

Governor Jan Brewer Has Lost Her Head

Brewer's increasingly outrageous claims about immigrants don't match the facts and are costing Arizona millions

After rejecting pleas from civil rights leaders, the Latino community, religious denominations, law enforcement professionals and constitutional scholars to oppose Arizona Senate Bill 1070, Governor Jan Brewer signed the controversial "show me your papers" bill into law. Major components of the law were enjoined by a [federal judge](#) and an appeal is currently pending before the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals.

The Governor claims that SB 1070's draconian measures are necessary because the state is under siege from undocumented immigrants and that the federal government is leaving the state of Arizona to metaphorically twist in the wind. – despite the fact that crime is down in Arizona and border protection spending is higher than ever.

The controversy, which intensified when the Obama administration sued to stop the new law from going into effect, has thrust the Governor into the national spotlight. Under heightened attention, the Governor's claims about the immigration crisis in her state have become increasingly alarming and, unfortunately, increasingly false.

Despite news reports which clearly call the Governor's claims into question, she has taken her anti-immigrant charges on the road: making national news appearances, [endorsing candidates](#) in other states and [raising millions of dollars](#) from conservative donors for championing the anti-immigrant agenda. But while her strategy may have delivered short-term political dividends for the Governor herself, her claims falsely painting the state of Arizona as a literal warzone have cost her state's tourism industry and economy untold millions of dollars.

Until recently, the Governor has successfully avoided responding to questions from the press about her blatantly false allegations about the crisis in her state. But when asked to respond at a candidate debate this week about the veracity of her claims, the questions literally [left the Governor speechless](#).

Falsely claims a rash of beheadings in the Arizona desert

Governor Brewer has justified her increased attention to immigration matters by characterizing immigrants as criminals who threaten Arizonans' public safety. When asked about this claim, Brewer said recently that police are finding evidence of particularly heinous crimes for which she has felt the need to take action. On June 27, 2010, Brewer said:

“Our law enforcement agencies have found bodies in the desert either buried or just lying out there that have been beheaded.”

However, the facts show something entirely different. In an article titled, “County coroners can’t back Brewer beheading claim,” the [Arizona Guardian](#) reports: “officials with six county medical examiners offices in the state, including four from counties that border Mexico, say they have never heard of such attacks.”

Ignoring the facts, the Governor went on to repeat the claim on a [local television show](#). Furthermore, she said during a national [Fox News](#) appearance:

“We cannot afford all this illegal immigration and everything that comes with it, everything from the crime and to the drugs and the kidnappings and the extortion and the beheadings and the fact that people can't feel safe in their community. It's wrong! It's wrong!”

Falsely claims that crime is soaring in Arizona

[Violent crime is down](#) across the state of Arizona, dropping by 12 percent since 2002. Over the same time period, Phoenix’s violent crime rate dropped by 14 percent; Tempe’s by 26 percent; and Mesa’s by 31 percent.

In fact, [Time Magazine](#) reports that “According to the FBI, the four large U.S. cities (with populations of at least 500,000) with the lowest violent crime rates – San Diego, Phoenix, and the Texas cities of El Paso and Austin – are all in border states.” And [Newsweek](#) cites an academic journal that found that cities with the largest increases in immigration between 1990 and 2000 had some of the largest drops in serious crimes.

Even the [Governor herself](#) acknowledged that “crime is down in Arizona.” But apparently noticing that she’d strayed from her campaign talking points the Governor immediately added, “[But] the fact of the matter is, if you’re living in Arizona and you are living in the areas that are severely impacted, you are faced with it on a daily basis.”

Falsely claims that most undocumented immigrants are “drug mules”

In response to a claim by a rival gubernatorial candidate that Governor Brewer is exaggerating immigrant-related crime and that most immigrants come to the United States to work, Brewer [said](#):

“Well, we all know that the majority of the people that are coming to Arizona and trespassing are now becoming drug mules. They're coming across our borders in huge numbers. The drug cartels have taken control of the immigration.

“So they are criminals. They’re breaking the law when they are trespassing and they’re criminals when they pack the marijuana and drugs on their back.”

However, as [CNN reports](#), the facts don't match the Governor's claims. "T.J. Bonner of the National Border Patrol Council told CNN that Brewer's claims were 'clearly not the case.' Brewer's comments, Bonner said, don't 'comport with reality – that's the nicest way to put it.'"

[Even Senator McCain](#), who embraced SB 1070 and has tacked right on immigration during his hard-fought primary race, had to distance himself, saying, "no, I think it's a large number."

Brewer admits: "I don't know what an illegal immigrant looks like"

SB 1070 would require police officers throughout the state to interrogate individuals they come in contact with in the course of their business for their immigration papers if they have a "reasonable suspicion" that the person is an undocumented immigrant. Further, the law would enable any individual to sue police departments for failing to interrogate people that the individual citizen believes might be an undocumented immigrant.

While the law she signed empowers everyday people on the street to judge what an undocumented immigrant looks like, the state's chief executive says that she couldn't tell herself. After the bill's signing a reporter asked Brewer if she knew what an undocumented immigrant looked like. [Her response](#):

"I do not know what an illegal immigrant looks like. I think that there are people in Arizona that assume they know what an illegal immigrant looks like. I don't know if they know that for a fact or not."

Indeed, who does know? However SB 1070 would grant everyday citizens the power to sue police departments based on their assumptions.

Brewer's anti-immigrant claims are costing Arizona millions

When asked about SB 1070's effect on Arizona's economy, Governor Brewer [asserted](#), "I believe it's not going to have the kind of economic impact that some people think that it might." However, a number of cities and counties have issued [economic boycotts](#), and many of the state's businesses [are already reporting losses](#) and attributing their lower bottom lines to SB 1070 and the hostile climate it has helped engender.

In an attempt to help ameliorate the effects of her decision, the [Governor created a \\$250,000 taxpayer-funded program to improve the state's image](#). Additionally, to offset the costs of litigating the lawsuits stemming from her decision, the Governor was forced to create a private legal defense fund. So far, is estimated that defending her decision in court [could cost over \\$1 million](#) but costs to the taxpayers related to officer training, prisons and untold other expenses as related to her decision are impossible to quantify at this point.

The law has had the effect of tearing communities apart and instilling a sense of fear into the lives of Latinos throughout Arizona – driving many to stay away from stores or even to move out of the state. As the *Arizona Republic* recently [wrote](#), "not everyone is pleased over the exodus of Latinos, both legal and illegal, saying their flight from Arizona could hurt businesses, schools and neighborhoods." The

article stated that in Arizona, “Latinos accounted for 16 percent of all purchases in the state, or \$31 billion in spending, according to a report by the Arizona Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.”

But it is the alarmist language being used by the Governor herself that has become the subject of serious concern to the state’s tourism industry. As a local Fox News affiliate reports in a piece titled, [“Brewer paints unattractive picture of Arizona for tourism industry,”](#) the Governor’s staff has been quick to shield her from criticisms about her claims related to crime and immigration. According to Fox, “when questions about the economic impact of the Governor’s claims began to surface at a recent tourism conference, the Governor’s staff abruptly ended the discussion.”

One [Arizona Republic](#) columnist summarizes, “[SB 1070] has led to boycotts that threaten Arizona's more traditional tourism industry, the one that emphasizes the state's beauty, tranquility and safety, and which generates (or used to) billions in revenue. According to the Arizona Tourism Alliance, the scare tactics and boycotts may already have cost the state a couple of billion dollars and caused roughly 30,000 folks to lose their jobs.”