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Staffing the Stewards of Democracy: the Demographic and Professional Profile of America's Local Election Officials

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ABSTRACT
Drawing on the results of two national surveys of local election officials (LEOs) in 2018 and 2019, we explore the demographic and professional profile of America's "stewards of democracy" and compare our data to other surveys of the local bureaucracy and civil service. Our demographic findings are consistent with prior surveys of LEOs, in which we find that the typical LEO in the United States is female, white, over 55, and earns just over $50,000 a year. We are interested in comparing the demographic profile of the typical LEO to other local officials and government employees. We want to understand if there is something unique about election administration that leads females to advance to leadership positions, and in many cases, choose to run for office, in order serve as the local official administering elections and supporting our democratic system. We compare our results with employment data from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) as a first step into answering these questions as well as exploring larger questions of representative bureaucracy. We also offer a first look at LEO job satisfaction and data that provide a glimpse into how people enter into the profession of election administration.

KEYWORDS
Election Administration, Gender, Representative Bureaucracy

1. Introduction

Every election cycle in the US requires thousands of local election officials (LEOs) to administer elections. These individuals work to ensure that voters have access to elections, that elections are fair and secure, and that results are properly certified. These individuals include elected and appointed officials, who we refer to as the "stewards of democracy" (Adona et al. 2019). While the central role of LEOs in the elections system has been recognized at least since Harris's 1934 seminal volume, research into LEOs

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has grown over the past two decades, particularly in response to the 2000 election and changes wrought by HAVA, with a focus on the role these administrators have in implementing election reforms or managing change in election administration. This paper uses a pair of new national surveys of LEOs to understand who it is that becomes a steward of democracy, and what this may tell us about access to this important role in US democracy.

The administration of elections in the US is a decentralized system with a complex set of diverse institutional arrangements that vary across states and sub-state jurisdictions. These election administration arrangements have been referred to as a "crazy quilt" (Hale 2015, p. 4), with variation not limited to just across jurisdictions, but also in definitions of who counts as a LEO. Further, the sets of tasks or roles that a LEO is responsible for within election administration vary greatly and may be in addition to other non-elections tasks they conduct as a part of their position. Depending on the criteria used, there are between 8,000 (Kimball and Baybeck 2013) and 10,000 (GAO 2001) local jurisdictions with some role in election administration in the US.[1]

This paper is organized with two goals: First is to contribute to our understanding of who serves as an LEO. This is the bulk of this paper and it aims to add to the base of knowledge on who becomes and serves as an LEO. This information also provides a foundation to understand how their personal backgrounds and professional experiences influence administrative decision making. Understanding who actually runs elections is an important first step in understanding the ways in which a bureaucrat's personal and professional characteristics may help shape the voter experience and improve (or erode) citizens' beliefs that our elections system is fair, accessible, and produces legitimate outcomes. How does a person become a LEO? Why do they serve? If LEOs are "street level bureaucrats," what does that really mean for them?

In an attempt to chip away at these questions, we offer an update on the demographic profile of the American LEO, some insights into their work environment, and how some of the data we collected compare with other local government offices. In a series of national surveys of local election officials[2] serving local jurisdictions, we asked

[1] The variation in this number is due to the sharing of responsibilities by multiple officers or officers for different portions of the election process in some states.

[2] We surveyed the chief local election officials in these surveys. We are careful not to use the term chief election

LEOs in our sample about their workload, years in service, pay, and professional training. We asked how they first came into election administration.

Our second goal is to explore the gendered nature of local election administration, and see if we can understand how this happened and, by all indications, why it appears to be continuing. Our surveys, along with past surveys of LEOs, have consistently found that women make up over 75% of LEOs in the US. This pattern parallels some other similar public positions such as municipal and county clerks (which overlap with LEOs in some cases.) We are interested in learning if this pattern constitutes an opportunity for women to enter public service, or whether women are filtered into elections leadership based on the perceived nature of the work or prestige and power attached to these public positions.

We start by reviewing past research on LEOs, and embed these findings within previous research on gender and local government, in our first attempt to gain leverage on our goals for the paper. This review provides several possible theories to understand the representation of women in local election administration. Next, we share the results from our own LEO surveys. Much of this section is a review of the descriptive statistics from key demographic and career variables we collected data on in 2018 and 2019. We conclude with a discussion centered primarily on the gender and LEO research questions and some recommendations for future research efforts.

2. Understanding the Demographics and Career Pathways of LEOs

Administering elections is a diverse interaction of federal, state, and local governments and priorities (Hale and Slaton 2008). These interactions include the private sector as election offices rely on equipment and supply vendors to manage voter registration, administer election conduct, and secure data and information. These mission-critical tasks have raised calls to better understand who LEOs are, how they are prepared and supported by those outside the local jurisdiction, and what resources help them to meet the challenges of modern election administration. For this paper we focus on

official in this context as that refers to the state level election official such as a Secretary of State. In our survey we did screen to ask that if the respondent was, "the local official responsible for administering elections in your jurisdiction"

Table 1. Profile of LEOs from Previous Survey Research (CRS Surveys - Fischer and Coleman n.d.)

	2004	2006	2008
Elected	65%	58%	53%
Women	75%	77%	76%
White	94%	95%	94%
Salary over $40,000	47%	39%	37%
Older than 50 years	63%	62%	62%

the first question: Who is the American LEO? We will also review data on the tasks and resource issues that LEOs face in the administration of elections.

Understanding both the make-up and perspectives of LEOs has been a focus of several waves of survey research over the past 15 years (Moynihan and Silva 2008; Kimball and Kropf 2006; Burden et al. 2013). These initial research efforts centered on understanding the implementation of the 2002 Help America Vote Act (HAVA). HAVA presented an opportunity to study election administration during an active period of policy change and reform in the US. Table 1 summarizes key attributes of LEOs from surveys conducted in 2004, 2006, and 2008 (Fischer and Coleman n.d.). These surveys provide a baseline on the demographics and background of LEOs. LEOs have been found to be predominately white, female, and over 50 years of age. Fischer and Coleman note these rates exceeded 2000 US Census Equal Employment Opportunity data. Comparing to 2019 data, this demographic composition is higher than administrative management roles in government settings, where an average of 37% are women on average, and 32% are White and non-Hispanic.[3] Therefore, even fifteen years ago when the first high quality LEO surveys were conducted, it was clear that women were far over-represented (by a factor of two) and whites were even more over-represented (by a factor of three). Gender and racial disparities of this magnitude deserve exploration, but their appearance among the "stewards of democracy" can raise serious concerns about the equity of our democratic system.

Who serves as a LEO is important because there is a body of evidence that shows

[3]Equal Employment Opportunity 2017 data summary for Administrative Services Managers, SOC 11-3011. Defined as, "Plan, direct, or coordinate one or more administrative services of an organization, such as records and information management, mail distribution, facilities planning and maintenance, custodial operations, and other office support services."

that demographics and personal beliefs can influence administrative decisions. For example, past research has found substantive impacts on the beliefs and attitudes of LEOs on various election reforms based on their own partisan views (Burden et al. 2013). It is not a surprise to see that LEOs are not dissimilar when compared to the voting public - personal traits or beliefs influence policy preferences. If we see certain demographic or career based patterns that lead to LEOs entering the position, might other factors also influence policy preferences or perspectives on election reform?[4]

To explore this question in more depth, we focus primarily on one demographic variable that stands out in this data: the over-representation of women as LEOs. Representative bureaucracy is a line of research about social equity in public administration and rests at the intersection of bureaucratic control, political accountability, and notions of fairness. This debate can be traced back to Kingsley's argument that certain portions of the federal bureaucracy were dominated by elites, and thus not representative (Kingsley 1944). Subsequent development of this concept has focused on the role racial or ethnically based interests and how these could be included in administrative processes (Kennedy 2014; Gooden 2015). While debates continue within academic literature over the concept and application of representative bureaucracy, a key concept is that increasing diversity within bureaucracy can bring more voices and insight to bear on the administration of US democracy.

