

Getting Less for More: The Failed Legacy of Gang Enforcement

When the existence of a gang problem has been announced or acknowledged by public officials, the conversation generally turns to how law enforcement should solve it. The following are fairly typical policy responses to the emergence of a gang problem:

1. Form a specialized gang unit within the police department if one does not already exist.
2. Launch a crackdown in high-crime neighborhoods by adding police patrols, aggressively enforcing public ordinances, and using every available opportunity to stop and question local residents.
3. Target alleged gang “leaders” and “hard-core” gang members for heightened surveillance and stiff criminal justice sanctions.

Other policy makers may propose adoption of a fourth option—a “balanced” approach that combines the gang enforcement tactics described here with provision of services and supports to gang members and gang-afflicted communities. The choice of a gang enforcement strategy is frequently based on political and institutional considerations. Officials seek strategies that let the public know they are “doing something” about the problem without requiring fundamental changes in the police department’s operations.

The official response to an emerging gang problem is rarely based on a solid understanding of gang issues or a coherent theory of what an intervention should accomplish. The hysteria that greets the sudden emergence of a gang problem creates a poor atmosphere for considering the questions that will determine the success or failure of a gang control strategy: What are its *objectives*? Whom will it *target*? And what *effect* will the initiative have on the targets in order to achieve the objectives?

The objectives of a gang control effort depend on whether the problem is defined as gang violence, gang crime, or the gangs’ very existence. Law enforcement officials often take the public position that gangs must be eradicated. In the words of Captain Ray Peavy, who heads the Los Angeles sheriff’s homi-

cide bureau, “Everyone says: ‘What are we going to do about the gang problem?’ It’s the same thing you do about cockroaches or insects; you get someone in there to do whatever they can do to get rid of those creatures” (Garvey and McGreevy 2007).

Others take a different perspective on what gang control efforts can, or should, set out to accomplish. As a representative of one urban community development corporation told a researcher, “The problem is not to get kids out of gangs but the behavior. If crime goes down, if young people are doing well, that’s successful” (Villaruel, personal communication). Some law enforcement officers also acknowledge—usually in private—that their goal is not to eliminate gang *membership* but to reduce levels of gang *crime* and *violence* (Villaruel, personal communication).

The second important question for gang control efforts is whom to target. On one hand, an initiative may elect to target “leaders” or “hard-core” members who are believed to be the driving force behind gang crime. On the other hand, the initiative may target “fringe” members or even nonmembers whom policy makers believe can more easily be enticed or deterred from gang activity.

The most appropriate target depends on one’s theory about how gangs operate. Some law enforcement officials subscribe to the view that gangs can be eliminated or at least neutralized by removing their leadership (“cutting the head off the snake”). Others argue that gang leadership is fluid, and that gangs—like the mythical hydra—are capable of growing new heads faster than law enforcement can decapitate them. Some contend that so-called “hard-core” members should be targeted because they do (and suffer) the most damage. But others believe that a focus on newer and more marginal members will not only save more youth but also limit gangs’ ability to reproduce themselves over time.

If drive-by shootings and other spectacular acts of gang violence are committed by younger members

at the behest of leaders, then it is possible—although not certain—that removing the leaders from the community might reduce violence. If, on the other hand, drive-bys and other acts of violence are initiated by younger and more volatile members with poor impulse control and a desire to “prove” themselves, then removing leaders will do nothing to quell the violence.

The third critical question for gang control efforts is what effects they are intended to have on the targets. A gang control initiative may set out to *incapacitate* gang members who are deemed too dangerous to remain on the street due to their role in the gang or their personal involvement in crime and violence. An initiative may also seek to use “carrots” or “sticks” to *persuade* individuals to change behaviors ranging from gang membership to gun violence. Finally, a gang control initiative may try to *disrupt* gang activities by making it impossible for individuals or the group as a whole to function normally.

Boston’s Operation Ceasefire is an example of a gang control effort with clear objectives, targets, and intended effects. The architects of Operation Ceasefire set *reducing gun violence* as the principal objective and stuck with that objective throughout the life of the project. They developed a strategy that was designed to *persuade* both *hard-core* and *fringe* youth gang members to stop engaging in acts of retaliatory violence.

Targeted youth were told that further acts of violence would place them and their gangs under heightened law enforcement scrutiny; they were offered supports and services designed to facilitate the transition from gang activities to other activities. Police also conducted saturation patrols and prosecuted targeted gang leaders, but these actions were considered components of the main “lever-pulling” strategy rather than competing strategies.

