



FINDINGS FROM THE
2023 LEO SURVEY



Today's Election Administration Landscape

Findings from the Reed College Elections & Voting Information Center
2023 Survey of Local Election Officials

Paul Gronke, PhD | Paul Manson, PhD

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Topline Findings from the 2023 EVIC LEO Survey

- **Job satisfaction** remains high, but misinformation, stress, and a toxic political environment are high level concerns.
- **Turnover** is twice as high as found in prior LEO surveys, but loss of institutional knowledge may be tempered by lateral movement. We need to know much more about who replaces a LEO when they depart.
- **Workloads** continue to rise across all task categories. LEOs are notably impacted by a rapid increase in public records requests and citizen inquiries.

Topline Findings from the 2023 EVIC LEO Survey

- The **labor time it takes to administer elections** is high and stretches the capacity of elections offices regardless of size. LEOs report increases in workload across most task categories, and the peak workload stretches well over a month.
- **Staffing and hiring** continue to be a challenge for many elections offices. Barriers to hiring include lack of appropriate skill sets and pay levels. LEOs are divided as to whether the political environment is a barrier.
- **Misinformation is a concern** among most LEOs. LEOs in smaller jurisdictions rely on face to face communication to counter misinformation, while LEOs in larger jurisdictions rely on a broad suite of communications channels.



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Who Are Today's LEOs?

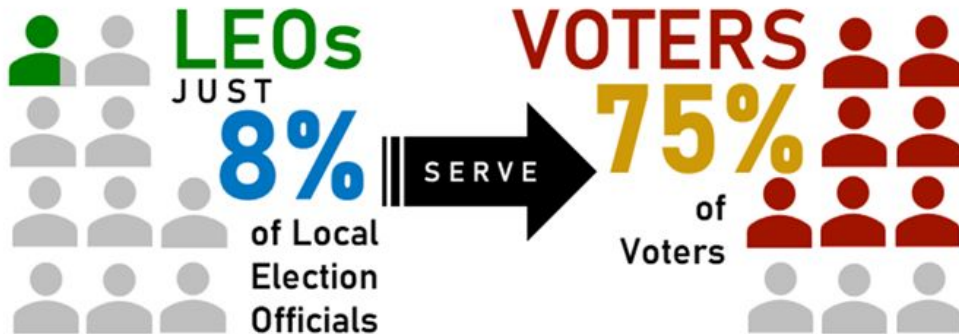
Demographics: Stability in an Environment of Change

- Many **demographic characteristics** of the LEO population **have remained stable** over the 5 years EVIC has been conducting surveys and when compared to Congressional Research Service surveys from 2004-2008.
 - [Gender and racial composition](#) among LEOs are areas that EVIC continues to research.
- **Vast differences** exist between elections offices that serve the largest and smallest populations in the United States.
 - Jurisdiction size is a fundamental to any attempt to understand and generalize about election administration in the United States.
 - Most results reported by EVIC in this report are broken down by jurisdiction size.
- Approximately **half of LEOs in our survey were elected** to their position.

Demographics: Stability in an Environment of Change

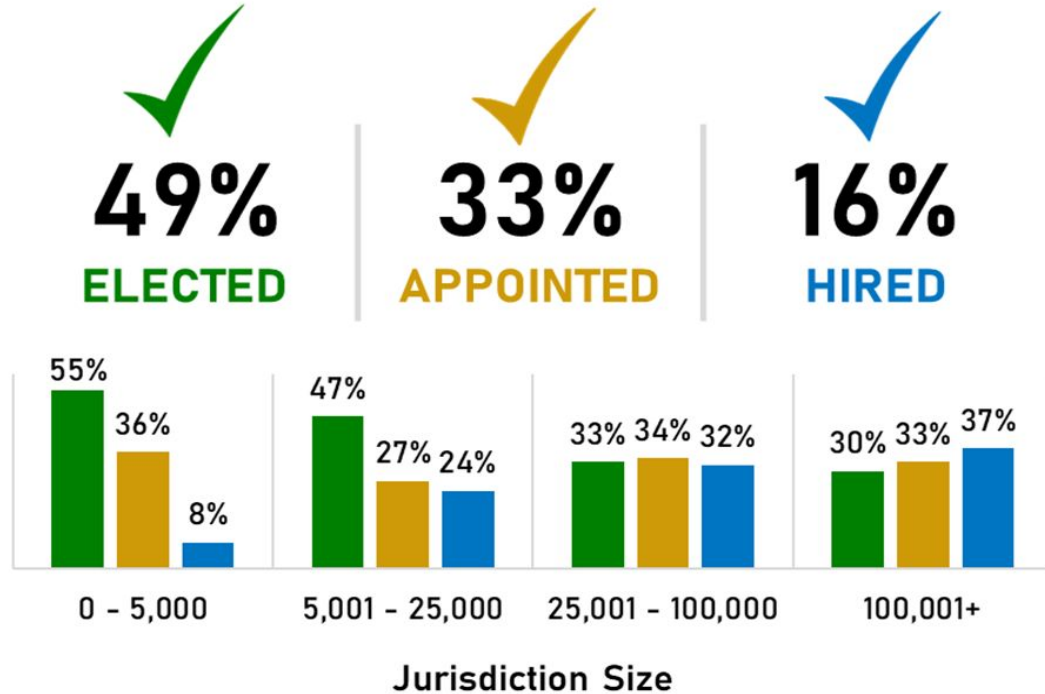
	2004	2006	2008	2020	2023
Elected	65%	58%	53%	57%	49%
Women	75%	77%	76%	80%	84%
White	94%	95%	94%	94%	92%
Without College Degree	60%	59%	56%	50%	55%
Salary over \$40,000	47%	39%	37%	45%	58%
Older than 50 years	63%	62%	62%	74%	74%
Conservative	51%	47%	44%	42%	45%

