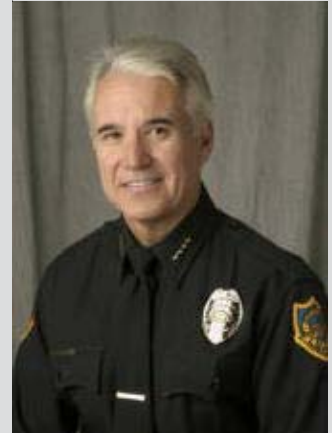


PARC INTERVIEW

George Gascón was born in Cuba and came to Los Angeles at age 13. After a distinguished military career, he joined the LAPD in 1978 and was promoted to Assistant Chief by William Bratton. In November 2003, Assistant Chief Gascón was selected by Chief Bratton to oversee all of the Department's patrol and detective functions. In this capacity, George Gascón implemented a variety of new initiatives designed to enhance the Department's ability to reduce crime and gang violence.

In August 2006, George Gascón was selected as Police Chief of Mesa, Arizona, the third-largest city in that state with a population of approximately 460,000. As Chief, he has achieved a substantial reduction in the crime rate and a significant rise in clearance rates for homicides and other crimes, initiated a forward thinking immigration policy, implemented a successful gang intervention strategy with the Mesa school district, and put in place a novel domestic violence program focusing upon the whole family.



Chief Gascón has been an active participant at the State and national level in police training, including the development of racial profiling training, a national model for police human relations training, and management training in the area of accountability (COMPSTAT). He taught community policing techniques to Central American Police Departments in El Salvador, participated as a one-time Advisory Board Member to the New York Regional Community Police Institute, and consulted on the development of training on respect for the rule of law and a culture of lawfulness for the Colombian National Police. PARC interviewed Chief Gascón in late January 2009.

PARC: You have brought about a significant crime reduction in Mesa. Would you describe the specific results and reductions?

Chief Gascón: Yes, absolutely. During the two years 2007-08, we achieved a 21% reduction in Part I crimes—an 11% reduction in 2008, and a 10% reduction for 2007. We had a 26% reduction in homicides for the same period. We had a significant reduction in traffic collisions. Our clearance rate has gone up tremendously, specifically our Homicide clearance rate. We closed 2008 with more than a 90% clearance rate in homicides. We were at 55% previously. And I'm talking about clearances by arrest—not exceptional clearances, but rather homicides where a suspect has been successfully identified and has been or will be prosecuted. I attribute that significant jump in the clearance rate to my program of decentralizing some detectives, and having all detectives work more closely with the patrol officers. To summarize, we have achieved significant reductions in crime, in traffic collisions, and substantial improvements in clearance rates. I think that if you determine success based on results in dealing with our primary mission as a municipal law enforcement agency, which is to reduce crime and the fear of crime, the reduction of crime in the city of Mesa is very significant. In fact, we looked this year at our crime per 1,000 residents, and the last time that we had similarly low rates was in 1967. We're being very successful.

PARC: When you first came to the Mesa Police Department, what was the state of the Department how did it impact upon your crime-fighting mission?

George Gascón: Well, when I got to Mesa, I noticed that there were multiple problems internally—morale problems with the officers and systems that were not working very well. Frankly, we were not following national standards in reporting crime in many areas.

And then, externally, we had significant problems with some communities, especially the minority communities. There was total disconnect. I came in right after a series of officer-involved shootings that had created problems, specifically in the Hispanic community. Although the officers' uses of force were legal and consistent with the training that they had been given, the perception of those shootings in the Hispanic community was very unfavorable.

I recognized that I needed to do a great deal of training internally; as well, I needed to motivate the officers to go out there and fight crime and do so intelligently. And, at the same time, I needed to make sure that we were going to have community support for that mission.

As a first priority, we started to clean up our reporting systems internally to make sure that we had a reliable measure of the crime that was actually occurring so that we could set up appropriate benchmarks. I brought the COMPSTAT model to Mesa, which is one that I worked with in LA with [Los Angeles Police Chief] Bill Bratton. I learned a great deal from Bill, so, with the help of the Los Angeles Police Department and my own experiences as the Chief of Operations in the LAPD, we started a COMPSTAT unit. The goal here was to develop a system where we could have access to timely and accurate crime information to help deploy police personnel effectively.

At the same time, we started to analyze our detective work. We had a heavily centralized detective function, resulting in a tremendous disconnect between patrol and detectives. That disconnect was impeding information sharing and depriving front-end officers in patrol of the tools they needed to understand what the crime picture was. Just as importantly, the back-end investigations were terribly delayed. So decentralizing detectives was important. It caused our clearance rates to climb.

