

**The Attraction of Working from 6 am to 9:30 pm for a Fraction of Minimum
Wage: Poll Workers and Their Motivation to Serve**

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Abstract: On Election Day, the U.S electoral system relies on what has been called an "army of volunteers" to administer the process of voting at the street level. In California alone, in the Primary of June 2006, there were 25,000 polling places that had to be staffed with a minimum of three poll workers. How are local election officials able to recruit hundreds of thousands of eligible workers to participate in this process during a time when civic participation among Americans is at an all-time low? Using survey responses from 15,000 poll workers in twenty-four California counties, we begin to answer this question. California's June 2006 poll workers had a wide variety of motivations for serving on Election Day. Sixteen categories of reasons emerged, which then were consolidated into four categories for ease of analysis. Motivations surrounding a sense of duty or wanting to serve were the largest group followed by the social benefits that come from a day of intense team work, and less so by material gain. These results are enough to design a multi-faceted recruitment and retention plan which at the minimum involves an appeal to the sense of duty as well as to social needs of potential and returning poll workers.

Introduction

They are typically called poll workers, precinct officers, election judges (or some hybrid of those) and are commonly referred to as the ‘army of volunteers’ who staff polling places around the country each election day, working long hours for varying, but uniformly little pay. They are the guardians, facilitators, policing authorities, access-granters, and gatekeepers of the in-person voting process nationwide. These volunteers play a crucial role in our democratic process and yet we know very little about them and what draws them to this important job, and what keeps them coming back to a job which is becoming more and more difficult.

A consequence of the Help America Vote Act’s requirements for changes in voting technology has been a growing complexity of the work of poll workers. In recent years, we have seen severe poll worker shortages as local election officials struggle to find enough people to staff the new high tech polling places. The poll worker shortage for the 2004 Presidential Election made national news.¹ In 2006, even more new voting equipment was rolled out as HAVA laws took effect. For the 2006 elections, both state primaries and the General Election on November 7th, various states and localities reported severe shortages, including Ohio, Colorado, Florida, Hawaii, and especially California for its June 6 Primary.² While there were cases of major glitches which were unacceptable,³ amazingly these elections did go forward. What can be learned from these elections about recruiting and retaining poll workers? Why do people volunteer to staff the polls and why do they return or not return for the next election? And answering this, how can we make staffing the polls on Election Day a more attractive experience?

Motivation and Participation

What do we know from the literature that might shed light on the motivation of voters to volunteer and serve as poll workers on Election Day? Very little is published specifically about poll workers and nothing is focused on their motivations to serve, but rather about their conduct on Election Day as “street-level bureaucrats” for the local election agency. The ‘poll worker’ position is a volunteer activity, with a small stipend, that assists government but only occurs two to three times a year. There is a substantial thread of literature concerning “public service motivation,” which was defined in 1990 as “an individual’s predisposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions and organizations.” (Perry and Wise 1990) While it sounds like Election Day service meets this definition, this literature provides insight primarily to about those who choose government service as their full time employment, rather than those who volunteer for a modest stipend to provide government services for one day. So does Election Day service fall more into the category of ‘volunteerism’ or ‘community service’? Volunteerism has long been a subject of empirical and theoretical inquiry, in

¹ Voters, brace for national poll worker shortage:

<http://media.www.dailytexanonline.com/media/storage/paper410/news/2004/11/01/WorldNation/Voters.Brace.For.National.Poll.Worker.Shortage-788111.shtml>

² New Laws and Machines May Spell Voting Woes, By IAN URBINA, October 19, 2006, New York Times:

<http://travel2.nytimes.com/2006/10/19/us/politics/19voting.html?fta=y&pagewanted=all>

³ Lines, malfunctions and untrained poll workers plague some states;

http://www.boston.com/news/nation/articles/2006/11/08/lines_malfunctions_and_untrained_poll_workers_plague_some_states/

particular in the fields of psychology and philanthropy; however, these studies are focused on giving and volunteering outside the government context.

In political science the motivations for volunteerism are discussed primarily with respect to joining voluntary organization and social movements, with the exception of Putman's (1995) conceptualization of civic engagement which is a broader category including all forms of connection to community life from social to political. Another line of inquiry in political science is motivations for political participation in the form of voting, attending hearings, contacting elected representatives, campaign activity, or work for a political party. (This is most clearly conceptualized in the "civic volunteerism model" of Verba, Scholzman, and Brady (1995).) In one sense, poll worker service may be considered the next step in participating in the democratic process after voting. Poll workers must be registered voters and are typically recruited through registration forms. Working at the polls to 'participate in the process' is similar to the act of casting a vote to be part of the process. However, voting is typically seen as an expression of a position on policies and candidates, and in that sense, is more like party and campaign work, than like operating the polls so that all voters can express their preferences. While poll worker service is a hybrid of all these types of activity, we can infer that some of the major antecedents and determinants to community services and political participation may help explain the motivation to volunteer as a poll worker. Demographics, such as age and socio-economic status, generational and lifestyle effects, degree of social connectedness (Putnam, 1995), and resources such as time, money, and civic skills (Verba et al. 1995), are plausible correlates of poll worker service. A sense of duty or 'public service ethic' may facilitate this type of volunteerism. This paper explores the question of poll worker motivation and retention keeping in mind these possible explanations.

