

Does Leslie Knope Make More Than  
Election Directors? Analysis of Election  
and Other County Directors in North  
Carolina Counties.

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# Obligatory Meme and Acknowledgements



# Introduction

- Common perception is that Local Election Officials (LEOs) salaries are low.
- LEOs are leaving the profession but higher salaries could help keep them in their positions (Roberts and Greenberger 2024)
- Research questions: What influences the salaries of LEOs and other county directors? How do election directors compare to other county directors?

# Literature

- Adona et al., (2019) found that nationally the average LEO makes less than \$50,000 (also Gronke et al., 2025).
- In 2020 and 2020 EVIC survey, more than half of LEOs are not satisfied with their compensation.
- Adler (2024), looking at job ads, finds that larger jurisdictions have higher pay.
- McGowan et al., (2024) looking at NC actual wages paid to Election Directors found average salary is ~\$60,000.
  - Found an effect from partisanship of county and board

# Context

- “Compensation paid to directors of elections in all counties maintaining full-time registration (five days per week) shall be in the form of a salary in an amount recommended by the county board of elections and approved by the Board of County Commissioners *and shall be commensurate with the salary paid to directors in counties similarly situated and similar in population and number of registered voters.*” (NCGS 163-35)[our italics].
- Gilbert v. Guilford County 2014 required additional factors into salary considerations including “percent of registered population, transience of population, strength of political parties and level of discord between them, electoral districts for state, county and municipal offices, comparable sophistication of population politically and the experience and skills of the individual in the role” (Sher, 2024)

# Hypotheses

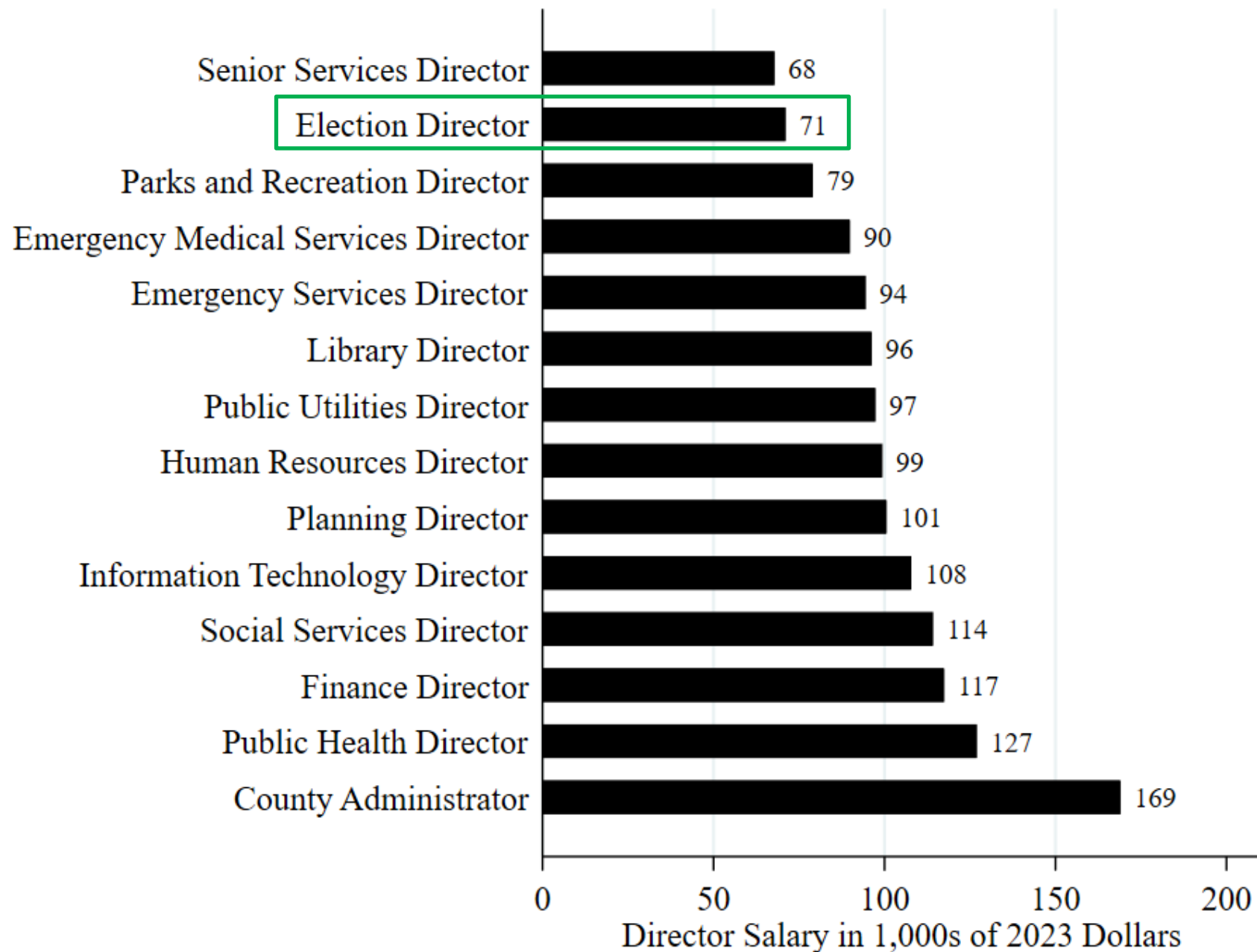
H1: Election directors make less on average than other county directors in North Carolina.

