

In Missouri's Senate race, Democrat Jason Kander's positioning as an outsider has turned Roy Blunt's incumbency into a disadvantage.

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Republican Roy Blunt won Missouri's open Senate seat in 2010 by a wide margin, but is now running neck and neck with his 2016 challenger, Democrat Jason Kander. As part of our [series](#) covering key Senate races in the 2016 election, [Robynn Kuhlmann](#) writes that Kander's anti-establishment campaign which has called for change has turned Blunt's incumbency into a disadvantage.



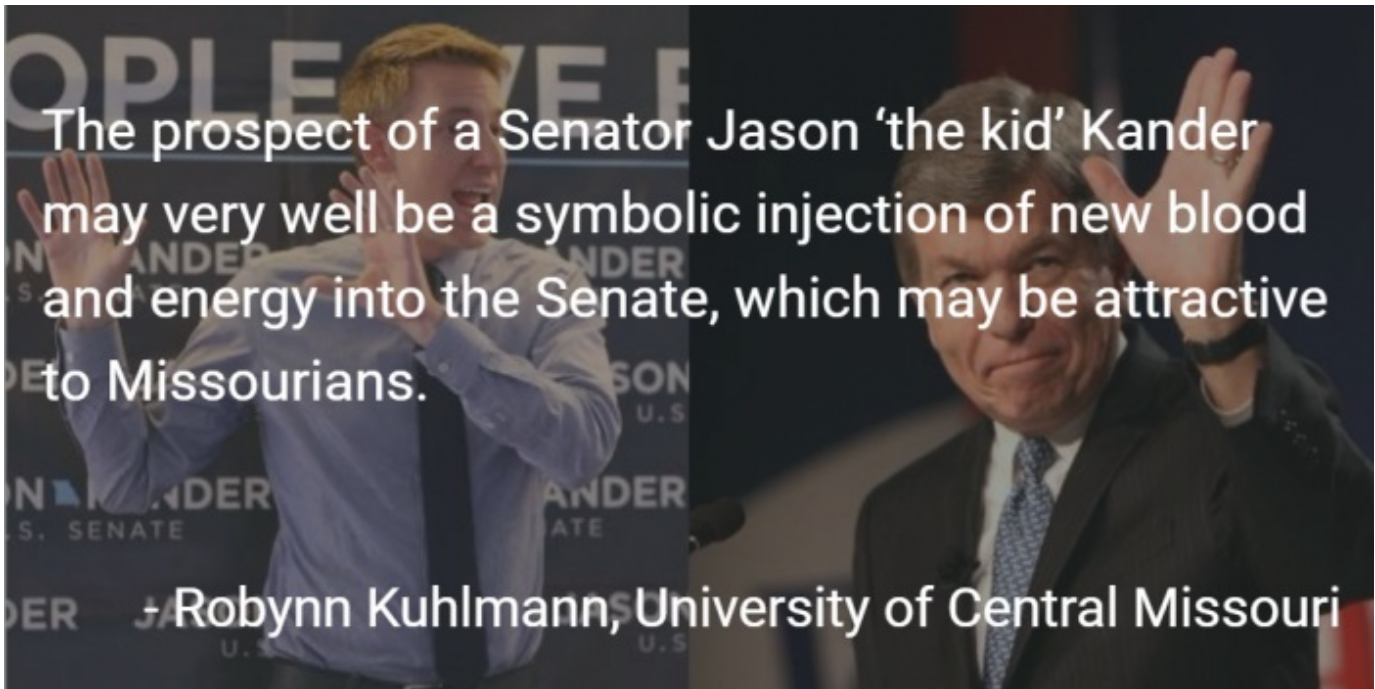
Missouri's Senate race has been riveting. Jason Kander, the Democratic challenger, has given the incumbent Republican Senator Roy Blunt quite the run. In response, Senate Republicans and outside groups have been [injecting money into Blunt's campaign](#) during the final days and weeks of the election as a last ditch effort to capture the lead. Meanwhile, Democrats are pushing forward, shoring up resources for Kander. This race is one of a few that have Democrats hoping for a big win to upset the balance of power in the Senate. The Kander/Blunt showdown is a [virtual tie](#). This is certainly not Blunt's 2010 election. Once considered a '[sleeper race](#)', the race for the Senate now has Blunt's campaign in full throttle.