The Data

The data for this paper come primarily from a survey of California poll workers during June 2006. We supplement the survey results with our knowledge gained from observations of trainings in 22 counties over a period of 2 years and participant observations of 20 polling places on four different Election Days in 5 California counties.

The survey data were collected from election poll workers (or precinct board members), who worked at polling places throughout California during the Primary Election of June 6, 2006. This survey was jointly funded by the California Secretary of State's office and the Election Administration Research Center (EARC) at UC Berkeley, and conducted in collaboration with the California Association of Clerks and Election Officials (CACEO), the professional association of California's local election officials.

California's 58 counties had roughly 25,000 voting precincts in the 2006 Primary election that were staffed by approximately 100,000 poll workers. By law, California's precincts have to be staffed by a minimum of 3 poll workers, but some counties, depending on availability, will hire as many as 6 workers to fill special needs, usually to add workers with second language skills. On average, a precinct board consists of 4 members. In many cases there is more than one precinct board in a polling place. In multi-precinct polling places, each board has its own table, but may share voting booths, equipment such as scanners, and staff if necessary.

The initial goal of the study was to deploy the survey instrument (see Appendix 1) to all poll workers in all 58 California counties. Due to various administrative hurdles, and a

tight timeframe only 24 counties were able to participate. In the 3 weeks before the election, EARC distributed over 55,000 surveys to 24 counties;⁴ each county received enough surveys for each poll worker to complete.

The survey instrument consisted of 32 questions, printed on a double sided 8 ½” x 11” sheet of paper. We stapled a self-addressed postage-paid business reply envelope to each survey, coded them by county, and collated them into packs of 4, 5, 6 or 8, depending on requests by counties. The surveys were then packaged into a large envelope that was stamped “For Inspector and Poll Workers”, one for each precinct, and delivered to the counties for inclusion into the precinct supplies.

Our assumption was that poll workers, upon unpacking their supplies, would find the envelope, distribute the surveys amongst themselves, fill them out either on or after Election Day, and drop them into the mail to EARC. During a pilot study in one county during the November 2005 special election, EARC received responses from 68% of surveyed workers.

Within three months after the election, EARC received back approximately 42 percent of the surveys state-wide. Responses are still coming back nine months after the election, even though another election has since occurred. Clearly these poll workers had something to say.

For this paper, we created a state-wide dataset by merging all the counties into one file. The dataset consists of the 15408 responses that have been coded, entered and analyzed. For smaller counties, we entered all responses, and for larger counties, we entered at least 20% of returns. We had eight individuals coding for three months.

The participating counties used a wide variety of voting technology. Some had scanners in their precincts, some used paper ballots that were centrally scanned, and others used touch screen or other DRE voting machines. To meet the HAVA accessibility requirement, some of the optical scan counties had ballot marking assistance devices and some used DRE machines, and two because of poor timing with certifications did not meet this requirement until the November 2006 General Election.

Many of the questions asked the respondents to write in an answer rather than check or circle a box, and these responses required categorization and assigning of codes. We developed the coding scheme using an emergent and reiterative method. With first glance at the hundreds of surveys we saw common language, for example, a frequent answer to “why did you become a poll worker?” was “civic duty” or “community service.” We started with codes for these clearly ubiquitous answers and as coders progressed they suggested new common categories which were then assigned additional codes to use in data entry. For text that had already been entered without a code these were then recoded into the appropriate category. By the end of this process we had very few answers that didn’t fall in to the given categories; for example, we ended up with 16 categories for the question on motivation. This process took about three weeks with eight individuals coding and meeting every other day to discuss the codes.

⁴ The counties that received surveys were: Alameda, Colusa, Contra Costa, Fresno, Humboldt, Kern, Lassen, Los Angeles, Mariposa, Marin, Monterey, Napa, Nevada, Orange, Riverside, Sacramento, San Bernardino, San Luis Obispo, San Mateo, Santa Cruz, Shasta, Solano, Tuolumne and Yolo.

Findings

Experience Level

The first question we ask is how many of the poll workers in June had worked previous and were returning? Because of the extreme shortage just prior to the election, were most of the workers new? The answer for our survey sample is contained in TABLE 1.

