

90,000 votes. That's how many GOP primary voters refused to support [unpopular](#) incumbent Josh Hawley on the Aug. 6th primary, despite the state GOP keeping his primary clear.

Alongside being outtraised by Democratic nominee and Marine veteran Lucas Kunce, a now-confirmed November [vote on reproductive freedom](#), and tightening polls, **Hawley pulled a campaign stunt** that confirms what the data has shown: **He's vulnerable — and desperate to prevent an upset.**



Winning in a red state usually requires a great Democrat with record-breaking fundraising, a terrible Republican, and enough split-ticket voters for it all to matter. In Missouri's Senate race, we have all three — **and we have a ballot initiative to end a Hawley-backed abortion ban.**

As the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* [summed](#) up: **"Kunce's personal story demolishes the stereotype of the latte-sipping, out-of-touch liberal...modest upbringing and centrist political bearings...extensive military and foreign relations experience...he is also able to communicate to more conservative rural voters. With recent polls showing Hawley with a single-digit lead in a state Trump won by 16%, Democrats may in fact have the opportunity for an upset."**

Just two weeks into the general election, Lucas is in the strongest position of any Senate challenger in Missouri in the 21st century — and he's in the strongest position of any Democrat taking on a Republican incumbent for U.S. Senate this cycle. **This memo outlines the polling, fundraising, and trends that show Missouri is now clearly the most winnable and affordable opportunity to flip a U.S. Senate seat in 2024.**

1. **Paid Communications And Campaign Resources**

Immediately following the August primary, Lucas wasted no time, taking his campaign straight to the statewide airwaves with compelling ads online and on TV touting his [service](#), his [background](#), shared [Missouri values](#), and even going on offense on [border security](#):

“Secure” ([Watch It Here](#)): Highlights Lucas’ unique record of service, commitment to working across the aisle, and takes on Hawley for his failed record on border security.



“Protect” ([Watch It Here](#)): Highlights Lucas’ community he serves and the freedoms he’ll protect — including reproductive freedom.



“Rebuild” ([Watch It Here](#)): Highlights Lucas’ economic struggles growing up and his mission to bring investment to Missouri.



“Family Values” ([Watch It Here](#)): Voiced by Born-and-Raised Missourian John Goodman, this ad challenges the anti-family extremism of Josh Hawley, while highlighting real Missouri values both John and Lucas learned growing up in Missouri.

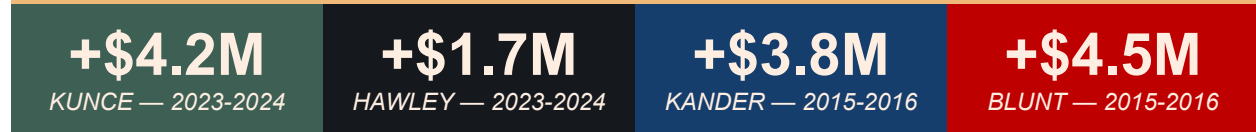


Instead of touting his record, Hawley’s first TV ad buy was \$1M for [ridiculously false](#) attacks against Lucas, **the surest sign yet of this race’s competitiveness**. But Hawley has even more cause for concern — he’s already being outspent by Lucas on TV, due in large part to his weak fundraising efforts following his disgraceful and embarrassing behavior on Jan 6th, 2021.

Hawley’s poor fundraising and high rate of spending puts him far behind former Senator Roy Blunt’s fundraising from 2016. Meanwhile, Lucas has been running hard this entire race, attracting [huge crowds](#), and earning Missouri’s [earliest-ever](#) AFL-CIO endorsement.

That support has translated to a record-breaking grassroots moment, [outraising Hawley](#) by \$1M in the most recent quarter and building the largest war chest for a challenger in state history — even larger than 2016 Democratic Senate nominee Jason Kander’s in 2016.

