SURVIVING AT THE MARGINS:

Election Budgets and Marginal Funding Decisions in North Carolina

Jose Altamirano, Harvard Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation

with contributions from Katelin Kaiser (counsel for Voting Rights) and Chris Shenton (Equal Justice Works Fellow for Voting Rights), Southern Coalition for Social Justice

February 2023

SOUTHERN COALITION for SOCIAL JUSTICE

HARVARD Kennedy School
ASH CENTER
for Democratic Governance and Innovation

Table of Contents

Introduction

Elections are funded at the county level in North Carolina. Boards of County Commissioners (BoCCs) appropriate the fiscal year funds necessary to hire and pay elections staff, rent polling places, replace or repair voting machines, order office supplies and equipment, mail and process absentee ballots, and perform voter outreach and education programs that form the backbone of democracy in North Carolina. This Report researched local county budgets from a sample of 40 counties and interviewed 12 elections officials to better understand the local dynamics that influence election budgets, and what constitutes a 'marginal funding decision' - the amount of money that is cut from an initial budget request or added later on in the fiscal year.

While no strong pattern was evident in the budget data, most of the counties studied saw their absolute budget figures increase in the period following Fiscal Year 2019. Several counties stand out as outliers due to their consistent budget decrease and merit further attention. Interviews revealed a common picture - election officials perform well given their often underfunded budgets. Directors from small, rural counties are especially vulnerable to a lack of advocacy and political support within the BoCC that may result in a lack of resources. Election officials from counties both big and small are concerned about the rise of election denier rhetoric and how it impacts their public perception, and are dismayed at the lack of voter education that results in a lack of support for their work. When asked what they would put extra money towards, a common answer was hiring more staff and obtaining more secure space to house their equipment and perform their duties.

A lot of labor and money goes into ensuring North Carolinians have a functioning democracy and safe, free, and fair elections, but there is still much work to be done to ensure that vision is accessible to all. Local elections officials need - and have earned - more financial and operational resources to do their jobs and achieve that vision.

Election Funding in North Carolina

Existing election funding research supports certain trends. First, property tax and the broader fiscal environment strongly influence election administration budgets and actual spending amounts, such as during recessions or pandemics.[1] Second, a study of budgetary tradeoffs at the local level in North Carolina suggests that elections are underfunded in part because election administration lacks "a natural constituency to advocate for it in county governments and because the outcomes from funding or underfunding are only observed intermittently."[2] Underfunded elections have different implications for election administration outcomes. Further research indicates that election spending influences a local jurisdiction's capacity to deal with issues such as residual votes, voter turnout, and election equity.

Furthermore, scholarship suggests that managerial capacity, defined as a manager's ability to integrate finances, human resources, capital and information technology, plays a role in election administration outcomes such as residual votes and voter turnout.[3] Managerial capacity is impacted by the funding afforded to elections; an election office's financial capacity allows the buildup of institutional capacity and provides for better technology and assistance.[4] In other words, election officials with more funding can conduct more voter outreach and assist voters with various barriers to ballot access. Finally, local election officials wield significant discretion over critical components of the election process and election administration infrastructure, including voter eligibility, voter registration, absentee ballot verification, and voter education.[5]

Sample Counties

A representative sample of 40 counties[6] was selected to conduct the research for this Report. Counties were selected based on a number of criteria, including:

☑ Their selection for Southern Coalition for Social Justice and NC Budget & Tax Center's Five-County Project in 2022

☑ 'Commuter' counties with historically underfunded elections

☑ Presence of local voting rights advocates or a strong CBOE Director

☑ Known occurrence of voter challenge events in the county

☑ Contributing to the representativeness of the overall sample, including population size, demographics, rate of population change, and geographic region.

The sample's total population hovers around 7.4 million[7], around 71% of the state's total projected population.[8]

---

1 Mohr, Zachary, JoEllen V. Pope, Mary Jo Shepherd, Martha Kropf, and Ahmad Hill. "Evaluating the Recessionary Impact on Election Administration Budgeting and Spending: Part of Special Symposium on Election Sciences." American Politics Research, June 18, 2020. https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X20935785.

2 McGowan, Mary Jo, JoEllen V. Pope, Martha E. Kropf, and Zachary Mohr. "Guns or Butter… or Elections? Understanding Intertemporal and Distributive Dimensions of Policy Choice through the Examination of Budgetary Tradeoffs at the Local Level." Public Budgeting & Finance 41, no. 4 (2021): 3–19. https://doi.org/10.1111/pbaf.12289.

3 Kropf, Martha, JoEllen V. Pope, Mary Jo Shepherd, and Zachary Mohr. "Making Every Vote Count: The Important Role of Managerial Capacity in Achieving Better Election Administration Outcomes." Public Administration Review 80, no. 5 (2020): 733–42. https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.13216.

4 *Ibid.*

5 Hannah Furstenberg-Beckman, Greg Degen, and Tova Wang, "Understanding the Role of Local Election Officials: How Local Autonomy Shapes U.S. Election Administration," Ash Center for Democracy in Governance, September 2021, https://ash.harvard.edu/files/ash/files/role_of_local_election_officials.pdf?m=1632410559.

