

Immigration and Usurpation

Elites, Power, and the People's Will

By Fredo Arias-King

Americans are aware that their political class may not always act in their best interest. This belief is enshrined in the American character, its laws, and the very philosophy underpinning the U.S. Constitution. The Founding Fathers crafted things so that the “knaves” will be forced to abide by the will of the people, but they warned that their “natural progress” is to find ways to remain in power and increase that power at the people’s expense. They therefore also urged eternal vigilance, spiritedness, and the occasional revolt of the people.

Thomas Jefferson, James Madison and others got it right—the knaves have, by and large, behaved, and their actions largely reflect in some way the will of the American people. Americans do not need to engage their politicians in an uncivil way—as happens most elsewhere—since the ballot box, the media, and other constitutional tools largely suffice. Indeed, the American political system works remarkably well. However, there are a handful of topics where the elites do not act in the interests of those they govern. Of these, the most notorious is the contentious issue of immigration. Why are politicians so keen on mass immigration while the common American is not? This has perplexed analysts.

When I aided the foreign relations of presidential candidate and president-elect Vicente Fox back in 1999 and 2000, I met with almost 80 U.S. congressmen and senators during numerous trips and at several events. With just over 50 of them, my colleagues and I spoke about immigration in some depth, as it is one of the important bilateral topics. My findings were reported in a *Backgrounder* published by the Center for Immigration Studies called “Politics by Other Means.”¹ It is a dense and academic paper, but the basic finding was: Indeed, American politicians are overwhelmingly pro-immigration, for a variety of reasons, and they do not always admit this to their constituents. Of those 50 legislators, 45 were unambiguously pro-immigration, even asking us at times to “send more.” This was true of both Democrats and Republicans.

These empirical findings seemed to confirm what some analysts without that level of access termed as a political “perfect storm” of widespread political-elite support for immigration despite its general unpopularity with the average American. The paradox is that immigration is the only issue (perhaps besides trade policy) that represents a notorious discrepancy between elite and popular opinion in the United States.² But this contradicts the established conventional wisdom of a representative democracy such as the United States. If mass immigration from Latin America has debatable benefits for the United States as a whole, if a majority of the American people is against it, and if immigrants cannot vote until they become naturalized (which can take years after their arrival), why would nine-tenths of the

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legislators we spoke with be so keen on increasing immigration?

Before these encounters, I believed that it was a problem of either diffusion of responsibility, “creeping non-decision,” or collective rationalization with those legislators, but that was dispelled the more of them we met. Most of them seemed to be aware of the negative or at least doubtful consequences of mass immigration from Latin America, while still advocating mass immigration.³

The familiar reasons usually discussed by the critics were there: Democrats wanted increased immigration because Latin American immigrants tend to vote Democrat once naturalized (we did not meet a single Democrat that was openly against mass immigration); and Republicans like immigration because their sponsors (businesses and churches) do. But there were other, more nuanced reasons that we came upon, usually not discussed by the critics, and probably more difficult to detect without the type of access that we, as a Mexican delegation, had.

Their “Natural Progress”

Of a handful of motivations, one of the main ones (even if unconscious) of many of these legislators can be found in what the U.S. Founding Fathers called “usurpation.” Madison, Jefferson, Alexander Hamilton, John Jay and others devised a system and embedded the Constitution with mechanisms to thwart the “natural” tendency of the political class to usurp power—to become a permanent elite lordling over pauperized subjects, as was the norm in Europe at the time. However, the Founding Fathers seem to have based the logic of their entire model on the independent character of the American folk. After reviewing the different mechanisms and how

they would work in theory, they wrote in the Federalist Papers that in the end, “If it be asked, what is to restrain the House of Representatives from making legal discriminations in favor of themselves and a particular class of the society? I answer: the genius of the whole system; the nature of just and constitutional laws; and above all, the vigilant and manly spirit which actuates the people of America ...”⁴ With all his emphasis on reason and civic virtue as the basis of a functioning and decentralized democratic polity, Jefferson speculated whether Latin American societies could be governed thus.⁵

While Democratic legislators we spoke with welcomed the Latino vote, they seemed more interested in those immigrants and their offspring as a tool to increase the role of the government in society and the economy. Several of them tended to see Latin American immigrants and even Latino constituents as both more dependent on and accepting of active government programs and the political class guaranteeing those programs, a point they emphasized more than the voting per se. Moreover, they saw Latinos as more loyal and “dependable” in supporting a patron-client system and in building reliable patronage networks to circumvent the exigencies of political life as devised by the Founding Fathers and expected daily by the average American.

