

Arizona's Anti-Immigration Law is also Anti-Faith



[1]By [Jenny Hwang](#) [2]

While visiting Phoenix, AZ in late January with a group of evangelical leaders who were in the border region to learn more about immigration, I met an immigrant family struggling to survive in a difficult economy. The father was employed as a mechanic but recently lost his job and lived in constant fear of being separated from his two young children who are U.S. citizens. This man considered moving his family back to Mexico because life was so hard in Phoenix, but was concerned about his two young children who would go back to a country they never knew. They were generous in feeding a group of American visitors delicious homemade Mexican food, as their children ran around the yard, yelling at each other in a mix of Spanish and English. During the same visit, my colleague met an undocumented immigrant woman named Maria whose son was killed by a drunk driver. She cannot press charges, however, because of her undocumented status.

The stories of this family and Maria demonstrate the more complicated side of immigration which can often just focus on border security and rule of law. The strict immigration law signed by Arizona Governor Jan Brewer at the end of April further complicates the situation of these immigrants and thousands more in Arizona. The thriving immigrant community in Arizona has contributed tremendously to the growing Arizonan economy and enriched the social fabric of its communities, but the hundreds of miles of border shared with Mexico and increasing border violence has created a palpable frustration in Arizona with immigrants and misguided attempts to stem illegal immigration. While most people would agree that illegal immigration is wrong and our federal immigration laws need to be reformed, this new Arizona law was written to stop illegal immigration through attrition, making Arizona such a poor environment to live in that undocumented immigrants will be forced to move to another state. Although federal immigration laws should be enforced and the border secured, addressing illegal immigration by making immigrants' lives miserable would be ineffective in curbing illegal immigration as it is intended to do because these enforcement measures would not address the underlying causes of why immigrants come to the United States in the first place.

I fear that when the law takes full effect at the end of July, there will be many unintended consequences that will impact not only hundreds of families in Arizona, but also Christian ministries and churches that serve immigrants in Arizona. Already, I have heard from Christian leaders on the ground that high school church youth groups that had many undocumented students as members are already missing some who have just disappeared without any word to their friends and neighbors. Other Christian leaders have lamented to me that the law's effect on the ground is "ridiculous and absurd. It's a backwards attempt at creating a society based on fear instead of rational, common sense policy."

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