6 Alamance, Ashe, Beaufort, Bladen, Brunswick, Buncombe, Cabarrus, Carteret, Chatham, Columbus, Cumberland, Duplin, Durham, Forsyth, Gates, Granville, Guilford, Halifax, Harnett, Henderson, Hoke, Iredell, Johnston, Lee, Lenoir, Martin, Mecklenburg, Nash, New Hanover, Onslow, Pender, Pitt, Richmond, Robeson, Rockingham, Stokes, Surry, Union, Wake, and Watauga

7 OSBM 2022 estimate. https://www.osbm.nc.gov/facts-figures/population-demographics

8 *Ibid.*

Counties Sampled
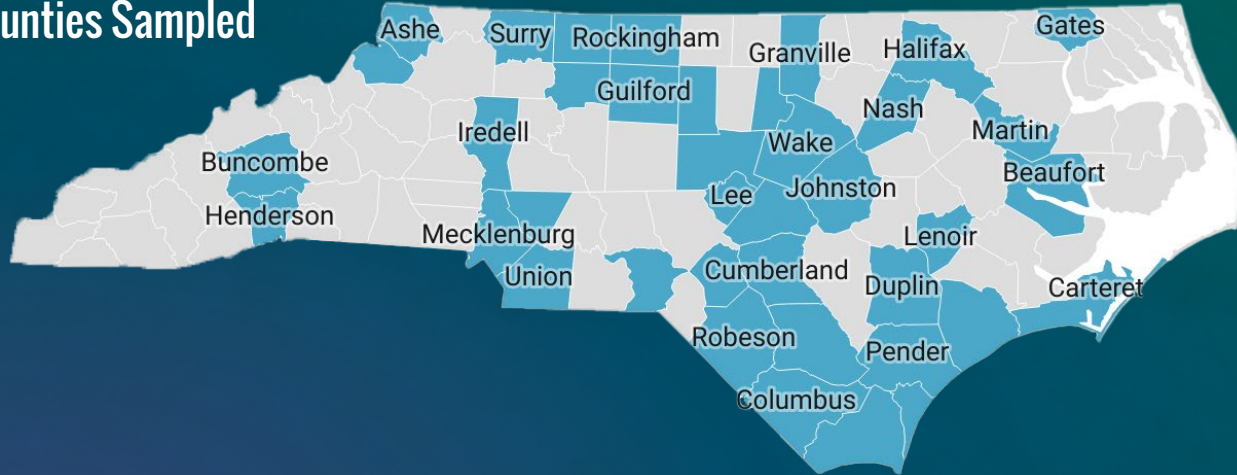
County Population
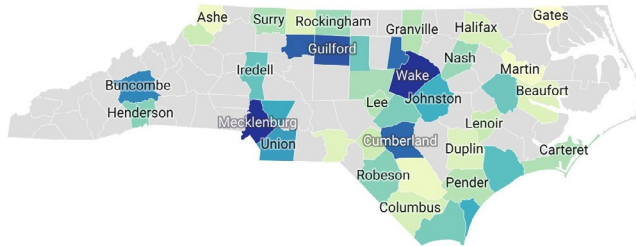
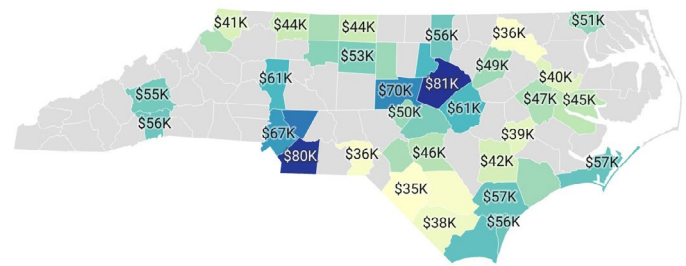*Total population*
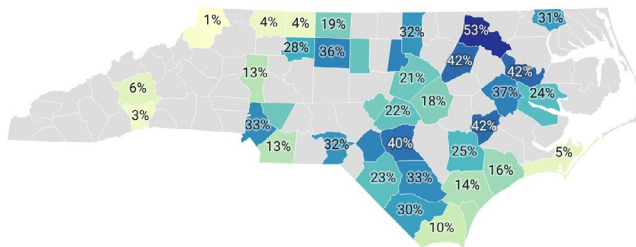Source: U.S. Census • Created with Datawrapper

Median Income in Selected Counties

Source: 2020 ACS 5-Year Estimate • Created with Datawrapper
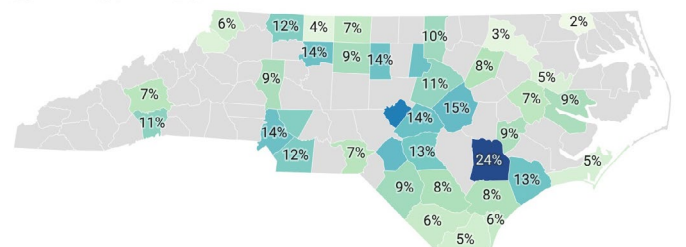
Black Share of County Population

Source: 2020 ACS 5-Year Estimate • Created with Datawrapper

Latine Share of County Population

Source: 2020 ACS 5-Year Estimate • Created with Datawrapper

Election Budget Data, Trends, and Impacts

County elections budget data was collected among the county sample for fiscal years 2015-16 through 2022-23 to paint a comprehensive picture of election funding over the last two presidential cycles. The total dataset can be found here.