While our present focus here is on gender, we do not wish to downplay the ongoing lack of racial diversity among local election officials in localities across the US and think it is a topic worthy of serious examination. We do not explore the subject of race in great depth because 1) there is not a large enough sample of non-white LEOs in our data for us to compare LEO attitudes toward certain public policy positions with that of their constituents, and 2) the unique challenges that local election administration presents—namely, the wide variation in elected vs. appointed local leaders, as well as the political nature of LEO responsibilities—make it difficult for us to draw many conclusions about what local governments ought to do to take action.

However, we do know that studies of representative bureaucracy strongly suggest

[4]One note we wish to make on this connection between beliefs and policy preferences: we are not suggesting that LEOs are not undertaking reforms when they are required to by law. But rather that attitudes or concerns from LEOs need to be understood to appreciate challenges or opportunities for new policy implementation.

that race and other demographic characteristics can lead to administrators advocating for policies and procedures that benefit underrepresented communities (King 2020; Bradbury and Kellough 2008). The assumption underlying the theory of representative bureaucracy is that, "if the attitudes of administrators are similar to the attitudes held by the general public, the decisions administrators make will in general be responsive to the desires of the public" (Meier and Nigro 1976, p. 4). In addition, remembering that half of LEOs are elected (USPCEA 2014), descriptive representation may also play a role in understanding the dynamics of the demographic composition of LEOs (Kropf, Vercellotti, and Kimball 2013; Clark 2014; Brunell, Anderson, and Cremona 2008). Similarly, descriptive representation assumes that constituents respond differently to representatives or bureaucrats belonging to the same or similar racial group. For instance, King and Barnes finds that voters who interacted with poll workers of the same race as the voter had higher levels of voter confidence than those who interacted with poll workers of a different race, all other things being equal 2018.

More public policy research is needed to understand whether representative bureaucracy or descriptive representation are important or desirable goals for election administration and if so, how we expect LEOs and local governments to take action. There is a further question of whether we ought to focus either of these theories on chief election officials or if we should rather focus on those who serve inside polling places. The body of work that King has done on this topic focuses specifically on poll workers, voters, and the theory of descriptive representation (King 2020). Meier and Nigro, however, strongly implied in their study of federal executives that looking to leadership may be a more useful exercise, pointing out that the "...demographic character of the entire civil service is not crucial to the effectiveness of representation as a means of political control" (Meier and Nigro 1976, p. 461). In the case of election administration, we know that many chief election officials have responsibilities that remove them from the public and it is not clear how those public interactions, however limited, shape administrative decision making. It is an important distinction to make—especially because LEOs define the procedures that temporary workers (e.g., poll workers) are expected to implement, down to the last detail, and often without oversight by a professional staff member.

Kropf et al further opine whether bureaucratic representation is a desirable goal for election administration at all 2013. That study's authors argue that political affiliation ought to be included in the definition of representation, notably because so many election official leaders are elected. If it is true that passive representation (i.e., sharing demographic characteristics with constituents) is a prerequisite for active representation (i.e., taking action that benefits those who share that characteristic), they question "whether having a representative bureaucrat (in terms of partisanship) is desirable in public policy, especially in a realm in which 'equal' treatment is an important value." On the issue to racial representation we need, as Meier and Nigro correctly point out, a workable theory of representative bureaucracy that includes 1) a definition of "representation"; 2) recognition that administrator decisions are constrained by political and other forces; and 3) more concrete evidence that administrators with origins similar to minority constituents will ultimately make decisions that benefit those constituents.

2.1. *Gender and Local Elected Officials*

When surveying the public service landscape, durable patterns of under-representation by women and minorities persist across elected and appointed offices. The Center for American Women and Politics' annual survey of elected offices notes these disparities for women. Across many types of offices, women are under-represented. For example, women currently hold only 24% of US Congressional seats; 29% of state legislature seats; and 30% of statewide elected offices. There are only 23 of the 100 largest cities in the US have women serving as mayors (CAWP 2019). There are shifts in representation in local offices, with 44% of school district seats held by women (NSBA 2018). At the city and county level, comprehensive demographic data are not available to explore similar dynamics. Research on local elected officials or public servants is fragmented, often with data collected by professional associations. These finding suggest that women are also over-represented at the county and municipal clerk level. The International Institute of Municipal Clerks noted its membership is 85% women, though this is not a complete measure of clerks. Emerging scholarship on clerks is also finding similar patterns. A national survey of clerks in 2011 found 90% were

women (Gordon 2011) and a statewide survey of California clerks found 84% were women (Crowder-Meyer, Gadarian, and Trounstine 2015). There appears to also be a sorting effect within these county elected positions. Women are over-represented as elected county officials in smaller population counties when compared to larger population counties (Bernick and Heidbreder 2018). Local positions are not uniformly more occupied by women across county jobs, a recent survey of sheriffs only 1% of respondents were women (Farris and Holman 2015).[5] This suggests there are unique dynamics at work for small to medium size local administration positions that create an over-representation of women.

Various theories have emerged to explain these under-representation at national and state level offices, and over-representation at local levels. These include cultural values and gate-keeping efforts to limit access to elected office in the US (Conway 2001). The cultural theory argues that patriarchal norms and expectations for the proper role of women in the workforce both limit public support for women and potentially undermine the initiative for women to seek office. This theory focuses on how the public perspective at large limit success in running for office.

The gate-keeping argument is an extension of the theory of cultural values, where resources are steered to male candidates because women are not seen as viable. This theory focuses on the party officials or funders that support the success of various potential candidates. There is a feedback loop between these two theories: women are seen as less able to succeed in running for office, and given no opportunity to demonstrate skills or ability to succeed, which reinforces a gatekeeper argument (and voter perception) that women are less capable.

It is important to remember that over half of local election officials are themselves elected, so we are also interested in how our research on LEOs may inform scholarship on political ambition, gender, and campaigns and elections. In examining policy level perspectives on women versus men as candidates, the cultural theory requires further development. Public attitudes on women running for office are tied not just to the gender of the candidate (or the voter), but also with party affiliation and the key policy issues in a given election. Public support for men or women candidates is found

[5]This particular example is unique, only 14% of full-time sworn sheriffs' office personnel are women based on a 2013 survey.(Burch 2016)

to be vary based on whether the issues at play in an election are identified as male or female policy issues (Dolan 2010). The public not only differentiates between men and women as candidates, but also assigns gendered value to particular policy issues. In addition, partisan identity reinforces these constructs and adds to the challenges for women running for office. This theorization of the interplay of gender and policy shifts at a local level where policy types may shift into different gendered classifications. The gatekeeper argument above would suggest that we see all elected or appointed offices kept in male control. Especially in positions that could be seen as opportunities to develop the skill and social networks to run for higher office.

These theories of gendered classifications and policy shifts at a local level. The gatekeeper argument suggests that the public expects men to hold all elected or appointed offices, especially if viewed as opportunities to develop the skill and social networks necessary to run for higher office. However as noted above, under-representation of women in official positions is not uniformly distributed across all levels. These different levels, and the policy areas they focus on are also viewed with different levels of prestige. A body of work has centered on explaining this difference in rates of representation based on the desirability of the position (Engstrom, McDonald, and Chou 1988; Clark 1991). This desirability hypothesis suggests that people filter out certain elected positions based on the prestige, power, and benefits of the office in question. The higher the perceived power or prestige, the less likely women are successful at gaining the position. The demands of positions such as clerks may be viewed as more accommodating of the multiple roles women are asked to play in their lives, in particular balancing the societal expectation of careers and care-giving (Gordon 2011).

This gendered filtering has implications for election administration and local policy. In local government, the motivation to seek office and the perspectives on managing politics have been found to differ between men and women (Fox and Schuhmann 1999). In their survey of city managers, Fox and Schuhmann found that women city managers represented their work as more a task of facilitating and managing community needs. In their surveys, women focused on the community engagement and involvement. Women were more likely to take a networked approach or view of politics and management, versus a more hierarchical perspective. For elections administration, this

perspective held by some women might align more with a voter-centric perspective on election reform and implementation. It may also make women better leaders in an administrative unit that relies heavily on volunteers and part-time workers for key duties (e.g. poll workers). One caveat is that these networked or community engage approaches women utilize may not be due to any particularly gendered worldview, but rather in the realities of administration where women must adapt strategies to succeed in the workplace. In other words, women may not take the hierarchical approach to management because that view itself is managed by male gatekeepers or is not culturally effective when employed by a woman. While women may be more community engaged, which is a desired outcome in US democratic norms, it may also just as likely be a strategy to negotiate a traditionally male dominated space.

