



## Nevada Guv Faces Fans and Foes in Reelection

By Lloyd Green  
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Brian Sandoval, Nevada's first term Republican Governor, has interesting enemies. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) fears him; Grover Norquist, the anti-tax crusader and head of Americans for Tax Reform (ATR), vocally disapproves of him. Reid is concerned that Sandoval would beat him if Sandoval chooses to run for Reid's senate seat in 2016. As for Norquist, in March 2012 he publicly [branded Sandoval a "rat" for raising taxes](#), adding that Sandoval would not be on the GOP's 2012 national ticket.

Rank-and-file Nevadans are a whole other story. Sandoval's approval ratings are just under 70 percent, [a number any politician would envy](#). In-state Republicans love him, independents like him a lot, and even Democrats are favorably disposed. Right now, Sandoval is projected to coast to reelection in November, [according to Politico](#).

So how did Sandoval manage to offend the powers that be, but find favor across the board in his home state? Could it be by being the anti-Reid, the anti-Obama, and the anti-Christie all rolled into one? Could it be by being in touch with reality and appearing responsive to the citizenry at large, as opposed to just narrow interests? Could it be by exuding sunshine and optimism, and unhesitatingly reaching across the aisle?

Sandoval is more committed to overall fiscal responsibility than wedded to ideology at any cost. But, he is also not profligate. In 2012, the free-market oriented Cato Institute gave Sandoval and Christie a "B", while New York's Andrew Cuomo and California's Jerry Brown both earned dismal "Ds". According to Cato, "Sandoval proposed a nine percent cut to the budget for fiscal 2012, and the legislature ending up [approving a cut of about five percent.](#)"

Impressively, Sandoval's success comes amidst Nevada having gone Democratic in the last two presidential elections. But part of it is also about Sandoval's own story. Sandoval is the first Latino elected to statewide office in Nevada, winning the attorney general's seat in 2002, before unseating the incumbent Governor Jim Gibbons in the 2010 Republican Primary, and then defeating Rory Reid—Harry Reid's son, in the general election.

Sandoval has also managed to burnish his image with a patina of integrity in the scandal-scarred Silver State. No one would confuse him the taciturn, forgetful and vengeful Senate Majority Leader. For the record, a decade ago Reid was purportedly [tied to convicted lobbyist Jack Abramoff](#), and now is reported to be the subject of a criminal investigation, along with Sen. Mike Lee (R-Utah), which Barack Obama's [Department of Justice has sought to block](#).

In a contrast, Sandoval is a former federal district court judge and state legislator, who as state attorney general developed Nevada's first public integrity unit, and took a tough stance against domestic violence and human trafficking.

Still, Nevada is Nevada, and like Reid, Sandoval served as a Chairman of the Nevada Gaming Commission. But then again, politics isn't about sainthood.

Right now, Sandoval's reelection is being treated as a forgone conclusion. Although 15 potential rivals have filed for the chance to take him on, none are given much of a chance. Instead, the focus has turned to the lieutenant governor's race; the Democrats efforts to at least salvage the no. 2 slot, and in the process give Sandoval second thoughts about [challenging Reid for Senate in 2016](#). For the moment anyway, Sandoval vows to complete his term if reelected.

Yet, Sandoval's position within the *national* Republican Party is more tenuous. On the one hand, Sandoval has demonstrated the ability to win in a swing state, and is projected to coast in November. On the other, Sandoval is deemed as suspect in some quarters on account of insufficient ideological orthodoxy.

Sandoval is pro-choice, but is opposed to late term abortions and public funding. At the same time, Sandoval has earned an "A" from the NRA, and is a Second Amendment advocate. Sandoval opposed the enactment of Obamacare, but has resigned himself to its reality like New Mexico's Republican Governor Susana Martinez.

As for social issues, Sandoval is no culture warrior. Last year, Sandoval signed a medical marijuana bill into law. While defending the state's current ban on same-sex marriage, Sandoval has urged that the matter be left to the voters to decide in a referendum. Sandoval has also voiced his support for secure borders, and has opposed amnesty for undocumented aliens.

Yet given where the GOP is these days, Sandoval's upward trajectory within the party appears limited. Other than vying for Reid's seat in 2016, Sandoval has few clear paths, and that is not just Sandoval's problem, but a Republican problem as well.

If 2012 should teach the GOP anything it is that there aren't enough Anglo votes out there to get a Republican elected as President without a broader base of support. Mitt Romney chalked-up an impressive margin among white voters, but still lost.

If the Republicans are serious about re-taking the presidency, it may be time for some bridge-building. With more than one-in-four Nevadans listed by the Census Bureau as Latino, and Hispanics a growing national population segment, Republicans in Washington should think twice before writing off Sandoval.