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Subject: McCain's ties to the International Republican Institute (IRI)

Posted by [extrabaggage](#) on Thu, 29 May 2008 12:00:05 GMT

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Quote:President Bush endorsed John McCain even before Mike Huckabee dropped out of the race. It was back in 2005 at an International Republican Institute (IRI) dinner. President Bush introduced John McCain as an "outstanding" IRI board chairman and as "a man of honor and integrity, and great personal courage."

McCain has served as board chairman since 1993. During the past fifteen years, under the cover of spreading democracy and a free market economic system, the IRI has helped install governments friendly to the United States and undermined others.

Despite its reputation for destabilizing popularly elected governments, McCain touts his experience in the IRI as an example of what he would do if elected President. "Given my decades of involvement in promoting democratic values, it is safe to assume that I will remain a supporter of legitimate democracy-building groups," McCain told The Arizona Republic.

Formed in 1983 during the Reagan Administration, the IRI is funded almost entirely by U.S. tax dollars to the tune of \$75 million a year, with the money being disbursed through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). Big business, lobbying groups, and foundations gave more than \$1 million to the IRI in 2006, while individuals donated a total of \$200,000.

The IRI calls itself a "nonprofit, nonpartisan organization committed to advancing freedom and democracy worldwide by developing political parties, civic institutions, open elections, good governance, and the rule of law."

But created at a time when CIA covert action in Central America was coming under increasing scrutiny, the IRI has undertaken some of the supplementary tasks the CIA traditionally performed.

And while the IRI portrays itself as nonpartisan, a quick look at the IRI website establishes that while it is not legally under the Republican Party, in practice it is indistinguishable from it. The group is an amalgam of businesspeople, party stalwarts, and neocons.

Corporate donors to the IRI include UPS, AT&T, Coca-Cola, Blackwater, Anheuser-Busch, Bell-South, Chevron, ExxonMobil Foundation, and BP. The Associated Press reports that many donor companies regularly lobby on the types of issues handled by the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, where McCain is the number two Republican.

On the board of directors, you also find Paul Bremer III, the former viceroy of Iraq; Alison B. Fortier, the director of Lockheed Martin missile defense programs; and John F. W. Rogers, managing director of Goldman Sachs. Another board member, Frank Fahrenkopf, was the chairman of the Republican National Committee from 1983 to 1989. He is also the president and chief executive officer of the American Gaming Association. To date, McCain has received more than \$100,000 from the gaming industry, as per [opensecrets.org](http://opensecrets.org).

But that's not the only financial overlap between the IRI and McCain's Presidential campaign. McCain's political action committee raised at least \$392,000 from IRI donor companies and their employees since January 2005. His presidential campaign has collected another \$670,000 from institute donors.

Key advisers to McCain have been on the IRI board, too. Randy Scheunemann, who drafted the Iraq Liberation Act (McCain was a co-sponsor of the bill), also was on the board of the Project for the New American Century, the neoconservative outfit that argued for overthrowing Saddam in the 1990s. Scheunemann is a foreign policy adviser to McCain.

According to its website, the IRI at first "focused on planting the seeds of democracy in Latin America [but] since the end of the Cold War, has broadened its reach to support democracy and freedom around the globe [and] has conducted programs in more than 100 countries and is currently active in 72 countries." As McCain told The New Republic, "We were all intoxicated by the fall of the Soviet Union and the collapse of its empire."

The IRI engages in what it calls the "consolidation of democracy." That is, it facilitates the coming together of splintered opposition parties, churches, human rights organizations, worker unions, women's organizations, and student groups.

Sometimes, as in some former Soviet republics, the IRI seems to support reformists, albeit those with a free market orientation. In the Ukraine, Viktor Yushchenko, the IRI-backed candidate, defeated Viktor Yanukovich, who was representing decrepit Soviet-style authoritarianism.

But IRI activities in Latin American countries such as Haiti, Cuba, and Venezuela are more controversial. In Haiti in 2002 and 2003, the IRI helped consolidate the opposition to the democratically elected Jean-Bertrand Aristide. "Several of the people who had attended IRI trainings were influential in the toppling of Aristide," reports Mother Jones. The U.S. ambassador to Haiti at the time even suggested that the IRI was instrumental in Aristide's downfall.

