



Anti-Immigration Ads Don't Add Up in 2008

Immigrant Bashing as Wedge Issue a Bust

A new analysis of immigration advertisements finds that the strategy of using immigration as a political wedge issue in the 2008 election cycle was an utter failure.

In the aftermath of the 2008 elections, America's Voice (AV) conducted a [series of public opinion polls](#), studied [battleground races](#) where immigration played a key role, and evaluated the [unprecedented turnout of Latino](#) and immigrant voters. Adding to this seminal research, AV's latest post-election report evaluates television advertisement data from the Campaign Media Analysis Group (CMAG) and classifies each ad on a spectrum ranging from positive, pro-immigration ads ("1") to harsh, anti-immigration ads ("5").¹

AV is excited to produce this first-of-its-kind report summarizing key findings. According to our review:

Immigration ads were prominent in many races throughout the country in 2008. In total, 234 immigration-related ads aired in 79 federal and statewide campaigns in 35 states.² Total spending on immigration-related ads by campaigns, parties, and outside groups was at least \$27.2 million.

The vast majority of immigration ads were on enforcement alone, not comprehensive reform. 84% of all immigration ads this cycle were on the "enforcement-only" and in many cases anti-immigrant side of the spectrum, while pro-immigrant ads represented just 5% of the total. Harsh immigration ads also dominated overall spending, as candidates, parties, and outside

¹ Detailed "methodology" is available at the end of the report.

² Immigration ads aired in 70% of the states: AL, AZ, CA, CO, FL, GA, ID, IL, IN, KS, KY, LA, MD, MI, MN, MO, MS, NC, NH, NM, NV, NY, OH, OK, OR, PA, SC, SD, TN, TX, UT, VA, WI, WV, and WY.

organizations funded these ads at approximately an 8:1 ratio over positive immigration ads (\$21m to \$2.7m).

Despite spending significantly on immigration ads, most candidates airing them lost. Of the 218 ads aired by Republicans or Democrats in races that have been decided, only 69, or 32%, favored a winning candidate.³ GOP candidates, party committees, and outside group allies sponsored 78% of the immigration-related ads in races that have been decided. Only 17% of these ads were placed by winning GOP candidates and their allies.

In the Presidential campaign, immigration was the topic of 9 ads run by Obama and McCain or their parties, totaling over \$2.5 million in spending. In addition, Spanish language advertising on immigration was heavily used by both Presidential campaigns. While only 4% of the overall number of ads and 8% of the overall spending on immigration ads was in Spanish (10 ads and \$2.2m respectively), these ads were key components of the Presidential campaigns' efforts to target an important group of swing voters.

Outside groups also aired immigration ads targeting the Presidential contest, and their tone was overwhelmingly negative. Outside organizations—National Rifle Association, National Republican Trust PAC, and Latinos for Reform—sponsored a total of four ads on immigration in the Presidential race. Each of these ads attacked Obama on the issue—three from a harsh, anti-immigration position. FactCheck.org called the [NRA and Latinos for Reform ads](#) “false” and “misleading,” and said that the [National Republican Trust PAC ad](#) on driver’s licenses was “one of the sleaziest false TV ads of the campaign.”

Our review of immigration ads in the 2008 cycle shows that the illegal immigration wedge strategy—where mainly Republican candidates ran attack ads against Democrats—was a loser. Republican candidates and parties ran 85% of the harshest immigration ads (“5”) in decided races. Only 21% of these ads were placed by winning GOP candidates and their allies. For example, in the North Carolina Senate race between incumbent [Sen. Elizabeth Dole \(R\) and Kay Hagan \(D\)](#), Dole went on the attack against Hagan in a series of immigration ads, but still lost. The same was true in the NM-2 House race, where [Ed Tinsley \(R\) also targeted Harry Teague \(D\)](#) with harsh immigration ads.

Voters saw through false claims and distortions by the GOP. The Republican Party’s efforts to distort procedural votes and misrepresent policy positions by Democrats in ads failed to put their candidates over the top. Republican infighting on the issue depleted campaign coffers, and helped turn key states from red to blue.