Demographics: The “75:8” Problem



- In 42 states, elections are administered at the **county level**. In 8 states, elections are administered at the **village, township, and municipality** level.
- Of 7,800 LEOs, 3,400 work in just 2 states (Michigan and Wisconsin). Another 1,500 administer elections in towns and villages in New England.
- The EVIC LEO Survey uses sampling methods to ensure that **our survey does not over- or under-represent small, medium, or large jurisdictions**.

Demographics: Elected vs. Appointed LEOs



- About **half of LEOs are elected** to their positions. The remaining half of LEOs are appointed or hired.
- Over half (51.%) of these are partisan elections, but the **vast majority (86.1%) of all LEOs' elections were uncontested.**
- Elective positions are much more common in smaller jurisdictions.

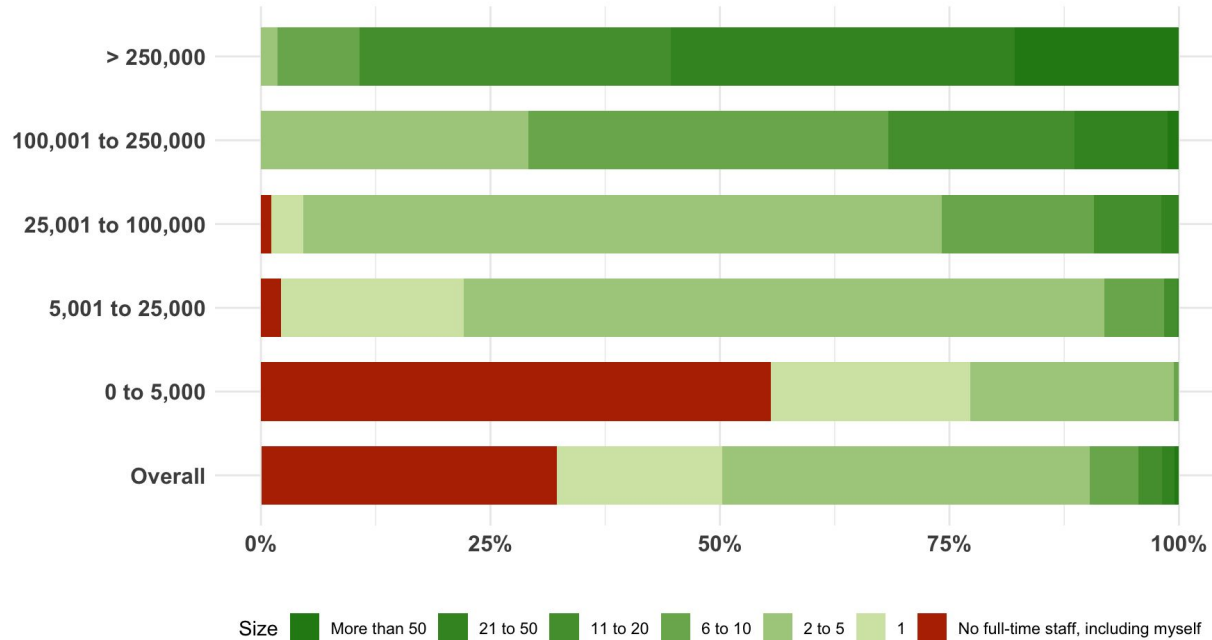


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The Work Environment: Hours Worked, Staff Sizes, and Workload

