



How “Zuckerbucks” Infiltrated and Influenced the 2020 Arizona Election

Trevor Carlsen, *Senior Research Fellow*

Hayden Dublois, *Senior Research Analyst*

Key facts:

- Based on preliminary data, Arizona counties received more than \$5 million in “Zuckerbucks.”
- 60 percent of Arizona counties received grants.
- More than half of the money sent to Arizona was given to Maricopa County.
- While the grants were framed as COVID-19 related, available data suggests personal protective equipment was not the priority.

Overview

During the 2020 presidential election, more than 2,500 election offices across the country received grants of varying amounts from the Center for Technology and Civic Life (CTCL). Run by a former Obama Foundation fellow, CTCL lists big tech companies such as Google and Facebook among its key funders and partners.¹⁻² One of its largest donors in 2020 was the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, which contributed \$350 million to the initiative so that CTCL could regrant the funds to local jurisdictions.³⁻⁴

CTCL’s election grants—or “Zuckerbucks”—were advertised as additional resources to help election jurisdictions “safely serve every voter” amid the COVID-19 public health emergency.⁵ Indeed, the grants themselves are called “COVID-19 response grants.” Mark Zuckerberg, one of CTCL’s largest benefactors, defended the grants as support for election officials to “help people vote safely.”⁶

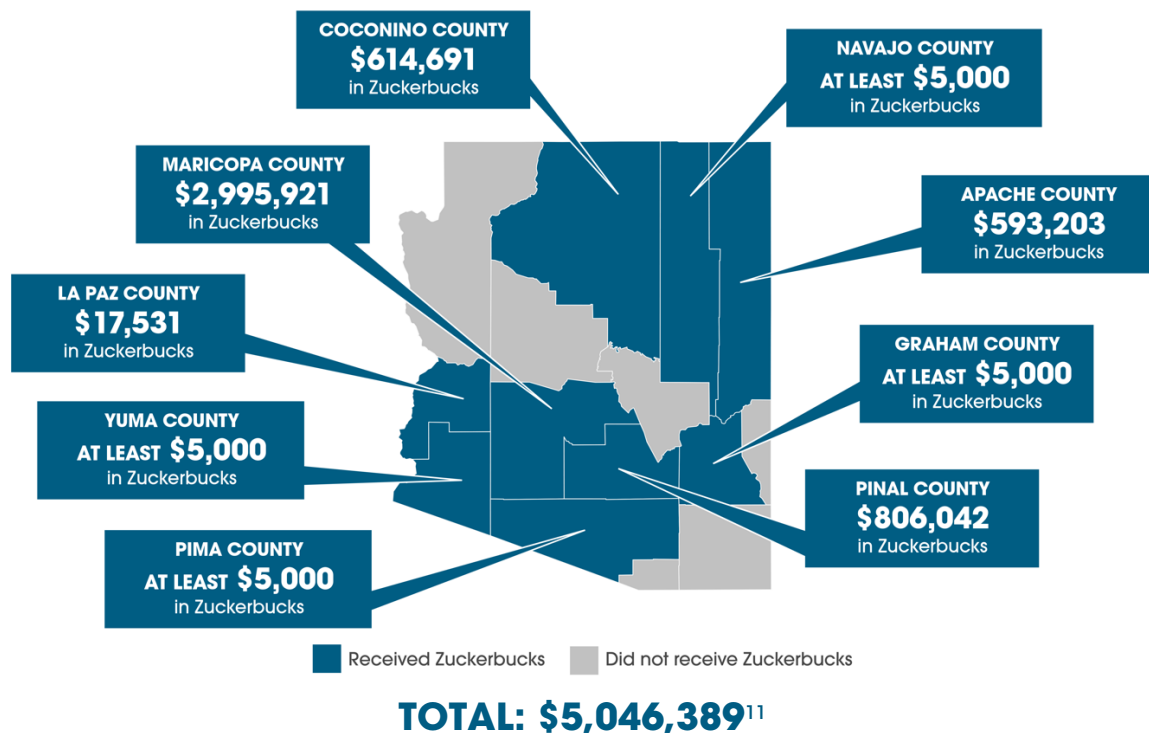
But a quick dive into the available data shows that the funds were largely requested for get-out-the-vote efforts, influenced voter turnout in favor of Democrats, and may have impacted the results of the election in some states—including in the critical swing state of Arizona.

