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## Accessibility and Clarity of Campaign Finance Databases in U.S. Cities

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**Accessibility and Clarity of Campaign Finance Disclosure Databases in U.S. Cities**

An Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors Studies in  
Political Science

By

Ethan Bridgforth

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Political Science

J. William Fulbright College of Arts and Sciences

The University of Arkansas

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this research project is to examine the varying states of disclosure at the municipal level depending on location and understand how the quality of campaign finance databases varies depending on what city one lives in. A literature review was conducted that focused on understanding the state of disclosure and transparency, as well as the relationship between technology and disclosure. An analysis of the campaign finance databases for six cities across the United States of America was also completed. Five individuals of differing demographics were asked to help rank the databases on a variety of aspects. I found that the differences in campaign disclosure requirements have no discernible effect on the level of accessibility and clarity when it comes to navigating the databases for information. Correlation was discovered when examining the relationship between the three aspects of each database. A relationship between the size of a city and the quality of its database was also discovered. The larger cities received lower scores for each aspect of their database, while the smaller cities received the highest scores. El Paso ultimately ranked the highest of the six cities examined and should serve as an example for cities looking to create or improve their own database.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would first like to thank Dr. Andrew Dowdle for serving as my thesis advisor. His advice and support throughout the process was invaluable. I would not have been able to complete this project otherwise. I would also like to thank Dr. Karen Sebold and Dr. Charles Muntz for their mentorship and for agreeing to serve in my defense. I greatly enjoyed every class I was able to take part with each of you and the knowledge I gained was extremely useful not only for completing this thesis, but also for my academic achievement in general.

I would like to thank the staff of the Fulbright Honors College. Jill Wheeler has been a mentor to me before I arrived on campus in the fall of 2017 and ever since. I will greatly miss being able to come to her office for advice and guidance. I would also like to thank Mary Ellen Hartford, Dr. Kirstin Erickson, and the rest of the tower room staff for all their help throughout my time as an undergraduate student. I also greatly appreciate Dr. Phil Harrington for serving as the Honors Council Representative on my committee.

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## **Introduction**

One of the key aspects of our democracy in the United States of America is political campaigning. Campaign finance is a crucial part of any hopeful campaign across the various levels of elections in America. The framework of campaign finance is built from the rules and regulations made by the federal government and each states' government. This framework is given some level of commonality amongst all states, despite varying local policy, by the rulings of the Supreme Court of the United States.

One important aspect of campaign finance that has been ruled upon by the Supreme Court is disclosure. Disclosure is a major part of campaign finance. Regulations regarding disclosure have a profound role in determining how our electoral process works. The purpose of this paper is to examine the varying states of disclosure at the municipal level depending on location and understand how the quality of campaign finance databases varies depending on what city one lives in. This paper aims to answer three questions. How does the level of accessibility and clarity amongst campaign finance disclosure databases in U.S. cities vary? How do campaign finance disclosure requirements vary between the cities and municipalities being examined? How do these differences affect the level of accessibility and clarity?

## **Literature Review**

Transparency and disclosure go hand in hand in understanding what creates a healthy democracy. Transparency in the context of social sciences is defined as the capacity of outsiders to obtain valid and timely information about the activities of government or private organizations.<sup>1</sup> Disclosure in the context of political campaigns is defined as the legal

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<sup>1</sup> Carolyn Ball, "What Is Transparency?" (2009)

requirement for political committees to disclose the identities of their donors.<sup>2</sup> For democracy to be in its healthiest form, it is widely believed by scholars that transparency must be present. Without adequate levels of information being available, citizens are unable to participate meaningfully in elections.<sup>3</sup> It has been found that there is a statistically significant relationship between disclosure requirements and perceptions of electoral integrity.<sup>4</sup> Thus, lower levels of disclosure correlate with worse perceptions of electoral integrity. A lack of faith in a nation's elections is dangerous. It can become a self-fulfilling prophecy that undermines faith in democratic governance itself.<sup>5</sup>

A recent and startling example of how democracy can begin to become undermined occurred this past year. Amid a global pandemic that halted the world in 2020, the United States had to manage to hold a presidential election. One solution utilized by millions of Americans was the use of mail in ballots. However, before and after the election concluded there were claims being made that this system would result in a fraudulent outcome. Despite President Trump's constant claims that the election was rigged, by January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021, 61 of the 62 lawsuits filed by the president and his allies had failed.<sup>6</sup> Despite the evidence clearly painting a picture of an election devoid of corruption, many Americans still feel that our democracy is broken. A poll conducted by the Pew Research Center in January 2021, found that 32% of voters believe that widespread illegal voting and fraud were major reasons for the result of the election. Another 14% of Americans credit it as being a minor reason. Just under 50% of Americans believe fraud

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<sup>2</sup> Robert E. Mutch, *Campaign Finance: What everyone needs to know* (2016)

<sup>3</sup> Dowdle, Sebold, "Full Disclosure or Faux Disclosure?" (2018)

<sup>4</sup> Norris, *Strengthening Electoral Integrity* (2017)

<sup>5</sup> Richard L. Hasen, *The Voting Wars* (2012)

