

The Hidden Backbone of Justice: Insights into Staffing Levels and Salaries of Court Support Personnel

Jeffrey M. Tsunekawa
Director of Court Services
Office of Court Administration
December 2024



Background

- Purpose is to conduct a study of the court personnel workload of the district and statutory county courts in Texas as directed in Rider 15 of OCA's appropriation pattern.
- Covers District Courts, County Courts at Law, Statutory Probate Courts, OCA's Children's Courts. District and County Clerk's Offices are optional to participate.
- Final report due to OCA by December 2024, and the Legislature no later than January 1, 2025.



Objectives

- Identify the number of staff in 2023 across the courts in each county.
- Gather feedback from stakeholders on court and office workload challenges including: are current levels effective, challenges to hiring, and what other support they need.
- Develop a formula to determine the appropriate staffing needs for the above courts and court clerk's offices to provide effective and efficient support for the operation of the courts.
- Recommend appropriate salary ranges for court and clerk's office staff.



Methodology

- A Mix of methods:
- Online surveys
 - Virtual interviews
 - Request of public data
 - Delphi panels

April - July

- Planning
- IRB Submission
- Instrument Development
- FOIA requests to counties

July - August

- Survey
- Cleaning of FOIA request data

August - September

- Interviews
- Cleaning and analysis of FOIA request data
- Survey analysis

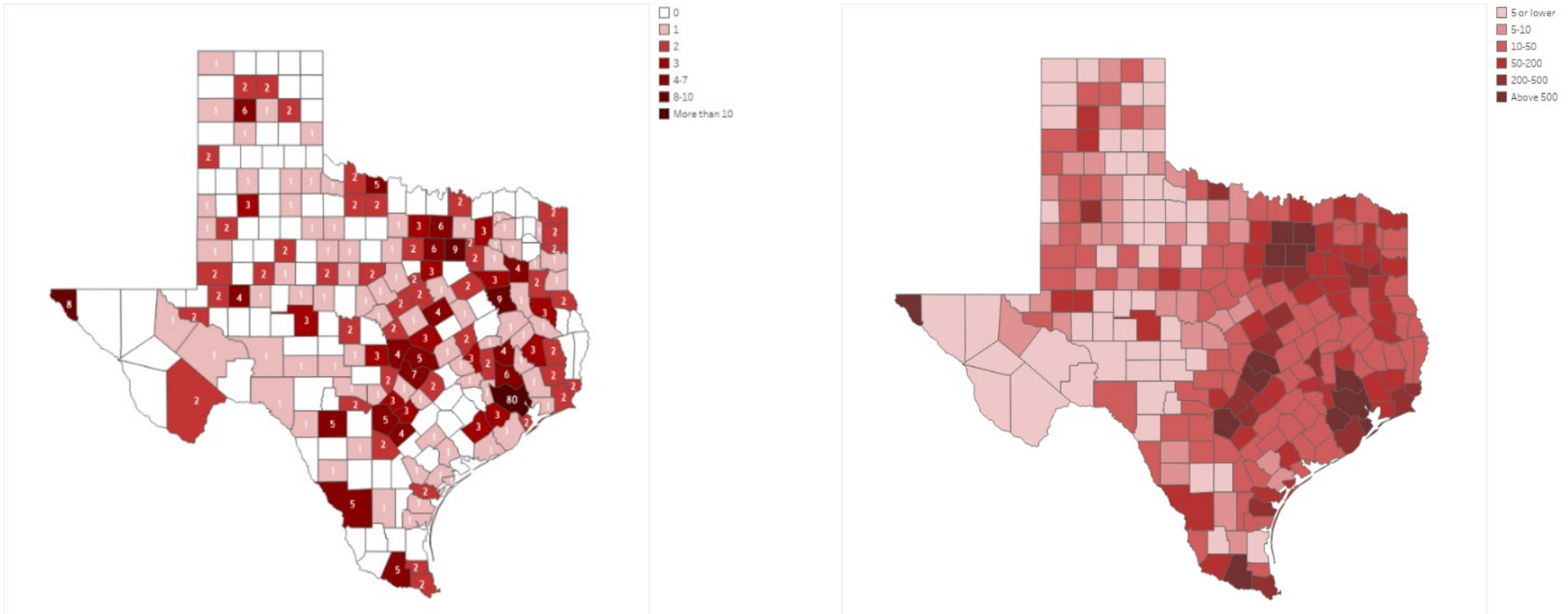
September - October

- Formula draft
- Delphi panels
- Cognitive interviewing
- Analysis of FOIA request data
- Draft report