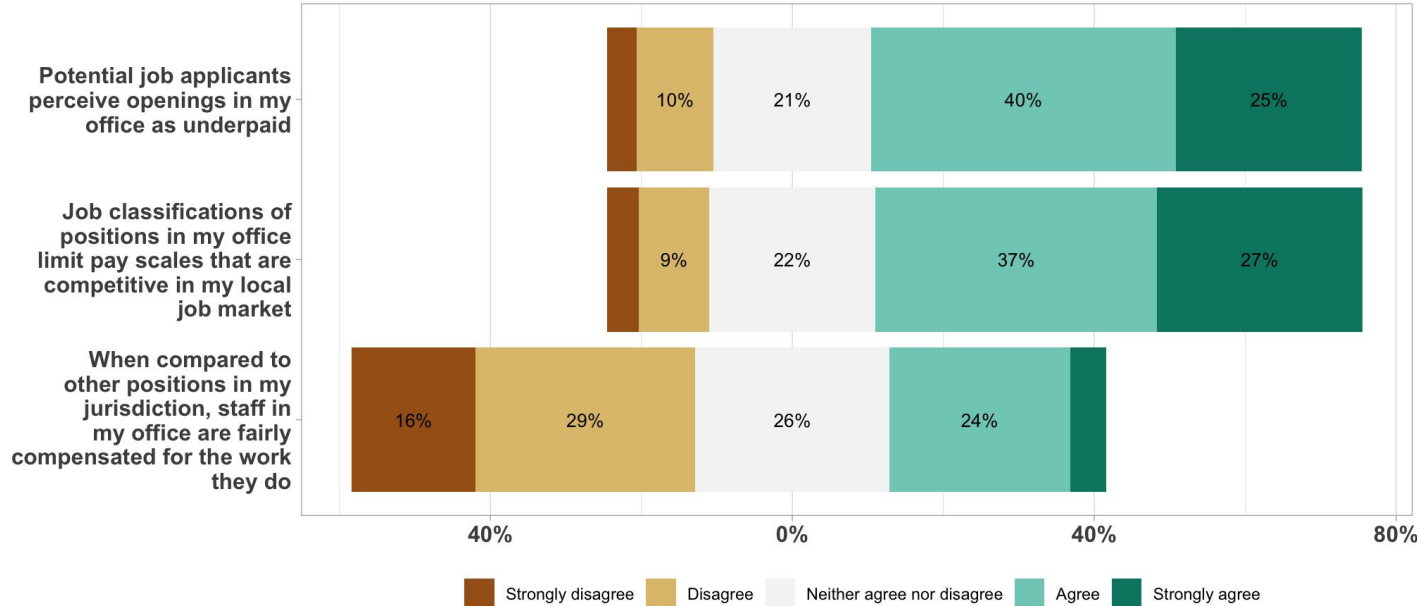
Work Environment: Staffing Levels



- **Smaller** jurisdictions may have **no full-time staff**, particularly in those with less than 5,000 voter.
- **Larger** jurisdictions are likely to have **more than 10** staff members including the LEO.
- **Medium-sized** jurisdictions manage with **fewer than 6** staff members.

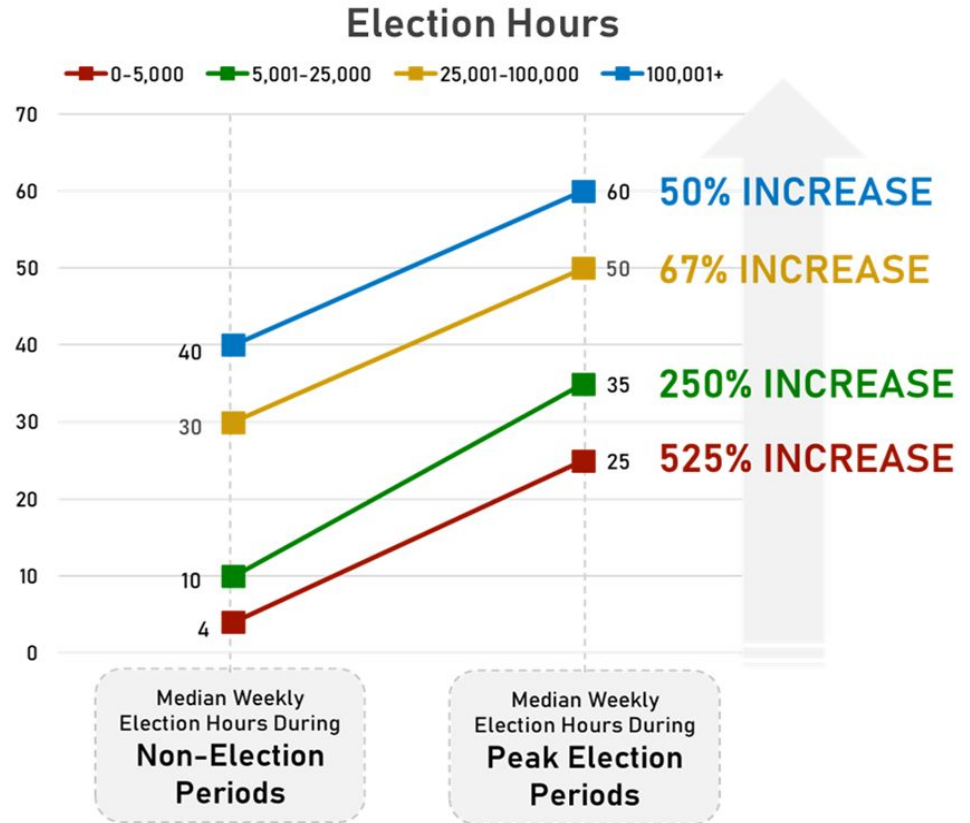
Recruitment Challenges: Pay and Job Descriptions