<sup>6</sup> Cummings, Garrison, Sergent, "By the numbers: President Donald Trump's failed efforts to overturn the election" (2021)

had some type of role in determining the result of the most important election in the United States of America.<sup>7</sup>

The situation discussed above is worrying and shows how the topic of transparency in politics has many applications. There are numerous ways to cover transparency in the political sphere. This paper will primarily focus on disclosure and transparency regarding campaign finance. Disclosure has been a primary part of campaign finance regulation for a large period of time. It was during the 1890s that the first state disclosure laws were enacted.<sup>8</sup> President Taft's work to get Congress to pass a law regarding disclosure in 1910 was a major victory for proponents of disclosure. This law remained on the books until it was replaced by the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971.<sup>9</sup>

There are many ways to go about attempting to regulate campaign finance. Disclosure has remained the most widely accepted type of regulation, particularly by the courts. The Supreme Court of the United States upheld the law dictating disclosure in both *Buckley v. Valeo* and *Citizens United*. Disclosure's popularity comes largely from the fact that it is seen as a means of discouraging potentially corrupt practices while ignoring the more controversial subjects, such as which contributions and expenditures are considered corrupting.<sup>10</sup>

This paper is focusing on disclosure at the municipal level. The pre-existing literature regarding disclosure and campaign finance at the municipal level is sparse compared to the vast catalog of literature on these topics in general. The literature that does exist often focuses on

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<sup>7</sup> Pew Research Center, "Biden Begins Presidency With Positive Ratings; Trump Departs With Lowest-Ever Job Mark" (2021)

<sup>8</sup> Louise Overacker, *Money in Elections* (1932)

<sup>9</sup> Robert E. Mutch, *Campaign Finance*, 2016

<sup>10</sup> Richard Briffault, "Campaign Finance Disclosure 2.0" (2010)



aspects of campaign finance apart from disclosure. Heerwig found that in Seattle while only one-fifth of donors in the mayoral election contributed at least \$500, these donations accounted for 55% of the money raised in the election. Furthermore, these candidates collected nearly one-fourth of their funds from the wealthiest 10% of Seattle neighborhoods. Heerwig identified a critical dimension of representational distortion in elections at the local level.<sup>11</sup> The relationship between gender, campaign finance, and electoral success at the municipal level has also been examined. Adams found that despite fewer women running for office, they have similar results to men at the local level. Women raise comparable amounts of campaign funds, while receiving contributions from the same sources as their male counterparts.<sup>12</sup> There have been studies completed on campaign finance at the municipal level in both Spain and Canada, yet literature focused specifically on cities in the United States is rare.<sup>13</sup>

A large aspect of this paper deals with the technological side of disclosure. Particularly, the level of accessibility to the information being disclosed. The online databases being examined have varying levels of usability. Ultimately, if the information being disclosed is too challenging to access, it does not matter whether the information is being disclosed in the first place. An example of barriers of use to technology that have existed, and the potential negative consequences is the Affordable Care Act rollout during the Obama administration. The ACA's website suffered numerous problems at the start of the rollout. Difficulties with logging in were abundant. Even just a few hundred users were enough to crash the website.<sup>14</sup> The reason that examining the ACA's rollout issues is important is because the botched rollout had a negative

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<sup>11</sup> Heerwig, "High-Dollar Donors and Donor-Rich Neighborhoods: Representational Distortion in Financing a Municipal Election in Seattle" (2017)

<sup>12</sup> Adams, "Gender, Campaign Finance, And Electoral Success In Municipal Elections" (2011)

<sup>13</sup> Cinca-Cerrano, "Factors Influencing E-Disclosure in Local Public Administrations" (2009); McDermid, "Campaign Finance and Campaign Success in Municipal Elections in the Toronto Region" (2007)

<sup>14</sup> Thompson, *The Affordable Care Act*, (2014)

effect on peoples' opinions of the program. A paper that conducted a review of 102 nationally representative public opinion polls in the period 2010-19 revealed that opinion on the ACA remains divided and has shifted in a sustainable way at only two points in time. It shifted in a negative direction following technical problems in the first enrollment period, and in a positive direction after President Donald Trump's election and subsequent Republican repeal efforts.<sup>15</sup>

Technological issues can delegitimize an otherwise positive product in the public's eye. One approach the Trump Administration took against the ACA was to kill advertisements for it. Back in 2017, with less than a week to go before the open-enrollment deadline, the Trump administration halted advertisements encouraging people to enroll in insurance coverage.<sup>16</sup> Despite the option to enroll being readily available, the lack of advertisement may as well be denying the coverage. This instance is similar to the relationship between campaign finance disclosure and accessible databases. It is great to have disclosure laws on the books, but if the information is not easily accessible to the average citizen than there is no point.

