' groups funnel massive sums of money into American politics through an array of left-wing advocacy groups, especially through the Arabella Advisors dark money network.

About Americans for Public Trust

Americans for Public Trust is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to restoring trust in government by holding politicians and political groups accountable for corrupt and unethical behavior. We use in-depth investigations and bold legal action to ensure that those who disregard the rule of law are held responsible. By raising awareness of this work, we help to rebuild public faith in our elected leaders.

Introduction

For years, Swiss billionaire Hansjörg Wyss has flooded the American political system with hundreds of millions of dollars in foreign dark money. Behind the scenes, Wyss has used his personal fortune to finance radical left-wing causes and candidates, all while attempting to avoid any public scrutiny or oversight. This investigative report seeks to expose the intricate web of actors, nonprofits, and dark money pass-throughs that have, for decades, enabled Wyss to pursue his expressed goal of “reinterpreting” the U.S. Constitution via progressive and leftist politics.¹

As a foreign national, Wyss is prohibited from not only donating directly to U.S. political candidates, but also from indirectly attempting to influence U.S. elections. However, not only has he given to candidates directly, but he has also founded two dark money groups – the Wyss Foundation and the Berger Action Fund – to pour money into U.S.-based, leftist advocacy groups. These groups then utilize their significant resources to advance a progressive agenda, mold policy debates and decisions, and, ultimately, influence American elections.²

The largest benefactor of Wyss' clandestine funding is the Arabella Advisors network, a dark money hub comprised of multiple nonprofits, which brought in nearly **\$1.6 billion** in 2021 alone.³ This network backs nearly every major advocacy group on the left and allows Wyss to indirectly advance his progressive policy priorities, such as radical environmentalism and securing victories for like-minded Democrat politicians. Perhaps even more concerning, Wyss supports organizations that champion sweeping changes to U.S. election laws and also directly engage in campaign activities, including voter mobilization efforts and political attack ads.⁴

Who is Hansjörg Wyss?

Beginnings of A Billionaire

Born in Bern, Switzerland in 1935, Wyss became enamored with the United States and the American West after visiting as a student in the 1950s. Following a career in the textile and automotive industries, Wyss became the president of Synthes, a Swiss medical device and implant manufacturer. After founding the American division of the company, Wyss later sold Synthes to Johnson & Johnson for nearly \$20 billion, and in 2023 was reportedly personally worth more than \$5 billion.⁵

History of Scandals: Professional and Personal

Under Wyss' tenure, Synthes was embroiled in a major scandal that resulted in the prosecution and incarceration of several of the company's employees. In 2009, federal prosecutors charged the company with conducting unauthorized clinical trials for an experimental “bone cement,” a surgical filler that was tied to the deaths of multiple patients. The company had illicitly marketed the product to doctors despite being aware it could produce potentially lethal complications, such as large blood clots. Synthes never reported the patient deaths to regulators and was accused of misleading FDA inspectors. Four of the company's top

executives pled guilty to the charges, and Synthes agreed to pay millions of dollars in fines in 2010.⁶

While Wyss was never indicted, serious questions remain about the extent of his involvement. Former Synthes employees have claimed that Wyss himself made the decision to ignore the FDA's clinical trial framework, fired a researcher who cautioned against skirting the process, and ignored other warnings about the cement's dangers.⁷

Wyss' private life has also not been free of controversy and scandal. He has been accused of sexually abusing a former employee of his foundation, and later reached a settlement with the victim over the allegations for \$1.5 million in 2013.⁸

“Swiss Billionaire Quietly Becomes Influential Force Among Democrats”

THE NEW YORK TIMES

Secret Rise to Prominence in U.S. Politics

With his nonprofit groups pumping hundreds of millions of dollars into a web of leftist advocacy groups, Wyss has established himself as one of the most significant influencers of American progressive politics, and – as noted by the *The New York Times* – has quietly become an “influential force among Democrats.”⁹

In order to ensconce himself amongst key members of the American left, he co-founded the Center for American Progress (CAP) alongside John Podesta – the former Chief of Staff to President Bill Clinton and current Senior Advisor on clean energy to President Biden.¹⁰

With the sale of Synthes in 2012, Wyss kicked his political ambitions into high gear, and quickly took advantage of the power his money could afford. His sister – who penned his biography – wrote “what was important for him [Wyss] was to find out that he could exert an influence through his foundations.” Wyss, a radical supporter of environmental activism and other progressive causes, continues to use his nonprofits to work towards his ultimate goal: using his influence to “(re)interpret the American Constitution in the light of progressive politics.”¹¹

