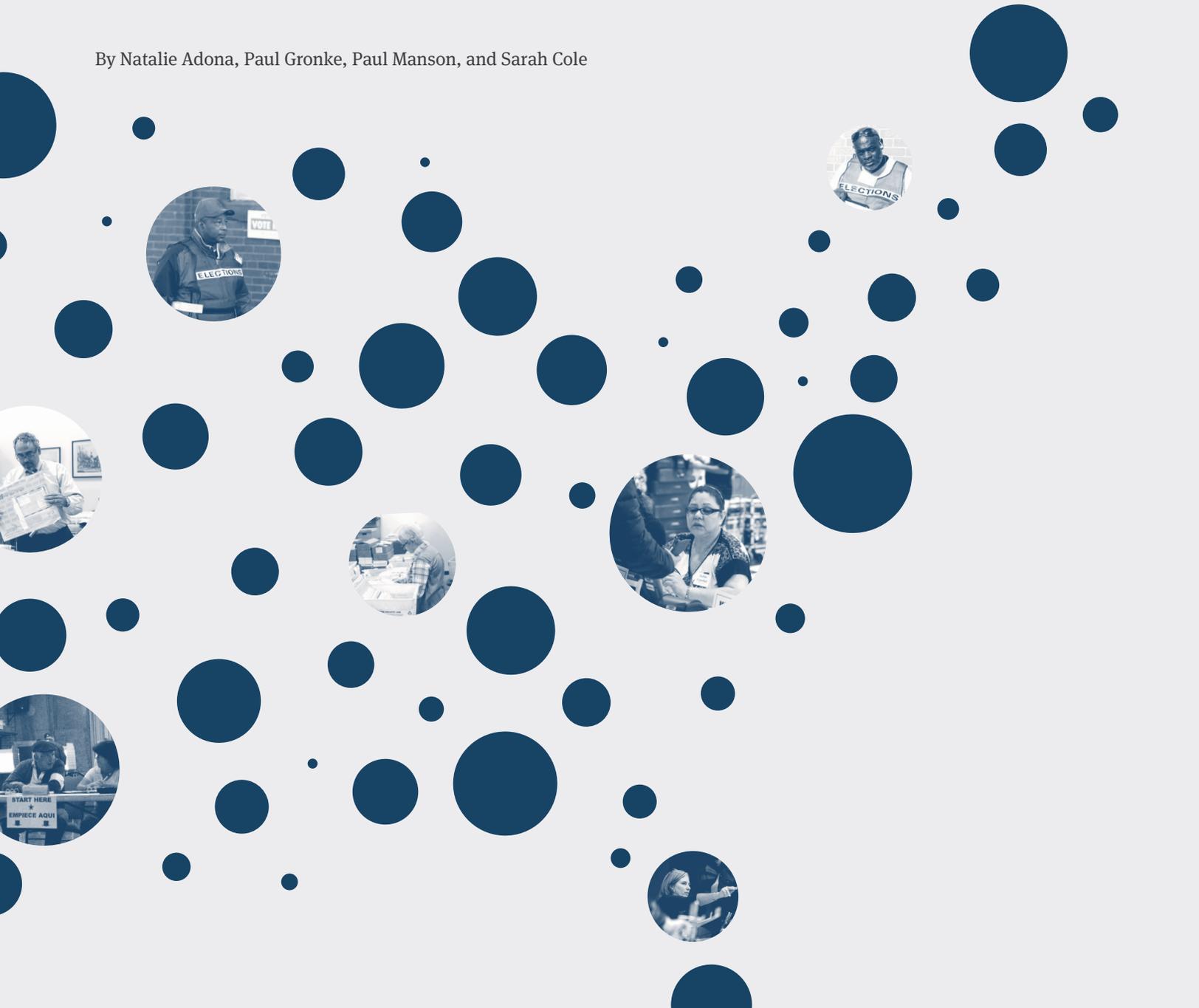


# Stewards of Democracy

## The Views of American Local Election Officials

By Natalie Adona, Paul Gronke, Paul Manson, and Sarah Cole



## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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## ABOUT DEMOCRACY FUND

Democracy Fund invests in organizations working to ensure that our political system is able to withstand new challenges and deliver on its promise to the American people. We work to encourage leaders across the political spectrum to find common ground to help reduce barriers to voting, improve integrity and public trust in the electoral system, and reduce the dependency of our leaders on special financial interests.

For more information, please visit [www.democracyfund.org](http://www.democracyfund.org).

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## ABOUT OUR PHOTOGRAPHS

The photographs used throughout this report were commissioned by Democracy Fund and capture real-world examples of election officials from around the country conducting the business of elections in 2016 and 2018. The use of these photos is intended solely to illustrate how this work is done and should not suggest the subjects' endorsement of the content in this report.

Photos by Ralph Alswang, Seanloui Dumas, Kian McKellar, and Danny Sax.

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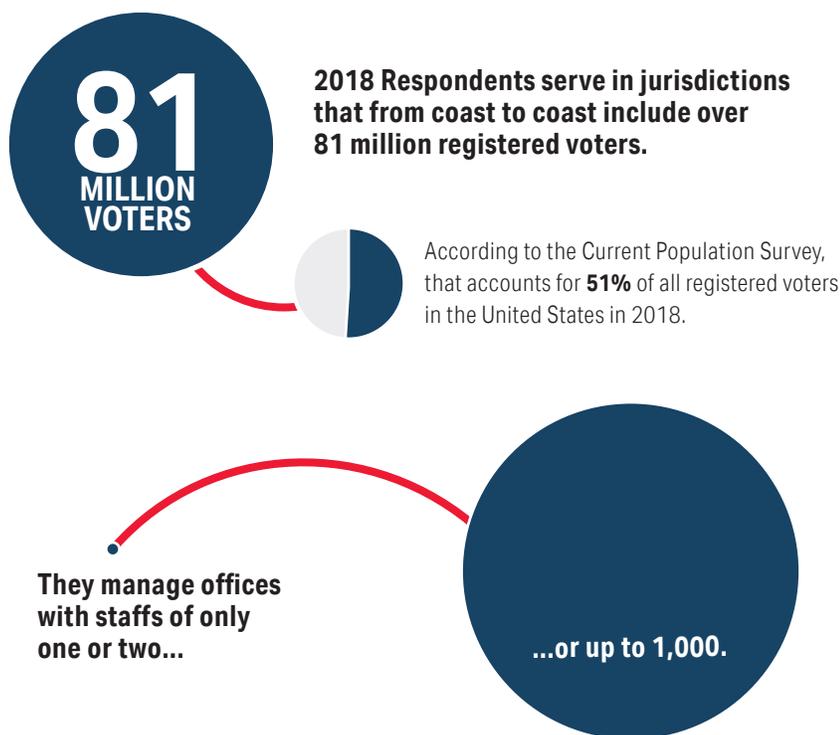
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# Executive Summary

Democracy Fund’s Elections Program supports, among other things, nonprofit organizations that improve elections processes and provide assistance to election officials themselves. As we work with grantees and partners, we are reminded time and again of the important role of local election officials (LEOs). These “stewards of democracy” manage the front line of elections in the United States and are responsible for ensuring fair, free, and secure elections. Despite being recognized as the people who run elections, LEOs are often left out of national conversations about election reform and may not have a seat at the table when important policy decisions are made at the local, state, or federal levels — decisions that LEOs will ultimately implement.

## About the Respondents to the 2018 Survey of Local Election Officials



The Democracy Fund-Reed College 2018 Survey of Local Election Officials (2018 LEO Survey) is part of our effort to create space for LEOs to be heard. Designed to capture the collective experience of LEOs across the country, the 2018 LEO survey solicited opinions about election administration, access, integrity, and reform.

Even in an extraordinary federal midterm election with historically high turnout, 1,071 LEOs from across the country took 10 minutes out of their busy schedules to answer this survey. In all, the respondents who completed the 2018 LEO Survey serve in jurisdictions that include over 81 million registered voters. They manage offices with staffs of one or two in the smallest jurisdictions to over 1,000 employees in the largest (not including poll workers). We are grateful for their participation and are proud to share these findings.

We hope that this report will be the start of an ongoing attempt to elevate LEO voices in efforts to modernize and secure American elections.

## **MEET YOUR LOCAL ELECTION OFFICIAL**

The typical LEO is most likely a white female between 50–64 years of age, making about \$50,000 annually. This trend has not changed much in 15 years and is unique compared to executive-level managers in state and local government. Some demographic trends like gender and education shift somewhat as jurisdiction size increases. Differences in pay and workload vary greatly by jurisdiction size, while patterns in years of service and professional training do not. LEOs in smaller jurisdictions are far more likely to have non-election responsibilities that constitute more than half their workload and earn less than those serving larger jurisdictions.

## **RUNNING THE 2018 ELECTION**

LEOs were prepared for the 2018 midterm election, although many — including LEOs in jurisdictions not covered by Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act — expressed low confidence in obtaining sufficient numbers of bilingual poll workers. While most LEOs took meaningful steps to make their computerized systems more secure from cyber intrusions, significant percentages said that many of the cybersecurity recommendations we listed were not applicable to their situations. LEOs in larger jurisdictions were far more likely to report taking these measures before the 2018 election. LEOs have high confidence in the security of their own state’s voter registration systems but were less confident in the security of voter registration systems across the country. LEOs were also very confident in their own states ability to count ballots as intended but were less confident in vote counts across the nation.

## **VOTER-CENTRIC ELECTIONS: EDUCATION AND OUTREACH**

The majority of LEOs from our survey agreed that, since they first started administering elections, registration and voting have become easier for voters and for election administrators. The LEOs we surveyed overwhelmingly expressed voter-centric attitudes and valued voter education and outreach — the percentage of LEOs endorsing this voter-centric approach has grown by 40 percent over the past decade. LEOs told us, in both closed-ended items and most forcefully in open-ended responses, that resource constraints are a major limitation on their ability to engage and educate voters and to assure a positive voter experience.

## **IMPROVING ELECTIONS USING NEW AND OLD TOOLS**

LEOs widely acknowledged the positive role that technology can play in improving election conduct but may be skeptical of technology put in place too fast. Opinions around “ease” or “difficulty” of online voter registration (OVR) and automatic voter registration (AVR) were strongly conditioned by experience with administering these policies. LEOs articulated, in their own words, the need to increase funding and resources, especially staff and poll workers, new technology, and training. They were sometimes frustrated with legislative changes to elections, especially when those changes occurred without LEO input or the funding needed to implement policies. LEOs expressed support for policy changes like early voting, expansion of no-excuse absentee voting, and all-mail elections.

## **THE BOTTOM LINE**

The bottom line is that all the LEOs we surveyed care deeply about their ability to administer elections in an accessible, efficient, and secure fashion. Respondents in our survey made it clear that they have and will continue to be good stewards of democracy; but, resources, staffing, and coordination between state and local officials are areas of concern.

The results should be interpreted as a snapshot of opinion taken in the midst of a competitive midterm election. We plan to solicit LEO opinions again, at different times, using different lenses. We hope that our efforts encourage conversations and collaboration with LEOs and lead to reforms that best serve the American electorate, providing policymakers with invaluable insight into the makeup of the election administration field and its evolving needs as it hopefully becomes more diverse in the coming years.

Thank you for reading this report. We look forward to your questions and feedback.

### **Sincerely,**

Natalie Adona, Democracy Fund

Paul Gronke, Early Voting Information Center at Reed College

Paul Manson, Early Voting Information Center at Reed College

Sarah Cole, Democracy Fund

# Reflections from a Local Election Official

Local election officials (LEOs) are at the front line of U.S. elections. Yet we are often left out of state or federal election administration debates. I sincerely thank the Democracy Fund and Reed College for their work to bridge this gap by engaging us to learn more about who we are and what we do. Election administration is perhaps one of the professions least understood and most underappreciated by the public, policymakers, and even departments within their own organization. Responsible for managing multiple programs, local election officials must be nimble and skilled in many disciplines, including technology, finance, communications, human resources, customer service, security, and logistics.

Election departments are relatively small – my office includes six full-time staff. Yet as each election day draws nearer, these departments expand to a cadre of temporary election workers and poll workers – frequently larger than the elections department itself. This corps of election workers interacts with more members of the public in a small window of time than any other governmental service and therefore influences voters' perceptions of government – particularly of the state and local levels.

As the Minneapolis Assistant City Clerk and Director of Elections & Voters Services, I know that LEOs are

dedicated to ensuring transparent, accurate, and accessible elections to all, while remaining nonpartisan and often operating under intense scrutiny with limited resources.

