

The Front Lines of Elections: Poll Workers in the New Election Administration Environment

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1. *Impetus for the study:* The 2020 election significantly altered the ways that poll workers are recruited, trained, and operate. As result, local election officials (LEOs) face a challenging environment in which to conduct the 2022 midterm and 2024 Presidential elections. The COVID pandemic, threats against election workers, and an aging cadre of experienced poll workers have conspired to reduce the number of persons willing to work as poll workers on and before Election Day. A national team of academics collaborated with local election officials (LEO) in 10 states and 19 jurisdictions to survey poll workers about their experiences in the 2020 election, reasons for working the polls in 2022 and beyond.

2. *Progress to date:* Poll workers in 10 states and 19 jurisdictions (N=5,427) were surveyed before the November 2022 election. The pre-election survey focused on three research questions:

- What factors motivate people to serve as poll workers and potentially deter them from working the polls in the future?
- How are poll workers navigating the many changes in state election laws and practices adopted since the 2020 election?
- How are poll workers responding to challenges such as threats against election workers, aggressive poll watchers, and partisan polarization?

A post-election survey of same poll workers is currently in the field. The post-election survey asks respondents from the pre-election survey whether, where, when and how they worked the polls in the November 2022 election and their experience working the polls. Additional questions are asked about how individuals were recruited to work the polls in the 2022 election and their intention to work the polls I future elections and their experience working the polls in 2020.

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Local election officials had the opportunity to include additional questions specific to their jurisdictions in both the pre-election and post-election surveys. Separate summary reports of pre-election surveys were prepared for each jurisdiction. Individual researchers were encouraged to brief their collaborating LEOs about the survey findings and provide any additional analyses requested by their respective LEOs.

3. Findings from pre-election survey

1. Approximately a third of persons who worked the polls in 2020 reported they were very unlikely (27%) or somewhat unlikely (3%) to work the polls in the 2022 election.
2. Reasons for not working the polls:
 - a. Too busy (25%)
 - b. Could not get preferred assignment (21%)
 - c. Concern about conflicts at the polls (15%)
3. Persons who were likely to work the polls in 2022 were:
 - a. Older i.e., > 65 years of age
 - b. Experienced i.e., worked the polls for 6+ years
 - c. Reported positive collaborations with other poll workers
 - d. Reported a positive affect about working the polls
4. Persons who were unlikely to work the polls in 2022 were:
 - a. Likely to report difficulties/problems working the polls in 2020
 - b. Concerned about partisan poll watchers
 - c. Concerned about conflicts at the polls with voters

Logit coefficients and estimated probabilities of likelihood to work the polls in 2020

	All Poll Workers		2020 Poll Workers	
	Coefficient	Δ Prob.	Coefficient	Δ Prob.
Years as a poll worker	0.110*** (0.0380)	.022	0.375*** (0.0637)	.047
Age	-0.00309 (0.0333)	-.000	0.0142 (0.0481)	.001
Affect about working the polls	0.900*** (0.0795)	.182	0.413*** (0.121)	.050
Experience with other poll workers in 2020	-	-	0.289*** (0.0789)	.036
Problems as a poll worker in 2020	-	-	-2.449*** (0.173)	.312
Poll worker training in 2020	-	-	0.263*** (0.0874)	.033
Voter problems observed in 2020	-	-	0.485*** (0.112)	.061
Constant	-2.096*** (0.245)		-4.147*** (0.596)	
Observations	4,714		3,724	

Fixed effects for jurisdictions and robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1