

The High Price of Being "America's Toughest Sheriff": Crime and Spending Soar in Maricopa County

Over the past year and a half, Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio of Arizona has transformed his police department into an immigration-enforcement agency, gaining international publicity in the process. Yet a growing number of elected officials, media outlets, and religious and civic leaders have criticized Sheriff Arpaio's tactics and their impact on his community. In addition, two independent reports by the *East Valley Tribune* and the Goldwater Institute describe a Sheriff's department where crime-solving is down and racial profiling and budget expenditures are way up.

In July 2008, the *East Valley Tribune* of metro-Phoenix ran a [series of articles](#) [1] chronicling its investigation of the immigration-enforcement activities of the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office (MCSO). The *Tribune* found:

- Sheriff Arpaio's immigration-enforcement crusade has resulted in a huge budget deficit for Maricopa County;
- His tactics include large-scale neighborhood sweeps and traffic stops for minor violations as a means to arrest immigrants;
- He has failed to arrest top smugglers and criminals (and, instead, swept up nearly 600 undocumented immigrants on charges of smuggling *themselves*);
- MCSO response times to emergency calls increased;
- MCSO arrest rates for non-immigration crimes dropped;
- MCSO crimes were left un-investigated.

Building on the *East Valley Tribune* investigation, the conservative [Goldwater Institute](#) [2] published *Mission Unaccomplished: The Misplaced Priorities of the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office* on December 2, 2008, a piece that further documents how the MCSO, under the leadership of Sheriff Arpaio, has failed to serve and protect the community:

MCSO budget increasing quickly:

- Since Fiscal Year 2001, the MCSO budget (excluding jails) has nearly doubled from \$37 million to \$72.5 million—approximately four times the rate of the county's population growth.

Crime rates escalating:

- According to FBI statistics, from 2004 to 2007 (excluding 2005, for which MCSO did not provide data), violent crimes increased nearly 70%, and homicides increased 166% in Maricopa County.
- In contrast, FBI statistics show that Phoenix and Mesa—which have their own police departments, but jurisdictions that overlap with MCSO, causing frequent feuds between Sheriff Arpaio and city authorities—experienced much smaller increases in violent crime.

Questionable crime reporting—what is MCSO trying to hide?

- According to the *East Valley Tribune*, MCSO regularly “tries to stifle almost anyone checking on its operations” and “keeps secret the most basic data about its police work that other

departments publish every year. It refuses to release public records – or tries to remove information from those records – without any legal right to do so.”

In 2007, MCSO had to pay \$38,000 in legal fees to a newspaper for withholding press releases. MCSO lost another legal case for taking six months to provide public records.

Crimes “cleared,” but not investigated — is emphasis on immigration to blame?

- Clearance rates represent the number of criminal investigations completed by law enforcement agencies. Each year, when MCSO presents its crime clearance statistics to the Maricopa County Management and Budget Office, the numbers are accompanied by the caveat that the data are not complete and therefore “not considered accurate.”
- Looking closely at the statistics it has provided, it appears that MCSO is declaring large numbers of cases “cleared,” or completed, but often without making an arrest or even conducting an investigation. It is difficult to determine why MCSO claims these cases are completed, or whether justice has been served. While MCSO is making immigration-related arrests, it is unclear whether other reported crimes are receiving an adequate amount of attention.
- MCSO reports a high clearance rate of 57% in 2006-7, significantly higher than the national clearance rate average of 44.3% for violent crimes and 15.8% for property crimes. But MCSO admitted that relatively few of the cleared cases (18%) ended with an arrest. In contrast, 78% of cleared cases in Phoenix ended with an arrest.

Fixation on immigration enforcement ineffective:

- Despite the large amounts of money spent on immigration enforcement and the large number of deputies assigned to immigration enforcement, MCSO has failed to arrest smuggling kingpins. Rather, hundreds of undocumented immigrants have been arrested for smuggling *themselves*, often when their vehicles are stopped for burned-out license plate lights or for traffic violations.
- While MCSO has diverted resources to immigration enforcement, response times to 911 calls have increased, arrest rates have dropped, and thousands of felony warrants have not been served.

The Goldwater Institute concludes that “MCSO has lost sight of its most essential priorities.” While raising their immigration-enforcement profile, Sheriff Joe and his deputies have failed to provide their community with effective law-enforcement tactics and essential law-enforcement services. The growing number and range of people and institutions criticizing Sheriff Joe and MCSO make clear that the over-the-top, media-grabbing immigration enforcement methods of the self-proclaimed “America’s Toughest Sheriff” are harmful to the people of Maricopa County and are a costly example of an enforcement model that should not be replicated.

For more information, see IPC’s report “[What Happens When Local Cops Become Immigration Agents](#) [3]?”

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Links:

- [1] http://www.eastvalleytribune.com/page/reasonable_doubt
- [2] [http://www.goldwaterinstitute.org/Common/Img/Mission Unaccomplished.pdf](http://www.goldwaterinstitute.org/Common/Img/Mission%20Unaccomplished.pdf)
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