

**Election Worker Recruitment and Retention in North Carolina**  
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## **Project Summary**

Our focus in this project is on the institutional capacity to administer elections in North Carolina. Elections in North Carolina are administered primarily at the county level. Each county has an appointed Board of Elections that hires and supervises an Elections Director. In many counties, the Elections Director hires and supervises staff members who assist the Director in administering elections. In addition, the Elections Director and his/her staff assist the county Board of Elections and the county's party officials in appointing and training election judges and other poll workers. The overwhelming majority of the work of administering elections in North Carolina is conducted by three groups of officials: (1) Elections Directors, (2) staff who work under the Elections Director, and (3) election judges and poll workers. Our analyses will focus on these three groups of officials.

In consultation with Karen Brinson Bell, the executive director of the State Board of Elections in North Carolina we have identified three threats that may limit the ability of North Carolina counties to have sufficient institutional capacity to administer elections in the wake of the 2020 election: (1) COVID-19, (2) macroeconomic conditions (primarily inflation and tight labor markets), and (3) security threats to elections officials. We are in the process of conducting a survey of all current Election Directors, election staff, poll workers, and election judges with questions related to how concerns about COVID, increased levels of threats and harassment, and changing economic conditions have affected their choices to remain in or leave elections work. Using the results of our survey, we plan to work with Elections Director Bell to recommend non-partisan policies to increase election worker retention.

## **Progress to Date**

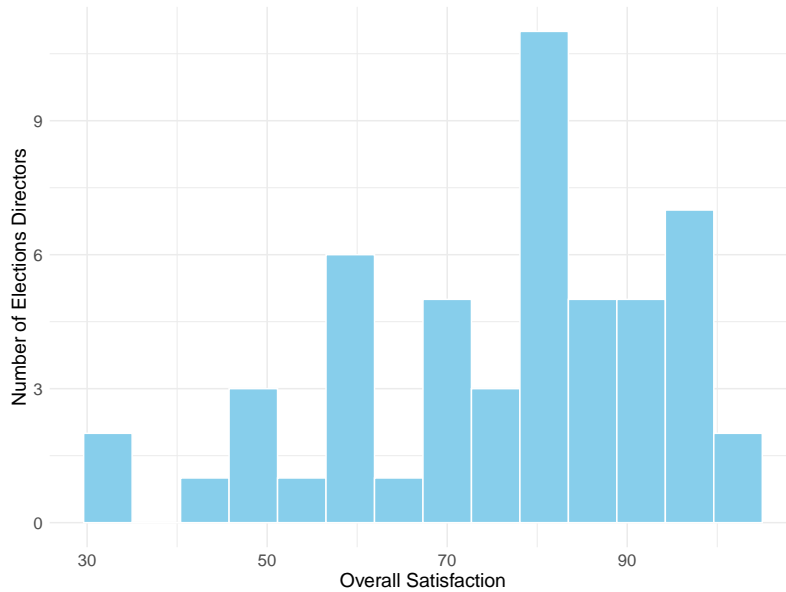
Working with Director Bell we completed our survey instrument in November of 2022. We were able to identify the names and email addresses for Election Directors in 97 North Carolina counties (3 directorships are currently vacant) and we fielded our survey to Directors December 13, 2022. No central list of names and emails for elections staff or poll workers exists, so these data are being gathered on our instrument sent to Election Directors. As of December 28, 2022 we had received completed responses from 65 Election Directors in North Carolina. We sent a follow-up email to counties who did not respond on January 4, 2023 and as of this writing we have received 4 additional responses. Our plan is to begin personally reaching out to Directors to encourage them to complete the survey the week of January 17, 2023.

## **Results to Date**

Our preliminary results present a mix of good and bad news with respect to how Elections Directors view their job. The good news is that most Elections Directors are satisfied with their jobs — see

Figure 1. The bad news is that 85% report that work related stress has grown since 2019 and 83% report that threats against elections officials have increased since 2019. A little more than 25% report having personally been threatened and almost half report that they know of staff or poll workers have refused to continue working in elections because of threats they have received. More than one-third of Directors report that it was more difficult to recruit poll workers in 2022 than in 2020. One of the biggest issues Directors report with respect to their own continued employment and the hiring and retention of staff and poll workers is low pay. More than 50% cite low pay as a reason staff are leaving and why they are considering leaving, while 60% cite low pay as a reason why it is increasingly difficult to recruit poll workers. A preliminary summary of our results would suggest that the combination of COVID-19 and the changing political environment is making the job of working in elections more stressful and more difficult and the compensation has not kept pace with the changing working conditions.

Figure 1: Election Directors' Overall Satisfaction



## Next Steps

In the coming weeks we will field our survey to elections staff and 2022 poll workers. We will also be reaching out in person to Directors who have not responded to our survey to see if we can entice them to participate.