In 2002, then-IRI president George Folsom applauded the failed Venezuelan coup against President Hugo Chavez. "Last night, led by every sector of civil society, the Venezuelan people rose up to defend democracy in their country," he said in a statement released by the IRI while the coup was still under way.

Not expecting the coup to fail, he went on to proudly claim that the IRI "has served as a bridge between the nation's political parties and all civil society groups to help Venezuelans forge a new democratic future." He boasted: "We stand ready to continue our partnership with the courageous Venezuelan people."

Last November, the IRI gave its "Freedom Award" to Tony Saca, the president of El Salvador. In taped remarks, McCain said, "El Salvador's politics and economy have been transformed. Today, former guerrillas are free to stand peacefully for public office, and economic growth is gradually eroding poverty." But fifteen years after the civil war ended, economic and political problems linger. Corruption is rampant. San Salvador's archbishop recently said the social conditions that gave way to the civil war remain. Activists who are organizing against Saca's neoliberal economic policies face riot cops and charges of terrorism under new laws that criminalize public protest.

IRI board member Richard S. Williamson presented the award to Saca and recalled President Ronald Reagan's policies in Latin America.

"Back then, the front line in the march to freedom was Central America," said Williamson. "I remember those close vote counts, in the early '80s, when Ronald Reagan was going against the majority in Congress who didn't want to support the freedom fighters in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and elsewhere. Fortunately, he prevailed, and twenty-five years later El Salvador is a beacon of freedom."

The IRI also conducts polls in high-stakes situations that it can skew to create a public and political consensus around a desired outcome. A "secret poll" conducted in Cuba found that "77 percent of Cubans want a new system of elections," "83 percent of Cubans believe changes to a more market-based economy would improve their daily lives," and "79 percent of Cubans do not believe the current government can fix the problems facing the country."

The first thing, of course, is that a secret poll cannot be verified. And secondly, it sharply contradicts other polls. A January 2007 Gallup poll found that 40 percent of Cubans disapproved of the Cuban government while 47 percent approved. The Gallup poll also noted that 75 percent of Cubans approved of their health care system and 78 percent of their education system.

In Iraq, the IRI has conducted polls, too. It asks such questions as: Do you prefer to change government through peaceful and fair elections, fair and public trials, and no arbitrary arrest or detention? Most people in any culture and under most circumstances would favor not being tortured or being arrested arbitrarily.

What is missing in the IRI polls are hard questions such as: Has the American occupation been good? How long should U.S. troops stay? According to a Program on International Policy Attitudes poll in September 2006, 71 percent of Iraqis favored a U.S. troop withdrawal within a year, and 61 percent of Iraqis approved of attacks on U.S. forces.

As board chairman, McCain says he has been a hands-on manager. "All board members are involved in determining where IRI will work and in overseeing those activities," he told The Arizona Republic.

McCain denies that the IRI has toppled any government. His critics say he bears a responsibility to investigate allegations of meddling in other countries.

If the so-called maverick becomes President in 2009, McCain will have some trust issues in international gatherings from day one. As the IRI board chairman, he has already shown his hand.

I hear a lot of mixed opinions. One particular quote that echoes would be the one below

Quote: Groups like the IRI do a great disservice to civil society groups by portraying themselves as one. The fact that they openly brag about subverting democratically elected governments should clue the US media in, but it doesn't. In fact, they are often portrayed as another benevolent pro-democracy group.

If McCain is elected, we probably can expect to see a lot more of our tax dollars directed to this group and its efforts to install and protect US-friendly regimes.

So Renegade forums, have your say. Post your OPINIONS!

Edit: Another quote I found

Quote:I don't know. I'm willing to bet that a significant portion of Americans fully support the IRI's agenda and the rest largely doesn't give a damn.

Has there ever been a case where the US' undermining of democracy abroad has had electoral consequences for a candidate or party? Maybe Iran-Contra, but that was more about Iran than the Contras.

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