It is not uncommon for LEOs to develop new operating procedures or best practices in light of new laws or policy changes – a challenge supported by minimal or nonexistent funding. Implementation also requires great care to ensure that every detail and step within the identified work flow are consistent with election administration laws and understood by the expansive group of poll workers and voters, often with short notice.

This report reflects the desire of LEOs to improve elections and to inform and educate voters. My hope is that our expertise can bring value to the policymakers. LEOs can facilitate the conversation on identifying areas to enhance or potential vulnerabilities. We can bridge the desired policy outcome to effective implementation with the funding required to be successful.

## **Grace Wachlarowicz, CERA**

ASSISTANT CITY CLERK, DIRECTOR OF  
ELECTIONS & VOTER SERVICES  
CITY OF MINNEAPOLIS – OFFICE OF CITY CLERK

# Introduction

Unlike most democracies, which have national election management bodies,<sup>i</sup> the United States has highly decentralized systems. As stewards of democracy, local election officials administer elections in the cities, towns, and counties where voting takes place.<sup>1</sup> They reflect the many threads that make up the “complex quilt”<sup>2</sup> of American election administration. This report focuses on the opinions and perspectives of a local jurisdiction’s chief election official. LEO administrative decisions, which are confined by local, state, and federal laws,<sup>ii</sup> influence nearly every aspect of the voter experience: the location, staff, materials needed for in-person voting, and the design of election materials that contain important instructions for voters.

LEO responsibilities are diverse and demanding. For example, the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) recently identified a non-exhaustive list of **20 competencies** needed for running elections, including election law, voting and tabulation, and project management.<sup>iii</sup> Their duties must be conducted in a professional and nonpartisan manner in every election, but especially in a highly competitive and polarized political environment.<sup>iv</sup>

The American election system has been in a period of nearly constant reform over the past 15 years,<sup>v</sup> with a substantial portion of the LEOs who responded to our survey witnessing multiple waves of reform. In addition to the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA)

and the Military and Overseas Empowerment Act of 2009 (MOVE Act), other changes transformed the way states administer elections, including significant changes to the process of voter registration. Since 2002, 37 states and the District of Columbia have implemented online voter registration (OVR). When Oregon passed automatic voter registration (AVR) in 2015, 17 states and D.C. followed suit.<sup>3</sup> Jurisdictions across the country further improved the voting experience by adopting voter-friendly options like vote centers, vote-by-mail, and other recommendations of the Presidential Commission on Election Administration (PCEA).<sup>4</sup>

Given their importance to democracy, we wanted to know how LEOs navigated these changes

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- i An electoral management body (EMB) is defined by ACE: The Electoral Knowledge Network, as “an organization or body that has the sole purpose of, and is legally responsible for, managing some or all of the elements that are essential for the conduct of elections and direct democracy instruments—such as referendums, citizens’ initiatives and recall votes—if those are part of the legal framework.” ACE: The Electoral Knowledge Network, “Electoral Management,” Accessed May 22, 2019. Available at: <http://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/em/ema/ema08>.
  - ii It is true, of course, that in “top-down” states, local election officials have less autonomy in making decisions. In some states, statute determines things like the time to mail absentee ballots or the hours for early voting. Nonetheless, even when constrained by state law or a state elections office, the local official retains substantial power to implement these laws and rules more or less equitably and efficiently.
  - iii EAC’s chart, which has been presented at several election official conferences and convenings, is available online. “Election Administrator Competencies,” U.S. Election Assistance Commission, Accessed May 22, 2019. Available at: [https://www.eac.gov/assets/1/6/electionofficials\\_wheel.jpg](https://www.eac.gov/assets/1/6/electionofficials_wheel.jpg).
  - iv At the national — and increasingly state and even local — level, the two major political parties have become polarized and elections have become more competitive. See, e.g., Lee Drutman, “Political Divisions in 2016 and Beyond,” Voter Study Group, June 2017, Accessed April 30, 2019. Available at: <https://www.voterstudygroup.org/publication/political-divisions-in-2016-and-beyond>.
  - v See, e.g., Voting Rights Act in 1965, followed by the Uniformed and Overseas Absentee Act of 1986, the National Voter Registration Act of 1993, the Help American Vote Act of 2002, and the Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment Act of 2009. No-excuse absentee balloting, first introduced in California in 1978, is now available in 28 states plus the District of Columbia. Voters can cast an in-person ballot prior to Election Day (variously referred to as “early voting” or “early in-person voting”) in 38 states plus D.C. Finally, three states (Colorado, Oregon, and Washington) conduct all elections using the “vote at home” system with some variations (Colorado uniquely provides for an in-person voting option at vote centers).

to the election system. What are their attitudes about elections modernization, election integrity, and voter engagement, and to what extent have those attitudes changed over time? LEOs can help us understand whether election reforms have improved the voter experience and the experience of administering elections. In addition to the survey findings, this report offers:

- A brief synopsis of the 2018 LEO Survey launch and suggestions on how to interpret the results.
- A description of the basic demographic profile of the American LEO for a glimpse inside the world of local election administration.
- A discussion of our survey findings on election preparedness, including observations on local-level cybersecurity activities and confidence in key aspects of election administration.
- Our findings on voter-centric elections, which cover LEO perspectives on voter access, education, and outreach — and how they think elections can be improved in their own jurisdictions.
- Questions for follow-up research and a detailed appendix of our research methodology.

## Launching the 2018 LEO Survey

Democracy Fund and Reed College launched the 2018 LEO Survey in May 2018 and stopped processing responses in August of the same year with two goals in mind. First, we wanted to better understand LEO views about the roles,

responsibilities, and challenges of election administration. Second, we wanted to create space for LEOs' opinions on matters of national interest around election administration, integrity, and reform. To ensure that our survey met these goals and was scientifically valid, we consulted with several state and local peers, as well as a group of political scientists with experience surveying this population.

The Democracy Fund-Reed College research team wanted to make sure that the survey took no longer than 10 minutes to answer and that the questions themselves would be purely opinion-based (i.e., no “look ups” required). We did this for at least three reasons.

First, we heard from several LEOs that they are less likely to answer a survey requiring them to dig deeply into their databases for information. Because much of the data describing election administration in a locality (e.g., number of registered voters, number of provisional ballots, etc.) is recorded every two years in the Election Administration and Voting Survey (EAVS),<sup>5</sup> we felt no need to duplicate those data.

Second, our schedule for survey administration overlapped with state primary election calendars, so we set a strict limit on the length of the questionnaire.

Third, we hoped to provide an educational opportunity for policy experts, researchers, advocates, and others seeking to learn more about LEO perspectives on elections and voting. By our estimation, these data offer helpful supplemental information not easily found anywhere else.

The survey focused on the following topics (some of which, for purposes of comparison, repeated topics from previous surveys):

- Length of service and prior experience running elections
- How election administration has changed over their time of service
- “Voter-centric” attitudes about election administration
- Preparedness for the 2018 election
- Evaluation of the costs and benefits of new election technology
- Cybersecurity measures implemented in their jurisdiction
- Demographics (age, educational level, race, gender, income)

We distributed the questionnaire to a randomly selected sample of 3,000 LEOs and worked with some of the most respected voices in election administration to draw attention to the survey. Ultimately, over 1,000 LEOs took the time to answer, both online and on paper. Responses were staggered to accommodate primary schedules, and the vast majority of responses came in over a six-week period. More detail about survey administration and response rates can be found in our methodology section.

## Interpreting Our Results

Our results are presented unweighted and, where appropriate, supplemented by comparisons across jurisdiction size. Even though some election processes across the country are similar, we caution against making broad generalizations about

LEOs, particularly between those who administer elections in different sized jurisdictions — even when they are in the same state. As in similar studies, we saw some differences emerge when we examined the results by jurisdiction size.

**Table 1** helps to provide a sense of the distribution of local election jurisdictions in our population.<sup>vi</sup> Depending on how you count, there are between 7,858<sup>6</sup> and 10,370<sup>7</sup> local election jurisdictions across the country. The average number of registered voters in a local jurisdiction in the United States is 28,170, and the median number of registered voters is 3,193. However, the range of registered voters is quite wide, with some election jurisdictions serving as few as 100 voters and others serving millions. This range suggests the inherent challenge of making sweeping conclusions about election administration and election administrators in the United States.<sup>vii</sup>

Jurisdiction size is a critical variable that impacts nearly every result in our report. We consulted with several scholars who have done similar research about jurisdiction size, which we base on the number of registered voters the LEO serves. David Kimball and Brady Baybeck, leading academic experts on American election administration, have observed that “[l]ess than 6 percent of the local election officials in the United States serve more than two-thirds of the voters in a national

election.”<sup>8</sup> We wanted to make our survey sample representative of LEOs and nationally representative of service provision to voters.

We define five categories of jurisdiction sizes, from the smallest to the largest. The “smallest” jurisdictions are led by LEOs who serve 5,000 and fewer registered voters. The LEOs in “smaller” jurisdictions serve between 5,001–25,000 registered voters. At times, we will refer to both of these categories of jurisdictions as “small.” We define “medium” sized jurisdictions as serving between 25,001–100,000 registered voters. The “larger”

jurisdictions serve 100,001–250,000 registered voters, and the “largest” serve over 250,000 registered voters. We sometimes refer to these last two categories as “large.”

Past research and our report show that the size of jurisdictions may be the most important variable to help us understand differences in the voter experience and the professional position and job environment of the local official. Legal and policy reforms have to take these differences into account. We encourage our readers to pay close attention to jurisdiction size breakdowns.

TABLE 1

## National sample designed to represent diversity of LEO perspectives.

JURISDICTION SIZE	PERCENT OF LEOS	PERCENT OF VOTERS	SAMPLE	PERCENT OF RESPONSES
Smallest (0 to 5,000)	57%	3%	30%	27% (↓3%)
Smaller (5,001 to 25,000)	27%	12%	28%	28% (=)
Medium (25,001 to 100,000)	11%	19%	29%	30% (↑1%)
Larger (100,001 to 250,000)	3%	16%	8%	9% (↑1%)
Largest (> 250,000)	2%	51%	5%	6% (↑1%)

vi Please note that we include only the 7,902 jurisdictions for which we have adequate contact information for the local election official.

vii The different totals occur because in some states, there are sub-jurisdictions within the jurisdiction that have responsibility for some, but not all, aspects of election administration. Some studies consider these sub-jurisdictional units as the basic unit of analysis. Kimball Brace, “Basic Election Administration: A Summary of Findings,” Election Data Services, Inc., February 2013, Accessed May 22, 2019. Available at: <http://grouper.ieee.org/groups/1622/WorkingDocuments/meeting-2013-02-NIST/Basic%20Election%20Administration.pptx>.

# Meet Your Local Election Official

Understanding who actually runs elections is an important first step in understanding LEO viewpoints on elections and voting. We start with a professional and demographic profile of the typical LEO and offer some insights into what these data tell us about the work environment of the professional election administrator. LEOs are a largely homogenous group in terms of race, gender, and age, with key differences in some trends when the data are broken down by jurisdiction size. Large numbers of LEOs have non-election related responsibilities, receive ongoing training from their states, have diverse educational backgrounds, and experience large variations in pay.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The typical LEO is a white female between 50–64 years of age, making about \$50,000 annually. This trend has not changed much in 15 years and is unique compared to executive-level managers in state and local government. Some demographic trends like gender and education shift somewhat as jurisdiction size increases.
- Differences in LEO pay and workload vary greatly by jurisdiction size, while patterns in years in service and professional training do not. LEOs in smaller jurisdictions are far more likely to have non-election responsibilities that constitute more than half their workload and earn less than those serving larger jurisdictions.

## A Snapshot of the LEO's Profession

We wanted to know more about the professional world that LEOs occupy. We did so by asking LEOs about their workload, years in service, pay, and professional training.<sup>viii</sup> We find that workload and compensation vary greatly by jurisdiction size, while patterns in years in service and professional training do not (the latter finding is a bit surprising given that LEOs in smaller jurisdictions tend to be older). The likelihood that a LEO will have non-election responsibilities decreases as jurisdiction size increases. Most LEOs have significant years of experience, and many are members of state and regional professional associations.

## WORKLOAD

To learn more about their professional responsibilities, we asked LEOs how much of their time is dedicated to elections. There is substantial variation among respondents, with many responsible for non-election related tasks.

- “Election-related matters constitute all or almost all of my workload.” (33 percent)
- “Election-related matters constitute the majority of my workload, but I have other duties not related to elections as well.” (26 percent)
- “Election-related matters constitute less than half of my workload.” (40 percent)

We note important differences by jurisdiction size, with an increase

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viii We did not include data on which of our LEOs were elected versus appointed in the 2018 LEO Survey.

