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# **THE ECONOMIC COSTS OF PURSUING HARDLINE STATE IMMIGRATION POLICIES:**

**How Expanded Immigration Enforcement Undermined  
Arizona and Florida's Economy**





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How Expanded Immigration Enforcement  
Undermined Arizona and Florida's Economy

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## Introduction

On December 13, 2023, Texas Governor Greg Abbott signed SB 4, a bill that aims to bolster his hardline efforts to deter the arrival of migrants to the U.S.-Mexico border.<sup>1</sup> The law allows all Texas law

enforcement officers to arrest individuals who they believe have undocumented status in the United States.<sup>2</sup> Although lawsuits against the bill have led to its temporary suspension as it gradually heads to the U.S. Supreme Court, other states like Iowa and Louisiana have started proposing and passing similar laws, demonstrating the political appeal of hardline state immigration laws.<sup>3</sup>

SB 4 is the latest case where state legislatures pass immigration laws with hardline enforcement components to address concerns about immigration. In 2010, the Arizona state legislature passed SB 1070, which allowed local law enforcement to detain purported undocumented individuals. SB 1070 prompted 11 states to adopt similar measures in the subsequent year. In May 2023, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis signed SB 1718, a hardline law that targeted immigrants through measures such as requiring hospitals to ask and report to the state about an individual's legal status.

Data about the role that Latinos – especially Latino immigrants – play in local economies and economic assessments show SB 1070 and SB 1718 carried sizeable economic costs. Arizona's economy took major hits due to boycotts against the law and the exodus of immigrant workers and consumers who played major roles in the state's economy. Reports from Florida suggest that undocumented migrants, who contributed \$12.6 billion to the state's economy in 2019, have started leaving the state. These trends have led SB 1718's proponents in the state's legislature to publicly outline how migrants can use "loopholes" to continue working in the state.

In short, these cases suggest that hardline state immigration laws can impose significant costs on their states' economies when they target – and, in many instances, force out – populations that play a central role in their consumer base and labor markets. These findings suggest the newest wave of hardline immigration enforcement laws that emerged after SB 4's adoption will generate the same results in states with large immigrant populations. More importantly, they serve as a preview of the significant damage that widespread enforcement actions such as mass deportations of the undocumented would inflict on the U.S. economy, especially when it comes to the removal of workers central to the country's workforce and tax base.

“Each time history repeats itself, the price goes up.

— Ronald Wright

## Arizona's SB 1070 (2010)

Arizona SB 1070, the “Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act” also known as the “show me your papers” bill, was passed by the Arizona state legislature in April 2010 to expel undocumented immigrants from the state through measures like requiring law enforcement agents to ask about an individual’s legal status. This law stands as the defining example of the manner hardline state immigration laws can hurt

the state’s economy, especially as migrants central to key industries leave for other states because of the law’s implementation.



### **SB 1070: The Emergence of Using Local Authorities to Target a State’s Immigrant Population Through Enforcement Actions**

SB 1070 emerged from a context where state leaders with anti-immigrant positions led efforts to target immigrants to “control” the border and promote public safety. One individual was Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio, who modeled himself as “America’s Toughest Sheriff” and used the Sheriff’s office to actively profile, intimidate and detain Latino and immigrant communities to “combat” undocumented immigration in the state.<sup>4</sup> State Senator Russel Pearce, a former

deputy of Arpaio, also championed anti-immigrant bills that targeted those they suspected of being undocumented immigrants.<sup>5</sup>

Pearce worked with several legislators to introduce SB 1070, which aimed to make undocumented immigrants leave the state<sup>6</sup> through four major sets of measures:

- Making failure to comply with federal alien registration requirements a misdemeanor.
- Making it illegal under state law for undocumented immigrants to work or seek work in the state.
- Authorized the warrantless arrest of an individual if an officer has “probable cause” to believe they have “committed any public offense that makes the person removable from the United States.”
- Required officers to inquire about an individual’s legal status during routine stops.

After the law passed the Senate 17 to 13 in February 2010 and the House passed a modified version of the bill 35 to 21 in April 2010, Governor Janet Brewer signed the law on April 23, 2010, arguing that the law “represents another tool for our state to use as we work to solve a crisis we did not create and the federal government has refused to fix.”<sup>7</sup> While the law generated pushback from President Obama, the Mexican government and civil rights groups in Arizona,<sup>8</sup> it impacted the legislative landscape for state immigration bills as six states adopted copycat versions of the bill within a year of its passage.<sup>9</sup>