The conceptual clarity that characterized Operation Ceasefire is rare among gang control efforts. Few initiatives have proved capable of orienting their activities around realistic, measurable public safety objectives. And most are unable to articulate a viable theory of how gang control activities will have the intended effect on their targets. Gang enforcement efforts mounted in response to public concerns about gang and gun *violence* have driven up arrests for *nonviolent* offenses with no reduction in violence. Gang intervention programs that were intended to target active members wind up serving nonmembers because the staff is unwilling to work with “that kind

of kid.” Conceptual clarity is no guarantee of success. The failure of efforts to replicate the Ceasefire model in Los Angeles and Indianapolis cast doubt on the underlying theory of “lever pulling” and deterrence “retailing.” But such clarity does make it easier to evaluate and debate competing proposals.

Further, the thrust of most gang enforcement efforts runs counter to what is known about gangs and gang members, rendering the efforts ineffectual if not counterproductive. Police officials make much of targeting reputed “leaders” while ignoring the fact that most gangs do not need leaders to function (not to mention the risk that removal of leaders will increase violence by destabilizing the gang and removing constraints on internal conflict). Research on the dynamics of gang membership indicates that suppression tactics intended to make youth “think twice” about gang involvement may instead reinforce gang cohesion, elevating the gang’s importance and reinforcing an “us versus them” mentality. Finally, the incarceration of gang members is often considered a measure of success, even though prison tends to solidify gang involvement and weaken an individual’s capacity to live a gang- and crime-free life.

It is easy to provide anecdotal evidence for the effectiveness of any one of these strategies: media reports are full of stories about cities where crime goes up, a crackdown is launched, and crime goes down. But a review of research on the implementation of gang enforcement strategies—ranging from neighborhood-based suppression to the U.S. Justice Department Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention’s Comprehensive Gang Program Model—provides little reason for optimism. Findings from investigations of gang enforcement efforts in 17 jurisdictions over the past two decades yield few examples of success, and many examples of failure.

The problems highlighted in the research include:

- Lack of correspondence between the problem, typically lethal and/or serious violence, and a law enforcement response that targets low-level, nonviolent misbehavior.
- Resistance on the part of key agency personnel to collaboration or implementation of the strategy as designed.
- Evidence that the intervention had no effect or a negative effect on crime and violence.
- A tendency for any reductions in crime or violence to evaporate quickly, often before the end of the intervention period.

- Poorly designed evaluations that make it impossible to draw any conclusions about the effect of an intervention.
- Failure of replication efforts to achieve results comparable to those of pilot programs.
- Severe power and resources imbalances between law enforcement and community partners that hamper the implementation of “balanced” gang control initiatives.

The following sections describe common gang enforcement strategies and explore findings of program evaluations from 17 jurisdictions.

Institutional responses: The rise of police gang units

Over the past decade and a half, we have witnessed a proliferation within law enforcement agencies of specialized units that focus on gang enforcement. The formation of a gang unit is often viewed as a rational response to an emerging gang threat. But researchers have concluded that gang units are more often formed in response to pressure on police to “do something,” or as a way to secure additional resources for the agency. Once gang units are launched, the experts find they often become isolated from the rest of the department, a development that can render them ineffective or even facilitate corruption.

Roughly half of local law enforcement agencies with 100 or more sworn officers maintain special gang units, according to a 1999 survey, including 56 percent of municipal police department, 50 percent of sheriff’s departments, and 43 percent of county police agencies (Katz and Webb 2003a). In 2003 Charles Katz and Vincent Webb estimated that the total number of police gang units (including state police agencies) stood at 360, most of which (85 percent) were no more than 10 years old (2003b).

Why law enforcement agencies form gang units

The proliferation of specialized gang units has been justified as a natural response by police officials to the spread of gangs and growing public concerns over gang crime. The argument for such units is that they permit officers to develop the technical skills and expertise needed to diagnose local gang problems and to assist the rest of the agency and the community to address them. But the idea that the formation of a gang unit is “a result of *rational considerations* on the

part of police agencies” that face “*real* gang problems” has been challenged by several researchers (Katz and Webb 2003a). Marjorie Zatz examined the establishment of a gang unit in Phoenix and determined that police officials had invented a serious gang problem in order to secure federal resources (cited in Katz and Webb 2003a).