³ For purposes of analysis, we grouped together candidates, parties, and ideological outside group allies. For example, ads sponsored by Republican candidates, the RNC, and Freedom’s Watch are grouped together.

Our analysis of immigration ads in the 2008 cycle confirms what we found in our earlier [report](#) on battleground races: the illegal immigration “wedge” strategy, mostly employed by Republicans against Democrats, was a spectacular failure.

The following report expands upon these key findings, and includes links to many of the campaign ads that aired this cycle. For more information or to schedule an interview with America’s Voice, please contact Paco Fabian at pfabian@americasvoiceonline.org or 202.412.9969.

I. IMMIGRATION ADS IN THE 2008 CYCLE

Immigration ads were prominent in many races throughout the country in 2008. In total, 234 immigration-related ads aired in 79 federal and statewide campaigns in 35 states.⁴ This includes ads run by third party candidates. Total spending on immigration-related ads from candidates, parties, and outside groups was at least \$27.2 million.

Immigration Ads by Type of Race and Ad Spending

| Type of Race | # of Immigration Ads | # of Related Races | % of Overall Immigration Ads | Cost of Ads | % of Overall Cost of Immigration Ads |
|---------------|----------------------|--------------------|------------------------------|----------------|--------------------------------------|
| U.S. House | 170 | 63 | 73% | \$13.3m | 49% |
| U.S. Senate | 34 | 13 | 15% | \$6.7m | 25% |
| Presidential | 23 | 1 | 10% | \$6.0m | 22% |
| Gubernatorial | 7 | 2 | 3% | \$1.1m | 4% |
| Total | 234 | 79 | | \$27.2m | |

The vast majority of immigration ads were on enforcement alone, not comprehensive reform. America's Voice used Campaign Media Analysis Group (CMAG) data to categorize each immigration ad by its tone and message, assigning a number on a scale of 1 to 5—from positive, pro-immigration ads (“1”) to extreme anti-immigration ads (“5”). Harsh, category “5” ads were the most common type of immigration ads aired this cycle, representing 56% of all immigration-related ads. Ads categorized as a “4” on the scale represented 28% of the total, meaning that 84% of all ads were on the enforcement-only side of the spectrum. Category “3” ads with more general references to immigration were 11% of the total; category “2” ads, discussing “temporary worker programs,” were less than 1% of the total; and category “1”, pro-immigrant ads were 5% of the total.

Harsh immigration ads also dominated overall spending, as candidates, parties, and outside organizations funded “5” or “4” ads at approximately an 8:1 ratio over positive immigration ads (\$21m to \$2.7m).

⁴ Immigration ads aired in 70% of the states: AL, AZ, CA, CO, FL, GA, ID, IL, IN, KS, KY, LA, MD, MI, MN, MO, MS, NC, NH, NM, NV, NY, OH, OK, OR, PA, SC, SD, TN, TX, UT, VA, WI, WV, and WY.

Immigration Ads by Classification

| Ad Classification | # of Ads | % of Overall Immigration Ads | Total Cost of Ads and % of Immigration Ad Spending |
|-------------------|------------|------------------------------|--|
| 5 | 131 | 56% | \$14.0m (51%) |
| 4 | 66 | 28% | \$7.0m (26%) |
| 3 | 25 | 11% | \$3.4m (13%) |
| 2 | 1 | <1% | \$15k (<1%) |
| 1 | 11 | 5% | \$2.7m (10%) |
| Total | 234 | | \$27.2m |

II. THE TOUGHEST TALKERS AND THE BIGGEST SPENDERS

Despite spending significantly on immigration ads, most candidates airing them lost. Of the 218 ads aired by Republicans and Democrats in races that have been decided only 69, or 32%, favored the winning candidate.⁵ GOP candidates, party committees, and outside group allies sponsored 78% of the immigration-related ads in races that have been decided. Only 17% of these ads were placed by winning GOP candidates and their allies.

