

## Anti-Immigrant Legislation in Arizona:

# Leads to Calls for a State Boycott

By Margot Veranes and Adriana Navarro | June 1, 2005

Reacting to a barrage of anti-immigrant messaging and misinformation, Proposition 200 was approved by 56% of Arizona voters on November 2, 2004. Prop. 200 forces all Arizonans to present proof of U.S. citizenship, such as a birth certificate or passport, to receive basic public services and to register to vote. Arizona's Attorney General has limited its application to five public benefits programs, but Prop. 200's most far-reaching impact has been one of widespread fear and intimidation. Immigrants are afraid to access even programs to which they are entitled. The voter-registration component of Prop. 200 constitutes a modern-day poll tax that often keeps low-income people and communities of color from voting.

Since Proposition 200 passed last fall, its backers have presented an alarming 20 bills targeting immigrants in the Arizona legislature, have cheered the vigilante *Minuteman Project* on the Arizona-Mexico border, and have worked to sponsor similar bills in other states. But there is a growing grassroots mobilization against the resurgence of racist policies in Arizona, and the threat of an international and national boycott of the state looms.

### Prop. 200 Passed After a Campaign Rife with Xenophobia and Half-Truths

In 2004, anti-immigrant groups nationwide with intimate ties to white nationalist organizations focused their attention on Arizona. Residents there were frustrated with low-wage jobs, poor healthcare, and funding being directed away from schools and public benefits programs. Extremists joined with a handful of fringe local groups to promote a hateful agenda of blaming immigrants for the state's woes.

By the time election season rolled around in 2004, Arizona voters had already been primed for an anti-immigrant message thanks to a campaign of lies and race-baiting that built upon a decade of intense border militarization. Early polling in August of 2004 showed high rates of approval for Prop. 200.<sup>1</sup> However, local community organizations mobilized against fringe groups from outside the state, and by mid-October, approval had dropped from 64% to 42%, and appeared to be falling further.<sup>2</sup>

Back in the spring of 2004, signature-gathering to place Prop. 200 on the November ballot was waning. A fringe

group calling itself, "Protect Arizona Now," had initiated the signature-gathering with support from national anti-immigrant figureheads and organizations. When Protect Arizona Now's efforts lagged, the Washington, DC-based Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), an anti-immigrant organization with white supremacist ties, moved into Arizona and began paying signature gatherers, investing \$500,000 to ensure Prop. 200 would appear on the ballot.<sup>3</sup> FAIR also wooed voters with a bogus study alleging that undocumented immigrants "cost Arizona \$1.3 billion per year." Their study, among other inaccuracies, misleadingly included \$810 million per year worth of state spending on education provided to children of immigrants who were U.S. citizens.<sup>4</sup> FAIR refers to such children as "immigrant stock," language that offers a glimpse of the white supremacy inherent in their analysis of immigrants.<sup>5</sup>

In fact, immigrants, both documented and undocumented, contribute heavily to Arizona's economy. The Thunderbird School of International Management and Wells Fargo Bank, in their report *Economic Impact of the Mexico-Arizona Relationship*, demonstrated that immigrants make enormous tax contributions, paying annually \$300 million more than they receive in services in Arizona.<sup>6</sup> In 2001, Mexican immigrants in Arizona paid \$1.5 billion in mortgages and rent, and Arizona banks and other financial institutions received \$57 million in transaction costs and fees from remittances sent to Mexico from the state. In addition, Mexican immigrant purchasing power in Arizona was estimated at \$3.9 billion in 2001.<sup>7</sup>

Further contradicting FAIR's numbers, the *New York Times* recently reported that the 8 to 10 million undocu-



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mented immigrant workers in the U. S. are now providing the Social Security system with a subsidy of as much as \$7 billion a year. This money will never be collected by undocumented immigrants themselves and will help fund the retirement of U.S. citizens for decades to come.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, FAIR continues to peddle its own statistics to promote Prop. 200 copycats in other states, scapegoating immigrants—not the federal government—for the severe cutbacks in state social and health services.

Since the approval of Prop. 200 by Arizona voters, immigrants have come under further attack from the Arizona legislature. This legislative session there were more than 20 anti-immigrant bills that sought to expand Prop. 200's application and many of them have been approved or are still pending.

