



## The Trouble With Chris Christie

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By Chris Hedges

New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie has been Wall Street's anointed son for the presidency. He is backed by the most ruthless and corrupt figures in New Jersey politics, including the New Jersey multimillionaire and hard-line Democratic boss George Norcross III. Among his other supporters are many hedge fund managers and corporate executives and some of the nation's most retrograde billionaires, including the Koch brothers. The brewing scandal over the [closing of traffic lanes](http://gawker.com/what-the-hell-is-this-chris-christie-bridge-scandal-an-1499317392) (http://gawker.com/what-the-hell-is-this-chris-christie-bridge-scandal-an-1499317392) on the George Washington Bridge apparently in retaliation for the Fort Lee mayor's refusal to support the governor's 2013 re-election is a window into how federal agencies and the security and surveillance apparatus would be routinely employed in a Christie presidency to punish anyone who challenged this tiny cabal's grip on power.

Christie is the caricature of a Third World despot. He has a vicious temper, a propensity to bully and belittle those weaker than himself, an insatiable thirst for revenge against real or perceived enemies, and little respect for the law and, as recent events have made clear, for the truth. He is gripped by a bottomless hedonism that includes a demand for private jets, huge entourages, exclusive hotels and lavish meals. Wall Street and the security and surveillance apparatus want a real son of a bitch in power, someone with the moral compass of Al Capone, in order to ruthlessly silence and crush those of us who are working to overthrow the corporate state. They have had enough of what they perceive to be Barack Obama's softness. Christie fits the profile and he is drooling for the opportunity.

Activists, Democratic and Republican rivals for power, liberals, reformers and environmentalists will, if Christie becomes president, see the vast forces of the security state surge into overdrive to stymie and reverse reform, gut our tepid financial and environmental regulations, further enrich the corporate elite who are pillaging the country, and savagely shut down all dissent. The corporate state's repression, now on the brink of totalitarianism, would with the help of Christie, his corporate backers and his tea party loyalists become a full-blown corporate fascism.

Wall Street was unable to mask Mitt Romney's cloying sense of entitlement and elitism, along with his Mr. Rogers blandness. But Wall Street sees in the profane, union-busting New Jersey governor the perfect Trojan horse for unfettered corporate power. Christie, eyeing a bid for the presidency in the 2016 election, has been promised massive financial backing by the Koch brothers; hedge fund titans such as Stanley Druckenmiller, Kenneth C. Griffin, Daniel S. Loeb, Paul E. Singer, Paul Tudor Jones II and David Tepper; financiers such as Charles Schwab and Stephen A. Schwarzman; real estate magnate Mort Zuckerman; former New York Stock Exchange Chairman Richard Grasso; former AIG head Maurice "Hank" Greenberg; former Morgan Stanley CEO John J. Mack; former GE Chairman Jack Welch; and Home Depot founder Kenneth Langone. David Koch has called Christie "a true political hero" and said he is "inspired by this man." Rupert Murdoch, whose ethics seem to align with Christie's, is similarly besotted with the governor.

Christie is pitched to the public, as was George W. Bush, as a regular guy, someone who speaks bluntly and candidly, someone you would want to have a beer with. But this is public relations crap. He is and has long been a hatchet man for corporate firms and big banks. He began his career as a corporate lobbyist in Trenton, N.J., working for clients such as the Securities Industry Association. He has done their bidding ever since. His wife, Mary Pat Christie, is a bond trader who has worked at JPMorgan Chase, Fleet Securities and Cantor Fitzgerald and is currently a managing director at Angelo Gordon, an investment firm in New York.

If Christie implodes politically, Wall Street will no doubt find another candidate to be its lackey. The system of corporate power, not the individual at the helm, is fundamentally the problem for democracy. But this does not mean we should not fear the excesses that surely would occur under a Christie presidency. Christie and those who want him to occupy the Oval Office have little regard for the impediments of law and do not know the meaning of the word "restraint."

The quality of most of the reporting on Christie has been pathetic. The numerous portraits of the "regular-guy" governor are rewritten versions of the fatuous press releases provided by the governor's public relations team. New Jersey desperately needs a version of the late columnist Mike Royko, whose unauthorized biography of Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley, "Boss," laid bare the Mafia-like inner workings of the Daley political juggernaut. The Christie forces, which have made an unholy alliance with the state's corrupt Democratic Party bosses to create an unassailable gang of corporate rulers, are as brutal and colorful as anything Royko chronicled in Chicago. The Democratic machine, led by Norcross, allied itself with the Republican Christie to crush the Democratic candidate for governor, Barbara Buono, who lost last November's election by a roughly 22 percentage points.