TABLE 1:

	N = 15,408	
Have you worked as a poll worker in previous elections?		
Yes	10447	67.80%
No	4843	31.43%
No Response	118	0.77%
Total	15,408	100.00%
If yes, in how many elections did you work as a poll worker?		
1	1194	11.43%
2-5	3982	38.12%
6-10	2673	25.59%
11+	1580	15.12%
Did not specify number of times	1018	9.74%
Total	10447	100%

Our data indicate that most of the workers in the June Primary in California were not new; in fact, two-thirds of those responding to our survey had worked in a previous election, and over half of those worked in 2-10 previous elections. So something must be going on that brings these workers back. The turnover rate varied somewhat by county, but not widely, and still over half of the workers in each county had worked before. Three of the twenty four counties had 58-61% returning workers, and five had 84-88% returning workers. In terms of years of experience, each county's workers distributed about the same as the state-wide dataset, with variations primarily in the size of the 2-5 year group and the 6-10 year group.

Motivations Types

As described above in ‘the Data’ section our coders found that motivations or answers to the question “why did you become a poll worker?” fell into 16 categories. (TABLE 2)

TABLE 2: Reasons Given for Poll Worker Service

Motivation category	Count	% of total N
to help or serve community/community service	2918	18.94%
to learn about, support or improve the election process/democracy	2415	15.67%
civic duty/civic responsibility	2049	13.30%
asked by friend/relative/neighbor	1936	12.56%
fun/interesting/enjoy it	1051	6.82%
like working with/meeting people or seeing neighbors	824	5.35%
money (i.e. for the stipend)	722	4.69%
heard about need for workers or otherwise recruited by county	637	4.13%
retired so have time	432	2.80%
patriotism (i.e. to serve my country)	329	2.14%
family tradition or regular habit/routine	208	1.35%
have free time	197	1.28%
school activity/credit/resume	176	1.14%
volunteer work for non-governmental organization/donate stipend to charity	132	0.86%
unemployed so have time	61	0.40%
need for bilingual workers/to help voters with LEP	47	0.31%
Unknown	1273	8.26%
TOTAL	15,408	100.00%

A discussion of these categories illustrates the kind of answers respondents gave to this open-ended question. The most common reason (almost 19%) given for becoming a poll worker was “to help my community” “to help out” or “community service.” The next most common category referred to something about the democratic process, democracy, the election or electoral process. In some cases, it was to learn about, experience, or be part of the process. In other cases it was about safeguarding the process (especially with respect to the 2000 and 2004 election troubles), such as “I wanted to make sure the process was fair and unbiased” or “I felt it was important to support our voting system” or “I feel its important to facilitate the process” with reference at times to the perceived incompetence of current workers, such as “I believe we need more smart capable people working at the polls.” The third most common reason was simply given as “civic duty” or “civic responsibility,” with no further explanation. Another fairly common reason was that a person (friend, relative, or neighbor) “asked me to do it.”

While the rest of the reasons each took less than 10% of the total, they are also interesting. A substantial group of 1000 respondents reported that they work at the polls because they like it, and claim that it is fun or interesting or they ‘thought it would be interesting.’ Another five percent expressed a social motive for working at the polls, in that they liked working with people, meeting people, or seeing neighbors. Slightly less than five percent admitted right off that they signed up to work for the small cash stipend they would receive. Another four percent responded to the last minute appeals for help by the county welfare offices, which they heard through news media or in letters from their local registrar. Several respondents claimed to have free time, usually specifically because they were retired or because they were unemployed. A small portion of respondents mentioned helping out their ‘country’ rather than ‘community’ and they were coded as patriots. Another very interesting repeated reason was “my mother always did it” or “my whole family has done it for years” and this was also categorized with comments such as “I started one year and just did it every election since.” A very few, mostly high school students, volunteered for election day service as part of a school project, for educational credit or for experience to put on a resume. Under one percent of respondents reported that they volunteer to work at the polls as part of their volunteer work for another organization, League of Women Voters for example, and/or to donate their pay to their preferred charity, and even a smaller few (47) stated that they were volunteering to assist voters with limited English proficiency (LEP).

