

## *A suicidal stand on Hispanics*

The Washington Post

May 14, 2010 Friday, Regional Edition

Copyright 2010 The Washington Post All Rights Reserved



**Distribution:** Maryland

**Section:** EDITORIAL COPY; Pg. A17

**Length:** 816 words

**Byline:** Michael Gerson

### **Body**

---

Has the Republican Party become, as Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid recently charged, the "[\*anti-immigrant party\*](#)"?

The accusation is overbroad. Republicans (and others) who are offended by chaos at the southern border, who are concerned about the strains illegal immigration places on public services and who believe enforcement should precede comprehensive reform are not necessarily "anti-immigrant."

Reid has an interest in painting with the broadest possible brush to motivate Hispanic supporters in his own, uphill reelection campaign.

But it would be absurd to deny that the Republican ideological coalition includes elements that are anti-immigrant -- those who believe that *Hispanics*, particularly Mexicans, are a threat to American culture and identity. When Arizona Republican Senate candidate J.D. Hayworth calls for a [\*moratorium on legal immigration from Mexico\*](#), when then-Rep. Tom Tancredo (R-Colo.) refers to Miami as a "Third World country," when state Rep. Russell Pearce (R), one of the authors of the Arizona immigration law, says Mexicans' and Central Americans' "way of doing business" is different, Latinos can reasonably assume that they are unwelcome in certain Republican circles.

The intensity of these Republican attitudes is evident not just from what activists say but also from what Republican leaders are being forced to say. Sen. John McCain, a long-term supporter of humane, comprehensive immigration reform, has run [\*a commercial\*](#) feeding fears of "drug and human smuggling, home invasions, murder" by illegal immigrants.

Never mind that the level of illegal immigration is down in Arizona or that skyrocketing crime rates along the border are a myth. McCain's tag line -- "Complete the dangd fence" -- will rank as one of the most humiliating capitulations in modern political history.

Ethnic politics is symbolic and personal. Democratic presidential candidate John F. Kennedy gained African American support by calling Coretta Scott King while her husband was in prison. Republican presidential candidate Barry Goldwater lost support by voting against the Civil Rights Act of 1964. A generation of African American voters never forgot either gesture.

## A suicidal stand on Hispanics

Republicans have now sent three clear signals to Hispanic voters:

California's [Proposition 187](#), which was passed in 1994 and attempted to deny illegal immigrants health care and public education before being struck down in court; the immigration debate of 2006, dominated by strident Republican opponents of reform; and now the [Arizona immigration law](#). According to a 2008 study by the Pew Hispanic Center, 49 percent of **Hispanics** said that Democrats had more concern for people of their background; 7 percent believed this was true of Republicans. Since the Arizona controversy, this gap can only have grown. In a matter of months, Hispanic voters in Arizona have gone from being among the most pro-GOP in the nation to being among the most hostile.

Immigration issues are emotional and complex. But this must be recognized for what it is: political suicide. Consider that **Hispanics** make up 40 percent of the K-12 students in Arizona, 44 percent in Texas, 47 percent in California, 54 percent in New Mexico. Whatever temporary gains Republicans might make feeding resentment of this demographic shift, the party identified with that resentment will eventually be voted into singularity. In a matter of decades, the Republican Party could cease to be a national party.

Even describing this reality invites scorn from those who regard immigration as a matter of principle instead of politics. But this represents a deep misunderstanding of politics itself. In America, political ideals are carried by parties. Republicans who are pro-business and pro-life, support a strong national defense and oppose deficit spending depend on one another to achieve influence. Each of these convictions alienates someone -- pro-choice voters, economic liberals, pacifists. But Republican activists who alienate not an issue-group but an influential, growing ethnic group are a threat to every other constituency. The vocal faction of anti-immigrant Republicans is not merely part of a coalition; it will eventually make it impossible for anyone else in that coalition to succeed at the national level.

The good news for Republicans is that **Hispanics** tend to be entrepreneurial and socially conservative. While the general image **Hispanics** hold of the GOP is poor, individual Republican candidates can make significant inroads. In presidential elections, Hispanic support can swing widely. In 1996, Bill Clinton got 72 percent of the Hispanic vote. In 2004, John Kerry's support was in the 50s. And Republicans do not need to win a majority of the Latino vote to compete nationally, just a competitive minority of that vote.

But even this modest goal is impossible if Hispanic voters feel targeted rather than courted.

[mgeron@globalengage.org](mailto:mgeron@globalengage.org)

## Classification

---

**Language:** ENGLISH

**Publication-Type:** Newspaper

**Subject:** IMMIGRATION (93%); US REPUBLICAN PARTY (92%); ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS (90%); POLITICAL PARTIES (90%); SMUGGLING (90%); LEGISLATIVE BODIES (90%); IMMIGRATION LAW (90%); HISPANIC AMERICANS (89%); VOTERS & VOTING (89%); US PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES 2008 (89%); US DEMOCRATIC PARTY (89%); POLITICAL CANDIDATES (89%); CRIME RATES (88%); ELECTIONS (78%); LEGISLATION (78%); CAMPAIGNS & ELECTIONS (78%); POLITICS (78%); US STATE GOVERNMENT (78%); US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS (78%); US STATE IMMIGRATION LAW (77%); TERRITORIAL & NATIONAL BORDERS (77%); ARIZONA IMMIGRATION LAW (77%); HEADS OF GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS (75%); AFRICAN AMERICANS (74%); HUMAN RIGHTS & CIVIL LIBERTIES LAW (67%); CIVIL RIGHTS (66%)

**Person:** JOHN MCCAIN (78%); JOHN F KENNEDY (73%); HARRY REID (73%); THOMAS G TANCREDO (58%)

A suicidal stand on Hispanics

**Geographic:** ARIZONA, USA (94%); COLORADO, USA (79%); CALIFORNIA, USA (79%); UNITED STATES (93%); CENTRAL AMERICA (78%)

**Load-Date:** May 14, 2010

---

End of Document