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## State Legislatures Tackle Immigration

**Carlos Macias**  
**May 2, 2008**



Several new state laws require employers to verify the legal status of immigrant workers.

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The size of this year's May Day pro-immigration rallies **paled** in comparison to the massive demonstrations held across the United States in 2006. Yet the large number of state-level immigration laws under consideration demonstrates the issue's continued importance. Earlier in the week, Arizona's Governor Janet Napolitano **vetoed state legislation** that would have mandated all state police and sheriff departments to enforce immigration laws. The bill

raised concerns about ethnic profiling and the likelihood of imposing a heavy burden on the state's already overloaded crime-fighting capacity. A *New York Times* editorial **applauded** the governor's decision, saying that a "rational immigration system will not be resolved by simplistic, predatory enforcement schemes."

But Arizona is not alone. In early March, Mississippi Governor Hayley Barbour **signed** a far-reaching **law** obligating employers to use the Department of Homeland Security's electronic system to verify employees' legal immigration status. Furthermore, the law makes it possible to charge an undocumented worker with a felony for holding a job. **South Carolina** and **Rhode Island** recently approved comparable laws. Immigration legislation gains consideration on local levels as well; an employee verification law proposed in Long Island's Suffolk County was recently **placed on a hold** by a court injunction. An editorial in *Newsday* examines the **impact of anti-immigration legislation** in Riverside, New Jersey, where the flight of migrant labor harmed not only the local economy but also the town's reputation.

In a report prepared for the Migration Policy Institute, immigration law expert Christina Rodríguez **assesses (PDF)** the legal validity of state and municipal-level immigration measures. In many cases, these states and counties are new immigrant destinations. "The traditional American story of immigrant enclaves in the heart of major cities has been fundamentally altered with the restructuring of the U.S. economy, the decentralization of cities, and the growth of the suburbs as major employment centers," according to a Migration Information Source analysis.

The arrival of immigrants in new parts of the United States is just one factor behind anti-immigration legislation; the foundering U.S. economy is another. In a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed, James Riley comments that immigrants become scapegoats when economic concerns loom, and in this day and age. "Today, it means **blaming Latinos**," he writes. He argues that immigrant workers keep labor markets flexible, benefiting employees and employers alike.

The U.S. economic downturn also shows signs of affecting immigrants—and the communities they send money to. A recently released Inter American Development Bank **poll** conducted in

## Upcoming Programs

- Jun 17 **AQ Bogotá Launch: Economic Growth and Social Mobility Bogotá**
- Jun 18 **2008 Latin American Cities Conference: Bogotá, Colombia**
- Jun 18 **Launch: *Estado de Derecho, Crecimiento Económico y Prosperidad* Bogotá D.C.**

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## Past Programs

- Jun 4 **Private Luncheon: Colombian Minister of Trade Luis Guillermo Plata New York**
- Jun 2 **The Andean Region at a Crossroads: Economic, Political, and Security Prospects New York**
- May 23 **Private Breakfast for Admiral James D. Stavridis, U.S. Southern Command New York**

## Newsletters

AS/COA provides up-to-date analysis through *News & Views*, the monthly policy e-newsletter, and the Weekly Roundup, a summary of the latest news stories covering the Americas.

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## Americas Quarterly

February 2008 showed that only 50 percent of immigrants send money home on a regular basis compared to 73 percent two years ago. The report attributes the slowing remittance flows to not only the weakened economy, but also the "harsher climate against immigration in this country." An AS/COA analysis [examines](#) the remittance slowdown.

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At the recent North American Leaders' Summit gathered in New Orleans, Mexican President Felipe Calderón [emphasized](#) the importance of addressing the immigration problem "with respect and responsibility." U.S. President George Bush also voiced his support for comprehensive immigration reform and closer ties with North American Free Trade Agreement partners. President Bush will serve as a keynote speaker at the [38th annual Washington Conference on the Americas: The Globalization of the Americas](#).

Although little progress is expected on federal immigration reform before a new U.S. president takes office, Democratic and Republican presidential candidates [share common views](#) on immigration-related matters; they support comprehensive immigration reform and tougher penalties for employers who hire undocumented workers. They also voted for raising a fence along the U.S.-Mexican border.

Send questions and comments for the editor to:  
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