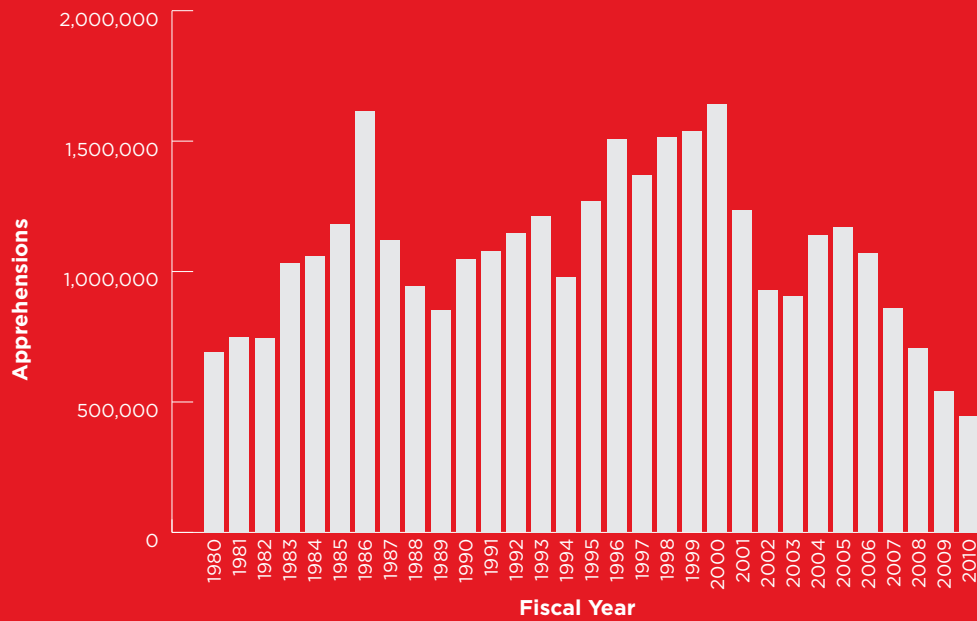


A combination of litigation and settlements eventually led to the law’s demise. Although the Obama administration’s lawsuit did not expunge the law’s core component, it successfully derailed most of its provisions.<sup>10</sup> On June 25, 2012, the Supreme Court upheld the provision that required officers to inquire about an individual’s status but struck down the other three provisions that Judge Bolton blocked in 2010. The ACLU and other groups launched litigation against the law that resulted in restricting the law’s core component – requiring local law enforcement to inquire about an individual’s status – through a settlement with the state’s attorney general office.<sup>11</sup>



The adoption of SB 1070 happened in a context where the politics around immigration in Arizona diverged from the realities at the border. As Figure 1 shows, the number of encounters at the U.S.-Mexico border dropped significantly between FY 2000 and FY 2010 after these numbers remained at elevated levels in the 1980s.

**Figure 1:**  
Encounters at the U.S.-Mexico Border (FY 1980 to FY 2010)



Source: CBP<sup>12</sup>

Although this drop in encounters initially appears to stem from efforts to expand border and interior immigration enforcement, studies found the state of the U.S. economy during the global recession and the diminution of the migrant age population played a substantially larger role in producing these outcomes,<sup>13</sup> raising questions about the efficacy of these hardline measures.



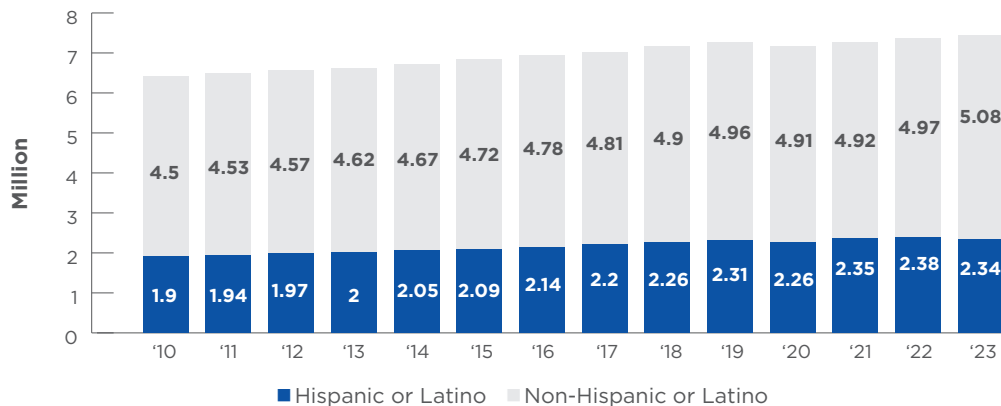


### The Latino and Immigrant Population in Arizona’s Labor Force

The adoption of SB 1070 occurred in a state where Latinos form a significant part of the state’s population and labor force that contributes to its tax base and economy. As Figure 2 shows, the number of Latinos in the state grew from 6,413,737 in 2010 to 6,828,065 in 2015, a number that increased to 7,431,344 in 2023. Latinos were approximately 30% of the state’s population between 2010 and 2023.

**Figure 2:**

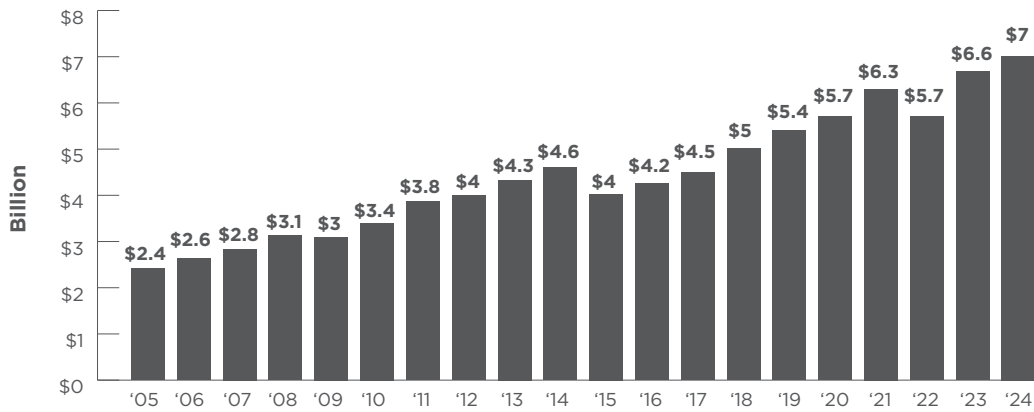
Population of Hispanic or Latino Origin Individuals in Arizona (2010 to 2023)