"I am a County Clerk, I have many responsibilities other than elections. I also contract with other entities for their elections, so especially in even years, I feel like I am constantly doing elections and my regular duties as a county clerk suffer. We are a small county and I have one person in my office dedicated to elections, so it is usually just the two of us... I honestly wish that it would be mandatory to have an Election Administrator, someone that does only elections and voter registration."

in non-election responsibilities as jurisdiction size decreases. For those with varied workloads, these essential, non-election related tasks could include maintaining vital or business records and court filings. Seventy-nine percent of LEOs from the smallest jurisdictions reported that elections constitute less than half of their workload. Conversely, 77 percent of LEOs from the largest jurisdictions reported that elections constitute all or almost all of their work. These data provide a starting point for better understanding of the weight of responsibilities of the LEO and the balance that must be struck in every election.

### **YEARS IN SERVICE**

Most LEOs responding to our survey said they have substantial on-the-job experience with elections. Forty percent have served between five and 14 years, and another 41 percent have served over 15 years, which means that they likely remember how elections were run before the implementation of HAVA.

Unlike many of our findings, there is little variation around years in service across differently sized jurisdictions. This gives us

confidence that we are engaged with a group of experts who have informed opinions about elections and voting. They are uniquely positioned to give us their perspectives about changes in election administration over time and the challenges of election administration, which we discuss in more detail later.

### **PAY**

There is a wide range of pay among LEOs. Our survey data show that average pay rises as jurisdiction size increases. Just over 45 percent of LEOs from jurisdictions of 5,000 or fewer registered voters reported that they are paid less than \$35,000, with over a quarter earning less than \$20,000. This pattern shifts radically as jurisdictions get larger. For example, only 4 percent are paid less than \$35,000 for jurisdictions of 25,000–100,000 registered voters. For jurisdictions with over 100,000 registered voters, almost all LEOs (around 97 percent) reported their pay above \$50,000.

It is important to acknowledge that these salary figures come from self-reports from the chief election officers in our survey and that

there could be further differences depending on whether the LEO was elected or appointed, or other factors not incorporated into our results. It also strikes us that the public's expectations of LEOs are the same, regardless of their workload or the number of voters they serve. We believe there is space for more research on the relationship between jurisdiction size, pay, and hiring decisions, and some discussion on this topic is provided below.

"Elections must be in your blood, you either love it or hate it. It's a unique job, with crazy hours. Only those who love it stay with it."

### **PROFESSIONAL TRAINING**

Most LEOs reported receiving initial and ongoing professional training. Over 76 percent reported that they attended professional training when they were hired.

Ninety-three percent of LEOs reported receiving ongoing training. LEOs from larger jurisdictions were less likely to have received initial training when they took their position.

Some officials summarized their professional training as “on the job” in terms of the particular rules of their jurisdictions. More research is needed to get a full picture of professional training — in this case, specifically whether differences in training requirements are driven by experience or some other factor (e.g., being elected or appointed).<sup>ix</sup>

LEOs nonetheless indicated that they are highly satisfied with their training. Sixty-four percent of LEOs from our survey classified their initial training as “extremely” or “very” effective. Over 78 percent said that their ongoing training was “extremely” or “very” effective.

We note some important points outside of our survey instrument that might add further context — including the following.

- First, other research we have conducted<sup>9</sup> suggests that these LEOs are most likely trained by state officials at least annually, if not more often. At these state-level trainings, the materials are mostly focused on procedural applications of the law, with some states incorporating tools and best practices.
- Second, several states and professional associations offer certificate programs, some of which require the LEO to renew or maintain a certificate with continuing education credits. In the 2018 LEO Survey, we found that 65 percent of LEOs are members of a state professional association, and about 24 percent are members of regional associations. Some of these programs are offered through state partnerships with universities and with Election Center.<sup>10</sup> Many of these programs assume that LEOs have experience and might require it in order to attend training.
- Third, our informal conversations with LEOs indicate that some small jurisdictions have had difficulty receiving training, particularly if the LEO has a limited travel budget and is not located near where training takes place. This is an area where states and professional organizations can be especially impactful.

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ix A 2009 survey of Wisconsin LEOs conducted by scholars at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the Ohio State University may provide some insight for the differences in training. These scholars found that officials in Wisconsin townships and villages were more likely to be elected (67–73 percent), while those in cities were appointed (63 percent). While we have not yet compared our sample responses by the selection method, it’s possible that the pattern observed in Wisconsin is reflected nationwide, and that the chief election officer in larger jurisdictions is more likely to have moved up the ranks (and thus not have needed training *when taking over as chief official*), while more LEOs in small jurisdictions were elected and thus were new to the world of election administration. See Barry C. Burden, David T. Canon, Stephanie Lavertu, Kenneth R. Mayer, and Donald P. Moynihan, “Selection Method, Partisanship and the Administration of Elections,” *American Politics Research*, Vol. 41, No. 6, pp. 903–936, Print. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X12472365>.

## The Demographic Profile of LEOs

The typical LEO is female (77 percent of our sample), white (95 percent), and 50 years of age or older (70 percent).<sup>x</sup> Many have a college education (55 percent), and some hold graduate degrees (14 percent).

These summary characteristics have to be interpreted with an understanding that there are far more small-sized jurisdictions. Fifty-seven percent of all LEOs nationwide, and 27 percent of our respondents, serve in jurisdictions with less than 5,000 registered voters. Another 27 percent of LEOs (and 28 percent of our respondents) are in jurisdictions with between 5,000 and 25,000 registered voters. Furthermore, we asked our respondents about their

own demographic profile and not that of their employees. **Figure 1** breaks down differences in LEOs’ demographic profiles by jurisdiction size. As jurisdiction size increases, LEOs are much more likely to be male, be younger than 50, have a college or advanced degree, and earn higher salaries.

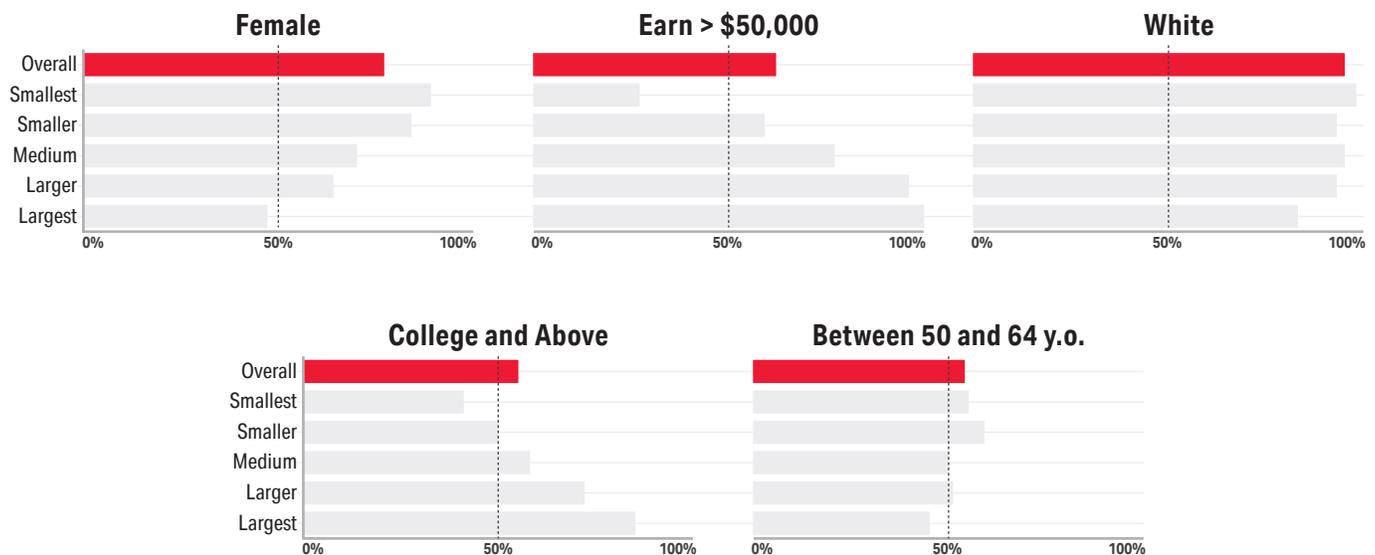
For instance, 53 percent of the LEOs in our sample who serve in the jurisdictions with more than 250,000 registered voters are male — five times as many as in the smallest jurisdictions. Forty-two percent of LEOs in the largest jurisdictions are under 50, compared to just 29 percent of LEOs in the smallest jurisdictions. Nearly all in the largest jurisdictions have a college degree, with 44 percent telling us they have graduate school training, compared to 20 percent of those in the smallest.

LEOs’ demographic profiles and differences by jurisdiction size have not changed much over the past 15 years and perhaps longer. (We are unaware of results prior to 2004.) Data in Congressional Research Service studies from 2005, 2007, and 2009 found a very similar profile:

*“According to the survey results, the typical LEO is a white woman between 50 and 60 years old who is a high school graduate. She was elected to her current office, works full-time in election administration, has been in the profession for about 10 years, and earns under \$60,000 per year. She belongs to a state-level professional organization but not a national one, and she believes that her training as an election official has been good to excellent.”<sup>11</sup>*

FIGURE 1

### The typical LEO is female, white, over 50, and a college graduate.



<sup>x</sup> Our analysis removes those who chose not to answer or who responded with “I prefer not to answer.” When those answers are included, 86 percent of our survey respondents identify as white.

Our survey, conducted a decade later, reflects a very similar measure of distinctiveness among LEOs. In one respect, the LEO workforce is not that different from the typical local workforce, estimated to be 61 percent female at the city/county level.<sup>12</sup> In terms of race, non-whites made up a small percentage of governmental employees and were more likely to hold administrative support roles. According to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), “Officials and Administrators” were 77 percent white and “Administrative Support” employees were 62 percent white, with more racially diverse workforces in some states and regions.<sup>xi</sup>

When we look closer at gender and pay data from EEOC, the LEO community appears unique compared to other executive-level managers. The gender and pay trends more closely mimic trends among the country’s state and local employees who provide basic administrative support. EEOC state and local government employment statistics from 2015 indicate that officials and administrators were more likely to be men (58 percent male), while administrative support workers leaned heavily female

(81 percent female). On average, LEOs are paid much less than the EEOC-reported figures for executive department heads.

The median salary for officials and administrators is over \$70,000, while the median salary for administrative support positions is just under \$50,000.<sup>13</sup> While our survey (and the population of LEOs) includes a larger number of administrators running very small offices, these results raise the possibility that LEOs – and by implication elections – are viewed differently than executive-level managers heading other governmental services.

We highlight these facts for two reasons. First, to add to the important discussions already taking place around gender, pay, and racial inequities in government hiring. Gender and pay dynamics in state and local government employment have not changed dramatically since at least 2000.<sup>xii</sup> Second, we hope to open up a conversation about the unique place that LEOs occupy in our government and to suggest that there is value in talking about representation and equity among leaders who act as all-important stewards of our democracy.

There is much we do not know. Our survey did not ask for the demographic profile of the LEO’s staff—only the respondent’s own demographic characteristics. We also did not ask LEOs to share their values around diversity, equity, and inclusion. Furthermore, we do not have any information about whether election administration serves as a path to other administrative offices or higher elected office. And while reliable data are hard to find, women tend to occupy leadership positions far less frequently in local governments,<sup>14</sup> so perhaps we should be encouraged to find that LEOs in many jurisdictions are female. Nevertheless, we are less than encouraged that females are tapped less frequently in larger jurisdictions, where election-related responsibilities and compensation are, according to our results, greater. We believe that election officials may want to pay close attention to these statistics, in terms of their hiring decisions and how they chose to engage their electorate. This is an important topic, and we encourage further research on it.

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xi According to the EEOC, “Officials and Administrators” are described as “Occupations in which employees set broad policies, exercise overall responsibility for execution of these policies, or direct individual departments or special phases of the agency’s operations, or provide specialized consultation on a regional, district or area basis.” For more on EEOC job classifications and a list of relevant titles, see “Form 164, State and Local Government Information (EEO-4) Instruction Booklet,” Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Accessed May 22, 2019. Available at: <https://www.eeoc.gov/employers/eo4survey/e4instruct.cfm>.

xii According to the EEOC in 2000, chief executives were overwhelmingly male (81 percent, compared to just 19 percent of females). Among those chief executives, men were 25 percentage points more likely to have a salary of \$125,000 and above. The number of female employees increases as you go further down the bureaucratic hierarchy. For example, administrative service managers in 2000 were 40 percent female, while first-line supervisors and managers were 68 percent female and administrative support positions were 73 percent female. We saw similar trends when the 2000 EEOC data were categorized by state and local occupation groups. Males were more likely to be officials and managers in state and local government jobs (61 percent), compared to females (39 percent). Once again, females were more likely to hold administrative support roles (69 percent, compared to 31 percent of males). See, generally, “Census 2000 EEO Data Tool,” U.S. Census Bureau, Accessed May 22, 2019. Available at: <https://www.census.gov/eo2000/index.html>. See also Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, “Job Patterns for Minorities and Women in State and Local Government (EEO-4).”

