

POLITICS

## Why Donald Trump is turning Arizona blue

How Donald Trump and divisive politics have awakened Arizona, a politically staid red state

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First Lady Michelle Obama speaks to a crowd of supporters as she campaigns for Hillary Clinton at the Convention Center, in Phoenix, Arizona on October 20, 2016. (Mark Ralston/AFP/Getty Images)

Mark Mioni's law firm transferred him last year from Washington, D.C., to Phoenix, primarily to translate for Spanish-speaking clients. The 31-year-old paralegal is surprised how rarely he uses that skill, in a region where more than one-fifth of residents cite Spanish as their first language. He instead gets responses in shards of hesitant English, from

people worried an errant *si* or *muchos gracias* may trip them up and get them transferred to immigration authorities.

“I tell them I’m not a police officer. I have nothing to do with that,” Mioni says. “When I first meet a client, that is almost the first thing I need to say to them.”

Mioni didn’t expect his legal work here to take on such political undercurrents. Just his luck, he moved to Arizona in the year of Donald Trump, whose rhetoric about the wall and vilifying of illegal immigrants has its most inflammatory potential in southern border states. He’s also arrived amid the age of Arpaio.

That’s Joe Arpaio, the elected sheriff of Maricopa County, which covers four million people in Phoenix and its endlessly sprawling suburbs. He proudly wears the nickname “America’s toughest sheriff,” though he earns nastier adjectives from the Latino community, with his “documents please” immigration patrols and mounting legal challenges for racial profiling. Arpaio has become a top surrogate for Trump, though he’s also chasing votes himself for his seventh term.



Latino voters are trying to oust Sheriff Arpaio, a man who touts himself 'America's toughest sherriff.' (Photograph by Murphy Bannerman)

In a state where voters favour conservatives as surely as retirees and snowbirds love the dry desert heat, a blunt-talking law enforcement boss and presidential candidate normally bolster each other. But in 2016, a reliably red state has approached the brink of turning blue, for only the second time since 1948. This is a changing Arizona, a state at the forefront of a national demographic transition to one where ethnic minorities become the population majority. That shift would, Democrats have long said, bring political waves—eventually—but the divisiveness of Trump and Arpaio seems to have made it crest early. It's making the Republicans' once-solid base crack up, even more blatantly in Arizona than it is in the rest of the country.

Hillary Clinton's campaign pumped \$2 million in new spending into Arizona for the contest's final weeks, and held rallies on three successive mid-October days with prominent boosters: Bernie Sanders, Chelsea Clinton and first lady Michelle Obama. Obama drew 7,000 to a midweek afternoon rally in downtown Phoenix, where she was introduced by

Carolyn Goldwater Ross, granddaughter of late Arizona senator Barry Goldwater, the unsuccessful Republican candidate for president in 1964. That year, Goldwater voted against the Civil Rights Act; a half-century later, his descendant praises a candidate for defending civil rights for minorities, women and the LGBT community: “That’s why this time, I’m with her.”

Obama arrives onstage to an ocean of smartphone photo snaps. She wonders aloud: Since “Hillary’s opponent” (she never names him) had a privileged life “way up in a tower,” maybe he hasn’t been exposed to people who are different. “And if you think this way, then it’s easy to see this country as ‘us’ versus ‘them’ . . . Maybe that’s why this candidate thinks certain immigrants are criminals, instead of folks who work their fingers to the bone to give their kids a better life.” The audience roars.



Arizona Cardinals fans wear masks of presidential candidates Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton during the NFL game between the New York Jets and Arizona Cardinals at University of Phoenix Stadium on October 17, 2016 in Glendale, Arizona. (Norm Hall/Getty Images)

Mioni thrusts his “Latinos for Hillary” sign skyward. Though never politically active in Washington, he’s worked in Phoenix to register Latino voters, he says. “They know why it’s important to come out.”

Trump launched his campaign last summer with a swipe at border states’ significant Mexican-American populations: “When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best . . . They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.” He was vying for leadership of a party that had, in 2012, shrank its share of the Latino vote to 27 per cent with Mitt Romney (from 40 per cent in 2004) and his talk of pushing illegal immigrants to “self-deportation.” The Republican Party’s post-Romney autopsy report urged more respectful outreach to Latinos, and a comprehensive immigration reform plan. Some party poobahs and presidential candidates tried that. The party grassroots tried Trump.