Republican lawmakers we spoke with knew that naturalized Latin American immigrants and their offspring vote mostly for the Democratic Party, but still most of them (all except five) were unambiguously in favor of amnesty and of continued mass immigration (at least from Mexico). This seemed paradoxical, and explaining their motivations was more challenging. However, while acknowledging that they may not now receive their votes, they believed that these immigrants are more malleable than the existing American: That with enough care, convincing, and “teaching,” they could be converted, be grateful, and become dependent on them. Republicans seemed to idealize the patron-client relation with Hispanics as much as their Democratic competitors did. Curiously, three out of the five lawmakers that declared their opposition to amnesty and increased immigration (all Republicans), were from border states.

Also curiously, the Republican enthusiasm for increased immigration also was not so much about voting in the end, even with “converted” Latinos. Instead, these legislators seemingly believed that they could weaken the restraining and frustrating straightjacket devised by the Founding Fathers and abetted by American norms. In that idealized “new” United States, political uncertainty, demanding constituents, difficult elections, and accountability in general would “go away” after tinkering with the People, who have given lawmakers their privileges but who, like a Sword of Damocles, can also “unfairly” take them away. Hispanics would acquiesce and assist in the “natural progress” of these legislators to remain in power and increase the scope of that power. In this sense, Republicans and Democrats were similar.

While I can recall many accolades for the Mexican immigrants and for Mexican-Americans (one white congressman even gave me a “high five” when recalling that Californian Hispanics were headed for majority status), I remember few instances when a legislator spoke well of his or her white constituents. One even called them “rednecks,” and apologized to us on their behalf for their incorrect attitude on immigration. Most of them seemed to advocate changing the ethnic composition of the United States *as an end in itself*. Jefferson and Madison would have perhaps understood why this is so—enthusiasm for mass immigration seems to be correlated with examples of undermining the “just and constitutional laws” they devised.

One leading Republican senator over a period of months was advising us, through a mutual acquaintance, about which mechanisms to follow and which other legislators to lobby in order to ensure passage of the amnesty proposal. In the meantime, he would speak on television about the need to “militarize” the border. This senator was recently singled out by a taxpayer’s advocacy group as a leader in “pork”-related politics.

Bill Richardson, who had served in Clinton’s cabinet and later became governor of New Mexico, kindly stopped to speak to our delegation at the Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles. He commented favorably to us: “What do Hispan-

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ics want? Fully funded government programs!” *The Economist* mentioned about his state:

*New Mexico is a poor place, with one of the highest proportion of people living on food stamps ... Its political tradition also long had a Latin American feel, based around a padrón system of clients and bosses. The bosses ran grocery stores, gave you credit, helped you if you needed a job. And all you had to do was vote for the Democrats ... New Mexican politics is still about jobs, contracts and personal loyalty, not ideology. And Mr. Richardson personifies this.*⁶

Trailer-park poverty combined with a cult of personality, where government initiatives regularly bear the governor’s name, as they would with some Latin American potentate (the governor is half Mexican himself), prevails in a state that is 40 percent Hispanic, including Hispanics already many generations in the United States.

Those that have come out supporting amnesty are also associated with other attempts to undermine the Jeffersonian and Madisonian model of democracy. Sen. Arlen Specter, for instance, a leading supporter of amnesty, years ago proposed another bill that would have changed the outcome of elections based on quotas, whereby electoral outcomes could be changed by a federal judge.⁷

Some legislators had also mentioned to us (oftentimes laughing) how they had “defanged” or “gutted” anti-immigration bills and measures, by neglecting to fund this program or tabling that provision, or deleting the other measure, etc. “Yes, we passed that law, but it can’t work because we also...” was a usual comment to assuage the Mexican delegations.