H2: Politics will influence county director salaries.

*H3: Experience will influence county director salaries.*

# Data and Methods

- Collected from County Salary Surveys from 2006-2021
  - Collected annually by Institute of Government UNC-Chapel Hill
  - Usable data from 2012-2021
  - Compare all the county level program director salaries in each county
- Other data from NC LINC Database
- Method: OLS with 2 way fixed effects for jurisdiction and year



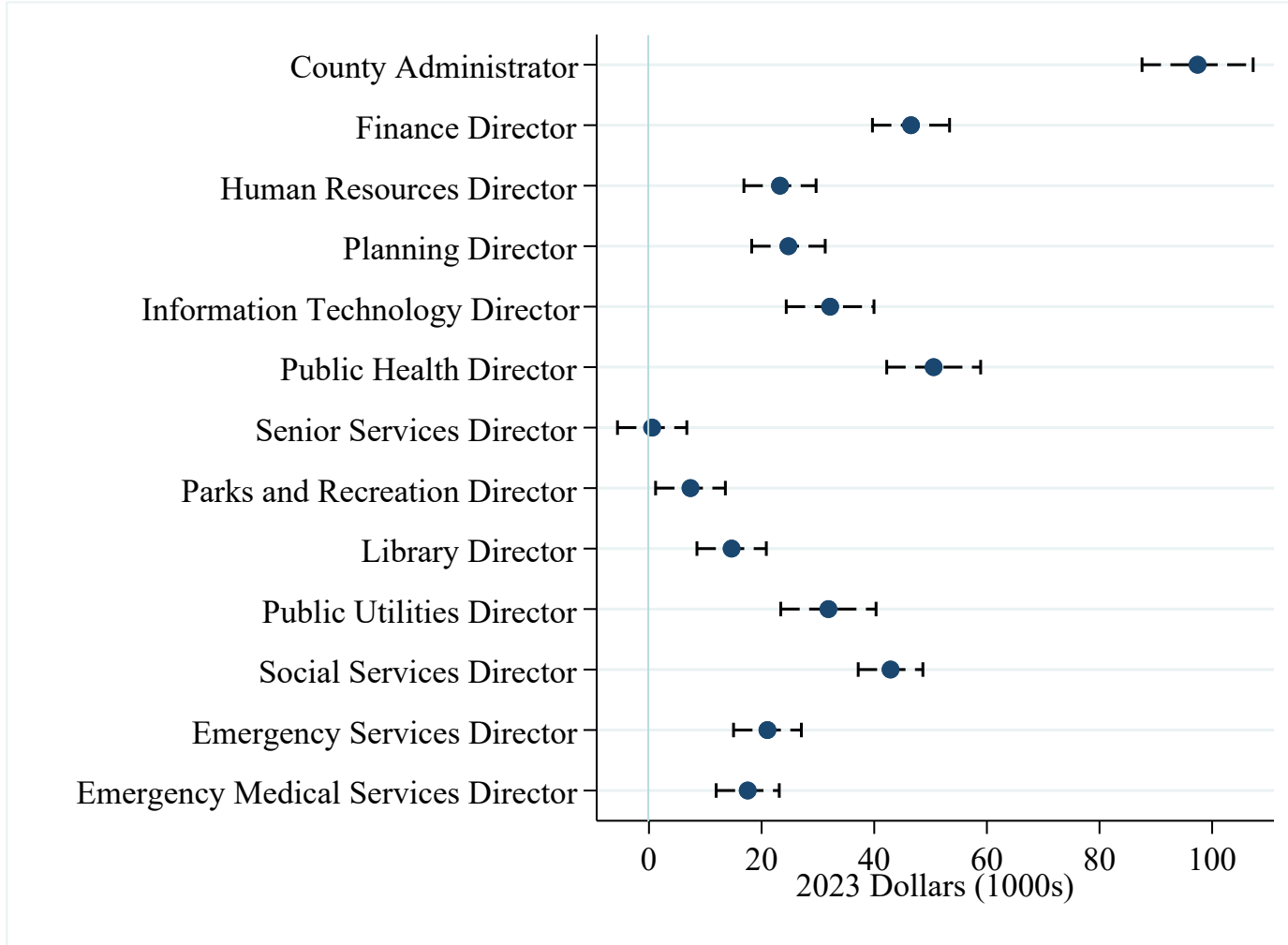
## County Director Pay Models (Salaries in \$1,000)