- Potential applicants view election jobs as **underpaid**.
- Jobs in election offices are **not classified with technical skills** to allow better pay.
- Compared to other county jobs, **positions in elections offices lag in pay.**



Maximum Hours Worked During Peak Periods

- Hours worked peak during elections, **exceeding 40 hours** a week for many offices.
- These peak hours are worked for 4-5 weeks per election.
- Small offices, **often without full-time staff**, see 525% rise in the hours needed to administer elections.
- These **small offices have many other duties** and responsibilities that cannot be delayed.

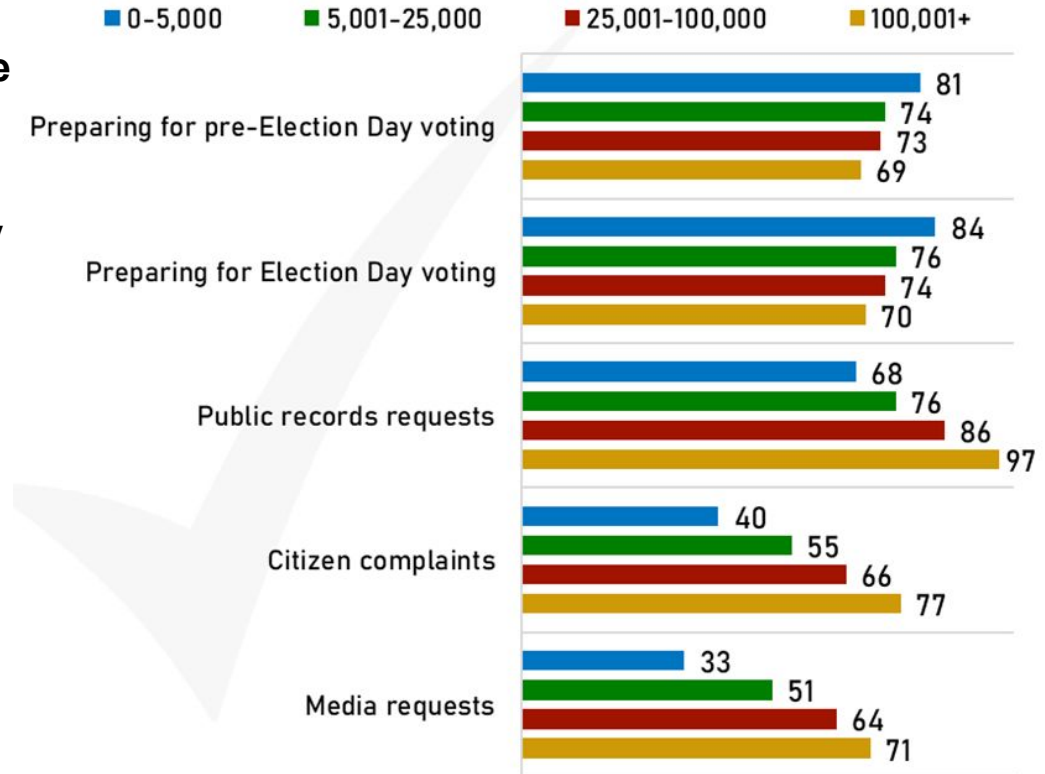


Changes in Workload By Task

- Across many election tasks, **more time is required** to accomplish tasks than 4 years ago.
- **Challenges in workload vary by size of election office:** smaller offices finding core election tasks more time consuming.
- Public record requests, citizen complaints and media requests are a greater challenge for larger offices.

