



# **Floridians for Election Transparency Pre-Election Observation Report**

**15 August 2022**

## **Introduction**

Floridians for Election Transparency 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, FFET trained and deployed teams of long-term election observers to interview Supervisors of Elections (the senior election official in each county) across the state. The program began in mid-May, and is ongoing.

As of early August 2022, we have approached the supervisors in 28 counties, which is 42% of the counties in the state, and have conducted in-depth interviews with 18 supervisors. After repeated attempts, we were unable to arrange interviews with ten of the supervisors we approached. The supervisor in Escambia refused through his assistant, supervisors in Duval, Leon and Palm Beach refused to return calls; The supervisors in Charlotte and Glades refused to be interviewed in person (a condition of our program); the supervisors in Gulf and Lake said they were too busy; the supervisor in Gadsden stated she was the only person her voters needed to hear from; and the supervisor in Okeechobee, somewhat ironically, stated observers did not know what they were talking about, and then “staunchly” refused to answer any questions.

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

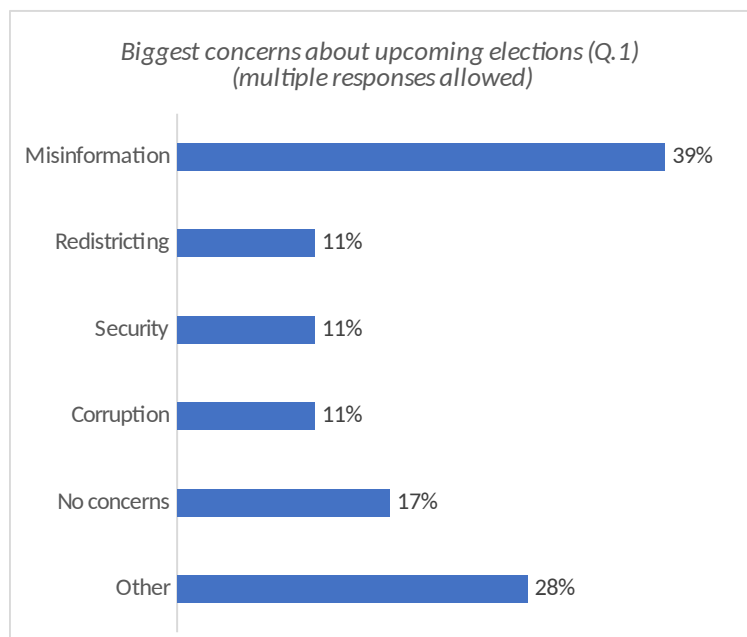
confidence in Florida’s election processes, and provides recommendations to state and election officials for reforming election processes to enhance transparency and increase voter confidence in the integrity of elections.

## 1 Biggest Concerns

The most common concern, shared by 39% of the supervisors, was with misinformation and disinformation on the security and integrity of the election process. One supervisor was concerned that *the media will propose false narratives attempting to take away the confidence of the public in the security of the election process*, and another worried about voters *falling prey to media misinformation about election security*.

The second most common response was that the supervisor had no particular concerns about administering the elections. After that we saw concerns about: how redistricting would impact and complicate the election for administrators and voters; physical security and the tense political environment; and concern that other supervisors and poll workers might not respect the law or election integrity.

Other concerns mentioned were cyber security, voter education, and the limited time available to adapt and train on new legislation and procedures.



## 2 Readiness for November Election

Regardless of their previously expressed concerns, almost all supervisors said they have the resources, equipment, personnel, and training needed to run an effective election this November. One said he wasn’t ready because of an inaccurate voter roll, and complained that there was not a uniform policy for decisions on voter registration; and one said he wasn’t prepared because he did not have enough poll workers.