What could be motivating U.S. legislators to do the opposite, that is, to see their constituents—already politically mature and proven as responsible and civic-minded—as an obstacle needing replacement? In other words, why would they want to replace a nation that works remarkably well (that Sarmiento was hoping to emulate), with another that has trouble forming stable, normal countries?

In light of what we learned from speaking to them privately, it is surprising that many legislators have gone public recently with their pro-immigration views, as opposed to simply adding their votes discreetly and imposing a *fait accompli*. This is another conundrum, but may be explained because legislators also suffer a collective-action problem. My feeling is that if the vote on granting amnesty to the illegal migrants was up for a secret vote, then perhaps we would see a 90 percent vote in favor, coinciding with my random sample from six years ago.

One such example of “natural progress” that legislators attempted to impose with no debate was when Pennsylvania state legislators—in the middle of the night before a recess—in July 2005 passed a bill giving themselves a modest pay raise. The civic reaction and spontaneous popular mobilization was such (with effigies of pigs carried by demonstrators calling their legislators “Harrisburg Hogs”), the legislators recanted and, with only one dissenting vote, repealed their pay raise weeks later.

To Govern Is to Populate

A group of Argentine statesmen in the 19th century sought to populate their country with immigrants from certain parts of Europe, believing that they were more politically mature and more propitious for a stable state than the *criollo* and *mestizo* populations in their country at the time. One of those statesmen, President Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, had a slogan: “To govern is to populate,” perhaps because Argentina traditionally has been both under-populated and ungovernable.

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Mexicans are kind and hardworking, with a legendary hospitality, and unlike some European nations, harbor little popular ambitions to impose models or ideologies on others. However, Mexicans are seemingly unable to produce anything but corrupt and tyrannical rulers, oftentimes even accepting them as the norm, unaffected by allegations of graft or abuse.⁸ Mexico, and Latin American societies in general, seem to suffer from what an observer called “moral relativism,” accepting the “natural progress” of the political class rather than challenging it, and also appearing more susceptible to “miracle solutions” and demagogic political appeals. Mexican intellectuals speak of the corrosive effects of Mexican culture on the institutions needed to make democracy work, and surveys reveal that most of the population accepts and expects corruption from the political class.⁹ A sociological study conducted throughout the region found that Latin Americans are indeed highly susceptible to *clientelismo*, or partaking in patron-client relations, and that Mexico was high even by regional standards.¹⁰

In a Latin environment, there are fewer costs to behaving “like a knave,” which explains the relative failure of most Spanish-speaking countries in the Hemisphere: Pauperized populations with rich and entrenched knaves. Montesquieu’s separation-of-powers model breaks down in Latin America (though essentially all constitutions are based on it) since elites do not take their responsibilities seriously and easily reach extra-legal “understandings” with their colleagues across the branches of government, oftentimes willingly making the judicial and legislative powers subservient to a generous executive, and giving the population little recourse and little choice but to challenge the system in its entirety.

These pathologies are already evident across the border. For example, at the height of the Monica Lewinsky scandal, when even President Clinton’s

strongest backers such as Rep. Richard Gephardt were distancing themselves from him and calling on the president to “tell the truth,” the Hispanic Caucus in the U.S. Congress lent its support to the president. Rep. Esteban Torres stated “We’re going to stand by him to the end ... no matter what!”¹¹ The case of the “unconditional support” by the Hispanics in Congress to their patron demonstrated why the Montesquieu-Madisonian model had difficulty functioning in the Latin American context. This type of unconditional support seems to be what professional politicians of both parties expect from their Hispanic constituents and allies.