Source: American Community Survey<sup>14</sup>

Latinos have significant purchasing power in Arizona. As Figure 3 illustrates, this population’s purchasing power increased from 2.4 billion in 2005 to 4.6 billion in 2015, an amount that increased to 7 billion in 2024. In 2015, Hispanic households contributed \$7.2 billion in federal, state and local taxes.<sup>15</sup>

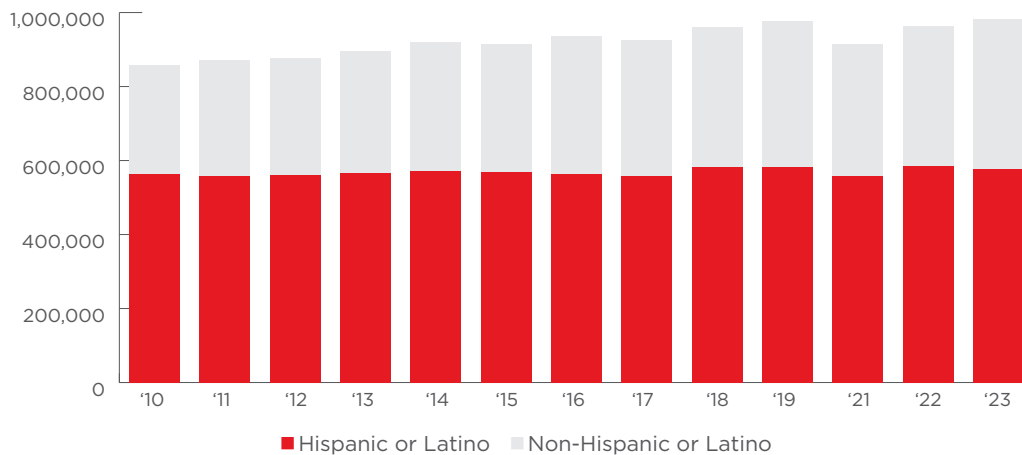
**Figure 3:** Latino Purchasing Power in Arizona (2005 to 2024)



Source: Arizona Hispanic Chamber of Commerce<sup>16</sup>

Individuals of Hispanic or Latino origin form most of the state’s foreign-born population (Figure 4). Between 2010 and 2023, individuals from this background formed between 58% to 65% of the state’s foreign-born population. In 2015, households led by Hispanic immigrants in Arizona had a spending power of \$8.1 billion and contributed \$2.5 billion in federal, state and local taxes.<sup>17</sup>

**Figure 4:** Hispanic or Latino Origin Individuals in Arizona’s Foreign-Born Population (2010 to 2023)



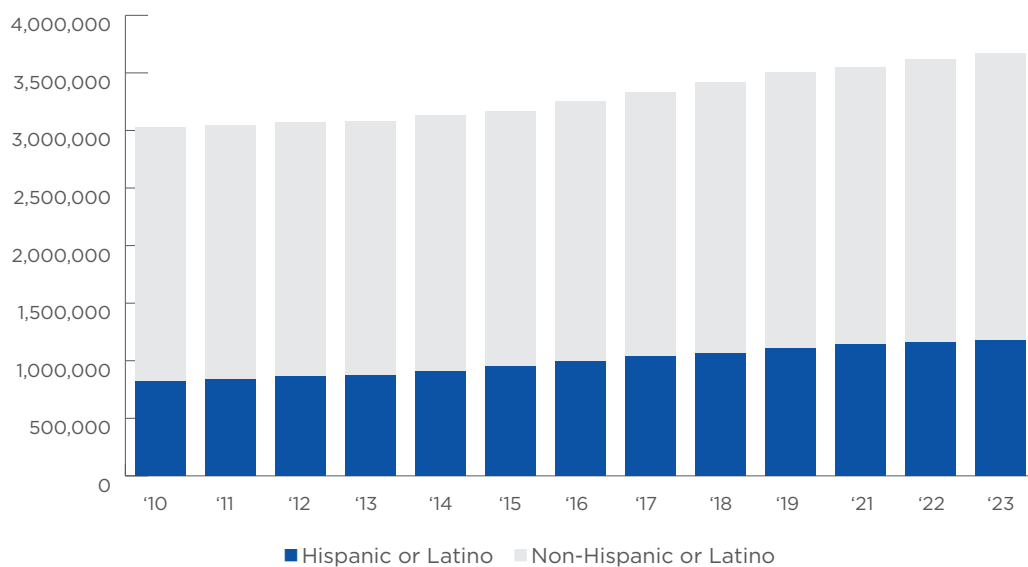
Source: American Community Survey<sup>18</sup>



The number of Latinos in the state’s labor force has increased in recent years. As Figure 5 shows, the number of Latinos in Arizona between the ages of 16 and 64 who were active in the state’s labor force increased from 911,128 in 2015 to 1,176,492 in 2023, a reversal from the period in 2010 and 2014 when these numbers only grew from 4824,012 to 876,037. Latinos accounted for approximately 30% of the state’s labor force during this period.