Mark Halperin and John Heilemann in their book "Double Down: Game Change 2012" give us perhaps the best glimpse of Christie, who flirted with running for the Republican nomination during the last presidential race and was considered as a running mate for Romney. The authors devote a chapter to Christie called "Big Boy," a nickname George W. Bush bestowed on the corpulent governor. When Romney met with Christie at the governor's mansion in Princeton to obtain his endorsement, Christie not only demurred but warned Romney he better not approach any major donors in his state. "If you jump the gun and start raising money here, you can certainly kiss my support good-bye," Christie told Romney, according to the book. The authors describe the conversation as "something out of 'The Sopranos.'"

The Romney campaign, which reluctantly agreed to Christie's incessant demands for private jets, ungainly entourages and expensive hotel rooms in return for campaign appearances by the governor in behalf of the GOP nominee, decided against selecting him as running mate

because, as the authors write, Romney's vetters were "stunned by the garish controversies lurking in the shadows of his record."

A 2010 U.S. Department of Justice inspector general's investigation of Christie's spending patterns in the federal job he held before he became governor, the book notes, called Christie "the U.S. attorney who most often exceeded the government [travel expense] rate without adequate justification" and someone who offered "insufficient, inaccurate, or no justification" for stays at exclusive hotels such as the Four Seasons. In addition, the inspector general's report raised questions among Romney's vetters about "Christie's relationship with a top female deputy who accompanied him on many trips," the book said.

"There was the fact that Christie worked as a lobbyist on behalf of the Securities Industry Association at a time when [Bernie Madoff](http://www.biography.com/people/bernard-madoff-466366) (<http://www.biography.com/people/bernard-madoff-466366>) was a senior SIA official—and sought an exemption from New Jersey's Consumer Fraud Act," Halperin and Heilemann wrote. "There [also] was Christie's decision to steer hefty government contracts to donors and political allies such as former attorney general John Ashcroft, which sparked a congressional hearing. There was a defamation lawsuit brought against Christie, arising out of his successful 1994 run to oust an incumbent in a local Garden State race. Then there was Todd Christie [the governor's brother], who in 2008 agreed to a settlement of civil charges by the Securities and Exchange Commission in which he acknowledged making 'hundreds of trades in which customers had been systematically overcharged.' (Todd also oversaw a family foundation whose activities and purpose raised eyebrows among the vetters.) And all of that was on top of a litany of glaring matters that sparked concern on [the Romney] team: Christie's other lobbying clients; his investments overseas; the YouTube clips that helped make him a star but might call into doubt his presidential temperament; and the status of his health."

Christie's large public entourage always includes a videographer who captures the governor's frequent public humiliation of those—public school teachers are his favorite targets for ridicule—who have the audacity to question his judgment. These exchanges are immediately edited and uploaded to YouTube. There are now more than 600.

State politicians who do not kowtow before Christie receive acidic notes and emails. A former acting New Jersey governor, Richard J. Codey, after defying Christie abruptly lost his police escort. A state senator who angered the governor was denied a promised judgeship. A Rutgers professor and political scientist who declined to endorse Republican redistricting plans abruptly lost state funding for his program at the university.

Christie's warped pathology, as is evidenced in this [2010 YouTube video](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PkuTm-ON9o4) (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PkuTm-ON9o4>) in which he belittles a public school teacher, is a source of pride for the governor and has made him a darling of the right-wingers who target those who teach the vast majority of American schoolchildren.

In another incident, [Christie angrily shouts](http://www.t TMZ.com/2012/07/06/chris-christie-governor-jersey-shore-video-boardwalk-fight) (<http://www.t TMZ.com/2012/07/06/chris-christie-governor-jersey-shore-video-boardwalk-fight>) to a man who had questioned his attacks on public school teachers: "You're a real big shot. You're a real big shot shooting your mouth off." The man replies, "Nah, just take care of the teachers." Christie, pushing his bulk before him and surrounded by his security detail, strides toward the man, who slowly backs away. "Keep walking away," Christie says menacingly. "Really good. Keep walking." The brief clip is a disturbing window into the governor's vindictiveness, one that is augmented by access to power.

The visceral need by Christie to ridicule and threaten anyone who does not bow before him, his dark lust for revenge, his greed, gluttony and hedonism, his need to surround himself with large, fawning entourages and his obsequiousness to corporate power are characteristics our corporate titans embrace and understand. They see in Christie versions of themselves. They know he will enthusiastically do their dirty work. They trust him to be a real bastard. If Christie and the billionaires behind him take the presidency and begin to manipulate government agencies and pull the levers of our [Stasi](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/563751/Stasi) (<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/563751/Stasi>)-like security and surveillance apparatus, any pretense of democracy will be gone.



AP/Mel Evans

New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie poses in his office at the Statehouse in Trenton in 2013.