Richard McCorkle and Terance Miethe found that the formation of a gang unit in the Las Vegas Police Department was driven by a search for resources and scandals within the department rather than an emerging gang crime problem (cited in Katz and Webb 2003a). Law enforcement officials fomented a “moral panic” by linking “national reports of a growing problem to local concerns of increasing crime in order to divert public attention away from problems within the police department and to justify an infusion of additional resources into the department.”

Gang panics are not always generated by law enforcement. Carol Archbold and Michael Meyer document a particularly disturbing example of how a handful of troubling incidents can snowball into a full-scale moral panic (cited in Katz and Webb 2003b).

The researchers found that the public fear generated by a series of youth homicides in a small Midwestern city led police to begin designating local minority youth as gang members. Fear continued to rise as the number of documented “gang members” grew. The situation eventually “spun out of control, resulting in community panic, even though there was no actual evidence of any gang-related activity in the city.”

Charles Katz, Edward Maguire, and Dennis Roncek examined factors that influenced the establishment of police gang units in about 300 large U.S. cities (Katz and Webb 2003b). The researchers found no relationship between the formation of a gang unit and “the size of a community gang or crime problem.” Instead, they found that gang units were most likely to be formed in cities with larger Hispanic populations, and among police departments that received funding for gang control efforts. The authors “reasoned that police organizations might be creating units when the community feels threatened by a minority group.” They also concluded that at least some of the gang units “might have been created prior to receiving external funding for the purposes of justifying the need for more resources.”

Other investigations have emphasized the role of institutional factors in the formation and persistence of gang units. Katz conducted research into a police

gang unit in a Midwestern city and found that the unit “was created under pressure from influential community stakeholders” (Katz and Webb 2003b). Katz’s finding fits previous research that demonstrates that the creation of specialized police units is “offered as a symbolic act to show the community, potential offenders, and police officers that the police department is taking a particular problem seriously (Meyer 1979; Scott 1995).”

This finding was strengthened in subsequent research by Katz and Webb examining police responses to gangs in four Southwestern cities: Albuquerque, New Mexico; Inglewood, California; Las Vegas; and Phoenix (2003b). The authors concluded that the creation of gang units was largely a reaction to “political, public, and media pressure” rather than a response to an objective problem *or* a strategy for securing additional resources or controlling marginalized populations. Katz and Webb report that “much of the data suggested that minority communities played a major role in shaping the nature of the police organizations’ responses to gangs.”

Their conclusion that public pressure influenced the formation of gang units fit with the findings of Weisel and Painter, who conducted interviews with police gang specialists in five cities and determined that “most police agencies had responded to gang problems because of well-publicized gang homicides and fights. They reported that the police departments in their study typically had responded by establishing specialized units that emphasized suppression” (cited in Katz and Webb 2003b).

What gang units do

It should be no surprise that gang units whose formation was precipitated by external pressures or opportunities rather than a coherent law enforcement strategy would have difficulty establishing a role within the agency. Katz found that “once the gang unit was created it was often required to incorporate competing ideas and beliefs into its organizational structure and operational strategy to communicate an image of operational effectiveness when it otherwise was unable to demonstrate success” (cited in Katz and Webb 2003b).

Katz and Webb found that most gang units gravitated toward intelligence-gathering and enforcement/suppression activities while devoting less attention to investigations and very little to prevention (2003a). The authors’ conclusions on the operation of gang units are not encouraging. The majority of the po-

lice departments they studied lacked formal mechanisms to monitor gang unit officers and hold them accountable for job performance.

The gang units tended to engage in “buffet-style policing,” accepting only cases that involved high-profile crimes such as homicides, drive-by shootings, and aggravated assaults. Priorities were not set by a well-articulated vision of the unit’s mission but instead were determined by a “unique workgroup subculture...that reflected internally shared beliefs about the nature of the local gang problem and the appropriate response to that problem” (2003b). The chief of one police department admitted to the researchers that he had “little understanding of what the gang unit did or how it operated” (2003a).

The absence of strong departmental oversight and the physical separation of gang units from the rest of the police force—three of four units operated from “secret” off-site facilities that were known only to gang unit officers—contributed to a “decoupling [that] led gang unit officers to isolate themselves from the rest of the police organization and from the community and its citizens.” Although gang units are supposed to afford an opportunity for officers to develop specialized expertise, the authors found that the officers were poorly trained and had little direct exposure to gang members: an average of just one to three contacts per eight hours worked.