## 3 Voter List Updates

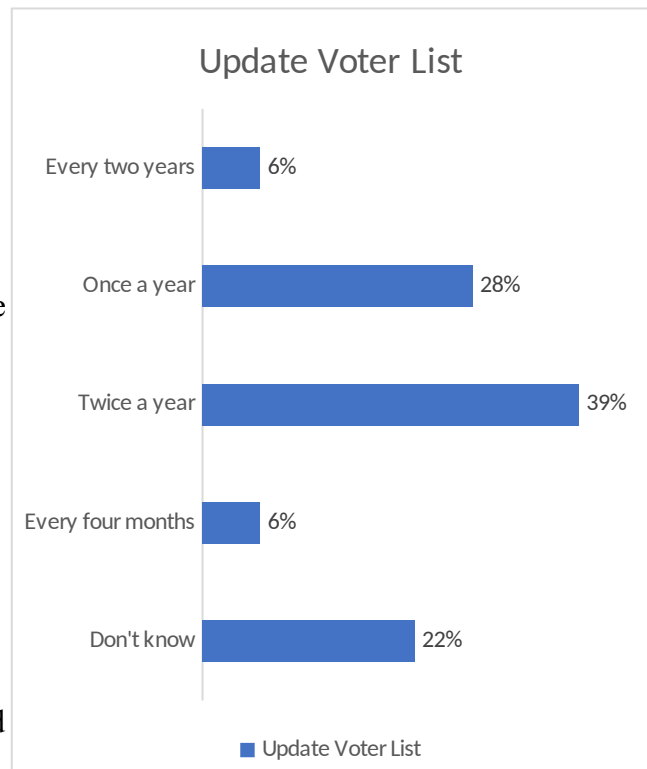
To get a better understanding of the voter list update process, we asked the supervisors a series of questions. When we asked them how often their voter list was cleaned (updated to remove the dead and those who had moved out of the area), and we received a variety of responses: once

every two years; once every year; twice a year; every four months, and not sure. All of the supervisors expressed confidence that their voter lists are accurate and up to date.

Several supervisors mentioned that they rely on the *Electronic Registration Information Center* (ERIC) for updates. 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. Florida’s association with this private and secretive organization damages public confidence in the integrity of our elections.

### Analysis and Recommendations

Despite the confidence of the supervisors, FFET 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 Florida elections. There are several steps that the DeSantis Administration can take to improve the accuracy of our voter lists and help rebuild public confidence in elections.



First, Florida should follow the example of other states, and withdraw from ERIC. Second, 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 Florida caught up to other modernizing states, and the rest of the world, on data and election transparency.

## 4 Third Party Registration

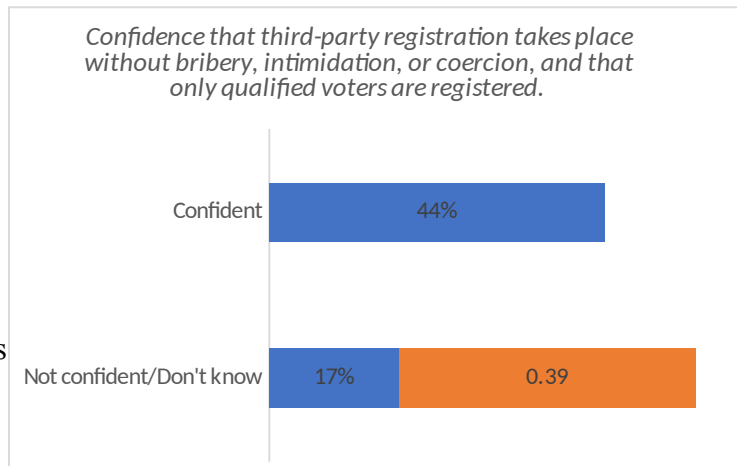
Rather than having new voters register in person, Florida allows third party voter registration, which means that non-government organizations are allowed to register voters. Internationally, registration is normally conducted by election officials; so we asked several questions to gain a deeper understanding of how this functions in Florida.

All of the supervisors we spoke with (except one, who wasn’t sure) said they had private third-party groups conducting voter registration in their county. Organizations mentioned included the Republican and Democratic parties, and many non-governmental organizations (one supervisor said he has “five to a dozen” for each election).

All of the specific organizations mentioned by the supervisors were either far left or extremist: League of Women Voters (pro-abortion, anti 2<sup>nd</sup> amendment), NAACP (climate change), Mi

Vecino (are on a mission to "Stacey Abrams Florida"), Tides Advocacy (fuel movements for social justice), Poder LatinX (who use the anarchist fist in their logo), Florida Rising (pro-abortion, climate justice), etc.

We asked the supervisors if they are confident that third-party registration takes place without bribery, intimidation, or coercion, and are confident that only qualified voters are registered through these third-parties. Less than half (44%) of the supervisors were confident in third-party registration, while one in six (17%) was not confident, and almost four in ten (39%) were unsure.



### Analysis and Recommendations

Because third-party voter registration is conducted primarily by organizations with clear political agendas, and takes place without any oversight or security protocols, it damages voter confidence in the voter list and election process. Since the primary obligation of any election administrator is to conduct an election that voters have confidence in, we recommend that Florida adopt international best practice, and only allow in-person voter registration at county election and administrative offices.