Aside from how easy it is to access these disclosure databases; it is also important to consider how easy it is to navigate them. The goal of any database or website with a user interface should be to be as widely and easily usable as possible. The older population in particular often struggles with technology. They are not the only group though. People with low tech literacy, second language learners, people with low general literacy, and those with vision or other impairments all experience usability issues similar to older adults.<sup>17</sup> It is clear that the likelihood of a person to vote is the highest around middle age and at the lowest shortly after

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<sup>15</sup> Brodie, "The Past, Present, And Possible Future Of Public Opinion On The ACA" (2020)

<sup>16</sup> Mangan, "Sabotage': Trump administration reportedly kills Obamacare ads for HealthCare.gov with less than week to go in open enrollment" (2017)

<sup>17</sup> Johnson, Finn, *Designing user interfaces for an aging population: Towards universal design* (2017)

becoming eligible to vote.<sup>18</sup> With the greatest interest in voting coming from the group most likely to suffer challenges with technology, it is imperative that our campaign finance databases be designed in a way that is accessible for even the most technologically illiterate user.

## **Methodology**

The U.S. Census Bureau states that there are 19,495 municipalities in the United States according to the 2017 Census of Governments.<sup>19</sup> For the purpose of this paper six cities across the United States will be examined. The cities being examined are Columbus, El Paso, Houston, Little Rock, San Diego, and Seattle. These municipalities have varying levels of transparency. To compare the state of transparency between the selected cities this paper will examine the disclosure requirements regarding monetary amounts and the reporting schedule that candidates are required to adhere to.

This paper will also examine the level of usability of each city's online campaign finance database. This paper will examine and compare three aspects of each database. These three aspects are the readability, ease of search, and the ease of data exportation. One way in which the ease of search will be measured is by counting exactly how many web pages one must navigate through to reach a desired report. The report being searched for in each database will be the city's current mayor's most recent financial report. To ensure fairness each trial will begin by typing the following phrase into the Google search engine: "*City State Campaign Finance*

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<sup>18</sup> Glen, Grimes, "Aging, Voting, and Political Interest" (1968)

<sup>19</sup> The Census of Governments is administered every five years and identifies the scope and nature of the nation's state and local government sector; provides authoritative benchmark figures of public finance and public employment.

Database.”<sup>20</sup> The number of webpages that a user must go through before reaching the report will be recorded.

To gain a better understanding of each databases’ usability five individuals will each examine the databases. I am individual #1. The individuals examining the databases have varying levels of technological literacy and knowledge of campaign finance. The individuals’ demographics are listed alongside a self-rating of their own technological literacy and knowledge of campaign finance. These two categories are rated on a scale of 1-10 with 10 meaning they are the most literate or knowledgeable. The individuals will then spend the amount of time it takes in each database to find the aforementioned desired report and attempt to export it. The individuals will then grade each database on the three aspects.<sup>21</sup> Each aspect will be given a score between 1-5, with 5 being considered the best score. Ultimately, the scores will be aggregated, and the six databases will be ranked. The individuals are described below:

Individual #	Age (in years)	Gender	Race	Highest Level of Education	Technological Literacy	Knowledge of Campaign Finance
1	21	Male	White	Bachelors	10	10
2	22	Female	Black	Bachelors	8	7
3	20	Female	White	Bachelors	8	2
4	55	Male	White	Doctorate	6	5
5	76	Female	White	Masters	2	4

<sup>20</sup> *City State* will be replaced with the city I am examining. Ex) “Columbus Ohio Campaign Finance Database”

<sup>21</sup> Readability, Ease of search, Ease of data exportation

## **Hypotheses**

Five hypotheses will be explored during the completion of this work. The first hypothesis is that the relationship that a city has with one of the three aspects being examined can be predictive of their scores for the other two aspects. The second hypothesis is that the largest cities, by population, will rank the best overall. The larger cities should have a greater number of resources (time, money, manpower) to allocate towards creating and maintaining a quality database. The third hypothesis is that the cities located in western states will rank better than the other cities. It is believed that these states are often ahead of other states when it comes to certain progressive measures. The fourth hypothesis is that cities located in a state that currently have a governor in the democratic party will perform better. Political affiliation of state leadership may have a noticeable effect on the results. The fifth hypothesis is that cities located in the same state will perform similarly. This should be due to the similar regulations they must follow and for the fact that the population likely shares similar sentiment towards the concept of disclosure.

## **Findings**

### *Columbus, Ohio*

Columbus is the capital of and most populous city in the state of Ohio. According to the Census Bureau, the estimated population of Columbus in 2019 was 898,553. Andrew Ginther has been the mayor since 2016 and is a Democrat. Columbus has a mayor-council form of government.

In Columbus, all municipal campaign committees must disclose the name, address, employer, and occupation of each contributor to the campaign, regardless of the amount of the contribution. All municipal campaign committees must disclose all campaign expenditures, the

purpose for which the funds were used, the name and address of the entities to which the expenditures were made, and the amount and date of each expenditure.<sup>22</sup> The requirement to disclose all contributions regardless of the amount took effect in 2019. This is a nice step towards increasing transparency. Candidates, PACs, and parties are required to disclose contribution and expenditure information 12 days before an election, 38 days after an election, and the last business day of every January and July.<sup>23</sup>

It took seven actions to reach the desired report, while navigating the Columbus database. This database had good colors that made it easy to read, however the text was small which could make it challenging for someone with impaired vision to navigate it as easily. It clearly states in a note how to open and export the reports as shown in the following picture. While that might be intuitive for some individuals, for many people that note is extremely helpful and that is one way this database sets itself apart from databases that assume the user already has a higher level of knowledge.