	Full Sample		Experience Control	
	Coef.	S.E.	Coef.	S.E.
County Administrator	97.42**	(4.971)	0	(.)
Finance Director	46.53**	(3.451)	47.99**	(3.816)
Human Resources Director	23.26**	(3.230)	24.83**	(3.604)
Planning Director	24.77**	(3.290)	26.66**	(3.562)
Information Technology Director	32.17**	(3.925)	33.43**	(4.255)
Public Health Director	50.55**	(4.202)	49.59**	(4.489)
Senior Services Director	0.566	(3.103)	2.724	(3.600)
Parks and Recreation Director	7.374*	(3.122)	7.504*	(3.490)
Library Director	14.68**	(3.104)	15.48**	(3.469)
Public Utilities Director	31.87**	(4.265)	31.40**	(4.529)
Social Services Director	42.90**	(2.893)	42.10**	(3.120)
Emergency Services Director	21.04**	(3.035)	0	(.)
Emergency Medical Services Director	17.54**	(2.823)	0	(.)
Total Population (Ln)	13.17	(9.592)	1.935	(10.68)
Pseudo Graduation Rate	-13.04	(8.836)	3.374	(8.642)
Real Per-capita Personal Income (1000s)	0.199	(0.240)	0.286	(0.294)
Percent Republican Vote	0.0747	(0.266)	-0.194	(0.321)
Commission Partisanship	-3.493	(9.527)	10.74	(14.13)
Republican Commission x Republican Vote %	0.0511	(0.174)	-0.178	(0.249)
Years in Position			0.0259*	(0.0112)
Constant	-85.38	(114.0)	47.58	(127.2)
Observations	9047		5093	
Within County R-Squared	.58		.41	
Joint Significance Test of Director Salary Gaps	F(28, 99) = 79**		F(24, 99) = 57**	
Overall Significance Test	F(13, 99) = 113**		F(10, 99) = 78**	

Standard errors in parentheses; year effects omitted; note that the models controlling for experience cover years 2014-2021 whereas the full sample model covers years 2012-2021

+ p<0.10, \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01

# Average Director Pay Gap by Position from Base Model



# Conclusions

- LEOs on average are \*among\* the lowest paid county directors in NC.
- Politics does not affect compensation for all directors, but experience is significantly and positively related to compensation. Differs from our previous study on just election directors. Raises the question of why?
- Limitations: Case study of NC and potentially other omitted variables.
- Policy implications:
  - Over time the LEO competencies have become more complex and election are considered critical infrastructure, which would suggest LEOs should be paid more.
  - Given that LEOs feel underpaid and may stay in their role for higher pay, this study provides some data to make the case for higher pay. However, the analysis also suggests that the problem may be a collective action problem for LEOs in NC.