Gang unit officers “rarely sought citizen input” or partnerships with community organizations, according to the researchers: “None of the gang unit officers in any of the study sites appeared to value information that *non*-criminal justice agencies might provide, nor did they recognize potential value in sharing their own information and knowledge with non-criminal justice personnel.” Gang units appeared instead to have adopted a *Spy vs. Spy* worldview that extended to their own departments. Some gang officers professed that “regular precinct stations or police headquarters were subject to penetration by gangs, purportedly rendering intelligence files vulnerable to destruction and manipulation.”

Given the isolation of gang units from their departments and their communities, it is not surprising that interview participants “were hard-pressed to offer specific evidence of the units’ effectiveness” and “rarely commented on the gang units’ impact on the amelioration of local gang problems.” Lack of confidence in the gang units’ effectiveness was most pronounced on the topic of suppression. The researchers found that “almost no one other than the gang unit

officers themselves seemed to believe that gang unit suppression efforts were effective at reducing the communities' gang problems.”

The isolation of gang units from host agencies and their tendency to form tight-knit subcultures—not entirely unlike those of gangs—also contributes to a disturbingly high incidence of corruption and other misconduct. The Los Angeles Police Department's Rampart scandal is only the most famous example of a gang unit gone bad. Katz and Webb cite several other places where police gang units have drawn attention for aggressive tactics and misconduct, including Las Vegas, where two gang unit officers participated in a drive-by shooting of alleged gang members; Chicago, where gang unit officers worked with local gangs to import cocaine from Miami; and Houston, where gang task force officers were found to routinely engage in unauthorized use of confidential informants, warrantless searches, and firing weapons at unarmed citizens.

Katz and Webb conclude by recommending that police departments with gang units take steps to make them more effective, including better integrating gang units into the department's patrol and investigative functions; strengthening managerial controls and accountability; and incorporating community policing strategies. But their research findings also suggest that police officials should reconsider whether gang units are an effective law enforcement tool or a potentially dangerous distraction from the real work at hand.

Neighborhood gang suppression

The 1980s and 1990s saw a significant shift away from prevention and treatment responses to gang activity in favor of suppression (Katz and Webb 2003a). The specific aims of suppression programs differ: some aim to halt potentially lethal behaviors such as gun carrying, while others seek to drive youth out of gangs entirely. But suppression efforts generally share a focus on specific geographies or gangs, and they require the investment of law enforcement resources in stepped-up efforts to monitor gang members.

The purpose of suppression is to reduce gang-related activity by current gang members, and to reduce the number of people who choose to participate in gangs, by providing for swifter, severer, and more certain punishment. The guiding assumption is that, in the words of Malcolm Klein, “the targets of suppression, the gang members and potential gang members, will

respond ‘rationally’ to suppression efforts [and] will weigh the consequences of gang activity, redress the balance between cost and benefit, and withdraw from gang activity” (Katz and Webb 2003a).

The reality of gang suppression is more complicated. Father Greg Boyle, founder of Homeboy Industries, argues that gang membership is not a rational choice but rather a desperate response to profound misery (2005). He believes that police attempts to deter gang activity by making life more difficult for gang members miss the fact that youth join gangs because they are already miserable. The research literature on gangs also indicates that suppression efforts can be counterproductive. Such tactics can increase gang cohesion by reinforcing an “us versus them” mentality, and by providing external validation of the gang's importance:

Gang researchers have noted the potential for gang suppression programs to backfire in the face of group processes that undermine deterrence messages through status enhancement, building cohesion within the gang, and invoking an oppositional culture, all of which lead to increased gang activity (Klein, 1995). A member of the 18th Street gang in Los Angeles makes the same point succinctly: “‘We're not taking it seriously.’... He said that the official attention on the gang—which the police say has up to 20,000 members in Southern California—united members and helped attract recruits. ‘Other gangs are getting... into 18th Street,’ he said. ‘It's growing’ ” (Lopez and Connell, 1997). (Maxson, Hennigan, and Sloane 2003)

Suppression efforts face other challenges as well. Suppression campaigns tend to cast a wide net that catches gang members and nonmembers alike. Stepped-up enforcement of public ordinances and the use of aggressive stop-and-search tactics can increase tensions between law enforcement and community members who feel that police are targeting the wrong people or engaging in racial profiling. Community members may feel less inclined to cooperate with police, making the task of law enforcement even more difficult.

Suppression efforts also require the investment of significant law enforcement resources in activities, like saturation patrolling, that are designed to prevent crime. Such investments may strain the capacity of police to solve crimes elsewhere, or limit the ability of local officials to provide other services that could have a greater long-term impact on crime and violence.