“His earlier comments had an impact for sure, and [Democrats] capitalized on that,” says Robert Graham, the Arizona Republican Party chairman. On Oct. 21, CNN quoted him dismissing his rival’s late-campaign push in Arizona—“to me it’s bright red.” To a Canadian reporter that same day, Graham was more cautious and mindful of polls. “This isn’t something that’s being coloured by the media. I would say it’s a bona fide tie in our state right now.” (Recent state polls have ranged from Trump up one percentage point to Clinton up by five.)

Graham says he also believes in the outreach mantra, and knew he had some mopping up to do after Trump called Mexicans rapists. He even crossed the border to the neighbouring Mexican state of Sonora as a goodwill gesture. “One thing I remind people is that the party is bigger than any one person.”

It’s not just with Latinos that Republicans may struggle in Arizona. Five per cent of residents identify as Native American, another group Trump has disparaged, calling Sen. Elizabeth Warren “Pocahantas” for once claiming Native ancestry. And more than six per cent of Arizonans are Mormon, a conservative community that deplores Trump’s harsh edges. Among them is Arizona Sen. Jeff Flake, the Senate’s most vocal critic of

the developer-turned-politician. Sen. John McCain, months after Trump mocked his war veteran status, finally disavowed the candidate after his groping comments came out—putting Arizona alongside Alaska as the only state where both Republican senators are publicly anti-Trump. That prompted Graham to issue a public plea for party unity.

Ruben Alvarez, a former Republican governor's aide, will back John McCain's re-election bid for the Senate, but can't back Trump, a man he says started his whole campaign based on hate. "As he continued down that path, I thought this is not the type of person we need as president," said Alvarez, a first-generation Mexican-American.

In Arizona, victory margins by Republicans are likely healthy enough to withstand internal discord—they've won by an average of eight points since 1988, even factoring in the 1996 election, when Bill Clinton took Arizona over Bob Dole and Ross Perot. A divided and traditionally bigger squad can beat a disengaged and smaller group—if they remain that way.

Last week, Latino and labour activists from across the U.S. joined hundreds of local campaigners to blitz doors in Latino-heavy communities to encourage early voting against Sheriff Arpaio, who is behind his Democrat rival by 15 points, the latest *Arizona Republic* poll says. Their pamphlets show Trump's arm draped around Arpaio, and calls them political soulmates: "We cannot let Trump & Arpaio win!" it says in two languages.

"We don't have to imagine a country with a Trump presidency because we already have Arpaio. You just have to look at Arizona," says Maria Castro, an organizer for Bazta Arpaio—a blend of the Spanish word *basta* (enough) with AZ, the state's abbreviation. It's personal for Castro, 22. She recalls her high school days, when she'd text friends to steer clear of a sheriff's checkpoint. Her mother, an undocumented immigrant, is afraid to drive, lest an officer pull her over and demand to see papers she doesn't have.

Berta Rita, an office cleaner and mother of five, snuck across the border in 1992, with her eldest child. Two years ago, officers scanned her husband's construction workplace for undocumented labourers. He lost his job. Rita often encounters residents who don't vote, whether they don't know how to or don't believe in it. She lacks any path to citizenship under current laws; she wishes she could choose whether or not to vote.

"People say the old guy has always been there. 'We're not going to win. It doesn't matter if we vote,' " Rita tells *Maclean's*, before the night's canvass. Her reply: "That's precisely why we don't win: Because you don't vote." With that, she touches on a chronic issue that's kept Arizona politics redder than it otherwise might have been. More than 30 per cent of Arizonans are Hispanic, but only 16 per cent of voters were in 2012, according to the U.S. Census Bureau data. Though some of that gap is because of non-citizens, even Hispanic citizens in Arizona were one-third less likely to vote than whites, and also lag African-American turnout. It's why Jan Brewer, a former Arizona governor and prominent Trump ally, so bluntly dismisses the challenge from Democrats there. "Nah," she told the *Boston Globe*. "They don't get out and vote. They don't vote." Arizona Democrats replied gamely in a fundraising appeal: "Challenge accepted."

An alliance called One Arizona bid to register more than 150,000 new Latino voters, a decent though not transformative uptick in a state with 6.7 million people. Groups like Bazta Arpaio are reminding those registered Latinos to vote, by early ballot if possible. When Rita led a group of activists from Louisiana around one traditionally low-turnout neighbourhood, it was the second or third visit to many doors. "We've never had a campaign as massive against Arpaio as this time," Rita says. "The same people that Arpaio has terrorized are going to kick him out."

