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# Local Election Officials Survey

APRIL 2023



# Methodology

- Benenson Strategy Group conducted 852 interviews from March 2-April 3, 2023, among local election officials across the country and of all political affiliations.
- The survey was conducted online using a list of 10,974 local election officials provided by the Brennan Center.
- Data was weighted to ensure it was representative of the universe of local election officials.
- The margin of error for the dataset is +/- 3.22% at the 95% confidence interval. It is higher among subgroups.

# 5 things to know about local election officials

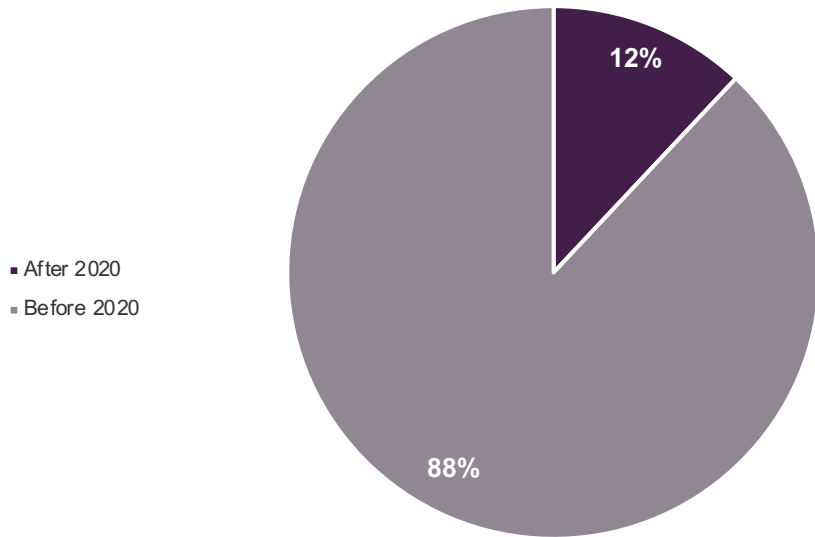
- 1. We can expect more than one in five to be serving in their first presidential election in 2024.**
  - 21% of local election officials either began serving after the 2020 cycle or say they are very or somewhat unlikely to serve in the 2024 cycle.
  - This rate of turnover is equivalent to one to two local election officials leaving office every day since the 2020 election.
- 2. Large numbers see threats, harassment, and abuse as serious problems for the field. Indeed, nearly one in three have been abused, harassed, or threatened.**
  - Nearly three in four feel that threats against election officials have increased in recent years.
  - Over half say they are concerned that threats, harassment, and intimidation will harm retention and recruitment; likewise, nearly half are concerned about the safety of their colleagues and/or staff.
  - 30% say they have personally been abused, harassed, or threatened because of their job as a local election official.
- 3. Many worry about political interference, including pressure to certify results in favor of a specific candidate or party.**
  - Thinking ahead to future elections, more than half are worried about political leaders engaging in efforts to interfere in how fellow election officials do their jobs.
  - More than one in nine are concerned about facing pressure to certify election results in favor of a specific candidate or party in future elections.
- 4. They need more resources to meet their administration and security needs.**
  - 74% say their annual budget needs to grow when thinking about election security and administration needs over the next five years.
  - Out of the 49 CISA Cyber Hygiene Scan and 54 CISA Physical Security Assessment recipients we interviewed, the vast majority implemented at least some recommendations, but only 10 local election officials in each category had fully implemented CISA's recommended improvements.
  - Lack of funds was the number one reason they gave for failing to implement all security recommendations.
- 5. The federal government needs to do more to support them, and there are opportunities to build awareness of federal resources.**
  - 27% say the federal government is doing a good job supporting them in their roles, compared to the 54% and 74%, respectively, who say the same thing about their state and local governments.
  - For many local election officials, especially those who began their service after the 2020 cycle, there is room to improve awareness of the federal resources available to them; there is more education to be done to increase the number of election officials taking advantage of these resources.
  - 85% of election officials say it is beneficial for CISA to dispel false information about elections by promoting facts about election administration and technology.

# The Big Picture

# Significant turnover with more to come means we can expect over 1 in 5 election officials serving in the 2024 cycle to be new

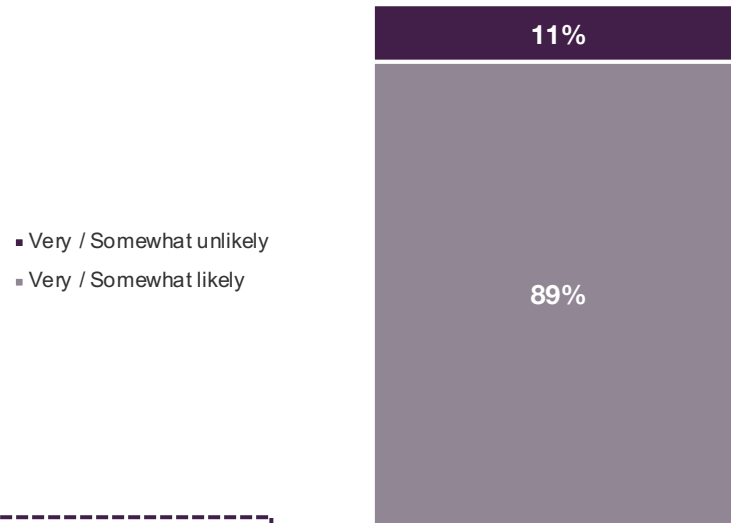
Share of Local Election Officials Who Began Service After vs. Before the 2020 Election Cycle

(Among all local election officials)



How likely are you to continue serving as a local election official going forward in the 2024 presidential election?

(Among all local election officials)



21% of all local election officials either:  
a) Began service after the 2020 election cycle, or  
b) Are very or somewhat unlikely to continue serving through the 2024 election cycle.

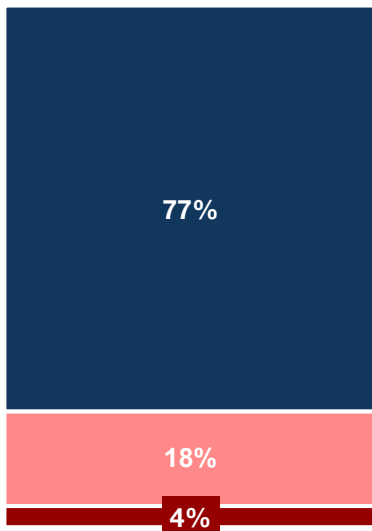
*Note: There is a small overlap of election officials who said they began serving after 2020 and will likely leave before 2024.*

# Safety concerns are driving many local election officials away from service and can threaten future recruitment

Do you personally know of any local election officials or election workers who have left their jobs at least in part because of fear for their safety, increased threats, or intimidation?

