

NOVEMBER 16, 2021



Show Me the Zuckerbucks: Outside Money Infiltrated Missouri's 2020 Election

Trevor Carlsen, *Senior Research Fellow*

KEY FINDINGS



NEARLY \$9 MILLION IN ZUCKERBUCKS POURED INTO MISSOURI FOR THE 2020 ELECTION.



COUNTIES THAT VOTED FOR BIDEN WERE GIVEN **50 PERCENT MORE PER REGISTERED VOTER** THAN COUNTIES THAT VOTED FOR TRUMP.



COUNTIES REPRESENTED BY DEMOCRAT STATE SENATORS RECEIVED **76 PERCENT OF ZUCKERBUCKS AWARDED** IN MISSOURI.



\$1.8 MILLION WAS AWARDED BUT NOT SPENT DURING THE 2020 ELECTION.



ELECTION OFFICES THAT HAD GRANT BALANCES AFTER THE 2020 ELECTION **SPENT MOST OF THE REMAINING MONEY.**

THE BOTTOM LINE:

MISSOURI SHOULD PROHIBIT GOVERNMENT ELECTION OFFICES FROM ACCEPTING FUNDING FROM PRIVATE INDIVIDUALS, NON-PROFITS, AND SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS.

Overview

During the 2020 election, the Center for Tech and Civic Life (CTCL), a non-profit run by a former Obama Foundation fellow, used the \$400 million it received from the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, to distribute thousands of “COVID-19 response grants” to election offices around the country.¹⁻³ These grants, or Zuckerbucks, found their way into more than a third of Missouri’s local election offices—to the tune of nearly \$9 million.⁴⁻⁵ And this does not even include a separate \$1.1 million grant the Missouri Secretary of State’s Office received from the Center for Election Innovation and Research—another Zuckerberg-funded group.⁶⁻⁷

Zuckerbucks reached across Missouri but grant awards favored Democrats

Just as they did in the battleground state of Pennsylvania, Zuckerbucks followed Democrats.⁸ All Biden-carried counties received Zuckerbucks, while less than half of the counties won by President Trump were grant recipients.⁹ But the disparity in grant award amounts is even more alarming.

Zuckerbucks awards varied widely across the state and ranged from \$5,000, the minimum grant amount, to more than \$2 million.¹⁰ Eleven of the counties carried by President Trump received only the \$5,000 minimum whereas the lowest amount received by a Biden-carried jurisdiction was 120 times larger.¹¹ In fact, Biden-carried counties averaged a grant award of nearly \$1.3 million.¹² By comparison, the average award for a Trump-carried county was less than \$107,000.¹³



But grant amounts did not necessarily scale with population size. Instead, generosity skewed in favor of jurisdictions with greater support for the Democrat ticket. **The average grant amount per registered voter for a Biden-carried jurisdiction was more than 50 percent larger than the average for Trump-carried counties.**¹⁴

ZUCKERBUCKS IN MISSOURI

ELECTION JURISDICTION	ZUCKERBUCKS	ZUCKERBUCKS PER REGISTERED VOTER
Bates	\$7,479	\$0.64
Boone	\$604,780	\$4.61
Butler	\$27,600	\$0.97
Carter	\$5,000	\$1.06

ELECTION JURISDICTION	ZUCKERBUCKS	ZUCKERBUCKS PER REGISTERED VOTER
Chariton	\$5,000	\$0.93
Christian	\$35,943	\$0.55
Clay	\$352,441	\$1.99
Cole	\$10,000	\$0.18
Dade	\$5,000	\$0.88
Daviess	\$5,000	\$0.93
Greene	\$404,718	\$2.06
Jackson	\$2,040,590	\$7.64
Jasper	\$59,094	\$0.72
Kansas City	\$1,332,300	\$5.88
Lafayette	\$14,934	\$0.64
Lawrence	\$19,481	\$0.78
Lewis	\$5,000	\$0.76
Lincoln	\$23,739	\$0.59
Marion	\$13,137	\$0.65
Newton	\$30,153	\$0.72
Osage	\$5,000	\$0.51
Perry	\$5,766	\$0.45
Pettis	\$20,909	\$0.78
Pike	\$10,038	\$0.93
Pulaski	\$36,032	\$1.43
Ralls	\$5,000	\$0.65
Ripley	6,926	\$0.78
Schuyler	\$5,000	\$1.79
Scotland	\$5,000	\$1.80
Scott	\$25,054	\$0.98
Shelby	\$5,000	\$1.12
St. Charles	\$667,919	\$2.30
St. Louis	\$2,048,474	\$2.70
St. Louis City	\$1,034,210	\$4.69
Sullivan	\$5,000	\$1.27
Taney	\$28,777	\$0.73
Texas	\$14,685	\$0.90
Vernon	\$9,348	\$0.71
Wayne	\$6,8312	\$0.76

ELECTION JURISDICTION	ZUCKERBUCKS	ZUCKERBUCKS PER REGISTERED VOTER
Webster	16,116	\$0.64
Wright	\$8,944	\$0.71
TOTAL	\$8,971,416	Average \$3.04