Change in Workload Over the Past 4 Years

% Who Say Each Task Takes More or a Lot More Time Than 4 Years Ago





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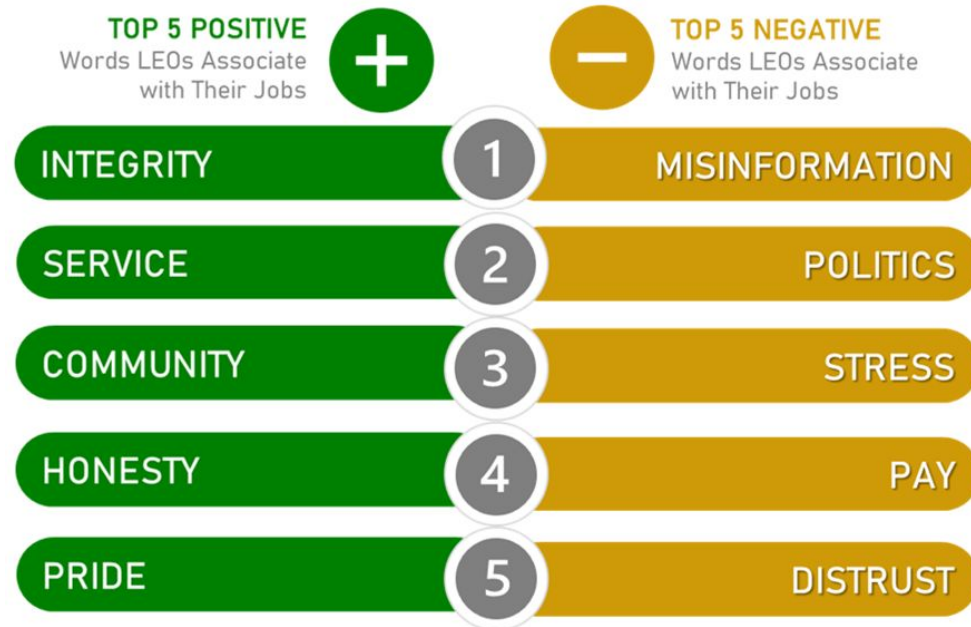
Job Satisfaction

The Good News: Job Satisfaction is High

- Even in the face of increasing workloads, nearly **4 out of 5 LEOs are satisfied with their jobs**, which says a tremendous amount about the commitment and dedication of the [“stewards of democracy.”](#)
- **Public service, community, and honesty and integrity** form a basis for a strong sense of professional ethos.
- The primary negatives: **misinformation, politics, and stress.**



of LEOs are **SATISFIED** With Their Jobs



The Positives: Personal Rewards, Pride, and Respect

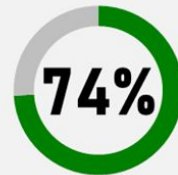
% Agree / Strongly Agree



My work gives me a feeling of **personal accomplishment**.



I am proud to tell people that I **work for my department**.



In my job I am able to **fully utilize** my skills, abilities, and knowledge.

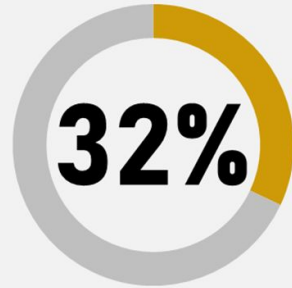


My work is **respected** by citizens.

- **Pride** in the public service LEOs provide is high, and stable over time.
- Dedicated public servants find **personal satisfaction** in their work.
- Many report that their work is **respected by local citizens**.

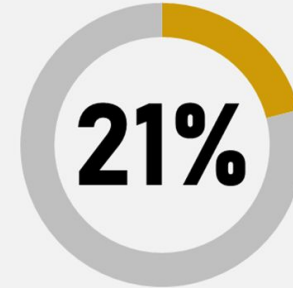
The Negatives: Work/Life Balance Is A Challenge

% Agree / Strongly Agree



I am able to
leave problems at work.

% Agree / Strongly Agree



I would encourage my own child to
**pursue a career in local election
administration.**

- Despite the strong personal commitment to public service, the **personal stresses are rising.**
- LEOs report an **inability to leave work at the office.**



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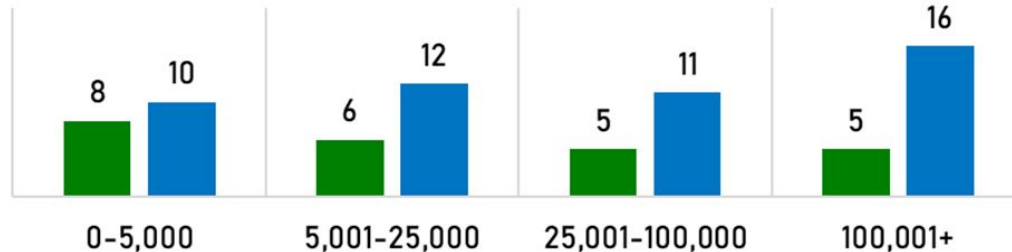
Experience Levels, Retirements, and Departures Due to Safety Concerns