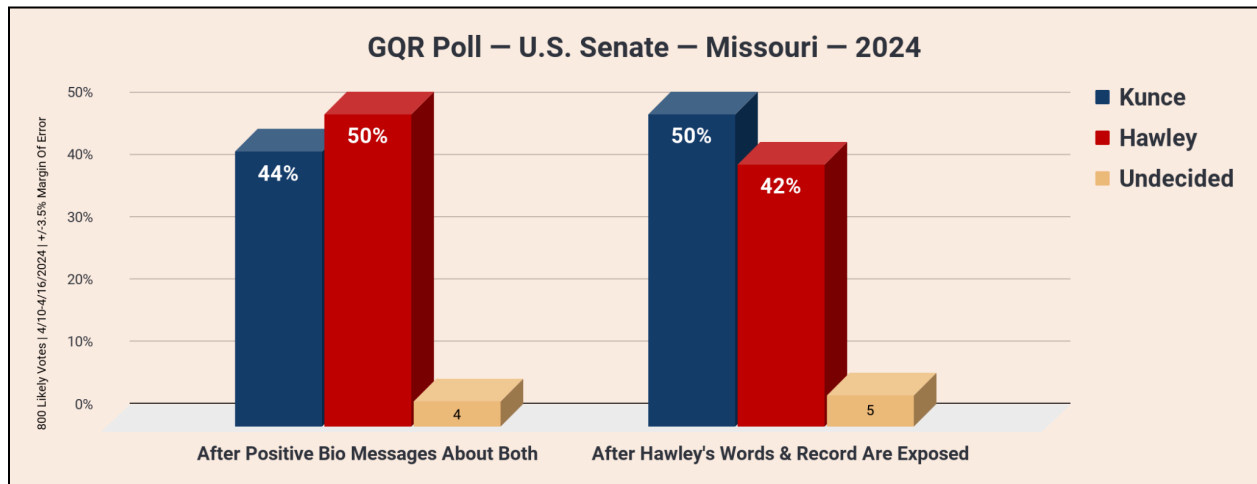
USABLE CASH-ON-HAND ADDED IN FIRST 18 MONTHS OF THE RACE | MISSOURI SENATE



Despite entering the race with a \$4M war chest, Hawley is now on track to be outspent by Lucas on paid communications. And unlike 2018, Hawley has significantly soured his relationships with party leadership and major supporters — including former mentor and Missouri political icon Jack Danforth, who described his previous support of Hawley as [“the worst mistake I ever made in my life”](#) following Jan. 6th.

As a result, Hawley has seen none of the early defensive external spending that Blunt enjoyed in his 2016 cycle, leaving Hawley uniquely vulnerable to hostile outside efforts.

2. The Polling: How Missouri Stacks Up



A recent internal poll by GQR found Lucas Kunce’s powerful message and story make this race a dead heat, even as respondents also hear a strong positive message about Josh Hawley.

But it also found when voters learn of Hawley’s major vulnerabilities, many unknown to the public, **it shifts the race toward Lucas at a similar scale to Republican [Todd Akin’s](#) shocking fall from an [11% lead](#)**. That fall later led to a Democratic win **outperforming the presidential race by 25%**.

PERFORMANCE IN MISSOURI’S MOST RECENT SENATE RACES IN PRESIDENTIAL CYCLES



Another recent poll from [Emerson College Polling/The Hill](#) found even with near-universal name ID, **Hawley is underperforming Trump by 10%** — lining up with GQR’s findings that Hawley’s favorability with voters (43%) lags behind Trump (53%).

It also shows Hawley is as vulnerable as recent polls show Ted Cruz and Rick Scott to be — even as **paid communications have already been ongoing** in Texas and Florida. Both Cruz and Scott have also regularly polled above 50%. [Morning Consult Approval polls](#) have also consistently found Hawley to be among the least popular incumbents in the Senate — and the least popular Republican incumbent running for reelection this year.

— A QUICK LOOK AT 2024’S TARGETED SENATE INCUMBENTS —

FLORIDA | Rick Scott



Spent On 2018 Race: \$83M
Raised In Last 18 Months: \$31M
**NOTE: Major Self-Funder*

[MOST RECENT POLLING \(August\):](#)
52% SCOTT — 42% DMP

MISSOURI | Josh Hawley



Spent On 2018 Race: \$11M
Raised In Last 18 Months: \$8.8M
**NOTE: Unable To Self-Fund*

[MOST RECENT POLLING \(June\):](#)
47% HAWLEY — 38% KUNCE

TEXAS | Ted Cruz



Spent On 2018 Race: \$45M
Raised In Last 18 Months: \$26M
**NOTE: Minor Self-Funder*

[MOST RECENT POLLING \(July\):](#)
53% CRUZ — 43% ALLRED

The recent Emerson poll showed **Lucas outpacing where [Kander was](#)** at this point in his near-win against Roy Blunt in Missouri’s last Senate race in a presidential cycle. After polling 14% down, Kander closed the gap after starting paid communications in the final months of the race. He ultimately fell just 2.8% short — **outperforming the presidential race by nearly 16%**.