Where did the money go?

Zuckerbucks were provided to local election jurisdictions across the country, infiltrating 47 out of 50 states.⁷ Because of Arizona’s importance in both the presidential and Senate contests, the Grand Canyon State figured prominently in CTCL’s distribution of funds.

While CTCL has not yet disclosed full details about how much was distributed to each grantee during the 2020 election, publicly available data shows that CTCL funneled more than \$5 million into nine Arizona jurisdictions.⁸ Based on the preliminary numbers, a large share of that money was spent in counties carried by President Biden.⁹ Unsurprisingly, Maricopa County, the fourth most populous county in America and home to more than 60 percent of Arizona’s voters, received more than half of all Zuckerbucks distributed in the state.¹⁰

ZUCKERBUCKS POURED INTO ARIZONA IN 2020



Source: APM Reports, Authors' public records requests

How was the money spent? PPE wasn't the only expense.

CTCL has not released data on how the money was spent; however, some available information reveals that only a fraction of the funding was requested for personal protective equipment (PPE).¹² For example, while a memorandum to the Coconino Board of Supervisors says the grant will be used to “supplement election work recruitment and training, and other security and safety measures,” it does so only after first pointing out that the grant provides “additional capacity to increase voter education efforts.”¹³ Other election jurisdictions spent absolutely nothing on PPE and COVID-19-related items

whatsoever.¹⁴ Responses to public records requests indicate that jurisdictions spent these “COVID-19 response grants” on vehicles, advertising, registering teenagers to vote, and other expenses unrelated to the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁵

Under the terms of the grants, jurisdictions were required to file reports with CTCL by January 31, 2021 broadly outlining how grant funds were spent. Even so, CTCL’s report template doesn’t require specific details, suggesting these reports may not provide much clarification on how the money was actually spent.¹⁶ CTCL has yet to make these reports widely available. Additionally, grantees have the ability to request an extension in spending remaining funds through June 30, 2021.¹⁷

Zuckerbucks influenced Arizona’s election

While data is limited due to CTCL’s unwillingness to make full reports on grant allocations and spending public, initial analysis points to Zuckerbucks having an influence on election outcomes in Arizona. On average, counties that received Zuckerbucks saw the Democratic presidential candidate’s share of the vote increase compared to the 2016 election.¹⁸

For example, in Maricopa County, the only county in the state to flip in the 2020 election, President Trump increased his vote total by more than 248,000 votes yet lost the county to Biden.¹⁹ In 2020, Biden improved on Hillary Clinton’s 2016 vote total in the county by more than 337,000 votes.²⁰ This nearly 90,000-vote difference cannot be explained by registration increases. While Democratic voter registration in Maricopa County has grown more than Republican registration since the 2016 election, the net increase was fewer than 50,000 votes and registered Republicans still outnumber registered Democrats by more than 100,000 voters.²¹ In counties that went for Biden in 2020, Zuckerbucks seem to have helped boost Democratic turnout.

ARIZONA COUNTIES WON BY BIDEN WITH ZUCKERBUCKS

COUNTY	2016 DEMOCRATIC VOTES	2020 DEMOCRATIC VOTES	PERCENT DIFFERENCE
Apache	17,083	23,293	+ 36 Percent increase
Coconino	23,404	44,698	+ 38 Percent increase
Maricopa	702,907	1,040,774	+ 48 Percent increase
Pima	224,661	304,981	+ 36 Percent increase

SANTA CRUZ COUNTY WITH NO ZUCKERBUCKS

	2016 VOTES	2020 VOTES	PERCENT DIFFERENCE
Support for Democrat Presidential Candidate	11,690	13,138	+ 12 Percent increase
Support for Republican Presidential Candidate	3,897	6,194	+ 59 Percent increase

