

What Happens When Local Cops Become Immigration Agents? Arizona Sheriff

Over the past year and a half, County Sheriff Joe Arpaio of the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office (MCSO) has transformed his police department into an immigration-enforcement agency, gaining international notoriety in the process. The *East Valley Tribune* of metro-Phoenix, Arizona, recently ran a [series of articles](#) [1] chronicling its investigation of the immigration-enforcement activities of MCSO. Using MCSO case files, interviews with top-ranking officers, and other sources of data, reporters uncovered startling facts about the enormous price tag—both financial and social—of the Sheriff's antics.

On January 19, 2007, the Maricopa County Board of Supervisors approved a partnership with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Around the same time, Arizona passed an anti-human smuggling law, which has been used to charge not only smugglers, but also undocumented immigrants who are charged with conspiring to smuggle themselves. From 2006 to 2007, the MCSO's new human smuggling unit arrested more than 650 people under the law. But serious problems are now coming to light.

The [East Valley Tribune](#) [1] found:

In Short Order Immigration Enforcement Sent Maricopa Into Significant Debt

- **The Sheriff's Office created a \$1.3 million deficit in just three months.** By the end of the first month of the MCSO partnership with ICE, deputies began working 4,500 extra hours every two-week pay period (compared to 2,900 extra hours previously). In April 2007, deputies worked more than 9,000 overtime hours at a cost to the county of \$373,757.

The Pay Off is Absurd: Immigrants Arrested for Smuggling Themselves

- In 2006-2007, deputies arrested 578 illegal immigrants in the course of traffic stops. Of those, 498 faced a single charge of paying for a smuggler. One firearm was found during those stops, and seven of the suspects were also arrested on drug charges (five for possessing small amounts of marijuana). MCSO has not built cases against those at the top of the smuggling rings.

As Cops Look for the Undocumented, Maricopa's Arrest Rate Plunges

- In 2005, the sheriff's office cleared 10.5 percent of its investigations with arrests. In 2006, when immigration operations began, that number dropped to 6 percent. In July 2007, detectives only made arrests on 2.5 percent of their investigations.
- Meanwhile, crimes including armed robberies, aggravated assaults, and sex crimes received little or no investigation.

As Cops Look for the Undocumented, Response Times Are Rising

- In 2006 and 2007, patrol cars arrived late two-thirds of the time on more than 6,000 of the

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most serious calls for service.

In order to staff the immigration team, Sheriff Arpaio pulled deputies off patrol beats and used them to staff the human-smuggling unit. Every patrol district, the trails and lake divisions, and central investigations bureau all lost deputies. Armed with fewer deputies, the districts' response times to emergency calls increased.

Police Sweep and Rove In Hispanic Neighborhoods...Just Because....

- Federal guidelines forbid sheriffs from doing immigration sweeps without “reliable, empirical data” that serious crime is taking place. However, Sheriff Arpaio increasingly conducts large-scale operations without any evidence of criminal activity, often in Hispanic neighborhoods or sites where day laborers convene.
- MCSO also relies upon roving patrols. On roadways that smugglers use, deputies look for vehicles that they believe might carry undocumented immigrants, such as large vans and SUVs. Sheriffs use minor traffic offenses, such as speeding or crossing the center line, as probable cause to stop the vehicle. Burned out license plate lights accounted for 10 percent of the deputies' probable causes.

What Does This Mean For Other Cities?

Cities across the country are taking similar steps toward enforcing federal immigration law. Many of them are finding that it is much more expensive than they thought in both monetary and human terms. Police departments find themselves without adequate funding to investigate crimes or perform their new immigration-related activities, and immigrant communities are fearful of cooperating with the police, thus hampering the ability of police to solve crimes. Allegations of racial profiling have stung the cities, and some will ultimately lead to costly lawsuits.

Local anti-immigrant policies are no substitute for comprehensive, substantive immigration reform at the national level. Furthermore, cities must learn from the mistakes of Maricopa County—attempting to enforce immigration laws at the local level has high costs and terminal consequences that cannot be ignored.

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