Source: Foundation for Government Accountability, Center for Tech and Civic Life, and Missouri Secretary of State

Looking at the distribution of Zuckerbucks by state senate district shows similar patterns. The 75 counties that did not receive Zuckerbucks are all represented by Republicans. And across the 34 senate districts, the only three counties that were completely free of Zuckerbucks are all represented by Republicans.¹⁵ Counties represented by at least one Democrat senator received 76 percent of Zuckerbucks.¹⁶

Zuckerbucks influenced the election

On average, Missouri counties that received Zuckerbucks saw an increase in the Democrat presidential candidate’s share of the vote between 2016 and 2020.¹⁷ For example, although President Trump held on to win Jackson County, the margin of victory shrank dramatically. The Kansas City suburb and beneficiary of the second largest grant in the state saw support for the Democrat candidate increase by more than 20,000 votes.¹⁸ President Trump went from carrying the county by more than 12 points in 2016 to about four points.¹⁹ Similarly, St. Charles County, which received the second-largest grant among Trump-carried counties, was also a candidate for boosting Democrat turnout.

MISSOURI’S 2ND CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Of the three counties that comprise the 2nd Congressional District—a top target for the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee—St. Louis County and St. Charles County received Zuckerbucks.²⁰ In fact, these two counties benefited from some of the most generous awards to Missouri jurisdictions. The Republican incumbent, Rep. Ann Wagner, earned fewer votes in both counties than she did in 2016.²¹ By contrast, Wagner’s opponent saw Democrat votes increase by 32 percent.²² This combination of fewer votes for Wagner and the surge in opponent votes led to one of the closest contests during Wagner’s career.

In Jefferson County, which did not receive Zuckerbucks, the increase in votes in the congressional race was more evenly distributed among the two major-party candidates.²³ Wagner increased her vote count in Jefferson County and, unlike in Zuckerbucks-receiving counties, had a margin of victory comparable to that of 2016.

“ In Jefferson County, which did not receive Zuckerbucks, the increase in votes in the congressional race was more evenly distributed among the two major-party candidates. ”

How was the money spent?

Personal protective equipment (PPE) was supposed to be a primary expenditure for the COVID-19 response grants.²⁴ In practice, however, grant spending on PPE was light, less than five percent of expenditures.²⁵ But counties found ways to spend the money, including spending nearly a quarter of a million dollars on “non-partisan voter education.” More than half of that spending came from Jackson County which requested \$1.5 million for outreach and education campaigns.²⁶ It ended up spending much less.

While most grant reports are light on the details of what exactly constitutes “non-partisan voter education,” some counties were more detailed in their reporting. Boone County, which categorized nearly \$15,000 as voter education, gave a specific example.²⁷ The report describes how those funds were used to produce a music video and radio spot with local rap artists.²⁸⁻²⁹

Most of the money appears to have been spent on updating equipment—not necessarily pandemic-related—and providing bonus pay to poll workers. Roughly a third of Zuckerbucks went to procure new election equipment.³⁰ Another third was used to pay poll workers and volunteers.³¹

But more than \$1.8 million—20 percent of the total allotted to Missouri—was not even spent during the 2020 election.³² In Jackson County, nearly \$1 million went unspent.³³

ZUCKERBUCKS PAID FOR EVERYTHING—EXCEPT PPE

Zuckerbucks Spending Trends in Counties That Received \$100,000 or More

ELECTION JURISDICTION	% SPENT ON PPE	% SPENT ON EVERYTHING ELSE	% UNSPENT
Boone County	11%	58%	31%
Clay County	0%	23%	78%
Green County	3%	68%	30%
Jackson County	0%	53%	46%
Kansas City	1%	87%	11%
St. Charles	0%	100%	0%
St. Louis	5%	91%	4%
St. Louis City	5%	95%	<0.1%

Source: Foundation for Government Accountability

Although the COVID-19 Response Grant program was purportedly launched to provide funding for the 2020 election, jurisdictions that had unspent grant funds were given an opportunity to continue spending through June 2021.³⁴ Election offices that received an extension were required to submit a second grant report.³⁵ But some counties that had small balances remaining, like Butler and Pike counties, were told, “[u]pon review, CTCL has approved your report and has decided to grant the remaining balance, to be applied towards future election administration expenses. You will not be required to report on the remaining balance.”³⁶⁻³⁷

Counties with larger balances were still required to file extension reports. Preliminary data suggests election offices largely found ways to spend their remaining funds in the six months after the election.³⁸ More than \$1.3 million was spent during the extension period and only about 10 percent of the extension balances were returned.³⁹



MORE THAN \$1.3 MILLION WAS SPENT DURING THE EXTENSION PERIOD AND ONLY ABOUT 10 PERCENT OF THE EXTENSION BALANCES WERE RETURNED.

Bottom Line:

Missouri should prohibit government election offices from accepting funding from private individuals, non-profits, and special interest groups. And lawmakers should require any remaining funds to be returned.