The next two tables (TABLES 3 and 4) list the motivation categories in a hierarchy of most common to least common for two groups, respondents who had been poll workers at least once before and respondents who were brand new to poll worker service. The returning workers motivations track the motivations of the whole sample fairly closely with 2% or less difference on each and slight changes in the order. For returning workers community service and civic duty are solidly at the top of the list. For new workers, these motivations fall to the third and fourth position.⁵ The top two reasons for volunteering among new recruits are to learn about or safeguard the process and because a friend or relative asked. This is to be expected because people who had never worked before are most likely to have read about polling place problems in 2000 and 2004 and decided to participate to discover how polling places operate and also monitor this operation. New workers are also likely to be recruited by friends who say “come work with me, its fun and we need you” particularly at the last minute and this is further supported by the observation that responding to the need for poll workers moves up to the 6th most common reason for the new group. By the same token, seeing or meeting people is much less the goal of new workers than it is of returning workers who know that to be a perk of the day. It also stands to reason that new workers are less likely than returning workers to claim that they are serving because it’s a family tradition and certainly not out of habit as they haven’t developed the habit yet. In sum, while this breakdown of motivations between returning and new workers makes sense and is in some cases endogenous to their experience status, the breakdown also confirms that in terms of ‘duty’ new workers are mostly concerned about the process, whereas returning workers see their duty more simply to volunteer.

TABLE 3: Returning Workers Motivation Hierarchy

Motivation category	% of total N
to help or serve community/community service	20.69%
civic duty/civic responsibility	15.22%
to learn about, support or improve the election process/democracy	13.91%
asked by friend/relative/neighbor	10.72%
like working with/meeting people or seeing neighbors	6.91%
fun/interesting/enjoy it	5.85%
money (i.e. for the stipend)	4.01%
retired so have time	3.23%
heard about need for workers or otherwise recruited by county	2.98%
patriotism (i.e. to serve my country)	2.51%
family tradition or regular habit/routine	1.81%
have free time	1.24%
volunteer work for non-governmental organization/donate stipend to charity	0.83%
school activity/credit/resume	0.70%
unemployed so have time	0.33%
need for bilingual workers/to help voters with LEP	0.29%

TABLE 4: New Workers Motivation Hierarchy

Motivation category	% of total N
to learn about, support or improve the election process/democracy	19.51%
asked by friend/relative/neighbor	16.54%
to help or serve community/community service	15.22%
civic duty/civic responsibility	9.25%
fun/interesting/enjoy it	8.90%
heard about need for workers or otherwise recruited by county	6.67%
money (i.e. for the stipend)	6.17%
like working with/meeting people or seeing neighbors	2.09%
school activity/credit/resume	2.06%
retired so have time	1.94%
have free time	1.38%
patriotism (i.e. to serve country)	1.34%
volunteer work for non-governmental organization/donate stipend to charity	0.93%
unemployed so have time	0.54%
family tradition or regular habit/routine	0.37%
need for bilingual workers/to help voters with LEP	0.33%

At this point, for simplicity of analysis, we collapse the motivation variable into four possible values: duty/service, social, material, and passes time.⁶ TABLE 5 displays the frequency of these four types, and the residual ‘unknown’ which represents the cases for which the value of this variable is missing. Duty/service dominates the sample with more than half of respondents choosing some form of that. The social motives for working at the polls come from a respectable one quarter of the poll workers. Material motives and serving at the polls to pass the time are much smaller categories, but still come from hundreds of respondents. We might guess that of the 8% unknown motives that some are related to these potentially stigmatized reasons. From the open-ended responses on the survey we learned how important the stipend was to many more poll workers than the number who explicitly reported money as their reason for serving.

TABLE 5: Frequency of Four Motive Types

motive type	frequency	
duty/service	Count	8395
	% of total	54.48%
Social	Count	4151
	% of total	26.94%
Material	Count	898
	% of total	5.83%
passes time	Count	690
	% of total	4.48%
Unknown	Count	1274
	% of total	8.27%
Total	Count	15408
		100%

Next we look at the motive type by whether the workers were new or had worked at the polls in past elections. (TABLE 6) The difference here was not quite as dramatic as when we examined the new and experienced workers across all 16 categories. When comparing the breakdown of the four motive types, there is slightly more of the new workers claiming material motives (8.24%) than in the whole sample (5.83%). A more substantial difference is seen by looking at the break down of the sample by experienced and new workers; we can see that the group claiming material motives is much more new (44.43%) than the overall sample (31.43%). And just as 13% more of the new group (compared to the overall sample) is in the material motives category, 13% less of the returning group is in that category. And the group that serves at the polls to ‘pass time’ is slightly more experienced and less new than the sample as a whole. To attract new workers it looks as though the stipend and school credit for high school students can be useful tools.

⁶ The categories were recoded as follows. ‘Duty/ Service’ includes civic duty, community service, patriotism, learn about/improve the process, heard about need for workers, and need for bilingual workers. ‘Social’ includes like working with people, asked by a friend, part of other volunteer work, fun or interesting, and family tradition. ‘Material’ includes money or school credit/resume. ‘Passes time’ includes having free time in general, because retired, or because unemployed.