# Running the 2018 Election

Preparing for any election requires extensive planning well in advance of the first day of voting. There must be enough polling places, poll workers to serve people, an accurate roster of qualified voters, ballots and equipment to cast votes on, and staff who are prepared to adapt at a moment's notice. Preparations must be carried out securely and with utmost integrity to ensure that eligible voters are able to cast ballots privately and independently and have a pleasant voter experience. We asked LEOs an extensive battery of questions about their level of preparedness, in terms of resources, staff, and other critical elements of the election process.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- LEOs were prepared for the 2018 midterm election, although many — including LEOs in jurisdictions not covered by Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act — expressed low confidence in obtaining sufficient numbers of bilingual poll workers.
- While most LEOs took meaningful steps to make their computerized systems more secure from cyber intrusions in 2018, significant percentages said that many of the cybersecurity recommendations we listed were not applicable to their situations. LEOs in larger jurisdictions were far more likely to report taking these cybersecurity measures before the 2018 election.
- LEOs had high confidence in the security of their own state's voter registration systems and ability to count ballots as intended, but were less confident in the security of voter registration systems and vote counts across the country.

Cybersecurity was one issue that received a lot of attention in 2018. Recent controversy surrounding voter registration systems and foreign interference in American elections elevated worries about election-system security, leaving many wondering whether states and localities were doing enough to address known problems and prepare for unknown threats.<sup>15</sup> The resources needed to address cybersecurity issues were helped, in part, by an infusion of congressional funding<sup>16</sup> and by organizations that stepped up to support state election officials.<sup>17</sup> Many of these activities were focused at the state level, but we wanted to get a glimpse into cybersecurity at the local level. What steps did LEOs take around cybersecurity activities in 2018, particularly as they juggled their other elections responsibilities? We also wanted to see the extent of their confidence in state voter registration and ballot-counting systems.

Overall, LEOs reported that they were prepared for the 2018 midterm election. However, many expressed frustration at a lack of resources and concern about their ability to obtain a sufficient number of bilingual poll workers. Many indicated that they took meaningful steps to make their computerized systems more secure in 2018; however, significant percentages said that some of the cybersecurity steps we asked about were “not applicable” to their situations, especially LEOs from small jurisdictions.

LEOs expressed high confidence in the security of their own state's voter registration systems but were less confident in the security of voter registration across the country. Mirroring public opinion, LEOs expressed high confidence in their state's ability to count ballots as intended but were less confident in vote counts across the nation.

## 2018 Election Preparedness

Because of the importance of the 2018 midterm, we wanted to know how prepared LEOs felt going into the general election. We asked LEOs whether they believed they had the financial resources to obtain a sufficient number of poll workers (including bilingual poll workers), physical polling places, and accessible voting machines. We also wanted to know whether or not LEOs thought that the poll workers in their jurisdictions would have the knowledge and skills to do their jobs effectively.

Finally, we wondered whether they felt that their jurisdictions would have adequate staff and time to enter new voter registrations and whether they thought they had received sufficient guidance from state and/or federal authorities regarding election security. While not a comprehensive list of items that LEOs need to check off to prepare for a competitive

federal election, we hoped that the questions would provide insights into the financial, staffing, and infrastructure challenges that LEOs may face.

First, the good news: 94 percent of LEOs we surveyed, no matter the size of the jurisdiction, reported that they were confident that they had adequate time and staffing to process voter registrations and that their poll workers would have the “knowledge and skills required” to do their jobs.

There are, however, some areas of concern around preparedness. Some LEOs expressed a notable lack of confidence about obtaining sufficient bilingual poll workers.

Just over one-third (36 percent) of all LEOs answered that they were “very confident” or “confident” about finding a sufficient number of bilingual poll workers, while 64 percent said that they were “somewhat” or “not at all confident.” When the data are broken down by jurisdiction, we find that confidence

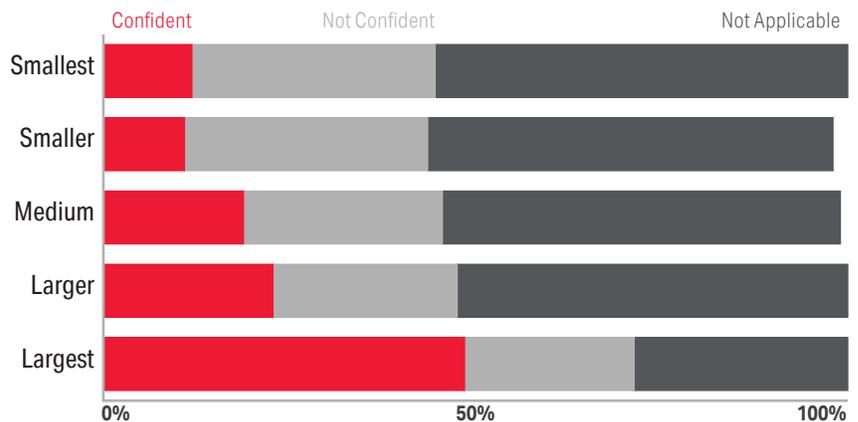
increases with jurisdiction size, with LEOs in the larger and largest jurisdictions expressing far more confidence than their peers.

More than half of the LEOs who completed our survey said that this question was “not applicable” to their situation. We took a deep dive into these numbers, categorizing our sampled jurisdictions by whether they are covered under Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.<sup>18</sup> We expected that a jurisdiction that is covered under Section 203 would choose to answer this question. However, some non-covered jurisdictions answered as well, even though they could have chosen “not applicable.”

Regardless of coverage, many LEOs proactively choose to provide language assistance in a spirit of voter-centric election administration, due to significant numbers of voters who need language assistance, even if the federal law technically does not require it.

FIGURE 2

### Small jurisdictions were less likely to be confident in finding bilingual poll workers.



Among the covered jurisdictions, 94 percent chose to answer the question. This response provides some indirect validation of the care and attention that LEOs gave to our survey. Sixty-eight percent of the LEOs in these covered jurisdictions told us that they were “very confident” or “confident” about obtaining bilingual poll workers. These results are consistent with our understanding of how language-access laws have been administered: Covered jurisdictions will ideally have put in place procedures and established relationships to meet their legal requirements.

The non-covered jurisdictions are a different and interesting group. Forty-two percent of the non-covered jurisdictions answered (i.e., did not choose “not applicable”), and among them, only 28 percent said they were “very confident” or “confident” about obtaining sufficient bilingual poll workers. We hope to learn more about the efforts of LEOs in non-covered jurisdictions who conducted voter outreach to language minorities, especially since LEOs expressed resource and time constraints throughout our survey.

In jurisdictions (covered or not) concerned about finding enough bilingual poll workers, state laws and budgetary constraints might make bilingual poll worker recruitment difficult. States with relaxed rules around who can serve as poll

workers may be better situated to meet staffing needs, especially in jurisdictions with strong high school and college poll worker programs. But poll worker qualifications like citizenship, residency, registration, or even party affiliation requirements can potentially disqualify permanent residents, community leaders, students, and independent-affiliating or “decline-to-state” voters from serving. Furthermore, some localities might not have the budget to conduct effective bilingual poll worker outreach — one of the many time- and resource-intensive activities LEOs must undertake to meet the needs of their voters.

## Meeting the Challenges of Cybersecurity

Though an issue in any modern-day election, cybersecurity was an area of heightened concern in 2018. We developed a new set of questions on cybersecurity, based on some of the most commonly cited best practice recommendations made available by several authorities on the topic, including the Center for Internet Security (CIS), the Belfer Center, the EAC, and National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST).<sup>xiii</sup> We asked LEOs if they took or planned to take recommended steps to strengthen election cybersecurity in their jurisdictions prior to the

2018 election, or whether such steps were “not applicable” to their situation. Our list provided nine cybersecurity tasks in this battery of questions, including whether LEOs require multifactor authentication, conduct criminal background checks of vendors and staff, or audit their systems for potential vulnerabilities.

Many LEOs reported that they either took or would take before the 2018 election meaningful steps to ensure that the computerized processes necessary to plan an election were secure. However, significant percentages of the surveyed LEOs answered that these steps were “not applicable” to their situations.

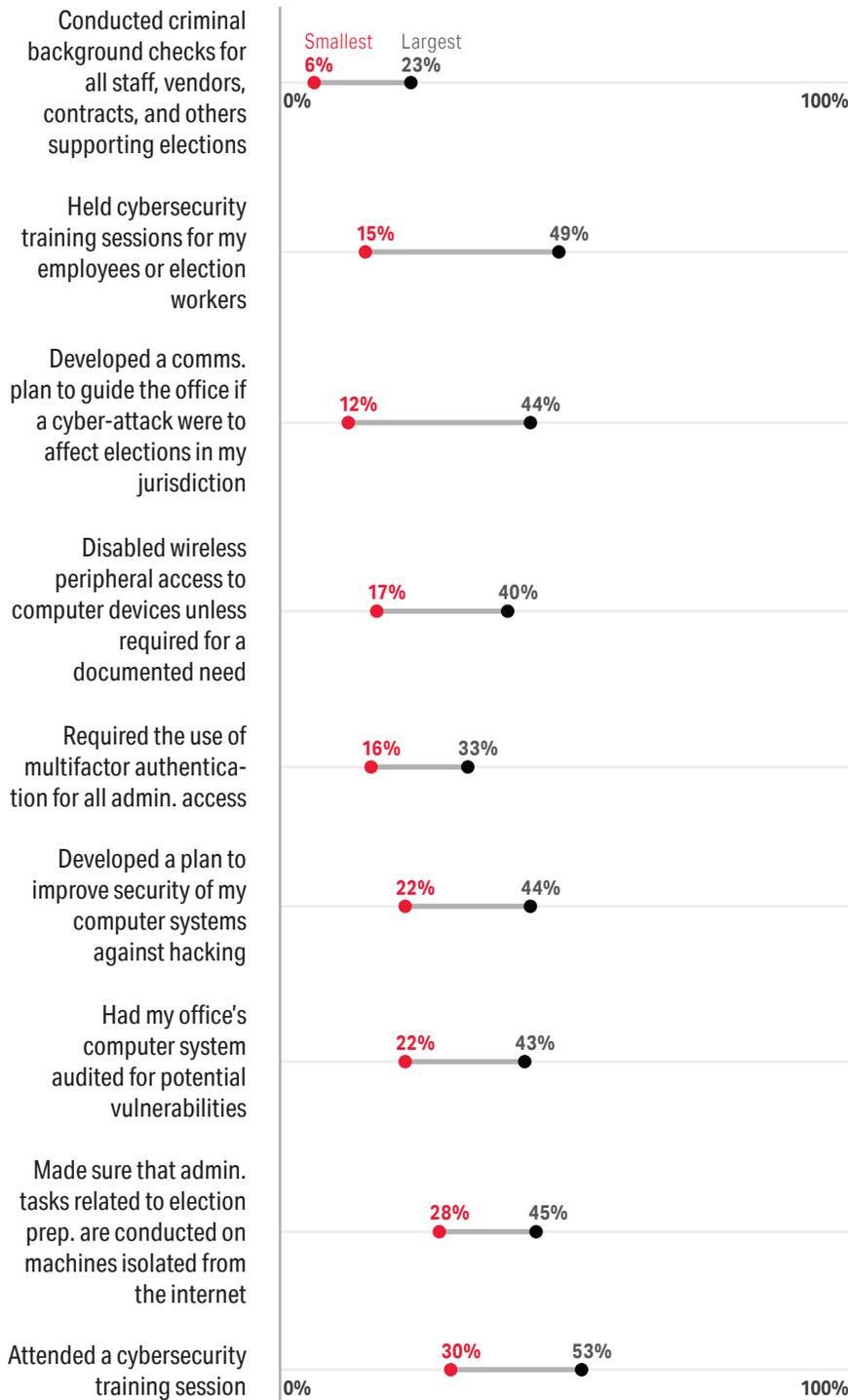
When the data are further broken down by jurisdiction size, we find that the larger the jurisdiction, the more likely it is that the LEO took steps to insulate their computerized systems from harm. As jurisdictions get larger, LEOs indicated that they have the capabilities, resources, and familiarity to handle new technology. Between 75–90 percent of LEOs in large jurisdictions reported that they had completed, or planned to complete, most of the cybersecurity recommendations we identified, compared to 25–56 percent of small jurisdictions. Seventy-nine percent of LEOs in large jurisdictions reported that they either had or would have their offices’ computer system audited for potential vulnerabilities prior to the November 2018 election.