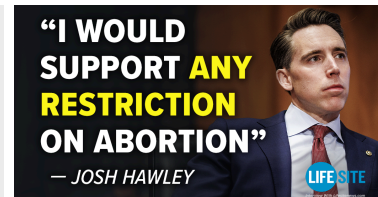
3. Path To (And Cost Of) Victory, And Split Ticket Voters

On the flip side, earlier GQR-led focus groups found voters consistently grew to like Lucas when learning more, valuing his upbringing, his service, and his independent mindset. The impact was so powerful, that it inoculated him against attacks, with even Republican participants defending him — a positive sign that Lucas will withstand Hawley’s current barrage of false attack ads.

The poll found only 27% could express a substantive opinion about Lucas — but unlike Hawley, Lucas has a net double-digit positive approval, showing a major opportunity for growth. After hearing only positive messages about both candidates, the race immediately narrows to a dogfight (44%–50%). Independents respond well to Lucas’ biography and drive much of this improvement, as 15% of independent voters shift toward Lucas in the revote.

This is even after respondents have heard a compelling positive message about Hawley based on his own messaging. After voters hear short messages informing them of Hawley’s extremism and corruption as Senator, with no other messaging beyond positive introductions for both candidates, **Lucas reaches a majority of the vote (50%–42%)**

This is a strong indicator that Hawley will be an even softer target when exposed in paid communications in the coming weeks and months.



Hawley's corruption, extremism, and failure to invest in Missouri—much of which voters have not been previously exposed to—have a devastating impact on his performance. **Hawley won only 51% of the vote in his last race (and before Roe was struck down) — so any major loss in support would be difficult for Hawley to recover from.**

Put simply, the impact of exposing Hawley's vulnerabilities to voters is huge. Throughout the survey, an enormous contingent of voters shift toward Lucas, indicating a highly persuadable electorate, even with a presidential vote also on the ballot. That's a rarity for many Senate races—and competing in Missouri is more affordable than just about anywhere else.

Trends In Costs + Split-Ticket Voting	FLORIDA	MISSOURI	TEXAS
Margin For Senate Race In That State's *Most Recent Senate-Presidential Cycle*	+7.7% GOP 713k votes short	+2.8% GOP 78k votes short	+9.6% GOP 1 Million votes short
Dem Senate Candidate's Performance Compared To Presidential Race <i>That Year</i>	+6.5% GOP net ≈380k more GOP votes in Senate race	+15.7% DEM net ≈230k more Dem votes in Senate race	+4% GOP net ≈370k more GOP votes in Senate race
Change In Trump's Margin 2016 To 2020	+2% TRUMP	−3% TRUMP	−3% TRUMP
Voter Turnout in 2020 Presidential Cycle	>11.1 Million	>3 Million	>11.3 Million

And all of that is before we get to abortion being on the ballot. Organizers recently [submitted](#) a record-breaking 380,000 signatures to put a vote to end Missouri's **TOTAL** abortion ban on the [November](#) ballot. Pro-choice initiatives (and anti-choice opponents) have fueled [huge wins](#) and record-breaking [turnout](#) — including Democratic victories in red states like [Kentucky](#), Ohio, Kansas, and [Alabama](#). Recent [polling](#) and [similar](#) initiative efforts indicate Missouri is likely to see [overwhelmingly](#) Democratic voters turned out by a [well-funded](#) initiative.

But it's about more than turnout. While Hawley has gained attention in recent months for his "[Manhood](#)" obsession, his vote [against](#) the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act, and lawbreaking that cost taxpayers **\$250,000**, the initiative forces him to play defense on [his worst set of issues](#) — issues that are [increasingly important](#) to voters across the spectrum. The [Emerson poll](#) found: **"The share of voters who say abortion is the most important issue facing their state in Missouri is higher than any state poll we have conducted in the past year."**

No U.S. Senator has a worse record on reproductive rights than Josh Hawley. He's a [leader](#) in a [national](#) effort to [ban all abortions](#). He's a pioneer behind the legal efforts and arguments being used against [IVF](#) and [contraception](#) — and [voted against](#) protecting [access](#) to both in the Senate. He's even [corrupted](#) our courts and used his [taxpayer-funded office](#) to support his [wife's legal activism](#) to [overturn Roe](#) and [ban the abortion pill nationwide](#),

In a cycle with historic levels of Democratic enthusiasm at the national level and reproductive rights on the ballot statewide, the floor for a Democratic candidate in Missouri was already historically high. But Josh Hawley's vulnerabilities and Lucas Kunce's strengths make this a race where any amount of investment can make a difference. Learn more at [LucasKunce.com](#).