When thinking of populating as a way of obtaining power, perhaps these U.S. legislators, rather than from the statesman Sarmiento, took an unconscious cue from another Latin American leader who used migration and ethnic policy for less laudable goals. Mexican President Luis Echeverría (1970-76), who began the cycle of political violence and economic crisis from which the country has yet to recover, pursued a policy of moving hundreds of thousands of impoverished people from the country’s south to the more prosperous and dynamic northern states, where they remain to this day, mostly in shantytowns. His goal was to neutralize those states’ more active civic culture that threatened his power—as these states were at the time the main source of opposition to his dictatorial ambitions. These pauperized and dependent migrants and their offspring would provide a ready source of votes for the ruling party along with a mobilizable mass to counter (politically as well as physically) the more civic-oriented middle classes of those northern states and “crack” their will to challenge his corporatist regime. Along with other extra-constitutional tools (he almost succeeded in canceling the constitution to remain indefinitely as president), migration from undeveloped areas was used by Echeverría as “politics by other means.” Echeverría, in other words, was the ultimate knave.

Do the U.S. legislators have an overt and well thought-out “plan,” as Echeverría did? That is unlikely.

Unlike Echeverría, these 45 U.S. legislators (especially the Republican ones) may simply be following a string of what can be called “rational short-

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termisms,” that seem beneficial now even though they may unwittingly lead to adverse outcomes for them in the end. Like a diet rich in fats and sugar brings jolt of energy and pleasure in the short run but causes health problems in the longer term, these congressmen still have incentives to allow and encourage mass immigration because of its low political cost for them and the perceived short-term benefits it brings (for them and the special interests that fund them).

If these “rational short-termisms” exist within a given individual (where he assumes both the benefits and the costs, such as with an irresponsible diet), they are more prevalent in a country, as those accruing the benefits are not those who pay the costs, and have an incentive to organize themselves to pursue the behavior leading to those outcomes. Because of collective-action problems, those benefiting from mass immigration are better organized, even if they are in the minority and even if they are vaguely aware that “someone else” pays for their largesse. These groups only see the assets, not the liabilities. By nature, legislators should prefer these short-termisms, since the payoffs are immediate and directly attributed to a political figure, whereas the costs can be pushed into the future. The payoffs and benefits of more long-term policies are unlikely to be associated with a particular political figure and become, essentially, public goods. Just as there is a large body of literature on “economic failure,” we should begin to explore a related concept—“political failure,” which could be the Achilles heel of the American and other models of representative democracy. In the end, the result of mass Latin American immigration will not likely present the stark choice of democracy versus non-democracy for the United States, but the *quality* of democracy may indeed be affected.

Acción Directa as a Double-Edged Sword

What awaits the United States when a critical mass of the American people realizes the immigration issue is little different than what happened in Pennsylvania with the pay-raise issue? What if they decide to organize?

These legislators are probably correct that, by acquiescing to mass immigration, they will eventually “crack” the immigration-control advocates. They do not need to win or even engage in a debate if they can change the terms of the game so decisively. However, they have only taken into account the *legal* or *civilized* resistance—from those who write in the papers or volunteer peacefully at the border. In Latin America, people engage in uncivil direct action because they have come to realize that attempting to convince their elites that their antisocial behavior has adverse consequences for the country—and expecting that this will dissuade them from engaging in it—is largely a futile exercise. But in the United States as well, once immigration-control advocates realize they cannot reach their goals through legal means, this could breed a form of resistance that has not occurred yet, but cannot be discounted offhand.

The degree of usurpation and neglect of their fiduciary duty by legislators could provoke immigration-reform advocates to engage increasingly in civil resistance, so that instead of influencing political institutions through civic engagement (as Americans traditionally have), they may attempt to politicize individual institutions. Their direct actions are already being reported: local officers taking it upon themselves to detain illegal migrants, sit-ins at immigration offices, vandalizing of Mexican restaurants, threatening calls to the Hispanic mayor of Los Angeles, etc. Once these types of mobilizations begin, they will be difficult to stop.

Some Americans may take a cue from Spanish/Latin American culture itself and engage in what Spaniards call *acción directa*, or “direct action.” A Spaniard once lamented that “In this country, nobody votes, but everyone protests.” Immigration advocates should not be surprised if Latin American

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immigrants and their offspring continue their tradition of direct action and ignoring laws and institutions—as the recent mass protests in cities across the country demonstrate. But they should also not be surprised if Americans also learn to pursue *acción directa*. An interesting test for the U.S. political class will be how they respond to Americans utilizing direct action, since they seem to tolerate and even encourage it for Latin American immigrants and their offspring. So far, their reaction has been predictable—accusing peaceful volunteers of being “vigilantes” and labeling critics as “racist,” while backing down in the face of mass protests by the illegal immigrants. There were even reports that the U.S. government had handed over to the Mexican government the names of the “Minutemen” critics and border-control volunteers.