Despite openly telegraphing this extremist endgame, Wyss prefers to exert his influence from the shadows. In European media, he has flippantly boasted that “nobody knows [him].” In 2011, he told a Swiss paper that he was fighting policing laws in Arizona, working to elect progressive federal judges, and funding abortion clinics, all while his “name never appears” linked to his efforts. While keeping this low public profile, Wyss has established connections at the highest levels of power, remarking last year to yet another a foreign news outlet that he had “indirect contacts in Washington and in the White House.”¹²

“Thus behind the scenes a Swiss plays an important part in American politics...”

BIOGRAPHY OF WYSS WRITTEN BY HIS SISTER HEDI

Wyss’ Foreign Dark Money ATM

Despite being prohibited by law, Wyss contributed nearly \$120,000 to candidates and political committees between 1990 and 2006, and openly bragged about his seemingly illegal political activity in 2003, saying he “supported senators.” When Wyss’ pattern of illicit giving was eventually examined by the Federal Election Commission (FEC), no legal action could be taken as the statute of limitations for the offenses had passed.¹³

After his earlier allegedly illegal contributions, Wyss altered his strategy to take a more indirect approach to generating political

influence. Instead of donating directly to candidates, he now uses his nonprofit groups – the Wyss Foundation, a 501(c)3, and the Berger Action Fund (BAF), a 501(c)4 – as vehicles to influence U.S. politics.¹⁴

Since their creation, these two organizations have donated a staggering **\$475 million** to exert political influence in America. In 2021 alone, BAF doled out a total of **\$72.7 million** to 12 different dark money organizations. Over **85%**, or **\$62.7 million**, was directed to groups focused on promoting and supporting President Biden’s agenda.¹⁵

Some of the prominent leftist groups that have received money from Wyss’ nonprofits include the Sixteen Thirty Fund and New Venture Fund – both part of the Arabella Advisors network – and the Wyss co-founded Center for American Progress. The Wyss Foundation and BAF also back other progressive organizations that advocate for key parts of the left’s agenda, including Fund for a Better Future (FBF), the League of Conservation Voters (LCV), the National Redistricting Action Fund (NRAF), Planned Parenthood, and Indivisible.

Wyss’ giving is nothing short of prolific. In total, his nonprofits have shipped over **\$265 million** to Arabella’s dark money groups, including **\$209 million** from BAF and **\$56.5 million** from the Wyss Foundation.¹⁶

\$475 Million

How Much Wyss’ Nonprofits Have Spent Influencing U.S. Politics

Swiss Citizen Influencing American Politics and Policy

Many of the groups Wyss funds are heavily invested in campaign activities, such as “get-out-the-vote” efforts, partisan-driven voter registration, ballot initiatives, and attack ads.

A frequent terminus for Wyss’ money, the Sixteen Thirty Fund regularly engages in political activity and financially backs other organizations that do the same. In 2020, the Sixteen Thirty Fund funneled nearly **\$164 million** to super PACs and other groups “expressly for political purposes.” Much of that money went to America Votes, the left’s leading voter turnout operation, and super PACs supporting now-President Joe Biden and Senate Democrats.¹⁷

Wyss has also helped financially support Eric Holder’s National Redistricting Action Fund (NRAF). The group chiefly utilizes its funding to intervene in election litigation benefitting Democrats in battleground states, but NRAF has also directly spent in elections. In 2019, NRAF poured thousands of dollars into efforts to back liberal judges running for the Wisconsin Supreme Court.¹⁸

Fund for a Better Future (FBF) and its affiliates support Democratic candidates and engage in ballot initiatives across the country.

In May 2023, FBF’s “Climate Power” – along with Democrat-aligned Future Forward USA Action and Way to Win Action – announced a \$20 million ad buy that would attempt to highlight the Biden administration’s health, economic, and environmental policies. According to media reports, the ads were informed and influenced by Democratic research.¹⁹

In addition to these groups, one of most significant ways Wyss has managed to impact American elections has been through the Hub Project. The group – founded in 2015 by Wyss and housed within the Arabella Advisors network – helps control the flow of Arabella money to progressive candidates and initiatives. The organization often creates vague “pop-up” or front groups – such as “Keep Iowa Healthy” or “North Carolinians for a Fair Economy” – to mobilize voters and disseminate media.²⁰

“What was important for him was to find out that he could exert an influence through his foundations.”