**Figure 5:**

Hispanic or Latino Origin Individuals in Arizona’s Labor Force (2010 to 2023)

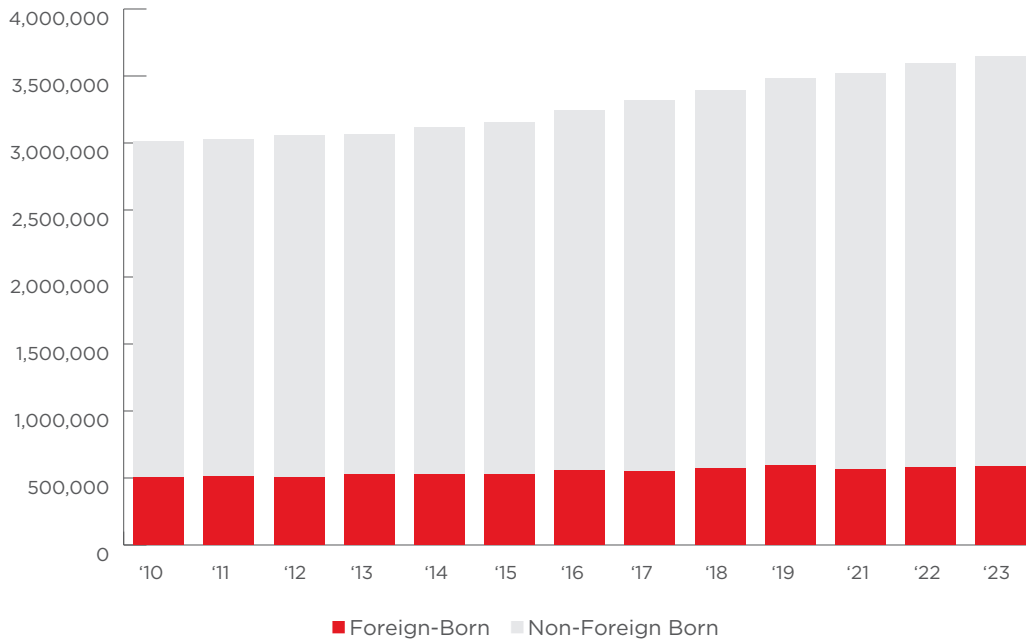


Source: American Community Survey<sup>19</sup>

Foreign-born individuals have been a consistent segment of the state’s labor force, forming 16% to 17% of this force between 2010 and 2023 (Figure 6). A 2012 study found that foreign-born individuals with legal status contributed 20.9 billion to the state’s GDP and \$3.5 billion in personal, business and sales taxes to the state’s coffers.<sup>20</sup>

**Figure 6:**

Population of Foreign-Born Individuals in Arizona’s Labor Force (2010 to 2023)



Source: American Community Survey<sup>21</sup>



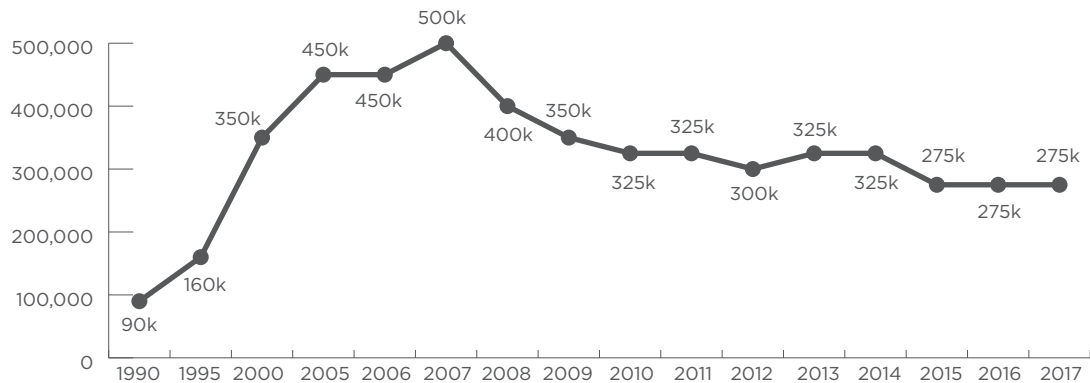
Undocumented immigrants form a key group in the state’s Latino population, especially during the period when SB 1070 was in effect. A 2012 study estimated that 253,296 of the state’s 283,088 undocumented immigrants were Hispanic, with 243,127 from North America – which includes Mexico – 10,358 from Central America and 2,280 from South America. The same study found that 169,876 individuals from the state’s 257,998 undocumented immigrants were in the labor force in the same year.<sup>22</sup> Another 2012 study found undocumented immigrants contributed \$2.4 billion in tax revenue and \$13.3 billion to the state’s GDP, with legalization adding another \$540 million in tax contributions.<sup>23</sup>

### The Law’s Fallout: Arizona Lost Workers Fleeing from SB 1070 While Facing Boycotts

The law’s efforts to target undocumented immigrants – or individuals perceived as undocumented immigrants – and make them leave the state generated economic losses because it forced out these key segments of its labor force, one that included a considerable number of Latinos. A 2012 Pew Research Center analysis found the state dropped from having the 8<sup>th</sup> largest immigrant population in 2000 to the 11<sup>th</sup> largest in 2012.<sup>24</sup> A 2019 Pew Research Center study also found the state’s workforce suffered significant losses after 40% of the state’s undocumented residents moved to other states or to Mexico between 2007 and 2016, largely due to SB 1070 (Figure 7).<sup>25</sup>

**Figure 7:**

Pew Research Center Estimates of Unauthorized Population in Arizona (1990 to 2017)



Source: Pew Research Center<sup>26</sup>

A 2016 Moody’s Analytics study found this exodus from the state reduced Arizona’s GDP by an average of 2% annually between 2008 and 2015 and reduced overall employment by 2.5%.<sup>27</sup> Other studies found these losses hit the state’s construction and agricultural sectors especially hard since they relied heavily on these workers. Arizona’s employment in the construction sector declined by 45.5% between July 2007 and December 2014, a trend from the 2008 housing crash that the law’s adoption accelerated between 2010 and 2014. Arizona’s employment in the agricultural sector declined by approximately 20% between 2007 and 2011.<sup>28</sup>