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<sup>22</sup> Columbus Campaign Finance Laws (Effective July 31, 2019)

<sup>23</sup> NCSL State Campaign Finance Disclosure Requirements 2015-2016 Election Cycle

# Campaign Finance REPORTING SYSTEM

- COMMITTEE
- REPORTS
- CONTRIBUTIONS
- EXPENDITURES
- COMMUNICATION REPORTS

Click on the text in blue font in the header row, to sort the report. Click on the text in red font to display the data.

Note: Clicking on the form numbers (for example "31-A"), will open the form in a new browser tab.

BACK TO SEARCH

COMMITTEE NAME	REPORT TYPE	REPORT SUBMITTED	AMENDED	ELECTION DATE	CONTRIBUTION	EXPENDITURES	COVER PAGE	PAGES
FRIENDS FOR GINTHER	QUARTERLY	04/27/2017	NO	11/03/2015	\$96,650.00 <a href="#">31A</a> <a href="#">31E - 1</a> <a href="#">31E - 2</a>	\$43,556.13 <a href="#">31B</a> <a href="#">31F - 1</a> <a href="#">31F - 2</a>	<a href="#">COVER PAGE</a>	<a href="#">30-A</a> 25
FRIENDS FOR GINTHER	QUARTERLY	10/31/2017	NO	11/03/2015	\$39,706.00 <a href="#">31A</a> <a href="#">31E - 1</a> <a href="#">31E - 2</a>	\$69,193.77 <a href="#">31B</a> <a href="#">31F - 1</a>	<a href="#">COVER PAGE</a>	<a href="#">30-A</a> 25
FRIENDS FOR GINTHER	QUARTERLY	04/30/2018	NO		\$120,628.99 <a href="#">31A</a> <a href="#">31E - 1</a>	\$59,455.41 <a href="#">31B</a>	<a href="#">COVER PAGE</a>	<a href="#">30-A</a> 24
FRIENDS FOR GINTHER	ANNUAL 2018	01/30/2019	NO	11/05/2019	\$92,797.00 <a href="#">31A</a> <a href="#">31E - 1</a> <a href="#">31E - 2</a>	\$157,843.63 <a href="#">31B</a> <a href="#">31F - 1</a> <a href="#">31F - 2</a> <a href="#">31F - 3</a> <a href="#">31F - 4</a>	<a href="#">COVER PAGE</a>	<a href="#">30-A</a> 44
FRIENDS FOR GINTHER	QUARTERLY	10/31/2016	NO		\$112,913.63 <a href="#">31A</a> <a href="#">31E - 1</a> <a href="#">31E - 2</a>	\$131,306.72 <a href="#">31B</a> <a href="#">31F - 1</a>	<a href="#">COVER PAGE</a>	<a href="#">30-A</a> 49
FRIENDS FOR GINTHER	ANNUAL 2016	01/31/2017	NO		\$112,913.63 <a href="#">31A</a> <a href="#">31E - 1</a>	\$166,249.30 <a href="#">31B</a> <a href="#">31F - 1</a> <a href="#">31F - 2</a>	<a href="#">COVER PAGE</a>	<a href="#">30-A</a> 50
FRIENDS FOR GINTHER	SEMIANNUAL 2017	07/31/2017	NO	11/07/2017	\$307,150.00 <a href="#">31A</a> <a href="#">31E - 1</a> <a href="#">31E - 2</a> <a href="#">31E - 3</a> <a href="#">31E - 4</a>	\$57,044.11 <a href="#">31B</a>	<a href="#">COVER PAGE</a>	<a href="#">30-A</a> 66
FRIENDS FOR GINTHER	PRE-PRIMARY	04/25/2019	NO	05/07/2019	\$53,694.00 <a href="#">31A</a> <a href="#">31E - 1</a>	\$81,480.66 <a href="#">31B</a>	<a href="#">COVER PAGE</a>	<a href="#">30-A</a> 15

Individual #	Readability	Ease of Search	Ease of Data Exportation
1	4	5	5
2	3	4	5
3	4	4	4
4	3	3	4
5	2	2	3

*El Paso, Texas*

El Paso is a city located in the western part of Texas. According to the Census Bureau, the estimated population of El Paso in 2019 was 681,728. Oscar Leeser has been the mayor since 2021 and is a Democrat. El Paso has a council-manager form of government.

The Texas Code states that campaign finance reports must include the date of the contribution as well as the full name and address of the contributor if the amount exceeds \$50. If the amount of an expenditure exceeds \$100 than the purpose of the expenditures must also be included.<sup>24</sup> Candidates for office in the state of Texas must disclose a financial report July 15<sup>th</sup>, Jan 15<sup>th</sup>, 30 days before an election, and the eighth day before an election.<sup>25</sup>

It only took four actions to reach the desired report on the El Paso database. This website was especially easy to navigate. It essentially directs you itself and allows you to export with extreme ease.

