



“Zuckerbucks” Infiltrated the Missouri Election Process

1. Mark Zuckerberg Funneled \$400 Million to Election Efforts in the 2020 Cycle

During the 2020 election cycle, the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative siphoned \$400 million to election jurisdictions for election activities. Most of the money funneled into local jurisdictions went through the Center for Tech and Civic Life (CTCL), a non-profit run by a former Obama Foundation fellow.¹⁻²⁻³ About \$50 million went to the Center for Election Innovation and Research.⁴

2. In Missouri, More Than \$7 million in Zuckerberg Bucks Were Distributed to Local Election Jurisdictions

CTCL reports that it awarded grants to 42 Missouri election jurisdictions for the 2020 general election.⁵⁻⁶⁻⁷ Preliminary analysis indicates that more than \$7 million was awarded across the state.⁸ Some of the most generous grants were made to St. Louis County and St. Charles County, which help make up the 2nd Congressional District, a top target for the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee.⁹ Additionally, the Missouri Secretary of State’s Office received a separate grant of more than \$1.1 million from the Center for Election Innovation and Research.¹⁰⁻¹¹

3. Zuckerbucks Influenced Missouri’s Elections

On average, Missouri counties that received Zuckerbucks saw an increase in the Democrat presidential candidate’s share of the two-party vote between 2016 and 2020, while counties that didn’t receive Zuckerbucks saw the opposite.¹²

Analyzing the 2020 election results compared to 2016 shows a statistically significant correlation between a county receiving Zuckerbucks and a county’s vote share moving toward the Democrat ticket.¹³

Of counties that broke for Trump in 2020, less than half of them received Zuckerbucks. By comparison, 100 percent of counties that voted for Clinton in 2016 and Biden in 2020 received Zuckerbucks.¹⁴

Missouri’s 2nd Congressional District

Of the three counties that comprise the 2nd Congressional District, St. Louis County and St. Charles County received Zuckerbucks. The Republican incumbent, Rep. Ann Wagner, earned fewer votes in both of these counties than she did in 2016.¹⁵ By contrast, Wagner’s opponent saw a 32 percent boost in support for the Democrat ticket.¹⁶ This combination of fewer votes for Wagner and the surge in opponent votes led to narrower victories in the two Zuckerbucks counties.



In Jefferson County, which did not receive Zuckerbucks, the share of increased turnout voting in the 2nd Congressional District race was more evenly distributed among the two major-party candidates.¹⁷ Wagner increased her vote count in Jefferson County and, unlike the Zuckerbucks counties, had a margin of victory comparable to that of the 2016 election.

4. Election Officials Spent Money on Efforts Unrelated to COVID-19

Despite being labeled as COVID-19 response grants, several Missouri election jurisdictions used the funds for expenditures beyond personal protective equipment (PPE) and hiring additional election staff.

For example, Boone County spent more than \$14,000 of its \$604,780 grant on “non-partisan voter education.”¹⁸ According to the Boone County Clerk’s Office, they used the funds to produce a music video and radio spot with local rap artists.¹⁹⁻²⁰

Similarly, Jackson County proposed a nearly \$1.5 million outreach and education campaign in its grant application. According to the grant report submitted to CTCL, it spent \$476,446.39 on “non-partisan voter education” and has nearly \$1 million unspent from the grant.²¹

A lack of transparency in the granting process yields an incomplete picture of how Zuckerbucks were spent in Missouri. The documentation provided by some Missouri election jurisdictions sheds some light, but more information is needed.

5. Missouri Should Prohibit Outside Money from Financing Elections

Missouri’s elections should be safeguarded from outside influence. Third-party involvement in the conduct of elections undermines the integrity of the process and erodes voter confidence. Policymakers in Missouri should prohibit election jurisdictions from accepting money from private groups and individuals. Legislators can restore trust by preventing election jurisdictions from receiving funds from outside actors.

¹ Nicholas Riccardi, “Mark Zuckerberg donates \$100M more to help election offices,” AP News (2020), <https://apnews.com/article/virus-outbreak-election-2020-technology-local-elections-elections-c2dcfde7fc750b7dd64243b0cf7fbb69>.

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

³ Michael Scherer, “Mark Zuckerberg and Priscilla Chan donate \$100 million more to election administrators, despite conservative pushback,” Washington Post (2020), https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/zuckerberg-chan-elections-facebook/2020/10/12/0e07de94-0cba-11eb-8074-0e943a91bf08_story.html.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Center for Tech and Civic Life, “Election offices that received CTCL COVID-19 Response Grants,” (2021), <https://www.techandcivicliflife.org/grant-update-march/>.

⁶ Initially, CTCL reported 45 jurisdictions as grant recipients. In post-election reporting, Cass County, Clinton County, and Putnam County were removed from the list. Cass County returned the amount it



was awarded, Clinton County missed a step in the application process and was not awarded funds, and Putnam County declined to accept the grant it was awarded.

⁷ CTCL's reporting includes Platte County among the grant recipients; however, a representative from Platte County Clerk's Office claims the county did not apply for a grant despite the county being listed by CTCL.

⁸ The projected amount is \$7,070,903. This is a projected total calculated by the authors based on disclosed grant amounts provided through Missouri's Sunshine Law requests. In cases where the grant amount has not been disclosed, the authors use the minimum grant amount. According to the terms of the grant, the minimum award amount was \$5,000.

⁹ Jack Suntrup, "Red to blue? National Democrats promise strategic, money help in Missouri congressional race," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, (2020), https://www.stltoday.com/news/local/govt-and-politics/red-to-blue-national-democrats-promise-strategic-money-help-in/article_ebc37590-3037-52b4-801e-9f98c1360747.html#tracking-source=home-top-story-1.

¹⁰ Center for Election Innovation & Research, "CEIR 2020 Voter Education Grant Program," (2021), <https://electioninnovation.org/research/ceir-2020-voter-education-grant-program/>.

¹¹ The specific amount granted to Missouri, as reported by the Center for Election Innovation & Research, was \$1,129,391.

¹² Authors' calculations based on changes in election results and turnout between the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections, as reported by the Missouri Secretary of State.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Authors' calculations based on changes in election results and turnout in St. Louis County and St. Charles County between the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections, as reported by the Missouri Secretary of State.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Authors' calculations based on changes in election results and turnout in Jefferson County between the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections, as reported by the Missouri Secretary of State. Ann Wagner received 1,002 more votes in 2020 and her Democratic challenger received 1,222 more votes than the 2016 Democratic candidate.

¹⁸ Information request to Boone County Clerk's Office. Grant Report to Center for Tech and Civic Life.

¹⁹ Information request to Boone County Clerk's Office. Grant Report to Center for Tech and Civic Life.

²⁰ Eva Qian, "Song, video promo for Boone County Clerk's Office encourages voter education." Missourian. (2020). https://www.columbiamissourian.com/news/elections/song-video-promo-for-boone-county-clerk-s-office-encourages-voter-education/article_6077a8dc-1a37-11eb-9fc8-f796d6eb3a98.html.

²¹ Information request to Jackson County Clerk's Office. Grant Report to Center for Tech and Civic Life. Actual amount remaining as of January 8, 2020 is \$950,791.68.