3. Survey Results[6]

3.1. *Demographic Profile of the United States LEO*

LEOs provided us with basic demographic information: age, gender, race, and education. LEO demographic profiles and jurisdictional differences by size have not changed much over the past 15 years (and possibly longer; we are not aware of results prior to 2004). LEOs are a largely homogeneous group in terms of race, gender, and age. We find some minor differences in education, gender, and age trends when the data are broken down by jurisdiction size as measured by total registered voters. Table 2 compares these key demographic categories between the two years of the survey and by between smaller and larger jurisdictions.

We see the most stark jurisdiction-level differences when we look at levels of education and salary. By contrast, we see almost no differences by jurisdiction size when looking at demographics by race. These patterns are relatively consistent between our two surveys in 2018 and 2019. As jurisdiction size increases, LEOs are more likely to be male, younger than 50 years of age, and have attended at least some college. For example, in 2018 in the smaller jurisdictions 87% of LEOs are women, while in the larger jurisdictions with more than 250,000 registered voters 52% of the LEOs are

[6]Survey administration information and methodology is reported in the Appendix.

Table 2. Key LEO Characteristics by Jurisdiction Size (Total Registered Voters)

	2018 Survey			2019 Survey		
Demographic	Overall	<=25,000	>25,000	Overall	<=25,000	>25,000
Female	77.3%	86.5%	66.0%	77.2%	87.0%	64.8%
$50,000 or more	62.3%	43.6%	83.5%	73.8%	62.4%	88.4%
White	94.5%	95.5%	93.3%	94.9%	97.1%	92.2%
College and above	52.3%	44.4%	62.0%	59.5%	52.2%	68.8%
50 years or older	67.3%	72.9%	60.2%	70.2%	73.9%	65.3%

men. In 2019 this dynamic remained and became slightly more pronounced. Smaller jurisdictions are also administered by older LEOs compared to larger jurisdictions. In 2019, 75% of smaller jurisdiction LEOs were 50 years of age or older, while 63% of LEOs for larger jurisdictions were older than 50 years of age. Nearly all in the largest jurisdictions have a college degree, with 44% sharing with us they have graduate school training. LEOs serving smaller jurisdictions are less likely to have a college degree. Pay differences also vary in proportion to size (measured in total registered voters) - with larger jurisdictions paying more to their LEOs.

Looking across the jurisdiction sizes, there are almost no differences when we look by race. In our survey data and in the data reported by the CRS, leadership among LEOs remains overwhelmingly white. Our data indicate that larger jurisdictions might be more likely to have a non-white local election official, whether elected or appointed. We note again that our surveys target the chief election official–while it is possible that our surveys were assigned to other staff members to answer, we assume for our analysis that answers reflect the demographic profile of the department's leader.

3.2. *Professional Profile*

3.2.1. Workload

Large numbers of LEOs have non-election related responsibilities, receive ongoing training from their states, and experience large variations in pay. We find that workload and compensation varies greatly by jurisdiction size, while patterns in years in service and professional training do not, see Tables 3 and 4. The likelihood that a LEO

Table 3. Election Workload by Jurisdiction Size (2018)

			Jurisdiction Size (Registered Voters)				
All Responses	n	Overall Pct	0 to 5,000	5,001 to 25,000	25,001 to 100,000	100,001 to 250,000	> 250,000
All or almost all	349	33.2%	3% (8)	27% (80)	47% (147)	68% (66)	77% (47)
Majority	277	26.4%	19% (52)	33% (97)	30% (93)	23% (22)	20% (12)
Less than half	424	40.4%	79% (221)	40% (118)	23% (73)	9% (9)	3% (2)

Table 4. Election Workload by Jurisdiction Size (2019)

			Jurisdiction Size (Registered Voters)				
All Responses	n	Overall Pct	0 to 5,000	5,001 to 25,000	25,001 to 100,000	100,001 to 250,000	> 250,000
All or almost all	278	32.4%	5% (5)	22% (81)	44% (111)	54% (40)	80% (41)
Majority	272	31.7%	23% (23)	37% (139)	30% (77)	35% (26)	14% (7)
Less than half	307	35.8%	73% (74)	41% (155)	26% (67)	11% (8)	6% (3)

will have non-election responsibilities decrease as jurisdiction size increase.

To learn more about their professional responsibilities, we asked LEOs how much of their time is dedicated to elections. We wanted to know whether election-related matters made up all, most, or less than half of their workload. In our surveys respondents were more or less evenly split overall, with about a third of LEOs providing affirmative answers in each category. For those with varied workloads, these non-election related tasks could include maintaining vital records (i.e., birth and death certificates), recording (e.g., documents indicating liens on property), business records, and court filings.

We find important differences by jurisdiction size, with a decrease in the share of election responsibilities as jurisdiction size also decreases. In 2018, for example, 79% of LEOs from the smallest jurisdictions said that elections constitute less than half of their workload, while 77% of LEOs from the largest jurisdictions reported that elections constituted all or almost all of their workload. Similarly in 2019, 73% of LEOs from the smallest jurisdictions answered that elections constitute less than half their workload, while 80% of LEOs from the largest jurisdictions answered that elections constituted all or almost all of their workload.

In order to better understand these jurisdictional differences we included a series of job satisfaction and experience questions. In 2019, the survey asked LEOs how they felt about their sense of accomplishment, their workload, and their work-life balance. The items asked them to indicate agreement or disagreement with these statements:

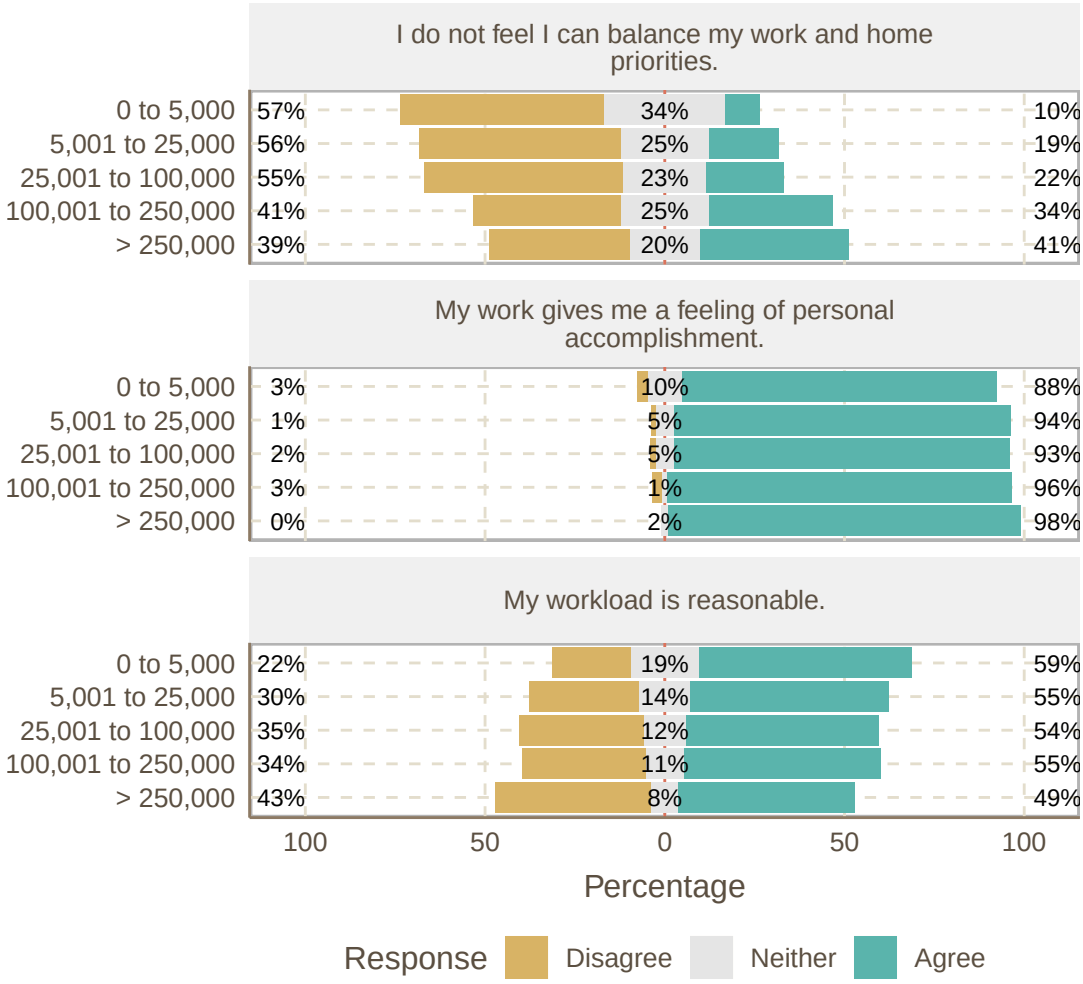

Figure 1. Workload and Work-Life Balance by Jurisdiction Size

- *My work gives me a feeling of personal accomplishment.*
- *My workload is reasonable.*
- *I do not feel I can balance my work and home priorities.*

