



Protesters in Phoenix, Arizona, protest SB 1070 and call for police to stop collaborating with ICE.

# Living in the Shadow of SB 1070

## Organizing for Migrant Rights in Arizona

BY CAROLINE PICKER

**A**RIZONA'S 2010 IMMIGRATION LAW may no longer be making national headlines, but the out-of-control immigration enforcement that made Arizona infamous continues to intensify, exacerbating the human rights crisis throughout the state.

The situation has only worsened since September 2012, when a U.S. District Judge allowed one of the most egregious provisions of Arizona's "SB 1070" to go into effect. The act codified the Right's strategy of "attrition through enforcement": in other words, amping up the deportation machine while also making life so unlivable for migrant people that they will "self-deport." Section 2B of this notorious law, often callously referred to as its "papers, please" provision, mandates police officers in Arizona to check the immigration

status of anyone for whom they have "reasonable suspicion" of being undocumented. In other words, it makes racial profiling into law.

Fernando Lopez is one of the many Arizona residents affected by the law. In June 2011, he was followed by highway patrol for several miles while on his way to work and then pulled over.

"If you look brown, you are seen as a target," Lopez says. "We know the risk of going outside, of going to the grocery store."

Because he could not produce a driver's license, Lopez was arrested. The sheriff's office referred him to immigration enforcement, and he spent a month in a detention center in Florence, Arizona. He is still fighting legal proceedings in order to not be deported. "My bond was set really high, at \$10,500," he says. "I only got out because people organized, people raised money for my bail—they made food, washed cars, even when the weather was 120 degrees outside. At the end all we have left is us.... We have to protect ourselves, fight back, organize."

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## SB 1070 Was Nothing New

Arizona has long-been a laboratory for xenophobic, racist, and nativist innovations in the war of attrition against migrant communities. The Minutemen first gathered here in 2004. That same year, Arizona started requiring proof of citizenship from public benefits recipients. Bans on driver's licenses for undocumented people and English-only rules in public schools followed. Sheriff Joe Arpaio is known for his monstrous treatment of immigrants in Maricopa County, where Phoenix is located. He holds detained immigrants in "Tent City," an outdoor jail with no temperature controls in Phoenix's brutal 110-degree summers, and has proudly called Tent City his "concentration camp." Arpaio regularly raids workplaces, setting undocumented people up with hyped-up identity theft charges merely for working to support their families, and administrates what the Department of Justice referred to as the "worst case of racial profiling" it has ever seen.

The Obama administration has overseen a record 1.4 billion deportations, and is now responsible for the deportation of approximately 1,400 people a day. Many of these deportations occur because of mandated collaboration between local police departments and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) through federal programs such as 287(g) and Secure Communities. Maricopa County was one of the first places in the country to have a 287(g) agreement, which allows police officers to be deputized as ICE agents and instigate deportation proceedings against those arrested. Secure Communities came not long after, cross-checking fingerprints instantly between the databases of police departments and ICE and therefore able to quickly identify the immigration status of anyone who comes into contact with the police, even if their charges end up being dropped. Both of these programs mean that local police officers are enforcing federal immigration laws, inextricably linking immigration, a civil matter, to the criminal system. Many, like Lopez, end up in detention and with the threat of deportation looming because of police doing immigration enforcement work.

SB 1070 and copycat legislation are spurred not just by racism and hate, but also by a corporate profit motive. Many immigrants can be detained for months or years while they are fighting their immigration cases, often in detention centers run by the same corporations that have made billions off of incarcerating victims of the war on drugs, such as the GEO group and Corrections Corporation of America, the largest private prison corporation in the world, which in 2009 identified immigrant detention as the source of a "significant portion" of its future revenue.

## The Real Experts on Immigration

While families are torn apart and workers are deported every day, the human rights movement led by undocumented people



Nataly Cruz, an undocumented immigrant in Arizona, speaks out about her uncle's arrest during an ICE raid in Phoenix Valley. Five of Cruz's family members have begun facing deportation proceedings.

from Arizona and across the country continues to gain strength. Undocumented youth have been risking deportation in order to demand that their voices be centered in the immigration debate. Indeed, President Obama's announcement granting temporary work permits to youth eligible for the DREAM Act came immediately following sit-ins staged by undocumented youth at his campaign offices in 2012.

And while the crisis in Arizona grows, undocumented people are fighting back in ever more powerful ways, such as the creation of peaceful Barrio Defense Committees: networks of neighbors, friends, and family members who are ready to protect each other from deportation and its consequences. Neighbors in these networks teach each other about their rights, how to document rampant racial profiling, and how to take action to stop deportation. Most also compose a defense plan, signing powers of attorney to assist with the impact of deportation, making it clear who will take care of

their children, pay their bills, collect their paychecks, and look after their belongings in the worst-case scenario.

Natally Cruz, an undocumented immigrant who had five family members put into deportation proceedings in a recent three-month period, says, “Now that I have lost the fear and I know my rights, the police have less power over me. . . . Organizing our own communities is the best way we can win respect and dignity.”

“They make law after law without ever including our voices, the undocumented people who are most affected by these laws. We know we need to lose our fear and take action to make sure that they can’t ignore us any longer,” says Cruz. In July 2012, Cruz was one of four undocumented adults arrested for engaging in civil disobedience outside of Sheriff Arpaio’s racial profiling trial, kicking off a national bus tour called the “No Papers, No Fear Journey for Justice.” Inspired by the Freedom Rides of the 1960s, undocumented people from across the country, including Cruz and Lopez, traveled from Arizona, through the South, and ended up at the Democratic National Convention in Charlotte, North Carolina. The ride culminated with an act of civil disobedience at the gates of the Democratic National Convention, where ten undocumented activists demanded that President Obama

and the Democratic Party take real action to benefit the whole migrant community and to keep families where they belong: together.

“When we do civil disobedience and risk deportation, we are just showing in public what we risk in private every day,” Cruz says. “I can drive around the corner or take my son to school and I could get deported.” The civil disobedience that Cruz and others have bravely engaged in sends its message loud and clear: what undocumented people, the real experts on immigration, want is an end to deportations and the right to live a life with their families without fear in the place that has become their home.

The injustices currently enacted against migrant people seek to strip away their humanity through criminalization. This is what makes the “We are Human” slogan that emerged in response to SB 1070 so powerful. The slogan also reminds U.S. citizens that we all become a little less human every time we fail to take action against the demonization and terrorization of our neighbors. By siding with migrant people in their brave fight for dignity and human rights, and by stepping up to the bar that undocumented people have set by risking everything, we all reclaim our humanity. ■