Missouri's elections should be safeguarded from outside influence. Allowing private funding of government offices could result in corporations and special interests having more influence in election outcomes than voters. This undermines the integrity of the process and erodes voter confidence. **To restore trust in Missouri elections, legislators should prohibit government election offices from accepting or spending funding from private individuals, outside groups, and non-profits.**

REFERENCES

1. Tiana Epps-Johnson, Center for Tech and Civic Life, <https://www.techandciviclifef.org/team/tiana-epps-johnson/>.
2. Center for Tech and Civic Life, "Press release: CTCL receives additional \$100M contribution to support critical work of election officials," Center for Tech and Civic Life (2020), <https://www.techandciviclifef.org/100m/>.
3. Center for Tech and Civic Life, "Election offices that received CTCL COVID-19 response grants," Center for Tech and Civic Life (2021), <https://www.techandciviclifef.org/grant-update-march/>.
4. Of the 116 election jurisdictions in Missouri, 41 received grants from CTCL. 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. Although CTCL reports Platte County among its list of grant recipients, a representative from Platte County Clerk's Office responded to a public records request that the county did not apply for a grant, despite the county being listed by CTCL. Perry County was awarded a \$5,766 grant but did not use any of the grant for the 2020 general election.
5. Author's calculation based on responses to public records requests sent to counties.
6. Center for Election Innovation & Research, "CEIR 2020 voter education grant program," Center for Election Innovation & Research (2021), <https://electioninnovation.org/research/ceir-2020-voter-education-grant-program/>.
7. Reportedly, the Center for Election Innovation and Research grant was used to mail voting information options to registered voters. See for example, Mark Sclinkmann, "Nonprofits' grants go to St. Charles County, Lincoln County, Missouri election agencies," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, (2020), https://www.stltoday.com/news/local/govt-and-politics/nonprofits-grants-go-to-st-charles-county-lincoln-county-missouri-election-agencies/article_b52bbd7f-b9de-56ce-bd18-f8ec7cc9a149.html.
8. Trevor Carlsen, "Zuckerbucks followed Biden voters in Pennsylvania," Foundation for Government Accountability (2021), <https://thefga.org/briefs/zuckerbucks-pennsylvania/>.
9. Grant information obtained through public information requests received by the author.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Author's calculations based on grant amounts obtained by public information requests received by the author and voter registration as reported by the Missouri Secretary of State for the November 3, 2020 General Election. See for example, https://www.sos.mo.gov/elections/s_default.asp?id=results.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. The three senate districts are District 3, District 22, and District 34. The Republican candidate running in District 3 ran unopposed in the 2020 general election. The Senators in District 22 and District 34 were not up for re-election.
16. Author's calculation based on the changes in election results and turnout between the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections, as reported by the Missouri Secretary of State.
17. Author's calculation based on changes in election results and turnout between the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections, as reported by the Missouri Secretary of State.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Jack Suntrup, "Ted 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.
21. Author's calculations based on changes in election results and turnout in St. Louis County and St. Charles County between the 2016 and 2020 general elections, as reported by the Missouri Secretary of State.
22. Ibid.
23. Author's calculations based on changes in election results and turnout in Jefferson County between the 2016 and 2020 general elections, as reported by the Missouri Secretary of State. Ann Wagner received 1,002 more votes in 2020 and her Democrat challenger received 1,222 more votes than the 2016 Democrat candidate.
24. Center for Tech and Civic Life, "CTCL program awards over 2,500 COVID-19 response grants," Center for Tech and Civic Life (2020), <https://www.techandciviclifef.org/grant-awards/>.
25. Author's calculation based on grant reports received in response to public records requests.
26. Information request to Jackson County Clerk's Office. Grant Report to Center for Tech and Civic Life.
27. Information request to Boone County Clerk's Office. Grant Report to Center for Tech and Civic Life.
28. Ibid.

29. 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.
30. Author's calculation based on grant reports received in response to public records requests.
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*
33. Response to public records request from Jackson County Clerk's Office.
34. Center for Tech and Civic Life, "Election offices that received CTCL COVID-19 Response Grants," Center for Tech and Civic Life (2021), <https://www.techandciviclifef.org/grant-update-march/>.
35. Center for Tech and Civic Life, "COVID-19 Response Grants," Center for Tech and Civic Life, <https://www.techandciviclifef.org/our-work/election-officials/grants/>.
36. Information request to Butler County Clerk's Office. Email response from the Center for Tech and Civic Life. Butler county was told to keep the remaining \$3.29 of the \$27,599.50 grant.
37. Information request to Pike County Clerk's Office. Email response from the Center for Tech and Civic Life. Pike County was told to keep the remaining \$14.96 of the \$10,038 grant.
38. Author's calculation based on information requests responded to by Boone, Greene, Jasper, Jackson, Kansas City, Lawrence, Ralls, and St. Louis County.
39. *Ibid.*



TheFGA.org | [@TheFGA](https://twitter.com/TheFGA)