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Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/ejas/11836>

DOI: 10.4000/ejas.11836

ISSN: 1991-9336

Publisher

European Association for American Studies

Electronic reference

Elizabeth Lowry, “‘Sincerely Held Religious Beliefs’: Media Representation and Rhetorical Strategy During Arizona’s SB 1062 Controversy”, *European journal of American studies* [Online], 11-3 | 2017, document 14, Online since 26 January 2017, connection on 08 July 2021. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/ejas/11836> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/ejas.11836>

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Elizabeth Lowry

- 1 On February 19th, 2014, Republican legislators in Arizona passed SB 1062, a bill that offered constitutional protections enabling businesses to deny service to any client should that client’s lifestyle be found to conflict with the “sincerely held religious beliefs” of the business owner (SB 1062). The bill had been authored by Cathi Herrod, president of the Center for Arizona Policy (CAP), a conservative Christian advocacy group. While Herrod claimed that the measures outlined in SB 1062 protected religious freedoms, opponents of the bill referred to it as the “anti-gay” bill (Herrod). Subsequently, the bill’s passage sparked national controversy. A week later, on February 26th, Arizona’s then governor, Republican Jan Brewer, vetoed the bill. While liberal and centrist media outlets celebrated the veto, much conservative media lamented the bill’s “mischaracterization” (Pitzi).

The debate over SB 1062 is emblematic of how American political media coverage has become increasingly polarized since 9/11. Media theorist, Gary Woodward writes: "Legislative politics is *more* partisan and bitter, intensifying feelings of a disconnect between citizens and their political institutions. In this frame, political life is often seen as a *performance for the public* by agents who in reality serve a different and privileged group of ‘special interests’" (1). When Woodward describes political life as a “performance for the public” he suggests that such a performance is orchestrated to provide members of the public with the sense that they, the people, are politically relevant. However, the word “performance” suggests spectatorship rather than active engagement. Hence, Woodward argues that, as spectators, Americans are temporarily placated by—rather than engaged in and served by—the political process. Feeling disenfranchised and powerless, people cling to partisan ideologies. Further, being

relegated to roles of passive spectatorship encourages interest groups to adopt ever more extreme positions, in the hope that doubling down on their core values will lead to national visibility and political relevance.

According to Woodward, political discourse no longer calls upon the public to consider working toward the common good. Instead, politicians are concerned with emphasizing individual interests at the expense of upholding collective democratic values: "Needs tend to trump social 'goods' as determinants of attention or inattention, involvement, or disinterest. In a political campaign relevant appeals are based on what a politician can do for the voter, *not* for the society" (16). When campaigns are based on appealing to the individual voter rather than on society as a whole, social divides increase. In turn, an emphasis on individual desires means pandering to powerful interest groups, which further foments oppositional and reactive political discourses. Woodward describes this "reactive" mindset as being characterized not only by fear and "fantasies of revenge" against an oppressive government apparatus, but also by public stances that are "often clearer about what they... oppose than what they endorse" (1). Building on Woodward's claims, I argue that this has been the case with SB 1062, which was allegedly passed in reaction to the threat of a perceived disenfranchisement of conservative Christians.

Using rhetorician Kenneth Burke's theory of dramatism, I analyze oppositional rhetorics surrounding SB 1062 in terms of discourses of reaction and identification. I examine and interrogate these discourses of reaction and identification by considering various components of rhetorical exigency such as the role of public participation in political debate, narrative-building, and a process that Crick and Gabriel refer to as "sensual-aesthetic disruption." I argue that it is not only a fondness for oppositional rhetorics, but the promotion of individualism and a lack of appreciation for the idea of the common good that cultivated the political climate allowing SB 1062 to pass. As such, I propose that conservative Christians in Arizona not only pushed for the passage of SB 1062 because they believed that they were defending their religious values, but also because—feeling increasingly disconnected from fellow Republicans—they sought to renew a sense of identification with other conservative voters.