The community piece was also very critical, so I set up a series of community forums. The people attending those forums became advisors to us about crime problems and about police structure at the city wide level. We also took each of our police stations—we have four stations or districts in Mesa—and created community police advisory boards at the station level. The goal there was to take local neighborhood leaders and in essence embed them in police operations to help identify priorities at the local neighborhood level and enhance the communication between the local police and that community. So we had the community forums take, if you will, a 30,000 feet, above-the-ground look at the city overall and then the community police advisory board looked at policing at the neighborhood level. At the same time, I was working very closely with the employee unions and employee groups in order to try to reengineer our internal process.

PARC: What was your strategy with respect to Part I crimes in general?

George Gascón: Well, there were several things. First of all, I have to give credit where credit is due, and the men and women of the Mesa Police Department have really done incredible work. They responded very well to the challenge. We would have never achieved the crime reduction levels we have without the hard work and commitment of the men and women of the Mesa Police Department. Our men and women have worked both hard and smartly.

For instance, they started to look at the nexus between calls for service and the likelihood of a Part I crime coming to pass at a later time involving the same victim or location. We started to peel the onion and go beyond the obvious. This approach has given us a powerful tool to prevent crime in a very proactive way.

For instance, we started to look at calls for noisy neighbors or loud parties or trespassing or other public nuisance types of things. We plotted them graphically and then figured out the degree to which those calls

were related to Part I crimes. It's a work in progress, but we are increasingly able to predict the likelihood of Part I crimes before they occur by looking at all those other indicators.

The other thing that we've done extremely well—and, in fact, it's one of our major focuses in '09— is preventing future crime by intervention with the victims of current crimes. We brought down our property crime significantly, especially burglaries and auto theft. However, we noted that in Mesa, as it occurs elsewhere, many crimes are facilitated by victim behavior—leaving doors unlocked, garage doors open, vehicles with property or valuables visible. Therefore, we assigned our crime prevention specialists to spend a lot of time in the various communities, educating people how to harden their own targets. We got to the point, where officers in their downtime, drive through neighborhoods and when they see a garage door open, they actually stop, go to the home, knock on the door, identify themselves, and provide crime prevention information. In some of the neighborhoods where we did that, our residential burglaries went down—in some cases, by as much as 20 or 30 percent. We also started to work more aggressively to intervene with kids that were at the threshold of becoming involved in gang activity.

PARC: Does Mesa have a significant gang problem?

George Gascón: We do. Not only does Mesa have a significant gang problem, it has a very diverse gang problem. Mesa has Hispanic gangs, and, within those gangs, you have the multigenerational gangs as well as younger gangs. We also have white supremacist gangs, motorcycle gangs, some African American gangs and Native American gangs. Additionally, we have seen the influence of prison gangs on some of our street gangs.

We also noticed that gang activity is transcending the traditional ethnic groups, meaning that, at the higher levels of the gang structures, you have white supremacist gangs actually working with Hispanic gangs. This cross ethnic gang cooperation is concerning because it illustrates how some street gangs are evolving into better organized crime syndicates.

Therefore, in dealing with gangs, we took a two-pronged approach. With respect to the hardcore gangs engaged in serious criminal behavior, we undertook an aggressive, intelligence-driven regional enforcement effort. We worked with other police departments in the area, as well as our Federal partners in the ATF, DEA, FBI and the US Marshal's Office to ensure we maximize our crime fighting efforts.

At the same time, in some parts of the city, we have younger gangs. With those gangs we are starting to do meaningful intervention work. In partnership with the school district, we set up a pilot program called the MESA program, which stands for Making Every Student Accountable, to work with at-risk youth. It is an eight week program where we work with the family and the kids through the school district. The MESA program is composed of a series of modules aimed at teaching at-risk youth how to cope with pressures in the school and improve academic performance. We also included a physical fitness module, and parenting classes. We've had excellent results.

Our kids' behavior really turned around in most cases. Their school attendance went up significantly. Many of these kids were failing all their classes. Now they were getting passing grades. We actually had some that did more than passing, we have had some kids who started to get B's and A's in their classes. We now have a model that works. We've been doing it for two years. There have been more than 100 at-risk kids in the program, more than 90 percent of whom have pretty much turned around. So we are trying to become better at both the prevention and the intervention sides because it's so critically important. We cannot arrest ourselves out of this problem. We really have to figure out other ways to deal with crime. Unfortunately, the biggest challenge to the MESA program is funding. Even though we have a great partnership

with the school district, we both lack sufficient resources to get it to the next level, which is significantly increasing the number of kids involved.