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<sup>24</sup> Texas Ethics Commission Title 15, Election Code Sec. 254.031

<sup>25</sup> NCSL State Campaign Finance Disclosure Requirements 2015-2016 Election Cycle



## CAMPAIGN FINANCE REPORTS

### CURRENT

• [January 15, 2021](#) »

### ARCHIVED

- [November 3, 2020 - General Election](#) »
- [November 5, 2019 - Special Election](#) »
- [July 15, 2018](#) »
- [May 6, 2017 - General Election](#) »
- [May 07, 2016 - Special Election](#) »
- [July 19, 2014 - Special Election](#) »
- [May 11, 2013 - General Election](#) »
- [July 15, 2011](#) »
- [July 15, 2010](#) »
- [January 15, 2009](#) »
- [July 15, 2007](#) »
- [January 15, 2006](#) »
- [November 14, 2004](#) »
- [July 15, 2020](#) »
- [July 15, 2019](#) »
- [January 15, 2018](#) »
- [January 15, 2017](#) »
- [July 15, 2015](#) »
- [July 15, 2014](#) »
- [January 15, 2013](#) »
- [May 14, 2011 - General Election](#) »
- [January 15, 2010](#) »
- [July 15, 2008](#) »
- [May 12, 2007 - General Election](#) »
- [July 15, 2005](#) »
- [July 15, 2004](#) »
- [January 15, 2020](#) »
- [January 15, 2019](#) »
- [July 15, 2017](#) »
- [July 15, 2016](#) »
- [May 9, 2015 - General Election](#) »
- [January 15, 2014](#) »
- [July 15, 2012](#) »
- [January 15, 2011](#) »
- [July 15, 2009](#) »
- [May 10, 2008 - Special Election](#) »
- [January 15, 2007](#) »
- [May 07, 2005](#) »
- [January 15, 2004](#) »
- [December 14, 2019 - Special Election](#) »
- [November 6, 2018 - General Election](#) »
- [June 10, 2017 - Special Election](#) »
- [January 15, 2016](#) »
- [January 15, 2015](#) »
- [July 15, 2013](#) »
- [January 15, 2012](#) »
- [November 02, 2010 - Special Election](#) »
- [May 05, 2009 - General Election](#) »
- [January 15, 2008](#) »
- [July 15, 2006](#) »
- [January 15, 2005](#) »
- [July 15, 2003](#) »

## November 3, 2020 - General Election

Office Sought	Place on Ballot	Name on Ballot	30th day before	8th day before	15th day after campaign treasurer appointment	Over \$500	Final Report	8th Day Before Run-Off
<b>Mayor</b>	1	Calvin Zielsdorf						
	2	Oscar Leeser						
	3	Carlos Gallinar						
	4	Dean Dino Martinez						
	5	Veronica "Vero" Carbajal						
	6	Dee Margo						
<b>Representative District 2</b>	1	Miriam "Judy" Gutierrez						
	2	Alexsandra Annello						
	3	James Arthur Campos						
<b>Representative District 3</b>	1	Jose Rodriguez						
	2	Cassandra Hernandez						
	3	Will Veliz						
<b>Representative District 4</b>	1	Dorothy "Sissy" M. Byrd						
	2	Sam Morgan						
	3	Joe Molinar						
	4	Shawn Nixon						
	5	Wesley Lawrence						

Individual #	Readability	Ease of Search	Ease of Data Exportation
1	5	5	5
2	5	5	5
3	4	5	5
4	5	5	5
5	4	5	4

### *Houston, Texas*

Houston is the most populous city in the state of Texas. According to the Census Bureau, the estimated population of Houston in 2019 was 2,320,268. Sylvester Turner has been the mayor since 2016 and is a Democrat. Houston is running under a mayor-council form of government.

The information regarding the Texas code and the reporting schedule stated in the El Paso section also apply for Houston. However, Houston takes the disclosure requirements a step further than El Paso. The City of Houston Code of Ordinances states that each report shall include the occupation and employer of each person making one or more political contributions that in the aggregate exceed \$500.00 in a reporting period.<sup>26</sup> Seven actions were required to reach the desired financial report on the city of Houston's database. This database is easy to read, and it is simple to export data. It is not as easy to search through this database though as it requires more actions to navigate to the desired reports than other databases.

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<sup>26</sup> City of Houston Code of Ordinances Sec. 18-103

Individual #	Readability	Ease of Search	Ease of Data Exportation
1	4	4	5
2	5	3	4
3	4	4	5
4	4	3	4
5	3	3	4

### *Little Rock, Arkansas*

Little Rock is the capital of Arkansas. With an estimated population of 197,312 in 2019 according to the Census Bureau, Little Rock is the most populous city in the state. Frank Scott Jr. has been the mayor since 2019 and is a Democrat. Little Rock runs under a council-manager form of government.