Moreover, those who challenge through extra-legal means the extra-constitutional and *fait accompli* pro-immigration methods of the elites would, paradoxically, be abiding more by the spirit and even letter of the U.S. Constitution than the political class being targeted by them. The Federalist Papers are replete with this philosophy. If they do so effectively, the reaction of the U.S. Congress may be the same as it was for the Pennsylvania legislature in the aftermath of the pay-raise scandal. Both policies are difficult to defend openly and publicly with an engaged citizenry.

If Americans do indeed take up civil disobedience and *acción directa*, hopefully they would realize that targeting Mexicans will not solve their problem, because even if for some reason they could “neutralize” Mexico as a source of mass immigration, soon they would be targeting Indonesians or Africans or South Americans. But that would be attacking the symptoms and not the root cause of their malaise.

Realizing this, what other events could turn the tables in favor of moderate and civic-minded immigration-reform advocates?

One, if these politicians begin to realize that the consequences of mass immigration *for them* are not what they expected—when the string of “rational short-termisms” crashes in the rocks of failed electoral campaigns or mass mobilization by critics of immigration against their political careers. Perhaps that is why three of the five lawmakers critical of mass immigration we met with are from border states. They perhaps have already come to realize that their “fantasy constituents” were different than expected. But this realization is unlikely to come any time soon to the remaining lawmakers.

Two, if a critical mass of Americans of Mexican and other Latin American descent take the lead in opposing the openly partisan and irredentist leaders mobilizing the illegal immigrants and the Latino citizens, since it is those types of leaders and provocateurs, not average populations at large, who start ethnic conflicts, as in Yugoslavia and Northern Ireland.¹² But this is also unlikely because of the collective-action problem. American Latinos who criticize mass immigration tend not to organize, as they are especially targeted by the pro-immigration Latino “leaders.”

A third peaceful way to close the gap between elite and popular opinion on the immigration issue is to pass certain political reforms that would help to assuage lawmakers’ concerns for their political and financial stability. Increasing their (already-high) salaries may be a small price to pay to reduce their proclivity to find solutions for their “natural progress” elsewhere, such as with immigration. However, in this case the medicine may be worse than the illness.

A fourth way would be for a political entrepreneur to successfully use popular discontent with mass immigration to reach power. This is essentially what happened in Denmark. There, the antisocial behavior of Middle Eastern and other immigrants was largely ignored by both main parties and the press, both also displaying an elite consensus against the population’s antipathy for immigrants and for further immigration. The parties had even agreed between them not to make immigration an issue in

campaigns or on television debates. Eventually, a political entrepreneur named Anders Fogh Rasmussen used the immigration issue to capture power inside his party, and then go on to win the general elections in 2001. As prime minister he enjoys popular support for his tough immigration and law-and-order policies, which also coincided with other reforms against big government and the welfare state. He was reelected in 2005, and even the opposition Social Democrats have dropped their prior position and now largely agree with Rasmussen’s views on immigration.

Bilateral Codependence

Some American and Mexican pundits argue that the outcome of the amnesty debate will affect the way Mexicans view the United States and their own democracy. The argument goes that if the U.S. Congress does not pass a law favorable to the undocumented workers, there will be a Mexican backlash against the United States that could ensure the victory of the illiberal, anti-American Left. However, this argument assumes that Mexico (through its population and political elites) acts in a rational way, and that these American overtures will be understood and appreciated (much the same way that France also understood and appreciated the American role in its liberation from Nazi Germany). However, the same argument was made by Russian elites and their American sympathizers during the debate on expanding NATO, with the argument that if America pursued its interests (expanding NATO), this would cause an irreversible collapse of Russian democracy and a backlash from the Kremlin. This argument held sway for years at the Clinton White House. In the end, NATO expanded and Moscow’s relations with its former imperial colonies and with NATO itself actually improved.