October - December

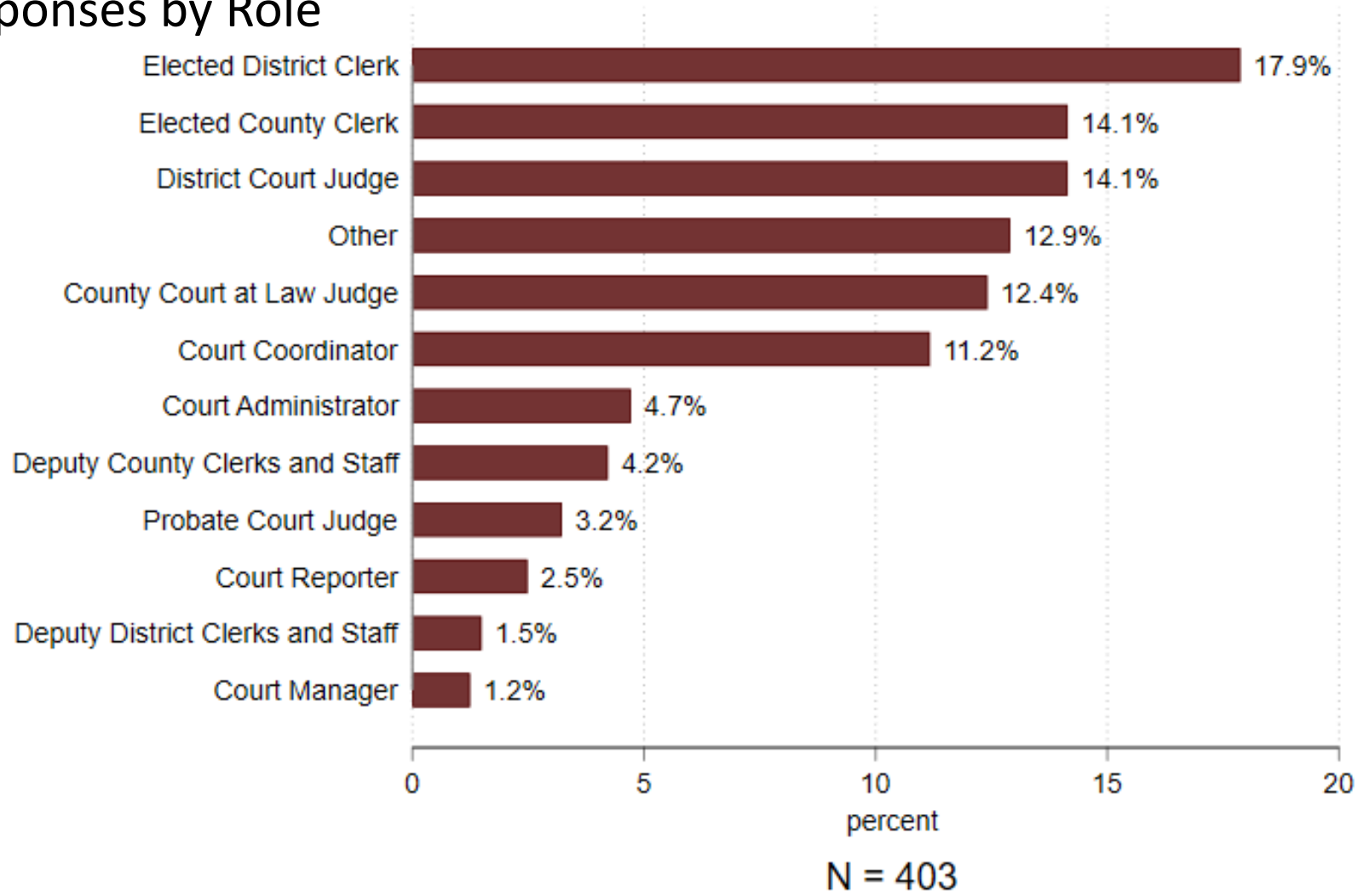
- Finalize analysis
- Refine formula
- Develop formula training
- Final Report

