

# USA and Mexico: Best democracies money can buy

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Global Research, September 16, 2012

[Progreso Weekly](#)

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Poverty & Social Inequality](#)

*“Do you really want to live in a country where one party is so desperate to win the White House that they go around trying to make it harder for people to vote if they’re people of color, poor people or first generation immigrants?” – Bill Clinton on Republican voter-ID laws*

Some friends look nostalgically at U.S. history as if our current situation means that a once-great and deeply principled America has eroded and collapsed.

Is this the America founded on slavery? The Constitution, which tried to mute every aspect of direct democracy?

The Tea Party rhetoric claims to represent the values of the Founding Fathers, who did not believe in democracy, religion, or free market nonsense. Democracy, to the wealthy elite then and now, meant that the property-less masses (the poor) would some day rule – if they learned to use the vote. To the oligarchs the majority are inferior people unfit to make decisions for the educated and financially well endowed. For the 1%, billionaires and their families, the idea of poorer people making decisions impacting on their wealth resonates sourly, or as they call it “class war.”

The oligarchs decided, long ago, that they were to permanently rule. The most recent development gained the Supreme Court’s help ([Citizens United](#)) so that the super-rich could “own” the 2012 election. The reactionary high court opened the door for super corporate donations to political campaigns. Compare gambling casino mogul Sheldon Adelson’s pledge of \$100 million to the modest amount a working person could afford to contribute.

Republicans have also tried to limit participation in voting by numerous means, including pushing so-called Voter ID laws that would demand photo identification of all voters. The less the masses vote, the better for the oligarchs. In Ohio, the GOP controls both houses of the Legislature, the governorship, the secretary of state’s office, and the state Supreme Court. Soon after the 2008 election, it imposed a draconian photo ID law designed to disenfranchise hundreds of thousands of suspected Democrats, as is being done in other states around the U.S. Since 2009, the Ohio GOP has purged roughly a million citizens from the state’s voter rolls. This accounts for some 15% of the roughly 5.2 million votes counted for president in the state in 2008. The purge focuses on counties that are predominantly urban and Democratic. In addition, electronic voting machines have been installed throughout the state, which are owned, operated, programmed and maintained – and will be tallied – by Republican-connected firms.

Ironically, Mexico’s wealthy elite may have begun to copy us. Or did our billionaires take lessons from their Mexican counterparts? A transnational army of election entrepreneurs has emerged that hires itself to the highest bidder on both sides of the border.

Before this year's July election, the Institutionalized Revolutionary Party (PRI) that governed Mexico for half a century until 2000 bought pre-paid gift cards and phone money cards for shoppers at a Mexican grocery store chain in return for their votes for PRI candidate Peña Nieto. A Congressional Research Service report issued on September 4, 2012, acknowledged that some independent domestic observation groups "found that vote-buying, intimidation, and other irregularities marred the electoral process." (Clare Ribando Seelke, Mexico's 2012 Elections, Congressional Research Service, September 4, 2012, p. 9)

Associated Press and British Guardian reporters interviewed shoppers who crowded one Soriana grocery store two days after the elections to redeem the cards. The shoppers told the journalists that PRI officials had given them the food or telephone money-cards, in return for their votes for PRI's candidate.

On July 4th, the Guardian reported that at least 28% of the voters interviewed acknowledged that they encountered vote buying as well as coercive tactics on behalf of PRI candidates. President Obama nevertheless immediately called the PRI presidential candidate to congratulate him and praise the democratic process of the country and its institutions."

PRI, like the U.S. Republican Party, bought the cooperation of the TV giants, Televisa and Tv Azteca, and launched a massive propaganda campaign. On the print stage, PRI backers invested heavily in Excelsior, El Universal, and El Sol de Mexico newspapers and got favorable stories. In Laredo, for example, the program "*Buen día Laredo*" reported positively on PRI and/or PAN and always negatively on the PRD candidate, or simply did not mention him or his campaign.

This barrage included stories of bogus opinion polls declaring PRI the clear favorite by just making the numbers up. Several PRI governors even used the budget from their respective state governments to finance the PRI campaign, not exactly a legal procedure. That was the case of the state of Mexico whose governor was also the PRI presidential candidate.

Mexico's so-called independent Instituto Federal Electoral and Tribunal Electoral del Poder Judicial set up to monitor elections and ensure fairness did nothing to stop the electoral fraud, or show that votes for PRD did not get counted, or that PAN and PRI votes got over counted. Instead of recognizing obvious illegalities, these institutions neither looked at the evidence nor sought it, and refused to even consider any of the charges. The Tribunal was even mandated to study, analyze and investigate the charges submitted, but the judges certified the election as legal and proper.

The Mexican Tribunal Electoral denied the petition filed by PRD candidate Manuel Lopez Obrador who demanded a reversal of the election results and called for a new election. But the presiding electoral judge announced that "there is no proof of vote-buying." The judges did not interview any card recipients and ignored video evidence lending credibility to these claims.

The Mexican high court asserted there was no proof of electoral crime. Yet, the PRD and a citizens' movement had delivered to the judges a 638-page document with thousands of examples of illegal activities affecting the election. The judges didn't open the document but nevertheless declared: "It has not been demonstrated that they (the cards) were given to citizens, or if that occurred, that it was done on condition they vote for a given candidate." The presiding judge later modified the remarks, saying that the people who received the

free food cards were already committed PRI voters and workers anyway.

Eduardo Huchim of Alianza Civica, a UN funded organization, described the 2012 election as “neither clean nor fair.” This was not Mexico’s first election theft. The great Mexican revolution in 1910 began under the banner of “effective suffrage, no reelections.” Yet, electoral thefts continued in 1939, 1987 and 2006. Viva la democracia.

Mexico’s elite still attempts to hide its political hands because their Supreme Court has not yet informed their people that corporate wealth is a form of freedom of expression as Citizens United did for the American public.

So there is plenty of proof that U.S. and Mexican super elites have modernized election theft. The old days of stuffed ballot boxes and dead people voting now appear as primitive larceny techniques.

The piety of both elites about how they cherish democracy has become downright offensive.

*Saul Landau’s film WILL THE REAL TERRORIST PLEASE STAND UP screened in Portland Oregon’s Clinton Theater on Sept. 13.*

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