Selected Counties Total Election Budgets

Fiscal Year	Total Amount
2015-2016	$39,243,633
2016-2017	$34,721,629
2017-2018	$39,000,160
2018-2019	$36,726,259
2019-2020	$64,407,600
2020-2021	$45,569,983
2021-2022	$50,441,936
2022-2023	$43,704,814

FY16: Missing data from Chatham, Martin, Pender, Robeson, and Stokes County
FY17: Missing data from Chatham, Martin, Pender, Robeson, and Stokes County
FY18: Missing data from Martin and Robeson County
FY20: Missing data from Pender County
FY22: Missing data from Robeson County
FY23: Missing data from Duplin, Hoke, Mecklenburg, Pitt, and Richmond County
Source: Author review of county budget ordinances, FY16-23

FY 2022-23 Election Budgets by County

Approved Budget Amount

$175K $1M $10.1M
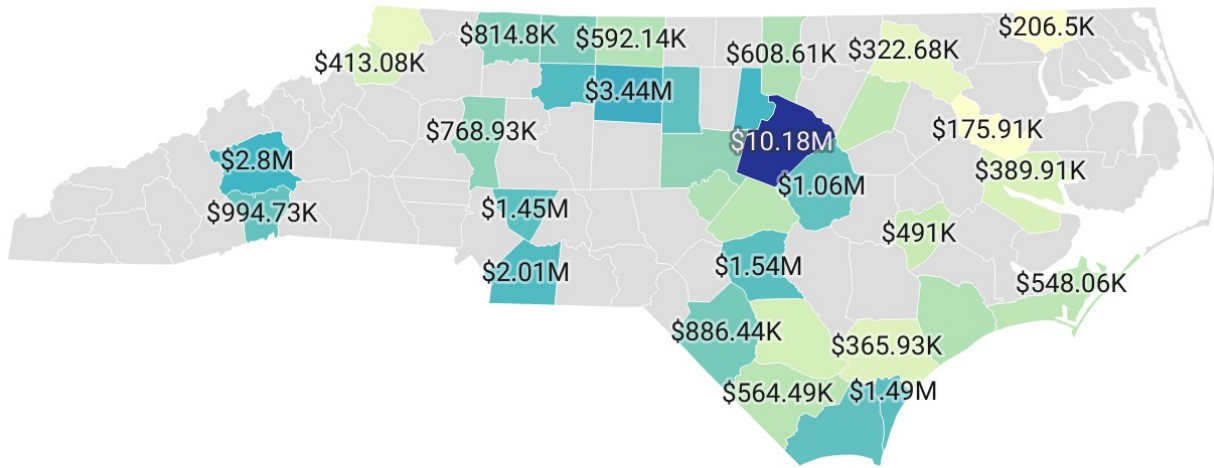
$413.08K $814.8K $592.14K $608.61K $322.68K $206.5K

$3.44M

$768.93K $10.18M $175.91K

$2.8M $1.06M $389.91K

$994.73K $1.45M $491K

$2.01M $1.54M $548.06K

$886.44K $365.93K

$564.49K $1.49M

Missing data from Duplin, Hoke, Mecklenburg, Pitt, and Richmond County

Source: Author review of county budget ordinances • Created with Datawrapper

Elections Budget as % of Total County General Fund, FY23

0.2%   1.6%

0.6%   0.9%   1.6%   0.6%   0.8%   0.6%   1.4%

0.4%   0.4%

0.3%   0.5%   0.5%

0.7%   0.5%   0.6%   0.6%

0.6%   0.4%

0.5%   0.7%

0.6%   0.4%   0.5%

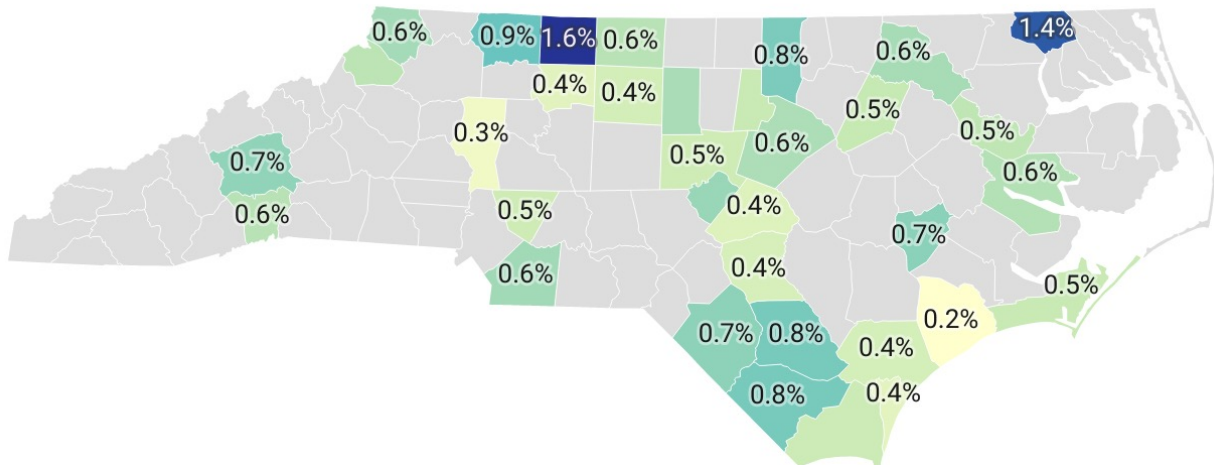0.7% 0.8%   0.2%

0.4%

0.8%   0.4%

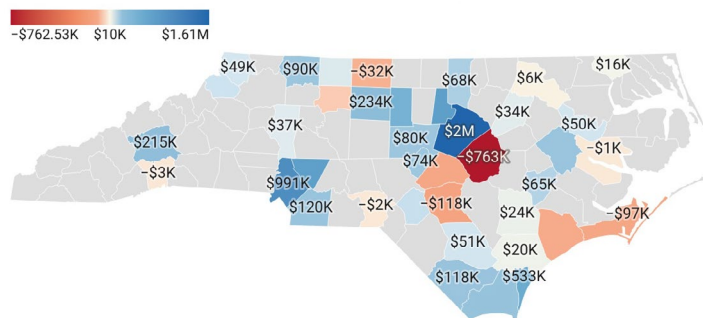*Missing data from Duplin, Hoke, Mecklenburg, Pitt, and Richmond County*