The combination of police-community tensions and high cost can make suppression efforts difficult to sustain. Unless the community has been transformed during the period of active suppression, gang activity is likely to resurface—if it ever went away in the first place—as soon as the police presence diminishes. Finally, suppression efforts may simply displace gang activity from target neighborhoods to surrounding areas.

Suppression is a popular response to perceived gang problems, despite the challenges outlined here and the lack of evidence of either short- or long-term reductions in crime. Suppression-oriented activities can provide a feeling of efficacy to law enforcement officers frustrated by their inability to rein in crime and violence, and they create the public impression that policy makers are “doing something” about crime.

The public discourse on gang enforcement is full of anecdotal accounts that credit suppression efforts with reducing gang crime. The typical scenario begins with a spike in violence or high-profile crime that triggers a “crackdown” on gang activity. If crime begins to fall, officials credit the suppression effort. If crime does not fall, new enforcement efforts are mounted until it does.

As long as suppression campaigns are launched during crime surges, success is virtually assured. The odds of crime falling back toward normal levels after a sharp increase would be good even if the police took no unusual steps. And as long as officials continue to announce new gang initiatives, it is all but certain that one of them will eventually correspond with a drop in crime.

When suppression efforts are subject to more rigorous evaluation, however, researchers often find that celebrated drops in crime are attributable to larger trends, seasonal fluctuations, or chance. Studies of gang suppression programs in three jurisdictions highlight the limitations of suppression tactics as well as weaknesses in the research literature on suppression.

The Anti-Gang Initiative: St. Louis, Dallas, and Detroit

St. Louis, Dallas, and Detroit were among 15 cities that received federal funds for gang suppression under the Anti-Gang Initiative of the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. All three efforts centered on targeted patrol operations in limited geographic areas with identified gang crime problems.

St. Louis

Violent crime has long been a problem in St. Louis. During the 1990s, the city’s homicide, robbery, and aggravated assault rates were consistently among the top five in the nation (Decker and Curry 2003). Young black men were disproportionately represented among homicide suspects and victims. In 1995 the St. Louis police recorded 52 gang homicides and 1,573 gang-related assaults.

St. Louis police used a \$500,000 grant from the Department of Justice to implement a “zero-tolerance” gang suppression program in the College Hill and Fairground Park neighborhoods during 1996 and 1997. The neighborhoods were reported to be the home of five active gangs and 200 gang members. The strategy developed by the police combined aggressive curfew enforcement; the use of consent-to-search tactics to reduce the availability of guns; and the targeting of known gang members by the Gang Intelligence Unit. The activities actually undertaken by officers differed from the plan, however, due to resistance on the part of some police units to assigned tasks.

Scott Decker and David Curry gathered data on Anti-Gang Initiative activities and crime outcomes in St. Louis. The researchers found that the initiative generated a considerable amount of police activity within the target neighborhoods, resulting in 301 pedestrian and traffic stops conducted under the curfew enforcement program and 63 arrests of known gang members conducted under the zero-tolerance program. But many of the activities did not fit within the stated goals of the initiative.

The conflict between the priorities set forth in the initiative and the priorities of the enforcing officers is evident in the curfew enforcement program. Officers were assigned to curfew enforcement and directed to send juveniles they encountered to a “curfew center,” but no juveniles were referred to the center on 24 of 31 nights of operation. Police officers were reluctant to enforce the curfew because they “didn’t regard curfew enforcement as ‘real police work,’ and [believed] that it was unlikely to address ‘real’ gang problems.”

A memo generated by the lieutenant in charge of the initiative shows similar resistance to the notion that police should enforce curfews. The lieutenant proposes that officers find ways to use curfew enforcement as an opportunity to do “real” police work: “Once the car is stopped...only time will tell what may be found....While our roll [*sic*] is curfew enforcement, the manner in which we carry out our

roll [sic] is strictly up to us. As you can see...the above-mentioned activities plus the ones you and your officers think up can all be conducted from the Anti-Gang Initiative Curfew Car.”

Problems also plagued the gun enforcement component of the Anti-Gang Initiative. The researchers found that the unit charged with gun enforcement “served a record number of warrants in the second half of 1996” and “actively implemented its mandate to sweep target neighborhoods for suspected gang members.” But the unit failed to use consent searches and “subverted” the goals of the program, according to the researchers, by using the process as an opportunity to make arrests. During 1996 the Mobile Reserve Unit conducted just 39 consent searches and made arrests in *more than half* of cases. Further, on two occasions, researchers conducting “ride-alongs” noted that Mobile Reserve Unit officers were “unable to identify the target neighborhoods.”