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xiii Special thanks to Professor Stewart of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the MIT Election Data and Science Lab and Tammy Patrick for their advice as the Reed team wrote the cybersecurity battery of questions. Based on all of the recommendations that have been made on elections cybersecurity, we narrowed down the list to those recommendations that have been mentioned the most often. For the recommendations and associated documents underpinning those questions, see the Handbook for Elections Infrastructure Security (footnote 33), the Belfer Center Cybersecurity Playbook (footnote 33), “Framework for Improving Critical Infrastructure Cybersecurity,” National Institute of Standards and Technology, Version 1.1, Accessed May 28, 2019. Available at <https://nvlpubs.nist.gov/nistpubs/CSWP/NIST.CSWP.04162018.pdf>; and “Election Security Preparedness,” U.S. Election Assistance Commission, Accessed May 22, 2019. Available at: <https://www.eac.gov/election-officials/election-security-preparedness/>.

FIGURE 3

## Small jurisdictions are not getting the support they need to complete key cybersecurity tasks.



This percentage is 47 points higher than LEOs serving in small jurisdictions. Fifty-five percent of LEOs in large jurisdictions reported that they either had or would conduct criminal background checks for all staff, vendors, contractors, and others supporting elections, while 15 percent of LEOs in small jurisdictions reported the same.

We urge caution when interpreting the results, especially as they relate to small jurisdictions. We do not yet understand why LEOs chose “not applicable.” We have discussed these items in briefing sessions with selected LEOs and carefully examined the patterns of responses. A “not applicable” answer may indicate that either we did not word the question properly (e.g., it is possible that some of these activities occurred outside of the time frame we asked about) or we asked the wrong person about elections cybersecurity. If another person or department is actually responsible for appropriate security measures, then choosing “not applicable” might be the appropriate response. Some of the small jurisdictions participating in our survey are in states where election responsibilities are shared between county and sub-county officials; many of these states place cybersecurity responsibilities on the county IT office. It may also be the case that primary responsibility rests with the state.

As this brand-new set of questions evolves, we will do more to understand where responsibility for election cybersecurity lies. We also hope to gain a better understanding of the extent to which LEOs’ day-to-day planning and activities had to change as a result of increased cybersecurity concerns.

Despite these limitations, we think our data show that there are opportunities to provide LEOs with further training and resources. Several organizations, many of which are Democracy Fund grantees, have produced useful guidelines, recommendations, and checklists that were tested by election officials and are publicly available at no cost. Furthermore, groups have stepped forward to provide cybersecurity training, including seminars designed specifically for local officials and statewide tabletop exercises to help officials strategize around multiple scenarios — all important tasks that every LEO ought to know about.<sup>xiv</sup> Our results might also demonstrate a communication gap, indicating state and federal officials should increase communication with local jurisdictions to reinforce the message that they are there to provide solutions and help solve problems. We hope that increased awareness and education will prompt LEOs to join the Elections Infrastructure Information Sharing and Analysis Center (EI-ISAC), which is free and offers several cybersecurity benefits for its members.<sup>19</sup>

## Confidence in Voter Registration List Security and Vote Counts

The American election system has experienced serious stress over the past two election cycles. Some stories challenged the integrity of American elections, including reports of improper use of personal data for political purposes (i.e., Facebook-Cambridge Analytica scandal),<sup>20</sup> use of social media to sow political division, unintentional spreading of misinformation about elections, and actual cyber threats to elections, specifically voter registration systems.<sup>xv</sup>

In 2016, there were attempts by malicious actors to break into statewide voter registration systems,<sup>21</sup> including the vendors that provide voter registration services. A recent joint intelligence bulletin issued by the Department of Homeland Security and the FBI said that all 50 states were subject to some level of “reconnaissance and hacking attempts.”<sup>22</sup> Fortunately, most of these incidents were just virtual knocks on the door rather

than successful cyber intrusions;<sup>23</sup> however, they raised questions about how election officials at all levels were navigating these controversies.

We asked a set of questions about LEOs’ confidence in two areas: whether votes would be accurately counted as intended in their state and nationally, and how confident they were in the security of voter registration systems in their state and across the nation. The first set of questions mirror the well-known “voter confidence” questions that are regularly included in many public opinion surveys;<sup>xvi</sup> the second set were newly created for our survey. To our knowledge, this is the first time that parallel questions about voter confidence have been asked of election officials and the general public.<sup>xvii</sup>

What we found was revealing. As expected, confidence in their state’s ability to count votes as intended was very high. Ninety-four percent said they agreed strongly or somewhat strongly that votes in their state would be counted as intended. When asked about confidence in the security of their state’s voter registration lists, 80 percent agreed that their state’s voter registration

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xiv Some examples of tools and best practices that are available include the Belfer Center Cybersecurity Playbook (<https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/state-and-local-election-cybersecurity-playbook>), the Handbook for Elections Infrastructure Security from the Center for Internet Security (<https://www.cisecurity.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/CIS-Elections-eBook-15-Feb.pdf>), online training on election cybersecurity hosted by the Center for Technology and Civic Life and the Center for Democracy and Technology (<https://www.techandcivillife.org/online-series>), and services from the Elections Infrastructure Information Sharing and Analysis Center (<https://www.cisecurity.org/ei-isac/ei-isac-services/>).

xv Many of these incidences are described in a recent report on election interference in the 2016 election. See, generally, Robert S. Mueller, III, “Report on the Investigation into Russian Interference in the 2016 Presidential Election,” U.S. Department of Justice, March 2019, Accessed May 22, 2019. Available at: <https://www.justice.gov/storage/report.pdf>.

xvi The voter confidence questions are in surveys such as the Cooperative Congressional Election Study (2017 survey and data are available at: <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi%3A10.7910/DVN/3STEZY>) and the Survey of the Performance of American Elections (2016 survey and data are available at: <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.7910/DVN/Y38VIQ>).

xvii We did not include identical items since it would seem strange to ask LEOs if “their vote was counted as cast.”

lists would be secure. We are encouraged to see that LEOs express very high levels of confidence in the systems in their own state. Given their high level of expertise, firsthand knowledge of election administration, and presumably greater attention to media stories about election outcomes and elections-related problems, we fully expected that LEOs' firsthand experience would result in high levels of confidence in their own states.

with voting might account for some of the gap in personal and national voter confidence levels.<sup>24</sup> In other words, feelings of confidence are higher if you are familiar with the election system and saw that your ballot was counted, but you are less confident in vote counts elsewhere if you had read or heard that people were having problems at the polls or if politicians level charges of fraud. Real accounts of actual attempts to alter election outcomes may also depress levels of voter confidence.<sup>25</sup>

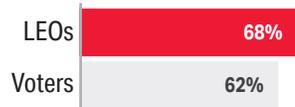
FIGURE 4

## Experience with elections may explain varying levels in confidence.

### Confidence that votes in my state will be counted as intended.



### Confidence that votes nationally will be counted as intended.



Voter data is from the 2016 Cooperative Congressional Election Study survey.

But at the national level, LEOs were less confident in the integrity of the national vote count, compared to the confidence they expressed in their own state. Only 68 percent agreed with the statement, “I am confident that votes nationwide will be counted as intended,” and only 44 percent were confident that voter registration lists would be secure in states other than their own. We suspected that we might see comparatively lower levels of confidence nationally, especially given the fact that actual attempts at cyber intrusions took place.

LEOs know their own states' processes and procedures inside and out but might not be privy to the specific processes for problem solving in other states. To some degree, it is natural to be less confident if there is less information to form an opinion. Because LEOs see the same media stories as the public, the gap between state and national levels of confidence among LEOs makes sense. We do caution, however, that we do not have strong evidence of the role the media might play in shaping voter confidence — only an assumption that hearing negative news stories about elections decreases confidence levels. It may also be possible that some of the LEOs we surveyed have some strong opinions about which laws and processes are better or worse. Such opinions may speak to the sophisticated level of election knowledge that LEOs have — as well as their hands-on experience. We encourage more research to further unpack these nuances.

Trends in public opinion provide background for these results. The public expresses a high level of confidence that their own ballot will be counted as cast, yet typically expresses lower levels of confidence in the national vote count. Voter confidence levels are influenced by whether the voter supported the person who won (the aptly named “winner’s effect”<sup>xviii</sup>). But we think that the tangible experience of voting is another factor driving confidence. In a recent report, we theorized that personal experience

xviii We did not measure whether a phenomenon similar to the winner’s effect might have been a factor in the LEO survey.

# Voter-Centric Elections: Education and Outreach

Democracy Fund promotes voter-centric elections by supporting programs that work toward cultivating a positive voter experience. By “voter-centric,” we refer to policies and processes meant to make voting more accessible for all, as well as actions that key stakeholders take to further that goal.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The majority of LEOs from our survey agreed that, since they first started administering elections, registration and voting have become easier for voters and for election administrators.
- The LEOs we surveyed overwhelmingly expressed voter-centric attitudes and valued voter education and outreach — the percentage of LEOs endorsing this voter-centric approach has grown by 40 percent over the past decade.
- LEOs told us, in both closed-ended items and most forcefully in open-ended responses, that resource constraints are a major limitation on their ability to engage and educate voters and to assure a positive voter experience.

There are several behaviors LEOs exhibit, as well as the processes they establish locally, that indicate an orientation toward voter-centric elections, including:

- LEOs creating and distributing voter education and outreach materials;
- Partnerships between LEOs and local organizations to help address specific voter needs;
- Ensuring that election processes at the local level are secure so that every ballot can be counted to the fullest extent of the law; and
- Establishing and maintaining a voter-centric organizational culture in local election offices and departments.

LEO opinions on voter access, education, and outreach help us understand the role LEOs play in civic participation. Although we have several years of survey data about how the public views elections, there is little information on how election officials think about voter access to elections.

We wanted to know more about LEOs’ commitment to voter-centric elections. First, we asked LEOs whether they believe elections and voting have become easier over their years of service — both for voters and elections officials. Second, we sought to gauge their opinion on the LEO’s role in educating voters and whether a lack of voter education caused Election Day problems. The latter set of items were adapted from questions asked a decade ago by the Congressional Research Service (CRS).

The majority of LEOs believed that registration and voting has gotten easier for voters since they first started administering elections. Furthermore, election officials overwhelmingly expressed voter-centric attitudes and endorsed statements that value voter education and outreach.

However, lack of resources is a barrier to a more positive voter experience. LEOs told us, in both closed-ended items and most forcefully in open-ended responses, that **resource constraints are a major limitation** on their ability to engage and educate voters and to assure a positive voter experience. Although funding is a significant barrier for LEOs, their broadly-based enthusiasm for voter education activities is notable and encouraging.

## LEO Perspectives on a Changing Election System

Americans rely on LEOs to educate them about elections and help shape their voter experience. When asked about their main sources of basic election information, for example, the public looks to local election websites to get details about registration deadlines and (to a lesser extent) candidates.<sup>26</sup> But we also know that administering elections has gotten more complicated, as elections have gotten more competitive and as election laws and election administration have become part of “the voting wars.”<sup>27</sup> We wanted to know whether LEOs agree or disagree that registration and voting has gotten easier or harder for voters (and for LEOs themselves — reported in the next section).

The majority of LEOs from our survey agreed that, since they first started administering elections, **registration and voting has gotten easier for voters.**

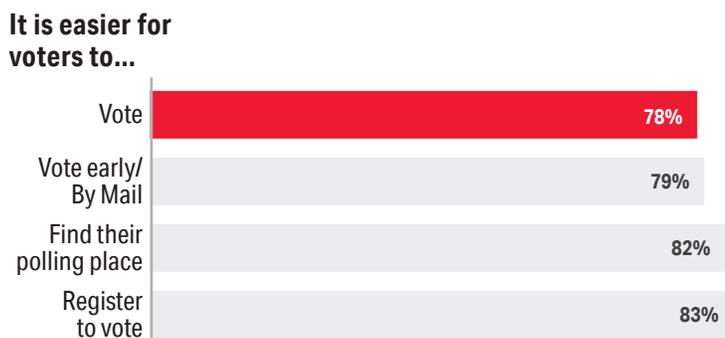
Eighty-two percent either “somewhat” or “strongly agree” with the statement, “Compared to when I started, it is easier today for voters...to register to vote.” Nearly as many believed that it is easier for voters to find their polling place. Seventy-seven percent believed that it is easier for voters to choose to vote early in person or by mail. About as many also believed that it is easier for voters to vote, regardless of the mode of voting.