Source: Author review of county budget ordinances • Created with Datawrapper

Looking at the change in budget figures across time provides useful insights into how elections are funded. Due to the electoral calendar and the fiscal year cycle, election budgets naturally ebb and flow from one year to the next. On fiscal years ending in odd numbers, county boards of elections need to budget for a general election (including a presidential election every four years); on fiscal years ending in even numbers, CBOEs budget for a municipal election and a primary. Therefore, while some budget drop-off can be expected depending on the fiscal year coming up, CBOEs still budget for at least one election each fiscal year and still incur significant costs every year.

CBOE's allocated budgets were compared from Fiscal Year 2021 to Fiscal Year 2022 (FY21 to FY22) and from FY22 to FY23 to identify trends in budget ebb and flow. This does not paint a complete picture, however; the best comparison for a given fiscal year is the equivalent year in the previous electoral cycle (e.g., 2015-16 and 2019-20; 2018-19 and 2022-23). To identify the most salient trends, CBOE budgets were compared between FY19 and FY23 as well.

Year-to-Year Change in Elections Budget, FY21 to FY22

Missing data from Robeson County
Source: Author review of budget ordinances, FY21-22 • Created with Datawrapper

Year-to-Year Change in Elections Budget, FY22 to FY23
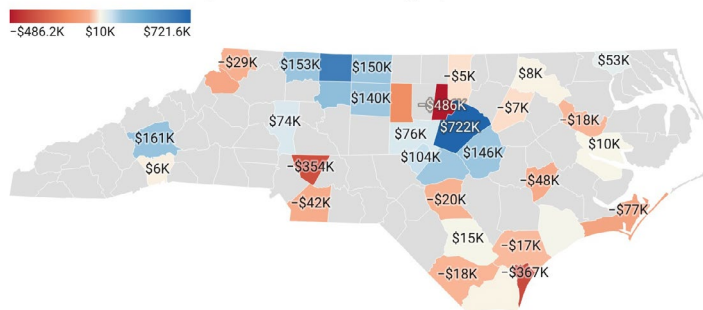
Missing data from Duplin, Hoke, Mecklenburg, Pitt, and Richmond County
Source: Author review of county budget ordinances, FY22-23 • Created with Datawrapper

Cyclical Change in Elections Budget, FY19 to FY23
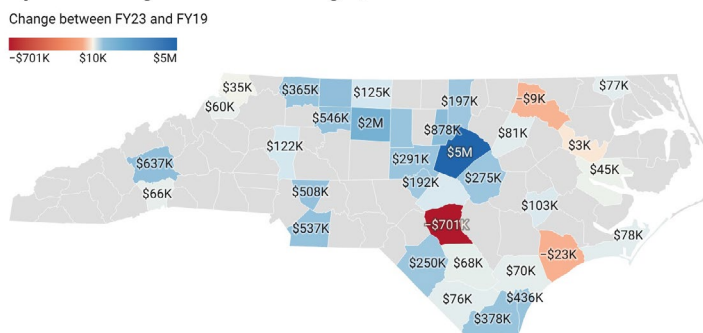
Change between FY23 and FY19

Missing data from Duplin, Hoke, Mecklenburg, Pitt, and Richmond County
Source: Author review of county budget ordinances, FY19 and FY23 • Created with Datawrapper

Year-to-Year Trends

As seen in the graphs to the left, a number of counties, many of them clustered in Southeast North Carolina, reduced their election budgets for Fiscal Year 2023 (FY23). More counties increased their budget between FY21 and FY22, likely to account for the greater number of elections held in the latter year. Between FY19 and FY23, most of the sample counties increased their election budgets, with a few notable outliers. Looking back through FY16, the following trends emerge:

Counties with year-to-year consecutive budget increases:

- Ashe (FY18-23)
- Brunswick
- Chatham (FY19-23)
- Guilford
- Iredell (FY20-23)
- Halifax (FY21-23)
- Lee
- Stokes
- Surry (FY22-23)

In addition, Forsyth County increased its elections budget every year since FY16, except for FY22.

Counties with year-to-year consecutive budget decreases:

- Cumberland
- Richmond (FY19-23)
- Carteret (FY21-23)

In addition, Watauga County decreased its elections budget in FY21 and FY23.

It is also worth identifying trends over the last few years in the share of the elections budget as part of the total county general fund. Even if the elections budget is being increased, it may not be getting increased as much as it could (or should) be, especially if the county budget is increasing year after year due to tax base (population) increases. The following trends emerge:

Counties with year-to-year consecutive share of total county general fund increases:

- Gates County saw its election budget as a share of the total county general fund increase from FY21-23.

- Forsyth County saw its election budget as a share of the total county general fund increase yearly since FY16, except for FY22.