Rather than rational and mutually beneficial, U.S. bilateral relations with Mexico (as it was with Russia in the 1990s before NATO expansion) can instead be called “codependence,” which is defined by the *Gale Encyclopedia of Psychology* as “silent or even cheerful tolerance of unreasonable behavior from others,” or even a pathology of trying to fix things for other people and rescue them, which in

turn encourages a certain behavior from the object to be rescued. These sacrifices and concessions (with countries as with people) produce a sense of entitlement and an unending string of additional unreasonable demands. The IMF also engaged in a form of codependence with Moscow in the 1990s—the more money that was lent to the Kremlin, the fewer reforms it implemented, and the more anti-U.S. and anti-Western rhetoric it engaged in, with much of that money going to finance the war in Chechnya, for its weapons industries, and for its political class.¹³

During the 18 months when I aided Fox's foreign relations, in those meetings with what became the new Mexican elite I do not recall so many discussions about "what can we do to make tough decisions to reform Mexico," but rather more "how can we get more concessions from the United States." Indeed, Fox largely continued governing the country as his predecessors did, even appointing as head of the federal police agency an Echeverría loyalist who was allegedly involved in a deadly extortion attempt against a museum owner in 1972. According to several leading world rankings on corruption, quality of government, development, and competitiveness, Mexico actually worsened during Fox's presidency.¹⁴ Lacking internal or external pressure, the Mexican elites have taken the path of least resistance, which is not the best outcome for the country. Paradoxically, as happens in co-dependent relations, a firm but polite defense of American interests by Washington would force the Mexican elites to act and in the end (surely after a brief period of acrimonious recriminations) would be beneficial for Mexico, much as the European Union's tough accession laws force elites in lesser-developed aspiring members (Spain in the 1980s and Central European countries in the 1990s) to adopt painful and otherwise politically unfeasible reforms that affect special interests but that benefit average citizens. After all, the gap between elite and popular aspirations in these countries is wider than in the United States, and on a broader range of issues.

This co-dependence is perhaps nowhere more evident than the personal relations of the political classes of Mexico and the United States. When speaking to these congressmen, we noticed an af-

finity toward the corrupt party we were attempting to overthrow in Mexico. Several had visited Mexico and apparently enjoyed lavish treatment from their hosts, even mentioning how some of the things they enjoyed in Mexico would not be possible at home.

Even though the Mexican political class is notoriously corrupt, they can often count on stronger support in Washington than can several more worthy world leaders who are genuinely attempting to reform and improve their countries. The history of the Bush family is symptomatic.

While snubbing pro-American reformers in the newly liberated Eastern Europe, George H.W. Bush did go out of his way to accommodate Mexico and its leader Carlos Salinas. Then-vice president and presidential candidate Bush openly endorsed Salinas after the latter's fraudulent election in 1988, a favor that Salinas returned four years later when he met only with Bush and snubbed his Democratic rival, Bill Clinton. As presidents, Salinas and Bush crafted NAFTA, and then Bush assisted Salinas in joining the OECD (though Mexico was not qualified) and was even attempting to promote him to head the WTO before Salinas's political star collapsed amid a torrent of corruption and political murders. Whereas Lech Wałęsa—the slayer of communism and harbinger of democracy for Poland and the rest of east-central Europe—publicly scolded his fellow former president George H.W. Bush in a Prague meeting in 1999 for having done much less than expected for the transformation of his country and the region as a whole, Salinas remains a close friend and admirer of Bush Sr. to this day. While Bush Sr. went out of his way to help Salinas, other deserving reformers besides Wałęsa also complained of having been ignored by Bush Sr., even in countries more important to U.S. security and prosperity than Mexico. For example, Bush Sr. repeatedly refused to give even a modicum of assistance (moral or financial) to the Russian government of acting Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar during the risky and painful reforms launched to dismantle the Soviet legacy and attempt to put Russia on a reform and democratic path. Bush's lackadaisical and lukewarm relations with such figures have been widely criticized, and seem counterintuitive. Gaidar's failure can largely be traced to the lack of political and

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financial support from the West, and the United States in particular, for his reforms.