Economic boycotts against the law compounded these economic losses from the loss of important workers.<sup>29</sup> In the year following the passage of Arizona SB 1070, for instance, the state experienced approximately \$141 million in losses from conference cancellations.<sup>30</sup> Its tourism industry also saw a loss of \$253 million in economic output, \$9.4 million in tax revenues and 2,761 jobs.<sup>31</sup>

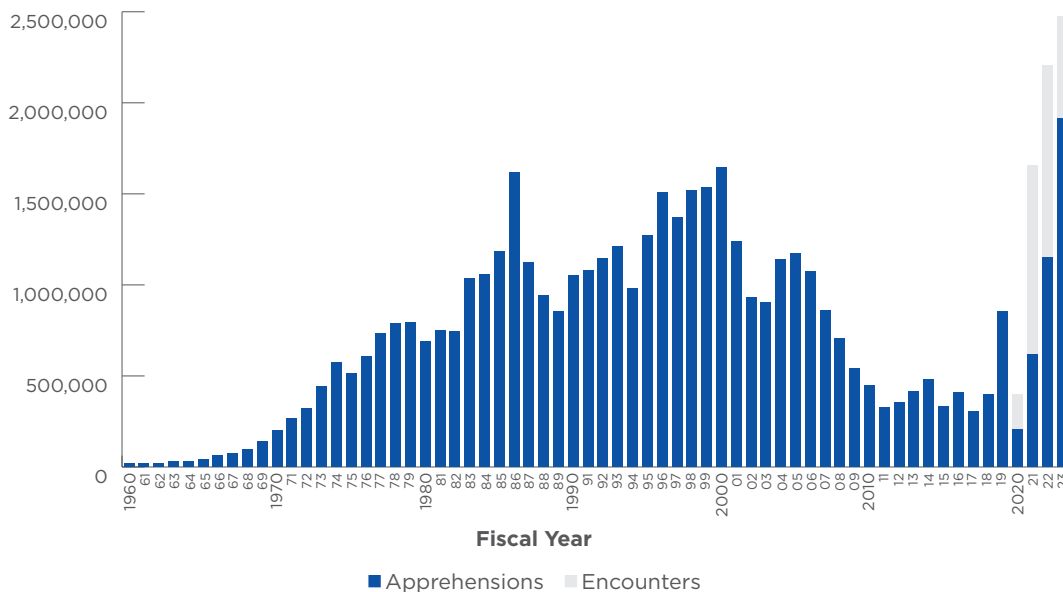
## Florida’s SB 1718 (2023)

Florida’s SB 1718 was passed by the state’s legislature in May 2023 to counteract a purported “invasion” of the U.S.-Mexico border. Like the other laws in this report, SB 1718 used hardline measures to make immigrants leave Florida, including criminalizing the transportation of migrants into the state and requiring certain hospitals to ask about an individual’s legal status. This case confirms that hardline state immigration laws can hurt a state’s economy by targeting individuals who play key roles in the state’s labor market and consumer base.

### SB 1718: An Increase in Border Arrivals Creates a New Opening to Target Immigrants Through Hardline Immigration Laws

SB 1718 emerged in the middle of a period where Border Patrol registered an increasing number of encounters at the U.S.-Mexico border. After apprehensions dropped between 2001 and 2011, arrivals to the U.S.-Mexico border began to increase in 2014 as the population shifted from single Mexican men to more diverse – and vulnerable – populations that encompassed a broader range of nationalities coming across from Latin America.<sup>32</sup> As Figure 8 shows, the number of encounters at the U.S.-Mexico border grew from 479,000 in FY 2014 to 2,475,669 in FY 2023.

**Figure 8:** Encounters at the U.S.-Mexico Border (FY 1980 to FY 2023)



Source: CBP<sup>33</sup>

Although these increases spanned the Obama and Trump administrations, the continuing rise of encounters at the border emerged as a challenge for the Biden administration, especially from governors like Texas Governor Greg Abbott who began busing migrants to “blue” cities with Democratic mayors such as Chicago and New York to exploit these circumstances for political gain.<sup>34</sup>



Governor Ron DeSantis and the Florida state legislature proceeded to use SB 1718\* to target undocumented immigrants despite claims it would rectify<sup>35</sup> Biden’s purported approach to immigration. The bill, which DeSantis proposed,<sup>36</sup> adopted various hardline measures to meet these goals,<sup>37</sup> including:

- The new law criminalized people as human smugglers who “knowingly and willfully” cross the State line into Florida with people they know, or reasonably should know, are undocumented.
- The law invalidated out-of-state licenses created specifically for undocumented individuals as well as ones indicating its holder did not provide proof of lawful presence in the United States.
- Hospitals that accept Medicaid must ask about an individual’s immigration status on registration or admission forms. However, individuals do not have to answer these questions and these answers cannot impact their treatment.
- Requires all employers with 25 or more employees to use the E-Verify system to ensure employees are in the country legally after the law came into effect.

