

Can institutional reform protect election certification?



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Project Summary

Objective: Protect the election certification process in a way that is incentive-compatible.

Proposed Solution:
Non-partisan commissions to certify elections.

Pathways to Election Subversion

Types of candidates
who run for office.

Politicians responding
to incentives to
overturn elections.

- Persuasion
- **Insulation**



Politicians' Incentives

- Win reelection
- Get credit with voters
(Avoid blame)
- Non-partisan commissions provide cover

Do Commissions
Provide Cover?



Case of Interest: Voters who Think the Election is Not Free and Fair

Which statement better describes how you feel about the 2020 presidential election?

- The 2020 election was free and fair and Biden won.
- We do not yet know who truly won the election; more investigations are needed.
- The 2020 election was stolen from Trump.

Survey Experiment on Insulation

- Wash U Survey conducted by NORC (N=1,013)
- 314 Respondents who DIDN'T respond that election was "free and fair"
- Hypothetical news story vignette.
- Outcome: Approve of the Secretary of State

Treatment 1: SoS's Position

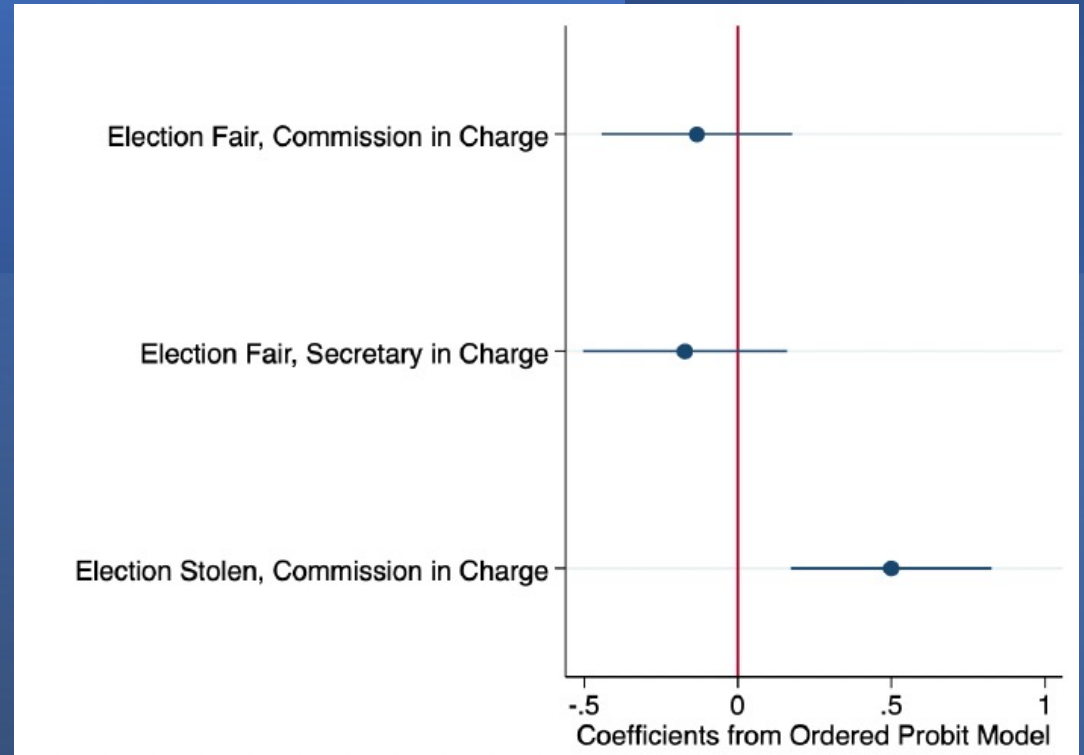
- "election was free and fair and the results should be certified"
- "election was stolen and the results should not be certified"

Treatment: Certifier

- Secretary of State
- Nonpartisan commission

Commission stolen condition leads to higher approval.

Other conditions not distinguishable.



Non-partisan commission insulates politicians (and the process)

Broad Support for Non-partisan Commissions

NORC Survey, N=1,013

In America, state governments oversee running elections. In some states, this duty is done by elected officials who are members of political parties. In other states, it is done by a nonpartisan commission with members who are appointed to the role of overseeing elections.

Who would you prefer to oversee elections in your state?

- Elected, partisan officials
- **Non-partisan, appointed commission**

Percent Choosing Nonpartisan Commission

Democrat	71%
Lean Democrat	85%
Independent	68%
Lean Republican	82%
Republican	72%

2020 Election...

Free and fair	76%
More investigations needed	70%
Stolen from Trump	74%

The Moral Hazard Problem

This may lead to more anti-democratic rhetoric.

BUT: Protects the certification process.

A seatbelt for democracy.



Summary

- Incentive-compatible solution that protects elections while allowing criticism.
- Broad consensus among voters for nonpartisan certification.



State officials deal with many important issues each year. Please read the following text, which discusses an issue you might have read about in the news 2 years ago.

The Secretary of State Discusses Whether the Election was Stolen

Elections in our state are certified by [a nonpartisan election commission composed of appointed members / the Secretary of State]. At the capital last week, the Secretary of State was asked about whether the state's election results from 2020 should be certified.

Secretary Whitaker, who has been serving since 2014 said, "This is the most passion I've seen regarding any election during in my time in office. I think the election was [free and fair and the results should be certified / stolen and the results should not be certified]."

The [nonpartisan commission / Secretary of State] officially certified the elections.

If you lived in this state, how much would you approve of the job Secretary Whitaker was doing?

Strongly Approve, Approve, Slightly Approve, Slightly Disapprove, Disapprove, Strongly Disapprove