Barrio Defense:
Arizona’s Immigrants are Standing Up to SB 1070

B. Lowe

Shortly after the 2010 passage of SB 1070, Arizona’s notorious immigration bill, 20,000 people gathered in Phoenix for a May Day march to protest the new law. Instead of ending with speakers or a formal program, as political marches often do, organizers broke the crowd into small groups and asked them two questions:

How will the new law impact you and your neighbors? What can you do about it?

“This is the time we must realize we have only each other and start organizing deeper in our own community.”

In the weeks and months after those small group discussions, communities across Arizona formed Barrio Defense Committees, neighborhood-based groups focused on resolving local problems, building resilience in the face of attack, and building organic leadership for broader social movements.

The committees are based on neighbor-to-neighbor relations where people commit to support each other to mitigate the negative impacts of deportations. Families sign power of attorney so that someone is prepared to take care of kids, pay bills, and communicate with an employer in the case of being taken away and placed in detention. They develop neighborhood watch efforts to look out for abusive police behavior, warn of check-points, and report abuse. Health projects, English classes, and supportive businesses weave together for self-sufficiency.

In addition to survival aspects, committees grow to remedy local issues like landlords refusing to make repairs or discrimination within schools. These daily building blocks lay a foundation for dealing with big problems like the anti-immigrant laws.

“For a long time we would only go take the kids to school, to work, and run errands,” said Leticia Ramirez, an undocumented mother of three.
“Other than that, we had become prisoners hidden in our own homes. But with the laws they were passing, even that wasn’t safe anymore. We realized the only safe community is an organized one. Coming out was our only option.”

In the Puente office in Phoenix, where committees meet on a weekly basis, hangs a sign with a quote by the legendary organizer, César Chávez: “Once social change begins, it cannot be reversed. You cannot un-educate the person who has learned to read. You cannot humiliate the person who feels pride. You cannot oppress the people who are not afraid anymore. We have seen the future, and the future is ours.”

**What Is SB 1070?**

The “Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act” (Arizona SB 1070) is a law in Arizona that, at the time of passage, was the broadest and strictest anti-illegal immigration measure in recent U.S. history. It is very controversial and has received national and international attention.

Various people and organizations filed suits in court, arguing that the law was unconstitutional. In 2012, the Supreme Court struck down several parts of the law but agreed to uphold one: the part that allows Arizona state police to investigate the immigration status of an individual stopped, detained, or arrested if there is **reasonable suspicion** that the individual is in the country illegally.

**THINK ABOUT IT:** What would create a “reasonable suspicion” that someone was in the country illegally? What are the effects that this law might have on people in Arizona? What are some of the ways it might affect police work?

**CONSIDER** the two pull-out quotes on p. 24. Do you agree or disagree? Explain. Do a free-write in response to either quote.

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**Source:** [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arizona_SB_1070](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arizona_SB_1070)