Survey Data



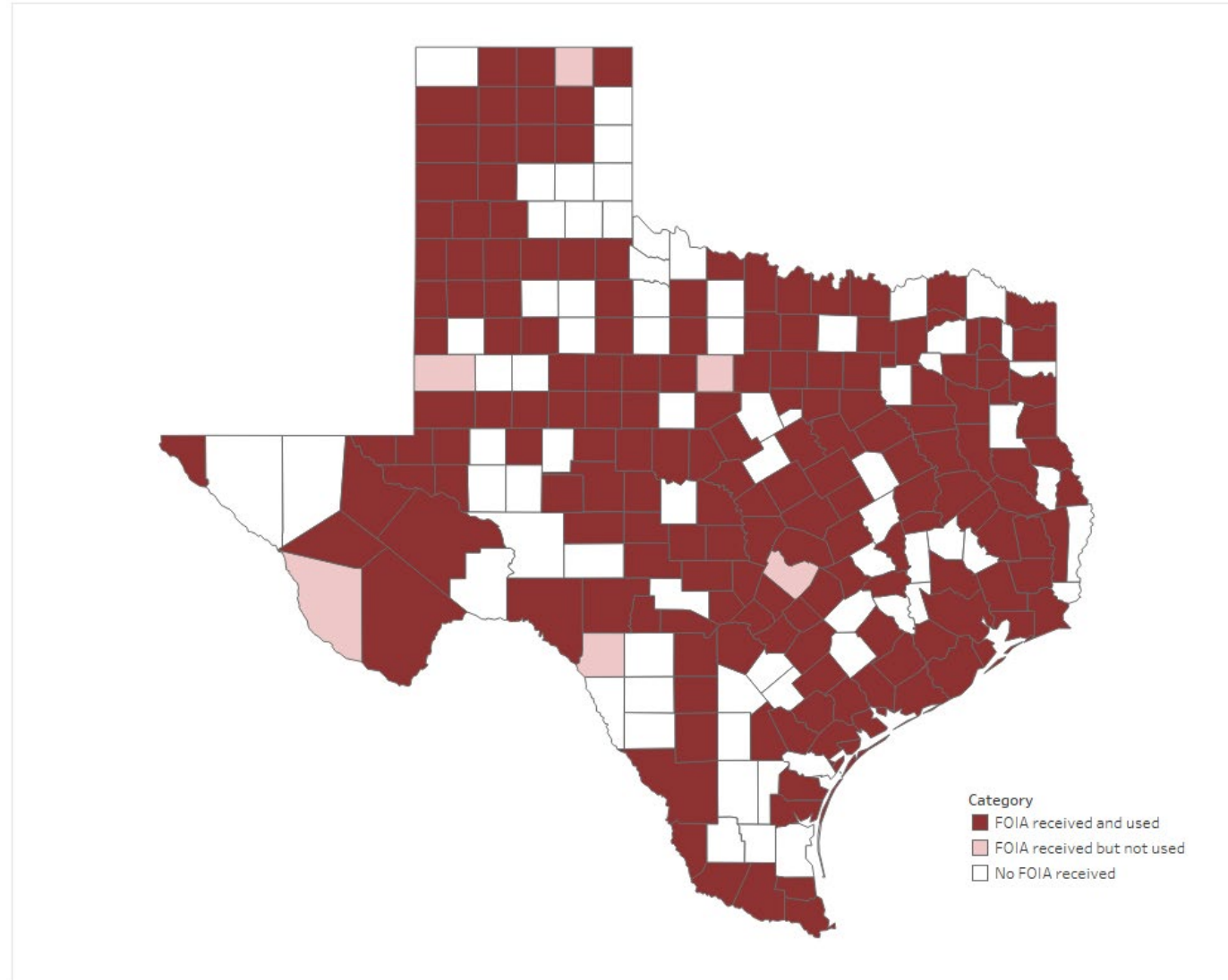
Survey Data

Survey Responses by Role

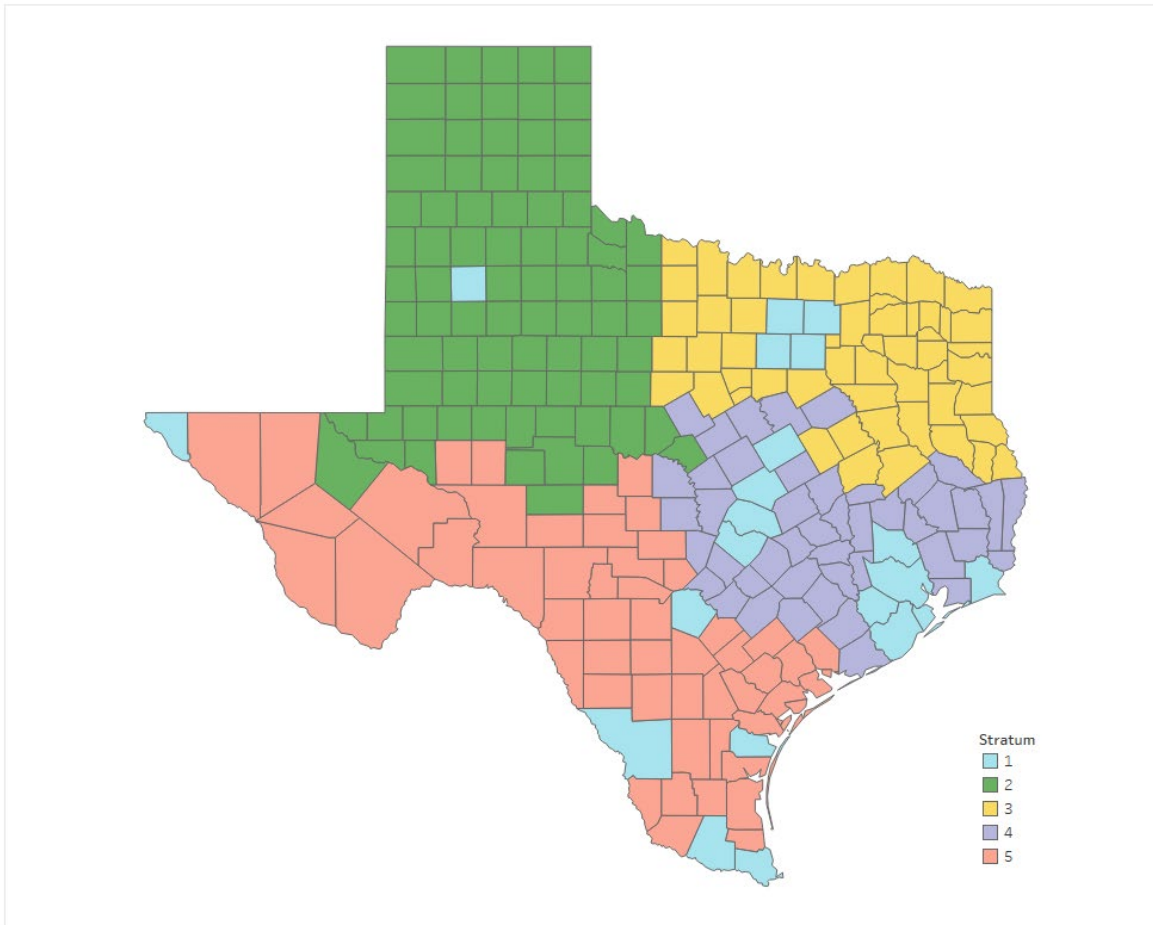


Database of Court Personnel

- Texas Public Information Act Requests for all 254 counties for courts and clerk's offices.
 - Names
 - Titles
 - Salaries
 - Email Addresses
 - FY21, FY22, FY23
 - Open positions during FY23
 - Associate Judges
- In the end, 254 requests were made, and data was returned from 181 counties.



Virtual Interviews and Delphi Panels



Conducted 36 interviews

- Judges
- Clerks
- Court staff

Conducted 2 Delphi Panels

- 7 individuals in Court Personnel Panel
- 7 individuals in County and District Clerks Panel

Conclusion: Survey and Interviews

- Court staff and clerks are new to their positions
- Overwhelming majority believe their workload is heavy
- Slightly above half believe existing staff are sufficient
- Salary (and then benefits) is the most important for hiring
- Court reporter is the most difficult position to hire for (and to retain)
- No autonomy influencing salaries