## 5 Voting in Nursing Homes and Other Institutions

In recent years we have seen increasing reports around the country of horrific election abuse in nursing homes and other institutions. Because Florida has a large population of senior citizens, and residents in care homes, we wanted to explore how voting for special populations is managed. As an example, we asked supervisors to explain how their office manages voting in nursing homes.

The most striking aspect of the responses to this question was how much they varied. One principle of good election management is clearly defined and standardized procedures; yet we had one that treated a nursing home as a precinct, several that sent ballots and then collected them, some that only sent ballots if requested, one that takes ballots to the home and leaves them for the staff to distribute and return, one that mails ballots, several where the nursing home supplied names and the supervisor sent ballots, etc. None of the explanations mentioned poll watchers or other security measures.

### Analysis and Recommendations

The Florida Department of Elections should develop standard procedures for voting in care homes and institutions, that make provision for the presence of poll watchers. In many countries a mobile polling team will have a set schedule, and travel around a district to visit care homes and institutions, accompanied by poll watchers. Because people in institutional care are

particularly vulnerable to election abuse through mail-in and absentee voting, in-person voting is preferred.

## 6 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 Florida's elections. The voting machines were certified by the state when purchased, and are updated and calibrated before each election. In more than half (56%) of the counties the update and certification are done by a representative of the company that makes the machines, and in the rest by a county employee (often with the assistance of a company representative). The supervisor is usually present for the update, but in about a third of cases the update is supervised by county staff. About half of the supervisors invite party representatives to witness the update and calibration, and half don't.

We asked if voting machines are ever connected to the internet, and 13 supervisors said no, five said yes, explaining that: *Results are transmitted by wireless modem on election night through a secure portal which sends encrypted results in a matter of seconds; they are only connected for a few seconds, using zero tunnel; not connected except on election night when they close the polls and submit counts from precincts to main election office; not connected, but there is a transmission with a virtual server, which receives data and uploads results; not connected, it is more of an intranet than internet.*

We informed supervisors that concerns have been raised across the country about the accuracy and integrity of voting machines in the 2020 elections, and that there are now calls to get rid of the machines, and use a manual process like that used in France; and then asked if they thought it a good idea to go back to a manual voting process. All of the supervisors said no, or did not respond. We then asked them why they didn't think it a good idea, and responses were fascinating.

More than half were concerned that manual counting would be less accurate than machine counting, and many were concerned it would be slower. One, who said hand counting would *take forever*, also said it would be less accurate, but thought the machines *could be hacked by a tenth grader*. Interestingly, and perhaps counter-intuitively for many people, one supervisor stated that *machines are more accurate, but the machine counting process takes longer than hand counting*. One supervisor said *we cannot go back to manual counting because Florida law requires machine counting*.

Some of the concern with hand counting was directly related to staffing; with one supervisor explaining that as they invested in technology for counting, they have been rapidly reducing the number of precincts, dropping from 577 in 2020 to around 300 for 2022 alone. Several others confirmed they no longer had the manpower for manual counting, with one saying *to count manually we would have to go back to smaller precincts*.

### 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). Floridians also distrust voting machines, and perhaps for good reason. Vulnerabilities, which can be found easily through a simple web search, have been discovered in all of the machines used in Florida.

While many computer scientists have warned about security issues with machines that can connect to the internet, these machines are also vulnerable through the thumb drives used to update ballots and download results, and to malfeasance 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 undetectably 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. Ultimately, the only way we can restore trust in Florida'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.

The primary objective of election administrators must be the conduct of an election process that voters view as accurate and fair, which results in the election of representatives that voters are confident have democratic legitimacy. Although supervisors are concerned that they don't have the manpower for manual counting, the lack of manpower is solely the result of policy decisions that prioritized computer equipment over staffing.

It is true that to reimplement manual counting we would have to go back to smaller precincts, but smaller precincts are best practice in election administration. Smaller precincts are closer to the people, have shorter wait times, and are easier to monitor. Because of our complex ballots, precinct size might be capped at something easily manageable between 600 and 1000 voters.

International practice and our own history demonstrate that manual voting and counting are cheaper, and faster, and more accurate, than the currently used machine-based processes; but even if it were more expensive or slower, they would still be preferable, because they are the only processes that are transparent enough to restore public trust in elections. For this reason, we recommend that the Department of Elections review international best practices in manual elections (France provides a good example), and prepare a plan for the legislature for reversion to a manual election process.