Immigration Ads by Party Responsible and Result of Campaign

| Result | Total # of Immigration Ads ⁶ | # and % of Ads on behalf of Republicans | # and % of Ads on behalf of Democrats |
|-------------------|---|---|---------------------------------------|
| Winning Candidate | 69 | 29 (42%) | 41 (59%) |
| Losing Candidate | 149 | 142 (95%) | 7 (5%) |
| Total | 218 | 171 (78%) | 48 (22%) |

⁵ For purposes of analysis, we grouped together candidates, parties, and ideological outside group allies. For example, ads sponsored by Republican candidates, the RNC, and Freedom's Watch are grouped together.

⁶ This total number of ads excludes those sponsored by third party candidates (Independent, Reform, Libertarian, etc.) as well as ads that played in campaigns that have yet to be determined (CA-04, LA-04, and MN Senate).

Republican candidates were responsible for the vast majority of extreme ads. GOP candidates, the Party, and associated outside groups sponsored 83% of the category “5” and category “4” ads in decided races. Following is a breakdown of each ad category.

Immigration Ads by Type of Ad and Party Responsible

| Ad Classification | Number of Ads | # and % by GOP Candidates or Party Orgs. | # and % by Dem. Candidates or Party Orgs. |
|-------------------|---------------|--|---|
| 5 (57%) | 124 | 106 (85%) | 18 (15%) |
| 4 (27%) | 59 | 45 (76%) | 14 (24%) |
| 3 (11%) | 23 | 13 (57%) | 10 (43%) |
| 2 (<1%) | 1 | 1 (100%) | 0 |
| 1 (<1%) | 11 | 5 (45%) | 6 (55%) |
| Total | 218 | 170 (78%) | 48 (22%) |

The strategy of running on harsh immigration ads—most often used by Republicans—failed. A full 57% of immigration ads in decided races were category “5,” yet only 32% of those supported candidates that won. Republican candidates and parties ran 85% of the harshest immigration ads (“5”) in decided races. Only 21% of these ads were placed by winning GOP candidates and their allies.

Category “5” Ads by Party Responsible and Result of Campaign

| Result of Category “5” Ad Sponsors’ Race | Total | # and % on behalf of Republicans | # and % on behalf of Democrats |
|--|------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Winning Candidate | 40 | 22 (58%) | 17 (43%) |
| Losing Candidate | 84 | 83 (99%) | 1 (1%) |
| Total | 124 | 106 (85%) | 18 (15%) |

Spending big money on immigration campaign ads did not translate into election success. For example, the National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC), GOP Presidential primary candidate Mitt Romney, and Senator Elizabeth Dole (R-NC) all spent more than \$1.5m on campaign attacks ads on immigration, and lost.

Top 10: Amount Spent on Immigration Ads

| Ad Sponsor | \$ Amount | # Ads | Result |
|-------------|-----------|-------|---------------------------|
| NRCC | \$1.99m | 9 | 1 Win, 7 Losses |
| Romney | \$1.88m | 3 | Lost in Primary |
| Dole | \$1.53m | 5 | Lost in General |
| Obama | \$1.37m | 5 | Won in General |
| McCain | \$1.19m | 4 | Lost in General |
| NRSC | \$1.04m | 3 | 1 Win, 1 Loss, 1 TBD (MN) |
| Buchanan | \$874k | 3 | Won in General |
| Noriega | \$853k | 1 | Lost in General |
| F. Thompson | \$658k | 3 | Lost in Primary |
| DCCC | \$613k | 2 | 2 Wins |

III. IMMIGRATION ADS AND THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

In the Presidential race between Senator Barack Obama (R-IL) and Senator John McCain (R-AZ), immigration was a focal point for key campaign commercials. Especially in the battleground states of Colorado, Florida, New Mexico, and Nevada, both Presidential campaigns devoted significant resources towards courting Latino voters, and paid particular attention to naturalized citizens and Spanish-language media. Unlike many of the down-ballot races featuring immigration ads, both Presidential campaigns tried to highlight positive aspects of their own support for comprehensive immigration reform and attack their opponent on the issue.