1. The New Mexico Photographer

In 1779, founding father Thomas Jefferson penned the "Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom in Virginia," specifying that religion should be considered a private matter and that the government should not privilege one religious tradition over another. In short, the bill called for what is now recognized as a "separation of Church and State" (Green). This bill eventually became part of the First Amendment to the Constitution and later, elemental to the 1791 Bill of Rights, clarifying that religious freedom would be protected by law. During the Civil Rights movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, anti-discrimination laws were put into place to protect the disenfranchised. However, over the years, conservative Christians have interpreted aspects of these anti-discrimination laws to be inimical to other constitutionally protected freedoms—specifically freedom of speech and the freedom of religion. Consequently, conservative Christians called for modifications to what they felt were oppressive anti-discrimination laws. SB 1062 was therefore not a "new" legislative move—rather it was introduced as an amendment to "sections 41-1493 and

41-1493.01, Arizona Revised Statutes; relating to the free exercise of religion" (SB 1062). As such, SB 1062, introduced by Republican Senators Yarbrough, Barto, and Worsely claimed to expand religious freedom by allowing Christian business-owners—or even individual employees—the right to deny service to potential clients with whose lifestyle choices they disagreed. (Examples of such denials might include a pharmacist refusing to sell contraceptive pills or a baker refusing to sell a cake to be served at a same-sex wedding). Although SB 1062 was apparently meant to be broader in scope than simply refusing service to same-sex couples, it quickly became known among its critics as the "anti-gay" bill. Supporters of SB 1062 often explained the bill by citing a 2013 New Mexico court case in which a conservative Christian photographer (Elane Huegenin of Elane Photography) was sued for refusing to photograph a same-sex wedding based on her religious beliefs (Ashtari; Shepherd). The *Elane Photography vs. Willcock* case was broadly referenced as having been inspiration for SB 1062, and the narrative of the "New Mexico photographer" was presented to the public in unambiguous terms: conservative media framed the photographer as having been a victim of political correctness and government oppression (Shapiro; Steimle; Weber). Simply casting the case of the "New Mexico photographer" as a situation wherein religious freedom was at stake, was enough to provoke widespread support from conservatives, leading the majority of Arizona Republican senators to vote in favor of SB 1062 (Dave). The link between invocations of the New Mexico photographer case and support for SB 1062 will be discussed further in the following section.

2. "Renaming" the Act: Reaction and Identification

Rhetorician Kenneth Burke's theory of dramatism is illustrated by his "dramatistic pentad," which consists of five parts: act, scene, agency, agent, and purpose (Blakesley 9-11). According to Burke, we are motivated primarily by the idea of "consubstantiality" or identifying with others, but the kinds of identification we seek, the reasons we seek it, and how we achieve it are often unclear—even to ourselves. Parsing a situation in terms of the dramatistic pentad can provide us with a clearer sense of the motivations of the agents or actors within a particular context.

A pentadic analysis of the SB 1062 controversy can (at first) seem deceptively simple. For example, from the perspective of Arizona Republicans in February 2014, the passage of SB 1062 was described as a "defense" of "religious freedom." Therefore, in explicitly Burkean terms, the *act* is to defend religious freedom; the *scene* is the state of Arizona in February 2014; the *agents* or *actors* are Arizona Senate Republicans and conservative interest groups; the *agency* by which the religious freedom was "defended" was the bill, SB 1062; and the stated *purpose* of the bill was to "defend" the "religious freedoms" of Christian conservatives. Conversely, to those who opposed the bill, a pentadic analysis of its passage could be read as being an *act* to authorize discrimination, thereby preempting a need for a counter-act to defend Civil Rights. The *scene* is (again) the state of Arizona in February 2014, but the *agents* or *actors* become Arizona Senate Democrats (as well as liberal interest groups), while the *agency* by which civil liberties can be defended becomes the veto of SB 1062. Therefore, the *purpose* of the veto would be to defend civil rights and uphold anti-discrimination laws. These pentadic analyses of the SB 1062 controversy immediately indicate an oppositional discourse in which each group is accused of infringing upon another's constitutional

rights. However, while the defense of religious freedom and the authorization of discrimination have been framed by the mainstream media as being the only "acts" relevant to SB 1062, the pentad provides an analytical tool that could help us to move beyond these binaries.

