

What is Project Veritas?

Project Veritas is a conservative media organization dedicated to secretly infiltrating progressive organizations to produce unflattering and often selectively edited videos. Project Veritas operates under the guise of citizen journalism, but serves a conservative political agenda without adhering to basic journalistic ethics. The organization was founded by James O’Keefe, a protégé of Andrew Breitbart, in 2010.

Project Veritas has frequently been criticized for editing its videos to deceive its audience and misrepresent its subjects. *New York* magazine described O’Keefe’s ACORN videos as having been “edited in a highly misleading way.”¹ A 2010 investigation into the ACORN videos by former California Attorney General Jerry Brown, found that O’Keefe’s videos were “severely edited,” and an accompanying press release described O’Keefe as a “partisan zealot.”² In 2016, Andrew Seaman—chair of the Society of Professional Journalists’ ethics committee—wrote that O’Keefe is “not an ethical journalist” and has a “history of distorting facts or context.”³

Project Veritas’ deceptive editing has been a source of continuing legal trouble for the group, which is currently fighting at least two defamation lawsuits filed by individuals featured in its videos, and has paid three settlements to individuals who brought defamation claims.

Previous targets:

Project Veritas and James O’Keefe have targeted a number of high-profile progressive organizations in their sting operations.

- **ACORN:** In 2009, O’Keefe produced videos appearing to show ACORN employees advising O’Keefe on tax matters for purported sex trafficking and prostitution schemes. O’Keefe’s videos were heavily edited, and ACORN was cleared of any wrongdoing by the Brooklyn district attorney.⁴ The videos were politically damaging, and caused Congress to suspend funding to the group, which filed for bankruptcy in 2010.
- **Planned Parenthood:** Project Veritas operatives have repeatedly targeted Planned Parenthood, releasing videos claiming that Planned Parenthood staff failed to report statutory rape and suggesting that they took donations from operatives posing as racists.
- **Teachers Unions:** Project Veritas has targeted several NEA and AFT affiliates. In 2016, it released three videos taken at the United Federation of Teachers and White Plains Teachers Association offices, in which operatives described a fake scenario of a potentially inappropriate disciplinary action between a teacher and student. Project Veritas has also posted sting videos dealing with

¹ http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2011/03/the_inevitable_backlash_agains.html

² http://ag.ca.gov/cms_attachments/press/pdfs/n1888_acorn_report.pdf

³ https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/is-it-okay-for-james-okeefes-investigative-reporting-to-rely-on-deception/2016/10/19/f32fd46a-962e-11e6-9b7c-57290af48a49_story.html

⁴ https://www.salon.com/2010/03/01/acorn_cleared/

potentially inappropriate student discipline, often involving fake scenarios created by Project Veritas operatives. Such videos were released with footage taken of staff and leaders from the Yonkers Federation of Teachers, United Teachers of Wichita, and United Educators of San Francisco. Project Veritas has targeted the New Jersey Education Association, infiltrating its annual conference and releasing several undercover videos.

- **Democratic Party:** Project Veritas operatives have been caught trying to infiltrate campaign offices of Hillary Clinton, Bernie Sanders, and Russ Feingold. Undercover videos, filmed at the state campaign offices of both Clinton and Sanders, were released in 2016. Project Veritas has also targeted consultants for the Democratic Party.

Conservative funding, ties to anti-union donors:

Project Veritas had revenue of \$3.7 million in 2015, the year for which its most recent public tax filings are available. While most of its donors have not been publicly disclosed, we know that Donors Trust, the Koch-related foundation that has been called the “dark-money ATM of the conservative right,” has contributed over \$2.1 million since 2012. Donors Trust is funded by anonymous contributions from Koch-network donors, which reportedly include Betsy DeVos and her husband. Donald Trump is also a donor to Project Veritas, contributing \$10,000 in 2015. Trump referenced O’Keefe’s videos during the presidential debates, and Donald Trump Jr. has tweeted about Project Veritas videos.

Project Veritas also has links to groups that want to take down teachers unions. Denis Calabrese, president of the Laura and John Arnold Foundation, is a known Project Veritas donor. The Laura and John Arnold Foundation is also a major funder of efforts to end defined-benefit pension plans for teachers. Project Veritas board member Colin Sharkey is the executive vice president of the Association of American Educators, a nonunion teachers organization funded by conservative nonprofits as a way of weakening teachers unions.