TABLE 6: Motive types of Experienced vs. New workers

			Experienced	New	Total
motive type					
	duty/service	Count	5808	2534	8395
		% within motive type	69.18%	30.18%	100
		% within experienced	55.59%	52.32%	54.48%
	Social	Count	2729	1396	4151
		% within motive type	65.74%	33.63%	100
		% within experienced	26.12%	28.83%	26.94%
	Material	Count	492	399	898
		% within motive type	54.79%	44.43%	100
		% within experienced	4.71%	8.24%	5.83%
	passes time	Count	501	187	690
		% within motive type	72.61%	27.10%	100
		% within experienced	4.80%	3.86%	4.48%
	Total	Count	10447	4843	15408
		% within motive type	67.80%	31.43%	100

Do motive types vary across occupational categories? In the survey we ask the question “What do you do when you are not working as a poll worker?” and just as we developed emergent codes for the motivation question, we develop about twenty categories for this question. In TABLE 7, seventeen of these categories are displayed and the other three are collapsed into “other.” The bottom row of the table displays the proportion of the entire sample that is represented by these groups. The largest group by far is the group that reported being ‘retired’ or ‘semi-retired,’ at 44% of the whole sample. The group that report ‘volunteer work’ as their main occupation could also be retired, but chose not to declare that on their survey. To provide adequate space TABLE 7 is broken into three tables with different occupation types; in each table the total distribution of the sample across the motive types is in the first column, as a comparison to the distributions of motives in each occupation type.

Starting with duty/service, we see that this is a significant motive (much higher portion of their motives than for the sample as a whole (54.5%)) for those who have likely hectic work schedules, managers (68.6%), self-employed (66.5%), business (64.9%) and professionals (64.6%). It follows that these groups need a compelling reason to fit working at the polls into their busy life. Full-time volunteers and those in the arts and in the construction trades also chose duty/service type motives more of the time than the whole group. Students, either in high school or higher education, report duty/service in lower amounts than the rest of the group. The retired group tracks the whole group on this motive type.

About a quarter of the sample report social motives and this is similar for most occupation categories, with the exception of stay-at-home spouses/moms/dads who choose social motives about one third of the time (34.5%), and high school students who chose social motives less than one fifth (19.4%) of the time. This may come as a surprise that high school students are not volunteering for the social benefits as much as other groups; however, the window for working as a high school student is small, perhaps 2 elections at the most, so its possible that these students have not had time to appreciate the social aspects of the experience.

High school students do appreciate more than any other group the material benefits of working at the polls, which is partially explained by the fact that high school credit is one aspect of the 'material' motive type. Other groups also reported material motives at higher rates than the whole sample including college and graduates students, unemployed and disabled. It follows that the groups with fixed or very low incomes would tend to state money as their primary reason in greater numbers. As we might expect, very few full-time volunteers report money as their main reason for volunteering, but more surprising is that those in the construction trades also rarely cite this reason.

The last category of "passes time" by definition includes those who are unemployed or retired. It is also a more common reason, compared to the whole sample, for full-time volunteers and those in construction. While this might make sense if those in construction are often between jobs, its interesting that the proportion of those in the 'work part-time' category choosing 'passes time' as a motive is not equally high. It is in fact the same as the sample as the whole sample. Understandably, 'have time' is chosen almost never by those busy with full-time jobs or school.

The next table examines how the motive categories break down among those workers who are willing to work in future elections and those that will not. Those that will return chose to work in the June 2006 election for basically the same reasons as the whole sample, but those that will not return or are unsure about returning came to the June election with a different distribution of motives. While less than 6% of workers in the sample claim material motives, over 10% of those refusing to return originally signed up for the material rewards. Those refusing to come back are also more likely to have volunteered for social reasons and less likely to have duty or service as their primary motivation. This leads us to believe that negative experiences on Election Day which might makes a worker refuse to work again overshadow any social or material benefits they did receive.

TABLE 7: Motive types across Occupational Categories

TABLE 7: a)

		Occupation	ALL	volunteer	retired	professional	government	business	other
Motive type	Unknown	Count	1274	15	512	33	106	48	4
		% within occupation	8.27	4.67	7.51	3.20	7.06	5.64	6.06
	duty/service	Count	8395	199	3756	667	856	552	34
		% within occupation	54.48	61.99	55.12	64.63	57.03	64.86	51.52%
	Social	Count	4151	76	1865	265	445	207	20
		% within occupation	26.94	23.68	27.37	25.68	29.65	24.32	30.30%
	Material	Count	898	5	217	51	78	27	4
		% within occupation	5.83	1.56	3.18	4.94	5.20	3.17	6.06%
	passes time	Count	690	26	464	16	16	17	4
		% within occupation	4.48	8.10	6.81	1.55	1.07	2.00	6.06%
Total		Count	15408	321	6814	1032	1501	851	66
		% within occupation	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
		% of Total	100.00	2.08	44.22	6.70	9.74	5.52	0.43