BIOGRAPHY OF WYSS WRITTEN BY HIS SISTER HEDI

Shaping Policy and Buying Access

For years, Wyss has advanced leftist and radical policies in the U.S., all with little transparency, public scrutiny, or government oversight. The groups Wyss funds all play key roles in influencing a wide range of public policy areas, including environmental issues, abortion, and the judicial system. Ultimately, all of these vehicles and methods of giving allow Wyss to indirectly influence U.S. politics and policy, all while granting him backchannel access to the highest echelons of American political power not afforded to regular citizens of the United States.

Wyss has used his fortune to not only buy a seat at the head of the table crafting the left’s policy agenda, but to also provide him with insider access to key members of the Biden administration.

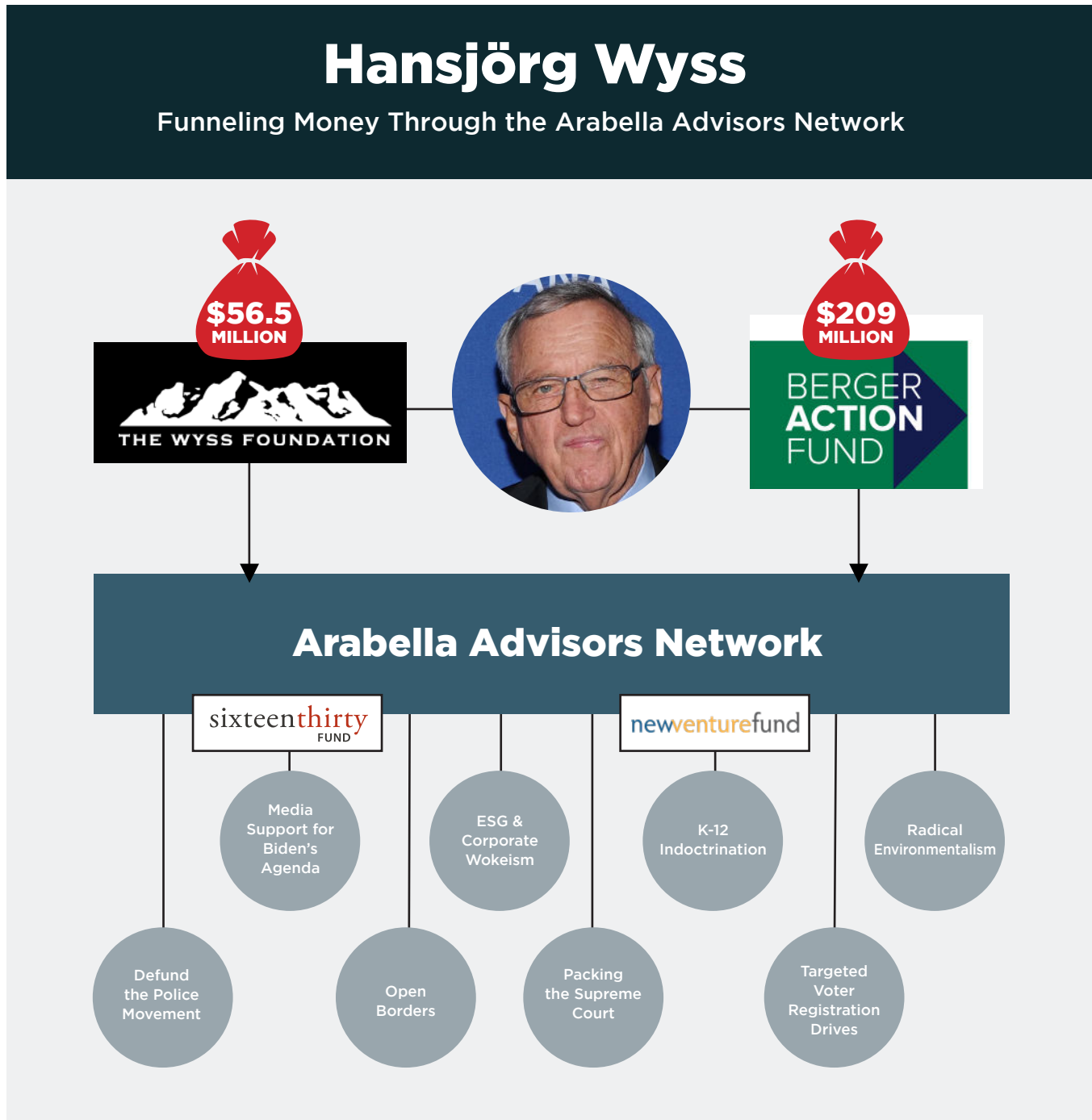
Through his relationship with CAP, which *Politico* dubbed “the most influential think tank of the Biden era,” Wyss has been quietly able to further key elements of the Biden legislative wish list. CAP is part of a consortium of environmental groups spending millions to support Biden’s Build Back Better agenda.²¹