## 7 Cost of Elections

Historically, one of the most common arguments for the use of technology in elections has been cost-effectiveness, with the assumption being that computerized elections are cheaper than manual election; but we are unaware of any rigorous studies that have tested these assumptions. We think that hiring a few more people may, in fact, be cheaper than purchasing and maintaining expensive election technology, but are not sure.

To gather data for our own study, we asked supervisors what it costs per voter to implement an election in their county. Among those who were willing or able to answer the question, responses varied widely: \$55, \$23, \$16, \$7, \$3, \$3, \$3, \$1.8, \$1.7, and \$1. Of course, costs vary from place to place, but this great variance suggests that supervisors are measuring cost per voter in different ways. This is actually a perennial problem in election administration – do you count salaries, security, rents, capital equipment, consumables, etc. Nobody seems to use the same list.

Comparing manual voting to machine voting is even more complicated, as you need to include the cost of intangibles. For example, what is the positive value, or cost, to society of election processes that are transparent, or not transparent? We recommend the Governor set up a task force to delve deeper into the actual cost of various election processes, but from our perspective, we would never sacrifice public confidence in election integrity for speed, cost, or efficiency.

## 8 Ballot Issues

Some concern has been expressed in the election integrity community about production, secure storage, and chain-of-custody for extra ballots, so we asked several questions on this issue. First, we asked how many extra ballots are available in each precinct, and responses varied widely: one said he ordered 50% than the total number of voters on the roll; four said 5 to 15% extra; three requested a percentage of the precinct total of registered voters of 90%, 70% or 65%; five said they print ballots on demand; one said 50 extra ballots; one said four or five hundred extra ballots; and one said he pads a little to make sure there are enough.

We next asked the Supervisors to describe the process used to track and account for excess ballots (ballots not used during election day), and responses (although using different words) were remarkably consistent, indicating a well-established process and effective training.

We know that in some areas, in other parts of the country, tabulating machines have sometimes had difficulty reading many mail-in ballots, and those had to be sent for manual adjudication. To determine if that is a concern in Florida, we asked the supervisors what percentage of ballots had to go to manual adjudication, and to briefly describe how ballots are adjudicated in their county.

Most said their adjudication rate was between .5 and 1%, with Lee County the outlier at 3%. Most were adjudicated by a three-person canvassing board, but a few said they used two contract workers representing opposing parties. More than half of those that mentioned it said no poll watchers were present during the adjudication.

### Analysis and Recommendations

The lack of uniformity in the production of extra ballots is concerning, and we recommend the Department of Elections establish and disseminate a consistent standard for the production and storage of extra ballots. Excessive ballot adjudication does not seem to be a problem in Florida, but we recommend that no adjudication be conducted without the presence of poll watchers from both parties.



## 9 COVID and Election Processes

Significant changes in election procedures were introduced in Florida prior to the 2020 elections in response to the COVID pandemic, and many people believe these changes weakened election integrity, so we asked the supervisors, as election professionals, for their views on this issue. Less than a fifth (17%) said that the changes in response to COVID had weakened election security or were not sure, while a third (33%) said the changes had strengthened integrity, and more than half (56%) thought the changes hadn't made any impact of election integrity.

When this question has been asked in other states, the percentage of respondents that thought COVID changes had negatively affected election integrity was much higher than it is in Florida; possibly because the changes in response to COVID in Florida were less radical than those in other states.

## 10 Poll Watchers

Poll watchers play an important role in deterring malpractice and reassuring the public that the voting and counting processes are free and fair, but there is increasing concern that the political parties are failing to recruit, train and deploy sufficient poll watchers to perform this essential function. To assess the situation in Florida, we asked supervisors if they had both Republican and Democrat pollwatchers at every polling location in 2020.

Only a fifth of supervisors said they had poll watchers from both parties at every polling place. For those that didn't, we asked that they estimate the percentage that each party covered. Most didn't know, but in Bay County they estimated Democrats covering 40% and Republicans covering 30%; while in Broward the supervisor reported there were no Democrat poll watchers; and in Calhoun County the estimate was about 30% covered for Democrats and about 10% for Republicans. One supervisor stated *they come out for the first day of early voting, but end up leaving.*

### Analysis and Recommendations

While there are large parts of the election process (absentee and early voting) that are now unobservable or difficult to observe and therefore unverifiable, poll watchers still play an important role in election integrity. Political parties have a responsibility to the public to train and deploy sufficient poll watchers to continuously observe all election processes that are open to observation.

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