Overall, immigration was the topic of 9 ads run by the Obama and McCain campaigns or their parties, totaling over \$2.5 million in spending. Additionally, outside organizations spent nearly \$500k on immigration ads in the general Presidential election. In total, the Obama/McCain race featured 13 immigration ads costing over \$3m.

Immigration Ads in the Presidential Race

| Immigration Ad Sponsor | # of Immigration Ads | # of Immigration Ads in Spanish | # of Immigration Ads in English | \$ Spent on Ads |
|------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| McCain/RNC | 4 | 2 | 2 | \$1.19m |
| Obama/DNC | 5 | 5 | 0 | \$1.36m |

| | | | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------|----------|-----------|-------------|
| Outside Organizations ⁷ | 4 | 2 | 2 | \$449k |
| Total | 13 | 9 | 11 | \$3m |

Spanish language advertising on immigration was used by both Presidential campaigns to try to attract key voters. While only 4% of the overall number of ads and 8% of the overall spending on immigration ads was in Spanish (10 ads and \$2.2m respectively), Spanish-language immigration ads were components of the Presidential campaigns’ efforts to target an important group of swing voters.

In 2004, Republican strategist Karl Rove and President George W. Bush recognized that Spanish-dominant and Latino immigrant voters—slightly less than half of the overall Latino electorate—were a potent audience for GOP political appeals. According to [NDN](#), the GOP more than doubled its share of the Latino vote from 1996 to 2004 by prioritizing outreach to Spanish-dominant Latinos.

In 2008, both Presidential campaigns courted these voters, especially in Colorado, Florida, New Mexico, and Nevada. Obama and McCain ran major ad campaigns in Spanish language media attacking each other on the immigration issue. John McCain started the back-and-forth in September, accusing Obama of killing the Senate’s 2007 attempt at immigration reform by voting for a series of so-called “poison pill” amendments, a claim the [New York Times](#) editorial board called “a jaw-dropping distortion.” According to the *Times*, “[t]he bill wasn’t killed by any amendments. It was killed by a firestorm of talk-radio rage and a Republican-led filibuster.”

Barack Obama’s response ad, also in Spanish, attacked McCain by linking him to right-wing radio host Rush Limbaugh, a foe of immigration reform. The ad featured pictures of McCain and Limbaugh interspersed with salacious, anti-Latino quotes from Limbaugh to stir the pot. The same *Times* editorial criticized the Obama ad for implying that McCain was a “friend and full-bore ally of restrictionists like Rush Limbaugh,” and ignoring Limbaugh’s criticism of McCain on the issue. While it is true that Limbaugh was no friend to McCain, he had attacked Obama repeatedly throughout the race, to McCain’s potential benefit.

Overall in the 2008 Presidential general election contest, 9 out of the 13 immigration-related ads were aired in Spanish—69%. Additionally, \$2.06m of the \$3m spent on these ads was targeted to Spanish language media—69%. According to research from [Bendixen and Associates](#), despite voting nearly evenly for President Bush and Senator John Kerry (D-MA) in 2004 (52% of Spanish-dominant Latinos supported Kerry in 2004 to 48% for Bush), in 2008 Spanish-dominant voters chose Obama over McCain 75% to 25%. Even with McCain’s spending on immigration ads and his previous stature as a leader on comprehensive immigration reform,

⁷ Each outside group ad we identified was oriented to attack President-elect Obama and/or favor Senator McCain.

he was unable to convince Latino immigrant voters—those closest to the fallout over the immigration debate—to vote for him and his Party given its [divisive stance](#) on the issue.

Outside groups also aired immigration ads targeting the Presidential contest, and their tone was overwhelmingly negative. Four separate ads on immigration were aired by outside groups during the general Presidential election. Each of these ads attacked Obama on the issue—three from a harsh, anti-immigration position. Two of the ads were in Spanish and two were in English. Descriptions and links to these ads are below:

The National Republican Trust PAC (English): [Benefits for Illegal Immigrants](#): This fledgling group, organized in September 2008, spent \$229k on an ad attacking Barack Obama for allegedly supporting government benefits for undocumented immigrants.