*(Among all local election officials)*

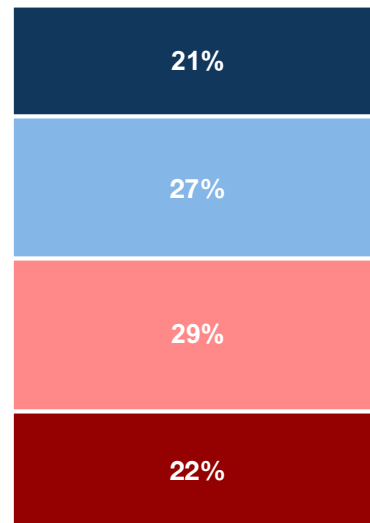
- No, I don't know of any.
- Yes, I know of one or two.
- Yes, I know of many.



Please indicate how concerned you are as an election official that threats, harassment, and intimidation against local election officials will make it more difficult to retain or recruit election workers in future elections.

*(Among all local election officials)*

- Not concerned at all
- Not too concerned
- Somewhat concerned
- Very concerned

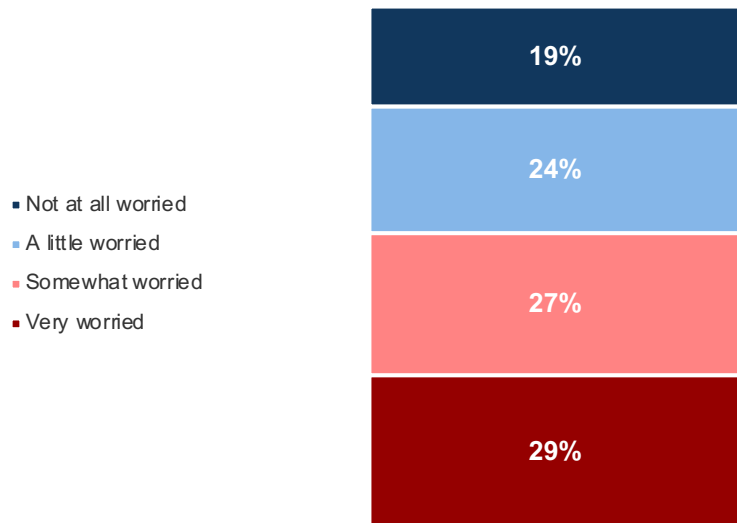


# Improper Interference

# Local election officials are worried about interference by political leaders

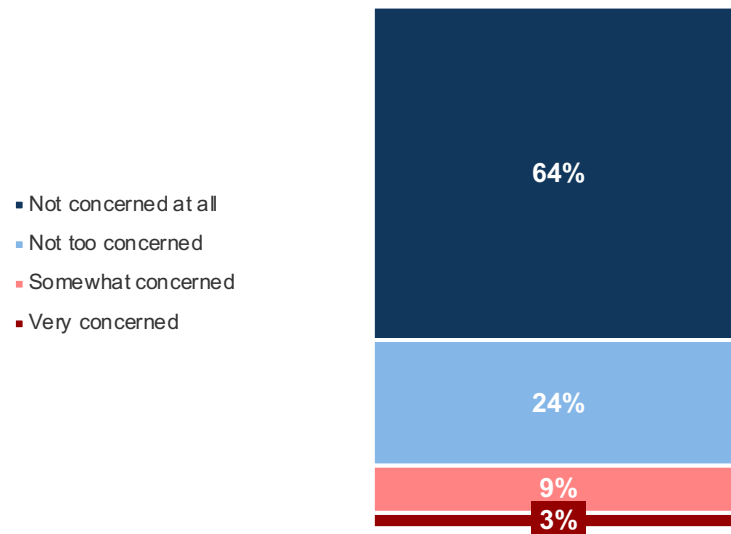
Thinking ahead to elections in the future, how worried are you about political leaders engaging in efforts to interfere with how your fellow election officials around the country do their jobs?

*(Among all local election officials)*



Please indicate how concerned you are about facing pressure to certify election results in favor of a specific candidate or party in future elections.

*(Among all local election officials)*



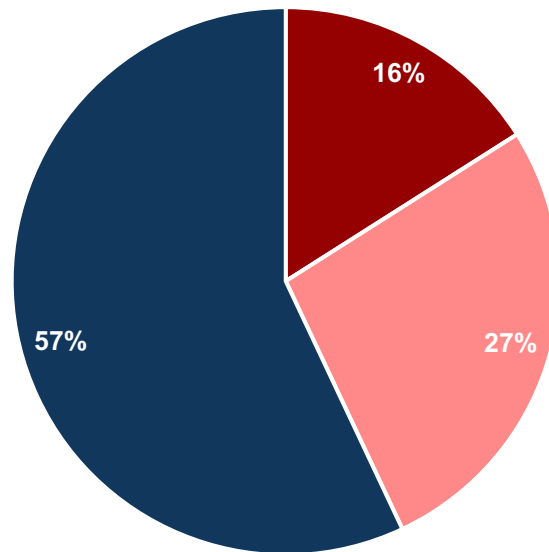


# Many local election officials are concerned that potential colleagues might believe in widespread fraud

Please indicate how concerned you are that, in future elections, some incoming local election officials might believe that there was widespread voter fraud during recent elections.