When conducting a pentadic analysis, Burke scholar David Blakesley emphasizes the need to go beyond the obvious—to "rename" the "act" so as to allow for multiple perspectives—or at least more than just two opposing viewpoints (10). Hence, the passage of SB 1062 as an *act* could also be interpreted as a means by which Christian conservatives sought to identify and identify *with* other conservatives, and a means by which to respond to religiously motivated lawsuits in other states. One such example is, of course, that of aforementioned "New Mexico Photographer"—Elane Photography vs. Willcock. In much media coverage, conservatives frame SB 1062 as being an explicit reaction to the case of the "New Mexico Photographer" (Brinkley; Shepherd). To Senator Yarbrough, in February 2014, proposing SB 1062 may have seemed a viable way to build solidarity among social conservatives across the Southwest—particularly on issues that pitted religion against queerness. California was of particular concern to conservative Christians. In June 2013, after a series of legal battles that had led all the way to the United States Supreme Court, same-sex marriage, which had been halted by Proposition 8, resumed in California (Savage). Proposition 8 (widely known as "Prop 8") had been passed in 2008 and had overturned existing laws in California that supported same-sex marriage, rendering such unions illegal. Of special concern to social conservatives was the fact that Ted Olson, a prominent Republican lawyer, had spearheaded the campaign to legalize same-sex marriage (McKinley). Further, only a couple of months later, in August 2013, the New Mexico Supreme Court had ruled in favor of the plaintiffs in the Elane Photography case on the grounds that "Same-sex marriages have been legally conducted in New Mexico after the state Supreme Court ruled last year that nothing in the law prevents them" (McCarthy). In other words, because New Mexico did not "specifically permit or prevent same-sex marriage" a legal precedent had been set for allowing same-sex marriage, meaning that objections to such marriages could not be taken seriously (McCarthy). At that time, gay marriage was specifically outlawed in Arizona (although it later became legally recognized on October 17th 2014) meaning that a situation similar to that of the New Mexico Photographer could not—at the time that SB 1062 was passed—have occurred in Arizona. Therefore, if Yarbrough's primary purpose had been to respond to the New Mexico lawsuit, the Arizona *scene* proved to be poorly matched to his stated *act*, in that no similar case had ever been documented in Arizona and—because of existing laws prohibiting same-sex marriage—could not (at that time) have taken place. These factors raise the question as to whether or not SB 1062 was really a reaction to the New Mexico case, or if conservatives were using it as a bid for support in an eventual battle against same-sex marriage (Dave).

SB 1062 was passed only a few weeks after Arizona's Connolly vs. Jeanes case came to light. On January 6th 2014, four same-sex couples filed to overturn Arizona's definition of marriage as being an institution that could exist only between a man and a woman on the grounds that this definition was unconstitutional (Connolly). Possibly, Yarbrough presented SB 1062 in reaction not to New Mexico (as he suggested), but in reaction to what he may have perceived as a more immediate "threat"—that is, the prospect of authorizing gay marriage in his home state (Dave). Publicizing the New Mexico case therefore became a preemptive rhetorical strategy: when the issue of

authorizing same-sex marriage inevitably arose in Arizona, conservatives could garner support for their position by pointing to cases in which they believed that Christian principles had been compromised by big government. By ensuring that Arizonans were familiar with the case of the New Mexico Photographer, conservatives hoped to impress upon their constituents a sense of what would be at stake if Arizona were to avoid implementing specific prohibitions against same-sex marriage. Observing reactions to the New Mexico case helped conservatives to figure out what kind of support they would need to tackle the issue of same-sex marriage.

To return to Burke, I argue that Arizona senators introduced SB 1062 because of their sense of uncertainty regarding the position of the Christian right within a Republican party that seemed to be growing increasingly fractured along ideological lines pertaining to religion and social prohibition. Again, drawing on Burke's scholarship, Blakesley writes: "Rhetoric, the aim of which is identification, is only necessary when there is a dispute over meaning, significance or implication, when, in other words, the basis for identification or cooperation is ambiguous or uncertain" (9). That is, conservative Christians within the Republican party were concerned that perhaps they would not be seen as the oppressed minority they believed themselves to be, and worried that moderate Republicans would not support them in championing conservative social values in the 2016 election.