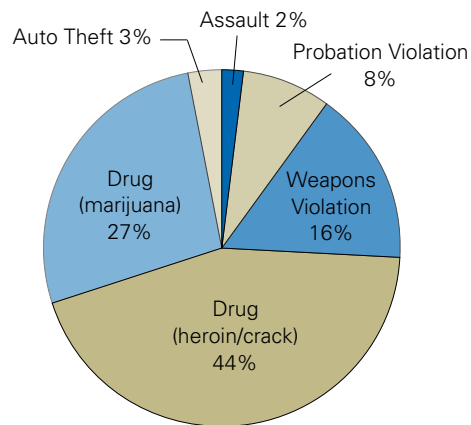
The activities of the Gang Intelligence Unit officers conformed more closely to the “zero-tolerance” strategies set forth under the initiative, perhaps because the officers saw the arrest of known gang members as “real” police work. The unit was responsible for 77 arrests over a 14-month period. Nearly all (91 percent) of the arrestees were African American males, and most (71 percent) of the resulting charges were for drug offenses. Weapons offenses accounted for 16 percent of arrest charges, and violent offenses accounted for just 2 percent. Probation violations (8 percent) and property offenses (3 percent) accounted for the remainder of the arrest charges. The arrests resulted in the seizure of 37 weapons.

The researchers compared the incidence of crime during the 12 months leading up to implementation of the Anti-Gang Initiative to the incidence of crime

during the 15 months of program operations. They found no statistically significant changes across nine crime categories in College Hill, and just one statistically significant change in Fairground Park—a drop in unarmed robberies from three per month in the preintervention period to just under two per month during the suppression program. The researchers also examined crime trends in two comparison neighborhoods with similar results. The comparison areas each saw a statistically significant change in just one of nine crime categories—an increase in assaults and an increase in unarmed robberies, respectively.

Decker and Curry conclude that the results were “somewhat discouraging given the targeted suppression focus and high levels of activity in small geographic areas with modest populations.” They suggest that the participation of the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department in a federally funded initiative put

Figure 7.1. Charges resulting from the St. Louis Anti-Gang Initiative Zero Tolerance Program



Source: Decker and Curry 2003

Table 7.1. Change in crime (gang and nongang) associated with St. Louis Anti-Gang Initiative

Crime category	Target neighborhoods		Control neighborhoods	
	College Hill	Fairground Park	O’Fallon Park	Hyde Park
Murder	NS	NS	NS	NS
Robbery	NS	NS	NS	NS
Robbery—weapon	NS	NS	NS	NS
Robbery—no weapon	NS	-35.7%	NS	+52.6%
Assault	NS	NS	+64.0%	NS
Gun assault	NS	NS	NS	NS
Person crime	NS	NS	NS	NS
Property crime	NS	NS	NS	NS
Index crime	NS	NS	NS	NS

NS Statistically nonsignificant

Source: Decker and Curry 2003

the agency on the map as “an important and capable institution,” but that it also “continue[d] the department’s isolation from social intervention strategies.”

The St. Louis case study starkly illustrates the potential downside of suppression efforts. Officers failed to follow strategies set forth under the initiative because they did not consider the prescribed activities “real” police work. Dozens of targeted arrests and hundreds of police stops failed to yield meaningful crime reductions in the targeted neighborhoods, *even during the period of intense police activity*. Finally, a half-million-dollar federal grant—not to mention untold resources expended by local and state authorities to process and punish individuals targeted under the initiative—failed to generate much more than a few dozen drug arrests.

Dallas

Eric Fritsch, Tory Caeti, and Robert Taylor report contradictory results from their evaluation of a parallel antigang initiative that was mounted in Dallas during 1996 and 1997 (2003). Gang-related violence fell in target areas, but violent crime levels remained stable and the incidence of robbery increased. Target areas achieved larger reductions in gang-related violence than control areas but underperformed the control areas on broader violent crime measures.

The Dallas Police Department reported 79 gangs

and 1,332 gang-related crime incidents in 1996. The Dallas Anti-Gang Initiative set out to reduce violent activity in five target areas by funding aggressive curfew and truancy enforcement, along with saturation patrols. The gangs targeted under the initiative were believed to account for 18 percent of the city’s known gang members and for 35 percent of all gang-related violent crime.