*(Among all local election officials)*

- Very concerned
- Somewhat concerned
- Not concerned at all / Not too concerned

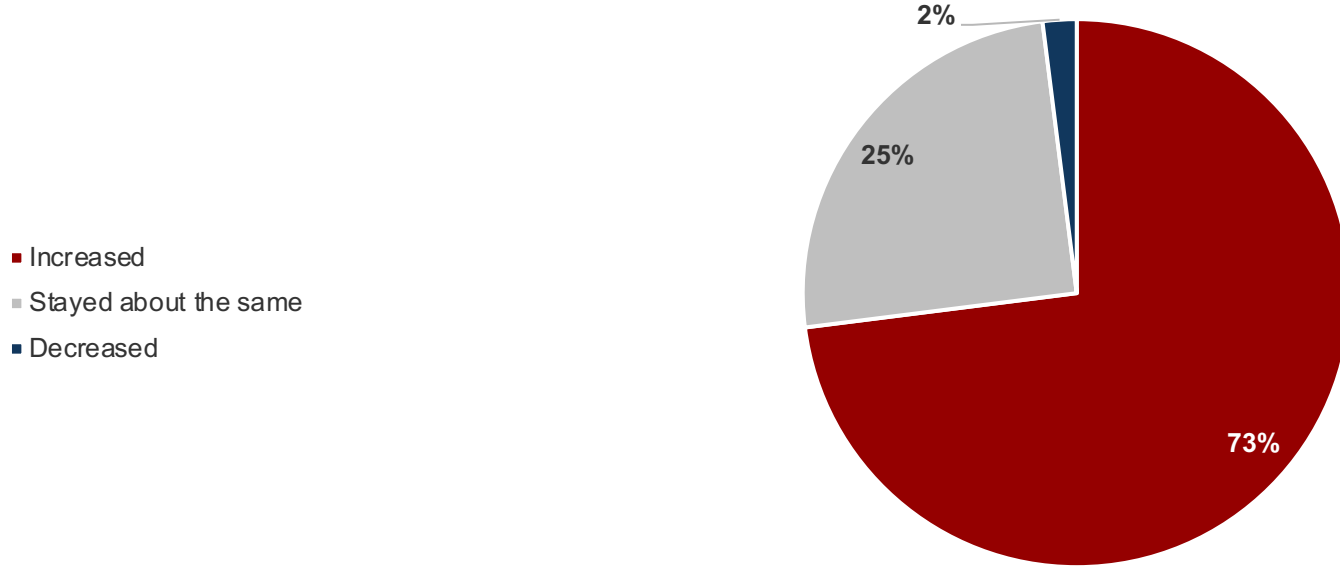


# Threats, Harassment, and Intimidation

# Nearly three quarters of local election officials feel threats have increased

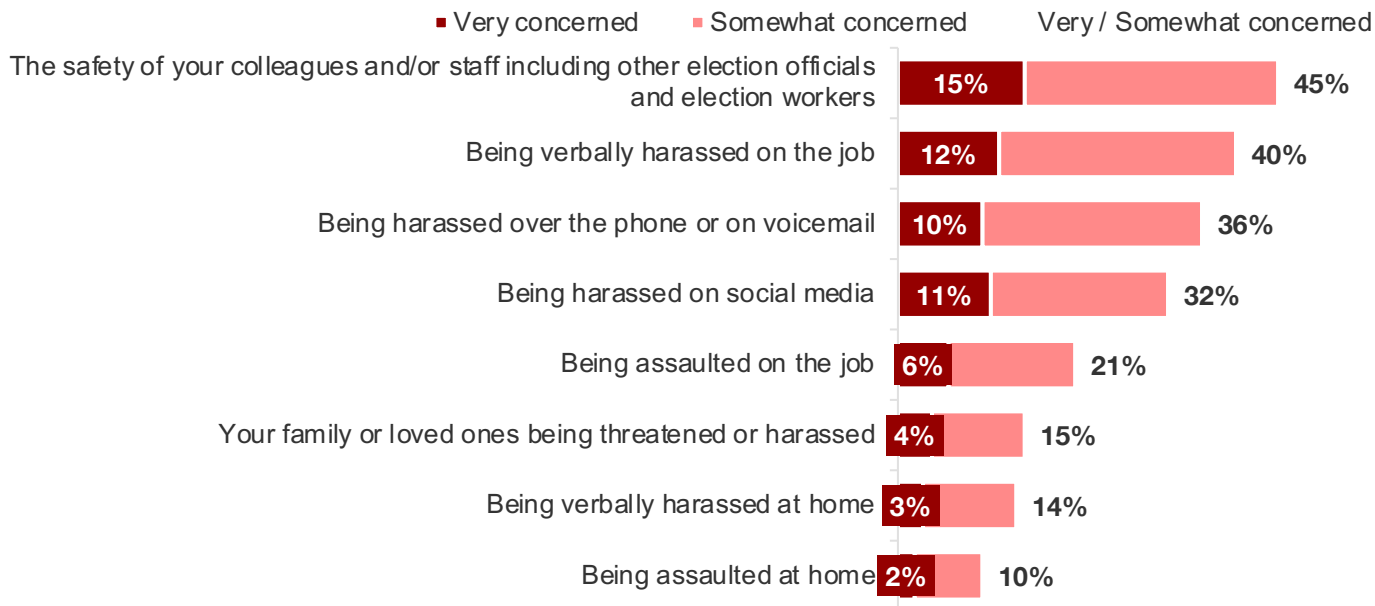
Regardless of whether or not you have personally been threatened because of your job as a local election official, do you feel that threats against election officials have increased, decreased, or have stayed about the same as in recent years?

*(Among all local election officials)*



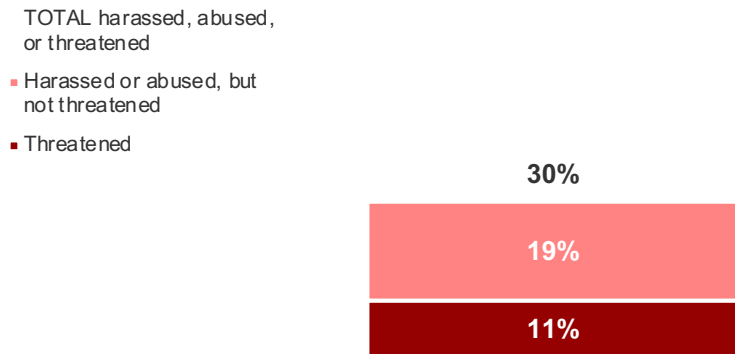
# Nearly half worry about their colleagues' safety

Please indicate how concerned you are as an election official with each of the following in future elections.  
(Among all local election officials)

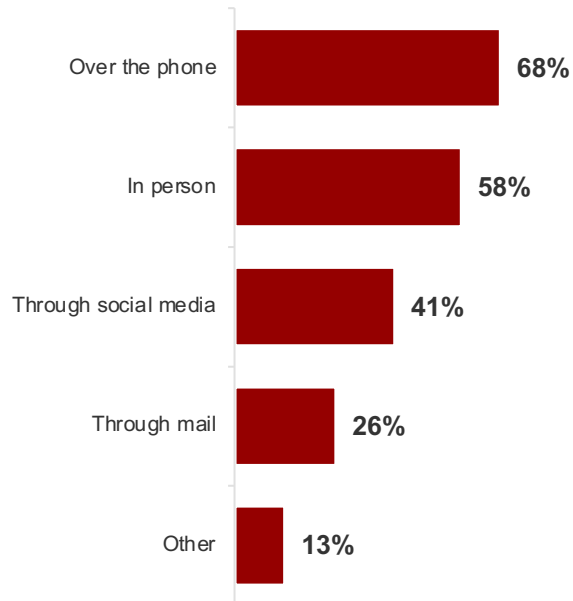


# Nearly 1 in 3 local election officials have experienced threats, harassment or abuse; more than half who received threats were threatened in person

Share of Local Election Officials Who Have Been Threatened, Harassed, or Abused Because of Their Job  
(Among all local election officials)