DeSantis also sent migrants to Massachusetts in September 2022<sup>38</sup> much like Governor Abbott did with border arrivals coming into his state.<sup>39</sup> Although this move generated significant blowback against DeSantis after reports surfaced that a former Army counterintelligence agent tricked the migrants into leaving for Massachusetts,<sup>40</sup> the state legislature allocated \$10 million for these purposes in February 2023.<sup>41</sup> SB 1718 also appropriated \$12 million for the same objectives.<sup>42</sup>

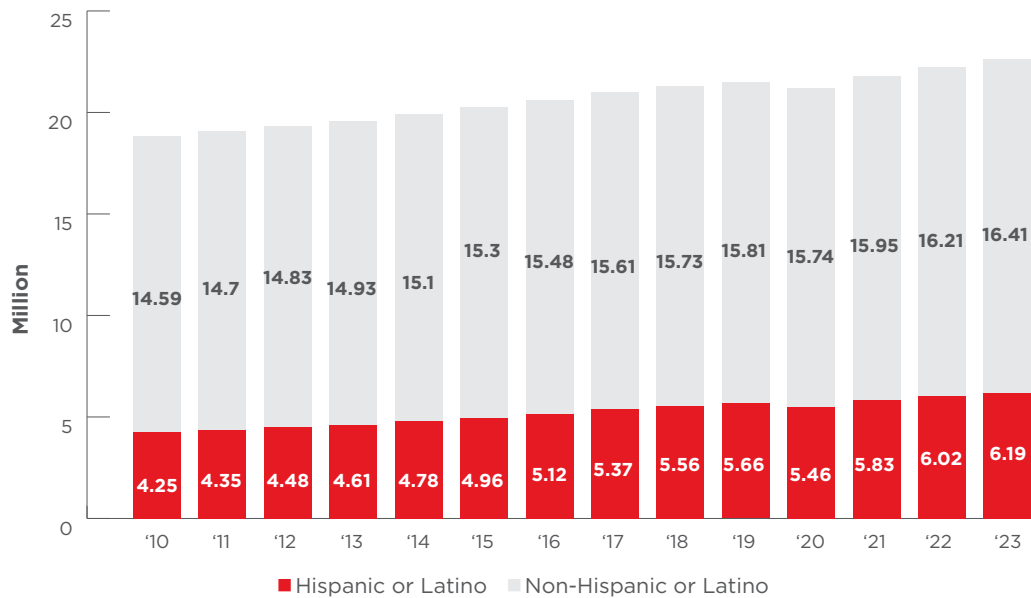
\* The bill builds on earlier efforts to adopt hardline approaches to immigration, including SB 168, which the Florida legislature passed in May 2019 to force local law enforcement agencies to work with federal immigration authorities and outlaw any effort by local authorities to impede this cooperation. Sullivan, Kate. “Florida Legislature Passes Ban on Sanctuary Cities | CNN Politics.” CNN, May 3, 2019. <https://www.cnn.com/2019/05/02/politics/florida-legislature-sanctuary-city-ban/index.html> (accessed May 25, 2024).



### The Latino and Immigrant Population in Florida’s Labor Force

The passage of SB 1718 occurred as Latinos emerged as a major segment of the state’s population and workforce that contributed to its tax base and economy. As Figure 9 shows, the number of Latinos in the state grew from 18,843,326 in 2010 to 2,2610,726 in 2023, with Latinos forming 22% of the state’s total population in 2010 and 27% in 2023.

**Figure 9:** Population of Hispanic or Latino Origin in Florida (2010 to 2023)

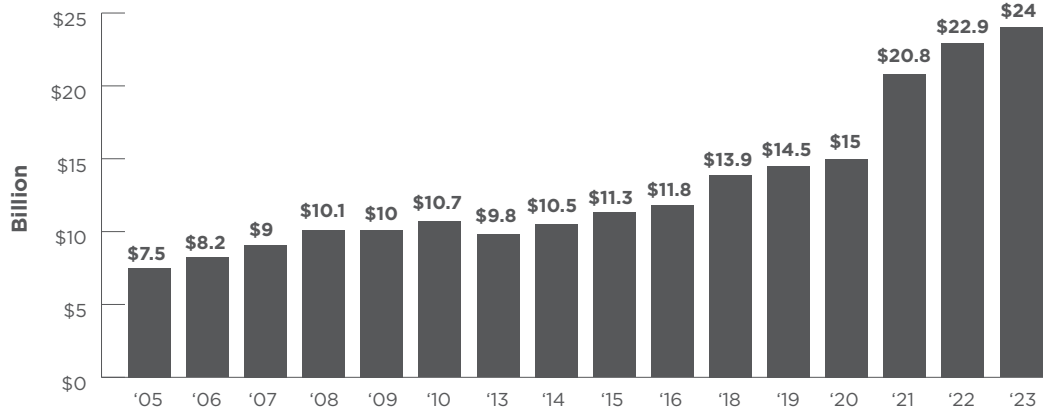


Source: American Community Survey<sup>43</sup>



Latinos have a great deal of purchasing power in Florida. As Figure 10 illustrates, this population’s purchasing power increased from 7.5 billion in 2005 to 24 billion in 2023. A 2022 study estimated that the state’s Latino population contributed \$259 billion to its GDP in 2018, with \$176.5 billion coming from personal consumption expenditures.<sup>44</sup>