The National Republican Trust PAC (English): [Driver’s Licenses for Illegal Immigrants](#): The same group spent an additional \$192k on an ad attacking Barack Obama for supporting driver’s licenses for undocumented immigrants and linked this policy to the terrorist attacks of 9/11.

National Rifle Association (Spanish): [Self-Defense](#): The NRA ad, which was only a small buy of \$22k, curiously attempted to link family self-defense to the immigration issue and Obama’s stance on guns.

Latinos for Reform (Spanish): [Not a Friend of Latinos](#): One ad, aired in Spanish and targeting Latinos, played the race card and criticized Obama’s commitment to Latinos. However, total spending on the ad amounted to only \$6k.

FactCheck.org called the [NRA and Latinos for Reform ads](#) “false” and “misleading,” and said that the [National Republican Trust PAC ad](#) on driver’s licenses was “one of the sleaziest false TV ads of the campaign.”

IV. THE REPUBLICANS’ ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION WEDGE STRATEGY FAILED

Our review of immigration ads in the 2008 cycle shows that the illegal immigration wedge strategy—where mostly Republican candidates ran attack ads against Democrats—failed to put candidates over the top. This confirms what we found in our report [Republicans: Fenced in By Immigration](#). Candidates supporting broader immigration reform consistently beat out hard-line politicians in battleground races in 2008. Out of 17 House races and 5 Senate races deemed competitive by *The Cook Political Report* a month before the election where the Democratic and Republican candidates held divergent views on immigration reform, reformers beat hardliners in 15 House races and all 5 Senate races. The same dynamic occurred in the Presidential contest, where Senator Barack Obama was an unwavering supporter of comprehensive immigration reform, while Senator John McCain tacked right during the Republican primaries.

For example, in the North Carolina Senate race between incumbent [Sen. Elizabeth Dole \(R\)](#) and [Kay Hagan \(D\)](#), immigration was an important and frequent topic of ads and discussion. Dole, who expressed a hard-line immigration stance during the campaign and touted her past efforts to block comprehensive immigration reform in the U.S. Senate, embraced the immigration wedge issue as a major part of her re-election strategy. Overall, Dole spent over \$1.5m on 5 extreme immigration ads.

In May 2008, Dole's first general election TV ad touted her role in "helping N.C. sheriffs crack down on illegal immigrants." In the ad, Dole featured Johnston County, NC Sheriff Steve Bizzell—whose virulently anti-immigrant [statements](#) include condemning undocumented immigrants for "breeding like rabbits," calling Mexicans "trashy," claiming that undocumented immigrants "rape, rob and murder" American citizens, and asking "How long is it going to be until we're the minority?" Dole also ran an ad against Hagan that linked the undocumented population to lost wages and runaway spending: *"Kay Hagan is being 'coy' about her illegal immigration plans. But, Hagan voted to give illegal aliens driver's licenses. So, here they came. Costing us a billion dollars each year. Billions in lost wages. What else is Kay hiding?"*

While Hagan embraced some of the same immigration enforcement policies as Dole, according to her campaign web site she also supported a "practical solution that is fair to taxpayers and addresses the problem at its roots: by strengthening the borders, enforcing and upgrading laws that crack down on employers who knowingly hire illegal workers, and eliminating the shadow economy that drives down wages and working conditions. If North Carolina's farmers and seasonal businesses are having trouble finding the help they need, Kay would support the reform of guest-worker programs to ensure farmers and businesses are able to meet their needs legally and stay competitive while protecting American workers' jobs."

Despite Dole's reliance on the immigration wedge issue, Hagan won the race, 53%-44%.