Across all respondents we heard their work gives them a feeling of accomplishment. The largest jurisdictions were more likely to disagree with the statement "My workload is reasonable" compared to LEOs in the smallest jurisdictions, see Fig 1. A similar pattern, in reverse due to the question wording, emerges for the work-life balance question. LEOs from larger jurisdictions are more likely to agree that balance is a problem at 41%. It is important to note that between 20% and 34% of respondents were neutral on this question.

One possible explanation could be that larger jurisdictions simply face more de-

mands on their offices and staff, in terms of the number of voters served and media attention to elections process. As we discuss later in the paper, LEOs that serve larger jurisdictions are more likely to be appointed, which could introduce a type of political demand that those who serve as electeds in smaller jurisdictions might not experience. It is possible, in other words, that administrative burdens are expressed differently between those who are elected versus appointed.

However, small jurisdictions are also likely to feel the impact of multiple demands on time and resources. When we asked about changes to improve elections in their jurisdictions, one LEO provided us with their perspective on how divided responsibilities impact the county:

> 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 2 of us... I honestly wish that it would be mandatory to have an Election Administrator, someone that does only elections and voter registration.

This clerk's quote is indicative of the multiple, and at times conflicting demands placed on America's stewards of democracy. While they are tasked to take on a diverse array of tasks, as we show next, they do so under with insufficient budgets, staff, and under close and critical public scrutiny.

3.2.2. Election Related Tasks

We asked respondents to share what tasks they were responsible for as local election officials. We generated a list of these tasks and asked them to check all that apply. These included (ordered by common overall response):

- Election Day Voting
- Early Voting (including absentee ballots)
- Voter Registration
- Managing Polling Places
- Recruiting and Managing Poll Workers Voter Roll Maintenance
- Election Recounts and Audits Counting Ballots
- Canvassing and Certifying the Election Selecting Voting Equipment

- Designing and Printing Ballots

The responses by jurisdiction size are reported in Table 5. Overall, most tasks are shared across all jurisdictions regardless of size. Though four tasks standout as more common for larger jurisdictions when compared to smaller ones: recounts and audits; canvassing and certifying; selecting voting equipment; and design and printing of ballots.

We noticed above that LEOs overwhelmingly express a sense of personal accomplishment with their work, even though many express concerns about their workload. On balance, the positive features of the profession seem to be winning out.

3.2.3. Career Origins and Experience

We noticed above that LEOs overwhelmingly express a sense of personal accomplishment with their work, even though many express concerns about their workload. On balance, the positive features of the profession seem to be winning out.

Most LEOs have substantial on the job experience with elections. In the 2019 survey, we asked LEOs when they first started working in election administration. Figure 2 shows the distribution of this first year of work in election administration by three groupings of jurisdiction size. The past three years shows a peak in new hires, but by and large most have served in election administration for several years. Half of of our respondents have been in their career since at least 2007, with the longest serving official having started their career in early 1960's. The smallest jurisdictions, with less than 5,000 registered voters, had LEOs with a median first year in election of administration of 2010. Larger jurisdictions, those with over 100,000 registered voters had a median first year of 2003. The LEOs serving jurisdictions in between these sizes started work in 2007. The smallest jurisdictions have an expected more recent median first year, as we expect that those in larger jurisdictions have spent more time in their careers and advanced to these larger jurisdictions. The figure below shows how officials started their career over time, Figure 2. In the 2019 survey, we asked LEOs when they first started working in election administration. shows the distribution of this first year of work in election administration by three groupings of jurisdiction size. There

Table 5. Election Tasks LEO is Responsible For Administering (Percentages by Size)

			Jurisdiction Size (Registered Voters)				
Election Tasks	n	Overall	0 to 5,000	5,001 to 25,000	25,001 to 100,000	100,001 to 250,000	> 250,000
Election Day Voting	817	93.3%	94% (99)	92% (358)	94% (243)	93% (69)	94% (48)
Early Voting (incl absentee)	805	91.9%	93% (98)	92% (357)	92% (237)	91% (67)	90% (46)
Voter Registration	802	91.6%	95% (100)	93% (359)	91% (234)	84% (62)	92% (47)
Managing Polling Places	791	90.3%	94% (99)	90% (349)	91% (236)	85% (63)	86% (44)
Recruiting and Managing Poll Workers	790	90.2%	96% (101)	89% (347)	91% (235)	86% (64)	84% (43)
Voter Roll Maintenance	779	88.9%	88% (92)	90% (348)	89% (230)	85% (63)	90% (46)
Election Recounts and Audits	765	87.3%	74% (78)	88% (343)	89% (230)	92% (68)	90% (46)
Counting Ballots	762	87.0%	85% (89)	85% (331)	88% (228)	92% (68)	90% (46)
Canvassing and Certifying the Election	710	81.1%	62% (65)	81% (316)	83% (213)	92% (68)	94% (48)
Selecting Voting Equipment	616	70.3%	53% (56)	69% (266)	72% (186)	85% (63)	88% (45)
Designing and Printing Ballots	568	64.8%	40% (42)	63% (243)	68% (175)	85% (63)	88% (45)

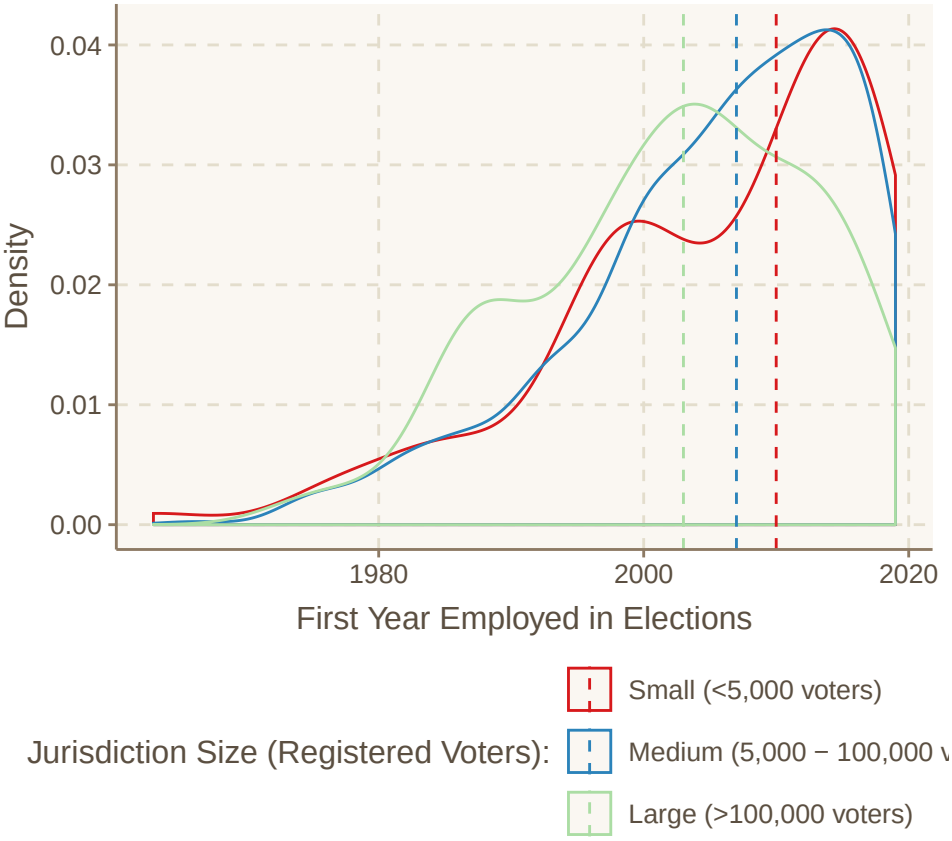

Figure 2. Year of First Job in Election Administration, by Jurisdiction Size

is a peak of new hires in the past three years, however many have been serving in election administration for many years. These findings give us high confidence that we are engaged with a group of experts who have informed opinions about elections and voting. They are also uniquely positioned to give us their perspectives about changes in election administration over time, which we discuss in more detail later.