In April 2000, candidate George W. Bush followed in his father's footsteps when he tacitly but unambiguously endorsed the candidate of Salinas's ruling party against a then little-known opposition figure named Vicente Fox, perhaps believing that the official-party candidate, the former secret-police chief Francisco Labastida, would engage in a *quid pro quo* as president. Labastida himself could not receive the honor in person on April 7, 2000, since he had been fingered by the U.S. press as a possible target of the Drug Enforcement Administration because of his record as governor. Instead, he sent his wife to meet with Bush. Florida governor Jeb Bush knew for many years and apparently also received lavish treatment from Salinas's brother Raúl, before Raúl was arrested on corruption and murder charges and spent the next decade in a Mexican high-security prison. Bush Sr. had a long friendship and business relations with Jorge Díaz Serrano, then director of the Mexican oil monopoly PEMEX, before he was also arrested in a power struggle and accused of embezzling over \$50 million. The long-time politicians of the Hank Rhon family, who were suspected of laundering drug money and who continue to win elections in Mexico, were also reported to have contributed money to the gubernatorial campaigns of George W. Bush from a Texas bank they own.¹⁵ To their credit, no overtly illegal practice has been proven against the Bush family in their dealings with Mexico, but the appearance of admiration toward its ruling classes cannot be easily discounted.

Though similar stories involving lesser politicians do not make headlines, several lawmakers we met also had a special, giddy mystique of Mexico as a place where moneyed leaders coexist with tame, grateful citizens. It would seem that the American political class has a special affinity for their colleagues south of the border. The appeal of their lavishness and impunity seems to strike a positive chord in the American politicians, who perhaps resent being held accountable by their citizens, who cannot become wealthy from politics, and who may be removed from power "unfairly" and without warning.

Conclusion

Samuel Huntington speculated that the American "creed" (values and beliefs) cannot be used to openly oppose mass immigration.¹⁶ That may change. So far, the immigration debate has centered on the immigrants themselves—whether they are worthy or unworthy. This debate is a red herring, since average Americans are unusually kind and restrained in the face of mass immigration, something that cannot be said about other nations (including Mexico).¹⁷ Recent poll findings from Zogby challenge the popular belief that the average American somehow has negative or overtly prejudicial feelings toward Mexicans in particular.¹⁸ However, Huntington did not take into account the possibility that the debate could yet be framed in terms of potential usurpation from the political class using immigration as a tool. If an organizeable mass of Americans comes to suspect that mass immigration from Latin America is being used by the political class to undermine their democracy and as a tool to liberate the political elites from the Jeffersonian and Madisonian constraints, then indeed we may witness a reaction—but hopefully not against the immigrants themselves, as they are also objects of elite manipulations in more than one country.

The Founding Fathers also prescribed a cure for usurpation. Hopefully the American people will not apply it so literally, for the sake of those legislators.