Counties with year-to-year consecutive share of total county general fund decreases:

- Onslow (FY17-23)
- Richmond (FY19-23)
- Cumberland (FY20-23)'
- Beaufort
- Carteret (FY21-23)

In addition, Watauga County saw its share of the total county general fund decrease every year since FY17, except for FY20.

2020-2021 Impact

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, North Carolina received federal funds from the CARES Act and Help America Vote Act (HAVA) in 2020 to supplement election funding. Non-profit organizations, including the Center for Tech and Civic Life and the NC Community Foundation, also provided supplemental funding. Sample counties received at least $10.6 million in federal, state, and private funds during the 2020-21 fiscal year. An (incomplete) list detailing the publicly-available amount of federal, state, and private funds that sample counties received that year can be found here.

Five County Project Deep Dive

The Southern Coalition for Social Justice and the NC Budget & Tax Center launched a Five County Project (5CP) in 2022, leading election budget workshops in five pilot counties - Brunswick, Johnston, Chatham, Halifax, and Watauga - in an effort to gauge the impact that grassroots advocacy could have on election funding. The following graphs show the change in election funding over time across the 5CP counties.
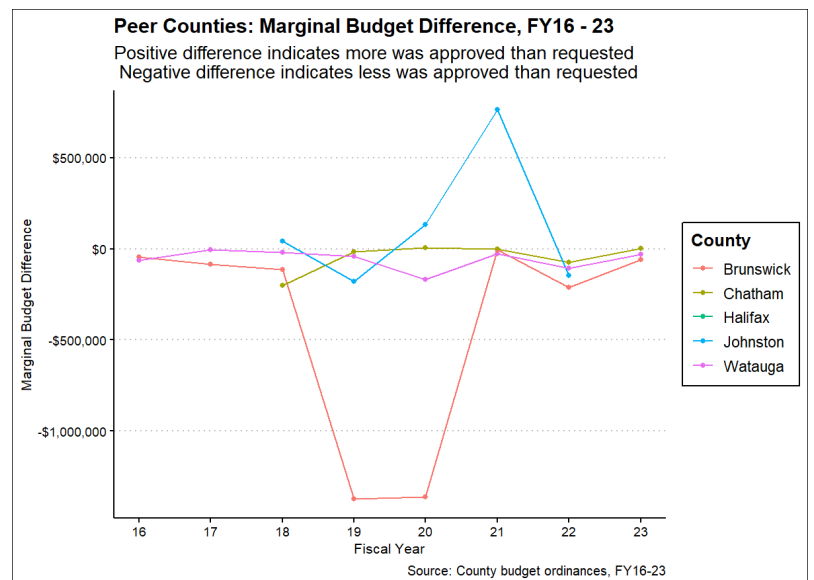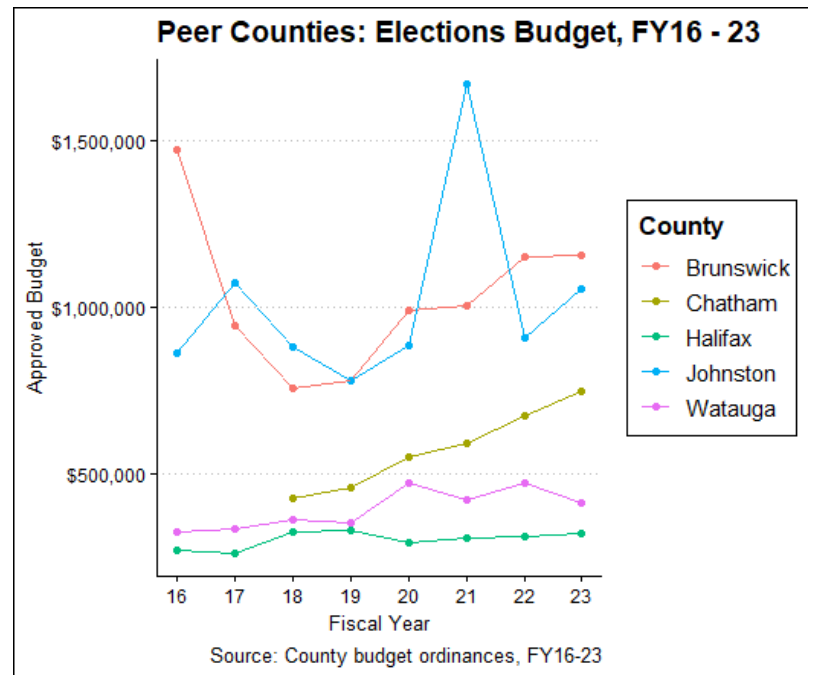
Takeaways

Over the last six fiscal years, a majority of sample counties have generally increased the funding of elections departments. A number of counties, however, have seen a consistent decline in funding, either in absolute terms or as a share of the total county budget. These counties - **Cumberland, Richmond, and Onslow** in particular - merit follow-up and special attention. **Onslow County** is especially worrying because it had among the highest differences between requested and approved budgets across the six fiscal years studied.