We also asked where they came from just before their first elections job. [7] Over 47% of our respondents indicated coming from the private sector prior to election administration, and 44% reported coming from some other form of public service. The bulk of those coming from prior public service originated in local government positions. A very small subset of respondents came from an elections related field such as private elections services or vendor (1.4%), political parties or campaigns (7%)

In addition to understanding where they came from, we also asked whether the LEO

[7] We offered respondents a wide set of choices and initially asked them to select one that best reflected their work prior to elections. However, a large number of respondents shared multiple responses. Instead of losing this data, we have decided to keep all of the responses and report them in aggregate to understand what fields lead to election administration.

Table 6. Selection Method by Size of Jurisdiction

	Jurisdiction Size (Registered Voters)		
Selection Method	<=25,000	25,000 to 250,000	> 250,000
Appointed	41%	59%	71%
Elected	59%	41%	29%

was elected or appointed to their position. Fifty percent of our sample were elected, with the other 50% being appointed. Of those elected, 67% were elected in partisan contests. This split in elected versus appointed shows a decrease from previous surveys (Fischer and Coleman n.d.; Moynihan and Silva 2008). We are not able to determine yet if states changed LEO selection procedures for LEOs or if this difference we observed reflects sampling challenges and our inclusion of more larger sized jurisdictions that tend to have appointed LEOs. For smaller jurisdictions, almost 60% are elected to their position, while for larger jurisdictions over 70% are appointed as shown in Table 6.

We are encouraged to find that LEOs are by and large public officials who enjoy their jobs. What about upward mobility? Another aspect of LEO careers we are interested in is the future career plans for those that serve as LEOs. As a part of our research questions around the over-representation of women in LEO positions, we hypothesized that LEOs might use the position as an entry into elected public service. We asked respondents to indicate agreement or disagreement with the statement: "My career goals include running for elected office (different than my current position if elected.)" Overwhelmingly, respondents disagreed with this statement. Almost 70% disagreed and only 8% agreed with the statement. A sizable 23% neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. This response pattern is persistent when we compare those elected versus appointed to office (Figure 3) and when we compare women to men (Figure 4). We note the potential for some response bias if we assume that LEOs do not want to share their political ambitions or represent themselves as using their office as a springboard for personal advancement. At the same time, the elected LEOs, while guarded, do have a sizable neither agree nor disagree response that might be a space to explore further.

Table 7. Prior Career Position before First LEO Role

			Jurisdiction Size				
Prior Position	n	Percent	0 to 5,000	5,001 to 25,000	25,001 to 100,000	100,001 to 250,000	> 250,000
Private: Nonelection	400	45.7%	53% (56)	47% (184)	44% (113)	39% (29)	35% (18)
Public: Local Govt	250	28.5%	27% (28)	29% (113)	32% (83)	20% (15)	22% (11)
Public: Elected	69	7.9%	10% (10)	7% (27)	7% (19)	12% (9)	8% (4)
Public: State Fed Govt	62	7.1%	5% (5)	9% (33)	5% (12)	12% (9)	6% (3)
Grad: College/Grad	62	7.1%	7% (7)	6% (24)	7% (19)	12% (9)	6% (3)
Other	46	5.3%	5% (5)	6% (22)	5% (12)	8% (6)	2% (1)
Grad: HS	39	4.5%	9% (9)	4% (14)	5% (13)	3% (2)	2% (1)
Pol Party/Campaign	36	4.1%	3% (3)	2% (7)	5% (12)	14% (10)	8% (4)
NGO	35	4.0%	3% (3)	3% (13)	5% (13)	4% (3)	6% (3)
Vol: Pol Party/Campaign	25	2.9%	2% (2)	2% (6)	3% (8)	11% (8)	2% (1)
No response	23	2.6%	4% (4)	3% (13)	1% (3)	3% (2)	2% (1)
Vol: Election Ofc	15	1.7%	1% (1)	1% (5)	3% (7)	0% (0)	4% (2)
Higher Ed Emp	13	1.5%	2% (2)	2% (7)	1% (2)	3% (2)	0% (0)
Private: Election Svcs	12	1.4%	0% (0)	1% (3)	1% (2)	4% (3)	8% (4)

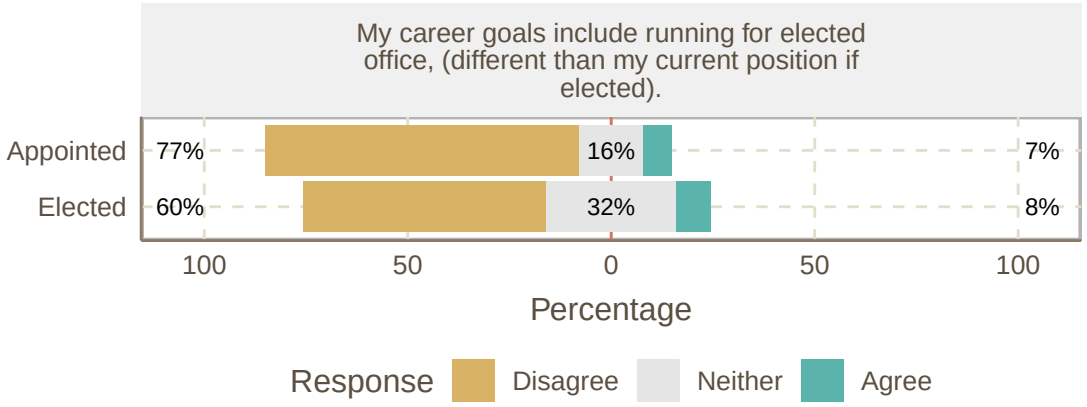

Figure 3. Do future career goals include election to higher office, elected and appointed LEOs

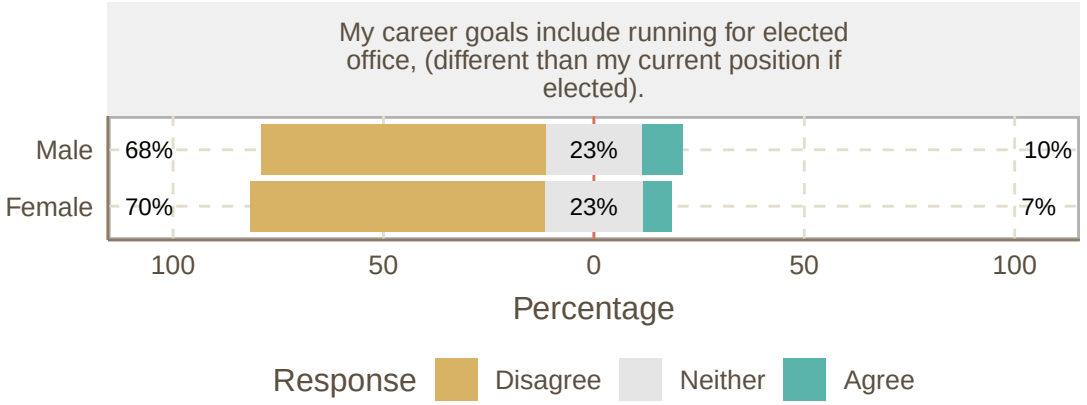

Figure 4. Do future career goals include election to higher office, by gender

Table 8. 2018 LEO Pay by Jurisdiction Size (Registered Voters)