If, as principal *agent* or *actor*, Yarborough's purpose was to identify with fellow conservatives as well as those sympathetic to their cause, the agency of SB 1062 may have seemed an effective way for conservative Christians to test the scope of their influence on the rest of the Republican party. But Gallup polls conducted in 2013 indicate that although Arizona is politically conservative, and although it is home to a number of right-wing Christian groups, it is far from being one of the most "religious" states in the country, ranking as only "moderately" religious (Newport). Further, polls from the Pew Research Center for Religion and Public Life administered between April 2nd 2014 and January 1st 2015, indicated that 58% of Arizonans actually supported gay marriage and that most Republicans were ambivalent about (rather than dead against) such unions ("Same-Sex"). It is therefore possible that Yarborough was not necessarily appealing to Arizonans, but to a far broader audience. National exposure would be desirable for a conservative Christian community concerned with sustaining a strictly biblical model of sexual purity. Further, accruing the support of a broader audience would help the Christian right to gain national visibility.

3. Exigency: Acts of Identification and Reaction

Here, with respect to discourses surrounding the passage of SB 1062, I discuss acts of identification and reaction, media narrative-building, instances of "sensual-aesthetic disruption," and debates over the meaning of public participation. On both sides of the debate, rhetorical exigency was framed as being a matter of fighting for fundamental constitutional freedoms. From a liberal perspective, basic civil liberties were being eroded, while conservatives claimed that their right to practice their religion was at stake. According to Woodward, once a debate is framed in the public sphere in oppositional terms that evoke religious belief, a productive middle-ground is rarely found: "Faith-based political consciousness has always been part of American life, a kind of wild card that lays down 'values' that, for many of those who hold them,

are not open to normal processes of debate or compromise” (13). Since “faith based political consciousness” involves taking sides and since there are rarely more than two positions to be taken, these debates tend to depend upon a critical mass—enough people coming down on one side or another, competing to hold the floor, and to have the last word while media attention lasts. In these contexts, celebrity endorsement of a certain perspective is particularly valuable and can be characterized as what Crick and Gabriel refer to as a “sensual aesthetic disruption.”

3.1. Sensual-Aesthetic Disruption

Drawing on Habermas’s public spheres scholarship, Crick and Gabriel define “sensual-aesthetic disruption” as “a type of experience that primarily comes to us through the senses and strikes us immediately (and largely unreflectively) as beautiful or ugly, pleasurable or painful, helpful or destructive” (213). An example of a “sensual-aesthetic disruption” within the context of the SB 1062 debate, would be the National Football League’s (NFL) public statement regarding the bill. This statement was made on February 22nd just three days after SB 1062 had been passed. During the Super Bowl season of January 2014, Michael Sam, a popular Missouri lineman who had come out as gay, had been praised by sports media networks for risking his career by being open about his sexual orientation. In this manner, the NFL was able to use SB 1062 to reinscribe its apparent commitment to tolerance. With respect to SB 1062, the NFL declared: “Our policies emphasize tolerance and inclusiveness, and prohibit discrimination based on age, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, or any other improper standard” (Ackerman). The NFL statement sparked fears that the 2015 Super Bowl scheduled to be held in Glendale, Arizona, would be canceled if Brewer failed to veto SB 1062. In fact, *Time* magazine suggested that the veto occurred primarily because Arizona, whose economy was heavily dependent on tourism, feared losing potential Super Bowl revenue, including a much-needed boost for its hospitality industry (Gregory).

3.2. Narrative-Building

Acknowledging that it doesn’t take much work to be politically active when one’s own interests are involved, Woodward contends that only a very small segment of the population “use their energies or experience to enter into national or community conversations about issues or ideas for which they have no immediate personal or financial stake” (13). I argue that in this respect, the national response to SB 1062 was unusual in that many people who were neither directly affected by discrimination against the LGBTQ community or by Arizona’s economy, weighed in on the issue and took up roles in opposing the bill. What prompted otherwise passive spectators to “act” when similar issues so often seemed to go unnoticed? In this case, I argue that the SB 1062 narrative was unusually compelling in that it was constructed to emphasize the fact that there was only a limited period of time within which to act. Governor Brewer had exactly one week to either approve or veto the bill, meaning that the public had been left at a tantalizing cliffhanger. Further, both the bill’s opponents and proponents suggested that enough public energy directed at the problem could affect its outcome. But in addition to the necessary narrative expectations of rising action and conflict,