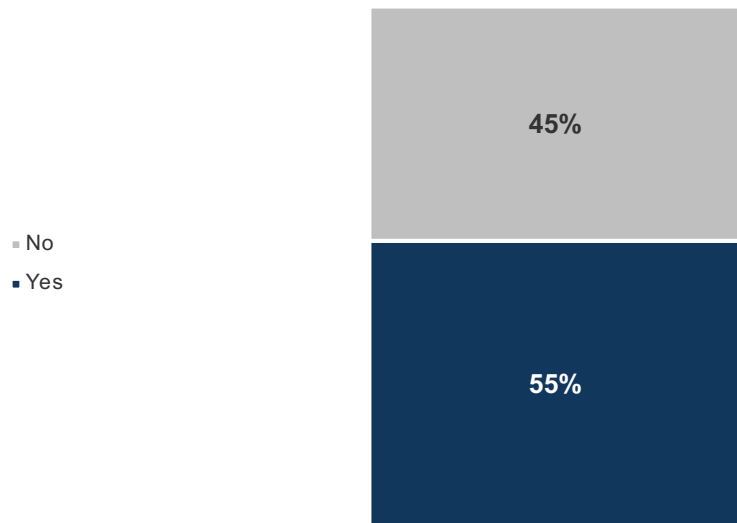


How have you been threatened?  
(Among the 11% of local election officials who have been threatened)



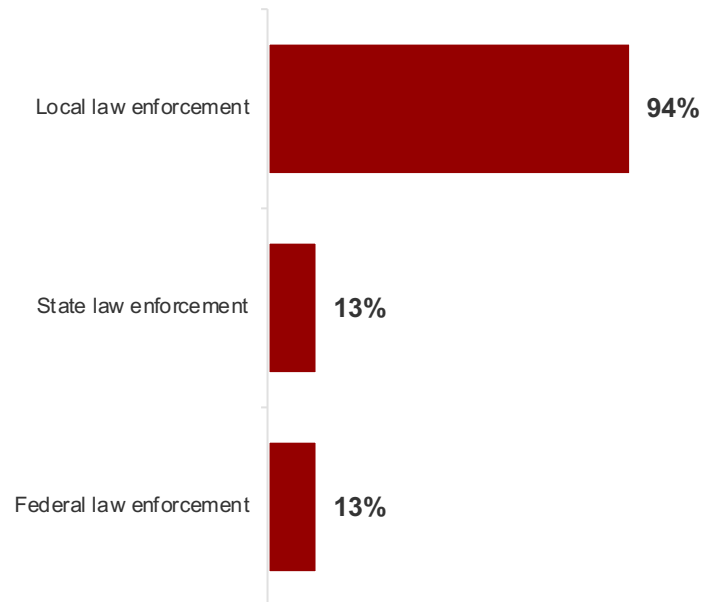
# Almost half of threats against local election officials have gone unreported; of threats reported, most reports are going to local law enforcement

Did you report this threat to law enforcement?  
(Among the 11% of local election officials who have been threatened)



Share of Local Election Officials Who Reported Threats to Local/State/Federal Law Enforcement

(Among the 6% of local election officials who have been threatened and who reported this threat to law enforcement\*)

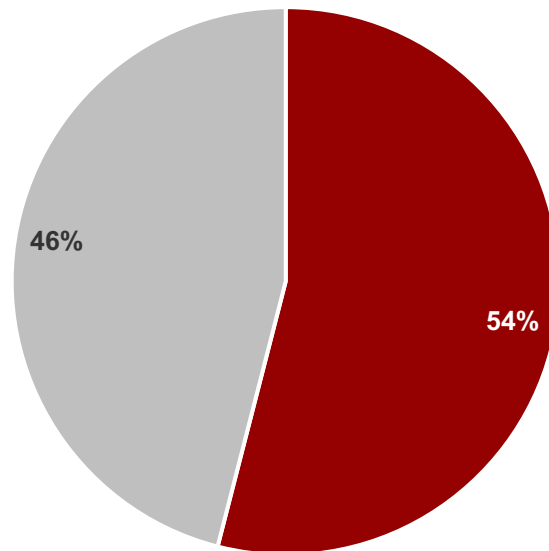


# Local election officials are also concerned about bad-faith FOIA requests

Please indicate how concerned you are as an election official about your office being harassed with bad-faith information requests in future elections.