In the NM-2 House race, [Ed Tinsley \(R\)](#) also attacked [Harry Teague \(D\)](#) with immigration ads. The seat was left vacant when Rep. Steve Pearce (R) opted to run for the Senate, and immigration was a key point of distinction between the two candidates for the House seat. During the campaign, Teague affirmed his support for comprehensive immigration reform, calling for "a path to citizenship" for undocumented immigrants. Tinsley tried to make a tough immigration policy a cornerstone of his campaign strategy and overall identity.

After running two immigration ads in his contested GOP primary at a cost of \$127k, Tinsley spent \$132k on a general election ad that staked out a harsh, anti-immigrant position and linked immigration to national security concerns: *"This is the scene of the crime... where people cross the border illegally everyday, and we don't know who they are. Some could be potential terrorists who want to harm America. I strongly support The Patriot Act. The Patriot Act is designed to track potential terrorists, but we must do more. We have to do whatever it takes to*

seal this border, and then make it clear, no drivers licenses for people here illegally, and no amnesty.”

Despite Tinsley’s attacks, Teague prevailed by a 56%-44% margin.

Voters saw through false claims and distortions by the GOP. America’s Voice also analyzed a subset of immigration ads that accused candidates of wanting to extend Social Security and means-tested public benefits to undocumented immigrants. There were 40 total ads in this category, all run by Republicans and their surrogates against Democrats, representing 17% of all immigration ads this cycle and \$4.6 million in spending. Our review shows that these ads were ineffective; only 15% of these ads were sponsored by winning candidates and their allies.

In Senate races, many ads sponsored by Nevada Senator John Ensign’s National Republican Senatorial Committee (NRSC) accused Democrats of voting to extend social security benefits to undocumented immigrants. This is a bad mischaracterization of a vote to kill a 2006 Ensign amendment, offered to the comprehensive immigration reform bill under consideration in the Senate. This tactic was roundly [denounced](#) by fact checkers when it first surfaced during the 2006 mid-term elections.

This year, Ensign reprised his controversial attack strategy despite the fact that his Party’s own Presidential nominee, Senator John McCain (R-AZ), also voted to table the Ensign amendment in 2006. McCain even spoke about it passionately on the floor of the Senate and encouraged other senators to join him in rejecting the Ensign amendment. In 2008, the NRSC attacked Democratic incumbent Senator Mary Landrieu (LA) for being on the “wrong side of the fence” on immigration, and lambasted her for this vote and others that tracked Senator McCain’s.

In House campaigns, similar Republican ads made the sweeping claim that candidates like Arizona’s Gabrielle Giffords (D) supported “amnesty and welfare benefits for illegal immigrants.” The ads refer to House Democrats’ votes on “motions to recommit,” or the last-ditch floor amendment allotted to the minority party in the House before a bill is passed. Since the Democratic takeover of the House in 2006, Republicans have been using motions to recommit to make political statements, not policy. They have declared that their motions to recommit would delete “egregious” provisions in the bills under consideration, like imaginary “loopholes” that they say would allow undocumented immigrants to collect public assistance.

As Carl Hulse described in the [New York Times](#) in 2007, “Hoping to reclaim their majority next year, Republicans have been loading once mundane opposition motions with all sorts of political bombs, which they are then unleashing in press releases to local newspapers, on a special website and—presumably—in future 30-second campaign ads.” The motion to recommit strategy is not about “fixing” anything in the bill under consideration, but about jamming the majority party on hot button issues like immigration.

As Hulse predicted, in 2008 the GOP used party-line votes on these motions to recommit as “evidence” for campaign ads on immigration in multiple House races—again, to little effect. 85% of these ads were sponsored by losing candidates and their allies.