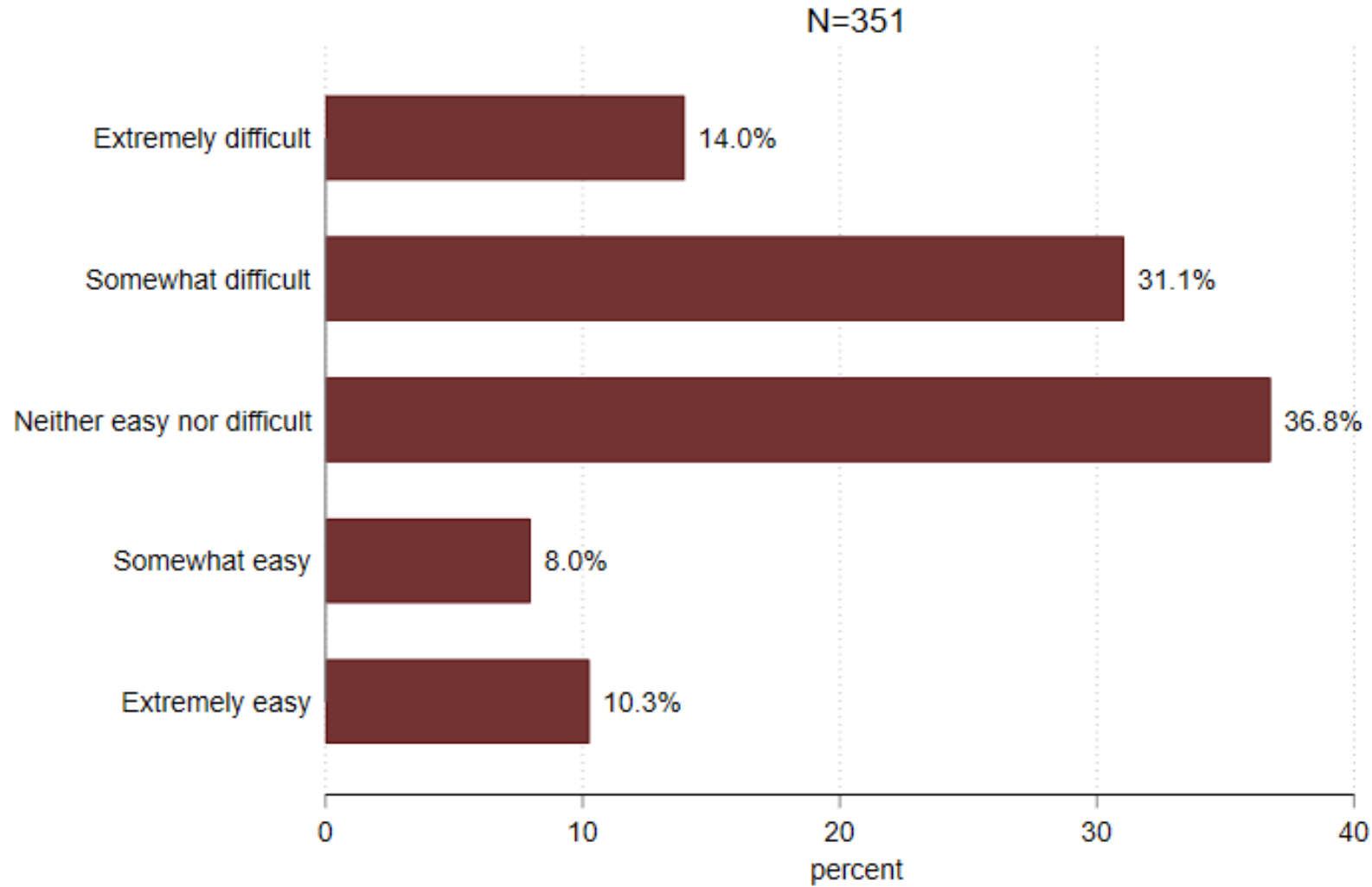


Conclusion: Survey Additional Support Needed

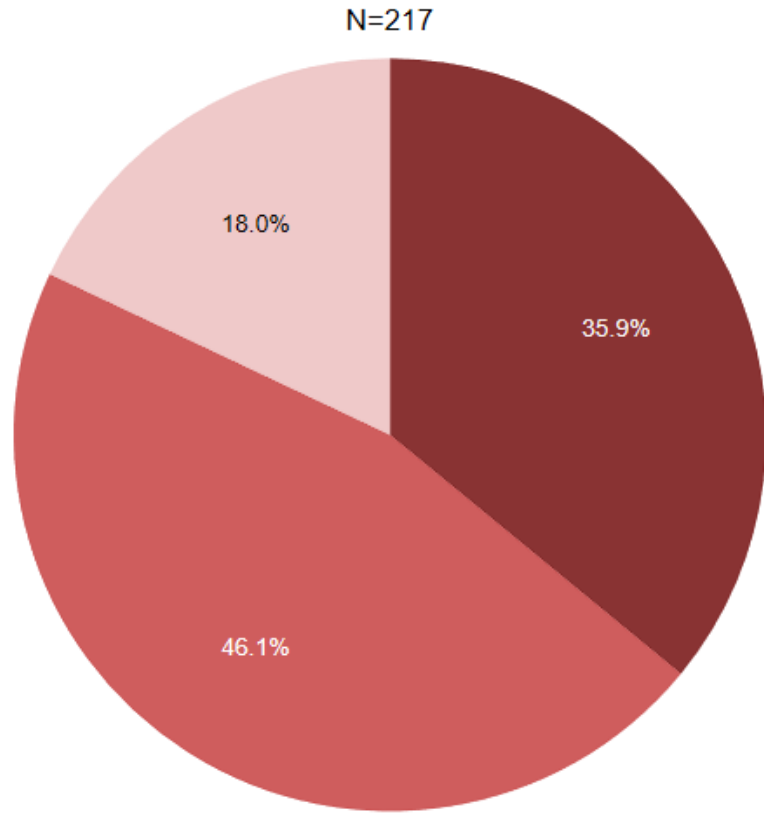
Response	Number of times mentioned
Additional staff which includes additional courts, attorneys, judges, and support staff	84
An integrated case management system that works across agencies within the jurisdiction	46
Additional or upgraded computers and technological support to perform their job duties	41
Improved e-file and online docketing/calendaring systems to improve efficiency	20
More, or improved, physical space and working conditions for their staff	15
More training opportunities and legislative updates	12