*(Among all local election officials)*

- Very / Somewhat concerned
- Not at all / Not too concerned



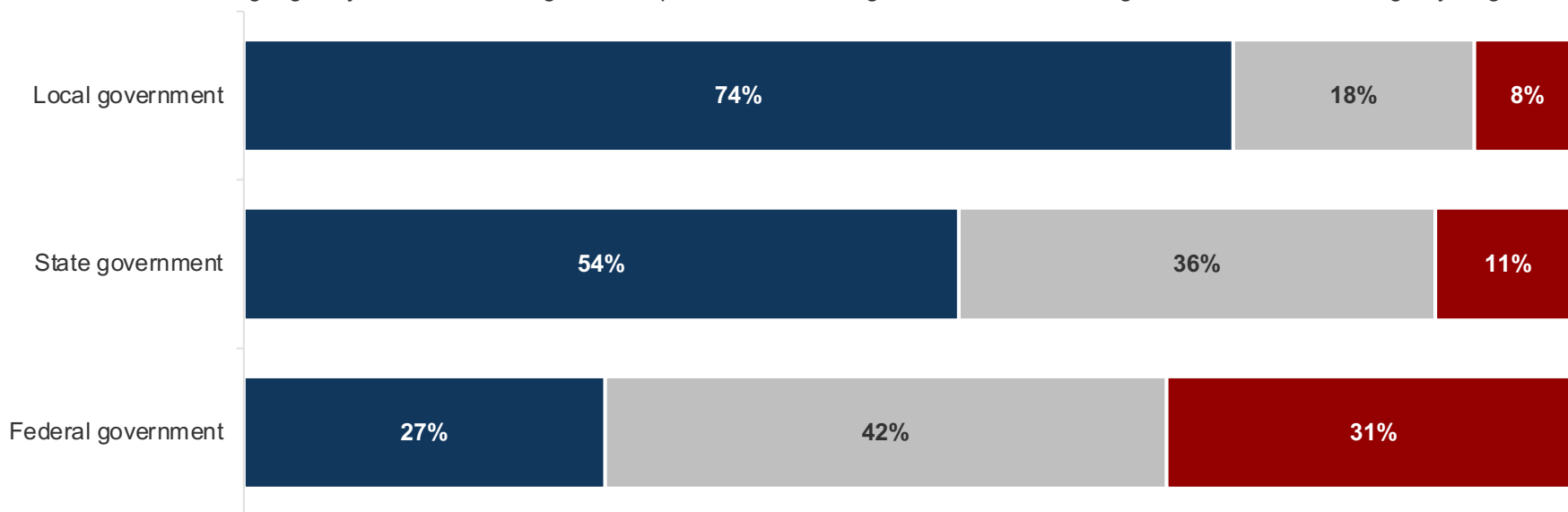
# Support from Government



# Local election officials say the federal government must do more to support them in their jobs

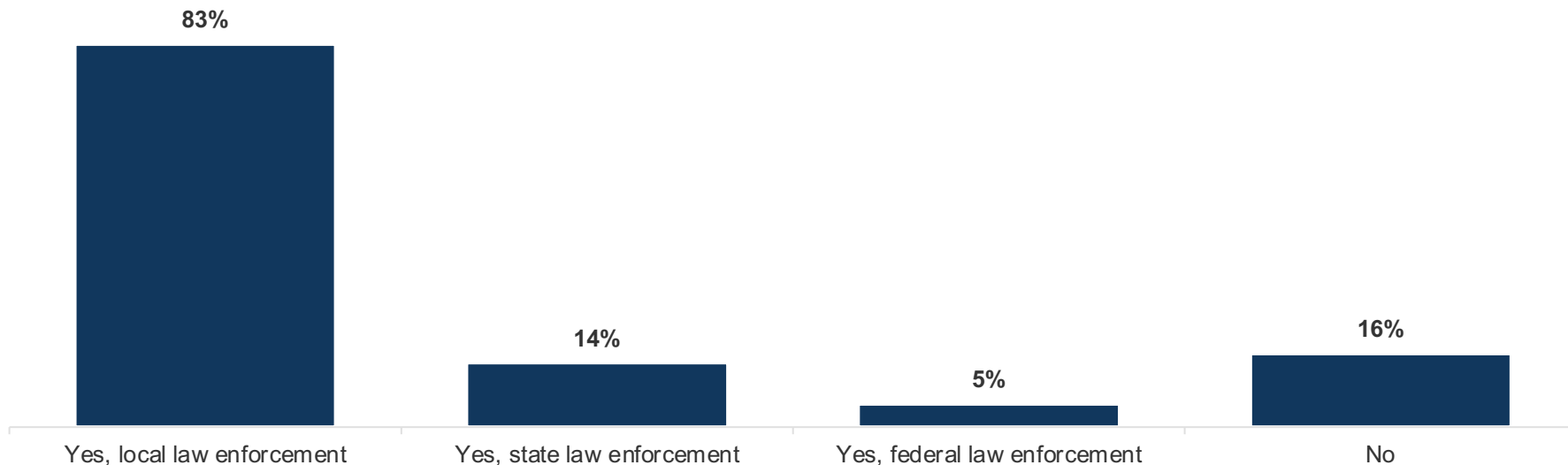
Local Election Officials' Evaluation of How the Local/State/Federal Government Is Supporting Them in Their Roles  
*(Among all local election officials)*

■ Is doing a good job   ■ Is taking some steps, but it's not enough and it should be doing more   ■ Is not doing anything



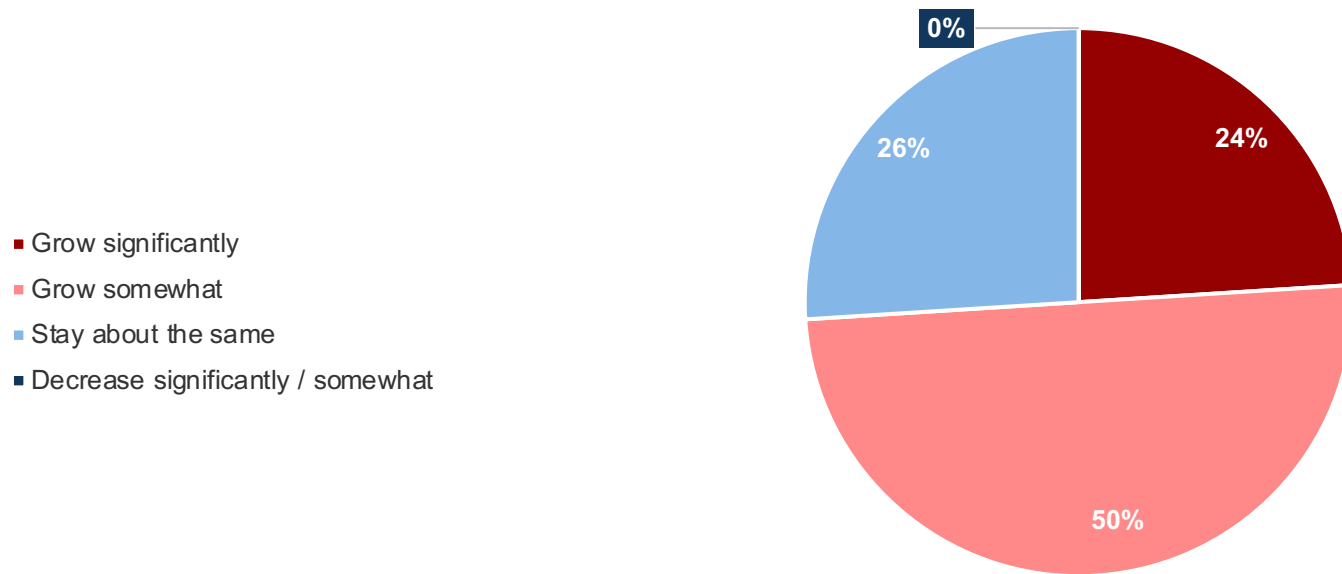
# More than 4 in 5 local election officials have a point of contact with local law enforcement; only 5% have a point of contact with federal law enforcement

Do you have a specific point of contact with any of the following groups?  
*(Among all local election officials)*



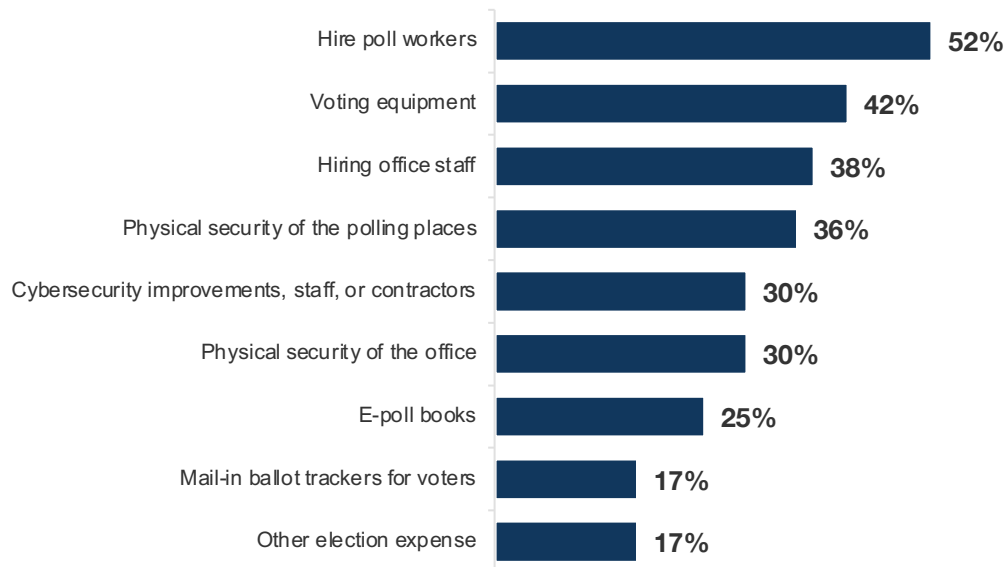
# Local election officials feel that their budgets need to grow to keep up with their administration and security needs

