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Land of the Free? Harvard Study Ranks America Worst in the West for Fair Elections

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As if further proof could possibly be needed of the sorry state of the American electoral process, a new study just ranked the United States dead last in electoral integrity among established Western democracies.

The Electoral Integrity Project (EIP)'s 2015 Year in Elections report is an independent research project by 2,000 elections experts from Harvard University and the University of Sydney in Australia assembled to examine the world's elections.

The EIP states that *"the core notion of **'electoral integrity'** refers to **agreed international principles and standards of elections, applying universally to all countries worldwide throughout the electoral cycle, including during the pre-electoral period, the campaign, and on polling day and its aftermath**. Conversely, 'electoral malpractice' refers to violations of electoral integrity."*

> The report gathers assessments from over 2,000 experts to evaluate the perceived integrity of all 180 national parliamentary and presidential contests held between July 1, 2012 to December 31, 2015 in 139 countries worldwide. These include 54 national elections held last year.

"Forty experts were asked to assess each election by answering 49 questions. The overall 100-point Perceptions of Electoral Integrity (PEI) index is constructed by summing up the responses," *Salon* explained.

According to the EIP, U.S. elections scored lower than Argentina, South Africa, Tunisia, and Rwanda — and strikingly lower than even Brazil. Specifically compared to Western democracies, U.S. elections scored the lowest, slightly worse than the U.K., while Denmark and Finland topped the list.

But, while certainly revealing, the U.S.' low ranking — which places the nation in the second, or "good," tier and perilously close to the "moderate" third tier of five possible — could hardly come as a shock to Americans.

Indeed, the 2016 elections have proven the system so rigged, even those who'd previously still harbored illusions our democracy is fair, have begun to come to terms with the truth: the political establishment's corporatist plutocrats *choose their own* to install in the White House every four years.

Hillary Clinton 'winning' Wyoming's primary despite being summarily trounced by Bernie

Sanders in the popular vote — with her 44 percent to his 56 percent — simply evidence the latest example of the farcical illusion of choice revealed by EIP. Superdelegates — who aren't beholden to vote for a candidate according to the popular choice and could potentially sway the nomination — are causing an even greater uproar among Democrats fed up with the establishment's obvious favorite candidate, Hillary.

On the other side of the political spectrum, Trump's challenge to the *status quo* has incited a furious scramble by the GOP establishment intent to thwart his nomination — no matter his sizable popular support. With rumors flying of a contested or brokered Republican National Convention, it's possible the establishment will succeed — despite Trump's own prediction the move will incite riots. To wit, Trump called out the delegate system as "rigged" on Thursday, following Colorado's lack of primary and subsequent choice to award all of its delegates to Ted Cruz.

Though voting ostensibly remains a right instead of a privilege, as highlighted by John Oliver recently, voter ID laws have drastically curtailed people's ability to simply vote for the leader of their choosing under the guise of fighting (effectively nonexistent) voter fraud. Even further to the point, many states requiring IDs to vote have such wildly inaccurate voter records that many people end up turned away at the polls — in some cases, when their information hadn't changed since the previous election.

Though reasons why the United States has reached this new low in fair elections are complex, critics often point to the tidal wave of corporate cash after the Supreme Court's decision in Citizens United. But this may be somewhat misguided. Would removing cash automatically bring some voting power back to the public? Perhaps to an extent. But it also ignores the will of the establishment to ensure its rulers always win — in other words, where there's a will there's a way.

Perhaps the EIP's revealing report can convince people that participating in the illusion isn't solving anything — and that ruling ourselves through the creation of such workable systems through agorism, among other ideas, are ultimately the most favorable for us all.

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