Salary	0 to 5,000	5,001 to 25,000	25,001 to 100,000	100,001 to 250,000	> 250,000
Less than $20,000	26%	2%	0%	0%	0%
$20,000 to $34,999	20%	12%	4%	2%	0%
$35,000 to $49,999	27%	27%	19%	2%	0%
$50,000 to $74,999	22%	38%	51%	36%	11%
$75,000 +	5%	20%	26%	60%	89%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 9. 2019 LEO Pay by Jurisdiction Size (Registered Voters)

Salary	0 to 5,000	5,001 to 25,000	25,001 to 100,000	100,001 to 250,000	> 250,000
Less than $20,000	19%	1%	0%	0%	0%
$20,000 to $34,999	26%	7%	3%	0%	0%
$35,000 to $49,999	27%	21%	14%	1%	0%
$50,000 to $74,999	24%	49%	43%	20%	9%
$75,000 to $99,999	3%	20%	27%	35%	13%
$100,000 and greater	0%	3%	13%	44%	78%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

3.2.4. Pay

Perhaps the reason LEOs stay around is the pay. There is a wide range of pay among LEOs, with average pay increasing as jurisdiction size increases. In 2018, just over 45% of LEOs from jurisdictions of 5,000 or fewer registered voters 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% are paid less than $35,000 for jurisdictions of 25,000 to 100,000 registered voters. For jurisdictions with over 100,000 registered voters, almost all LEOs (around 97%) are paid above $50,000. Similar jurisdiction-based differences emerged in our 2019 data, see Table 9. In that year, 45% of LEOs in the smallest jurisdictions were paid less than $35,000 annually, with almost 20% paid $20,000 or less. By contrast, 78% of LEOs serving in the largest jurisdictions in 2019 reported pay of $100,000 or more. Note that between our 2018 and 2019 surveys, we added an additional salary category for 2019 at the higher end of the scale.

We noted earlier that there was an increased likelihood of a male serving as a LEO as jurisdiction size increased. There appears to be some relationship between pay and gender in our survey data as well, with pay increasing as jurisdiction size gets larger. Figure 5 shows the distribution of salary ranges by gender. Men are more likely to be

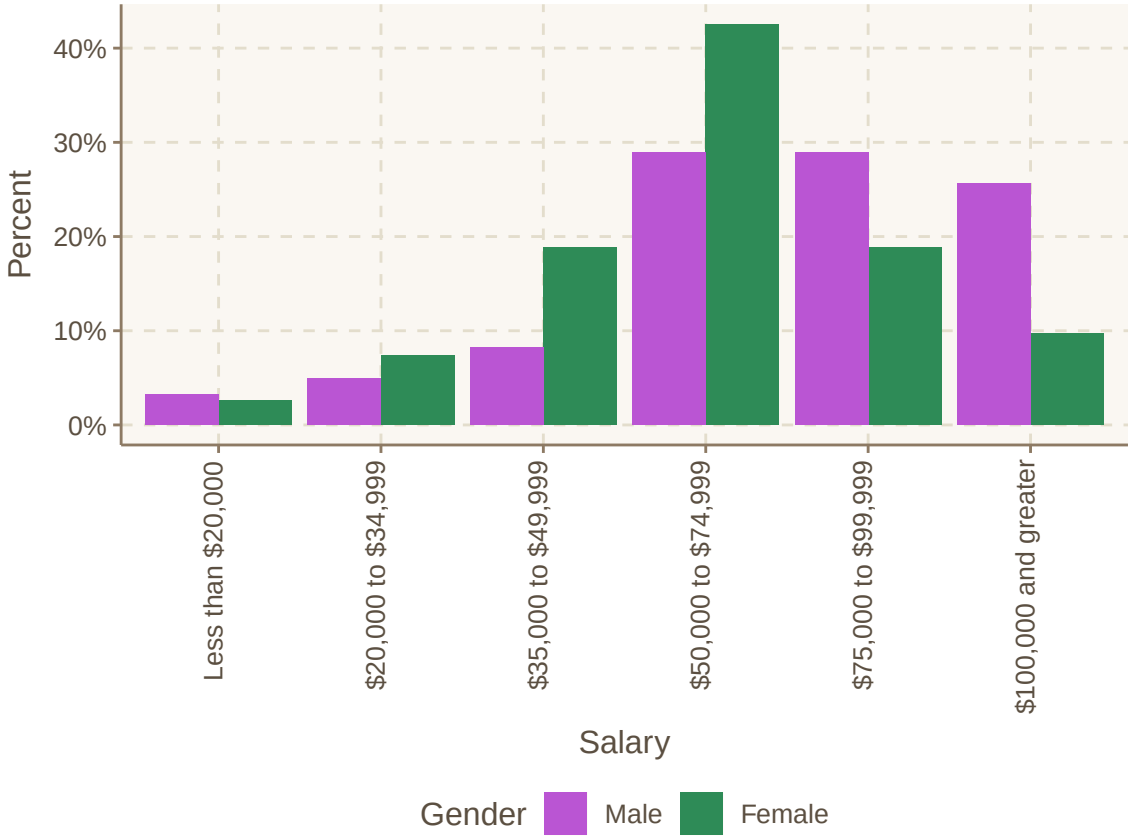

Figure 5. Salary by Gender among LEOs

Table 10. Salary by Gender

Salary	Male	Female
Less than $20,000	3%	3%
$20,000 to $34,999	5%	7%
$35,000 to $49,999	8%	19%
$50,000 to $74,999	29%	43%
$75,000 to $99,999	29%	19%
$100,000 and greater	26%	10%

Table 11. Educational Attainment by Gender

Education	Male	Female
High school	3%	13%
Some college	19%	33%
College	41%	38%
Some graduate school	11%	3%
Graduate school	26%	12%

have higher salaries when compared to women LEOs, most notably for those reporting over $100,000. These higher paid respondents make up 12% of our sample. Differences in pay can be explained by differences in experience or qualifications. Here we see a mixed set of results. Women are slightly more likely to have been in the elections administration field longer, but are also less likely to have more advanced education or degrees see Figure 6 and Table 11. The plot on first year shows a slightly earlier first year for women, with the median first year being 2006 for women and 2009 for men. Education is where we see more pronounced difference. Of male LEOs, only 21% do not have a college degree while 46% of women lack a college degree. On the other end of the scale, 37% of men have a graduate degree or some graduate education while only 14% of women do.

In 2019 we followed up our pay question and asked LEOs the degree to which they are satisfied with their pay. Interestingly, most LEOs express satisfaction with their pay, with the largest jurisdictions more likely to agree. Overall, nearly 53% of LEOs either "strongly" or "somewhat" agreed with the statement, "I am satisfied with my pay." While the majority clearly express satisfaction with pay, there are a substantial percentage of LEOs who indicate some level of dissatisfaction. Notably, 32% of LEOs

Table 12. Size of Jurisdiction LEO Manages by Gender

Jurisdiction Size (Registered Voters)	Male LEO	Female LEO
0 to 5,000	6%	14%
5,001 to 25,000	26%	49%
25,001 to 100,000	39%	26%
100,001 to 250,000	13%	7%
> 250,000	15%	3%