Wyss aims to “(re) interpret the American Constitution in the light of progressive politics.”

BIOGRAPHY OF WYSS WRITTEN BY HIS SISTER HEDI

Major Funder of the Arabella Advisors Network

The Arabella Advisors network is the largest dark money player in American politics, and a major recipient of Wyss' funding – raking in more than **\$265 million** from his nonprofits. Comprised of the Sixteen Thirty Fund, the New Venture Fund, the Windward Fund, Hopewell Fund, and North Fund, Arabella's network acts as a central hub for distributing dark money to left-leaning advocacy groups across the country. After pulling in nearly **\$1.6 billion** in anonymous contributions and spending almost **\$1 billion** in 2021, Arabella has established itself as the foremost hub on the left to finance efforts to support the Defund the Police movement, pack the Supreme Court, enforce radical green energy policies, and prop up the Biden administration's agenda.



Key Groups Backed by Wyss

sixteenthirty FUND

The **Sixteen Thirty Fund**, part of the Arabella Advisors network, is a dark money behemoth that has poured hundreds of millions of dollars into leftist causes. Using his Berger Action Fund, Wyss has funneled a staggering **\$209 million** into the Sixteen Thirty Fund. The group's "multi-million dollar grants singlehandedly power" a wide range of organizations on the left. Sixteen Thirty Fund has financed attack ads against Republicans and backed targeted get-out-the-vote and advocacy campaigns. It has also acted as a "fiscal sponsor" for other groups that have pushed liberal ballot measures, propped up the left's economic and health policies, and attempted to block conservative Supreme Court nominees.²²

newventurefund

New Venture Fund (NVF), the largest nonprofit in the Arabella Advisors network, has received a total of **\$57.8 million** dollars from Wyss' groups. Created by the founder of Arabella Advisors, Eric Kessler, NVF has incubated or supported dozens of groups on the left. NVF helped launch Wyss' Hub Project, whose mission is "partly to shape media coverage to help Democratic causes." NVF often operates under dozens of trade names so it can appear to be a separate grassroots organization. Questions and concerns about murky financial compliance circle NVF. Recent lawsuits filed by ex-employees have accused NVF of "misrepresenting information to donors" and "failing to abide by the strict controls" the organization purportedly had in place to prevent prohibited spending.²³

FUND FOR A BETTER FUTURE

Fund for a Better Future (FBF) and the **Resources Legacy Fund (RLF)** – its 501(c)3 partner – are the organizations behind the front group **Climate Power**. Propelled by nearly **\$91 million** from Wyss, who is consistently one of the group's top donors, Climate Power has spent tens of millions of dollars on paid media pushing President Joe Biden's infrastructure and climate agenda. During the 2022 midterm elections alone, Climate Power spent **\$5.3 million** in ads supporting dozens of House Democrats. FBF/Climate Power has also provided financial support to the liberal judicial advocacy group **Demand Justice** and the largest Democratic super PAC, **Priorities USA**.²⁴

CAP

The Center for American Progress (CAP), the nation's leading liberal think tank, was co-founded by Wyss in 2003 along with John Podesta, Wyss' personal friend and former Chief of Staff to President Bill Clinton. Wyss' nonprofits have given CAP over **\$10 million** since its creation, and the organization now has at least 66 alumni working for the Biden administration – enabling Wyss

to boast that he has "indirect contacts in Washington and in the White House." This list of CAP alumni includes Podesta, who oversees the implementation of billions of dollars in green energy spending by President Biden.²⁵



The League of Conservation

Voters (LCV) network is the self-proclaimed "political voice of the national environmental movement..."

