



The Stewards of Democracy in 2022: Insights from the Democracy Fund/Reed College Survey of American Local Election Officials



Paul Gronke, PhD & Paul Manson, PhD
Elections & Voting Information Center at Reed College

Motivations for the Surveys

Document the LEO Community

- Demography, experience levels, career trajectories, impending retirements
- Professional norms, values, and service orientations

Amplify and Elevate the Voice of LEOs in Policy Debate

- National and state level discussions of election policies often neglect the perspective “street level” experts

Explore Election Preparedness and Continuing Pain Points

- How officials respond to a rapidly changing environment with new demands
- Areas with adequate staff and resources; areas of need and “pain points”

Evaluate the Threat Environment (New for 2022!)

- Severity and types of abuse and harassment

Serve as a Resource for the Research Community

- Comparable surveys used by researchers and others in the democracy space

A Stable Workforce & the Diversity Challenge

The “Typical” LEO has Remained Stable Over 20 Years

Typical LEO:

- Female
- White
- Over Age 50
- \$50K+Annual Salary
- Elected

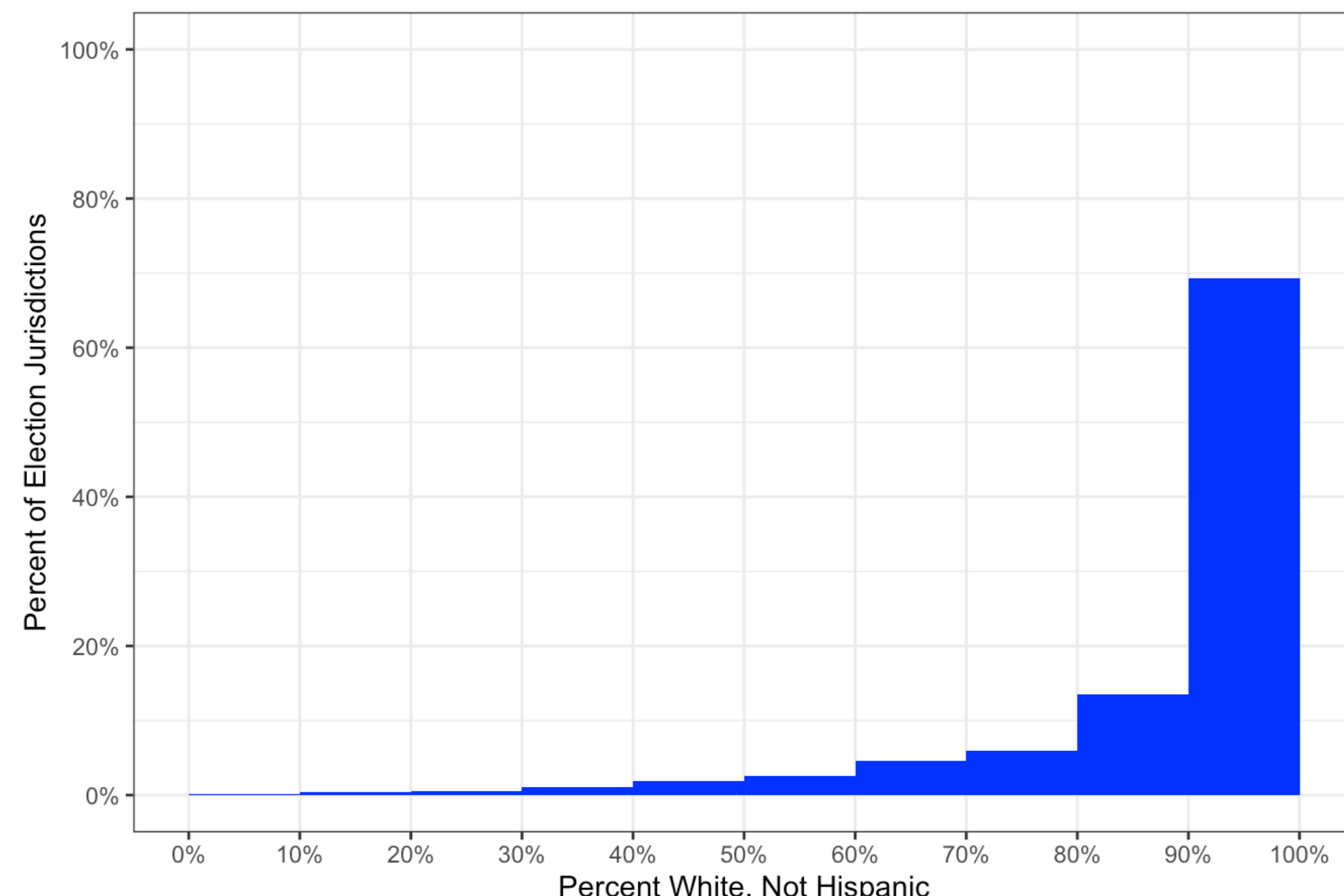
Current LEO Workforce:

- Higher Levels of Education
- More Male LEOs
- More LEOs of Color
- LEOs have Higher Incomes in Larger Jurisdictions

The Diversity Challenge: LEOs Reflect Racial Distributions Across Counties, Cities, and Townships

- Diversifying the LEO community faces the same challenge of federalism and localism that may impede change in other areas.
- Most LEOs rise via—and over half were elected from—their local jurisdiction
- More than 70% of election jurisdictions are more than 90% white

Almost 70% of jurisdictions are more than 90% White



Learn More:

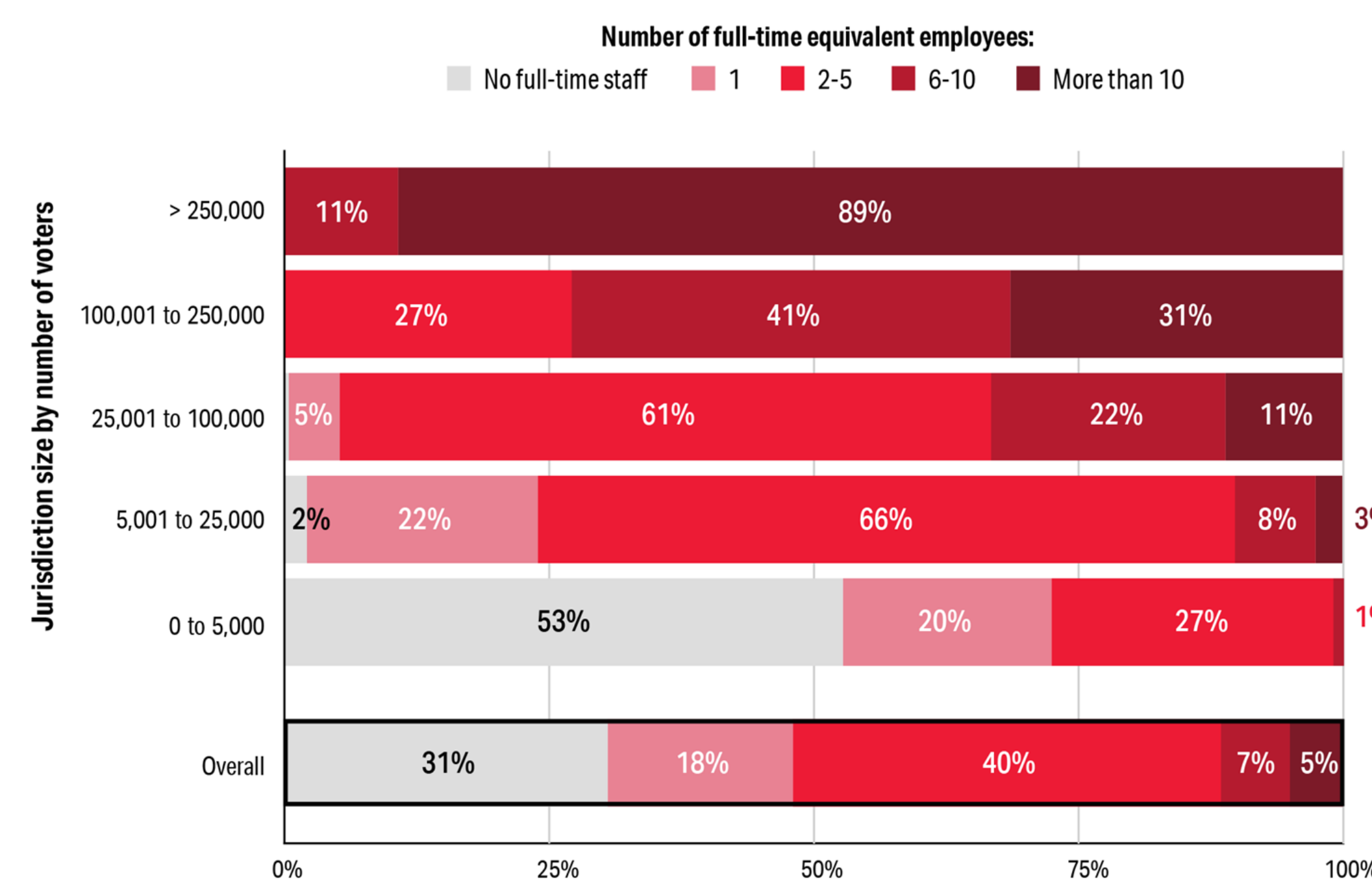
“Staffing the Stewards: Gender, Race, and Representative Bureaucracy”