We also find that LEOs in larger jurisdictions are far more likely to think that registration and voting have become easier for voters. For example, 61 percent of LEOs from the largest jurisdictions “strongly agree” that registration has become easier for voters, compared to 42 percent of their peers from the smallest jurisdictions. This pattern of differences between the smallest and largest jurisdictions emerged in all questions that ask about the ease of voting.

One possible explanation for this variation could be the inherent complexity of serving a large electorate — i.e., as the number of eligible voters served increases, the need to adopt rules that streamline election processes also increases. As tools like the Elections Performance Index (EPI) indicate,<sup>28</sup> the majority of states are improving. The EPI rankings are based on metrics that are largely focused on improving the voter experience. So, it should not be surprising that LEOs across the country view voting as easier, compared to when they first started as election officials.

FIGURE 5

### The majority of LEOs say it's gotten easier to vote since they started.



## Voter Education and Outreach as an Essential (New?) Job Function

A key aspect of planning a successful election is promoting nonpartisan voter education about the process and the candidates. Nonprofit organizations, political organizations, state and local officials, educators, and media organizations across the country each play an important role in voter education. But conversations with election officials lead us to believe that voter education has only become seen as an essential job function in recent years.

“When I started 25 years ago, voter education was not ‘part of the job’, we provided only the when, where, and how. Voters were from the greatest and silent generations to the Baby Boomers who saw voting as a civic duty. The culture now is quite different; civic duty is not as ingrained.”

We wanted to know how LEOs today see their role in voter education and access, especially when tasked with other essential election responsibilities. The LEOs we surveyed overwhelmingly expressed **voter-centric attitudes** and endorsed statements that **value voter education and outreach**. Ninety percent of our survey respondents “strongly” or “somewhat agree” that they enjoy educating citizens about voting rules and procedures. Eighty-two percent “strongly” or “somewhat agree” that LEOs “should consider it part

of their responsibilities to work on voter education and satisfaction,” and the percentage endorsing this voter-centric approach appears to have grown substantially in the past decade.

“Hire additional staff to focus on educating the public, especially school-age children.”

In its 2011 report, CRS found that “voter education about rules and procedures is important, and two-thirds [of respondents agreed] that is it the responsibility of LEOs.”<sup>29</sup> Our survey shows a 40 percent increase in the percentage of LEOs who embrace this aspect of election stewardship. Large majorities agreed (“strongly” or “somewhat”) that lack

of citizen knowledge about voting rules can cause significant problems when people vote, and only a small percentage agreed that their primary responsibility is to conduct the election and not worry about voter satisfaction.<sup>xix</sup>

When we analyzed responses by jurisdiction size, we found that LEOs from medium and large jurisdictions are more likely to “strongly agree” with the statement “Local election officials should consider it part of their responsibilities to work on voter education and voter

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xix Interested readers may wish to compare these responses to questions asked by CRS in 2008, although using a slightly different set of response categories. See Figure 42 in Congressional Research Service, p. 58.

satisfaction.” They were also more likely to “strongly disagree” that “The primary responsibility of local election officials is to conduct the election, not worry about voter education or voter satisfaction.”

Few LEOs from smaller jurisdictions actively reject the voter-centric positions, but these LEOs are somewhat less likely to provide a strong endorsement. While we find these overall results promising, we also encourage discussion and follow-up research on at least three key points.

First, several survey respondents called attention to lack of funding for elections. The need for more resources is a persistent problem

in election administration, and the effects at the local level emerged in our survey.<sup>30</sup> LEOs told us that lack of resources limits their ability to engage and educate voters. Only 35 percent “strongly” or “somewhat agree” that they have the time and resources to educate voters, as well as conduct the election. Several LEOs took the opportunity to express the need for more resources in the open-ended responses, which we discuss later in this document.

Second, LEOs in small jurisdictions indicated that they may need more help conducting voter education activities. They likely have few employees and, as our data show, are the most likely to have non-elections-related responsibilities. LEOs from

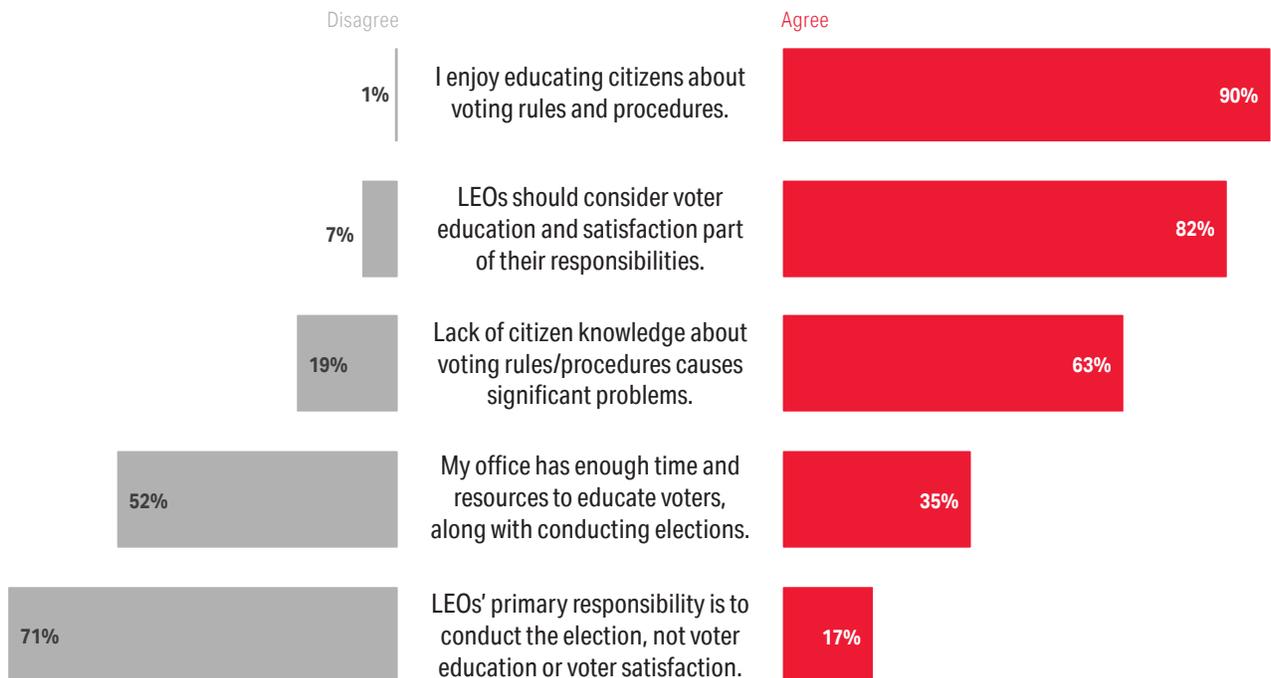
small jurisdictions were also more likely to “strongly disagree” that they have the time and resources to work on educating voters.

Third, as noted earlier, several kinds of organizations conduct voter outreach activities. There are undoubtedly collaborative voter education efforts between election officials, nonprofits, and other groups.

But how widespread are these efforts, and what kinds of jurisdictions benefit? More research is needed to know the extent to which resource constraints incentivize collaboration across groups.

FIGURE 6

## The overwhelming majority of LEOs want to educate voters — but fewer than half have the resources they need to do this important work.



# Improving Elections Using New and Old Tools

Considering their years of experience, we wanted to learn more about how LEOs view improvements in the American election system — specifically, their attitudes about technology and policies that modernize voter registration systems. We asked baseline questions about ease of election administration over time and views on the role of election technology generally. We then asked about the ease or difficulty of election administration in states with online voter registration (OVR) and automatic voter registration (AVR). Finally, we share a summary of what LEOs think, in their own words, would improve elections in their jurisdictions.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- LEOs widely acknowledged the positive role that technology can play in improving election conduct, but they may be skeptical of technology that is put in place too fast.
- Opinions around “ease” or “difficulty” of OVR and AVR were strongly conditioned by experience with administering these policies.
- LEOs articulated, in their own words, the need to increase funding and resources, especially staff and poll workers, new technology, and training. They were sometimes frustrated with legislative changes to elections, especially when those changes occurred without input or the funding needed to implement policies. LEOs expressed support for policy changes like early voting, expansion of no-excuse absentee voting, and all-mail elections.

## General Improvements in Election Administration

Most LEOs believe that election administration has become easier. Seventy-two percent either “somewhat” or “strongly agree” with the statement, “Compared to when I started, it is easier today for election officials...to get voters registered.” Sixty-one percent either “somewhat” or “strongly agree” that administering pre-Election Day and Election Day voting and certifying election results have all gotten easier since they first started.

But election reforms have not uniformly made things easier for everyone. Between 20 and 26 percent of our respondents said things have “neither” gotten easier nor harder, and a small percentage (between 9 and 16 percent) told us that things have actually gotten more difficult since they started.

Unlike most of our survey results, this finding is *not* an area where there is much distinction between jurisdictions’ sizes or by years of experience as an election official. However, we observed that LEOs from small jurisdictions were less likely to strongly agree with statements about the ease of registration and voting (though they did not actively disagree).

For example, 42 percent of LEOs from the largest jurisdictions “strongly agree” that it is easier today for them to get voters registered than when they first started, compared to 26 percent of LEOs from the smallest jurisdictions.

The results we presented on LEO workload may offer some insight. When we compared these answers to their responses on workload, we saw a similar trend. Forty-five percent of those who have elections constitute all their workload were more likely to **strongly** agree that election administration has become easier since they first started, compared to just 29 percent from jurisdictions where elections constitute less than half their workload. As already noted, LEOs from small jurisdictions are more likely to have elections constitute less than half their workloads. In the context of these ease of elections and voting results, our findings may show that the downstream effect of policies are not necessarily felt equally across jurisdictions.

Our results show markedly higher evaluations about administrative improvements when compared to the situation a decade ago. In 2008, CRS researchers found that approximately the same number of LEOs thought that HAVA had improved the election process in their jurisdiction as thought it had not improved the election process (and evaluations of HAVA were substantially more negative in 2004 and 2006).<sup>31</sup>

While comparisons to our questions are hindered by different wordings, a clear majority of all our respondents felt that elections and voting have improved since they started, and for 40 percent of our respondents their tenure began before HAVA.

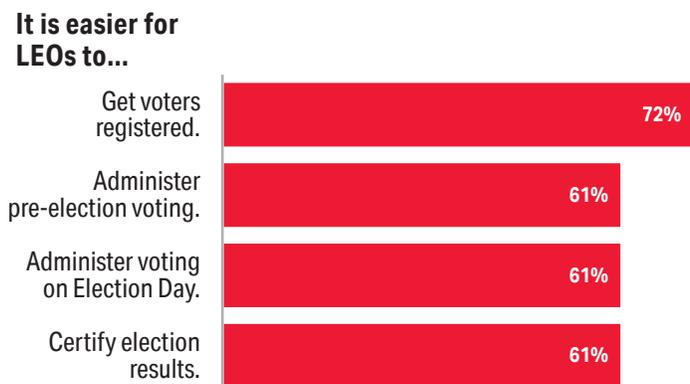
## Election Technology

We have seen several examples of election technology changing election administration enormously. The PCEA’s final report made several recommendations on improving the voter experience using technology, including state adoption of OVR and increasing efficiencies at the DMV.<sup>32</sup> Since that report was published in 2014, state adoption and implementation of OVR has more than doubled. A third of states have also adopted AVR, which some consider to be a modern version of the Motor Voter law.<sup>33</sup>

Many election officials now use internet resources, including social media, as a communication tool for voter outreach. In fact, an increasing number of civic-tech organizations have provided election officials with tools designed to make their jobs easier.

FIGURE 7

### LEOs report it is easier today for election officials to complete key responsibilities.



These include the Election Toolkit produced by the Center for Technology and Civic Life and the Center for Civic Design templates for election design and election security best practices.<sup>34</sup>

Given the rapid pace of change in a short period of time, we wanted to know the extent to which LEOs believe technology has improved election administration. We asked LEOs to agree or disagree with a set of statements about the value of election technology. Some were worded such that “agree” indicated comfort with new technology, while in other cases, “disagree” provides the technology-savvy response.

We find that LEOs widely acknowledge the positive role that technology can play in improving the conduct of elections. Sixty-eight percent of LEOs “strongly” or “somewhat” **agree** that the use of new election technology dramatically improves elections in the LEO’s jurisdiction; 45 percent agreed that the benefits of new election technologies greatly outweigh the risks. Most LEOs (52 percent) “strongly” or “somewhat” **disagree** that new election technology has moved too quickly, but most (59 percent) also think that it is best to wait until “all the bugs have been worked out.”