TABLE 7.b)

			ALL	service	clerical	college or grad student	high school student	unemployed	homemaker
Motive type	unknown	Count	1274	29	10	30	9	5	36
		% within occupation	8.27	6.24	4.13	3.58	2.07	2.87	4.83
	duty/service	Count	8395	245	142	408	174	89	393
		% within occupation	54.48	52.69	58.68	48.75	40.09	51.15	52.68
	Social	Count	4151	149	71	221	84	41	257
		% within occupation	26.94	32.04	29.34	26.40	19.35	23.56	34.45
	Material	Count	898	32	13	162	160	21	31
		% within occupation	5.83	6.88	5.37	19.35	36.87	12.07	4.16
	passes time	Count	690	10	6	16	7	18	29
		% within occupation	4.48	2.15	2.48	1.91	1.61	10.34	3.89
Total		Count	15408	465	242	837	434	174	746
		% within occupation	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
		% of Total	100.00	3.02	1.57	5.43	2.82	1.13	4.84

TABLE 7.c)

			ALL	self-employed	part time worker	Writer/arts	trades/labor	manager	disabled
Motive type	unknown	Count	1274	7	11	6	8	4	3
		% within occupation	8.27	3.08	5.31	3.66	8.25	3.31	2.54
	duty/service	Count	8395	151	112	99	58	83	63
		% within occupation	54.48	66.52	54.11	60.37	59.79	68.60	53.39
	Social	Count	4151	51	59	41	22	29	33
		% within occupation	26.94	22.47	28.50	25.00	22.68	23.97	27.97
	Material	Count	898	12	15	12	2	4	15
		% within occupation	5.83	5.29	7.25	7.32	2.06	3.31	12.71
	passes time	Count	690	6	10	6	7	1	4
		% within occupation	4.48	2.64	4.83	3.66	7.22	0.83	3.39
Total		Count	15408	227	207	164	97	121	118
		% within occupation	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
		% of Total	100.00	1.47	1.34	1.06	0.63	0.79	0.77

TABLE 8: Motive types by willingness to serve in future elections

			Will serve again?			
			Yes	No	maybe/DK	Total
motive type		Count	7676	305	327	8395
	duty/service	% within motive type	91.44	3.63	3.90	100
		% within will return	56.07	43.39	49.62%	54.48
	social	Count	3639	246	220	4151
		% within motive type	87.67	5.93	5.30	100
		% within will return	26.58	34.99	33.38%	26.94
	material	Count	765	77	49	898
		% within motive type	85.19	8.57	5.46	100
		% within will return	5.59	10.95	7.44%	5.83
	passes time	Count	631	23	24	690
		% within motive type	91.45	3.33	3.48	100
		% within will return	4.61	3.27	3.64%	4.48
Total		Count	13690	703	659	15408
		% of Total	88.85	4.56	4.28	100

We also asked respondents why they would not return and a brief look at those answers might shed more light on the relationship between experiences and motives. Only 703 of the 15,408 respondents declared that they would definitely not work in a future election, but they gave a variety of explanations for that firm decision. (See TABLE 9). Over one quarter of these workers who will not come back complained about the length of the day, indicating that split shifts may allure them back to poll worker service. One fifth of those unwilling to return simply could not because they would be working, moving, or traveling. Sixteen percent of these respondents said they would definitely not work again and also wrote explanations such as “only if I don’t have to run the equipment” or “only if I can work with ____.” This does not include the ones who wrote ‘possibly’ or ‘not sure,’ but these respondents should probably be combined with the ‘not sure’ group because they essentially gave conditions under which they would they might return. Surprisingly, a bad experience with the other workers, dislike of the system, the complexity of the job, and the low pay were not the most common reasons to refuse working again. Even added together, these three reasons are not as prevalent as the day simply being too long. It would appear that somehow reducing the length of the work shift on Election Day would do more to retain workers than to focus on their original motives for volunteering.

TABLE 9: Willingness to Return and Reasons why not

	answer	count	percentage
Are you willing to work in future elections?	Yes	13690	88.85%
	No	703	4.56%
	Possibly/Maybe/Not Sure/Don't Know	659	4.28%
	Unknown Response	356	2.31%
		15408	100.00%
If no, why not?	Day too long	340	26.11%
	Schedule Conflict	266	20.43%
	Depends on ___OR only if ___ changes	214	16.44%
	Too old/frail/physical limitations	175	13.44%
	Workers horrible/system doesn't work	98	7.53%
	Not enough money	73	5.61%
	Too much responsibility/too difficult	69	5.30%
	Don't want to/not interested	67	5.15%
	Total Reasons Given	1302	100.00%
		Said no but didn't say why not	96

Conclusion, policy recommendations, and further research

This partial examination of survey responses tells an interesting story about who these California poll workers are and what drives their decisions to start working at the polls and to continue working at the polls. And this story points us to specific areas where state and local policy could improve the staffing of the nation's polling places.