Thank you! [zmohr@ku.edu](mailto:zmohr@ku.edu)



# Addendum

# Control Variables

- Presidential vote (previous presidential election)
- County population (logged)
- Urban versus rural
- Real per capita personal income (000s)
- Property tax base (logged, adjusted for inflation)
- High school graduation rate
- County fixed effects

	Coef.	S.E.
County Administrator	97.26**	(4.958)
Finance Director	46.44**	(3.444)
Human Resources Director	23.20**	(3.222)
Planning Director	24.72**	(3.283)
Information Technology Director	32.11**	(3.912)
Public Health Director	50.49**	(4.192)
Senior Services Director	0.535	(3.095)
Parks and Recreation Director	7.301*	(3.114)
Library Director	14.62**	(3.097)
Public Utilities Director	31.87**	(4.256)
Social Services Director	42.85**	(2.884)
Emergency Services Director	21.02**	(3.027)
Emergency Medical Services Director	17.54**	(2.812)
Democratic Vote %	-0.122	(0.233)
Total Population (Ln)	15.70+	(8.936)
Pseudo Graduation Rate	-14.78+	(8.830)
Real Per-capita Personal Income (1000s)	0.197	(0.242)
Constant	-103.5	(98.01)
Observations	9071	
Within R <sup>2</sup>	.58	
Joint F-Test	84.12**	