Turnover and Experience: The Seven Eleven Pattern

Comparison of Years in Current Position vs. Years in Service



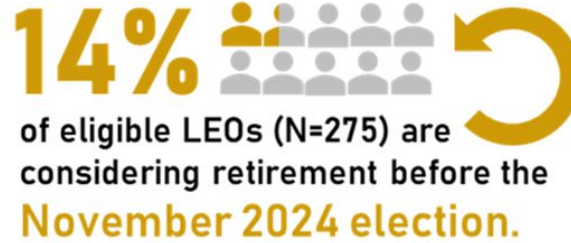
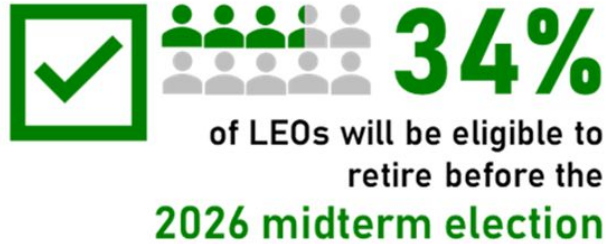
by Jurisdiction Size



- Average years of service increases as jurisdiction size increases but time in current position decreases.
- While LEO turnover is on the rise, LEOs in the largest offices have **long records of experience**.
- Succession planning is a key concern, especially as length of service rises.

Retirement Eligibility and Timing

LEO Retirement Eligibility and Timing



Of eligible LEOs (N=275) are considering retirement after the **November 2024 election**, but before the **November 2026 election.**

- Over 1 out of 3 LEOs are eligible to retire before 2026 election.
- Approximately 4 out of 10 eligible LEOs plan to retire before the 2026 election.

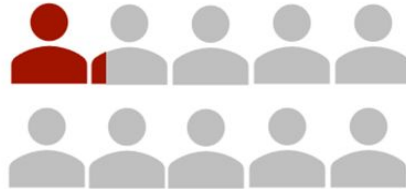
How Threats and Harassment May Hasten Departures

 **31%** Know any LEOs Who Left Their Job In Part Because of Fear for Safety

by Jurisdiction Size



11%
of LEOs Have Considered Leaving their Job Due to **Safety Concerns**



- **1 out of 10 LEOs** have considered leaving their job due to safety concerns.
- **Threats and harassment are all too common** with many reporting fears for safety as a motivation to leave service.
- Impacts of threats and harassment are **focused on larger jurisdictions.**



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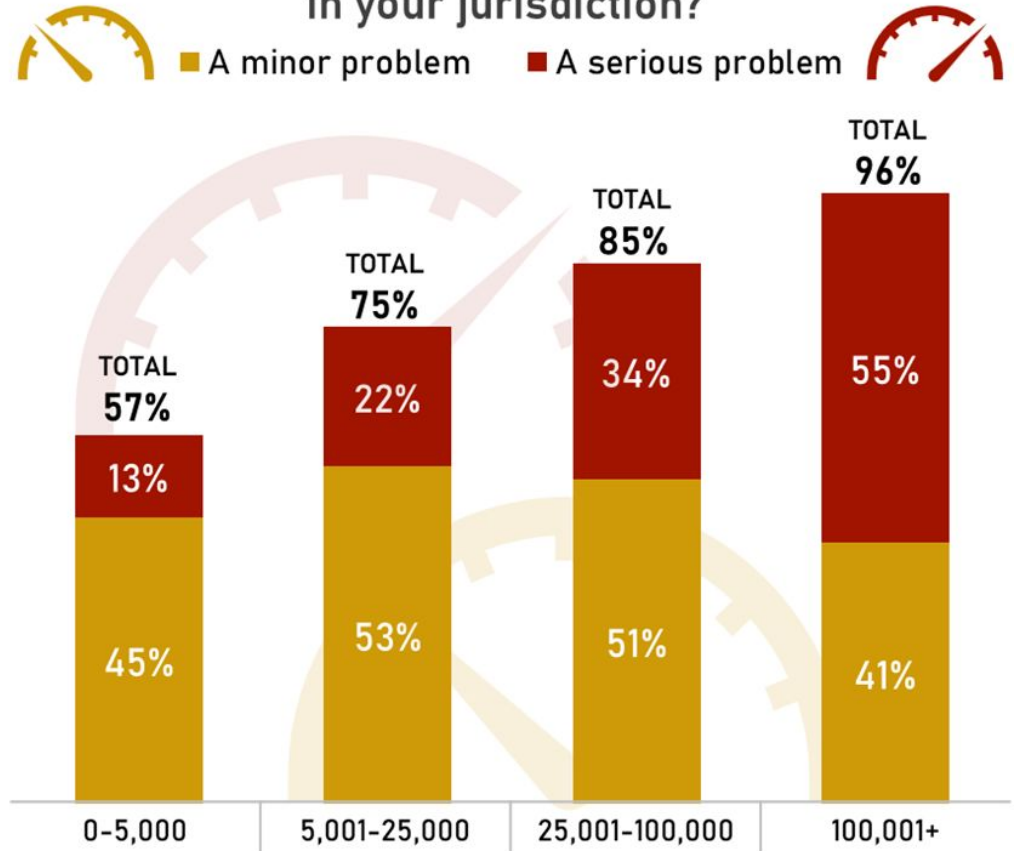