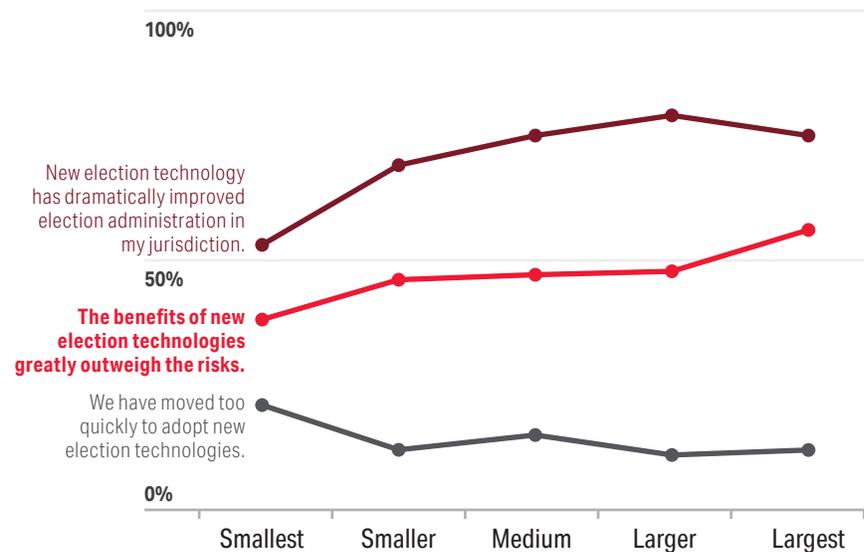
There are different viewpoints about election technology among officials who serve in jurisdictions of different sizes.<sup>xx</sup> Election administrators in

medium and large jurisdictions are more likely to express optimistic attitudes about the contribution of new election technology. These LEOs were more likely to agree that technology has improved administration and that the benefits outweigh the risks. In contrast, LEOs from smaller jurisdictions were more cautious. More research is needed to know why LEOs in smaller jurisdictions express more skepticism about election technology.<sup>xxi</sup> It may be that small jurisdictions do not have the resources necessary for support and maintenance of modernized processes, especially with respect to identifying and correcting technological problems.

Some LEOs — in any sized jurisdiction — might have incompatible software that makes it hard for their systems to “talk” with intrastate agencies (e.g., DMV) or might even be prevented from using new technologies due to conflicts with state law. LEOs with the resources needed to incorporate new technologies might have limited bandwidth to share best practices with others. Or it may be that new technologies might need to be tailored further to accommodate the needs of LEOs in small jurisdictions. There is much that we do not know, and we hope that these data serve as a good starting point for future studies.

FIGURE 8

### Larger jurisdictions are more likely to agree that new technologies improve elections.



xx To simplify and provide consistency for Figure 8, we plotted agreement with all of the statements discussed in this section. However, as explained in our analysis, we consider disagreement with the statement “We have moved too quickly to adopt new election technologies” as the technologically optimistic response.

xxi In the area of technology, most LEOs a decade ago also agreed with most of these same statements (Congressional Research Service, p. 11). Because we do not have access to the raw data from these earlier surveys, we cannot make comparisons across jurisdiction size.

## Voter Registration Modernization: Experience Matters

To get an idea of how LEOs view modernization of voter registration systems, we asked whether or not OVR and AVR<sup>xxii</sup> had made the work of election officials easier or more difficult. We tailored these questions to the administrative regime in each state. In other words, if a surveyed jurisdiction was in a state that had OVR but not AVR, LEOs were asked whether OVR *had* made their work harder or easier and if they *thought that AVR, if adopted, would* make their work harder or easier.<sup>xxiii</sup>

Though LEOs generally believe that technology has made elections and voting easier, responses to our voter registration modernization questions show that opinions around “ease” or “difficulty” of OVR and AVR are strongly conditioned by experience with administering these policies. LEOs in states that have implemented OVR or AVR were much more inclined to view these policies positively. For example, 79 percent of LEOs in states with OVR thought it made their work easier or made no difference, compared to 49 percent of LEOs in non-OVR states. Similarly, 57 percent of LEOs in states with AVR thought it made their work easier or made no difference, compared to just 39 percent of those in non-AVR states.

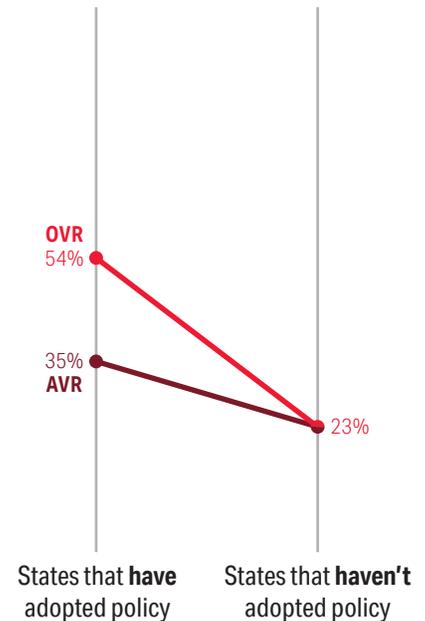
Encouragingly, many respondents in states without AVR and OVR were almost as inclined to say “they need more information” as they were to say it made things harder. Of those who do not live in states with OVR or AVR, 33 percent believed that OVR will make their jobs more difficult, and 48 percent believed that AVR will make their jobs more difficult.

These findings may reflect the time and effort that it takes to make sustainable election policies work well. Every change in policy will have downstream effects on election officials, who do not always feel like they have the funding needed to accommodate policy changes. Administrative changes impact the entire elections department and becoming acclimated to change takes time. Since Arizona adopted it in 2002, OVR’s administrative gains are well known to many, with its benefits realized more or less fully depending on how states implement it. AVR, however, is available in less than half of states, was first implemented only three years ago, and has not been implemented by every state that adopted the policy, leaving several of our respondents guessing as to what might be because the details are still being worked out. Though more research is clearly indicated, time and experience appear, at first glance, to make a large difference in the comfort level LEOs express with voter registration modernization policies.

FIGURE 9

### Opinions on new election policies are shaped by experience.

Percent saying the following policies make elections easier to administer:



xxii We did not provide definitions for OVR and AVR in this battery of questions. We make note of it here because the full scope of what is considered to be AVR varies across states.

xxiii We asked the “would make” question in any state where OVR or AVR has been passed but not yet implemented, as well as in states where OVR or AVR has not yet been adopted.

# In Their Own Words: The Case for More Funding and Opening Lines of Communication

We provided an opportunity for LEOs to express their needs in their own words. Near the end of the survey, we asked:

*If there is one change you could make that would help you run more efficient, secure, and fair elections in your jurisdiction, what would that be?*

The question was open ended — meaning that LEOs could provide us with any answer in the space provided. Several hundred LEOs took the opportunity to provide us feedback in their own words. We had nearly 526 responses, totaling 8,034 words to read and digest! We thank elections officials for their thoughtful answers.

TABLE 2

## THEMES FROM OPEN-ENDED RESPONSES

Increase funding and resources	34%
Change state election codes	22%
Improve communication	14%
Voter Education	8%
No change needed	3%
Other	20%

Overall, LEO answers fell into three general categories: the need for increased resources; the desire for increased communication between federal, state, and local stakeholders (especially lawmakers); and the need to change (or in some cases, stop changing) state election policy.

### NEED FOR INCREASED RESOURCES

Several LEOs articulated the need to increase funding and general resources, especially staff and poll workers, for new technology and training. While the need for additional staff and poll workers is not new, we note the following nuances within these responses:

- LEOs from small jurisdictions identified different staffing needs compared to their peers in bigger jurisdictions. Rather than asking for additional staff or poll workers, the small jurisdictions expressed the difficulty of having few or no full-time election staff in the first place.
- Frequent mentions of the need for additional staff and poll workers were sometimes coupled with concerns about the competency, training, and age of poll workers.
- Those with additional IT training or tech-support needs shared that they could use staff members dedicated solely to IT.

The need for newer technology and access to training is also not new. Smaller, medium, and larger jurisdictions were more likely to identify the need for “new general

technology” and “new equipment” (such as accessible voting machines and mechanical ballot sorters) compared to the smallest or largest jurisdictions.

Many also shared that they want more training opportunities for themselves and their peers, both in-state as well as the “financial resources to attend continuing national trainings.”

**Table 3** on the following page offers details on where LEOs report their desire to direct additional resources.

“Simply put, it is a funding issue. If you want voter education & reach out that’s funding. If you want more early vote centers that’s money. If you want shorter lines at the polls... that’s money. If you want equipment you can count on that’s money... If you want to continue to stay up to date and educated that’s money! *It all comes back to funding for me!*”

## DESIRE FOR INCREASED COMMUNICATION BETWEEN FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS

Several LEOs identified communication gaps between adjacent localities, state officials, and legislators. Of those who identified the need for more frequent communication, 74 percent would like to communicate more with federal and state stakeholders, and 26 percent said that communication with adjacent jurisdictions would improve elections in their area.

At the federal and state levels, many shared their frustrations with legislative changes to election administration, especially when those changes occurred without input from the LEO community or the funding needed to implement policies. One LEO “would require that the lawmakers actually show up to local election offices to observe how an election is truly run prior to crafting election-related legislation.”

LEOs from small jurisdictions were more likely to refer to legislators in general terms (e.g., “financial decision makers”) and did not identify specific local, state, or federal offices that they would like to talk with more frequently.

In terms of local-level communication, some — especially LEOs in small jurisdictions — expressed the need for increased communication in adjacent or other jurisdictions within the state. For example, one LEO suggested that they would like to see “[m]ore emphasis on cybersecurity with support from my locality believing Elections are important enough.”

## CHANGES TO STATE ELECTION POLICY

There were two main ways that LEOs expressed their opinions about changes to state election policy. LEOs either suggested policy changes that they would like to see *or* expressed the need for fewer changes. Key policy changes LEOs said that they would support were expansion of early voting, expansion of absentee voting, and all-mail voting. Medium- and large-sized jurisdictions were especially supportive of these policies.

A significant number of LEOs also expressed strong opinions about the process of changing election laws in their states, with many criticizing the political dynamics that they have observed. Many LEOs believed that some legislative changes made in their states were ill-considered. For example, some were concerned with a lack of time between the end of early voting and Election Day. They suggested either switching to no-excuse absentee or limiting early voting to take place only one or two days before the election.

These findings are consistent with prior research done by the Democracy Fund Elections team and are reflected generally in the Election Administration and Voting systems map.<sup>35</sup> The common refrain implicit across all these answers is that opening up lines of communication would help ease LEOs’ concerns (or at least, provide an opportunity for feedback, which several felt they did not have).

To be fair, we did not ask LEOs how frequently they speak with their state legislators, or if they have

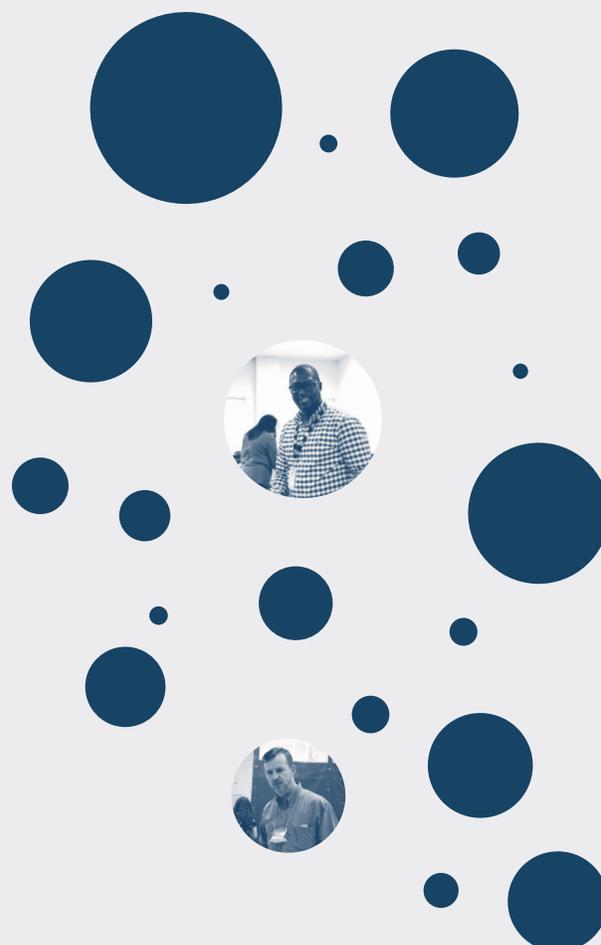
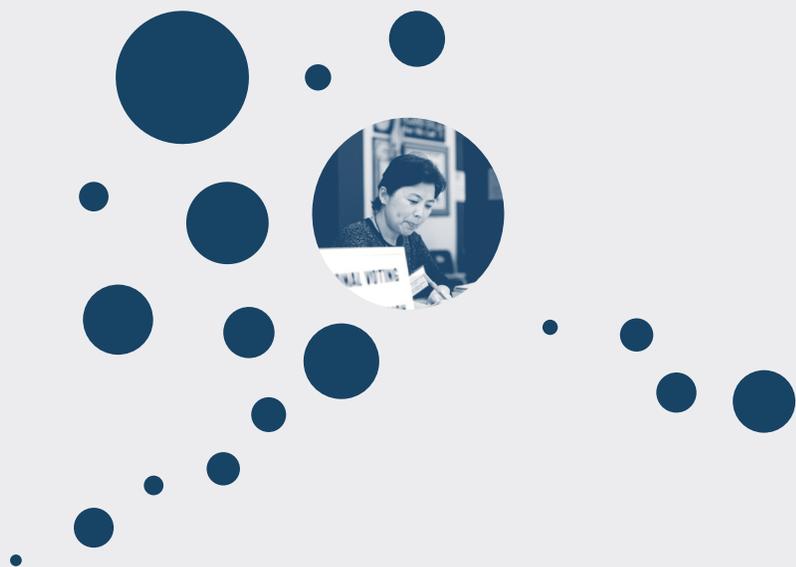
invited legislators to visit their local offices. Based on the answers we received, some LEOs see certain kinds of legislative changes as political, without an understanding of how changes will impact the local election process. More space for communication and understanding between all stakeholders is a clear message that resonates through this open-ended question.

