

The Effect of Workload on Public Official Retention: Evidence from Local Election Officials

Joshua Ferrer

American University

Election Official Workload and Turnover

Local election official turnover has risen sharply over the past two decades. At the same time, the job of administering elections has grown more demanding:

- Workloads increase **50-900%** during election periods
- Officials must complete many administrative tasks for each election day
- Too many elections crowds out other duties: voter roll maintenance, staff training, performance evaluation, planning, etc.

Q: Does reducing the number of election days an official administers improve retention of local election officials?

Election Date Consolidation as a Workload Shock

Election date consolidation joins separate elections onto the same date. It can take several forms:

- Consolidate local and special district elections onto the same date
- Hold local elections concurrently with state/federal contests
- Hold special elections with regularly scheduled races
- Select alternatives to runoff elections

12 states enacted election date consolidation laws in 2025. Prior scholarship finds consolidation increases voter turnout, improves representation, and saves money---but effects on administrators themselves are unstudied.

Measuring Election Workload

Nationwide voter file data (L2), 2014--2020. Main measure of workload:

- **Number of election days** administered in a jurisdiction each year

Votes cast per voting-age population (VAP) used as a robustness test

Election dates are aggregated from voter participation histories. Two methods to correct for false positives from voter moves:

- *Criteria method*: exclude dates with <100 votes or <1% of highest vote total that year
- *Stayer method*: filter to voters continuously in voter file at same address, 2014-2020

Methods correlate highly ($r = .87$). Validated against manually collected election workload data for 400 most populous counties, 2014--2024.

Measuring Local Election Official Turnover

Data from Ferrer and Thompson (2025):

- Identifies the chief local election official who administered each even-year general election, 2000--2024
- Enables construction of 2-year and 4-year turnover measures at the jurisdiction level

How many elections do local election officials administer each year?

The average jurisdiction administers between **2.2 and 2.5 elections per year**:

- 1.9 federal, state, primary, special, and runoff elections
- 0.3 municipal elections

Figure 1: Average Number of Elections Run Per Year by Local Election Officials, 2014-2020