devoted full-time to shaping a pro-environment Congress and White House." The group supports transitioning to a "green economy" by eliminating fossil fuels and backs a host of radical environmental policies and initiatives, including a ban on gas-powered cars and the shuttering of coal power plants. Molly McUsic, a long-time Wyss confidant who serves as the President of the Wyss Foundation and Board Director of the Berger Action Fund, also sits on LCV's Board of Directors. Having received nearly **\$18 million** from Wyss nonprofits, LCV continues to engage in targeted voter registration drives and sizeable paid media campaigns to prop up President Biden's partisan agenda.²⁶

INDIVISIBLE

Indivisible — a grassroots-based organization founded to oppose President Trump and his administration's policy priorities, has benefited from over **\$4.7 million** in backing from Wyss' Berger Action Fund. In 2017, Indivisible orchestrated chaos in town halls across the U.S., and currently prioritizes statehood for D.C., expanding the Supreme Court, and radical environmental policy.²⁷



National Redistricting Action Fund

founded by former Attorney General Eric Holder, has received **\$5 million** from Wyss in support of its mission of generating advantageous maps for Democratic candidates and rolling back Republican gains and majorities at the state level.



Planned Parenthood, the largest provider of abortions in the U.S., has received **\$6 million** from Wyss nonprofits. Operating

over 600 "health centers" across the country, Planned Parenthood has consistently campaigned for liberal abortion policies and railed against the repeal of Roe v. Wade, while its affiliated Action Fund conducts voter mobilization operations and promotes pro-abortion candidates.²⁸

Conclusion

For decades, a Swiss billionaire has been allowed to flood the American political system with **\$475 million** in foreign dark money to bankroll the radical left and indirectly influence U.S. policy. His actions have all been undertaken with little to no transparency, public scrutiny, or government oversight. While the organizations benefiting from Wyss' money have all denied using these funds for overt political spending, all have **refused** to provide any specifics or information regarding what safeguards they have instituted to guarantee that this is not the case.²⁹

Wyss' efforts are designed to influence our politics and alter our electoral outcomes, and to further his personal goal that he has championed for years: "(re)interpret[ing] the American Constitution in the light of progressive politics." Despite not being a U.S. citizen, Wyss has helped build and shape the modern progressive movement in America through organizations he has either helped create or that now depend on his financial support. Furthermore, his billions have afforded him unique access to a web of key players - like John Podesta - who now hold significant positions of power and influence in the Biden administration. With such intricate ties to Biden officials, it is perhaps not a wonder that Wyss can openly brag of his "contacts" in Washington and the White House.

With growing concern in recent years regarding foreign influence in our elections, the threat posed by foreign dark money spending cannot be understated. A foreign billionaire's efforts to circumvent the law in a blatant attempt to transform U.S. government and politics should be alarming to all Americans. In order to safeguard our democracy and all branches of our government from undue, foreign dark money influence, our elected leaders must take clear and decisive action. It is imperative that Congress launch a sweeping investigation into how Wyss and other foreign citizens use dark money to influence American politics and policy. However, simply exposing these shadowy methods and networks is not enough.

Our leaders must pass legislation that outright bans foreign nationals from contributing to 501(c)(4) social welfare organizations. Foreign nationals should be prohibited from contributing to these conduits for electoral advocacy, just as they are prohibited from contributing to U.S. political campaigns. This will be a meaningful step to ensure that our elections are free from foreign meddling and ill intent.

Methodology

Hansjörg Wyss' pattern of giving and influence in the U.S. has been identified through a comprehensive analysis of the following sources:

1. Tax returns of Mr. Wyss' nonprofit organizations, including: the Wyss Foundation (EIN: 25-1823874, Years 2002 to 2021), the Hansjoerg Wyss Foundation (EIN: 23-3012622, Years 2001 to 2013, *Dissolved in 2013 and Merged Assets into the Wyss Foundation*), and the Berger Action Fund (EIN: 20-8948868, Years 2007 to 2021).
2. Tax returns of the organizations that comprise the Arabella Advisors network, including: the New Venture Fund (EIN: 20-5806345, Years 2006 to 2021) and the Sixteen Thirty Fund (EIN: 26-4486735, Years 2009 to 2021).
3. Media articles, including reporting by the *Associated Press*, *The New York Times*, *Politico*, *Real Clear Politics*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and more.
4. A collection of electronic sources, including websites, online records, and social media accounts.
5. Primary source documentation, including the biographical work, *Hansjörg Wyss: My Brother*, written by Swiss author Hedi Wyss, Mr. Wyss' sister.

Endnotes

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