

IMMIGRATION, CRIME KEYS TO BROWN'S DEFEAT

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Byline: SCOTT THURM, Mercury News Staff Writer

Body

Completing a stunning political comeback, Gov. Pete Wilson on Tuesday rode middle-class fears about **crime** and illegal **immigration** to a new, four-year lease on the governor's office.

Wilson, who 18 months ago ranked as the most unpopular governor in modern California history, obliterated Democratic state Treasurer Kathleen Brown. With more than half the votes counted, Wilson led Brown by a 3-2 margin.

Propelled by a strong tailwind that helped Republicans nationwide, Wilson helped the GOP capture at least three other statewide offices. Proposition 187 - the anti-illegal-**immigration** ballot measure that Wilson made the centerpiece of his campaign - also passed easily.

The verdict seemed as much a repudiation of Brown as vindication for Wilson. In the most recent Field Poll, completed just 10 days ago, only 29 percent of Californians thought the governor was doing a good job.

Still, Tuesday's victory is certain to revive speculation that Wilson will seek the 1996 Republican presidential nomination. Wilson repeatedly has denied any interest in national office, but as governor of the nation's largest state, with a presidential primary in March 1996, he is certain to be a powerful force within the GOP.

"President Wilson," some backers shouted as he addressed supporters at the Doubletree Hotel in Los Angeles.

"What happened today is people went to the polls and voted to continue the progress we made," the former assemblyman, San Diego mayor and U.S. senator told the joyous crowd. He called the results "a victory for working Californians, those who work hard, play by the rules and pay their taxes, who have raised their children to obey the law, to respect themselves and others."

Focused campaign

Wilson clearly reaped the rewards of a campaign built around **crime** and illegal **immigration**. Those were the top issues cited by voters in an Associated Press exit poll, and more than two-thirds of voters who called those issues important supported Wilson. Three-fourths of voters who backed Proposition 187 also voted for Wilson, the exit poll found.

The reversal of fortunes for the gubernatorial candidates was astonishing. In May 1993, pollsters gave Brown a 23-point lead in a hypothetical matchup with Wilson; Tuesday night, the 61-year-old governor won by almost an equal margin. For Brown, the daughter and sister of former California governors, it was a bitter **defeat**. But she offered a gracious concession speech shortly after 10 p.m.

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"I hope and pray that having won the battle of tactics, (Wilson) will now use his victory to help rebuild California," Brown told supporters at the Biltmore Hotel in Los Angeles. "I pledge to do what I can to help him chart California through this difficult passage in our history."

Long, costly contest

Although both faced primary challenges, Wilson and Brown essentially ran against each other for two years, after Wilson's record-low approval ratings in 1992 lured Brown into the race.

Together, they raised and spent about \$50 million, setting a record for a state political campaign. At times this fall, they spent \$300,000 a day, mostly on television commercials attacking one another.

Wilson hammered Brown for opposing the death penalty - even though Brown pledged to enforce death sentences if elected - and for supporting continued government services to illegal immigrants. Repeatedly, he attacked Brown to her brother Jerry, a now-unpopular former governor.

Those attacks mirrored Wilson's highly focused campaign, in which he dwelled almost exclusively on **crime** and illegal **immigration**. Seizing on extraordinary fears of **crime**, he exhorted legislators - who needed no prodding - to pass more than a dozen measures to lengthen criminal sentences, including "three strikes, you're out." Then, he signed each one with great fanfare, frequently using the footage in television commercials.

Emotional ads

Wilson also adopted Proposition 187 - the ballot measure that would deny public services to illegal immigrants - as part of a campaign that included repeated trips to the border and lawsuits against the federal government. In several emotional commercials, Wilson used footage of Mexicans running across the border at San Ysidro while a narrator said, "They keep coming."

Brown tried a variety of tactics against Wilson, accusing him of ignoring the state's economic woes, raising taxes and lax parole policies, among others. But little of the criticism seemed to stick; it wasn't until the final weeks of the campaign, when Brown enthusiastically embraced opponents of Proposition 187, that she seemed to rally public support.

Notes

ELECTION 1994

Mercury News Staff Writers Mitchel Benson, Gina Boubion and Pamela Kramer contributed to this report.

Graphic

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PHOTO: MERCURY NEWS

Kathleen Brown conceded graciously just after 10 p.m.

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PHOTO: ASSOCIATED PRESS

Gov. Pete Wilson cheers as he watches returns and learns the news of his victory.

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