National Tides are Relevant – but so is State Context

Missouri is currently a state that [favors Trump](#) and had consistently voted Republican in presidential elections since 2000. Despite this trend, Democrat, Jason Kander is a significant contender to incumbent Blunt. This conservative trend at the top of the ticket is also reflected in some of the down-ballot races. Races for Missouri's Republican held veto-proof legislature are highly uncompetitive, sealing the deal for Republicans, and a minority of Democrats in state legislative seats. This illustrates the strong conservative ties of the state, and illuminates the electoral fortunes of redistricting with a strongly divided rural/urban (and suburban) cleavage. To be sure, Missouri has a mixture of both Republicans and Democrats in state-wide and nationally held offices. The [rural/urban cleavage](#) merges electoral outcomes together, modifying the left-right vote. These elections tend to produce a mix of Democrats and Republicans – which can sometimes complicate early projections of safe and competitive seats.

Roy Blunt's 2010 Race was Nowhere Near Marginal

In 2010, Roy Blunt's first conquest for US Senate was a breeze. It was nowhere near competitive. He was very well known and liked. In fact, it was a landslide victory, sealed with a [13.6 percent](#) vote margin. He served as Missouri's Secretary of State in 1984 and as a US house representative from 1996 through 2008. His rather lengthy career in politics gave him a clear incumbency advantage and the ability to claim credit for his achievements. However, what was once an advantage seems to be a disadvantage. Kander is running an [anti-establishment campaign](#) which has been very well articulated in many of his political ads. With the exception of this 2016 race, each political seat Blunt sought had been highly [uncompetitive](#).



Blunt's 2010 run is in stark contrast to the current race he faces. His 2010 opponent, Robin Carnahan, served as the Secretary of State and her father was Governor Mel Carnahan. Political timing was just not right as she entered into a midterm slump during the second year of first term President Barack Obama; an [election year](#) with political conditions ripe for the party out of power. In 2010, 47.7 percent of Missouri's [likely voters](#) believed that the conditions in the country were going 'pretty badly.' 23.8 percent believed they were going 'very badly.' Only 10 percent thought that things were going very well or fairly well. In the same poll, Obama's approval ratings were quite low. The country was reeling from the 2008 recession, and blame for the poor economy shifted to the Democrats who held the presidency and Congress. It was also a midterm election and core Republican voters were invigorated. In 2010, a well-liked and well-known Blunt comfortably sailed into the Senate.

Jason 'the kid' Kander and an Awkward Election for Senator Blunt

Blunt now faces an awkward election. This year's presidential election has brought out those anti-establishment ruminations of 2010, but, from both liberals and conservatives. Blunt has been quite ambiguous in his support or non-support of Donald Trump. Assumedly, he is being strategic. Taking a position may result in losing votes he would otherwise have had if Trump had not been on the ticket. However, his ability to tie Democrat Hillary Clinton to Jason Kander does not seem to be sticking. Interestingly, Kander is not as well-known to Missourians in the first place, yet, Blunt and Kander's [favorability ratings](#) are in a virtual tie.

Jason Kander is a unique candidate who taps right into the mid-section of Missouri culture and politics. He served as Secretary of State for only one term and he has been able to articulate the outsider status. If elected, he would be the youngest member in the Senate at 35. This would stand tall in a Senate which has an [average age](#) of 61. The prospect of a Senator Jason 'the kid' Kander may very well be a symbolic injection of new blood and energy into the Senate, which may be attractive to Missourians. His military career also gives him an edge in a state where military training and veterans are wholeheartedly embraced. He poses as an outsider to DC and is running a candidate-centered campaign, sidestepping away from the branding of the Democratic Party.

Some of Kander's positions on issues also resonate in the Show Me State. A prime example is his ability to embody the states' overall position on gun rights. This is illustrated through his ad that features him explaining expanded background checks while [assembling an AR-15 blindfolded](#). In a state where citizens are affirmatively pro-gun, he hits a chord. [79 percent of Republicans](#) who are likely voters agree with expanded background checks. What may be uncomfortable for Blunt is that only 30 percent of likely voters are aware of his NRA endorsement. Another thorn

in Blunt's side may be his rejection of President Obama's Supreme Court nominees. 60 percent of Independents and 52 percent of Republicans who are likely voters believe that their Senators are taking this position too far. Meanwhile, Kander's message is a very vocal 'we need change' sentiment.

Senator Blunt is able to claim credit for a lot of work he has done as a statesman for Missouri. His lengthy political career has helped him in the past. However, Kander's ability to capture a variety of characteristics that shape Missouri's political climate resonates. Additionally, the electoral mood, the nature of state-wide elections in Missouri, and the energy Kander has put into this race, has created a sure-fired shot of adrenaline.

Featured *image* credit: [Jason Kander Paul Sableman](#) (Flickr, [CC-BY-2.0](#)), [Roy Blunt Gage Skidmore](#) (Flickr, [CC-BY-SA-2.0](#)).

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