**TABLE 3**  
**NEEDS FOR ADDITIONAL FUNDING**

Staff and Poll Workers	29%
Technology and Equipment	25%
Training	29%
Increase General Elections Budget	11%
Physical Space	8%
Cybersecurity Capacity and Resources	4%
IT Training or Tech Support	3%

**TABLE 4**  
**LEO SUPPORT FOR POLICY CHANGES**

Early Voting	35%
Absentee Voting	28%
All Mail	20%
Update/Modernize Code Generally	9%
Support Voter ID	7%
Oppose Voter ID	2%



# Conclusions

As stewards of democracy, America’s LEOs are entrusted with the awesome responsibility of ensuring that elections are conducted fairly, efficiently, securely, and equitably. We are humbled by the commitment to service that is evident among our survey respondents.

In this report, we saw that LEOs nearly universally embrace a voter-centric approach to election administration. Over the past decade, a significantly larger proportion believe that voter education and outreach is an essential element of their job. They recognize that election reforms and technological changes, while creating short-term challenges, have improved the overall registration and voting experience — both for voters and for election officials themselves. We are heartened to find evidence that LEOs love their jobs — most have worked in the elections field for several years, even during a period of highly competitive elections and heightened public scrutiny.

Election officials take pride in their work and felt prepared for the 2018 election. But our data also show that LEOs faced new demands to increase cybersecurity and operated in an environment of fiscal constraint. Our open-ended responses made clear that state legislators, state elections officials, and LEOs should

communicate more often about how elections **should be** run and the realities about how elections are **actually run**. This need comes through clearly in LEO responses on cybersecurity, with significant percentages of “not applicable” answers showing that there is more work to be done around training and education.

Our results align with previous reports in identifying jurisdiction size as a key point in terms of resources, capacity, familiarity and ease with technology, and compensation. Though many features of election administration are shared within and across states, the disparities between large and small jurisdictions, in terms of LEO compensation, work environment, and optimism around technology, make it clear that policymakers should not ignore these differences.

We believe that there are a number of research questions worthy of further exploration. We share some that rise to the top on the following page.

# Opportunities for Future Research

**We noticed that the demographic and professional makeup of the LEO population differs from other local managers in state and local government.**

Trends in LEOs' race, gender, and pay raise issues of representation that are potentially unique given the LEO's role in democracy. The high number of female leaders in election administration is particularly notable. Though we offered no opinions on why these trends exist, we note the need for more research on the relationship between jurisdiction size, pay, and hiring decisions in election administration.

**Many LEOs told us that they had personnel and resources in place for 2018. However, it was apparent that resource limitations are their number one concern.** It remains unclear to us whether or not state legislatures or counties regularly allocate sufficient resources, personnel, and expertise that allow LEOs to be the best stewards of democracy, who many clearly aspire to be. It also remains unclear to us why so many LEOs in smaller jurisdictions reported that many security measures were not applicable to their situation.

**The commitment to voter-centric election administration merits follow-up as well.**

Again, we take time to ask the extent to which collaborative voter education efforts take place between election officials, nonprofits, and community groups. How widespread are these efforts? More research is needed to know the extent to which resource constraints incentivize collaboration across groups.

**Several of our LEO respondents in OVR and AVR states indicated that experience influences perspectives on the difficulty or ease of policy implementation.**

As states adopt and implement these policies, we encourage further study of LEO perspectives, especially in states with complex implementation challenges.

In closing, we hope that the 1,071 LEOs who answered our survey see their voices within the pages of this report and that this work helps to open the dialogue that LEOs told us they wanted. We look forward to sharing these results over the next few months with all stakeholders, but especially state associations, professional associations, and state and federal officials. And lastly, we welcome continued opinions and feedback from the LEO community.

# Acknowledgements

The Democracy Fund/Reed College 2018 Local Election Official Survey would not have been possible without the cooperation of over 1,000 officials who gave us their time and shared their opinions. We thank them for their cooperation.

We especially want to thank Dr. Evan Crawford of the University of San Diego. Dr. Crawford's dedication and expertise on the development and administration of the 2018 LEO Survey went above and beyond our expectations.

The authors also thank the following people for their role in this project:

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# Methodology

One of the goals of the 2018 LEO Survey was to create an instrument that would be detailed but short, informative, and meaningful. Early in the process, we decided to draw a *sample* rather than send an instrument to every jurisdiction in the country.<sup>i</sup> Producing a nationally representative sample of local election officials required the Early Voting Information Center research team to make a number of important choices about how to identify the LEO population, how to draw the sample, and, finally, how to report the results.<sup>ii</sup> Below is a brief overview of how we put this survey together.

## PRODUCING A POPULATION LIST

Reed College obtained a comprehensive database of local election jurisdictions in the United States (our “population” or “sampling universe”) from the U.S. Vote Foundation. This list, supplemented and validated with additional lists from election officials in Wisconsin and Michigan, was matched with jurisdictions from the 2016 EAVS<sup>36</sup> so that we could add the number of registered voters.<sup>iii</sup>

The first version of our sample universe totaled 8,083 local election jurisdictions. This is 2,279 fewer than the 10,370 local jurisdictions reported by Kimball et al.<sup>37</sup> and 2,249 fewer than the 10,340 jurisdictions reported by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) in its 2016 report, *Issues Related to Registering Voters and Administering Elections*.<sup>38</sup> GAO researchers confirmed that the discrepancy was a result of how we treated the jurisdictional unit in Minnesota. In its research, the GAO was interested in the administrative unit that purchases and allocates election machines and technology, which in Minnesota is the sub-jurisdiction (township and municipality). Our survey is directed at the chief election officials, who are appointed at the county level in Minnesota.

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- i The biennial U.S. Election Assistance Commission’s Election Administration and Voting Survey (EAVS) theoretically covers every jurisdiction in the country, although the information is sometimes conveyed by states and sometimes by localities. Sampling of LEOs was also done by the 2005, 2007, and 2009 surveys conducted by the Congressional Research Service. See Kimball et al.
  - ii We are indebted to our academic advisory board, Dr. David Kimball of the University of Missouri, St. Louis; Dr. Brady Baybeck of Wayne State University; Dr. Lonna Atkeson, University of New Mexico; and Dr. Charles Stewart III, MIT, for assistance with our sampling.
  - iii In a few states, we had to supplement the EAVS counts of registered voters because a mismatch between their list of jurisdictions and our list of jurisdictions.

Our final list, with contact information and number of registered voters, totaled 7,903 jurisdictions. The reduction from 8,083 was a result of different ways that jurisdictional and sub-jurisdictional units are handled in the various databases. Please see Crawford and Gronke (2019)<sup>39</sup> for detailed information on the database matching and sampling process.

## **DRAWING A REPRESENTATIVE SAMPLE**

From our contact list of nearly 8,000 local election jurisdictions, we drew a sample of 3,000. We wanted our sample to be representative of LEOs and nationally representative of service provision to voters. In other words, we wanted sufficient coverage of LEOs serving a large and diverse American electorate. As pointed out by previous researchers, “Less than 6 percent of the local election officials in the United States serve more than two-thirds of the voters in a national election.”<sup>40</sup> Therefore, following past practice, we have sampled jurisdictions *proportional to the number of registered voters they serve*.

In practice, this means that 100 percent of jurisdictions with more than one million registered voters fell into our *sample*. These jurisdictions constitute only 0.3 percent of the *population* of LEOs (23 of 7,903 jurisdictions) yet serve 20 percent of all registered voters. In contrast, the smallest (<5,000 registered voters) jurisdictions constitute 57 percent of all jurisdictions (4,497/7,903) and serve almost 3 percent of *voters*. We sampled almost 11 percent of these jurisdictions (859/4,497).

To categorize jurisdictions in this final report, we started with the guidelines proposed by Kimball and Baybeck<sup>41</sup> and the GAO.<sup>42</sup> These research teams divided jurisdictions into categories based on the number of registered voters they serve, striking a balance between representing LEOs and representing voters served by election officials. As our report makes clear, any survey of this population must account for the fact that most of the LEO population serves jurisdictions with comparatively fewer registered voters.

Our final set of five reporting categories is a bit finer grained than Kimball and Baybeck’s three-category breakdown but less granular than the GAO’s seven categories. The goal was to balance the number of registered voters represented by each size group with the number of responses within that group. We believed that the Kimball and Baybeck<sup>43</sup> classifications for medium jurisdictions were too all encompassing to be meaningful in our analyses. The GAO categorization scheme, in our view, is too coarse at the lowest level (<10,000). That category alone encompasses 68.5 percent of the jurisdictions in our population (and would be a greater proportion in the GAO study, which, because it examined sub-county level units in Minnesota, had 2,000 more jurisdictions). At the upper end, the GAO scheme includes so few jurisdictions that we cannot report survey results broken down by these categories.

## **SURVEY ADMINISTRATION**

The 2018 LEO Survey was originally developed as an online survey. After a series of pilot tests, we distributed the online survey May 7, 2018, via email invitations to everyone in the sample. As the web survey data collection proceeded, the team developed a paper survey instrument to supplement data-collection efforts. During the week of July 2, 2018, paper surveys were mailed out to 2,488 officials with a business reply envelope. The online survey data collection used the Qualtrics web survey platform for email distribution and data collection. The paper survey used Remark Office OMR to optically recognize data.

## **SAMPLING AND RESPONSE RATES**

Data collection resulted in 546 responses from the web survey and 525 responses from the paper survey for a total of 1,071 responses. Our response rate is 35.7 percent. In terms of proportions in each jurisdiction, the result was a sample that very closely matched the samples used by Kimball and Baybeck<sup>44</sup> and the GAO.<sup>45</sup> We are confident that we have drawn a high-quality, representative sample.

Because our response rates are comparatively equal across jurisdictions (the difference in our responses vs. sample is reported in the last column), we have chosen not to provide a survey weight to account for differential response rates. We also have not, at this juncture, developed a survey weight that would produce results that are generalizable to the population of LEOs.<sup>iv</sup>

## **CODING THE OPEN-ENDED RESPONSES**

The team initially coded 533 statements provided in response to the 2018 LEO Survey question, *“If there is one change you could make that would help you run more efficient, secure, and fair elections in your jurisdiction, what would that be?”* The first wave through the statements used open coding by two researchers. The two codebooks and segments were then reviewed for overlap and differences. After this review the team decided to shift to modified axial coding based on the initial codebooks.

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iv We had extensive discussions within our team and with our advisory board about developing a survey weight that would produce descriptive statistics that are generalizable to the population of LEOs. To illustrate how a survey weight works, in this case, weighting the data would multiply each response from LEOs in the category “0 to 10,000” by 2.06 ( $.685/.332 = 2.06$ ). We have not developed this kind of survey weight because the only reliable information we have on our population (and thus information for weights) is the number of registered voters. We have no information about the “true” age, gender, race, education, years of experience, or many other characteristics that will typically be drawn from the census to develop survey weights.

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