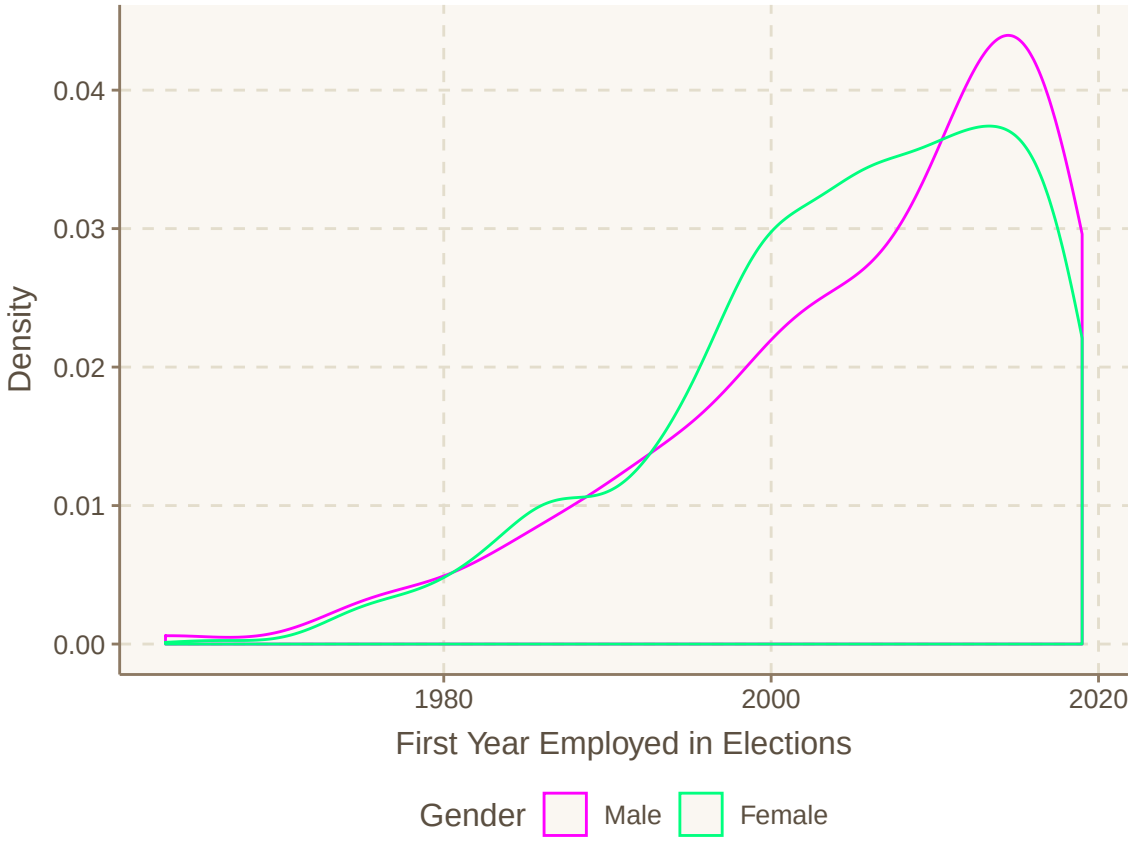

Figure 6. Year of First Job in Election Administration, by Gender

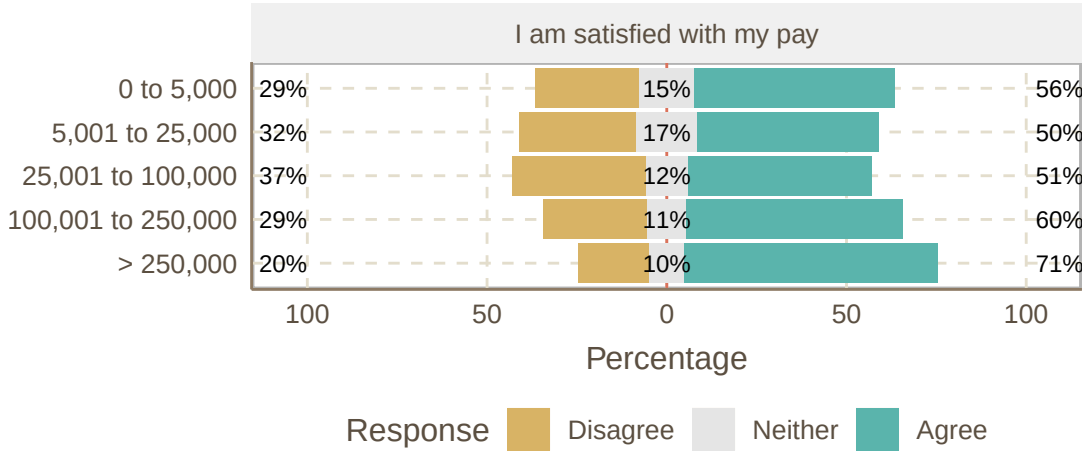

Figure 7. Satisfaction with Pay by Jurisdiction Size (2019)

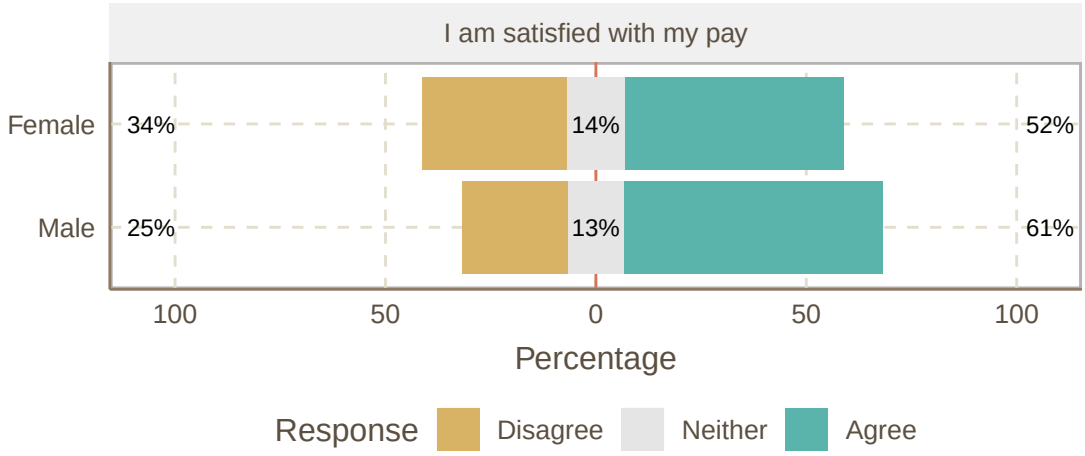

Figure 8. Satisfaction with Pay by Gender (2019)

"strongly" or "somewhat" disagreed with that statement and over 14% neither agreed nor disagreed. When we looked at the same responses by jurisdiction, agreement increases with jurisdiction size, as shown in Figure 7. There are some differences between men and women on this item, with men more likely to agree that they are satisfied with their pay (61%) versus women (52%) as shown in Figure 8.

4. Where Does Local Election Administration Fit?

In one respect, the LEO workforce is not that different than the typical local workforce, which is estimated to be 61% female at the city/county level. When we look closer at data from Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), it appears that the

LEO community is unique compared to other executive level managers—gender and pay trends more closely mimic trends among the country's state and local employees who provide basic administrative support. The LEO community, however, is not entirely unique in its racial demographic when compared to other similarly situated state and government employees.

Gender and pay dynamics in state and local government employment have not changed dramatically since at least the year 2000. When we looked at EEOC state and local government employment statistics in 2015, we discovered that "Officials Administrators" were more likely to be men (58% male versus 42% female), while "Administrative Support" leaned heavily female (81% female versus just 19% male). When we looked at median pay for these state and local government jobs, we note that on average LEOs are paid much less than executive department heads. While the average LEO makes $50,000, the median salary for Officials Administrators is over $70,000. However, the median salary for Administrative Support positions is just under $50,000. While we recognize that our data may skew toward small sized jurisdictions, we raise the possibility that LEOs may be viewed differently than the heads of other governmental organizations.

Our findings also show the demographics or LEOs are concentrated in certain types of jurisdictions. While as a whole the field appears to have an over-representation of women, this is not evenly distributed across the sizes of jurisdictions. Women primarily serve the smaller jurisdictions and are compensated accordingly. The largest jurisdictions, and the ones that serve the most voters, shift the over-representation to men. These findings are not a surprise based on previous research. The size of a county's population is a predictor of whether its chief official is male or female, with larger populations more likely served by men (Bernick and Heidbreder 2018). There are two competing perspectives on how top explain this. The first the desirability hypothesis (Engstrom, McDonald, and Chou 1988) positing that power and prestige distribution across types of offices explain the under-representation of women in larger (and therefore more desirable) offices. Second, is that the work of a smaller jurisdiction LEO is the type of occupation that best serves the competing demands placed on women in the workforce (Gordon 2011). We hope to explore this interaction further with future

surveys and interview research.

