

Accepted Manuscript

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PII: S0261-3794(16)30321-3

DOI: [10.1016/j.electstud.2016.06.015](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2016.06.015)

Reference: JELS 1762

To appear in: *Electoral Studies*

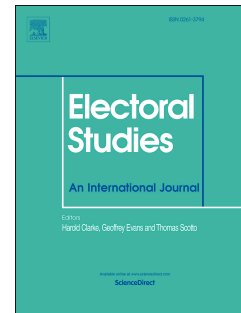
Received Date: 3 July 2014

Revised Date: 14 June 2016

Accepted Date: 22 June 2016

Please cite this article as: Sjoberg, F.M, Bring the Party Back in: Institutional Design for 'Smart Election Fraud', *Electoral Studies* (2016), doi: 10.1016/j.electstud.2016.06.015.

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Bring the Party Back in: Institutional Design for ‘Smart Election Fraud’

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Abstract

Autocrats face a dilemma. Continue with fraudulent electoral practices and risk revolt, or reduce fraud and risk losing elections. One solution is to structure electoral governance such that it allows for independence and professionalism at the center, lending credibility to the electoral process, and partisan local-level administration, enabling fraud at the micro level. Partisan poll workers can help deliver the vote by the use of ‘smart fraud’ – fraud that minimizes the risk of being caught and is used only when needed. In Armenia, the ruling party’s vote share, as a proportion of all registered voters, increases with 2.5 percent in polling stations where the chairperson was randomly assigned to the ruling party. Fraud forensics suggests that one of the mechanisms behind this was falsification of the results protocol during the count. I conjecture that fraud is only used in high-stakes elections and that election observers are unable to detect it.

Keywords: Election Fraud, Principal-Agent Theory, Electoral Governance, Experiments.

JEL Classification: C93 (Field Experiments), D72 (Political Processes and Rent-Seeking), D73 (Corruption).

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* Acknowledgements: Paper presented at the APSA 2013 Annual Meeting in Chicago, the ISA 2013 Annual Convention in San Francisco, and the ASN 2013 Convention in New York. For helpful comments I would like to thank Donald Green, Timothy Frye, Susan Hyde, Henry Hale, Andrew Little, Chris Dawes, Jesse Dillon Savage, Joshua Tucker, Arturas Rozenas, Thomas Zeitzoff, and Israel Marques. All mistakes remain my own. I would also like to thank Abdurashid Solijonov at International IDEA for sharing cross-national data.

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