Biden carried five of Arizona’s 15 counties in the 2020 election. In the four Biden-carried counties that took Zuckerbucks, the number of Democratic-presidential voters increased by 36 percent or more. By contrast, in Santa Cruz County without Zuckerbucks, Democratic-presidential votes increased by only 12 percent.²² Although Santa Cruz County had the second-lowest increase in overall turnout from 2016, Trump was still able to improve his vote count in the heavily Democrat county by nearly 60 percent.²³

What Arizona can do to protect its elections

The conduct of Arizona’s elections should be safeguarded from outside influence. Policymakers should prohibit private groups and other third parties from financing election jurisdictions in order to avoid undermining the integrity of Arizona’s elections. Arizona legislators can restore confidence in their elections process by preventing outside actors from financing elections.

1 Center for Tech and Civic Life, <https://www.techandcivillife.org/key-funders-and-partners/#>.

2 Tianna Epps-Johnson, Center for Tech and Civic Life, <https://www.techandcivillife.org/team/tiana-epps-johnson/>.

3 Carlie Porterfield, “Zuckerberg Donates Additional \$100 Million TO Support Election Efforts While Facebook Accused Of Spreading More Misinformation,” Forbes, (2020), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/carlieporterfield/2020/10/13/zuckerberg-donates-additional-100-million-to-support-election-efforts-while-facebook-accused-of-spreading-more-misinformation/?sh=74ff3c9f56b7>.

4 Center for Tech and Civic Life, “CTCL Receives \$250M Contribution to Support Critical Work of Election Officials,” <https://www.techandcivillife.org/open-call/>.

5 Center for Tech and Civic Life, “COVID-19 response grants,” <https://www.techandcivillife.org/our-work/election-officials/grants/>.

6 Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook post, (2020), <https://www.facebook.com/zuck/posts/10112459455098901>.

7 Tom Scheck et al, “How Private Money From Facebook’s CEO Saved The 2020 Election,” NPR (2020), <https://www.npr.org/2020/12/08/943242106/how-private-money-from-facebooks-ceo-saved-the-2020-election>.

8 Ibid.

9 Hayden Ludwig, “How CTCL Helped Biden in Arizona and Nevada,” Capital Research Center, (2021), <https://capitalresearch.org/article/how-ctcl-helped-biden-in-arizona-and-nevada/>.

10 Capital Research Center, “Arizona Final Grants,” Capital Research Center (2020), <https://capitalresearch.org/app/uploads/CTCL-Grants-2020-Arizona.xlsx>.

11 This is a projected total based on disclosed grant amounts and uses the minimum amount in cases where the amount has not been disclosed. According to the terms of the grant, the minimum award amount was \$5,000, suggesting a minimum of another \$20,000 in Zuckerbucks spent in Arizona for a total projected minimum amount of \$5,046,389.

12 Hayden Dublois and Nic Horton, “How ‘Zuckerbucks’ Infiltrated & Influenced the 2020 Florida Election,” Foundation for Government Accountability, (2021), <https://thefga.org/research/zuckerbucks-florida-election/>.

13 Coconino County, Arizona, "Agenda Packet – October 6, 2020," https://coconino.az.gov/AgendaCenter/ViewFile/Agenda/_10062020-2647.

14 Hayden Dublois and Nicholas Horton, "How "Zuckerbucks" Infiltrated & Influenced the 2020 Florida Election," Foundation for Government Accountability (2021), <https://thefga.org/research/zuckerbucks-florida-election/>.

15 Based on responses to public records requests submitted by the authors

16 Center for Tech and Civic Life, "CTCL COVID-19 Response Grant Report," CTCL (2021), <https://form.jotform.com/210018751820143>,

17 Center for Tech and Civic Life, "COVID-19 Response Grants," <https://www.techandciviclife.org/our-work/election-officials/grants/>.

18 Authors' calculations based on changes in election results and turnout between the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections, as reported by the Arizona Secretary of State's Office

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 State of Arizona, "Voter Registration Counts," <https://azsos.gov/elections/voter-registration-historical-election-data/voter-registration-counts>.

22 Authors' calculations based on changes in election results and turnout between the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections, as reported by the Arizona Secretary of State's Office.

23 Ibid