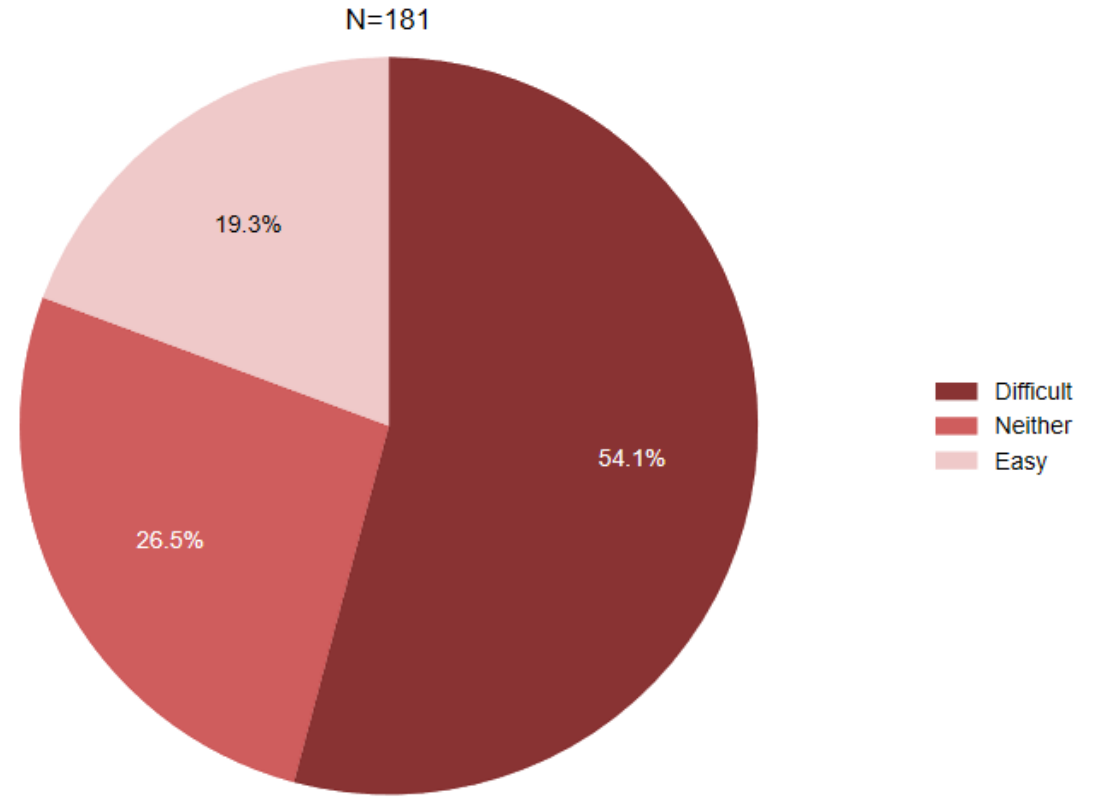
Conclusion: Recruitment and Retention



Conclusion: Recruitment and Retention



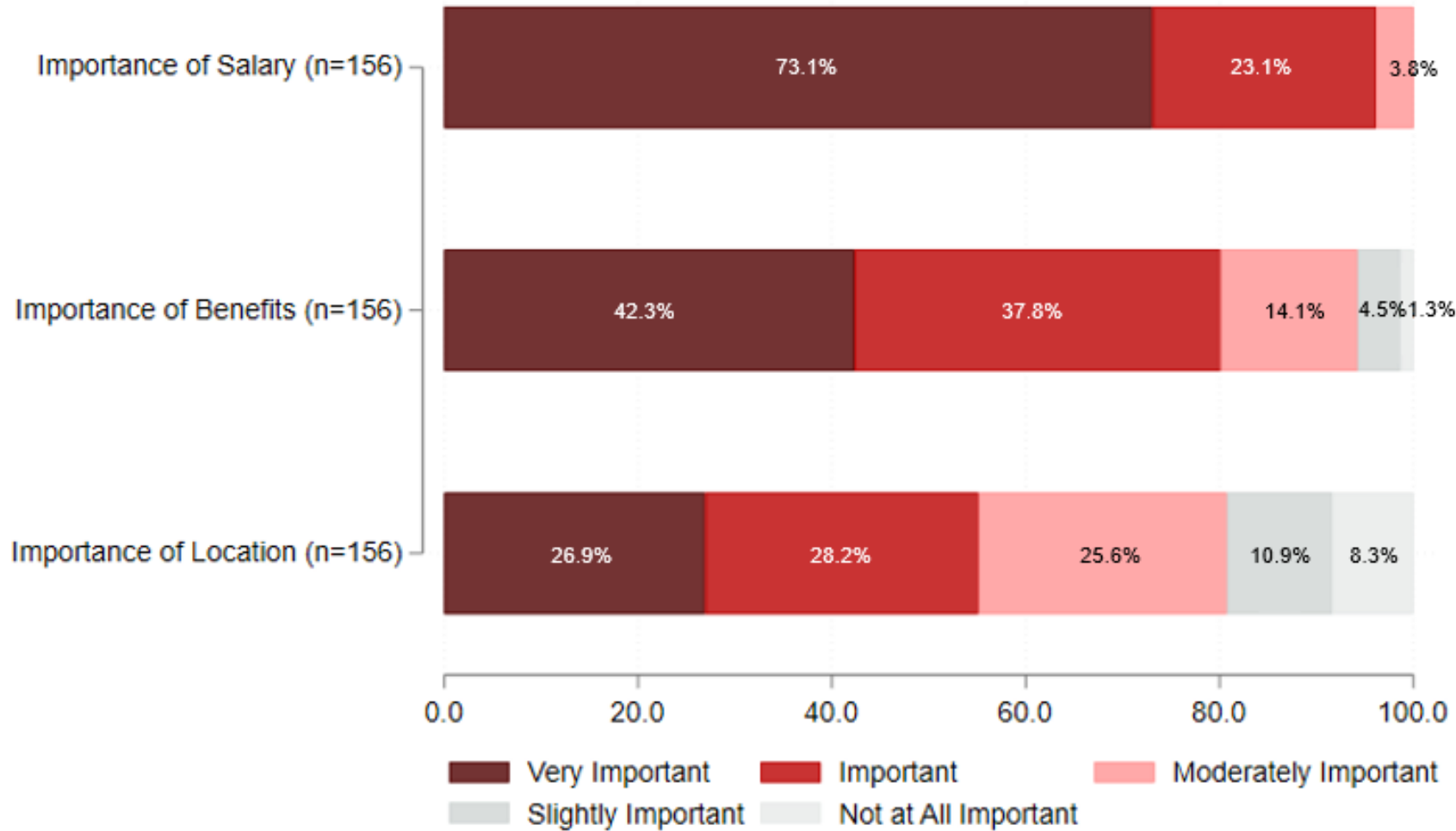
Court Personnel



