Georgians for Election Transparency
Pre-Election Observation Report

21 October 2022

Introduction

Georgians for Election Transparency (GFET) is an organization of concerned citizens dedicated to promoting fair and transparent elections. We recognize that public faith in the integrity and fairness of elections has decreased significantly in recent years. To gain a deeper understanding of the issues and factors that have driven this decline in confidence, GFET trained and deployed teams of long-term election observers to interview County Election Supervisors (the senior election official in each county) across the state. The program began in mid-June, and is ongoing.
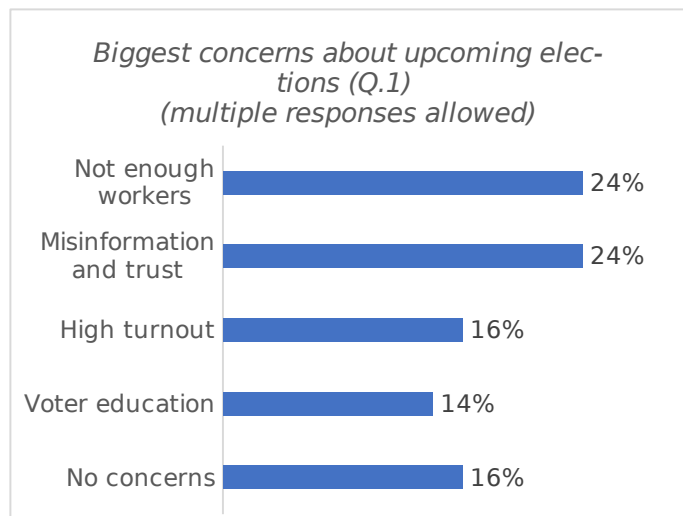
As of October 2022, we have approached the supervisors in 55 counties, which is 35% of the counties in the state, and have conducted in-depth interviews with 37 supervisors. After repeated attempts, we were unable to arrange interviews with 18 of the supervisors we approached. Most of those we could not interview said they were "too busy", or did not respond.

The in-depth interviews were conducted using a structured questionnaire, so each supervisor was responding to the same questions. The following report summarizes the findings of these interviews, includes some analysis as to why certain electoral practices may undermine public confidence in Georgia's election processes, and provides recommendations to state and election officials for reforming election processes to enhance transparency and increase voter confidence in the integrity of elections.

1   Biggest Concerns

We asked supervisors what their biggest concerns are regarding the upcoming elections, and the most common responses, expressed by about a quarter (24%) of supervisors, are: finding and training enough poll workers; and concerns related to misinformation and decreasing public trust in elections.

Interestingly, one supervisor said he had problems getting enough poll workers in the past, but this time already had 100 extra. One supervisor attributed misinformation and increasing lack of trust

Biggest concerns about upcoming elections (Q.1)
(multiple responses allowed)

Concern	Percentage
Not enough workers	24%
Misinformation and trust	24%
High turnout	16%
Voter education	14%
No concerns	16%

in election processes to candidates, saying *Lots of candidates use this tactic* (questioning election integrity) *to fire up voters.*

Other common concerns included worry about handling expected high turnout during early and election day voting (16%), and concern that voters might not understand the election process because little or no voter education had been done (14%), with several noting the lack of attention and funding dedicated to voter education by the state. About 16% said they had no concerns.

2   Readiness for November Election

When we asked the supervisors if they if they felt they had the resources, equipment, personnel, and training needed to run an effective election in November, about four-fifths (81%) said yes, and about a fifth quarter (19%) said no, with the primary reason for being unready again a lack of personnel.

3   County Election Administration

We asked several questions about county election administration, learning that in most counties, the Board of Elections consists of two Republicans and two Democrats, and a fifth member who is an Independent or considered nonpartisan. We also asked who supervises their work, and most said the Board of Elections, but one proudly stated, *the citizens of the county supervise my work;* and another said, *citizens and the Secretary of State.*

4   Voter List Updates

To get a better understanding of the voter list update process, we asked the supervisors a series of questions. About four-fifths (81%) said they get regular updates from health officials, state agencies, and funeral homes so they can update the list to remove to remove dead people. Some also mentioned scanning of obituaries to update their list.

When we asked the last time they had access to the National Change of Address list, we received a variety of responses. The most common response (49%) was that they got the National Change of Address list once a year; but other responses were: *done by the state (19%), daily (14%); monthly; every quarter (6%).* One supervisor said updating the list is done by the Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC) (ERIC is a non-governmental organization funded by the far-left Open Society Foundation, which is itself funded by the anti-democracy extremist billionaire, George Soros); one said they have had no access in three years, and one said never.

Almost all of the supervisors (92%) expressed confidence that their voter lists are accurate and up to date, but one wasn't sure, and two said no; with one expressing doubt in the efficacy of the system of mail notification, and the other stating the list is not accurate because they cannot drop anyone until they have not voted in two federal elections.

Analysis and Recommendations

Despite the confidence of the supervisors, GFET and other election integrity groups believe that our voter lists are in many cases bloated and inaccurate, and that this is one of the most serious

vulnerabilities in Georgia elections. There are several steps that the next administration can take to improve the accuracy of our voter lists and help rebuild public confidence in elections.

First, Georgia's association with ERIC damages public confidence in the integrity of our elections, and we should follow the example of other states, and withdraw from ERIC. Second, the Secretary of State should conduct a comprehensive voter registration audit to accurately assess the quality of our voter list, and to determine if there are areas that need improvement. Third, enhance transparency and enable oversight by publishing the voter list online. This is promoted by the Democratic Party overseas as international best practice, and it is time Georgia caught up to other modernizing states, and the rest of the world, on data and election transparency.