Thinking about your election administration and security needs over the next five years, would you say your annual budget needs to...?  
*(Among all local election officials)*



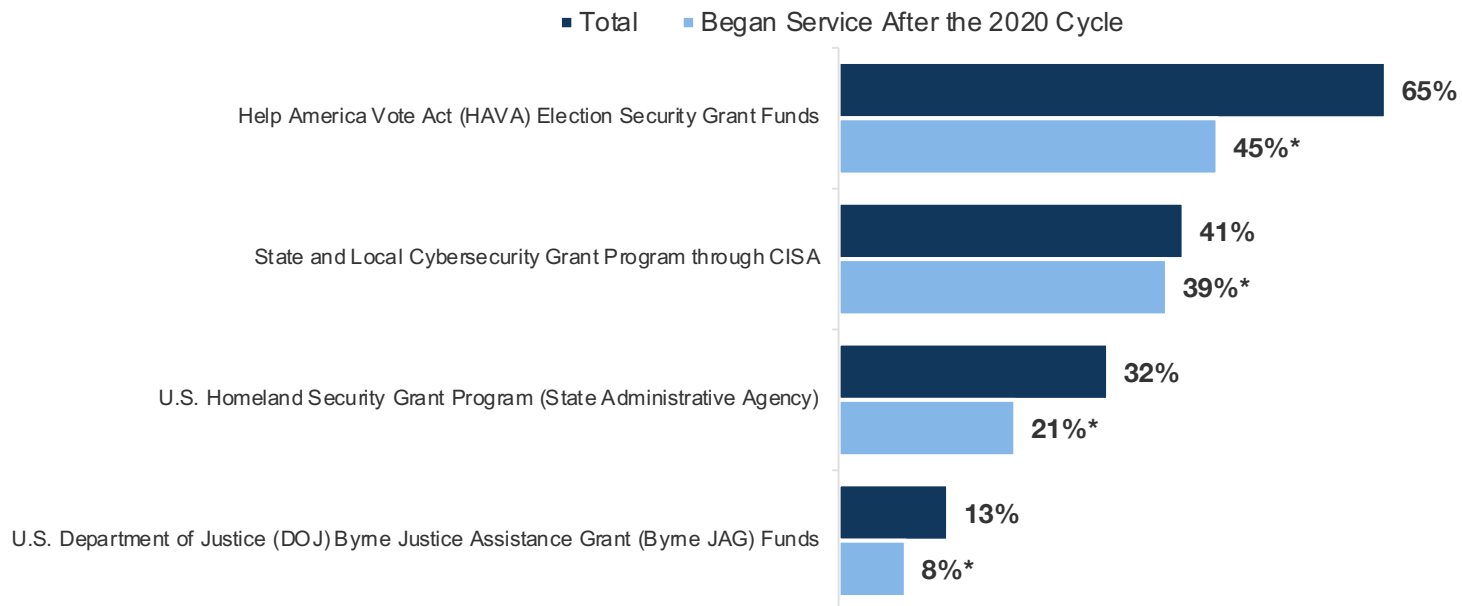
# Investment priorities include hiring poll workers and staff, updating voting equipment, and enhancing physical and cybersecurity measures

If your budget was to grow, in which of the following areas, if any, would you invest?  
*(Among the 74% of local election officials who feel that their annual budget needs to grow)*



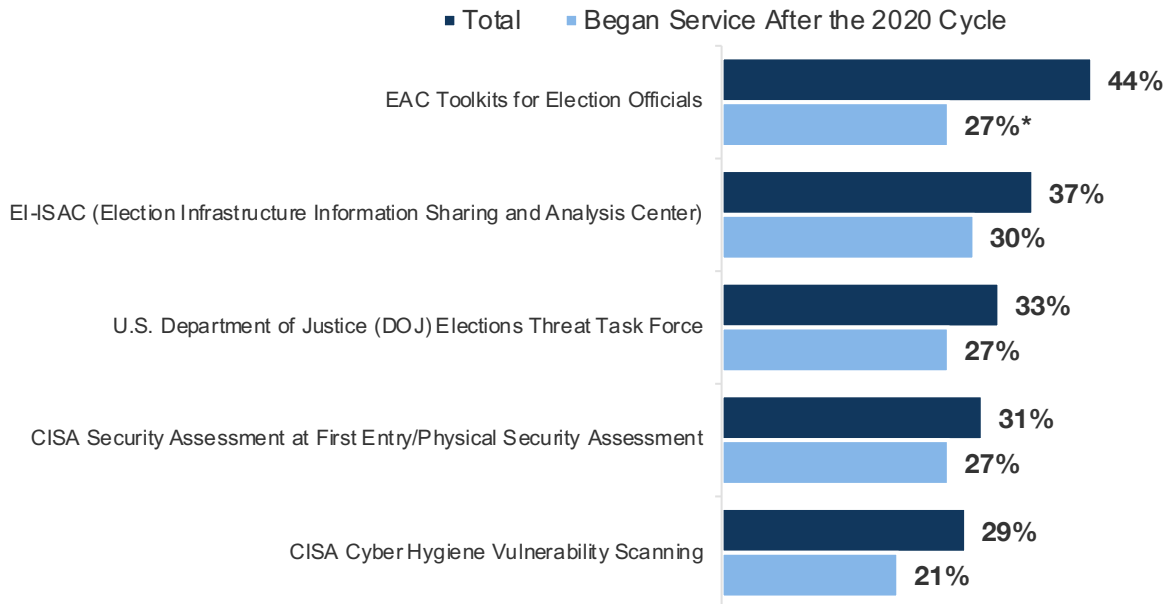
# For many – especially those who began serving after 2020 – there are opportunities to improve awareness of federal grant funding programs

Which of the following resources were you aware of prior to taking this survey?  
(Among all local election officials)



# Likewise, there is room to improve awareness of the federal services and resources available to local election officials, particularly for new officials

