**Final project**

Intended to produce a published story for my State Government reporting class as well, which led to the decision to pursue campaign finance and the current Senate race in Missouri.

**Script**: On the GitHub repository: <https://github.com/srijitadatta/FinalProject>

**Data**: All files emailed to [lucasek@missouri.edu](mailto:lucasek@missouri.edu)

**Documentation**:

The source of my datasets is the Federal Election Commission. But I also got some help from the Missouri Secretary of State website.

I used the following links to export the data as csv files, imported them on R Studio, and analyzed them for the final story (which is still in progress):

* <https://www.fec.gov/data/elections/senate/MO/2022/> - MO Senate candidates list
* <https://www.fec.gov/data/browse-data/?tab=bulk-data> – I used the 2021-22 bulk data, and relied heavily on this data description link for the same: <https://www.fec.gov/campaign-finance-data/all-candidates-file-description/>
* <https://www.fec.gov/data/committees/> – Filtered out principal committees for specific candidates from this link
* <https://tinyurl.com/3hm2yuyt> – Filtered out source of contributions for Democrat and Republican candidates from this link
* <https://tinyurl.com/yc62tpaw> – Individual contributions

Did not use for analysis, but consulted these links for verification:

* <https://www.fec.gov/data/raising-bythenumbers/> – Raising data
* <https://www.fec.gov/data/spending-bythenumbers/> – Spending data
* <https://tinyurl.com/bdz3vbdk> – List of candidates
* <https://www.opensecrets.org/races/summary?cycle=2022&id=MOS1&spec=N> – Succinct summary and data charts

**Who keeps the data**: The FEC is a federal agency that serves the purpose of maintaining transparency in the finance behind federal elections. All campaign committees have treasurers who obtain, maintain and also report the funds raised and disbursed with the FEC website. (Source: <https://www.fec.gov/help-candidates-and-committees/keeping-records/>)

**Description of the data analyzed**: I mostly analyzed the all candidates file from the bulk data information, and the rest follow similar terminologies or patterns although they don’t have all the rows and columns at the same time. Therefore, I have detailed out the data description for the [all candidates file (2021-22) below](https://www.fec.gov/data/browse-data/?tab=bulk-data):

The file contains all financial information in a summarized format for the funds raised and used by each candidate during the election period. Candidates, Total Income, Remittances from Approved Commissions, Total Expenses, Remittances to Approved Commissions, Treasury Totals, Credits and Debts, and Information about other summary financial information are among some of the main records for each candidate running for the Senate in the whole country. Most of my analysis focused on the funds raised by candidates, as well as disbursements, leading to cash on hand for candidates running from Missouri.

The column names on the file are as follows:

CAND\_ID – Candidate identification

CAND\_NAME – Candidate name

CAND\_ICI – Incumbent challenger status

PTY\_CD – Party code

CAND\_PTY\_AFFILIATION – Party affiliation

TTL\_RECEIPTS – Total receipts

TRANS\_FROM-AUTH – Transfers from authorized committees

TTL\_DISB – Total disbursements

TRANS\_TO\_AUTH – Transfers to authorized committees

COH\_BOP – Beginning cash

COH\_COOP – Ending cash

CAND\_CONTRIB – Contributions from candidate

CAND\_LOANS – Loans from candidate

OTHER\_LOANS – Other loans

CAND\_LOAN\_REPAY – Candidate loan repayments

OTHER\_LOAN\_REPAY – Other loan repayments

DEBTS\_OWED\_BY – Debts owed by

TTL\_INDIV\_CONTRIB – Total individual contributions

CAND\_OFFICE\_ST – Candidate state

CAND\_OFFICE\_DISTRICT – Candidate district

SPEC\_ELECTION – Special election status

PRIM\_ELECTION – Primary election status

RUN\_ELECTION – Runoff election status

GEN\_ELECTION – General election status

GEN\_ELECTION\_PRECENT – General election percentage

OTHER\_POL\_CMTE\_CONTRIB – Contributions from other political committees

POL\_PTY\_CONTRIB – Contributions from party committees

CVG\_END\_DT – Coverage end date

INDIV\_REFUNDS – Refunds to individuals

CMTE\_REFUNDS – Refunds to committees

The columns are organized similar to this in the file, and I used filter options for separating the Democrat candidates from the Republican ones in the list, and as per the list found on the Secretary of State website. More detailed information can be found here, and it is also what I consulted for help with my analysis: <https://tinyurl.com/2x4r56yc>

**Time frame**: The summary information found on the file is completely dependent on summary reports filed by the principal campaign committees for each candidate. Even then, fresh reports take another 24-48 hours to get updated on the site. The data I used for analysis ranges from Jan. 1, 2021 to March 31, 2022. Some specific fields and candidates have updated data from April as well.

**Methodology/Decisions/Challenges**:

I got some help and guidance from both my J7430 professor and my Missourian state government beat editor to navigate the website in terms of obtaining the data I needed.

At first, I went on the main committee page, entered the names of specific candidates and exported the filtered results as a csv to analyze the data. Later on, I started exploring the website and figured out there was more data I could take a look at and potentially include in the report.

My biggest challenge was being completely unfamiliar with how campaign finance, filings and to some extent, how even elections work in this country. Some Google and Youtube helped, (thankful for the internet!), but also meetings with my state government editor (since I am not a part of the actual class, I enrolled in Communications Practice with him). Once that was out of the way and I got most of it figured out, things more or less fell into place.

I first started work on this some time towards the end of Spring Break. It took me a while to realize that neither had the filing deadline passed at that point, nor was the first quarterly report out. My editor suggested waiting for it until both had passed and the website updated – which led to the end of April.

The challenge still persists in the sense that it is still very early into the election cycle, and even the primary elections are a couple of months away from now – which means that the data is still in a rudimentary form since the candidates will be spending/raising more as the election date approaches closer. But my editor and I decided that what we have available right now is still good enough to look at in terms of a “where we stand now” story, which is exactly what I am working on and pursuing to be published by the tail end of the semester.

**Story Idea:**

The idea I have is to look at the amounts raised by Senatorial candidates in Missouri, including a breakdown of what has been raised and spent by Democrat and the Republican candidates. Apart from that, the report will also focus on the amount of cash in hand that candidates have at present, including analysis for some of the candidates of where they got their funds from (in-state, out of state and other notable contributors like specific industries or educational institutions, etc), trends in raising funds and try to make sense of the same. I also noticed that Josh Hawley and Roy Blunt received a lot of funds even though they are not running, so there would be a separate section for them, as well as for those like Vicky Hartzler and Cori Bush who are former House representatives running for the Senate. Also, a look at the amounts raised/spent for this election cycle in comparison to previous years from a “where we stand now” angle since it is so early in the cycle. Comments/quotes from specific lawmakers and experts well acquainted with the subject matter will be included as and when accessible or necessary.

It is also my intention to grate visual elements like a bar graph or column chart listing out the candidates that have raised the highest amounts of money, as well as what each candidate has in terms of funds raised and current cash on hand.

The final story is still a work in progress, but the pattern of analysis would remain the same regardless of any updates to the data. In this context, any feedback or other suggestions/areas to explore for the completion of the story would be highly appreciated as well!