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THE COUNCIL OF STATE GOVERNMENTS SOUTHERN OFFICE

Election Administration in the South

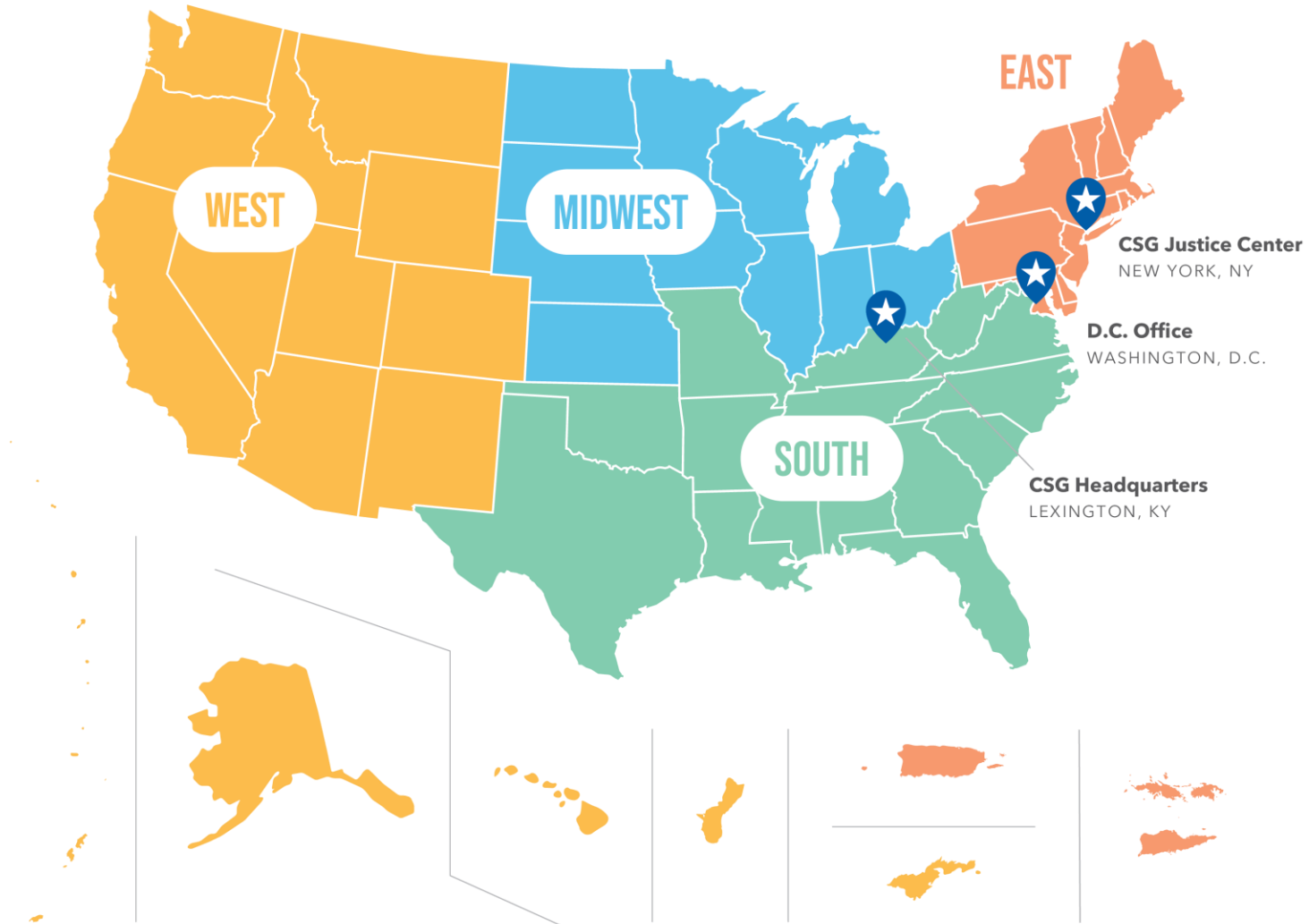
Georgia House of Representatives
Blue Ribbon Study Committee on Elections Procedures
Thursday, September 18, 2025
Savannah Technical College

Tyler Reinagel, Ph.D.
Director of Policy and Research, CSG South



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MEMBER TERRITORIES: NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS, GUAM, PUERTO RICO, AMERICAN SAMOA, U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS



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CSG SOUTH: LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT



Center for the Advancement of Leadership Skills (CALS) – 18 Years



Staff Academy for Governmental Excellence (SAGE) – 6 Years



CHIEFS15X- Chief of Staff Leadership Retreat- Launched this year



Policy Masterclasses

CSG SOUTH: LEGISLATIVE STAFF RESOURCES



Legislative Service Agency Directors Group (LSA)



Staff Alliance for Intergovernmental Leadership (SAIL)



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CSG SOUTH: SOUTHERN LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE (SLC)

- CSG South's Annual Meeting
- The nation's largest regional gathering of legislative members and staff
- Over 2,200 attended in 2023, making it the largest SLC to date. This year we had just over 1,400 in Birmingham, Alabama.
- 41 sessions offered, including keynotes, policy sessions, government staff tracks, committee meetings, site visits, and more
- Robust Guest and Youth program in conjunction with policy and government staff sessions
- 100,000 meals packed during the conference's philanthropy project reaching over 1 million meals since this event started in 2011





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Election Administration in the South

- Centralization v. Decentralization
 - State Owned/Maintained versus Local Procurement and Cost Burden
- Local Control and Coordination with State
 - Review and approval of equipment
 - Requirements and Eligible Vendors/Models
 - Partial State Reimbursement/Supplement based on type of election
- Funding Challenges
 - Highly variable costs
 - One time costs
- Recent and Current Legislative Efforts



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Oklahoma



- Centralized Model of State Selection, Funding, and Ownership
- State-owned/maintained equipment deployed to all 77 counties utilizing a hand-marked paper ballot and standard eScan A/T optical scanner from Hart InterCivic.
- The optical scanners were deployed statewide in 2012 as a part of a \$16.6M contract at that time.
- Local costs generally limited to staff salary/benefits, printing, postage



Mississippi



- Decentralized model of equipment acquisition and ownership
- The Mississippi Voting Modernization Act (SB2879) passed in 2022 and began the transition of the state from electronic voting/touchscreen machines to paper-based systems starting in 2024.
- The purchase or rental of optical mark tabulating equipment (OMR) required under the act is at the discretion of County Boards of Supervisors from three state-approved vendors. The transition to paper-based ballots was a two-year process, and the adoption of SB2879 was accompanied by a state-funded \$8.7M grant program for counties.
- Elections Support Fund receives funding from the LLC reporting/filing fees to be disbursed to counties based upon populations solely for:
 - Acquiring, upgrading, maintaining, or repairing voting equipment/systems;
 - Conducting elections using voting machines/systems’;
 - Hiring temporary technical support for said equipment; and
 - Ensuring all computers/machines used in voting administration are secure.



Arkansas



- Decentralized model of equipment acquisition and ownership
- Approved election equipment is selected by the Secretary of State, including both voting machines and electronic vote tabulating devices, all requiring a voter-verified paper audit trail. Counties also have the option of paper ballots being counted by hand rather than using electronic vote tabulating devices.
- At the county level, the 'quorum court' in each of the state's 75 counties is responsible for selecting a combination of approved equipment, paper ballots, and tabulation devices approved by the Secretary of State.
- The legislature-adopted FY2026 Secretary of State budget (HB1147) included \$11M for this fund, "for professional fees and services for upgrading or purchasing county voting systems, grants and aid for voting system equipment, programming, maintenance or equipment and devices."

Louisiana



- Centralized model of equipment acquisition and ownership

Secretary of State is responsible for the selection and purchase on voting equipment (LA Rev Stat § 18:19) for each of the state's 64 parishes (county equivalents).

Voting machines purchased and owned by the state government are distributed to a "parish custodian" (functionally an elections administrator) at the local level.

Based on shifts in volumes of voters, these local officials work in conjunction with the Secretary of State to reallocate machines from lower demand precincts to higher volume precincts, and can make formal requests for additional equipment purchased by the state for the benefit of their respective parishes.

- Allows SoS to sell maps/mapping data of precincts/jurisdictions to support a Voting Technology Fund which is designated for "...the acquisition and maintenance of voting machine technology, including hardware and software; voting equipment and supplies;... and information technology products to produce, run, and support the election and voting system."



North Carolina



- Decentralized model of equipment acquisition and ownership
- The three approved vendors (Election Systems and Software, Hart InterCivic, and Clear Ballot) are all either hand-marked or paper-based ballots generated through a ballot marking device and include a paper trail.
- Two vendors are in active use throughout the state, with the third having withdrawn from the state in 2019
- For each of the vendors, the State Board of Elections requires a “statewide uniform price for each unit of the equipment” regardless of the county making the purchase or the number of units being purchased (G.S. § 163-165.7(a)(7)).
- This eliminates the need for a competitive bid process that is seen in several other southern states, but county officials are required to have a public demonstration of the proposed equipment in their jurisdiction before changing/upgrading.



Tennessee



- Decentralized model of equipment acquisition and ownership
- County governments contracting with their selected vendor following 2022 legislation. The state required county governments to upgrade/replace equipment to ensure a mandatory “voter-verified paper audit trail” requirement.
- At the time of the bill’s (HB2331-SB2558) passage, the fiscal note from the Fiscal Review Committee estimated significant one-time expenditures by county governments for the required upgrades/replacements of equipment
 - \$11.625M in FY2023 and \$15.098M in FY2024, with subsequent annual costs of approximately \$1.098M for equipment maintenance, replacement, and additional acquisitions
 - Upgrades in 46 Counties, Full Replacement in 15
- The state government did provide limited funding for partial reimbursement to counties, including roughly \$1.4M annually during the transition period and \$500K in FY2023



Kentucky



- Decentralized model of equipment acquisition and ownership
- Kentucky empowers county (or county equivalent) governments to select “any type and make of voting system” that complies with statutory requirements.
 - Those specifications address similar concerns seen in other states – paper-based voting, security, accessibility for voters with disabilities, and no internet/cell network connectivity As of May 2025, the state’s 120 counties/county equivalents are utilizing various combinations of three (3) e-poll books (registered voter roster), three (3) ballot marking devices (BMDs), two (2) ballot printing devices, and three (3) ballot scanning devices
- State Elections Board provides funding to counties (KRS 117.345, 117.343)
 - \$255 per precinct, \$0.50 per registered voter per year reimbursement
 - State appropriations of \$1.2M annually to reimburse (HB53, 2025)
 - “If you’ve been around for any election cycle as an elected official, you can attest that these numbers don’t cover very much,” [KY SBE Assistant Director Richard] House said.



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South Carolina



- Centralized acquisition, ownership, and maintenance of equipment
- The Palmetto State transitioned to a centralized equipment model in 2019, with Election Systems and Software selected by the State's five-member State Elections Commission from among seven contractors for a \$51M contract serving all of the state's 46 counties.
- This contract included the state-level acquisition of ExpressVote ballot-marking devices that provide verifiable paper ballots, and optical scanners that are being upgraded through the same vendor as of late 2024.
- This approach replaced a paperless voting system that had been in place since 2004

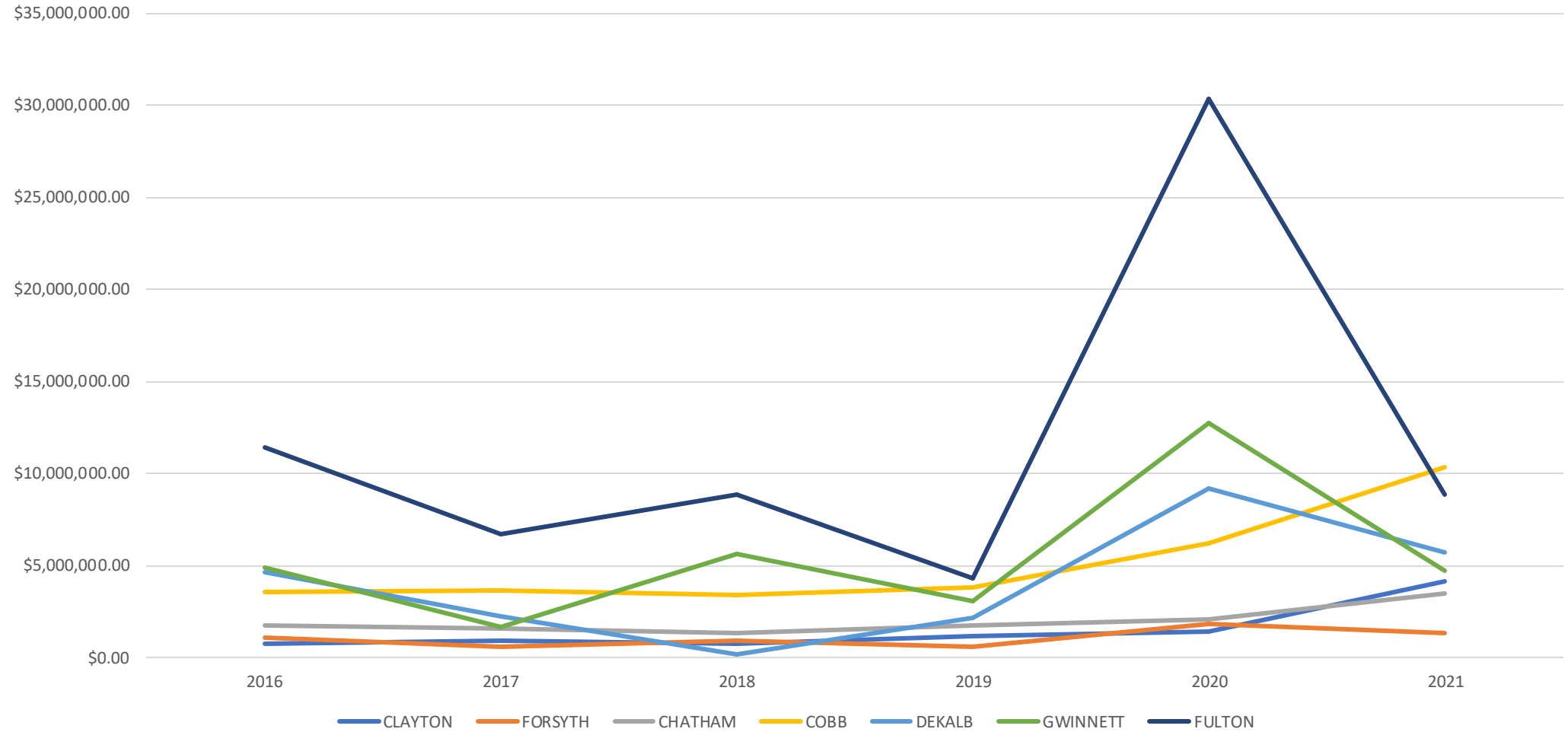


Election Costs in Georgia

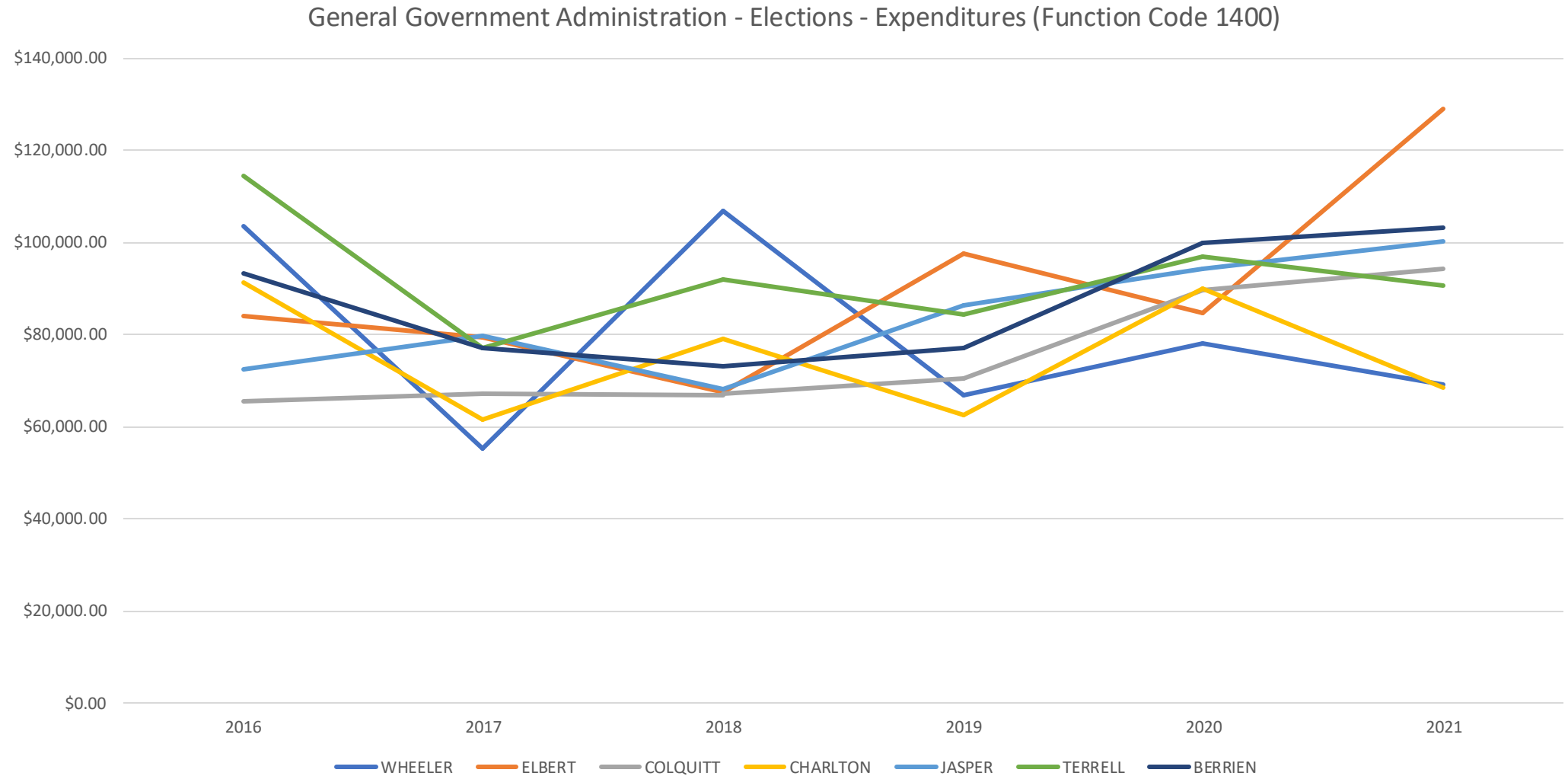
- Largely borne by County governments through General Fund (Fund 100) Revenue
 - Among most inconsistent expenditure lines in county budgets
- Fiscal Year Incongruence Considerations
- Local financial management practices *may* capture additional equipment acquisition as capital expenditure and significant one-time expenses
 - Cherokee County, \$1.65M in FY2021
 - Houston County, \$2.57M in FY2021
 - Irwin County, \$113K in FY2023
 - Thomas County, \$1.77M in FY2020
- County and Municipal Governments *may* contract for election administration
- Cost variance seen in large, medium, and small counties alike – the following slides indicate election expenditures in all three types of counties



General Government Administration - Elections - Expenditures (Function Code 1400)



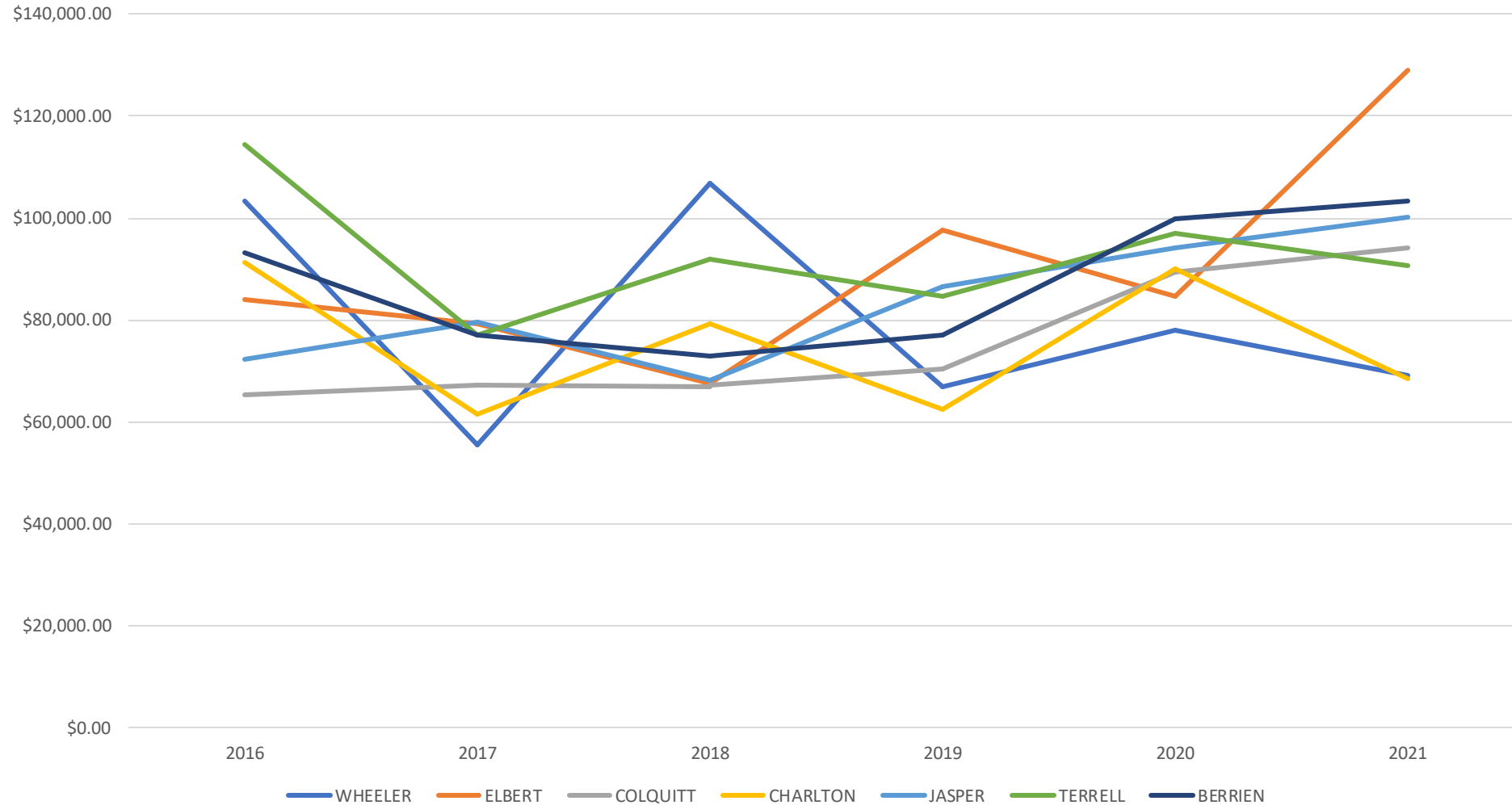
- Source: Report of Local Government Finance, Georgia DCA



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General Government Administration - Elections - Expenditures (Function Code 1400)



- Source: Report of Local Government Finance, Georgia DCA



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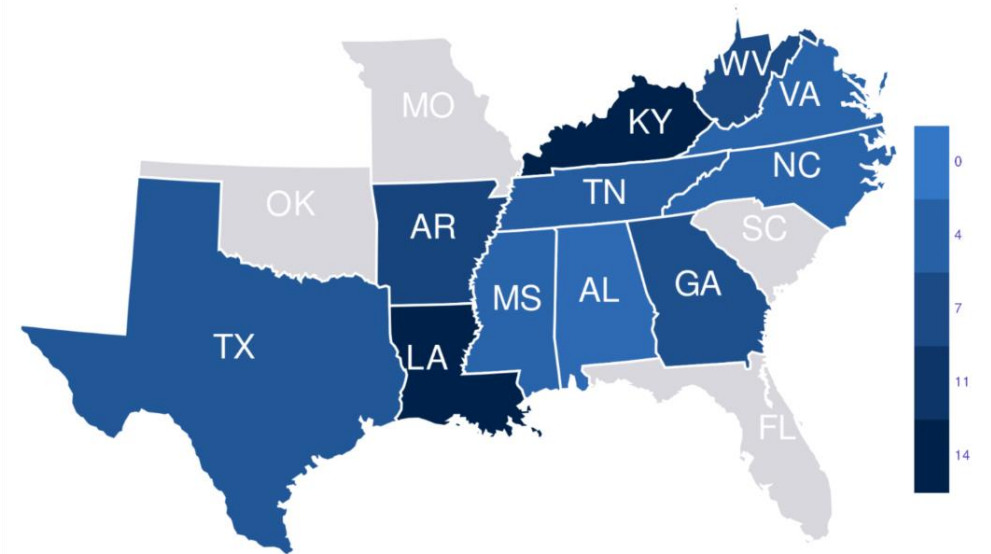
Election Administration in the South

- Centralized election equipment and financial responsibility are rare
 - Oklahoma, Louisiana, and South Carolina are the only three Southern states
- Local Government grant programs and one-time funding are common in decentralized states, particularly in legislated transitions
- Equipment standards and approvals are common
 - Paper-verified ballot generation, secrecy, automatic tabulation, capacity for write-in voting, and no internet/cell network connectivity, etc.
- In the South's decentralized election equipment states, Election Systems and Software (ES&S) (12 Southern States) and Hart InterCivic (7 States) are the most common approved vendors
 - Other approved vendors include Clear Ballot, Democracy Live, Diebold, Dominion (5, inc statewide in GA/LA), Populex, Sequoia, Unisyn, and Voting Works



Election Legislation in the South

- Since 2020, nearly 500 bills addressing voting or polling equipment have been filed in the South, with more than 65 enacted or sent to the governor—including every CSG South member state except **Florida, Missouri, Oklahoma, and South Carolina**.
- Most are aimed at securing electronic voting equipment physically and electronically or ensuring paper reports are available to audit electronic voting and tabulation methods.





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Recent Election Legislation in the South

- AL HB101 (2025)
 - Recurring \$2.3 million appropriations to support local elections administrators with electronic voting equipment;
- KY HB53 (2025)
 - Recurring \$1.2 million appropriations to support physical recounts/audits by local administrators – as all use electronic ballot scanners;
- TN SB2587 (2024)
 - Requires majority vote by local elections administrators when deciding what machines to purchase/use/retire.
- TX Several (2025)
 - Focus on ensuring a sealed/signed paper trail exists for each optical ballot scanner with an established “chain-of-custody.”
- WV HB 4438 (2022)
 - Specifies that any electronic voting system/equipment must store all voting data in at least three secure virtual back-up locations for verification purposes.



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