"The Minutemen vigilantes have diverted the attention of the public and the media while their counterparts sporting suits and ties in the State Capitol promote racist laws," said Luis Herrera, an organizer with the St. Peter's Housing Committee in San Francisco. "A war against immigrants and people of color has been declared in Arizona."

## Voting Rights of U.S. Citizens Under Attack

Prop. 200 backers also made unfounded accusations that undocumented immigrants voted in Arizona. Their true aim was to suppress voting by people of color. They openly declared during a televised debate, "Too many Latinos are voting." The impact of Prop. 200 identification requirements on voter registration has been staggering—in Pima County, over a two-week period early this month, 423 of 712 voter registration forms were rejected, or 59% of new voters. Last year, when 6 times as many people were registering because of the presidential election, *no* voter registration forms were rejected.<sup>9</sup>

Arizona is already red-flagged by the U.S. Justice Department (USDOJ) because of its history of widespread voter intimidation against people of color. Consequently, all changes to the state's voting laws must be approved by the federal government. Despite Prop. 200's blatant discriminatory intent, in January 2005 the USDOJ ruled that forcing people to show proof of citizenship when registering to vote does not deter people of color from voting.

Arizona is now the first state in the U.S. to require that anyone registering to vote present a birth certificate, passport, or tribal identity card. In Arizona, approximately one-third of the Latino and African American populations

live in poverty. Citizens who cannot afford to purchase a birth certificate (\$15 in Arizona), or passport (\$85) will be prohibited from registering to vote. Civil rights leaders say this is eerily reminiscent of racist poll taxes. Prop. 200 also wipes out clipboard voter registration drives because making copies of the required documents at a potential new voter's doorstep is practically impossible. A number of bills currently before the legislature seek to further restrict voting rights and are sponsored by the same anti-immigrant contingent of legislators.

## Arizona Becomes the Vanguard State for Anti-Immigrant Measures

Prop. 200's legalization of racial profiling has had a detrimental impact on U.S.-Mexico relations, as well as earned Arizona a reputation for intolerance within the United States. Recent headlines in Arizona's Spanish-language newspapers included, "*En riesgo imagen de Arizona* [Arizona's Image at Risk]," and "*Peligroso racismo en Arizona* [Dangerous Racism in Arizona]." Harry Garewal, the president of Arizona's Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, warned that Arizona is being singled out at a national level as the most intolerant and racist state.<sup>10</sup>

In March, a 7-member delegation of Mexican senators visited Arizona to investigate the effects of Prop. 200. The senators, seeking to analyze the law and its effects on Mexican nationals, had appointments with Arizona Attorney General Terry Goddard and Phoenix Mayor Phil Gordon. However, Governor Janet Napolitano, a one-time opponent of Proposition 200, announced her refusal to receive the delegation and later Mayor Gordon, also a one-time opponent of the measure, canceled his meeting with the Mexican legislators.<sup>11</sup>

Following their three-day visit to Arizona, their official report described a "desolate panorama" of rising anti-immigrant sentiment. "The anti-Mexican atmosphere that prevails there, far from diminishing, is being felt with ever-increasing force," delegation member Miguel Sadot Sánchez noted.<sup>12</sup>

Prop. 200-like legislation is actively being promoted by FAIR and other anti-immigrant organizations around the country. Emboldened by Prop. 200's passage in Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee, Virginia, and Ohio are all facing similar measures. In Arkansas, Joe McCutchen recently became the chair of "Protect Arkansas Now," a group supporting the "Arkansas Taxpayer and Citizen Protection Act," closely

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modeled on Proposition 200. A recent report by the Southern Poverty Law Center notes that Joe McCutchen was a member of the white supremacist Council of Conservative Citizens (CCC) in 2001, according to the CCC's newspaper.<sup>13</sup>

## A Post-Prop. 200 Nightmare

**The Arizona legislature is now debating 20 additional bills that seek to criminalize and further marginalize immigrant workers and their families.**

HB 2030 expands Prop. 200 to prohibit undocumented immigrants from attending public universities and community colleges, as well as Adult Education and Family Literacy programs. It also blocks access to utility and child care assistance. It is based on the false premise that immigrants are a net economic drain on the state. HB 2030 passed the Arizona Legislature and was vetoed by the Governor.

HB 2592 bans state funding for day labor centers. It would prohibit cities and towns from maintaining or building a day labor center if it is used to "facilitate the hiring of undocumented workers." Day labor centers provide safe, organized, and convenient locations for both workers and employers. HB 2592 passed the Arizona Legislature and has already been signed by Governor Napolitano.