The disclosure requirements for municipal races in the state of Arkansas are addressed in the Arkansas Code. Candidates must list the name and address for each contributor that donates more than \$50. The contributor's principal place of business, employer, occupation, the amount contributed, the date the contribution was accepted by the candidate, and the aggregate contributed for each election must also be included.<sup>27</sup> The reporting schedule in Arkansas varies depending on how close it is to the election. Generally, reports are filed quarterly, but starting the

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<sup>27</sup> Arkansas Code Title 7 Ch. 6 Sub Ch. 2

year before an election the reports are filed monthly. A candidate must also file seven days before an election and 30 days after an election.<sup>28</sup>

The campaign finance database for the Little Rock mayoral races is different than all the other databases examined. It is easy to navigate, and it only took five actions to reach the desired report, however simply finding this database is a lot more difficult than any of the other cities. To find data for the municipal races in Little Rock, one must visit the Pulaski County Clerk’s website. Thus, the information that was originally put into the web browser, “Little Rock Arkansas Campaign Finance Database” was only returning the database for statewide elections. It is not made particularly clear that you are using the wrong database either. Once you manage to reach the true database it is very easy to use. Still, the average citizen would likely become frustrated and give up on attempting to find the mayoral campaign finance report before realizing their mistake. For that reason, “ease of search” for this database must be rated lower than it otherwise would have been.

Individual #	Readability	Ease of Search	Ease of Data Exportation
1	5	3	5
2	5	2	5
3	5	2	5
4	5	1	5
5	4	1	4

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<sup>28</sup> NCSL State Campaign Finance Disclosure Requirements 2015-2016 Election Cycle

### *San Diego, California*

San Diego is the second largest city in the state of California according to the Census Bureau. San Diego had an estimated population of 3,338,330 in 2019. The current mayor, Todd Gloria, is a Democrat and assumed office in December 2020. Prior to Gloria's election, Kevin Faulconer was the mayor for six years. Faulconer is a registered Republican which means that during his tenure as mayor, San Diego was the largest city in the United States with a Republican mayor. The city of San Diego functions under a mayor-council form of government.

The San Diego city code refers to the California Code of regulations regarding disclosure requirements. The California code states that for contributions totaling above \$25 but less than \$100, the following must be recorded: date of contribution, the amount, full name, and street address of the contributor. For contributions totaling more than \$100 all of the previous information must be included as well as the contributor's occupation and employer.<sup>29</sup> The reporting schedule for California is semi-annually with pre-election reports. Unlike any of the other places examined thus far, the reporting schedule here is based off the amount received. A candidate must file a report within 10 days of receiving contributions of \$5,000 or more. A candidate must also file a report within 24 hours for every contribution exceeding \$1,000 from a single source.<sup>30</sup>

Six actions were necessary to reach the desired report, but it was easy as you are immediately met with a place to search for the specific candidate you are interested in as compared to some of the other databases that make a person navigate through multiple webpages

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<sup>29</sup> California Code of Regulations Title 2 Division 6

<sup>30</sup> NCSL State Campaign Finance Disclosure Requirements 2015-2016 Election Cycle

before ever allowing you to search for a particular individual. However, the colors used for the page as well as having some smaller text made the readability suffer.

City of San Diego Office of the City Clerk  
Electronic Filing of Disclosure Statements

[Search Home](#)  
[Search By Name](#)  
[Search By ID](#)  
[Search by Date](#)  
[Advanced Search](#)

**Search By Name**

Search By Name

**You searched for: 'gloria'.**

**Candidates/Officeholders**  
Names of Candidates/Officeholders that matched your search criteria.

[Gloria Todd](#)

**Committees**  
Names of Committees that matched your search criteria.

[Democrats for a More Affordable and Sustainable San Diego in Support of Chris Olsen for Council and Todd Gloria for Mayor 2020- Sponsored by YIMBY Democrats of San Diego County](#)

[Friends of Gloria Tyler-Malley](#)

[Neighbors for Housing Solutions Supporting Todd Gloria for San Diego Mayor 2020](#)

[No Committee Dist 3 Todd Gloria](#)

[One San Diego, a coalition of taxpayers supporting Todd Gloria for San Diego Mayor, 2020](#)

[San Diegans from Every Community in Support of Todd Gloria for Mayor 2020 sponsored by Laborers Int'l Union of No. America Local 89](#)

[San Diego Small Business Coalition Supporting Todd Gloria for Mayor 2020](#)

[Todd Gloria for Assembly 2016](#)

[Todd Gloria for Assembly 2020](#)

[Todd Gloria for City Council](#)

[Todd Gloria for City Council 2012](#)

[Todd Gloria for Mayor 2020](#)

[United San Diego, a coalition of citizens supporting Todd Gloria for San Diego Mayor 2020, Sponsored by State Building and Construction Trades Council of California Independent Expenditure PAC](#)

Individual #	Readability	Ease of Search	Ease of Data Exportation
1	3	4	5
2	4	5	5
3	3	4	5
4	3	4	5
5	2	3	4

### *Seattle, Washington*

Seattle is the largest city in the state of Washington. According to the Census Bureau in 2019, Seattle had an estimated population of 753,675. Jenny Durkan has been the mayor of Seattle since 2017 and is a Democrat. The type of government found in Seattle is a mayor-council system.

