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## [Why did Napolitano Wait So Long And Do So Little?](#)

Posted by: [Pablo Alvarado](#) in [Migrant Rights Blog](#)

on May 23, 2013

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Despite Monday's unfortunate Supreme Court ruling that allows Arizona, at least for now, to go forward with state-mandated immigrant-hunting and racial profiling, there is reason to believe that the tide is turning on the Arizona approach to immigration policies (replicated in Georgia, Alabama and several other states).

Just days before the court ruling, undocumented students pushed the president to announce a new Department of Homeland Security policy potentially offering DREAM-eligible students work permits instead of deportation to countries many of them have never known.

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No doubt it was the threat of embarrassment to the president that finally led Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano to codify what was common knowledge — that immigrant communities deserve relief from the threat of deportation. The new policy counteracts previous administration claims about DHS' limited ability to act. It demonstrates that Napolitano has had the authority to relieve suffering all along. Her refusal to do so earlier or do more now shows that only pressure from organized and undocumented communities makes the difference.

It may very well be Napolitano's Arizona roots that pose a big part of the problem for those who want a more even-handed approach to overseeing our broken immigration laws.

Her refusal to rein in enforcement of the "Secure Communities" immigrant roundup program has led to

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some 400,000 deportations annually — most of them initially stopped for a minor traffic infraction or other non-criminal behavior. Under Napolitano’s leadership, this administration has presided over more deportations than any other in history. Florida has been among the most affected states.

“Secure Communities” erodes public safety because it deters witnesses and victims of crime from contacting or collaborating with local police for fear of deportation. Although several governors and big city mayors have expressed vigorous opposition, earlier this month DHS massively expanded the program into requiring nearly all state and local police to notify federal authorities when they arrest someone who might be in the country without documents, no matter what infraction led to the arrest.

Despite DHS spin, the result has been families divided and communities disrupted.

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Secure Communities in a sense had its origins in Arizona, when Napolitano was the governor. With her support, Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio, now the subject of a Department of Justice civil rights investigation, was given immigration enforcement power in Phoenix as part of a post- 9/11 experiment. Already controversial for his abusive treatment of prisoners, Sheriff Arpaio used his federally-granted authority to begin a war of attrition against Latinos in his county that he is carrying on to this day.

That “experiment” in Arizona and 60 other countries evolved into Napolitano’s Secure Communities juggernaut, the Arizonification of the entire country. Almost immediately after it’s implementation, reports of racial profiling and other discriminatory behavior became commonplace , but Napolitano did little to respond. With escalating scrutiny from the Department of Justice and civil rights proponents, DHS has offered lip service reform while aggressively clinging to the original Arizona model.

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Last Sunday in Phoenix I joined 3,000 people in a vigil outside Arpaio's Maricopa County jail with a message that has become rebellious in today's climate; love will conquer hate. While Secretary Napolitano may be reluctant to choose her side on that equation, it will be the brave steps of those currently deemed "illegal" who will force her to the right side of history.

That dilemma will not be just for Napolitano alone but for every officeholder today. In California's state assembly, there is an antidote to Arizona's SB1070. The Trust Act (AB 1081), will create a bright line between police and immigration authorities, and could become a model for states looking to modify the impact of the Secure Communities program.

Immigrants are coming to understand that the only secure community is an organized one. The fruits of

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their efforts will be policies that protect and advance the rights of all of us, regardless of the Secretary of Homeland Security's stubborn loyalty to Sheriff Arpaio and his policies that she has brought to the national level.

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*Originally published in [the Miami Herald](#). June 27, 2012.*

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<http://www.miamiherald.com/2012/06/27/2871217/why-did-napolitano-and-obama-wait.html#storylink=cpy>