End Notes

- ¹ “Politics by Other Means: The ‘Why’ of Immigration to the United States,” Center for Immigration Studies *Backgrounders*, December 2003, <http://www.cis.org/articles/2003/back1703.html> .
- ² “See Elite vs. Public Opinion: An Examination of Divergent Views on Immigration,” by Roy Beck and Steven A. Camarota, Center for Immigration Studies *Backgrounders*, December 2002, <http://www.cis.org/articles/2002/back1402.html> .
- ³ Maybe this is where immigration policy differs from trade policy. At least the elites that promote free trade with other countries do genuinely believe it benefits the U.S. economy and the average person, and the evidence proves them right.
- ⁴ The Federalist Papers, No. 57.
- ⁵ Jefferson wrote “I wish I could give better hopes of our southern brethren. ... what will then become of them? Ignorance and bigotry, like other insanities, are incapable of self-government. They will fall under military despotism ...” Jefferson letter to Marquis de Lafayette, 4 May 1817, in <http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/P/tj3/writings/brf/jefl249.htm>
- ⁶ “Bill Richardson’s Story,” *The Economist*, 29 May 2004, p. 34.
- ⁷ S 1992 (vote No. 177, 97th Cong.).
- ⁸ An analyst actually argued that allegations of corruption and abuse have a positive impact on a politician’s career throughout Latin America. Andrés Oppenheimer, “Los más denunciados, los más votados,” *Reforma*, 17 September 2002, p. 33A.
- ⁹ Surveys indeed reveal a distrust of institutions by the citizenry, but also a distrust of each other—55 percent thought “most people in Mexico are corrupt,” whereas 25 percent believed most other Mexicans are honest. See the *Reforma* survey focused on corruption, in “La cultura del soborno,” *Reforma*, 29 August 2002, 8A. Moreover, social status and education seem to be positively correlated with corruption. Another survey by Transparency International revealed that the younger and more educated Mexicans are actually more likely to engage in corruption, and that most people believe public officials are entitled to gain financially from their positions. See Leonardo Valero, “Son más corruptos los jóvenes, revelan,” *Reforma*, 5 April 2002, 7A.
- ¹⁰ The survey was conducted in 18 Latin American countries by Latinobarómetro. The question was if the respondent knew of someone who had received privileges for sympathizing with the party in power. The average for Latin America was 18 percent, whereas the Mexican figure was 34 percent. “Lidera México en clientelismo,” *Reforma*, 30 October 2005, A1.
- ¹¹ CNN Headline News, 4 August 1998.
- ¹² This is the theory of Fintan O’Toole, *The Lie of the Land: Irish Identities* (London: Verso, 1997). O’Toole’s writings on Yugoslavia include “Serbian aim to kill all Kosovans is nothing new,” *The Irish Times*, 5 May 1999.
- ¹³ See Stephan Hedlund, “Russia and the IMF: A Sordid Tale of Moral Hazard,” *Demokratizatsiya*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (2001), http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3996/is_200101/ai_n8944035 .
- ¹⁴ See my article “Mexico’s Wasted Chance,” *The National Interest*, Winter 2005-6.
- ¹⁵ Steve Sailer, “Latino Magazine Probes Bushes’ Mexican Contacts,” United Press International, 23 February 2001. See also Alan Zarembo, “Bush Family Ties,” *Newsweek International*, 26 February 2001.
- ¹⁶ Samuel Huntington, “The Hispanic Challenge,” *Foreign Policy*, March/April 2004.
- ¹⁷ See “Mexico’s Glass House: How the Mexican constitution treats foreign residents, workers and naturalized citizens,” by J. Michael Waller, Center for Security Policy Occasional Paper No. 7, April 2006, http://www.centerforsecuritypolicy.org/Mexicos_Glass_House.pdf , and “Mexico’s Immigration Law: Let’s Try it Here at Home,” by J. Michael Waller, Center for Security Policy Occasional Paper No. 8, April 2006, http://www.centerforsecuritypolicy.org/Mexicos_Immigration_Law.pdf .
- ¹⁸ See “Zogby Poll: Americans, Mexicans Want Closer Ties, But Suspicion Abounds,” 19 March 2006, <http://www.zogby.com/news/ReadNews.dbm?ID=1082> .



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Backgrounder

Immigration and Usurpation

Elites, Power, and the People's Will

By Fredo Arias-King

Americans are aware that their political class may not always act in their best interest. This belief is enshrined in the American character, its laws, and the very philosophy underpinning the U.S. Constitution. The Founding Fathers crafted things so that the “knaves” will be forced to abide by the will of the people, but they warned that their “natural progress” is to find ways to remain in power and increase that power at the people’s expense. They therefore also urged eternal vigilance, spiritedness, and the occasional revolt of the people.

Thomas Jefferson, James Madison and others got it right—the knaves have, by and large, behaved, and their actions largely reflect in some way the will of the American people. Americans do not need to engage their politicians in an uncivil way—as happens most elsewhere—since the ballot box, the media, and other constitutional tools largely suffice. Indeed, the American political system works remarkably well. However, there are a handful of topics where the elites do not act in the interests of those they govern. Of these, the most notorious is the contentious issue of immigration. Why are politicians so keen on mass immigration while the common American is not? This has perplexed analysts.

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