Peer Counties: Elections Budget, FY16 - 23
Source: County budget ordinances, FY16-23

Peer Counties: Marginal Budget Difference, FY16 - 23
Positive difference indicates more was approved than requested
Negative difference indicates less was approved than requested
Source: County budget ordinances, FY16-23

Peer Counties: Share of Total County General Fund, FY16 - 23
Source: County budget ordinances, FY16-23

Understanding the Dynamics of Election Funding through Election Officials

11 CBOE Directors and one CBOE Board Chair agreed to anonymous interviews where they shared more information about their budgeting process, insights into the dynamics that shape their budgets, and clarified misconceptions that the local residents often have about election officials' work. While no county is the same, and local context informed the answers these Directors (and Board Chair) provided, the following takeaways were consistently echoed throughout these interviews:

County budgeting process

The county budget process begins in late winter/early spring of the outgoing fiscal year, with most interviewed CBOE Directors sharing that they usually compared the previous relevant cycle (presidential, midterm)'s budget as a basis for that year's draft budget. After the Board of Elections approves the budget, the CBOE Director has a series of meetings with the county manager or a member of the county's finance department. Budget line items are reviewed in this meeting, and any necessary or suggested revisions or cuts are addressed.

It is in these meetings that election budgets are often cut or slimmed down. Directors emphasized that not many line items are optional - they are statutorily required to fund certain costs, including costs necessary to host and staff polling sites. Crucial to the budget-making process was the relationship between the CBOE and the County Manager - resolving any revisions or cuts satisfactorily is essential to ensure that the budget gets final approval from the BoCC later in May/June. Directors with good relationships with their BoCCs shared how they came prepared to defend every line item they requested in their budgets. The county management's approach to the budgetary process plays a key role, too - a budgetary approach that is more "nickel and dime" oriented often results in trimming requests across the board. Other county managers instruct all departments to unilaterally cut their budgets towards a common goal (e.g., a 10% cut), relying on departments to 'figure it out.'

Revealing quotes:

> I would put together a budget based on the general statute, and the [BoCC] went ahead and cut based on what we had [the year] before... in elections, you can't base your budget based on the previous year... because every election cycles are only identical to the one from four years ago, but once I got them to understand that, I didn't have any issues there either.

> [The BoCC] knows that if we have more elections they're gonna have to give me more money, for funds. They know that if we have a lawsuit they're gonna have to give me money for an attorney.

> You talk to a lot of counties in Eastern NC or [elsewhere], they're fighting over the needs and they can get it, but it's a constant fight. They're not fighting over new office furniture, they're fighting over how many absentee envelopes they can order.

Election budgeting dynamics: what gets cut, and what they wish they could afford

Most CBOE Directors expressed satisfaction with their county management and the level of trust and good faith in the process. Some pointed out the inherent awkward structure of the funding dynamic: CBOEs derive their authority from the NC State Board of Elections and are bound by state law to perform certain functions, but they derive their funding from county governments. Echoing this, some Directors pointed out that sometimes they feel isolated, a dynamic that can lead to underfunding or lack of political support for funding CBOEs within county governments.

Beyond base costs, including salary for full-time staff and what is statutorily required to be funded, directors exercise their discretion to determine what is worth fighting for in their budgets. Certain directors emphasize that travel for certification and state-sponsored training are non-negotiables in their budget. Others stress that they need to retain or increase funds for precinct officials to avoid negative impacts on election administration performance.

Election directors dealing with underfunding often had to point out the consequences of underfunding elections to their BoCCs to get their point across. A Director from one county shared how their BoCC initially planned only to fund half of a planned voting machine replacement for that year. In that year's municipal elections, a number of voting machines failed to work on Election Day. The election director cited this incident to their BoCC to advocate for entirely replacing voting machines, lest a similar breakdown occurs on the presidential Election Day the following year.

Revealing quotes:

I used every penny from the [federal and private] money that they gave us... I used every single bit of it.

My board members didn't want to put up a fight and neither did I, but I just kept pushing and kept pushing [to secure funding for replacement voting machines].

Knowing some of the directors around the state, I do know some of them have had some issues with their BoCC... I would say [having a good relationship with BoCC and County Manager] is 100% the reason why I don't have any issues with budgets.

We're a small, rural county... we're treated like the red headed step kid. You might get a little bit of help but you won't get the help that you need. It's almost like they don't care. We try to make it work the best that we can. Working with other counties, at least [we can share] resources.

[Who treats us like red headed stepchild] the county management and county commissioners. It's almost like we're a separate entity from the county management... they can't really tell us what to do and they can't tell us how to do it, the only thing they control is the budget. If they want us to play by their rules, then they do it by controlling the budget.

The role of tech in running elections

Several interviewed Directors expressed a general level of core competency with the level of tech-savvy required to do their jobs today, but many Directors from smaller or rural counties expressed difficulties in having county IT staff help them. Directors statewide mentioned how older precinct officials often struggled with technology. A county Director shared how, since hiring a full-time voting specialist administrator in Fiscal Year 2021 to oversee their tech, they were not as reliant on county IT staff and were better equipped to handle tech issues independently. Thus, in-house tech support is a source of technical competency and organizational capacity for many CBOEs.

On the other end, counties without dedicated tech support are reliant on countywide IT staff. These officials expressed gratitude for the NC State Board of Elections's Security and Support Technician (SST) teams, mentioning how response times for tech questions and other routine issues have improved since the State Board deployed the SST program. Several directors formed informal networks with their peer district election directors, sharing best practices and troubleshooting tips to deal with challenges when they came up, and county IT staff or State Board help was slow to arrive.

The evolving election landscape has changed the role of elections. Directors expressed their growing understanding that administering elections is increasingly tech-heavy. Some directors expressed frustration that they cannot hire qualified candidates due to a low pay scale or the unique work calendar, with relatively slower summers and heavy workloads in the fall during election years.