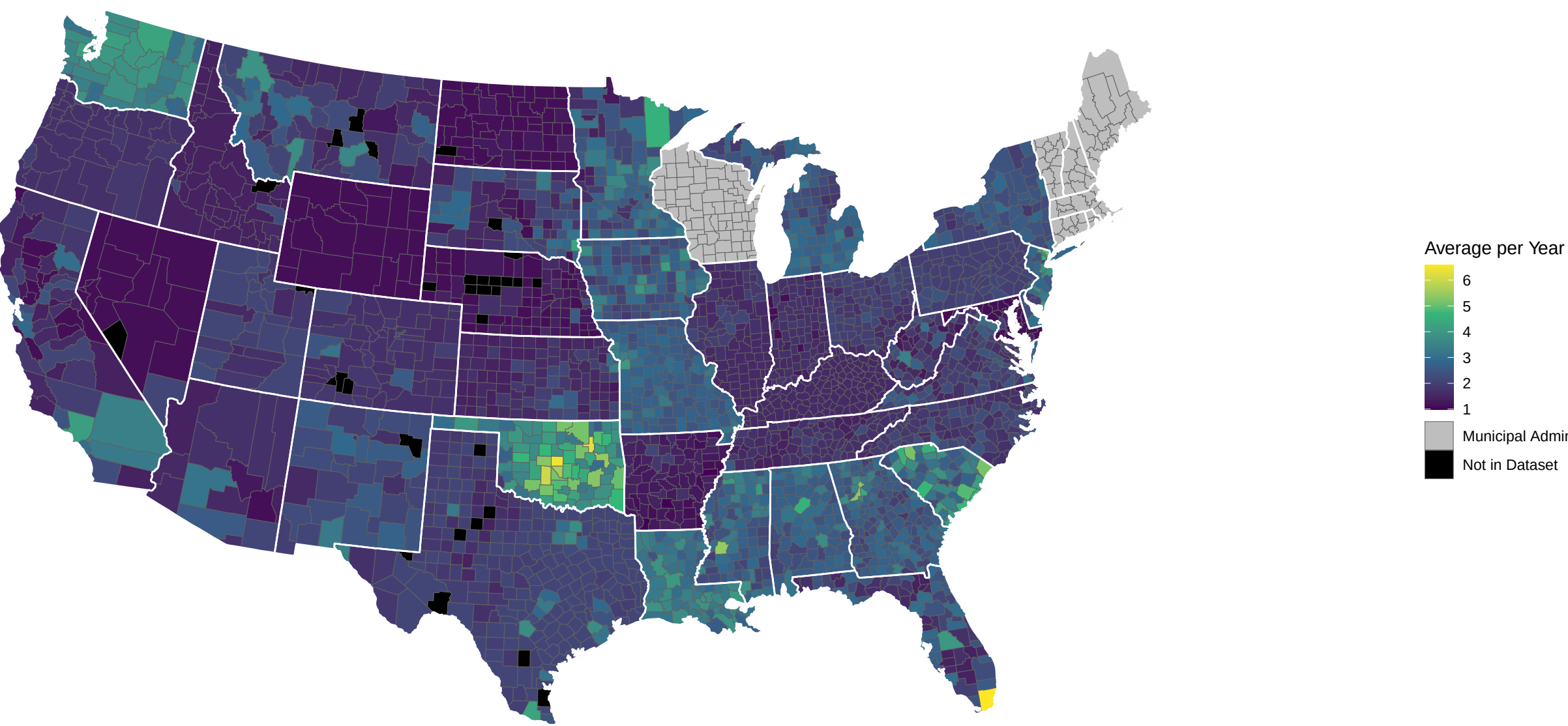
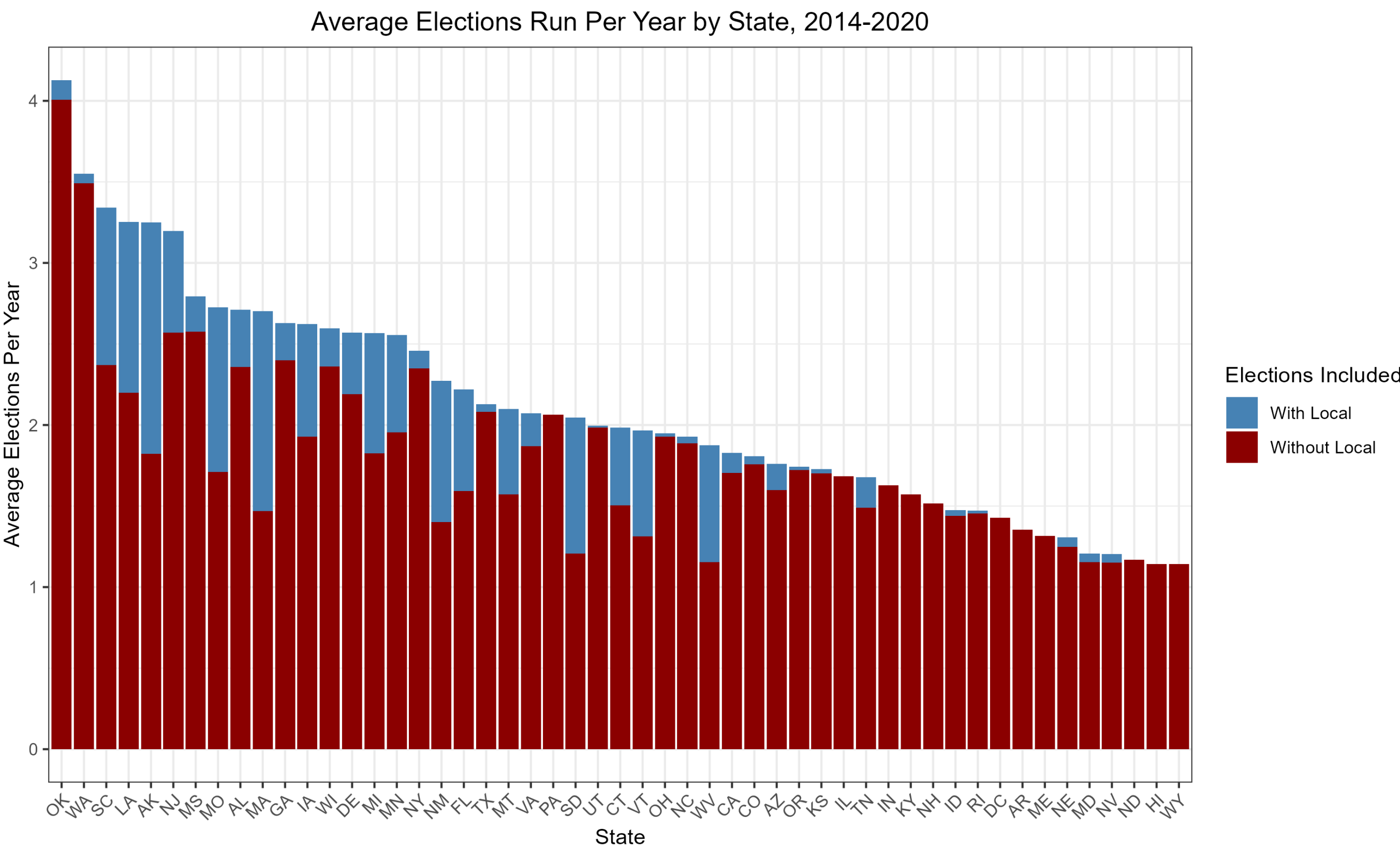


Figure 2: Average Number of Elections Run Per Year by State, 2014-2020



Cross-Sectional Regressions

	Total Number of Election Officials			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Total Elections Administered	0.005 (0.005)	0.012 (0.007)	-0.0002 (0.002)	-0.0001 (0.003)
State FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Method	Criteria	Criteria	Stayer	Stayer
Includes Local Elections	Yes	No	Yes	No
Observations	4,990	4,990	6,259	6,259

Difference-in-Differences Regressions

	2-Year Turnover			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Elections Administered (Past 2 Yrs)	-0.008 (0.004)	-0.004 (0.006)	-0.009 (0.004)	-0.005 (0.005)
Jurisdiction FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year x State FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Method	Criteria	Criteria	Stayer	Stayer
Includes Local Elections	Yes	No	Yes	No
Observations	14,970	14,970	18,777	18,777

Across all specifications, there is no statistically significant relationship between number of election days and local election official turnover.

Robustness

Null findings are robust to:

- Using Votes cast per VAP as alternative measure of workload
- Exclusion of state fixed effects
- 2-year or 4-year outcome windows
- Different lags between independent and dependent variable
- Subsetting to jurisdictions with high responsibility for municipal election administration
- Subsetting to county-level jurisdictions only
- Using manually collected election workload data

Takeaways

- Local election officials administer over 2 elections every year
- Despite rising workloads and rising turnover, **election workload does not predict local election official retention.**
- Other factors---**salary, political environment, partisan pressure**---may be more important drivers of turnover