Latinos aren't numerous enough in the Phoenix area or Arizona to reject Trump or the 84-year-old sheriff themselves—not yet at least. But the racially charged actions, language and Trump's mass deportation threats don't just chafe on Latinos—Arizonans who live and work alongside Mexicans grow weary of it, too. The Dreamers, who were brought illegally across the border as children, "they're as American as my children," says Arizona-bred Gibson McKay, a former McCain chief of

staff. “What do you do with that? You send them back to Mexico?” Most people understand they’re an important part of the economy, he says. “There’s a guy at my house right now, and he’s laying some flooring for me, and I don’t know if he’s documented or not. He’s a nice guy. His name is Oscar . . . There’s no big surprise for Arizonans.”

Further south in Democrat-friendly Tucson, it’s a quiet Tuesday night at the local Republican office, as train engineer Lance Todd brings his son in to pick up campaign materials for a class assignment. For the first time since the first president Bush, Todd can’t vote Republican for president; Trump’s groping comments were the final straw. “He’s an idiot. I didn’t like someone who seemed to be anti-woman, anti-black, anti-Hispanic. Trump seems to be the wrong person for us to be fighting for.”

Trump’s last visit to Arizona, in early October, came in Prescott Valley—northwest of Phoenix, the whitest county in the state, according to census data. All speakers at his rally were white, including Graham, Brewer and Arpaio. That contrasts with the Obama rally, and Sanders’s rally in Tucson, where Latino politicians pumped up Clinton and younger members talked about their families’ immigration hurdles.

Attending the Sanders event at the University of Arizona, Anne Serverian wore a navy Trump T-shirt, warning students about the risk immigrants posed. “When you graduate, they are going to jeopardize your jobs and the jobs of your friends,” the retired food store owner warned. In an interview, she stresses the importance of Trump’s wall, in place of the fence that runs along most of the Arizona-Mexico border. “We’re not just talking about Mexicans. We’re talking about ISIS coming through,” she says, repeating a myth fact-checkers like Politifact have repeatedly debunked.

At Arizona Republican headquarters in Phoenix, a few dozen Trump fans gather for the final debate, laughing when Trump calls his rival “a nasty woman” and jeering when Clinton is allowed to speak at length. Paul Gorman, who wears his Republican precinct committeeman button, expresses confidence that legal migrants don’t like the illegals getting

away with it. Is Trump's message resonating with them? "I can't really say for sure," he replies. "I don't talk to many of them."

Win or lose Arizona this year, Gorman's ilk will have to do more to talk to "them." As it does throughout the country, the Latino population continues to rise much more rapidly than its white population: even without Trump, state Democrats had expected that Arizona would become more competitive by 2020 or 2024. By 2030, state population projections show the white population will no longer constitute a majority; two decades later, the number of Hispanics will nearly outnumber non-Hispanic whites. The heavy share of retirees adds to what Brookings Institution demographer Bill Frey calls the country's sharpest "cultural generation gap": Arizona's senior citizen population is far whiter than its child population (82 per cent versus 41). "If Donald Trump gets defeated, it doesn't mean his base is going away, and it doesn't mean there aren't going to be people trying to take advantage of that base for their own purpose," Frey says. "I think that to the extent that Hispanics are organized this time, those organizations will continue."

As the Latino population increases, even if turnout remains low it will inevitably increase its political clout in southern states like Arizona, and similarly Republican-friendly Texas. But as the demographic becomes more established, and more homegrown, immigration will fade as a priority; already, some polls show economy and jobs as top Latino issues, just like the general population. McCain and George W. Bush won good shares of minority support, and Republicans can get back on that track, says Alvarez, the Clinton-supporting Republican. But if anti-immigrant voices hijack another election, it won't play with anybody, he warns. "We need to adjust, otherwise I don't think we're ever going to win another presidential election."

On the campaign's third-last weekend, Bazta Arpaio held a pre-emptive "retirement party" outside the Maricopa County sheriff's office. If they oust Arpaio, and Trump loses so bad he even drops Arizona, the state's voters may help force political retirement on not just a sheriff and a reality-TV celebrity, but on an entire caustic branch of campaign policy.

