



2004 ELECTION ANALYSIS

To embrace and uphold our tradition as a nation of immigrants

ARIZONA'S PROPOSITION 200

Proposition 200 passed in Arizona on November 2nd when 56% of voters voted in favor of it. Despite this loss, there are some silver linings and valuable lessons to be learned from this battle. Here, we try to make sense of what happened in Arizona, discuss the measure's implications, and provide ideas on how we can use this experience to advance our agenda and counteract some of the restrictionists' spin on its passage.

WHAT HAPPENED IN ARIZONA?

Proposition 200 was drafted by the Protect Arizona Now (PAN) Coalition with the support of the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), which poured \$450,000 into the signature collection process. FAIR's calculation in supporting Proposition 200 was that by targeting a border state where people were upset over illegal immigration, they could win by a large margin. Its hope was that this would result in the intimidation of national policy makers who were moving forward on immigration reform, and that anti-immigration advocates in other states would be encouraged to push for copy-cat initiatives. (FAIR and affiliated organizations tried to qualify ballot initiatives in California, Colorado, and Nevada in 2004 but failed to do so.)

Proposition 200 seeks to limit undocumented immigrants' access to public benefits and voting by requiring proof of citizenship when voting and when applying for (vaguely defined) public benefits. In addition, it forces public servants to deny services to undocumented immigrants and to turn them over to authorities. Failing to do so could result in jail terms and fines.

A media poll in early summer registered support for the initiative as high as 80% among voters. Given these numbers and FAIR's involvement, advocates knew that defeating this measure would be an uphill battle—if not impossible. In September a broad-based, bipartisan, labor/business/faith, Anglo/Hispanic coalition came together to fight Proposition 200. It organized a targeted media and grassroots campaign that reached voters across the state. In the process it raised \$1.3 million dollars, mobilized new voters, and brought together an unprecedented coalition from the right and the left including key groups such as the AARP, the Chamber of Commerce, unions, and virtually every law enforcement agency in the state.

Once the campaign against Proposition 200 started, the support for the initiative dropped in the polls to 66% and then finally to the high 40s a week out from the election. This significant drop was the result of a timely and targeted strategy that highlighted the fact that Proposition 200 was not going to do what its proponents said it would do—stop illegal immigration—and would have unintended consequences that would make life for all Arizonans more difficult. This strategy worked; and having a range of voices that spoke against the initiative—including leading Republican and Democratic elected officials from Sen. John McCain to Gov. Janet Napolitano and Reps. Kolbe, Flake, Pastor and Grijalva—made it more powerful. Furthermore, shortly before the election, it was revealed that the anti-immigration proponents—FAIR in particular—used fraudulent materials to get the measure on the ballot in the first place.

In short, the more voters learned about the initiative and its impact on the state, the less they liked it and the more they knew it was a bad non-solution to the perceived problem of illegal

immigration. In the end, while the measure did pass with 56% of the vote, this is not the wide margin FAIR was hoping for.

The Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) has already gone to court requesting a preliminary injunction against Proposition 200. MALDEF is challenging its constitutionality.

WHY THE RESULTS WEREN'T SO BAD

As expected, restrictionists have already taken to the air waves claiming their victory will sweep across the country. Activists in other states, most notably Georgia and California, are already planning to push similar legislation. However, the results in Arizona may not translate well to other states for the following reasons:

Arizona is different not only from other states but even from other border states. For one thing, Arizona has suffered a greater impact and pressure from illegal immigration because much of the flow has been channeled through its border. Enforcement measures implemented in Texas and California have sealed former thoroughfares in those states and are in turn pushing migrants to cross the more deadly Arizona desert. The number of people crossing the Arizona border, the publicity around the number of people dying in the desert, and the increasingly violent tactics of smugglers has made undocumented migration much more visible in Arizona.

Secondly, Arizona was (at least at the outset) a presidential battleground state; placing greater attention on its politics in this election year, and giving its restrictionist activists a larger megaphone from which to deliver their messages—of course assisted by restrictionist media personalities Lou Dobbs and the likes.

Finally, the victory for Proposition 200 is the product of many years and millions of dollars worth of activity by restrictionists. Groups like FAIR, American Patrol, and others have been investing in paramilitary vigilante groups and targeting elected officials for some time, hoping to make Arizona ground zero in America's immigration debate.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM WHAT HAPPENED IN ARIZONA?

On the positive side there is much that happened in Arizona that can serve as a model for other states fighting similar legislation:

An unprecedented coalition. Probably for the first time in our movement, a broad coalition of local and national allies came together to defeat this state measure in an extraordinarily short amount of time. It included current and former elected officials, hospitals, firefighters, labor, business, progressive, and faith groups and the list goes on and on. They came together and invested time and resources with the single purpose of uniting to defeat this initiative.

Bipartisan opposition. While the main proponents of Proposition 200 were Republican State Legislators, leaders of both parties understood the need to fight Proposition 200 on policy and political grounds. Policy-wise, Proposition 200 was an overbroad, poorly drafted disaster. Politically, Republican leaders in particular understood that strong GOP support for Proposition 200 would spell long-term disaster for the party in Arizona. Recall that the GOP-supported Proposition 187 in California in the mid-1990s spelled electoral doom for the Republicans for nearly a decade as the fast-growing Hispanic population attained citizenship, registered to vote and became overwhelmingly Democratic in that state.

A successful fundraising effort. In just a few short months, the campaign was able to raise \$1.3 million from local and national groups and community members. Labor, advocacy groups, business leaders and immigrant communities contributed to the effort by donating money raised through their membership or in some cases through radiothons.

An aggressive ground game. A number of grassroots organizations enlisted hundreds of volunteers in get-out-the-vote and public education efforts. Union members, students, and activists came together and reached thousands of new voters and spent countless hours educating voters on the potential impact of the initiative.

Voters want immigration reform, but were only being offered an unworkable initiative. Perhaps the most hopeful lesson was that when voters got a chance to think long and hard about what was being offered, they knew Proposition 200 was not the answer.

In short, we were successful in building a local coalition and structure that will give us traction to continue pushing for real reform locally and at the national level.

KEY MESSAGES

During the last week we have read news reports that the Bush administration will push for some kind of immigration reform in coming months. Proposition 200, no doubt, will be flagged by restrictionists as a sign that people want a total clamp down on immigration and that no concessions should be given to more moderate (and effective) approaches. It is important to keep in mind that while people want reform they want reform that works. The following messages may help you explain what happened in Arizona and how we can talk about it:

- Voters want immigration reform, not non-solutions that only continue the status quo and drive people further underground.
- National anti-immigration groups like FAIR are growing increasingly desperate. Their influence in Washington is increasingly marginal as both parties move beyond simplistic solutions to complicated problems. Stirring up anti-immigrant sentiments at the state and local level is the only game they have left.
- The more voters understood the local/state implications, the less they agreed with Proposition 200. It will take more than building a massive wall around the country to address all that ails our broken immigration system.
- Immigrants are a part of our communities—in practically every state and county—trying to target them with harsh measures will do much more to harm our community than to actually have an impact on immigration. Essentially, proponents of measures such as Proposition 200 are willing to cut off their nose to spite their face.