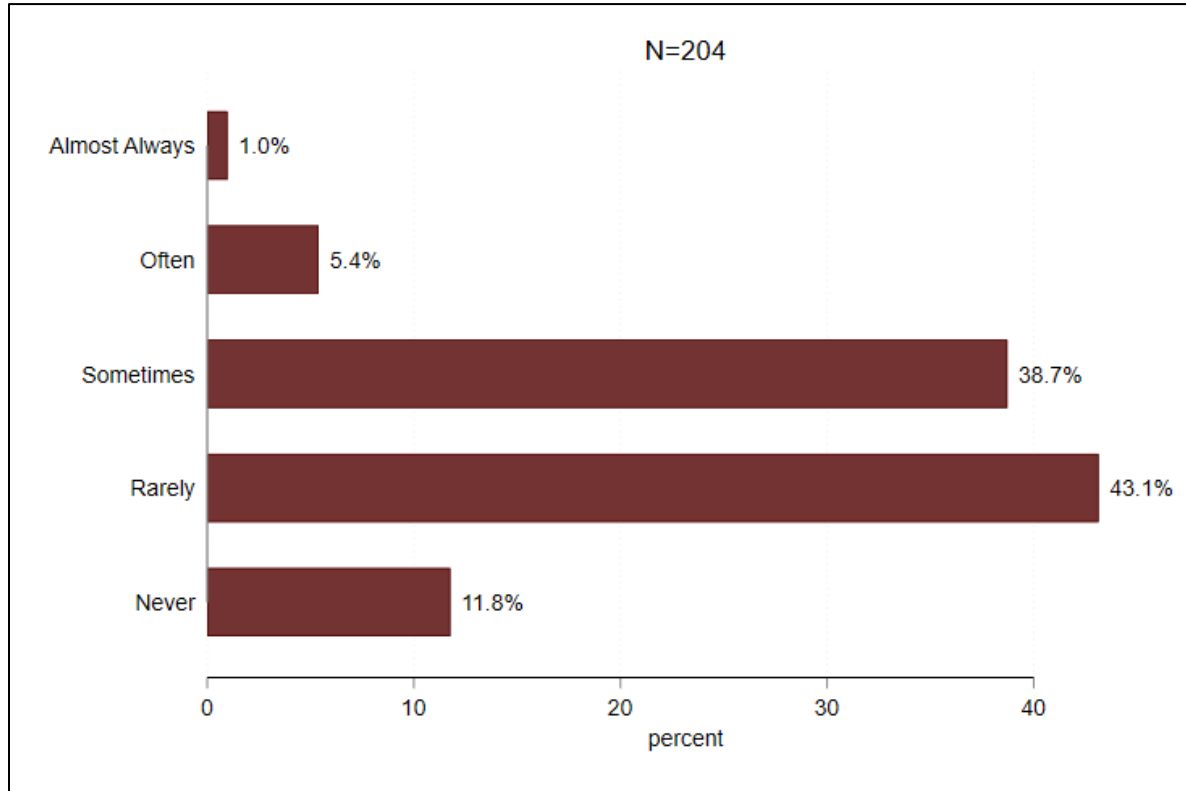
Clerk Personnel



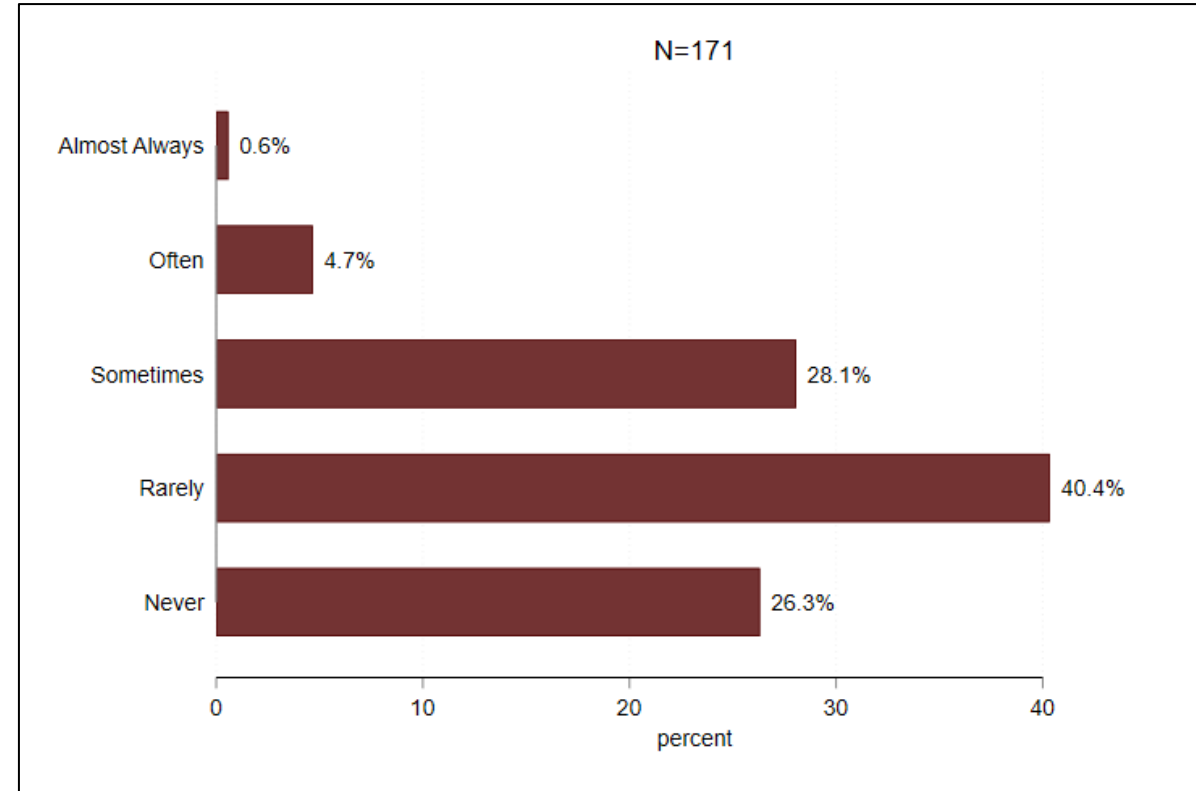
Conclusion: Recruitment and Retention – *Salary, Benefits and Location*



Conclusion: Recruitment and Retention - Relocation



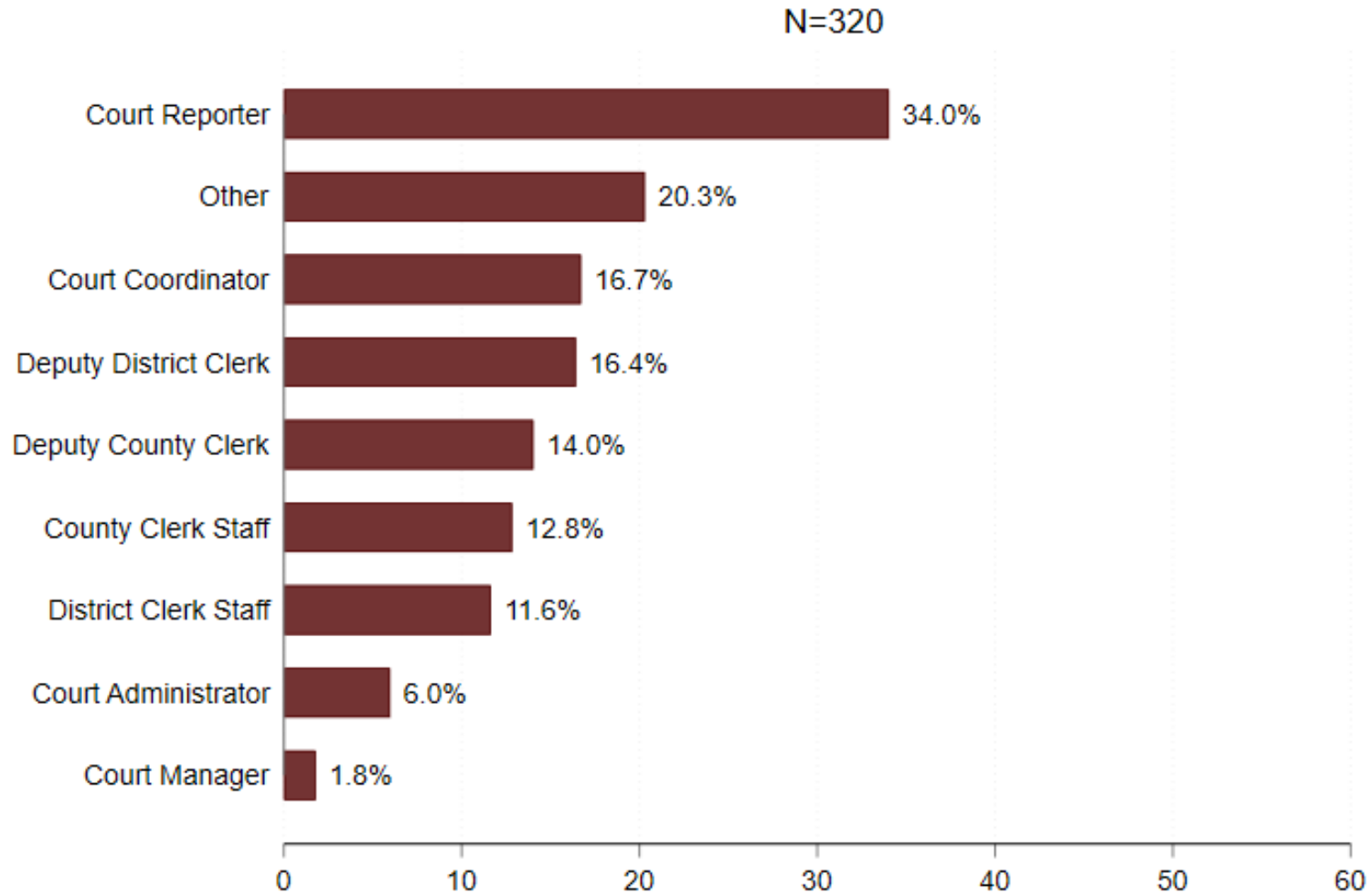
Court Personnel



Clerk Personnel



Conclusion: Recruitment and Retention – *Difficulty to Hire and Retain*

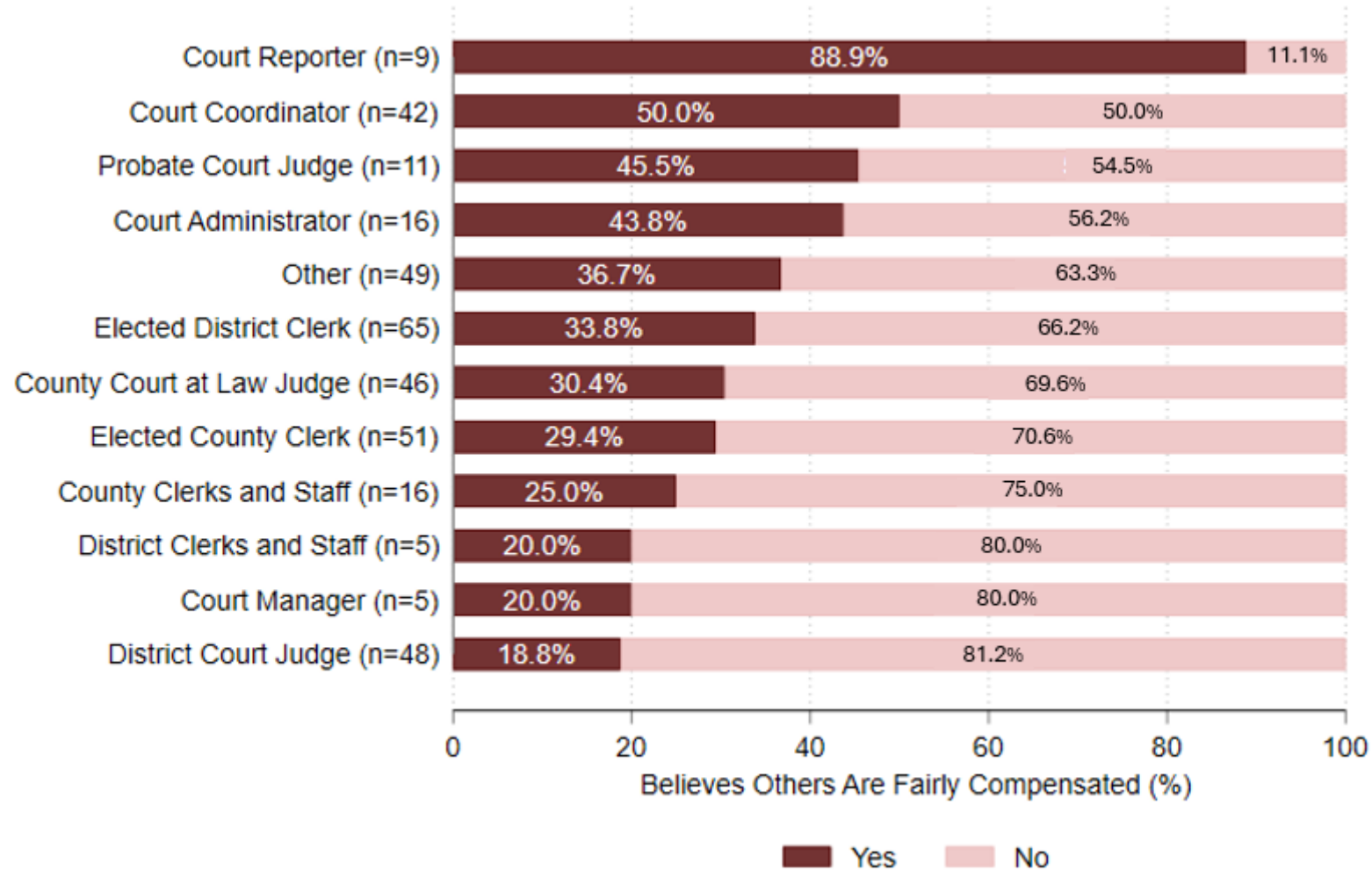


Conclusion: Recruitment and Retention – *Difficulty to Hire*

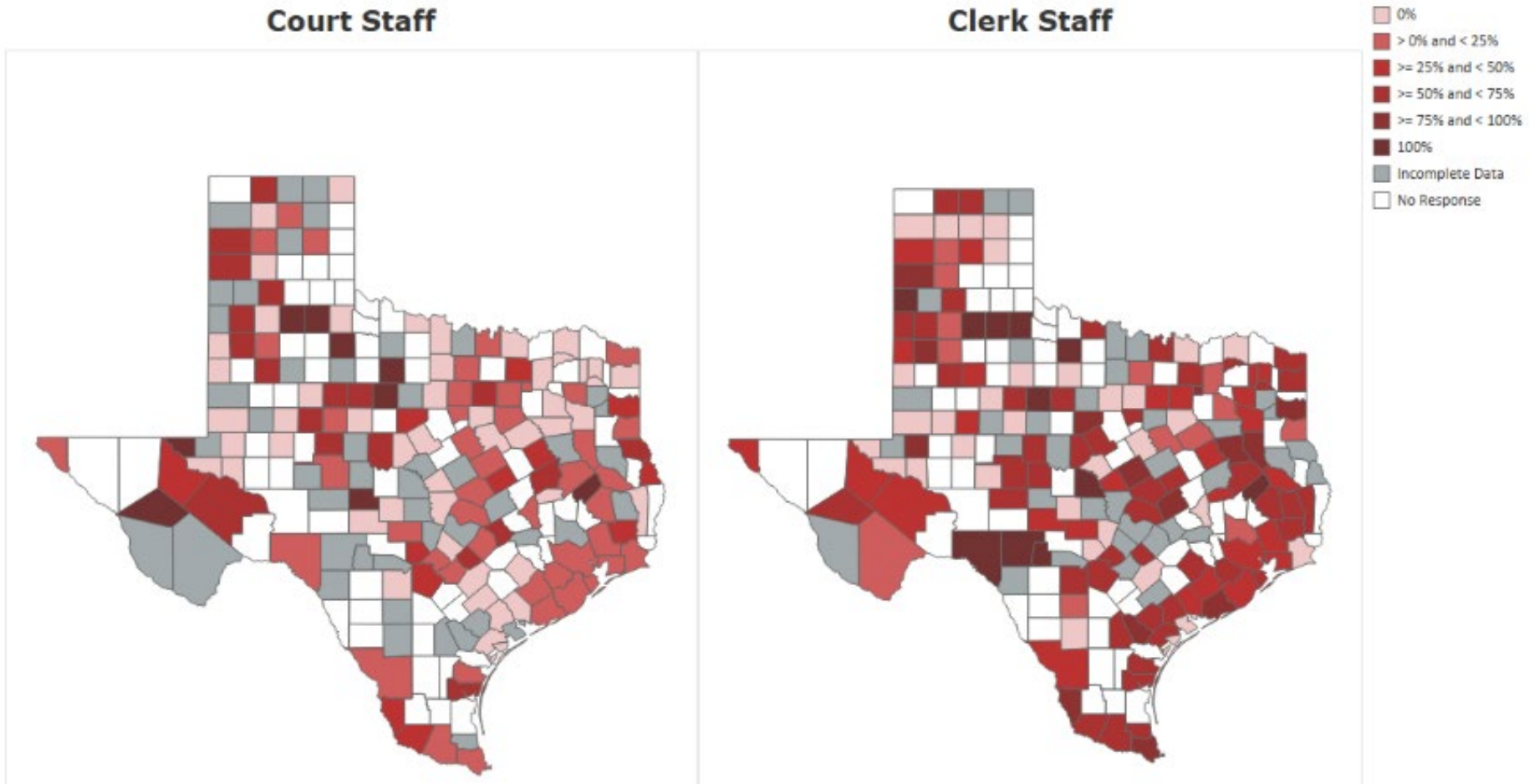
Reason	Number Responses
Low pay compared to the cost of living	32
Lack of qualified applicants	27
Difficulty in competing in compensation with larger surrounding counties, state agencies or the private sector	15
Too demanding of a workload and/or expectations in comparison to pay	13
Lack of Court Reporters	10
General desire of all applicants to work remotely	8



Conclusion: Recruitment and Retention – *Respondents who Felt Colleagues are Not Compensated Fairly*



Conclusion: Recruitment and Retention – *Staff Living Under Living Wage by County*



Staffing Needs Formula

- Separate staffing formula for court and clerk's offices.
- Editable to meet the needs of the local business operations.
- Detailed instructions for use.
- Varying test results from volunteer courts and clerk's offices.

	Per week						# of positions to fill
	# of hours per one task per 1 staff	# of task	# of hours	Miscellaneous	# of staff to complete all task	# of current staff	
Manage court operations, including consulting with the judge, working with other court staff, and coordinating the transfer of inmates Tasks: 1. Interact with the court's case management system as needed to document case progress to resolution 2. Maintain court files and records of cases on the court's docket *For this function, one task is equal to the number of specialized dockets run by the court.	15		0	0	0.0		0.0
Assist the judge with court proceedings Tasks: 1. Assist in the calling of the docket and flow of the day's proceedings *For this function, one task is equal to the number of court coordinators assigned to the court.	12		0	0	0.0		0.0
Assist in the development of court guidelines, procedures, and standards Tasks: 1. Provide administrative support in the development of standard operating procedures for the court based on statute and guidelines *For this function, one task is equal to the number of administrative staff assigned to the court.	1		0	0	0.0		0.0
Coordinate the request for juries for the court with the District Clerk Tasks: 1. Communicate with the District Clerk's office when jury pools will be needed for the court 2. Communicate with the District Clerk's office when cases are resolved, and juries are no longer needed for *For this function, one task is equal to the number of cases set for jury trial.	1		0	0	0.0		0.0
Manage the court calendar/docket	4		0	0	0.0		0.0



01

Recommendation

Increase salaries of court support personnel and clerks' office staff to the county living wage and create suggested standardized pay scales for counties.



02

Recommendation

Conduct a state-wide time study of county and district clerks' offices and court support personnel to further refine key values in the staffing formula.



03

Recommendation

Continue to support and educate counties and stakeholders on the value of data collection and reporting.



Questions and Thank You

Jeffrey Tsunekawa
Director of Court Services
Jeffrey.Tsunekawa@txcourts.gov
P: 512.463.1629