Buffeted By Many Storms: The State of Local Election Administration in 2022

A Community with Enormous Disparities in Size, Staff, and Resources

- Geography, federalism, and decentralization are pervasive features in American election administration.
- The largest 2% of jurisdictions serve half of the nation’s voters.
- Half of LEOs serve in jurisdictions with 5K or fewer registered voters & operate with little to no staff support.

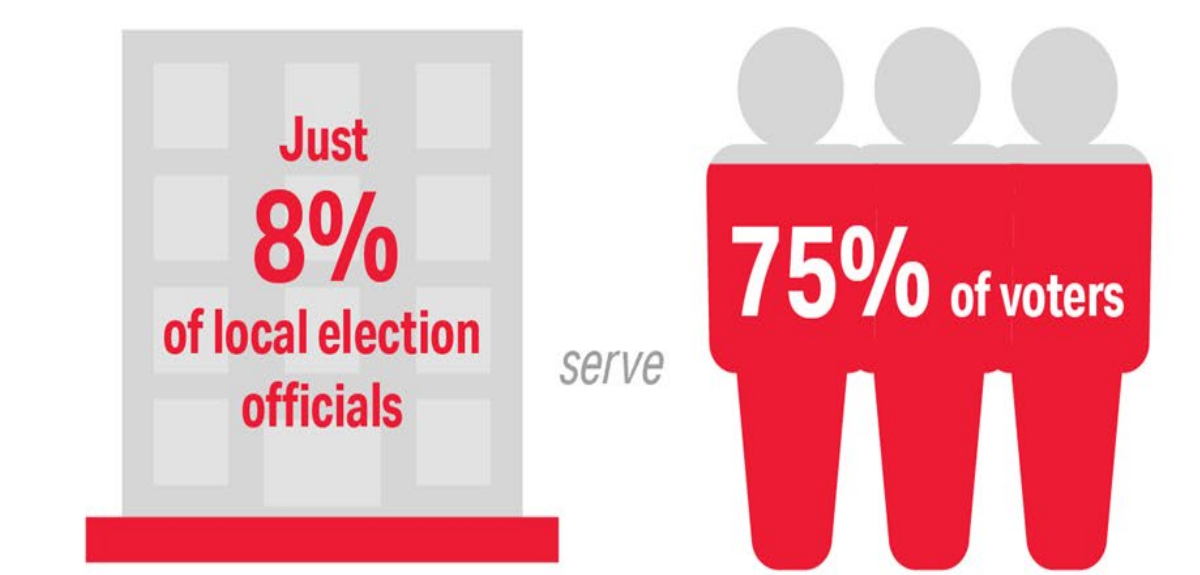
Nearly one-third of election offices operate with no full-time elections officials