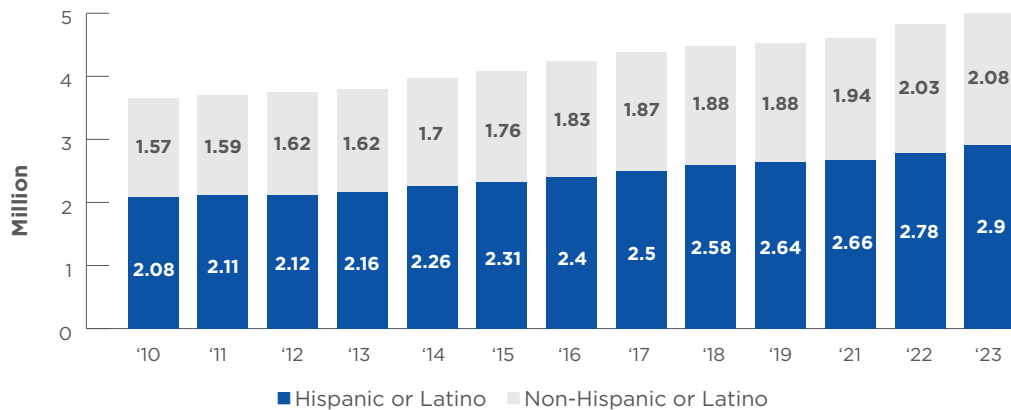
**Figure 10:** Latino Purchasing Power in Florida (2005 to 2023)



Source: The Selig Center<sup>45</sup>

Individuals of Hispanic or Latino origin form most of the state’s foreign-born population (Figure 11). Between 2010 and 2023, individuals from this background comprised between 58% to 65% of the state’s foreign-born population. In 2015, households led by Hispanic immigrants in Florida had a spending power of \$38.6 billion and contributed \$12 billion in federal, state and local taxes.<sup>46</sup>

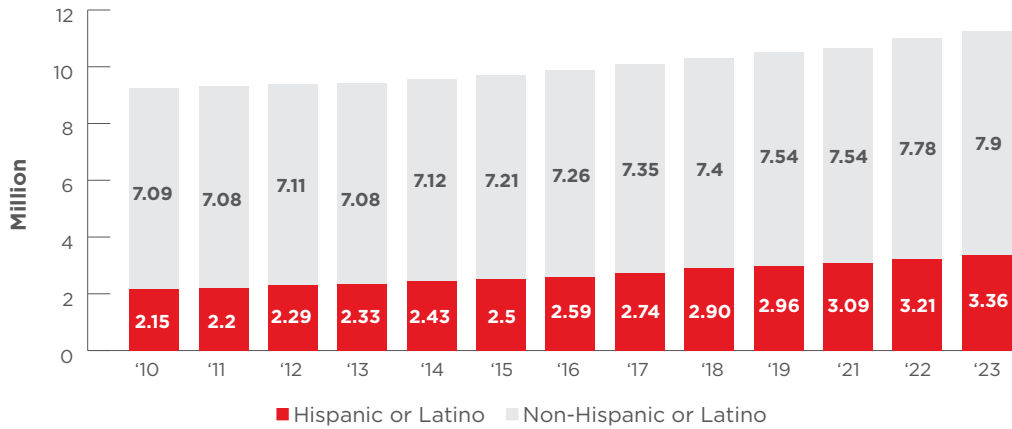
**Figure 11:** Hispanic or Latino Origin Population in Florida’s Foreign-Born Population (2010 to 2023)



Source: American Community Survey<sup>47</sup>

Latinos constitute a significant portion of Florida’s labor force as they do in Arizona. As Figure 12 shows, the number of Latinos in Florida’s labor force increased from 2,158,548 in 2010 to 3,360,192 in 2023, forming 27% to 32% of this force during this period.

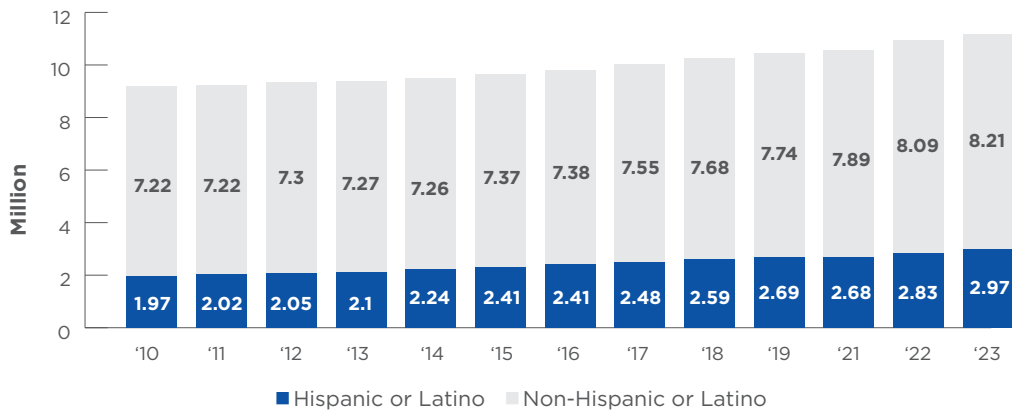
**Figure 12:**  
Hispanic or Latino Origin Population in Florida’s Labor Force (2010 to 2023)



Source: American Community Survey<sup>48</sup>

Foreign-born individuals have become a vital part of the state’s labor force between 2010 and 2023, forming between 21% to 27% during this period (Figure 13). Studies show that foreign-born individuals contributed \$27 billion in federal taxes and over \$10 billion in state and local taxes. Immigrant-led households invested \$125 billion into the state’s economy.<sup>49</sup>