SB 1306 allows for police and Border Patrol cooperation. Police would be able to detain immigrants for the purpose of calling Border Patrol, creating further abuse and policing in low-income communities of color. SB 1306 passed the Arizona Legislature but was recently vetoed by the governor.

HB 2709 would build a private prison in Mexico to jail undocumented immigrants arrested in Arizona. Private prisons are already cashing in on immigrant detention and are notorious for human rights violations. This bill would require a new treaty between the U.S. and Mexico. HB 2709 passed the Arizona Legislature and was vetoed by Governor Napolitano.

SB 1511 prohibits public entities from accepting the *matricula consular* as a form of identification. The *matricula consular* is an official I.D. card issued by the Mexican Government through its consular offices. SB 1511 passed the Arizona Legislature and was vetoed by Governor Napolitano.

## National and International Boycott of Arizona Imminent

Prop. 200, the rapid advance of its legislative offspring, and the upsurge of armed paramilitaries on the border, have prompted communities in Mexico, Arizona, and across the United States to begin organizing a boycott of Arizona. The boycott will target Arizona businesses, conventions, and tourism, and will ask individuals and businesses to shop, travel, and conduct business elsewhere.

The communities most affected by Prop. 200 and its offspring bills in the Arizona Legislature wield considerable economic power. Mexican tourists alone spend an estimated \$1.6 billion in Arizona every year, and Mexican immigrant purchasing power is close to \$4 billion. Mexicans who might normally visit Arizona to shop would be asked not to purchase anything in the state. In addition, immigrants, Latinos, and their allies in Arizona have begun to engage in work stoppages, and are considering boycotting specific industries or companies that support anti-immigrant legislation.

The boycott will coincide with a petition drive to repeal Prop. 200. Arizonans held a series of community meetings in May, 2005, to decide what industries the boycott will target and to consult the communities that would be most impacted by such an action.

In the early 1990s, Arizonans challenged white supremacists with a boycott and won. When a ballot initiative to recognize the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday failed to pass, local and national civil rights groups initiated a national boycott of Arizona. The year-long boycott cost Arizona \$200 million, its reputation, and an NFL Superbowl. When given the chance to vote on the holiday again, Arizona voters approved it.

Arizona currently is at the epicenter of a national and international struggle to defend the human rights of immigrants and U.S. citizens of color. The passage of Prop. 200 here marked the kick-off of a dangerous state-by-state drive to hide a racist campaign behind a strategic front of blaming immigrants for economic and social ills.

Almost completely missing from the heated contest playing out in Arizona and nationally is a discussion of the unjust U.S. trade policies that propel migration. Immigrants suffer increasing imprisonment and policing for simply crossing a border. Instead of imposing harsher restrictions on the First World's exploitation of Third World peoples, U.S. laws punish the victims of the global economic system even further.

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“We see the effects of these free trade policies every day in the faces of the workers at our Centers,” said Salvador Reza, director of the Macehualli Work Center in Phoenix, a day labor center that could soon be banned under HB 2592. “Prop. 200 and its henchmen have got to be stopped, or this place is in for a boycott.”

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*Margot Veranes and Adriana Navarro are members of Defeat 200 in Tucson, Arizona. For more information on Prop. 200 and similar bills currently before the Arizona Legislature, the Boycott of Arizona, and other ways to support immigrant rights campaigns in Arizona, please contact Defeat 200 at [defeat200@yahoo.com](mailto:defeat200@yahoo.com). Piper Weinberg and Alexis Mazón contributed to this article.*

## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>3</sup> See Right Web profile at <http://rightweb.irc-online.org/org/fair.php>
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- <sup>6</sup> *Economic Impact of the Arizona-Mexico Relationship* (2003), available online at [http://www.thunderbird.edu/faculty\\_research/research\\_centers/econ\\_impact/](http://www.thunderbird.edu/faculty_research/research_centers/econ_impact/), accessed on 5/03/05.
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- <sup>8</sup> Porter, Eduardo. “Illegal Immigrants are Bolstering Social Security with Billions,” *New York Times*, April 5, 2005.
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Authors: Margot Veranes and Adriana Navarro  
Editor: Laura Carlsen, IRC  
Production and design: Tonya Cannariato, IRC