Revealing quotes:

"
Elections have changed drastically over the last 10 years... we used to be more of an administrative position, now it's a tech heavy position, and the pay is not reflecting that.

"
It is so frustrating - rarely does the first person I [offer a job to] take the job... it's not fair to compare [pay rates] within elections departments because the entire field is suppressed... we need to be comparing outside elections. We need to be comparing duties, not titles.

Community relations

Most interviewed Directors expressed frustration at the rise of election-denier conspiracy rhetoric. Such rhetoric, and the individuals who propagate these conspiracy theories at the national and state level, undermine the credibility of these public servants. Several Directors explicitly brought up instances of local residents being inspired by this rhetoric to accuse CBOE officials of election fraud or even harassing them. There was an overall theme of worry that the rise of election fraud conspiracy theories since 2020 has made their jobs more polarized and harder to connect with local voters. Directors pointed out the lack of voter education exacerbates the spread of conspiracy theories.

Most directors were unaware of county residents advocating for greater election funding to the BoCC. Most interactions with their local community resulted in election deniers or people getting in touch to complain about hyperlocal accessibility issues, such as moving voting sites or Election Day precincts. There is limited anecdotal evidence that community advocacy for election spending may be effective if it is organized in concert with managing the relationship between CBOE and BoCC. In some counties, directors indicated that they had success in fostering relationships with local county parties to generate trust and lower the temperature regarding partisan rhetoric suggesting election fraud.

Revealing quotes:

A gentleman that stood and thanked the commissioners for all that I had asked for in the budget... I watched it online and saw, and thought that was neat.

If it wasn't so aggressive for next year, we might be able to move forward with whatever we needed if we had that push. I think what helped us is that one of our vice chair to the BoCC, his partner was appointed to my board, and she was appointed as the chair. She saw what I did and saw the struggles I go through, she told him and he started visiting her operations... we might not get 100%, but we have noticed that we do start to get some support.

Clarifying misconceptions

At the same time, interviewed Directors expressed pride in their work and their ability to do so much with limited resources. All expressed how the public at large does not know how much work they do to run elections and what goes into that work - a common refrain was that "people don't know that [the work of] elections are year-round," and that "elections are not just Election Day." The public's lack of knowledge regarding election officials' work exacerbates the difficulty in securing appropriate resources. Additionally, the electoral calendar means that election offices have to budget for and staff for an election (or more) every year - challenging a misconception that the cost of elections is reduced significantly in non-presidential years. While some ebb and flow is natural, and municipal elections have lower turnout than federal elections, the fixed costs of many of their responsibilities mean that the yearly change is not - should not - be too great.

Revealing quotes:

We have been accused of not having fair and accurate elections since the 2020 election... in NC there's no way. People don't realize what we do.

We never worried about bomb threats, we never worried about cameras on the equipment, so we have had to throw money... and do I think we need cameras on the equipment? No I don't, but it makes the public feel better.

The public sees us as a moving wheel if one side wins an election or not... that just makes it awful. We're constantly dealing with the public coming in... I don't know how we solve it, if it's voter education, the national news cycle... what happens in PA and AZ doesn't happen in NC - that doesn't stop 100 people coming in here and asking about Dominion machines.

I love my job, I really do love my job, but... when we're pulling 100 hour weeks... I really believe a lot of us had PTSD [after 2020]... Folks in this job have either been here a long time or are just starting out.

Marginal Funding Decisions

A key goal of this Report was to identify 'marginal funding decisions' - the amount that was cut from the initially requested election budgets or an amount added later in the fiscal year. We set out to determine a scale of marginal funding decisions that could be applied to each county in North Carolina. Unfortunately, this project finished without defining a scale.
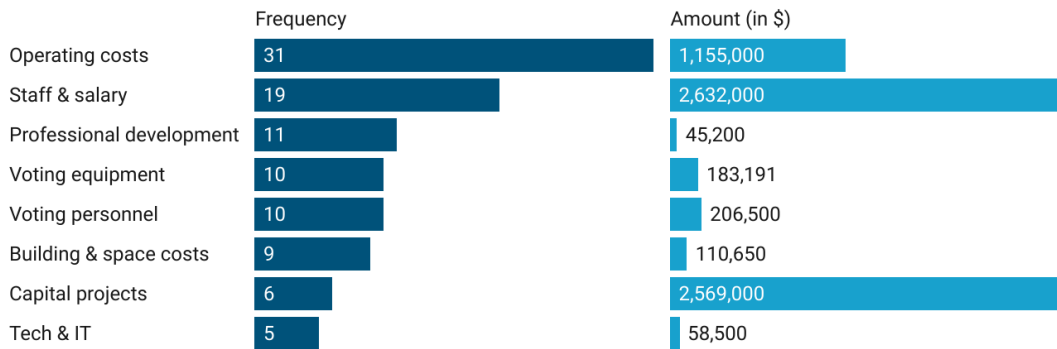
First, the marginal funding decision for each sample county varied greatly from year to year. Determining an average amount was too noisy, as year-to-year differences were based on the election held that year and the increase (or decrease) in the total county budget.

Second, there was too much missing data from counties that did not share their requested budget information to make a confident estimation.