Source: 2022 Democracy Fund/Reed College Survey of Local Election Officials



Source: 2022 Democracy Fund/Reed College Survey of Local Election Officials



Source: 2022 Democracy Fund/Reed College Survey of Local Election Officials

A Community United Serving Voters & Delivering Democracy While Struggling with Workload, Low Pay, and Disinformation

The Good: Job Satisfaction Remains High

- 78% of LEOs are “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with their jobs’
- 82% of LEOs say their jobs give them a “feeling of personal accomplishment”

The Good: Customer Service and Voter Access are Core Professional Values

- 78% of LEOs “enjoy educating citizens about rules and procedures”
- 63% of LEOs think that encouraging voter turnout is part of their job

The Bad: Increasing Workloads, Loss of Experience Due to Exits and Retirements

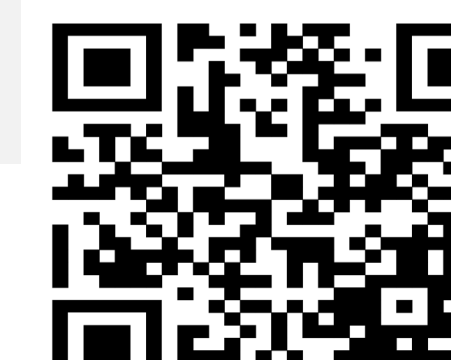
- LEO workloads are increasing across the board, but highest increases are in smallest jurisdictions with least capacity to respond
- 30% of LEOs are eligible to retire before 2024, and 40% of those LEOs said they will retire

The Bad: Election Rule are Changed Without Consultation, and Changes Often Don’t Help

- 50% of LEOs said that state legislatures don’t consult the elections community when changing laws
- 46% said that new laws passed between 2020 and 2022 did not improve election administration

Learn More:

“The State of Local Election Administration in 2022”



Threats, Abuse, & Harassment

Threats have become “just part of the job” for far too many LEOs.

1 in 4 local election officials experienced abuse, harassment, or threats as part of their work in the last two years



Threat Environment Varies by Region & Jurisdiction Size

More threats reported:

- In Larger Jurisdictions
- By Male LEOs
- On the West Coast

Who Takes Threats Most Seriously?