Woodward points to the need for "the transformation of a key character" (36). This narrative element becomes the ultimate pay-off: transformation indicates growth and progress. As such, liberal and centrist media delivered gratifying indicators of personal transformation when several Arizona Republicans apparently claimed that they regretted having voted to pass SB 1062. In a February 24th *Associated Press* article, Republican Senators Worsely, Pierce, and Driggs (all of whom had initially voted to pass SB 1062) are described as "urging" Brewer to veto the bill: "Pierce said he and the others went along to present a solid Republican front, despite misgivings. 'We were uncomfortable with it to start with and went along with it thinking it was good for the caucus,' Pierce says. 'We really didn't want to vote for it, but we made a mistake and now we're trying to do what's right and correct it'" (Pierce qtd. in Christie). The *Huffington Post* presents an even less ambivalent expression of regret in its reference to Senator Steve Pierce who was quoted as having admitted that he had made a mistake in voting for the bill, baldly stating: "I screwed up" (Pierce qtd. in Terkel). However, although Pierce admitted that he regretted supporting the bill, he claimed that he had done so because he did not believe that it was "anti-gay": "I have friends that are gay and I wouldn't do anything to hurt them. This is blown way out of proportion and it's too bad" (Pierce qtd. in Terkel). In both the *Huffington Post* and *Los Angeles Times*, the Republican Senators who changed their minds about passing SB 1062 are characterized as having repented. The word "regret" is used in the *Huffington Post* and strongly insinuated in the *Los Angeles Times* which describes the stances of various Arizona Republicans toward SB 1062 as being a total "reversal" of position (Carcamo). In an article in *LGBTQ Nation*, senators opposed to the bill from the outset (John McCain, Jeff Flake, and Doug Ducey) are named and Worsely is reported as stating that he had felt "uncomfortable" when the bill was initially passed. Thus, the liberal press had begun to point out the party's disagreements over social issues. This coverage not only emphasized cracks in the Republican façade, but it also appealed to pathos in detailing how individual senators had chosen to make decisions that they felt to be morally correct, rather than to toe the party line.

On the other hand, an article that emerged in the more conservative *Arizona Republic* does not portray the senators as having come around to the idea that they had participated in discriminatory action. Instead, the senators are portrayed as being regretful only that their intentions were misunderstood. The *Arizona Republic* specifies that Worsely, Pierce, and Driggs wrote a letter to Governor Brewer stating: "While our sincere intent in voting for this bill was to create a shield for all citizens' religious liberties, the bill has instead been mischaracterized by its opponents as a sword for religious intolerance" (Driggs qtd. in Pitzi). The senators' change of position is carefully worded to suggest that the problem is not with the content of the bill itself, but with the bill's "mischaracterization." To emphasize this point, the *Arizona Republic* references Cathi Herrod, of the CAP, who portrays a scenario in which Republicans are coerced into rejecting SB 1062 because of liberal "fear-mongering" (Herrod qtd. in Pitzi). Further news coverage suggests that conservative media outlets tended to avoid discussing individual Republican senators and/or their thoughts about the bill. Rather, they focused on how the content of the bill itself had been misrepresented. For instance, a *National Review* headline claims "CNN Distorts Arizona's Right to Refuse Bill" and accuses CNN of ignoring "the text and import of the proposed law" (Johnson). Similarly, rather than discuss the differing stances of individual senators, *Breitbart* cites "a group of eleven renowned law professors" who claim that SB 1062 has

been "egregiously misrepresented" (Hawkins). In this manner, the conservative press maintained a sense of Republican unity.

3.3. Public Participation

During the period following the passage of SB 1062 and long after the bill's veto, Arizona's metropolitan areas saw a proliferation of blue and yellow equality stickers on cars and storefronts, while rainbows—signifying gay pride—covered the Facebook profile pictures of Americans all over the country. While Woodward is cynical about such actions having real political value, he cites Michael Schudson, who believes that many of the personal choices we make are, in fact, political statements—from the way we dress to our status updates on social media (29). Also arguing that there is often a fine line between activism and spectatorship, Crick and Gabriel connect the idea of civic engagement and participation within the democratic process to Burke's theory of dramatism by suggesting that spectatorship can indeed be considered a form of "action": "A dramatistic framing can account for the fact that human beings may... act as spectators within certain environments, but it also does not begin with the assumption that they are spectators by nature. Instead, it assumes that they are actors within situations" (208). That is, Crick and Gabriel see the term "spectator" as being ambiguous, suggesting that a spectator can be passive or active depending on cultural context. Nonetheless, while these theorists interpret public expressions of solidarity as being a form of participation in the political process, Woodward believes such expressions to be more symbolic than transformative (29).