The disclosure requirements are listed in the Seattle Ordinances. For contributors making an aggregate contribution greater than \$25 their name and address must be recorded. If the aggregate total exceeds \$100 then the contributor's occupation and employer's name is required. If a campaign's expenditure exceeds \$50 then the name, address, date, and purpose of the expenditure must all be reported.<sup>31</sup> The reporting schedule for the state of Washington requires that reports be filed on June 1<sup>st</sup>, monthly until May of an election year, 21 days prior to an election, seven days prior to an election, and the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the month during the month following an election.<sup>32</sup>

Six actions were required to reach the desired report for this database. The Seattle database differs from the rest greatly. It is very interactive and essentially turns the database into an active report instead of having the database serve purely as a storage locker like the other five databases. It has a very nice look, but I do think a potential downside is that for an individual who is less savvy around the databases it could overload the individual with information. Even still, it is not overly complicated and the database fluent will certainly appreciate the change of pace.

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<sup>31</sup> Seattle Municipal Code Title 2 Ch. 2.04

<sup>32</sup> NCSL State Campaign Finance Disclosure Requirements 2015-2016 Election Cycle

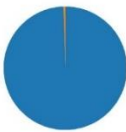
## Jenny A Durkan (DURKAN JENNY A), 2021

Overview
Contributions
Expenditures
Loans
Pledges
Independent Expenditures
Debt
Reports

**Cash contributions:** \$4,920.00

[View/Download](#)

**Contributions by contributor category**



Individual: \$4,895  
Click chart to display dollar amounts.

Contributor name contains  Search Clear [f](#) [t](#)

Top 45 contributors to this campaign

Amounts shown are aggregate totals of cash and in-kind contributions.

NAME	CITY	STATE	CASH/IN-KIND	AMOUNT
KAUSHIK SANDEEP	SEATTLE	WA	Cash	\$500.00
SELIG MARTIN	SEATTLE	WA	Cash	\$500.00
LOESCH MARTY	LA CONNER	WA	Cash	\$500.00
KULLY DANIEL	SEATTLE	WA	Cash	\$500.00
EVANS KELLY	FEDERAL WAY	WA	Cash	\$500.00




## Jenny A Durkan (DURKAN JENNY A), 2021

Overview
Contributions
Expenditures
Loans
Pledges
Independent Expenditures
Debt
Reports

**Itemized expenditures:** \$ 4,838.00  
**Non-itemized expenditures:** \$ 82.00  
[View/Download](#)

**Expenditures by itemized/non-itemized**



Click chart to display dollar amounts.

**Most recent expenditures** [f](#) [t](#)

Non-itemized expenditures will have as the recipient "EXPENSES OF \$50 OR LESS". In-kind expenditures will list the contributor in the recipient column.

RECIPIENT	TYPE	DATE	DESCRIPTION	AMOUNT	REPORT
BLUE WAVE POLITICAL PARTNERS LLC	EXPENSE	01/10/2021	Compliance Consulting	\$250.00	<a href="#">C4</a>
EXPENSES OF \$50 OR LESS	EXPENSE	01/01/2021		\$18.70	<a href="#">C4</a>
NGP VAN INC	EXPENSE	12/07/2020	Software Rental	\$150.00	<a href="#">C4</a>
EXPENSES OF \$50 OR LESS	EXPENSE	12/01/2020		\$2.30	<a href="#">C4</a>
EXPENSES OF \$50 OR LESS	EXPENSE	11/01/2020		\$5.60	<a href="#">C4</a>
EXPENSES OF \$50 OR LESS	EXPENSE	10/01/2020		\$0.70	<a href="#">C4</a>

Individual #	Readability	Ease of Search	Ease of Data Exportation
1	5	5	5
2	5	5	5
3	5	4	5
4	4	4	5
5	4	3	4

## Analysis

By combining the scores, the databases can be ranked on each of the three aspects as shown in the table below. There is a good amount of variety between the scores when it comes to both readability and ease of search. The scores for ease of data exportation are almost all identical. Surprisingly, Columbus had the lowest score in this category even though I personally found it to be one of the strongest in this category and even mentioned specifically that it did a good job explaining how to export data. I hypothesize that because all the individuals looked at the databases in the same order with Columbus coming first that it ranked the lowest because they were not used to exporting data in general. This would explain why as the databases go on the scores start to look identical as four of the six databases ended up with the same score for the ease of data exportation category.

When looking at the readability category, the two lowest scores stand out. Both Columbus and San Diego were criticized for having small text size. San Diego's color scheme also seemed to be unfavorable. It is clear that when considering readability, the size of the text is extremely important. The lowest scores for that category were given by the two oldest individuals, which would make sense given the likelihood of older individuals suffering from some sort of visual impairment that would cause the issue of small text to be exasperated.

El Paso received the only perfect score for ease of search. Little Rock also received the only single digit score. This however is an outlier as this score was weighed down by the extreme difficulty it took to find the Little Rock database. The database itself was on par with the others when it came to search. Overall, El Paso was clearly the most highly rated database. This is in large part due to its simplicity. The oldest individual only gave a score of five once throughout the entire exercise, and it was for El Paso's ease of search. The simplistic, yet

informative nature of the El Paso database should serve as an example for cities looking to create or improve their own database.