Poll workers have a variety of reasons for volunteering their time and taking on large responsibilities on Election Day. Wanting to serve their community or a belief that it is their 'civic duty' are top reasons. Although its unclear what 'civic duty' means or if it even means the same thing to the 2000 or so poll workers who wrote that on their survey, its interesting that this was a prevalent answer. For workers who are volunteering for the first time, another type of duty is even more important, and that is to be part of or monitor the democratic process. This finding indicates that concerns over Election Day glitches attract people to poll worker service who might otherwise not have considered it;

consequently an appeal to the need for ‘new blood’ in the poll worker workforce for this reason may produce results. New workers in June were drawn by last minute appeals from state and county authorities to help stem the crisis. One county reported to us that after a press release about their shortage they had more volunteers than they could take. These appeals should be made at an earlier date so that volunteers can be screened for competence.

It is important to note here, that there is no easy answer to whether the poll worker workforce should have continuity or should have more turnover, and we think it should be somewhere in between. A large returning workforce makes the job of local election officials easier, as reduces the need for last minute recruitment and for more extensive training. As on-the-job experience is the best training, experienced workers do tend to be, on average, more competent and the best ‘on-the-job’ trainers themselves; at the same time experienced workers may be un-willing to learn new procedures and ‘stuck in their ways’ creating confusion for new workers who correctly understood their first training. Also, the most experienced workers may be reaching an age or time in their life when they really should be encouraged to retire from poll worker service rather than maintain the county’s continuing workforce at all costs.

Another major draw of working at the polls is the social and enjoyable aspects of it. While it’s a long difficult day with a lot of responsibility, workers gain satisfaction from their accomplishment and end up calling the work ‘fun.’ They also share this task with others, see their friends and neighbors, and meet the hundreds of voters who all converge in one place over the day. Even when the workers are not at a polling place near their own homes, they reap the benefits of the social aspects of the job. The only drawback to this motivation that we observed was occasional reports that workers were more involved in chatting with friends and neighbors than assisting all voters in an equitable manner or providing a quiet well run atmosphere for voting. This issue could easily be addressed and stemmed in local training sessions.

While some form of duty or service or social benefit makes up over 75% of the motivations reported, there were also poll workers who sign up for material reasons or simply to pass the time. Material reasons include school credit (high school), experience for the resume, and more typically the stipend. The stipend, while small (\$60-\$140 depending on the level of responsibility and county), was enough to draw over 700 workers. And we believe even more appreciate this check than actually told us on the survey as the respondents talked about the importance of the money in other open-ended questions. Money was slightly more of a draw for those working for the first time, and we believe stipend increases would attract new workers and keep others coming back.

Appeals to duty or service would clearly bring in a more diverse group including those with traditional full-time employment. Duty or service was the attraction for 64-68% of the poll workers who were pulled away from jobs with fixed or long hours. And at least 60% of full-time volunteers and writers/artists were also drawn by a sense of duty. Outreach about the social aspects of poll worker service would also bring in more workers as that seems to be a very important motive across all occupation groups. While

duty and social motives are not lost on students, material incentives would bring more from this population. Making working at the polls a valuable part of both high school and college education, by garnering the support of teaching staff, especially in government classes, for this activity is a very good policy objective.

If we look at poll worker retention from the point of view of who will not work again and why, we find little help from looking at their motives for volunteering in the first place. At the very least we might infer that attracting people to work at the polls for a sense of duty or service is the best way to keep them coming back. However, when we look at the reasons people don't come back it's clear that we could stem this occurrence by allowing shifts that do not last the entire 15 hour Election Day. More research is needed to determine if this small percentage (less than 5%) that do not plan to return are competent team players that we would like to return. In addition, 20% of them simply can't work again in that county or the next election because of other plans, and this group we can do nothing about.

In sum, we recommend a multi-pronged approach to poll worker recruitment (in California, but it should apply in other states as well). Outreach to educate workers should be year-round and emphasize the importance of participating in the process and the need for competent Election Day staff, while also advertising the social benefits of the activity, using quotes from past workers about how and why they enjoy the day. This outreach combined with increasingly the flexibility and benefits for students should help to increase the diversity of the poll worker workforce. In order to keep competent poll workers coming back, states and localities must do what they can to allow split shifts and increase stipends to reflect the increasingly responsibilities and challenges of working at the polls.