How much did the national outcry against SB 1062 and a groundswell of ostensive "civic participation" in the debate sway Brewer's final vote? Would she have vetoed the bill anyway? It is impossible to know for sure. However, the consequences of the bill's veto were widely celebrated: business-owners who had threatened to leave Arizona promised to stay. There was no longer any danger of national sporting events being moved to other more tolerant states. Further, Arizona Democrats, who had unanimously voted against SB 1062 gained national visibility and presented a united front to the public. But although debates surrounding the bill brought a greater show of solidarity on behalf of Arizona Democrats, the same debates resulted in complications for Republicans. The SB 1062 debate had already been fractured along party lines with Democrats against, and the majority of Republicans for the bill—but it had now become evident that Republicans disagreed upon myriad issues, and, within the party, the rift between the religious right and fiscal conservatives had only grown.

4. Conclusion

While many liberal and centrist Americans considered the veto of SB 1062 to be a victory for social justice, others suggested that it was not a genuine victory because the bill had been vetoed for economic, rather than humanitarian reasons. Thus, the veto did not signal a triumph over discrimination as much as the overwhelming triumph of capitalism, which had absolved politicians from having to tackle Civil Rights. Framed in terms of dramatism, if the *act* is upholding Arizona's economy, then the *actor* is Governor Brewer, the *scene* is a financially compromised Arizona, the *agency*—that is the alleged power to save Arizona's economy from further degradation—is SB

1062, and the *purpose* of vetoing the bill becomes a bid to save the economy. This pentadic analysis illustrates a scenario in which issues of social justice are sidestepped altogether.

Finally, although it is debatable as to whether or not SB 1062 was vetoed primarily in the service of social justice or the economy, I conclude that applying dramatism to national controversies surrounding discriminatory bills such as SB 1062 can provide a useful rhetorical function when public arguments are decontextualized and oversimplified. By "re-naming the act" or reframing the personal and political motivations behind tightly controlled debates in which certain language has been allowed or disallowed, dramatism helps to expose ways in which controlled debate—particularly that concerning same-sex marriage—avoids alternate interpretations. For instance, in cases where religion has been pitted against queerness, religious conservatives typically preempt accusations of prejudice and discrimination by suggesting that their own values and freedoms are under attack. In the Prop 8 debate, conservative Christian discourses of personal freedom were emphasized, while discourse on the Civil Rights of marginalized groups was disallowed—meaning that conservatives had so effectively stacked the deck with respect to initiatives such as Prop 8 that its proponents had apparently come to believe that allowing same sex couples to get married was explicitly harmful to the wellbeing of the heteronormative nuclear family. Dramatism can destabilize tightly controlled conservative Christian media discourse by uncovering weaknesses in reasoning that lead to a loss of public confidence. Further, dramatism can help to uncover how politicians attempt to use significant local issues as a means by which to identify with larger ideological groups—to build, define, and redefine specific identities. Ideologically driven local issues such as SB 1062 bear implications that reach beyond simply refusing service to a person one disapproves of, meaning that bills such as SB 1062 can play a key role in a much larger national battle for Civil Rights.

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ABSTRACTS

In February 2014, the Governor of Arizona was given one week to decide whether or not to veto SB 1062, a controversial bill that would allow business owners to refuse service to clients whose lifestyle choices offended them. During that week, the bill was widely reported upon, and became a subject of national debate. I draw on rhetorician Kenneth Burke's theory of dramatism to analyze oppositional media discourses around SB 1062—in particular the conservative Christian strategy to frame SB 1062 as a matter of religious freedom. To do so, I consider various components of rhetorical exigency such as the role of public participation in political debate, narrative-building, and a process that Crick and Gabriel refer to as "sensual-aesthetic disruption." I argue that it is not only a fondness for oppositional rhetorics, but the promotion of individualism and a lack of appreciation for the idea of the common good that cultivated a political climate that allowed SB 1062 to initially gain support.

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Keywords: anti-gay bill, Arizona, Cathi Herrod, Christian, Conservative, Democrat, discrimination, Governor, homophobia, Jan Brewer, liberal, media, opposition, religion, religious beliefs, religious freedom, Republican, SB 1062, values, veto

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