



New Models for Keeping Partisans out of Election Administration

Summary Version

In at least six swing states, elections in 2022 for secretary of state will feature well-funded “stop-the-st” candidates, who if elected, will be responsible for overseeing the administration of elections and are prepared to overturn unfavorable election results to help their side win. Similar threats are emerging at local level, where most of the core election functions of registering voters, administering polling stations, and tabulating results take place.

These scenarios underscore the need to address a unique vulnerability of U.S. election administration: lack of safeguards against party or candidate loyalists holding key election administration positions.

While partisan election administration is a long-standing feature of U.S. elections, our history also includes nominating commissions, which assist in the appointment process for state judges, and independent redistricting commissions, which determine state legislative and congressional district boundaries, can provide a model for election administration.

By contrast, constitutionally independent bodies run elections in 73 countries. The U.S. is the only country that allows high-ranking party members to lead state election administration.

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Judicial Nominating Commissions (JNCs) and Independent Redistricting Commissions

Applying These Models to State Election Administration

Summarized below are seven key attributes of these commission types that can provide model approaches for reforms to state election administration:

1. Appointment processes prevent control by one or both political parties, while providing meaningful input from them.
2. Appointment processes involve relevant stakeholders such as civil society organizations, professional associations, political independents, and third parties.
3. Appointments are made by a diverse group of stakeholders.
4. Explicit criteria help guide the work and output of the commissions.
5. Commissions are required to work transparently.
6. Commission processes include mechanisms for review by, or appeal to, branches of state government.
7. Commissions have constitutional status, providing protection for their functions and composition.

Recommendations for reform:

- ★ **States should establish independent commissions to draw district boundaries.**
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- ★ **At the local level, states should consider a nominating commission role for some local election positions and should carefully increase the use of nonpartisan elections.**

The report was written by Kevin Johnson and published by The Carter Center and Election Reformers Network. [It is available here.](#)

