

Immigration issue defines California race / Wilson's tough stand winning over voters

USA TODAY

September 30, 1994, Friday, FINAL EDITION

Copyright 1994 Gannett Company, Inc.

Section: NEWS; Pg. 4A

Length: 1220 words

Byline: Bob Minzesheimer

Dateline: SAN DIEGO

Body

A registered Democrat, Megan Ryan usually gives female candidates the benefit of any doubts because "somehow I think they understand things better."

But come Nov. 8, she says, there's no way she'll vote for Democrat Kathleen Brown for governor. The main reason: Brown's "squishy" **stand** on illegal **immigration**.

Ryan is only one vote, but she helps explain why Republican Gov. Pete Wilson, who showed up in polls as one of the nation's most unpopular governors, now leads Brown in the latest surveys, 48%-41%.

While two-thirds of **voters** tell pollsters that Wilson has done a poor or fair job, analysts credit his current **standing** on his relentless focus on two emotional **issues** that many Californians see as threats to their way of life: crime and illegal **immigration**.

A Wilson TV ad shows immigrants running across the border as an announcer warns "They keep coming. Two million illegal immigrants in **California**," and Wilson concludes: "Enough is enough."

Ryan, 38, a nurse, agrees: "I'd never say this 10 years ago, but the more I pay taxes, the more resentment I feel."

And asked about the governor's **race**, the first thing she says is "I'm voting for Proposition 187," a ballot initiative that would deny most government services to illegal immigrants in **California**.

Wilson endorses that initiative; Brown opposes it. And here on the border, where county supervisors recently declared an "illegal immigrant emergency," that **stand** is key.

This year's gubernatorial **race** started out with predictions of big implications for the 1996 presidential **race**.

A **win** by Wilson, 61, would establish him as a GOP presidential contender, pundits said. A **win** by Brown, 47, would help President Clinton in a state he desperately needs in 1996.

Brown, the state treasurer, came out swinging: "In four years under Pete Wilson, we've seen the promise that once was **California** destroyed - job by job, school by school," she said.

But Wilson took on Brown, daughter of former **California** governor Pat Brown and sister of another governor, Jerry, calling her "a political cipher."

Immigration issue defines California race / Wilson's tough stand winning over voters

Now it appears immigration is defining both candidates - and that could also affect the national immigration debate.

Immigration is a huge issue in California, where an estimated 1.7 million illegal immigrants live.

Wilson and other critics says that's damaging the state's economy, citing estimates that illegal immigrants add \$ 2.4 billion a year in education, health and prison costs.

That number is subject to intense debate. A study commissioned by the Justice Department says it's \$ 1.3 billion, noting that immigrants do many vital jobs like farm work, and contribute to the economy.

But fears about rising immigration has galvanized voters, who favored the ballot initiative, 57%-31% in the Field Poll.

Wilson calls the initiative "the two-by-four" to "send a message to Washington that we can't educate every child from here to Tierra del Fuego."

Brown charges Wilson is "hypocritically exploiting our people and our fears" and that denying schooling to children of illegal immigrants, "throwing them into the streets . . . will cost us a lot more in the end."

Brown and other critics question the initiative's constitutionality and premise. A 1984 Supreme Court ruling says illegal immigrant children are entitled to public education. Most experts say people cross the border for jobs, not benefits.

But the initiative is now a symbolic issue in a state battered by the recession, says San Jose State University political scientist Terry Christensen: "When you're paranoid about your own well-being, strangers are a threat."

And it's the people most likely to be threatened who are most likely to vote.

"There are two Californias," says Sherry Bebitch Jeffe, political analyst at the Claremont Graduate School: "One is older, Anglo, conservative, anti-government, anti-tax and more likely to vote. The other is younger, more minority, less likely to vote and more in need of government services that the other California votes on."

The Field Poll shows white Anglos back the immigration initiative 60%-27%; Latino voters split 48%-44%.