That said, what was able to be gleaned from the available data paints a consistent picture that suggests certain kinds of cost categories are cut more than others. Insights from interviews reveal the most common types of programs or resources that election officials wish they could afford (or afford more of). The following graphs quantify these two things:

Marginal Funding Cuts by Category

Types of funding requests that were cut or partially funded, and a limited approximate value of cut or partially funded requests

	Frequency	Amount (in $)
Operating costs	31	1,155,000
Staff & salary	19	2,632,000
Professional development	11	45,200
Voting equipment	10	183,191
Voting personnel	10	206,500
Building & space costs	9	110,650
Capital projects	6	2,569,000
Tech & IT	5	58,500

Operating costs include: Postage, printing, printers, legal fees, advertising, voter outreach & education, and other office supplies and equipment
Staff & salary costs include: new FTE positions, benefits, and Board member pay
Professional development costs include: training and travel
Voting equipment costs include: New voting machines and voting machine maintenance
Voting personnel costs include: Poll worker pay and election official pay
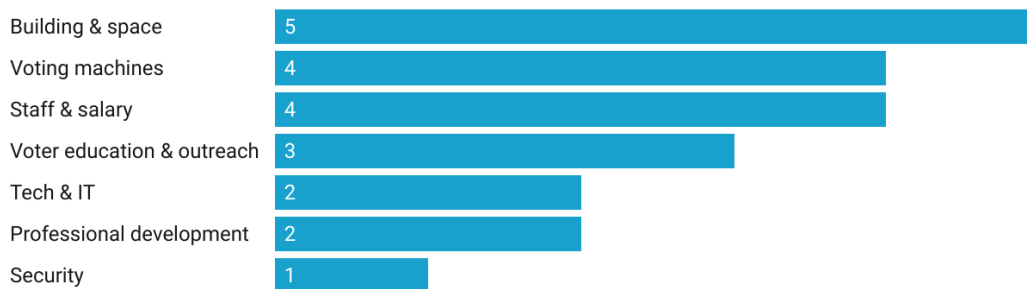*Building & space costs include: Office space, rental payments, voting booths, generator, and security systems Tech & IT costs include: software upgrades, telephone lines, and other associated IT costs*
Missing data for some counties in some years; this is an incomplete estimate and $ amounts are likely higher
Source: Author review of county budget ordinances, FY16-23 • Created with Datawrapper

Marginal Funding Requests by Category

Frequency of spending categories provided

Building & space	5
Voting machines	4
Staff & salary	4
Voter education & outreach	3
Tech & IT	2
Professional development	2
Security	1

Staff and salary include new FTE positions, seasonal worker pay, and poll worker pay
Professional development includes training tools and certification
Source: Author interviews with CBOE Directors • Created with Datawrapper

The most commonly cut line items from requested budgets were operating costs, most frequently office supplies, and new full-time staff positions. Voting equipment maintenance and resources were often cut but ultimately negotiated to be partially funded or funded in the following fiscal year. When asked what they would spend extra money on (usually defined as an additional $50,000 or $100,000), directors most frequently expressed a desire to have their own office space. Many of these directors share office space with other county departments and are growing cramped given their work, including a higher amount of absentee ballots to process. Another top priority was replacing voting machines with newer models and raising poll worker pay.

Moreover, top-of-mind for directors was better engaging the public through more voter outreach and education. Directors almost always mentioned their desire to launch innovative programs to encourage the public to learn more about the work of elections officials, advertise elections in public spaces, and make the entire elections process - voter registration, in-person voting, and absentee voting - more accessible for all. They cannot further reach the public and achieve these goals due to their lack of funding.

Conclusion +
Areas for Further Advocacy & Research

Election officials in North Carolina are dependent on of their local governments to fund them adequately. While elections have become more polarized at the national and state level, the work of election administration is often still governed by local concerns and politics. Suggestions to support election officials through greater federal, state, and private funding are both necessary and correct. At the same time, there are areas for further advocacy and research, such as developing relationships with CBOE Directors and demystifying the relationships between CBOEs and BoCCs, towards addressing potential sources of tension or raising consciousness through advocacy. The following is a list of further areas of study:

The most pressing need for each target CBOE - certain county boards do not have their own building, while others are short-staffed. Many are experiencing both issues - identifying which issue is more pressing to resolve over the next few years may be county-specific.

CBOE Director managerial training and capacity play a significant role in determining the outcome of marginal funding decisions. More experienced directors generally have established strong relationships with their BoCC and county management. A subtle, safe channel where these directors can mentor or share advice with younger staff, especially new directors in neighboring, smaller counties, could be helpful.

Identify which county parties are willing to engage in a constructive relationship with their CBOE and which are not, to determine which CBOEs need more political support.

CBOEs needing tech support or more staff may be unable to hire an additional full-time staffer and may not attract a qualified candidate for seasonal work. Thus, looking into ways that the State Board or private organizations can further expand live and remote tech support can help CBOEs.

SOUTHERN COALITION for SOCIAL JUSTICE

The Southern Coalition for Social Justice, founded in 2007, partners with communities of color and economically disadvantaged communities in the South to defend and advance their political, social, and economic rights through the combination of legal advocacy, research, organizing, and communications. Learn more at southerncoalition. org and follow our work on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram.

Media Contact

Media@scsj.org

HARVARD Kennedy School
ASH CENTER
for Democratic Governance and Innovation

The Roy and Lila Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation advances excellence and innovation in governance and public policy through research, education, and public discussion.

By training the very best leaders, developing powerful new ideas, and disseminating innovative solutions and institutional reforms, the Center's goal is to meet the profound challenges facing the world's citizens. The Ford Foundation is a founding donor of the Center.