**Can courts in non-democracies deter election fraud? De jure judicial independence, political competition, and election integrity**

Cole J. Harvey  
ORCID: 0000-0001-8202-250X  
[cole.j.harvey@okstate.edu](mailto:cole.j.harvey@okstate.edu)   
Assistant Professor  
Oklahoma State University

207 Social Sciences and Humanities  
Stillwater, OK 74078

**Abstract**: Many non-democracies hold multiparty elections, while also adopting institutions of *de jure* judicial independence; yet there is debate over how non-democratic courts can affect election integrity. This paper argues that increased *de jure* independence creates incentives for opposition recourse to the courts, which reduces election fraud due to greater legal exposure for election-manipulating agents and the ruling party. However, this effect occurs only when competition is low and the ruling party has limited incentive to intervene. These predictions are distinct from those of prior work, and are supported by analysis of cross-national election-year data from 1945-2014. Pre-processing techniques are used to reduce concerns about endogeneity and confounding. The results show that principal-agent dynamics can occur in manipulated elections even when incumbents remain in office, challenge the centrality of protest risk as a deterrent to manipulation, and offer a framework for predicting when *de jure* reforms translate to behavioral independence.

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