PARC: You also made significant progress in the area of domestic violence. How was that accomplished?

George Gascón: That's another very interesting area where we have done some exciting work. We know that domestic violence not only impacts the victim and the assailant but it also impacts the family unit as a whole. We wanted to do something about this reality, that children who are raised in an environment or home where domestic violence is a problem themselves tend to become either victims or abusers as they become adults.

Last year we started a program where, after we did the initial police response, we send our victim services people to work with the victim and the suspect to make sure that the victim was going to avail herself (I say herself, because it's mostly women on the victim side) of the medical services and all the other available intervention services and that the suspect was handled appropriately. One of the things we know is that when patrol responds on the evening of the incident and the victim is really upset she wants to prosecute, but, by the next day or the following day, reality sets in. Intimidation or economic reasons may cause the victim to change her mind and not follow through with the process. So getting our services around the victim to help her is very important. We are also now starting to get our arms around the suspect, recognizing that the suspect generally is going to come back to that home and that it is really necessary that they also avail themselves of the services designed to help modify suspect behavior.

Finally, our goal for '09 is to start working also with the kids with the help of the schools. We want teachers and principals to recognize how domestic violence impacts the children. We want teachers to take notice and respond positively and affirmatively when these kids are acting differently because trauma: If the kid's grades are going down, or attendance becomes spotty, or the child's behavior worsens, we want teachers to realize that they need to provide help and work with the kids. In Mesa, we're fortunate to have a very forward-looking school district, and that's the other piece of the equation. So in the domestic violence arena, our goal is to put our arms around each impacted member of the family as opposed to simply getting in there and arresting the suspect.

PARC: You have been linking together otherwise autonomous police departments with the information needed to attack crime regionally. Would you please describe that?

George Gascón: I'm a strong believer in gathering quality actionable information and collaboration. I think that the next generation of crime fighters will be better able to predict crime before it occurs and actually intervene. We're more successful when the crime doesn't occur at all than when we have to go out and solve a crime that has already occurred.

As to the regional approach, we created a regional gang and crime information fusion center in Mesa currently staffed by Mesa personnel and individuals from other police departments in the region. We track regional crime on a daily basis, almost on a real-time basis, and we have been able to garner the support of federal agencies in the region as well.

We now have the ability to identify serious offenders very quickly and be able to arrest them much more rapidly than we would have otherwise. When information is not being shared, one police department may have the impression that certain individuals are working independently, maybe committing one or two crimes each. You don't get to see the total picture, which may be that the suspects are working together and committing crimes in multiple places. So bringing law enforcement together, sharing information, and enhancing our analytical tools have significantly multiplied our effectiveness on a regional basis.

PARC: *The Mesa Police Department has recently adopted and circulated a new policy on immigration enforcement. To set the picture, Arizona is a state in which there has been a significant amount of illegal immigration. It is also a state in which there is a strong, anti-immigrant sentiment. What is Mesa's new immigration policy?*

George Gascón: The policy was the result of over a year of collaborating with people inside the police department as well as those in the community. We worked not only with the Hispanic community and other minority communities, but also with the legal community—specifically, those who deal with immigration issues. I wanted to make sure that the policy we developed was something that was going to be, if not embraced by everyone, at least understood by everyone.

One of the things I've learned about local policing and undocumented immigration is that you're always walking a very fine line. The effectiveness of local policing is predicated on having a good and trusting relationship with the communities that you serve. It's very difficult to fight crime if a substantial part of your community feels so apart from the police that they're unwilling to share information with you and to assist you with crime prevention efforts.

So I wanted to make sure, especially when we're talking about the Hispanic community—because illegal immigration in Arizona really is primarily a Hispanic issue—that we had the trust of the Hispanic community. We wanted people to understand that the Mesa Police Department would not be a threat to people who are law-abiding, apart from an unauthorized border crossing. We wanted those individuals to feel comfortable working with the police, reporting crimes, and helping us with crime prevention programs, without the fear of being deported or finding themselves the subject of retaliation. That was very important to me because unattended crime problems eventually hurt the entire community, not just those here illegally. So we created a policy that very clearly talks about our obligation to fight crime but to do so thoughtfully and constitutionally and in a way that makes sense for local policing. Primary immigration enforcement on the streets should be handled by federal authorities, not the local police.