Republican infighting on the immigration issue depleted campaign coffers, and helped turn key states from red to blue. Following November’s historic losses for the GOP, some Republican strategists have criticized the Party’s handling of the immigration issue and called on GOP leaders to rehabilitate their image with Latinos. As Senator Mel Martinez (R-FL) [stated on NBC's "Meet the Press"](#): “the very divisive rhetoric of the immigration debate set a very bad tone for our brand as Republicans...there were voices within our party, frankly, which if they continue with that kind of rhetoric, anti-Hispanic rhetoric, that so much of it was heard, we're going to be relegated to minority status.” And an unidentified Republican consultant [told Charlie Cook](#) that his GOP colleagues should “stop being [misguided] on immigration. We are alienating huge parts of the electorate, we are turning our primaries into single issue ‘hate’ contests and ignoring the single fastest growing bloc of voters in the country.”

In the Presidential race, Mitt Romney and Fred Thompson spent a combined \$2.54m on anti-immigration ads. Romney’s in particular targeted Senator McCain for his previous leadership on comprehensive immigration reform, charging McCain with “supporting amnesty for illegal immigrants, [and] taking jobs away from Americans.” Romney’s ads ran throughout January 2008 in the key Republican primary states of Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina, and Florida—all states that McCain won, except Iowa which Mike Huckabee carried. While on the one hand Romney and Thompson’s ads were ineffective in putting their candidates over the top, they did contribute to McCain revising his immigration position during the primary battles.

However, in moving on to the general election, McCain [was unable to compete](#) well for Latino voters to whom immigration is an important issue because of his association with the Republican brand and failure to speak clearly and consistently on the issue. McCain’s poor showing among Latino voters—winning just 31% of the vote, compared with George W. Bush’s 40% in 2004—put key battleground states out of reach, and contributed greatly to his loss in November.

McCain ally Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC) also faced tough attacks on the issue from primary opponent Buddy Witherspoon, who ran ads stating: “Right now, South Carolina is the state of emergency. Each year, thousands of illegal immigrants use our local hospitals, and who pays the bills? The good hardworking people of this state. Lindsey Graham supports illegal immigrants using your money to pay for their hospitalizations.” Graham was able to coast to a 67% to 33% win in the primary and 58% to 42% win in the general, but not without spending additional dollars to combat the attacks.

In the New Mexico Senate race, Republican candidate Steve Pearce attacked both his primary challenger Heather Wilson (R) and Democratic general election opponent Tom Udall in a series of immigration ads. Pearce spent over \$200k on 6 ads throughout the primary and general

campaigns. While Pearce bested Wilson in the primary 51% to 49%, he proved too conservative for the New Mexican electorate. Pearce lost to Udall by 22 points in November, turning this former Republican-held Senate seat from red to blue.

As the millions of dollars spent by Republicans on ineffective immigration attack ads show, candidates and party committees would be wise to recognize: the illegal immigration wedge issue is bust.

V. CONCLUSION

\$27.2 million in spending, 234 ads, 79 races in 35 states and what do candidates, party committees, and ideological groups have to show for it? Very little “return on investment.” Candidates that ran harsh immigration ads lost handily to politicians who promised action on real reform.

Let this report from America’s Voice be the last nail in the coffin of the illegal immigration wedge strategy. Between now and the mid-term elections, politicians should stop playing politics and start moving the ball forward on key issues like comprehensive immigration reform. Their constituents would be better served—and their 2010 ad dollars better spent.

Methodology

Using monitoring data from the Campaign Media Analysis Group (CMAG), America’s Voice tracked ads throughout 2008 which they categorized as being “immigration” in nature. CMAG provided AV with general ad information such as estimated spending, language of airing, air dates, and media market, as well as ad scripts, video files and storyboards where available. CMAG tracks ads in 210 Designated Market Areas (DMAs), so our analysis is comprehensive, yet not exhaustive.

For this report, we focused on ads from federal and statewide campaigns—Presidential, Senatorial, Congressional and gubernatorial—which aired between January 1, 2008 and November 4, 2008. These ads were then additionally categorized by the party identification of the candidates and the outcome of the race.

AV then compiled all ad scripts and assessed the ad’s immigration position, classifying the ad on a scale of 1 to 5—from positive “1” to anti-immigrant and anti-immigration reform “5.” Ads scored at a “3” were relatively neutral ads mentioning immigration.