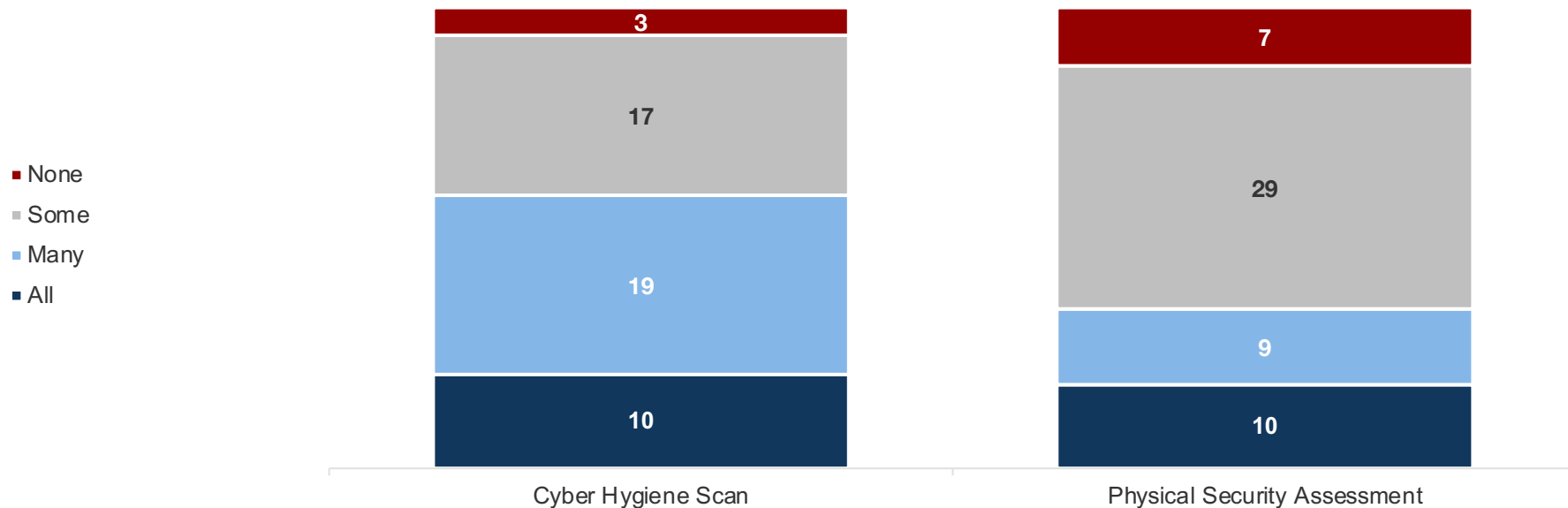
Which of the following resources were you aware of prior to taking this survey?  
(Among all local election officials)



# The vast majority of the 49 and 54 officials we interviewed who received CISA scans/assessments implemented at least some recommendations

How many of the recommended improvements were you able to implement in your system?

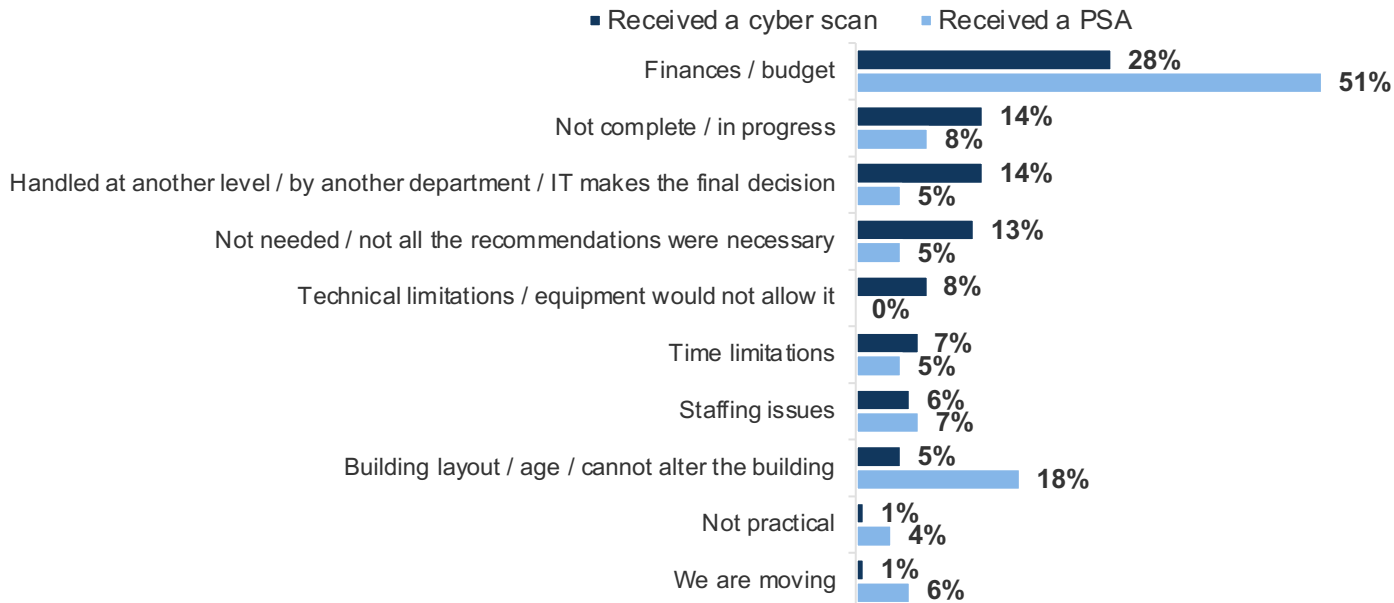
(Among the 49 and 54 local election officials, respectively, whose offices received a Cyber Hygiene Scan or Physical Security Assessment\*)



# Budget constraints are the major factor stopping local election officials from implementing all of CISA's cyber and physical security recommendations

## Why did you not implement all the recommended improvements? (Free Response Question)

(Among the 5% and 6% of local election officials, respectively, whose offices received a cyber hygiene scan or PSA but did not fully implement recommendations\*)



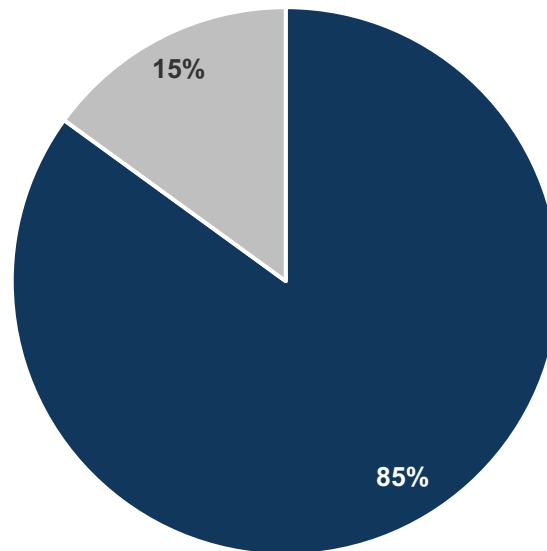


# Most local election officials feel that it is beneficial for CISA to actively debunk false election information

How beneficial, if at all, is it for CISA to dispel false information about elections by promoting accurate information on election administration and technology?