These descriptive observations just scratch the surface in terms of the analysis that can be done with this survey. With additional data on the poll workers by county we can do even more involved analysis at the county level. We plan to investigate the question of poll worker motivation closer by developing and testing models to explain the willingness to become a poll worker and the willingness to return as a poll worker. For example, independent variables that explain the reason for becoming a poll worker might include the individuals background in terms of demographic variables (education, occupation, socio-economic status, age) and the incentives provided by the institutional structures of county and state government (stipend amount, technology available, polling place amenities, length of shift). The willingness to work again as a poll worker might be explained by the quality of the experience (s) on Election Day, the complexity of the polling place environment in that particular locality, and the original motives for volunteering. For both of these analyses, we want to examine the motives and willingness to return for competent workers and need a measure of competence for the dependent variable as well. We hope that this future research will provide insight about the motivations of this particular type of volunteer work, and also inform policy makers about this important class of participants in the democratic process and how to ensure their continued service.

APPENDIX 1: Survey Instrument

Dear Poll Worker: Please complete this confidential questionnaire to assist a University of California study on poll worker training in California, and then return it in the postage paid envelope. As a poll worker, your expertise is essential to our research and your participation is much appreciated. We hope our research helps to improve the poll worker experience and election process for everyone. (Please complete both sides of this page.) **THANK YOU! THANK YOU!**

ABOUT YOUR TRAINING BEFORE ELECTION DAY

1. Did you attend a training class for the June 6, 2006 Election? Yes_____ No_____
 If No, why not? _____

2. Have you attended trainings in the past for other Elections? Yes _____ (If Yes, how many)? _____ No _____

(for questions below please circle the number that applies)

3. How convenient was the training location? 0(N/A) 1(poor) 2 3(good) 4 5(excellent)

4. How convenient was the training time? 0(N/A) 1(poor) 2 3(good) 4 5(excellent)

5. Did you receive any reference materials (manuals, checklists, etc.) at training to take home? Yes ___ No___ N/A___
 If Yes, did you review any of the materials before reporting to your polling site on Election Day? Yes___ No___
 If you did NOT review materials received, why not? _____

6. Do you have additional comments about and/or suggestions for improvement of **poll worker training**?

ABOUT YOUR ELECTION DAY EXPERIENCE

1. Have you worked as a poll worker in previous elections? Yes_____ No_____
 (If Yes, in **how many elections** have you worked as a poll worker?) _____

2. Please circle your job title on Election Day June 6, 2006:
 Inspector Judge Clerk Other _____
 What were your job titles in past elections? _____

(for questions below please circle the number that applies)

3. How well did the training prepare you for Election Day? 0(N/A) 1(poor) 2 3(good) 4 5(excellent)

4. How well did the training prepare you to operate any voting equipment (such as ballot marking devices, ballot scanners, electronic machines) on Election Day? 0(N/A) 1(poor) 2 3(good) 4 5(excellent)

5. How well did the training prepare you to demonstrate to voters how to operate any voting equipment (such as ballot marking devices, ballot scanners, electronic machines)? 0(N/A) 1(poor) 2 3(good) 4 5(excellent)

6. How well did the training prepare you to manage different voter situations and questions on Election Day? 0(N/A) 1(poor) 2 3(good) 4 5(excellent)

7. How effective was the training in preparing you to serve voters with disabilities? 0(N/A) 1(poor) 2 3(good) 4 5(excellent)

8. How effective was the training in preparing you to serve voters with limited English proficiency? 0(N/A) 1(poor) 2 3(good) 4 5(excellent)

9. How helpful was the training/instruction you received on Election Day from other poll workers or election staff? 0(N/A) 1(poor) 2 3(good) 4 5(excellent)

10. How adequate were the available reference materials for guiding you through Election Day processes and procedures? 0(N/A) 1(poor) 2 3(good) 4 5(excellent)

11. In your opinion, how well did Election Day processes go at your polling place? 0(N/A) 1(poor) 2 3(good) 4 5(excellent)

ABOUT YOUR ELECTION DAY EXPERIENCE (continued)

12. Do you think class training is valuable for working at the polls? Yes _____ No_____ Not Sure/Don't Know_____

13. Did you have adequate reference materials available to you on Election Day? Yes__ No__ Not Sure/Don't Know_____

What materials were most useful on Election Day? _____

14. Do you have additional comments about and/or suggestions for improving **written poll worker reference materials**?

ABOUT BEING A POLL WORKER IN GENERAL

1. Why did you become a poll worker?

2. When you are not serving as a poll worker, what do you do?
(for example: high school student, college student, retired, county employee, state employee, teacher, in business, etc...)

3. Are you willing to work in future elections? Yes_____ No_____ (why not?) _____

4. Do you have additional comments about and/or suggestions for improving **your county's poll worker program**?

Co # _____