5. Change Over Time or A Stable Workforce?

While some patterns in LEO demographics have been stable across both our two surveys and the previous LEO research, we also note that several do show change over time. The percent of LEOs elected to their position has decreased somewhat since 2004. Additionally, level of pay and education have increased over time as well. These trends might suggest an increased level of professionalization among LEOs.[8] Table 13 reports out key attributes of LEOs from the three Congressional Research Service LEO surveys from 2004 to 2008 and our most recent 2019 LEO survey. In 2019 we added questions that make comparisons possible. Notably, by adding questions about elections versus appointments for LEO selection and political ideology questions. Our survey does handle the responses slightly differently as noted. Our salary categories spanned over the $40,000 value and has a break at $50,000, which is close to what the present day value of $40,000 would be if inflation adjusted from 2008. Another difference is our ideology scale used party affiliation (Democrat to Republican) versus general beliefs (Conservative to Liberal).[9] Another caution is related to the sampling method used for each survey. It is possible that the LEO 2019 method places more emphasis on larger jurisdictions compared to the CRS sampling strategy.[10]

We note some important points outside of our survey instrument that might help put these data into context. First, other research work that we have conducted suggests that these LEOs are most likely trained by state officials at least annually, if not more often. Some LEOs might receive training from state or regional professional

[8]By professionalization here we particularly mean the increased use of formal training and development, including higher education. This is not to say LEOs have not been an established profession, but rather these data suggest a trend towards more professionalization.

[9]Our scale was: Strong Democrat, Not very strong Democrat, Independent lean Democrat Independent, Independent, Independent lean Republican Independent, Not very strong Republican, Strong Republican.

[10]Our sampling approach was focused on making sure we heard from LEOs that work on behalf of the bulk of registered voters in the US. We sampled 100% of LEOs with 15,000 or more registered voters in their jurisdiction. Below that, we used a sampling probability based on jurisdiction size so as to minimize the impact of certain states with 100's of very small jurisdictions. The CRS sample included all LEOs in a state if there were 150 or fewer LEOs in that state. For states with 150 or more LEOs, a random sample was drawn. It is possible that this approach captures more smaller sized jurisdictions in the CRS approach. While number of LEO is inversely related to jurisdiction size, some states such as Texas would still be 100% sampled, including some very small jurisdictions. For a detailed discussion of the sampling challenges in LEO research, see Lee and Gronke (2020).

Table 13. Profile of LEOs from Across 15 Years

	2004	2006	2008	2019
Elected	65%	58%	53%	50%
Women	75%	77%	76%	77%
White	94%	95%	94%	95%
Without College Degree	60%	59%	56%	40%
Salary over $40,000	47%	39%	37%	74%
Older than 50 years	63%	62%	62%	70%
Conservative	51%	47%	44%	43%

Note:
Notes: Salary range in 2019 does not fully match, we used $50,000 as a break. 2019 Survey also used a seven point scale for Democrat to Republican. We are comparing Republican identfication to Conservative here.

associations. The 2018 LEO Survey found that 65% of LEOs are members of a state professional association, and about 24% are members of regional associations. Second, several states offer certificate programs that have to be renewed or maintained with continuing education credits, some of which are offered through partnerships with universities and with Election Center. Third, our informal conversations with LEOs indicate that some of the small jurisdictions might have an especially difficult time receiving training, particularly if the LEO has a limited travel budget and does not live or work near the location where training takes place.

6. Conclusion

We have focused on the demographic dynamics in election administration for two reasons: first, to add to the important discussions already taking place around gender, pay, and racial inequities in government hiring; and second, to open up a conversation about the unique place that LEOs occupy in our government and to suggest that there is some value in talking about representation and equity among leaders who hold powerful bureaucratic positions.

In our paper, we found that most LEOs who responded to our survey were women and even though many indicated that they were overall satisfied and even happy with their jobs, there are still many opportunities for improvement. Even though LEOs

across jurisdictions face the same responsibilities and challenges that we discussed in our survey research, female LEOs were more likely to be paid less than their male counterparts, who serve larger jurisdictions and who are more likely to be political appointees, despite the fact that women, on average, serve longer than men. Overall, the LEOs we surveyed, who are the chief election officials in their jurisdictions, are paid less than executives in other local governmental organizations, indicating that election administration suffers from the perception that its low-level administrative work that does not hold much prestige and, at worst, "women's work."

But there were some bright spots; women may also be more likely to enjoy work life balance if they hold an elected position, which many of them do, and again expressed satisfaction with pay. Our findings and findings of other surveys suggest that election administration could serve as a pipeline for female leadership, even if LEOs are remiss to admit that election to higher offices is a career goal.

We also noted the need for more research, especially on the intersection of LEO leadership, government hiring, and race. Our findings on the lack of racial diversity in LEO leadership are not only crucial to understanding the extent to which local governments successfully create opportunities for racial minorities, but also raise serious questions about democratic representation and voter confidence among under-represented groups. We believe that public servants have an obligation to help correct the social inequities that their institutions have propagated and we hope will be guided by studies like this. While we believe that election officials have a similar responsibility, both in terms of their hiring decisions and how they chose to engage their electorate, we also urge caution and sensitivity. This is a topic we remain fascinated by and encourage further research.

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7. Appendices

Appendix A. Sampling and Survey Design

We administered surveys in 2018 and 2019. We used slightly different sampling procedures between the two years to try and control for the impact of jurisdiction size as measured by total number of registered voters.

The 2018 Local Election Official Survey utilized a sampling frame built off of a

comprehensive list of all local election officials in the country obtained from the US Vote Foundation. This was matched with registered voter totals from 2018 Election Administration and Voting Survey (EAVS) administered by the US Election Assistance Commission (EAC). [11] We also used local contacts and websites when necessary for sub county data. We drew a sample of 3,000 jurisdictions, using sampling proportional to the registered voter population. For the 2019 Local Election Official Survey we developed a new sampling frame by building off of the 2018 EAVS and scraping data from Secretary of State or similar websites state-by-state. We made a series of edits to this list of jurisdictions to create proper entries for each local jurisdiction that included a local administrator responsible for election administration. This resulted in a sampling frame with 7,834 local jurisdictions. We drew a sample of n=3,000 from this list using the random systematic sampling method, with inclusion probabilities proportional to number of registered voters in each jurisdiction. This ensured that all of largest jurisdictions were included in a sample ($>$ 25,000 registered voters), and we collect a representative sample of jurisdictions of smaller sizes.

Our sampling method was determined with two goals in mind. First, we wanted our sample to be representative of local election officials. Second, we wanted our sample to be nationally representative of service provision to voters, or put another way, we want to assure that we have sufficient coverage of local election officials serving a large and diverse American electorate. As pointed out by previous researchers, "(l)ess than 6% of the local election officials in the United States serve more than two-thirds of the voters in a national election" (Kimball and Baybeck 2013). Therefore, following past practice, we have sampled jurisdictions proportional to the number of registered voters they serve. In practice, what this means is that 100% of the larger jurisdictions ($>$ 25,000 registered voters) fell into our sample.

A key challenge in sampling LEOs is the diversity of jurisdictions, and that most of the LEOs in the United States are concentrated in smaller jurisdictions when measured by number of registered voters. This is connected to state-specific election administration systems. For example, the top five states in terms of number of LEOs represent 57% of the sampling frame. However, these five states combined only represent 8% of registered voters in our sampling frame, and for all but one of these states, the median total registered voters in the jurisdiction is less than 1,800. Our sample resulted in less of these very small jurisdictions responding. The top five states in terms of number of LEOs represent 34% of our sample and 17% of registered voters. We intentionally divide jurisdictions into various size classes in an effort to control for the impact of the size, distribution, and representation of jurisdictions.

The 2018 survey was distributed online and with mailed surveys. The initial waves of distributions were done online via email and scheduled around state primary election schedules in the Spring of 2018. As response rates stabilized we mailed paper surveys to non-respondents in the sample. Approximately half of the sample in 2018 came from

[11] https://www.eac.gov/research-and-data/election-administration-voting-survey/

each mode (n=1071). The 2019 survey was designed in the Spring of 2019. The survey was mailed late in August, 2019 with survey returns occurring over three months, mostly concentrated in the first 6 weeks (n=871). Reminder emails were sent twice in September and October for jurisdictions if we had an email address for the chief election official. The 2018 survey items focused on preparedness for the 2018 Midterm election in November. The 2019 survey focused on the LEOs themselves with items on career history, job satisfaction, attitudes on various election reform initiatives, and finally personal demographics. Response rates for 2018 was 36% and 2019 was 29%. The primary source of the difference was the mode of survey. 2018 began with an email invitation to participate using an online Qualtrics survey, with non-respondents mailed follow up paper versions. The 2019 survey began with mailed surveys to the entire sample and email follow up to complete a PDF version of the survey.