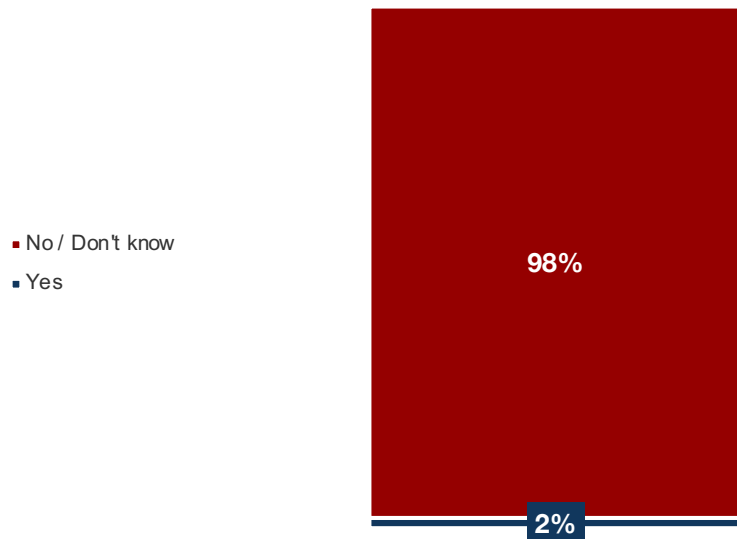
*(Among all local election officials)*

- Very / Somewhat beneficial
- Not at all / Not very beneficial

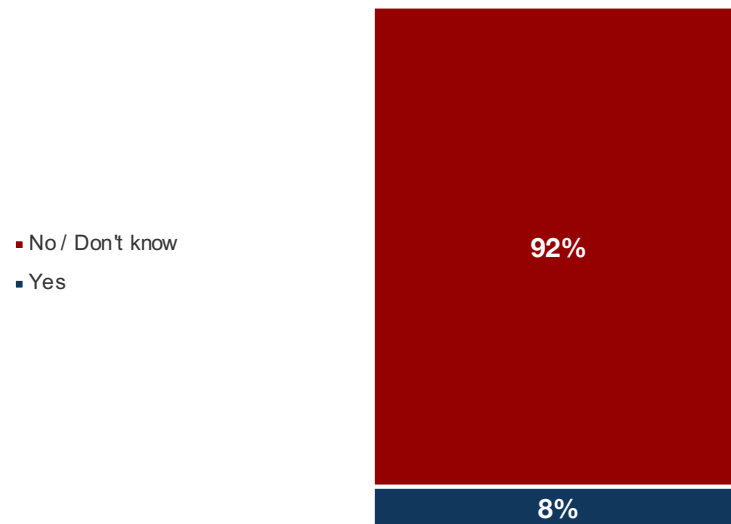


# Almost none of the 1 in 3 officials aware of the DOJ Task Force have contacted the Task Force or have spoken with the Crimes Coordinator

**Have you ever attempted to contact the DOJ Election Threats Task Force?**  
*(Among the 33% of local election officials who are aware of the DOJ Election Threats Task Force)*

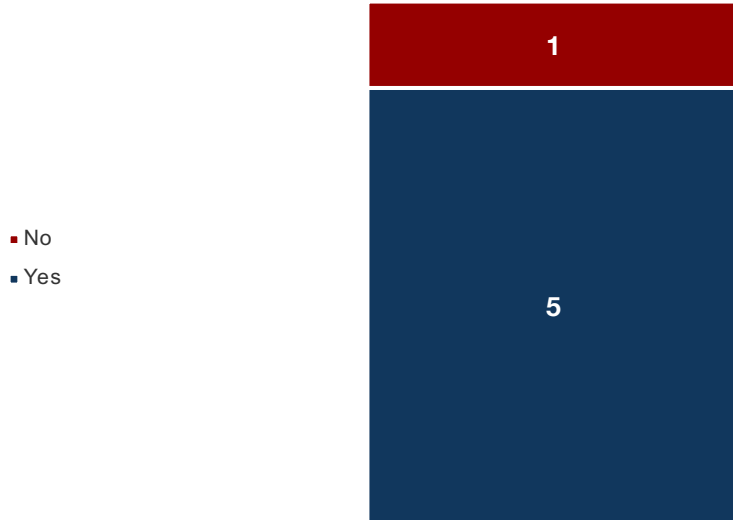


**Have you spoken with the FBI's Local Election Crimes Coordinator?**  
*(Among the 33% of local election officials who are aware of the DOJ Election Threats Task Force)*

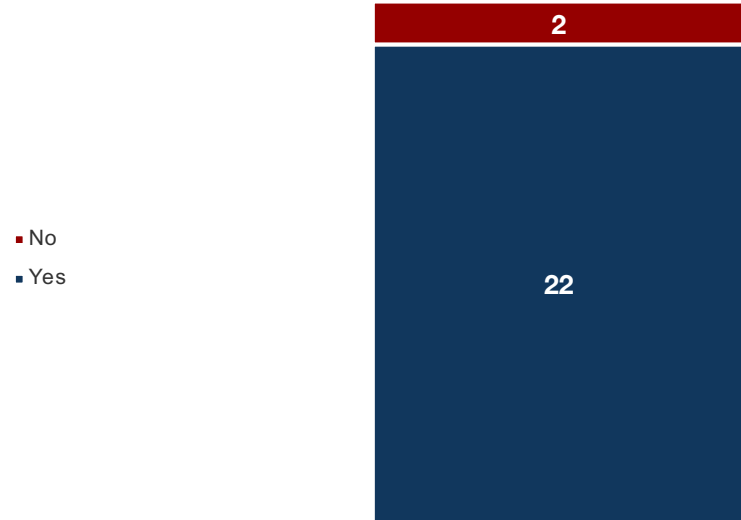


# The small share of those who had contact either with the Task Force or the Crimes Coordinator found their interactions helpful

Was your interaction with the DOJ Election Threats Task Force helpful?  
(Among the 6 local election officials who attempted to contact the Task Force\*)



Was your interaction with the FBI's Local Election Crimes Coordinator helpful?  
(Among the 24 local election officials who have spoken with the Crimes Coordinator\*)

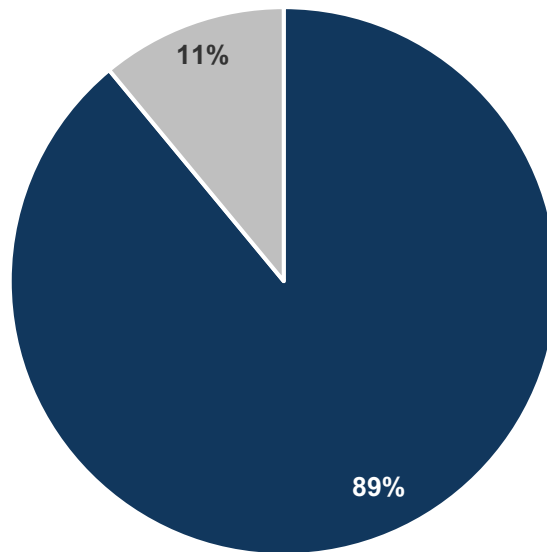


# Nearly 9 in 10 local election officials would be more willing to trust and work with DOJ if the Task Force hired someone with elections experience

If the DOJ Task Force hired a staff member with elections administration experience who had connections in the elections community, would this increase or decrease your willingness to work with and trust the DOJ?

*(Among all local election officials)*

- Increase greatly / somewhat
- Decrease greatly / somewhat





# Thank you

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