Misinformation and Voter Education

Misinformation is a problem everywhere, but especially in large jurisdictions

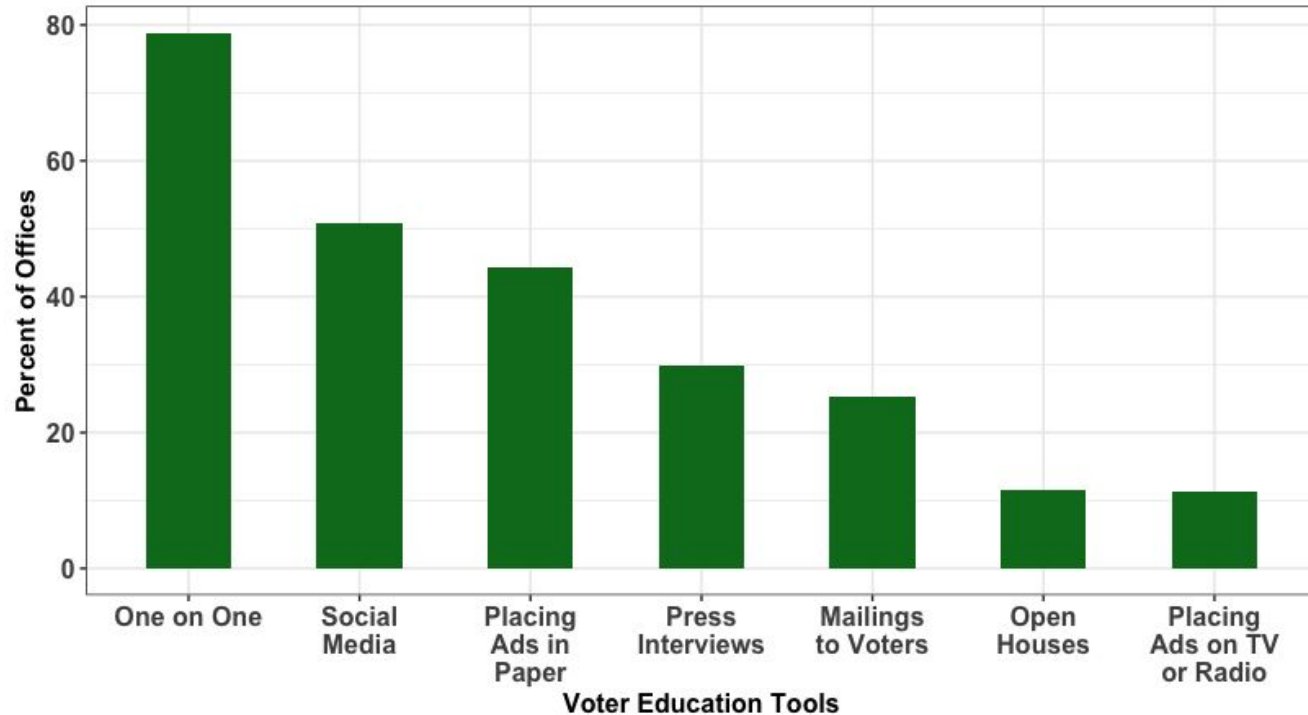
- Challenge of misinformation is **most prevalent in the medium sized and largest jurisdictions.**
 - Less than 4% of 100,000+ jurisdictions say that misinformation is “not a problem”.
- Smaller jurisdictions are much less likely to tell us that misinformation is a problem.
 - 30% of 0-5,000 say that misinformation is “not a problem.”

How serious a problem is misinformation in your jurisdiction?



Addressing Voter Education and Information Needs

- **One-on-One** (face-to-face, phone, and email) methods are the **primary way LEOs communicate** with voters.
- **Social Media and print media** are still very important.
- Radio and TV ads are seldom used.