5 Voting Machines

Doubt about the accuracy and integrity of voting machines is common among voters of both major parties, so we spent some time learning about their use in Georgia's elections. When asked if they found the voting machines and poll pads problematic, 78% were positive about the machines, saying things like: *they are much better, and have a paper trail*; *the machines run smoothly, and the accuracy of counting is good*; *they are better for counting and accuracy*; *they are better, more secure*; and *not problematic, that is misinformation*.

The remaining 22% of supervisors did find the technology problematic, citing a range of concerns, including: *teaching poll workers complicated system; battery backup system has flaws, and battery weights 75 pounds so clerks don't want to lift it*; *occasionally have a technology issue, like you would have with your phone*; *the poll pads are not holding up*; *accuracy is a bit off, but will almost match*; *cumbersome, with many operating parts that people do not like*; *machines have problems and I think they will start failing*; and *hate machines, they are hooked up to wi-fi*.

A strong majority of supervisors (66%) said county staff calibrate their voting machines, with the rest using either local IT consultants or Dominion experts. When asked if they invite outside groups to witness the calibration, all but two said yes. All of the supervisors said they comply with the regulation that requires all secure material be locked up, but a few (16%) said they didn't have video surveillance of the materials, or the cameras did not record video.

Analysis and Recommendations

Many Americans (possibly most) distrust voting machines, and this distrust is also common among the senior leadership of America's political parties (although few Democrats have spoken on this issue recently, many are on record—including the current Vice President and the Speaker of the House—expressing distrust of voting machines prior to the disputed 2020 presidential elections). Georgians also distrust voting machines, and perhaps for good reason. Vulnerabilities, which can be found easily though a simple web search, have been discovered in all of the machines used in Georgia, and most of the machines do have wi-fi capability.

While many computer scientists have warned about security issues with machines that can connect to the internet or through cell phone modems, these machines are also vulnerable through the thumb drives used to update ballots and download results, and are vulnerable to

rigging by technicians working on the machines (for example, Katie Hobbs, the Secretary of State in Arizona, recently decertified machines that had been audited out of concern that they might have been undetecably altered to favor a particular candidate or party during the audit process).

Voting machine processes are opaque, both because of their complexity, and because their manufacturers will not allow examination of their code. They cannot be effectively observed and verified by citizens, or poll watchers, or even election officers, so those who lose elections will always have doubts about the fairness of the process.

Although most of the supervisors expressed personal confidence in machine voting, we believe the primary objective of election administrators must be the conduct of an election process that *voters* view as accurate and fair; and that ultimately the only way we will be able to restore trust in Georgia's elections is to revert to an open and transparent manual polling process, that poll watchers, election officers, and ordinary voters can see, understand and verify.

6   SB 202 Election Reform Bill

In response to the disputed 2020 election, the Georgia legislature drafted an election reform bill that the Governor signed. We asked the supervisors a series of questions to gauge their response to the bill, and determine if they had any concerns about implementing aspects of the new law. We had a much higher rate of "no response" in this series than in other parts of the survey, as many supervisors felt expressing an opinion on the reforms could be perceived as political.

Do you support SB202?

Yes; 30%

No; 5%

No response

About a third (30%) of supervisors said they support SB202, while just 5% said they did not support the reforms. When asked if the new reforms would improve integrity in their counties, 43% said yes, 11% said no, and 46% gave no response. All of the supervisors said they have already enacted the provisions of the bill, or that they are in process and will be ready for the 2022 elections.
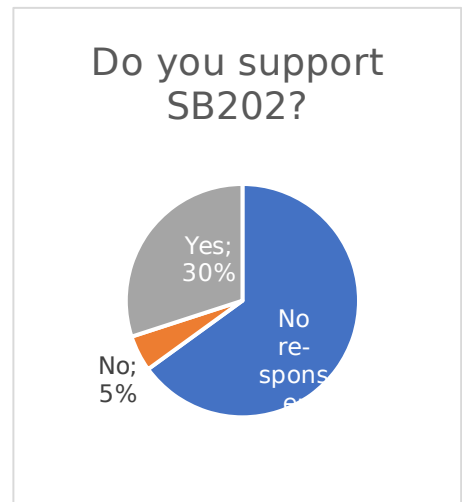
We asked if there are areas of concern the new law doesn't address and about a quarter (27%) of the supervisors said yes, citing security concerns with the absentee ballot process, Saturday voting, provisional voting, and the reduction in drop boxes. About half (49%) of the supervisors said no, and the rest had no response.

Election reforms dropped into existing processes and procedures can create areas of confusion, conflicts with existing law, or mandate outcomes without clear direction as to how those are to be achieved, so we asked about this issue. About a third of supervisors had identified confusion, conflicts and gaps created by SB202, and several mentioned that the law was hard to understand and interpret. Others noted that the Secretary of State's office had been good at responding to questions, and providing clarification and training on new processes.

Many election integrity advocates (including our group) are opposed to early voting, as they see it as decreasing election transparency and creating opportunities for election fraud, while increasing the cost and complexity of election administration. We were curious about the opinion of the supervisors on this issue, and asked them a Goldilocks question; "Do they think the early voting period is too long, too short, or just right?" A majority (57%) opted for the status quo and said *just right.* Almost a third (30%) said it is too long, and 14% gave no response. No one said the early voting period is too short.

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