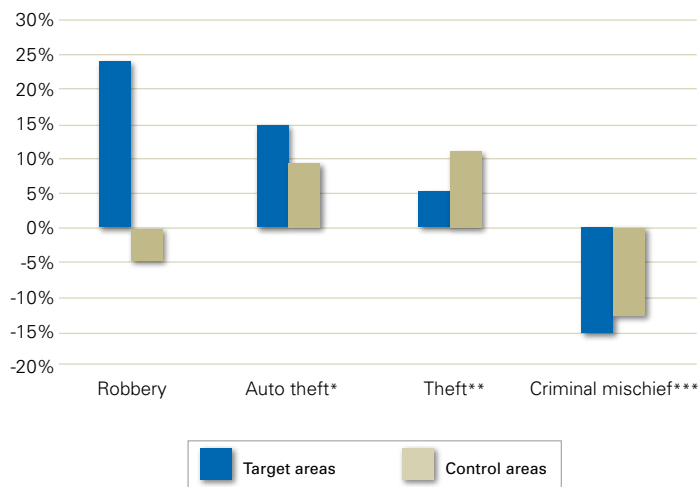
Fritsch, Caeti, and Taylor matched the five target areas with four control areas not covered by the initiative and compared changes in monthly reports of gang-related violence. The results were mixed: three of five target areas saw statistically significant reductions in gang-related violence, but so did two of four control areas. The overall incidence of gang-related violence dropped significantly in both target and control areas, although the decline was greater in the target areas (57 percent versus 37 percent). Because reports of gang-related violence were relatively infrequent even before the intervention, the total gang crime reduction in the target areas amounted to 12 fewer incidents per month, compared to a reduction of eight incidents per month in control areas.

The researchers sought to explain the difference in target area outcomes by analyzing the specific activities of police patrols. They found that police patrolling the target areas where gang violence fell significantly had devoted 80 to 90 percent of their overtime hours to curfew or truancy enforcement. Police units in target areas that did not see statistically significant reductions in gang violence, by contrast, had engaged primarily in saturation patrols. The researchers concluded that “saturation patrol to increase police presence only was not effective in decreasing the level of gang violence in these areas.”

Fritsch and his colleagues also compared overall crime trends in target and control areas, expecting to find both a drop in reports of violent and property crime and an increase in the number arrests for weapons and drug offenses generated by officers freed from responding to calls for service. The data showed the opposite result: the only statistically significant violent crime trend in the target areas was a 23.8 percent *increase* in the number of reported robberies. The target areas actually *underperformed* the control areas, which saw no significant change in violent crime reports.

Target and control areas performed equally, and poorly, in the area of property crime. Target areas experienced a statistically significant 15.4 percent increase in auto thefts. And control areas saw a statistically significant 11.4 percent rise in other thefts.

Figure 7.2. Statistically significant changes in crime (gang and nongang) associated with Dallas Anti-Gang Initiative



- * Significant in target area only
- ** Significant in control area only
- *** Significant in both areas

Source: Fritsch, Caeti, and Taylor 2003

The *only* statistically significant crime reduction in the target areas was for criminal mischief. This trend was evident in the control areas as well, which suggests either a citywide drop in “criminal mischief” or a change in charging policies.

Finally, arrests for weapons offenses actually *fell* by a statistically significant 29 percent in the target areas while remaining stable in the control areas—an indication that the initiative may have been *less* effective than policing-as-usual at catching weapons-related activity. The target areas did see a 24 percent jump in drug arrests while control areas saw a much smaller 8.3 percent increase. The changes in drug arrests were not statistically significant and therefore may not be meaningful. But the results fit the pattern seen in St. Louis, where drug charges accounted for the overwhelming majority of arrests made under the “zero-tolerance” gang policing initiative.

There are several potential explanations for the apparently contradictory outcomes of the Dallas Anti-Gang Initiative. First, it is possible that apparent reductions in gang violence were a consequence of changes in the way offenses were reported by the police department rather than a drop in violence. The classification of an offense as “gang-related” can be highly subjective, and the integrity of the classification process can easily be compromised by changes in staffing or reporting procedures. Such problems have led some researchers to warn against the use of law enforcement gang data to track trends or make comparisons between jurisdictions, as discussed in chapter 6.

Second, the apparent contrast between sharp drops in reports of gang violence and the lack of change in overall crime rates could be explained by the fact that gang-related incidents accounted for a small share of violence, even in the target areas. The five areas targeted under the initiative were selected, in part, because they “experienced a large amount of gang violence in the preceding year” (Fritsch, Caeti, and Taylor 2003). But even before the initiative began, reported incidents of gang-related violence represented less than 10 percent of all violent incidents in the target areas.