Addressing Voter Education and Information Needs

- There are **important differences by jurisdiction size** in how **LEOs engage** with voters across jurisdictions.
- **Smaller Jurisdictions:**
 - Focus mostly on **one-on-one** communications
 - Lesser use of social and print media
- **Larger jurisdictions:**
 - Rely on a **broader portfolio** of outreach methods.
 - Have more capacity and more need to use multiple approaches.

Voter Education:

“What methods of outreach have you regularly used in your jurisdiction?”

	Overall	0-5,000	5,001-25,000	25,001-100,000	100,000+
One-on-One	79%	72%	85%	90%	93%
Social Media	51%	34%	68%	76%	91%
Ads in Paper	44%	31%	59%	68%	62%
Press Interviews	30%	11%	41%	71%	92%
Voter Mailings	25%	15%	31%	45%	66%
Open Houses	11%	7%	11%	24%	32%
TV/Radio Ads	11%	3%	2%	2%	7%

The Most Effective Education and Outreach Methods

- There is substantial agreement that **one on one methods are the most effective method** to engage with and educate voters.
 - One on one communication methods are ranked as the most effective by one-half to one-third of LEOs in the small through the medium-sized jurisdictions.
 - Social media is the second method chosen as most effective.
- The **largest jurisdictions differ: print mailings** are the most commonly chosen as the most effective method, followed by one on one communications.
 - This difference may be a function of higher rates of by-mail voting in the largest jurisdictions in our survey.

Voter Education:

“Which method of outreach do you think is most effective in your jurisdiction?”

	Overall	0-5,000	5,001-25,000	25,001-100,000	100,000+
One-on-One	43%	48%	40%	34%	25%
Social Media	16%	14%	18%	22%	16%
Ads in Paper	7%	7%	9%	4%	1%
Press Interviews	4%	2%	6%	12%	11%
Voter Mailings	10%	7%	11%	13%	27%
Open Houses	1%	0%	3%	5%	5%
TV/Radio Ads	2%	1%	2%	2%	5%



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Survey Methodology

Survey Methodology

- The 2023 survey was a self-administered web survey conducted from July 11 to August 16, 2023.
 - The EVIC team drew a sample of N=3,106. We oversampled all LEOs serving in jurisdictions with majority minority populations (as we did in 2022) in order to identify any special challenges to election administration and bureaucratic representation in those communities.
 - The survey was administered by [SSRS](#) working in close collaboration with the EVIC survey team.
- A total of 886 Local Election Officials completed the survey for a response rate of 28.5%.
 - The final response rate is comparable to previous years of the LEO Survey.
 - We obtained respondents from LEOs in 49 of 50 states and the District of Columbia.

Survey Methodology: Response Rates

- Response rates were somewhat lower for smaller and for majority-minority jurisdictions, as expected because of a reliance on the web for the 2023 survey.
 - Response rates tracked closely the web response rates from our prior, dual-mode (web and print) surveys.
 - Post-survey analysis indicate no serious biases due to differences in response rates.

Table 3: Completes by Jurisdiction Size

Jurisdiction Size	Sample Size	Response Rate	Total
0-5,000	446	24%	109
5,001-25,000	1386	28%	382
25,001-100,000	864	30%	259
100,001-250,000	230	35%	80
250,001+	180	31%	56
Total	3106		886

Table 4: Completes by Majority Minority

Majority Minority Status	Sample Size	Response Rate	Total
Majority Minority	396	24%	95
Not Majority Minority	2710	29%	791
Total	3106		886

Survey Methodology: Questionnaire

- The questionnaire was developed by the EVIC team in consultation with an advisory panel of scholars, state and local election officials, and other stakeholders.
 - SSRS reviewed the questionnaire and provided feedback regarding question wording, order, clarity, and other issues related to questionnaire quality in order to maximize response rates, reliability, and validity.
- The 2023 instrument was built on the [2022 survey instrument](#) with new questions of interest added.
- New Questions and Topic Areas:
 - More detailed reports of maximum hours worked in peak and non-peak periods
 - Staffing turnover, recruitment, and hiring (permanent and temporary workers)
 - Office resiliency: succession planning and documentation
 - Misinformation, responses to misinformation

EVIC Contact Information

- **Paul Gronke, PhD | EVIC Director**
 - gronkep@reed.edu
- **Paul Manson, PhD | EVIC Research Director**
 - mansonp@pdx.edu
- **Michelle M. Shafer | EVIC Senior Program Advisor**
 - shaferm@reed.edu
- **Web: [EVIC Website](#) & [LEO Survey Website](#) | X (Twitter): [@ElectionsVoting](#)**