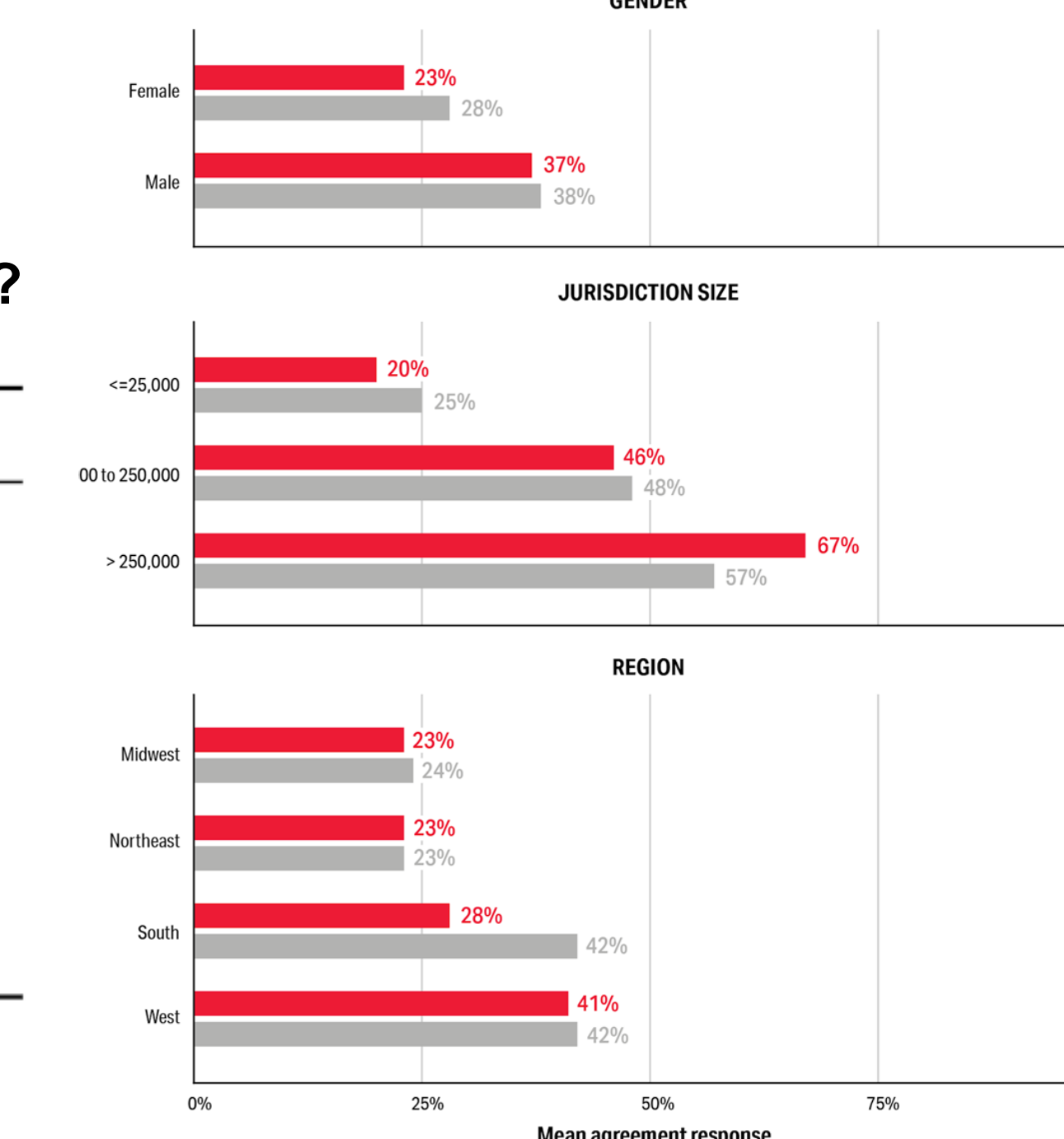
Institution	Percent
My state’s chief election official	43.2
Local law enforcement	27.4
Federal law enforcement	25.2
My state legislature	17.5
The national media	17.4
Local media	14.3
The United States Congress	11.8

Source: 2022 Democracy Fund/Reed College Survey of Local Election Officials

Local election officials experience high threat levels no matter who they are, where they work

Experienced any instances of abuse, harassment, or threats as part of work as an election official in the past two years

Very concerned about the reports of abuse, harassment, or threats directed at some election officials



Source: 2022 Democracy Fund/Reed College Survey of Local Election Officials

About the 2022 LEO Survey

The 2022 LEO Survey is the fourth survey from Democracy Fund/Reed College building upon our surveys from 2018, 2019 and 2020.

Methodology

- EVIC partnered with SSRS on the survey administration
- Questionnaire developed by EVIC, in consultation with an advisory group of academic researchers, election officials, Democracy Fund, and SSRS
- Sample of n=3118 drawn from a national list of LEOs by EVIC included an oversample of all LEOs serving in majority-minority jurisdictions
- Fielded 6/21/22-9/22/22 using a web survey with hard copy backup
- 912 completed surveys were received for a 30% response rate with little variation in response rate by jurisdiction size
- Poster Graphics: Democracy Fund & The Williams Group

Jurisdiction Size	Sample Size	Response Rate	Web Completes	Hardcopy Completes	Total Completes
0-5,000	407	31%	92	34	126
5,001-25,000	1436	27%	262	126	388
25,001-100,000	865	31%	197	75	272
100,001-250,000	230	30%	60	10	70
250,001+	180	31%	41	15	56
Total	3118		652	260	912

Learn More:

Find Research Reports, Codebooks, Crosstabs, and more at <https://evic.reed.edu/leo-survey> or QR Code.