We adopted a policy not to inquire about the immigration status of people that were seeking help, such as the victim in domestic violence incidents. Also, we would not check immigration status if you were reporting a crime. Likewise, we would not check the immigration status of minors that were involved in low-grade misdemeanors or civil violations, or people in general involved in civil violations, such as traffic infractions. We clearly informed the community about all these areas where we were not going to be seeking to determine the immigration status of the person. On the other hand we have made it very clear that if we were arresting you for a criminal offense, or found out that there was a warrant outstanding against you, we would check whether you were here without authority and contact ICE [Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the successor agency to INS], if you are an undocumented immigrant.

PARC: *What would happen if, for example, an individual was caught drinking in public?*

George Gascón: It would depend on the totality of the circumstances. If the encounter leads to an arrest, our procedures require that we assess the immigration status of all those we arrest and process through our jail. If during that process we determine a person to be an unauthorized immigrant ICE is contacted.

PARC: *Have you found, as some have argued, that undocumented persons commit proportionally more crimes?*

George Gascón: No. When I first arrived in Mesa, one of the things that I quickly understood is that we needed to do was to have an honest discussion concerning crime and illegal immigration. Because of inflammatory and inaccurate rhetoric, in some quarters, people wrongly believe that 90 percent, or at least a very substantial amount of crime, is being committed by those who are here illegally. However, having worked my entire career in LA, I knew that probably wasn't the case, because, generally speaking, the vast

majority of people who cross the border come here to work, and that's all they do—they work and do not want to call a lot of attention to themselves. Mostly, they are law-abiding people, and in my opinion, that's the proper context to help guide policy making efforts on immigration enforcement for local police.

We spent a lot of time researching and assessing the criminality rate of people who are here illegally. We learned that in 2008, approximately 9 percent of all of our arrests included undocumented persons. About 10 percent of the Arizona's population is undocumented—approximately 500,000 to 600,000 people. Given these numbers I believe it is reasonable to assume that the criminality among people who are here without authority is roughly proportionate to their percentage of the population. Therefore, policy discussions concerning the allocation of local police resources to this problem should be made in light of these facts instead of misinformation.

PARC: Has the policy been in place long enough to see how it's working out?

George Gascón: The written policy is perhaps too new to really say how it is working. It was implemented in January 2009. During '08, we did extensive training of all of our people, as well as the media. We brought in the media because we wanted to educate the public and we wanted to be very transparent. We gave the media the same class that we gave our officers. And that provided some really good results for us, because, again, it clarified what we are doing and what we are not doing.

PARC: You have commented publicly about the high cost of law enforcement and the need to think of ways to civilianize various positions and functions within policing in order to bring down the costs. Can you develop those ideas a little bit more and tell us about your thinking in that regard?

George Gascón: First, there's a high cost to crime, and we have to recognize that. While I was in Los Angeles, I was an early proponent of trying to quantify the cost of crime. Based on various studies, a murder, for instance, costs the economy anywhere from \$4 to \$11 million. The cost of a rape is somewhere around a quarter of a million dollars. So, I think it's important, first of all, to recognize the tremendous economic impact of crime. However, it's important also to recognize that policing is very expensive. And, in some areas, we may be pricing ourselves out of the ability of a local community to afford policing as we currently do it.

Policing is an investment as well as a cost. It's important for people to realize a reasonable return on that investment. If there are ways that we can achieve similar results at a lower cost we should do so as long as it does not negatively affect our professionalism. In Mesa we're exploring what would be the right ratio of sworn vs. civilian personnel. There are two primary reasons for this effort. First, if we can free up our sworn officers to dedicate more time to work with the community on problem solving and other community policing efforts, we have a better chance of improving the community's quality of life and reducing crime. Second, if we can train civilians to handle many investigations where the suspect is not present and to complete the required reports, collect evidence including fingerprints, DNA, photos, etc., and do so with more efficiency because we can incorporate both the preliminary investigation traditionally completed by sworn officers and the lab-scientific work traditionally conducted by civilians into one seamless process, we can reduce our operational cost.

Finally, I am not an advocate of lowering the salary of police officers or lowering their pensions to reduce cost. I think it's important, in order to maintain the high level of professionalization, that you compensate people well. Although you don't go into policing to become rich, it's important to be able to attract the right kind of people. Therefore, in my opinion, the best way to improve the affordability of policing is to balance the work force and create a situation where well trained, well compensated sworn police officers concentrate in those areas that require a police officer's attention, and allow para-professional civilians to handle the rest.

PARC: Thank you very much, Chief Gascón, for a very stimulating interview.