It can be ascertained that the three aspects have a certain level of correlation between the databases. El Paso and Seattle are both given scores in the upper half for all three aspects. Little Rock would also have likely been in a similar situation were it not for the problem of locating the database itself. On the other side, Columbus and Houston both rank in the bottom half of scores for all three aspects. Despite having a limited sample size, it is clear that the relationship a city's database has with one aspect can be predictive of its relationship with the other aspects. This information supports the first hypothesis. I hypothesize that if we were to continue this analysis with more cities that this would remain true.

There is also a relationship between the size of the city and the quality of its database. Houston and Columbus are the second and third largest cities examined. Seattle, El Paso, and Little Rock are the fourth through six largest cities examined, respectively. Originally, I hypothesized that the largest cities would rank the best due to having a greater number of resources to allocate on creating and maintaining a database. However, it is clear here that the smaller cities' databases performed better. This could potentially be attributed to a smaller number of records. Thus, the prediction of the second hypothesis is not supported by this research. Furthermore, I believe that El Paso and Seattle are in the ideal spot regarding size while Little Rock is an example of the downfall of being too small. Despite Little Rock sharing great scores with El Paso and Seattle in two of the categories, its ease of search really suffered. As explained earlier this was due purely to the issue of locating the database. I attribute this to the smaller size of the city and hypothesize that if more cities the size of Little Rock and even smaller are examined that this problem will persist.

The third hypothesis claimed that the cities located in western states would perform better than the other cities. The two cities located in the western part of the United States are Seattle and San Diego. Both of these locations are on the western coast. Neither of these cities performed better than El Paso. Seattle had the second highest score for the Ease of Search category and the third highest for readability. San Diego had the lowest score for readability and the third highest for the other two aspects. While these scores are not terrible, it does not support the initial hypothesis that these cities would perform better than the cities located in non-western states.

The fourth hypothesis was that the cities located in a state currently ran by a democratic governor would perform better. Seattle and San Diego are both located in a state led by a Democrat, the other four cities are all located in a state led by a Republican. This hypothesis ended up grouping the cities in the same way the previous one did. The two cities located in the western part of the United States were also the two cities in a state led by a Democrat. Thus, while receiving good scores, the overall ranking does not support the hypothesis that cities located in a state led by a Democrat will perform better.

The final hypothesis examined was that cities located in the same state would perform similarly. This hypothesis only applies to two of the cities examined. El Paso and Houston are both located in the state of Texas. Despite both cities being located in Texas, their scores are very far apart. El Paso ranks in the top two of every aspect while also being the overall highest scorer. On the other hand, Houston received scores in the bottom half for all three aspects. This evidence does not support the original hypothesis. However, it must be noted that it would require a much larger sample size to be able to truly determine if this holds true across multiple

examples. It would be good to expand this research by adding a second city from the other four states and similarly compare the results.

Readability	Ease of Search	Ease of Data Exportation
Little Rock (24)	El Paso (25)	El Paso (24)
El Paso (23)	Seattle (21)	Little Rock (24)
Seattle (23)	San Diego (20)	San Diego (24)
Houston (20)	Columbus (18)	Seattle (24)
Columbus (16)	Houston (17)	Houston (22)
San Diego (15)	Little Rock (9)	Columbus (21)

## Conclusion

As discussed previously, disclosure in the United States at the municipal level is an area that is yet to be greatly examined. This paper looks to help start discourse around this topic. The next steps to further this discussion given more time and less restraints are clear. I believe that a wider literature review could be conducted to further understand relationships between laws, regulations, aspects of cities, and database quality.

As restraints caused by a global pandemic begin to lift in the future, it would be ideal to greatly expand the number of individuals examining and ranking these databases. I would like to achieve a much wider range of demographics in the individuals. I was also only able to examine six municipalities. While I selected a wide variety to gain a strong understanding of the state of disclosure across United States' municipalities, the next step would be to look at even more cities of varying size, location, and regulations. I also believe that the number of aspects being judged

by each individual could be increased. For example, the aspect “readability” could be broken down into smaller aspects. The size of text and coloring of webpages were common focal points of that category. Both could serve as aspects themselves.

Ultimately campaign finance disclosure requirements do not vary that much between the six cities examined. The differences often appear when one city wishes to take their requirements a step further, such as Houston choosing to go beyond what is required of the city by the state and thus having slightly stricter requirements than El Paso. In the end, the differences in the requirements have no discernable effect on the level of accessibility and clarity when it comes to navigating the databases for information. The three aspects of each database that were examined have the greatest impact on the accessibility and clarity of each database. While all six databases succeed at being a tool of transparency and disclosure, a design soaked in simplicity that helps to guide its users is the most successful. If municipal databases across the country adopt a simplistic, “less is more,” design it should lead to more individuals feeling empowered and knowledgeable about their political system which in turn strengthens our democracy.

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