That could change, Jeffe says, if the debate turns into a "hate campaign" reminiscent of California's turn-of-the-century laws to exclude Asian immigrants. That could "energize" Brown's liberal and Latino supporters.

But so far, the campaign has focused on issues favoring Wilson. After struggling through a 1991 tax increase, and a budget crisis where the state issued IOUs rather than paychecks, his approval rating is 44% - as low as Clinton's in California.

Now he's got immigration in focus, with the help of the ballot initiative.

San Diego County Commissioner Brian Bilbray, who's using the issue to run for Congress, says 4,800 babies were born in the county last year to mothers who are illegal immigrants; 41% were on welfare.

That stirs angry middle-income voters like Gary Leonetti, 46, who runs a shoe repair shop here.

"Both Wilson and Brown can go to hell," Leonetti snaps. "He jacked up taxes and if she's like her brother, she'll raise them too."

But because of immigration, Leonetti says he'll vote for Wilson: "She's on the fence and he's talking tough. Maybe he'll do something. Maybe he's learned how to run this state. But I doubt it."

Public supports this proposition

Immigration issue defines California race / Wilson's tough stand winning over voters

Supporters hope California's Proposition 187 will do for immigration control what Proposition 13 did for tax-cutting here after it passed in 1978.

Co-authored by Alan Nelson, Immigration and Naturalization Service commissioner under President Reagan, the proposal has drawn strong public support.

The law would:

-- Bar illegal immigrants from public schools or colleges; parents of all schoolchildren, including U.S. citizens, would have to prove legal residence.

-- Deny non-emergency public health care and social services to anyone who can't prove legal status.

-- Require educators, police and public health officials to report anyone suspected of being an illegal immigrant.

Opponents include the state Parent-Teacher Association, Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, California Medical Association, and Roman Catholic Cardinal Roger Mahoney.

They warn that the state could lose \$ 15 billion annually in federal aid if it violates federal laws.

Supporters doubt President Clinton will ever cut off federal aid to California.

A contrast of California voters

Political analysts say there are two kinds of Californians, those who live there and those who vote. Non-Hispanic whites make up about half of California's population, but they dominate the polls - especially when there is a low turnout of voters. How the makeup of the population contrasts with the roll of registered voters and those who voted in the 1992 election and the 1994 primary:

Registered 1992 '94 primary

Group	Pop.	<u>voters</u>	turnout	turnout
Whites	54%	76%	79%	83%
Hispanics(1)	28%	11%	10%	8%
Blacks	7%	7%	6%	5%
Others	11%	6%	5%	4%

Source: Field Poll 1 -- Hispanics can be of any race

Notes

THE NATION; See related story; 04A; See info boxes at end of text.

Graphic

PHOTO, b/w, Grace Saenz, AP; PHOTO, b/w, Robert Hanashiro, USA TODAY

Classification

Immigration issue defines California race / Wilson's tough stand winning over voters

Language: ENGLISH

Subject: IMMIGRATION (92%); ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS (91%); GOVERNORS (91%); CAMPAIGNS & ELECTIONS (90%); US STATE GOVERNMENT (90%); US DEMOCRATIC PARTY (90%); US REPUBLICAN PARTY (89%); REFERENDUMS (89%); HEADS OF GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS (89%); VOTERS & VOTING (89%); US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS (89%); BALLOTS (78%); COUNTY GOVERNMENT (78%); POLITICAL CANDIDATES (78%); US STATE IMMIGRATION LAW (76%); POLLS & SURVEYS (76%); ECONOMIC CONDITIONS (76%); MUNICIPAL FINANCE (71%); LAW ENFORCEMENT (71%); TREASURY DEPARTMENTS (71%); JUSTICE DEPARTMENTS (68%); ECONOMIC NEWS (66%)

Company: WILSON TV AD (96%); WILSON TV AD (96%)

Industry: TREASURY DEPARTMENTS (71%)

Person: BILL CLINTON (73%)

Geographic: CALIFORNIA, USA (94%)

Load-Date: October 28, 1994

End of Document