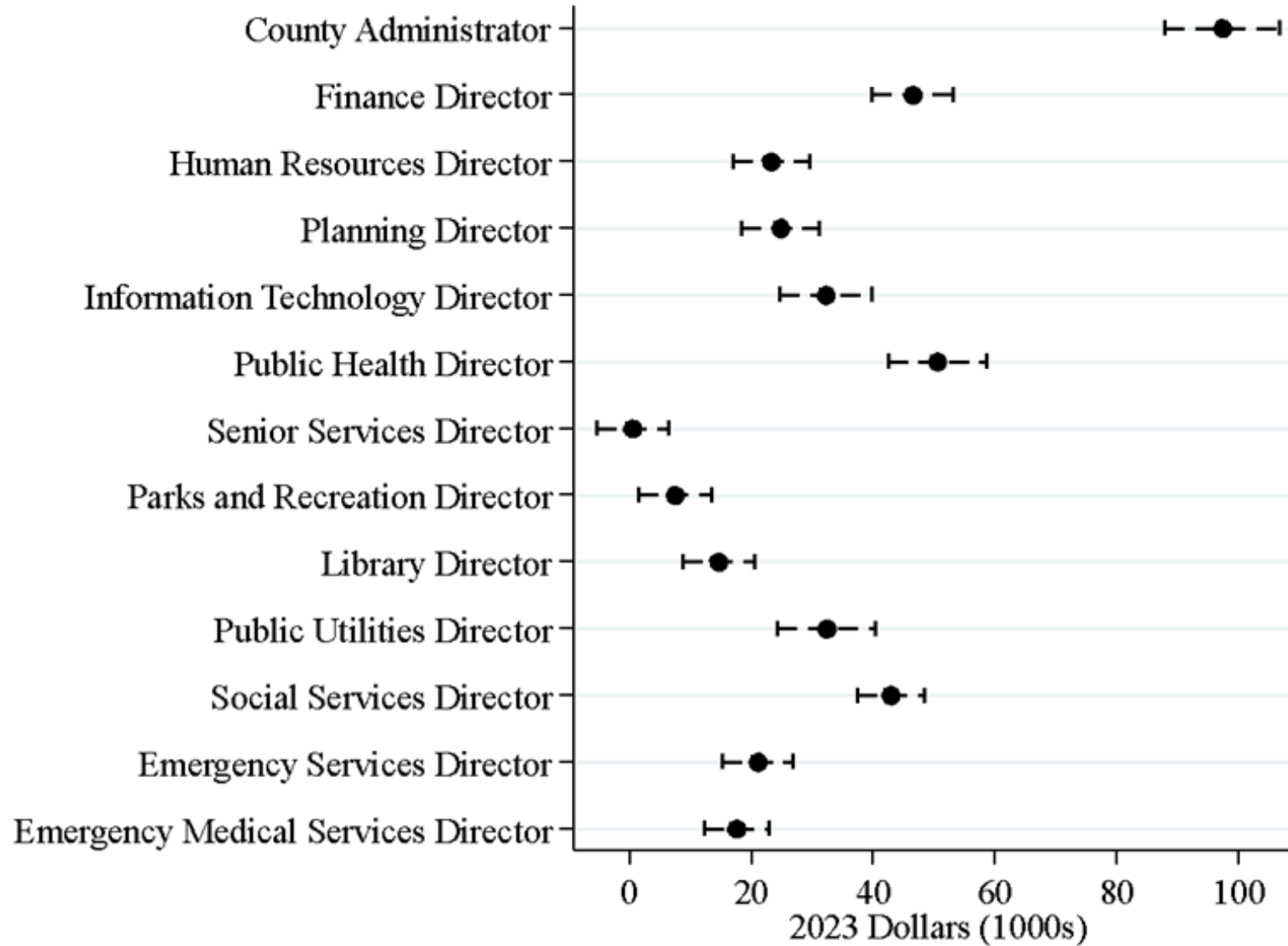
## Model without interaction

**Table 3: Director Pay Interaction Model**

	Coef.	S.E.
County Administrator	61.33**	(16.08)
Finance Director	29.46*	(12.85)
Human Resources Director	6.342	(11.85)
Planning Director	5.865	(11.02)
Information Technology Director	6.867	(13.09)
Public Health Director	27.49*	(12.91)
Senior Services Director	-16.00	(11.04)
Parks and Recreation Director	-13.88	(11.64)
Library Director	-8.594	(10.92)
Public Utilities Director	29.17*	(14.40)
Social Services Director	25.60*	(10.40)
Emergency Services Director	4.855	(10.50)
Emergency Medical Services Director	6.038	(9.507)
Democratic Vote %	-0.562+	(0.306)
County Administrator x Democratic Vote %	0.865*	(0.407)
Finance Director x Democratic Vote %	0.409	(0.327)
Human Resources Director x Democratic Vote %	0.406	(0.305)
Planning Director x Democratic Vote %	0.454	(0.285)
Information Technology Director x Democratic Vote %	0.609+	(0.345)
Public Health Director x Democratic Vote %	0.554+	(0.326)
Senior Services Director x Democratic Vote %	0.397	(0.277)
Parks and Recreation Director x Democratic Vote %	0.514+	(0.307)
Library Director x Democratic Vote %	0.559*	(0.278)
Public Utilities Director x Democratic Vote %	0.0755	(0.326)
Social Services Director x Democratic Vote %	0.416	(0.266)
Emergency Services Director x Democratic Vote %	0.389	(0.275)
Emergency Medical Services Director x Democratic Vote %	0.277	(0.254)
Total Population (Ln)	16.52+	(8.852)
Pseudo Graduation Rate	-15.50+	(8.710)
Real Per-capita Personal Income (1000s)	0.189	(0.241)
Constant	-93.77	(97.76)
Observations	9071	
Within R <sup>2</sup>	.59	
Joint F-Test	72.42**	

Describe this here

**Figure 3: Average Director Pay Gap by Position from Interaction Model**



Testing if pay gap between election directors varied across counties where population voted in favor of Democrats.

No systematic differences from the base model noted.

**Figure 4: Pay Gaps Across Democratic Vote Percent**