**Figure 13:**  
Population of Foreign-Born Individuals in Florida’s Labor Force (2010 to 2023)



Source: American Community Survey<sup>50</sup>



Undocumented immigrants form a key group in the state's Latino population and workforce. A 2022 study estimated that 901,732 of the state's 1,185,446 undocumented immigrants were Hispanic, with 332,603 from North America, 321,752 from South America, 289,463 from Central America and 124,908 from the Caribbean. 799,541 individuals from the state's 1,045,214 undocumented workers were active in the labor force, an increase from the 693,351 individuals active in the state's labor force from the state's 926,445 undocumented workers in 2012. A 2024 study found that undocumented immigrants contributed \$1.8 billion in state and local taxes in 2022, a number that would increase to \$2 billion if these individuals could access work permits to remain in the state's workforce legally.<sup>51</sup>

### **The Law's Fallout: A Potentially Devastating Hit to Florida's Economy That Echoes SB 1070's Impact on Arizona**

Much like SB 1070, SB 1718 has impacted Florida's economic outlook in the year since the law's adoption. The Florida Policy Institute produced an initial analysis of the ways the law's efforts to drive immigrants from the state will negatively impact its economy. It noted that six key industries employ 391,000 undocumented workers – or 10% of these industries' employees – who generated \$12.6 billion for the state's economy in 2019. In addition to losing this economic output, the loss of these workers would also hurt the state's fiscal base since immigrants without a documented status contributed approximately \$923 million to state and local taxes in 2019.<sup>52</sup>



Despite warnings from employer groups that the law would imperil their workforces,\* the law's adoption prompted an exodus of migrants from the state, leaving employers without vital workers, localities without populations that support their tax base and stores without key customers for their products and services.<sup>53</sup> These losses have been acute in industries that rely heavily on immigrants such as the agriculture, construction, hospitality and restaurant industries<sup>54</sup> without any sizable impact on immigrants entering the state.<sup>†</sup> These losses alarmed some of the bill's advocates in the state legislature, with one member stating the law's ongoing impact would be "very dangerous for agriculture. We desperately need more legal workers and this is going to make it worse."<sup>55</sup>

Much like SB 1070, Florida has seen tourism drop as SB 1718 and other controversial laws have led fewer organizations and individuals to visit the state in 2023. While tourism is influenced by a wide array of factors, tourism to the state in the final quarter of 2023 decreased, powered by a considerable drop in domestic tourism of 12% relative to the same period in 2022. Hotel rooms sold decreased by 4.4% as civil rights organizations issued travel warning advisories after SB 1718 was signed into law. Multiple organizations have canceled conventions in the state, citing the political climate and controversial policies as a reason, with early predictions putting the costs at \$20 million.<sup>56</sup>

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\* Mapp, Annie. "Immigration bill could negatively impact agriculture industry, Farmworker Association of Florida Says." WFLA, May 4, 2023. <https://www.wfla.com/news/hillsborough-county/immigration-bill-could-impact-agriculture-industry-farmworker-association-of-florida-says/> (accessed October 31, 2024).

† While the bill aimed to deter the arrival of undocumented immigrants, reports have documented an increase in informal driving networks transporting undocumented across state lines. Garsd, Jasmine. "Anguish and fear in Florida amid rising anti-immigrant sentiment." National Public Radio, April 24, 2024. <https://www.npr.org/2024/04/24/1236631178/florida-immigration-desantis-sb1718-fear> (accessed May 25, 2024).

## Conclusion: The National Implications of the Economic Costs of Hardline State Immigration Laws

As this report has shown, the adoption of hardline state immigration laws can generate hefty economic costs for the states when Latinos form major segments of their state's consumer and labor force, which has implications for the adoption of the recent wave of state enforcement laws. Although federal courts have paused the implementation of Texas SB 4 as legal challenges against the law proceed,<sup>57</sup> the law could produce similar effects as SB 1070 and SB 1718 since the state relies heavily on immigrant workers.<sup>58</sup> The emergence of SB 4 copycat laws in Iowa, Louisiana and other states,<sup>59</sup> a trend that mirrors the wave of SB 1070-style laws that surged after the Arizona law's adoption, could cause the same impacts in those states if immigrants form significant portions of their workforce and consumer base.

These case studies serve as a preview for large-scale national enforcement efforts that target undocumented individuals. In terms of economic costs, deporting the nation's 8.1 million undocumented workers, who comprise 5% of the nation's workforce, would reduce Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 2.6% – nearly \$5 trillion – over ten years.<sup>60</sup> Others note that deporting these individuals would cost the country \$46.8 billion in federal taxes, \$29.3 billion in state and local taxes and 22.6 billion in Social Security tax payments.<sup>61</sup> Studies show that unilaterally deporting the undocumented would cost the U.S. government at least \$315 billion, an amount that expands to \$967.9 billion if the country deportes one million individuals every year for a decade.<sup>62</sup>

Rather than undermining the U.S. economy, lawmakers should legalize the undocumented to strengthen it. Estimates show legalizing undocumented workers would generate \$1.5 trillion towards the nation's GDP over 10 years, provide \$367 in cumulative new tax revenues and create 371,000 new jobs by 2031.<sup>63</sup> Others show relief for all undocumented immigrants would produce a cumulative of \$1.7 trillion over 10 years and create 438,800 new jobs.<sup>64</sup> To be sure, the U.S. must address the challenges at the U.S.-Mexico border, including tackling illicit actors and organizing migration to the United States. But these measures should support a balanced approach that also provides individuals with a fair shot to legally enter the country and provides relief for the undocumented,<sup>65</sup> not one that harms individuals who play a key role in boosting the country's economic future.<sup>66</sup>



## Acknowledgements

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## Endnotes

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