



# Zuckerbucks Infiltrated the 2020 Election: A Cautionary Warning for Louisiana

## 1. Mark Zuckerberg funneled \$400 million into local election offices.

Under the guise of helping election officials grapple with administering an election during a pandemic, the Center for Tech and Civic Life (CTCL) distributed grants to more than 2,500 jurisdictions during the 2020 election.<sup>1</sup> CTCL is a non-profit run by a former Obama Foundation fellow that receives its funding from big tech companies, including more than \$350 million in “Zuckerbucks” from Mark Zuckerberg.<sup>2-3-4</sup>

## 2. In nearby competitive races, Zuckerbucks were distributed in big ways.

In Louisiana, where President Donald held a commanding lead in the pre-election polls, the state went largely unscathed by these CTCL grants, or “Zuckerbucks”, with just over \$1 million flowing into the state. By contrast, in neighboring Florida and Georgia, which were considered battleground states, Zuckerbucks were widely distributed—and at astounding rates.

Florida saw nearly \$17 million flow into 11 counties.<sup>5</sup> Zuckerbucks appear to have boosted Democrat turnout in parts of the state.<sup>6</sup>

Georgia received more than \$45 million in Zuckerbucks – among the most in the nation.<sup>7</sup> \$31 million went towards the general election, with an additional \$14.5 million going towards the special senate elections.<sup>8</sup>

## 3. Zuckerbucks influenced the Florida election.

CTCL funneled nearly \$17 million into 16 percent of Florida counties during the 2020 election, with 80 percent of counties with a population of more than one million receiving grants.<sup>9</sup> Zuckerbucks were dispersed among Florida counties that are traditionally considered “swing” areas—such as Miami, Fort Lauderdale, Kissimmee, Tampa, and more.<sup>10</sup>

Zuckerbucks also flowed into areas that typically lean towards Democrat candidates.<sup>11</sup> In fact, 78 percent of counties that voted for Hillary Clinton in 2016 received grants, while just seven percent of counties carried by Donald Trump received grants.<sup>12</sup>

These grants boosted Democrat turnout in several Florida counties, more than offsetting Republican turnout.<sup>13</sup> For example, Leon County, saw Democrat votes increase by more than 12 percent, while there was only a seven percent increase in Republican turnout.<sup>14</sup>

#### **4. Zuckerbucks influenced the Georgia election.**

Georgia received more than \$45 million Zuckerbucks during the 2020 elections, with \$31 million going towards the presidential election, and nearly \$15 million more going to finance the special Senate elections.<sup>15</sup> Georgia received some of the highest grant sums nationwide, accounting for nearly 10 percent of all Zuckerbucks.<sup>16</sup>

Zuckerbucks in Georgia were highly concentrated on areas that tend to vote Democrat. Counties won by Trump were granted nearly \$2.3 million—\$1.91 per registered voter—and counties won by Joe Biden were given nearly \$29 million, more than \$7 per registered voter.<sup>17</sup> Overall, there were nearly four times as many Zuckerbucks per registered voter in counties won by Biden.<sup>18</sup>

The six counties receiving grants that totaled more than \$1 million were all won by Clinton in 2016, and later by Biden in 2020.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, nine out of the 10 counties that received the most money were won by both Clinton and Biden.<sup>20</sup>

Zuckerbucks influenced the Georgia elections. In 2020, jurisdictions that received Zuckerbucks saw a leftward shift at a rate more than double that of the previous election cycle.<sup>21</sup> But that is not all. A majority of these counties—75 percent—saw an increase in Democrat turnout that more than offset any uptick of Republican turnout.<sup>22</sup>

#### **5. Election officials spent money on efforts unrelated to COVID-19.**

CTCL grants were marketed as COVID-19 response grants, but several election jurisdictions nationwide spent resources on activities unrelated to COVID-19. Examples include voter advertising, promotional videos, and registering teenagers to vote.<sup>23</sup> In fact, many jurisdictions spent absolutely nothing on personal protective equipment (PPE) or allocated incredibly small portions of their grant dollars towards PPE.<sup>24</sup>

#### **6. Louisiana should ban outside money from financing elections.**

CTCL distributed \$400 million to at least 2,500 local election offices nationwide—with Mark Zuckerberg being the primary funding source. While Louisiana was largely able to avoid being targeted by CTCL, many neighboring states, unfortunately, were not. The stories of Georgia and Florida should be cause for concern.

To avoid these problems in the future, Louisiana policymakers should act now to prohibit private groups and other third parties from financing elections in local jurisdictions across the state. Zuckerbucks undermined the democratic process in many states nationwide during the 2020 election, but Louisiana does not have to be next.

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- <sup>1</sup> Center for Tech and Civic Life, "CTCL program awards over 2,500 COVID-19 Response Grants," <https://www.techandciviclife.org/grant-awards/>.
- <sup>2</sup> Center for Tech and Civic Life, "Key Funders and Partners," <https://www.techandciviclife.org/keyfunders-and-partners/>.
- <sup>3</sup> Tiana Epps-Johnson, Center for Tech and Civic Life, <https://www.techandciviclife.org/team/tianaepjs-johnson/>.
- <sup>4</sup> 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/>.
- <sup>5</sup> Hayden Dublois and Nic Horton, "How "Zuckerbucks" infiltrated & influenced the 2020 Florida election," Foundation for Government Accountability (2021), <https://thefga.org/briefs/zuckerbucks-florida-election/>.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup> Hayden Dublois and Tyler Lamensky, "Zuckerberg went down to Georgia: How Zuckerbucks influenced the Georgia elections," Foundation for Government Accountability (2021), <https://thefga.org/paper/zuckerbucks-influenced-georgia-elections/>.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>9</sup> Hayden Dublois and Nic Horton, "How "Zuckerbucks" infiltrated & influenced the 2020 Florida election," Foundation for Government Accountability (2021), <https://thefga.org/briefs/zuckerbucks-florida-election/>.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>15</sup> Hayden Dublois and Tyler Lamensky, "Zuckerberg went down to Georgia: How Zuckerbucks influenced the Georgia elections," Foundation for Government Accountability (2021), <https://thefga.org/paper/zuckerbucks-influenced-georgia-elections/>.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>23</sup> Hayden Dublois and Nicholas Horton, "How 'Zuckerbucks' infiltrated & influenced the 2020 Florida election," Foundation for Government Accountability, (2021), <https://thefga.org/research/zuckerbucksflorida-election/>.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid.