



Part 1 — Why Elections Look Different Today

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TRENTON, Ga. — Elections in Dade County have changed significantly over the years, evolving from a single election day every four years—conducted entirely with pen and paper—to a much more frequent and complex process. This year's election schedule listed eight separate elections. Expanded requirements set by state law have transformed election operations into a year-round responsibility for the county's sole full-time elections employee.

Modern Requirements Demand Real Infrastructure

Georgia law requires that all elections—from federal to local—use a uniform voting system comprising electronic ballot markers and ballot scanners, supplied or certified by the Secretary of State, producing secure, paper-based records of votes (O.C.G.A. § 21-2-300).

Counties are responsible for maintaining, transporting, and securely storing this equipment in compliance with state rules, which means having secure, climate-controlled storage, sufficient electrical capacity, and adequate workspace for maintenance and programming.

The Full-Year Scope of Elections Work

Early in-person voting is held for at least 17 consecutive days before most elections, including two mandatory Saturdays and the option for two Sundays (Georgia Secretary of State – Vote Early in Person, O.C.G.A. § 21-2-385).

Logic & Accuracy (L&A) testing of voting equipment is conducted before each election and often requires 5–7 full workdays depending on the number of precincts and complexity of the ballot.

Absentee ballot processing and early tabulation can take 10–15 additional days for each election cycle, while Election Day operations and post-election audits add another 5–7 days.

Individually, these tasks account for approximately 40–50 active workdays per election cycle. However, because Georgia law requires a runoff election if no candidate achieves a majority of votes, and runoffs effectively repeat the full process—early voting, testing, processing, and canvassing—the workload can double within a single election year AP News+1.

As a result, Lowanna Vaughan is managing election operations every week of the year, with repeated cycles and no true downtime.

One Person, Year-Round Responsibility

In Dade County, Vaughan is the only full-time county employee dedicated exclusively to elections. Unlike larger counties with election departments of five, ten, or more staff members, she handles every operational detail herself—voter registration, L&A testing, equipment logistics, ballot tabulation, post-election audits, and coordination of poll worker training.

Human Impact: Strain on Staff and Volunteers

Beyond technical duties, Vaughan is responsible for overseeing training for every poll worker before each election, as required by the Georgia Secretary of State (Georgia Poll Worker Manual, 2021). Without a dedicated elections facility, this often means setting up training and equipment in borrowed or shared spaces, then breaking them down again—sometimes multiple times in a week or even a day.

The result is a demanding, high-pressure environment that places strain not only on Vaughan but also on the county’s poll workers, who must adapt to shifting schedules and locations while maintaining compliance with state requirements.

Conclusion

Elections in Georgia are a year-round operation, governed by strict laws and equipment standards. For a small county like Dade—with only one full-time elections employee—the infrastructure and staffing challenges are significant. A dedicated elections facility isn’t about convenience; it’s about ensuring secure, efficient, and resilient administration of elections in accordance with Georgia law