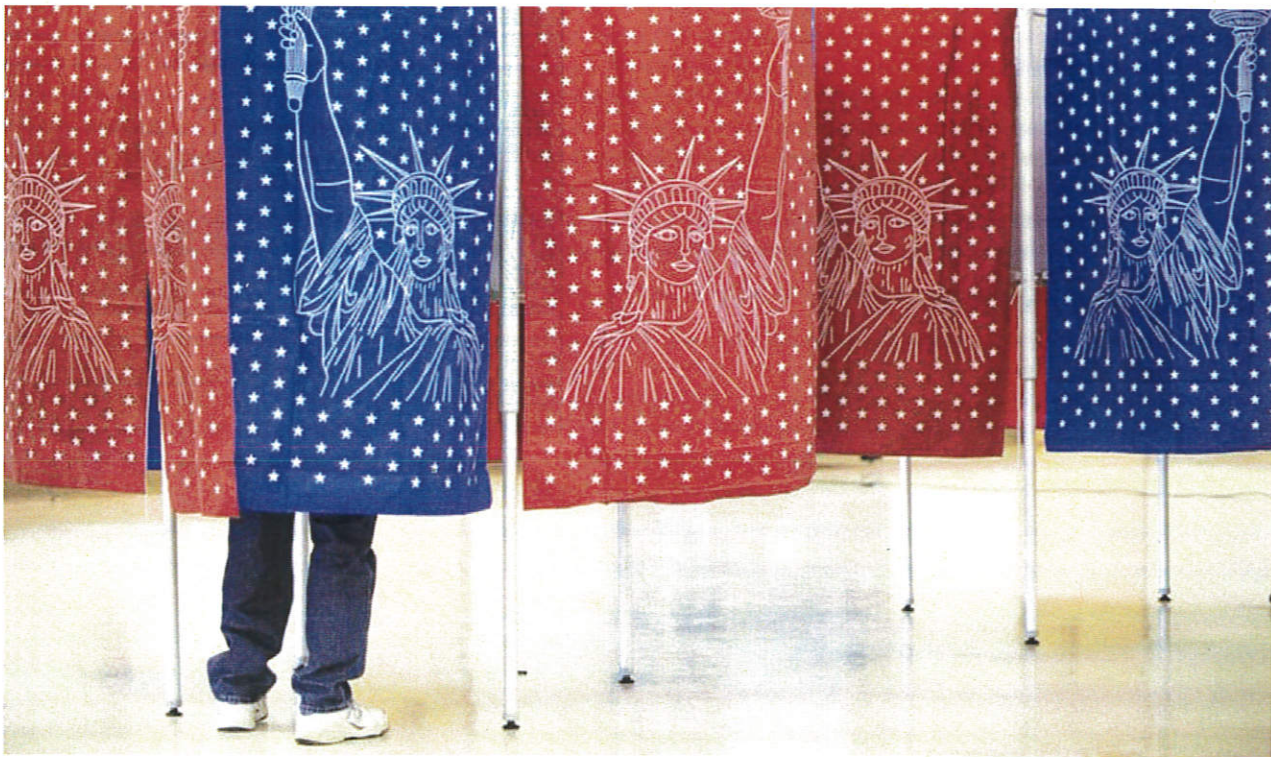


Mexican national who took cousin's identity to vote illegally to be deported



Laura Janeth Garza's conviction Thursday comes more than a year after Republican Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton's office helped prosecute another Mexican national also facing deportation for illegal voting. (Associated Press) more >

By Paul J. Weber - Associated Press - Thursday, September 13, 2018

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) – A Mexican national whose attorney said she used a cousin's identity to live in the U.S. for decades and held a job assessing students in Houston schools is facing deportation after pleading guilty to illegally voting in the 2016 election.

Laura Janeth Garza's conviction Thursday comes more than a year after Republican Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton's office helped prosecute another Mexican national also facing deportation for illegal voting. But the circumstances of the cases differ and Garza's attorney, John Cardenas, said she knew this was always a possibility.

The 38-year-old Houston woman entered the country as a young girl. She was about 12 years old, Cardenas said, when Garza's mother and uncle told her assume the identity of a cousin who was a U.S. citizen but had moved to Mexico. Cardenas didn't know how Garza voted, but said she offered to return to Mexico if the charges were dropped.

"That wasn't on the table for the state," he said. "She's resigned. She understands that this was something that may have come up along the way."

Last year, a jury in Fort Worth sentenced Mexican national Rosa Maria Ortega to eight years in prison for illegal voting in a case that drew widespread attention because of the severity of the punishment, since voting fraud convictions many times result in probation.





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Ortega, who was accused of improperly casting a ballot five times between 2005 and 2014, was a permanent U.S. resident whose attorney said mistakenly thought she was eligible to vote. Ortega, who has four teenage children, is likely to face deportation upon leaving prison.

Cardenas said Garza will also face deportation when she finishes serving a 180-day jail sentence in a few weeks. He said he had no problem with how Paxton's office handled the case and commended prosecutors for not insisting she serve prison time. Although Garza was given 10 years in prison for illegal voting, a second-degree felony, her sentence was probated as part of the plea agreement.

Cardenas said Garza worked for the Houston Independent School District, helping assess students with their language skills. A district spokeswoman did not immediately return messages Thursday.

Paxton has defended Texas' voter ID law, which is among the toughest in the U.S., and has made voting safeguards a top issue of his nearly four years in office. He said Garza's conviction demonstrates "our commitment to ensuring that Texas elections remain free and fair."

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