On a monthly basis, target area residents reported an average of 61 robberies, 92.3 aggravated assaults, and 181.6 simple assaults. Yet the police department recorded an average of just 20.9 incidents of gang-related violence per month. It is possible that the target neighborhoods became less safe despite a real decline in gang-related violence, with the monthly increase in robberies (up 14.5 per month) exceeding the drop

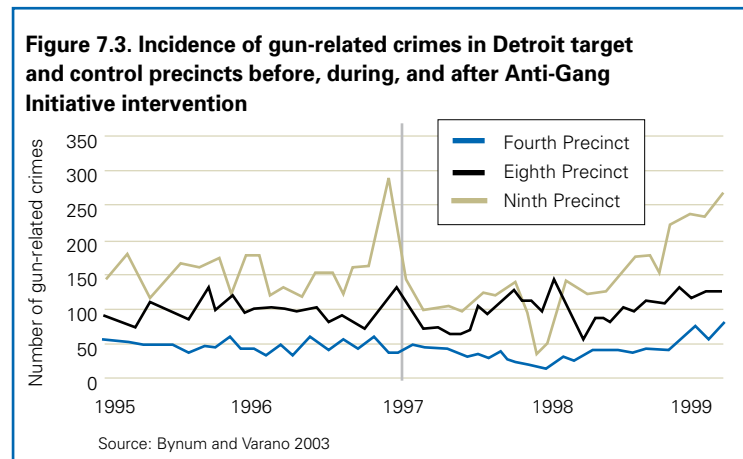
in gang-related violence (down 12 per month).

Regardless of whether the results are an artifact of reporting problems or evidence that police in Dallas won the battle with gangs while losing the war on crime, they do not speak well for the effectiveness of gang suppression. Residents of the target neighborhoods experienced *higher* levels of violent crime, including a statistically significant increase in robberies, during the intervention period than during the previous year, while police made significantly *fewer* arrests for weapon offenses. The outcomes suggest that the Dallas Anti-Gang Initiative was, at best, a distraction from the real problem and, at worst, a counterproductive exercise that increased levels of violent crime.

Detroit

Timothy Bynum and Sean Varano examined a third federally funded antigang initiative in Detroit and concluded that the effort contributed to a substantial reduction in violence (2003). But this conclusion appears to have been biased by the selection of the evaluation time frame. A comparison of crime trends over a longer period suggests that violent gun crime trends in the target precincts may have matched or underperformed a comparison district.

Detroit launched its Anti-Gang Initiative in 1997. Police estimates of gang membership were somewhat inconsistent at the time (ranging from a high of 3,500 in 1997 to a low of 800 in 1998), and the department did not track the incidence of gang-related crime. The research team used gun crime as their primary measure of the problem, based on a finding that self-reported gang members were more likely than other arrestees to report carrying guns most or all of the time (13 percent versus 4 percent).¹ More than 12,000 gun-related crimes were



¹ The data on gang membership and gun carrying was collected through Detroit’s Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring program.

reported to Detroit police in 1996, including 5,293 aggravated assaults, 4,877 robberies, 1,801 weapon offenses, and 346 murders.

Federal funds provided to Detroit's Anti-Gang Initiative were used to establish the Gang Specialist Unit within the Detroit Police Department's Special Crime Section (SCS). The new unit was staffed by both SCS gang specialists and patrol officers from the targeted precincts. The main activities undertaken by the Gang Specialist Unit were:

- “aggressive enforcement of city ordinances, including curfew and truancy sweeps” in target geographic areas;
- joint police-probation operations targeting gang members for possible violations of probation conditions; and
- regular visits to local schools to speak with school administrators and question people “hanging around” the school perimeter during the school day.

The Wayne County prosecutor's office also assigned a staff person to serve as a liaison to the unit and oversee the prosecution of gang-related crimes.

The research team sought to assess the impact of the initiative by examining arrest patterns in the two target precincts and by comparing gun-related crime trends in the target precincts and a third “control” precinct. Most of the arrests that took place in the target precincts were for disorderly conduct or violations of local ordinances. Drug offenses accounted for 17 percent of arrests, while person and weapon arrests were 9 percent and 7 percent, respectively, of the total.

The research team also compared the monthly incidence of violent crime during the quarter preceding the launch of the operation to the incidence of violent crime a year later. They found that the number of assaults, robberies, burglaries, and gun assaults had fallen drastically, led by a drop in gun assaults of more than two-thirds. The control precinct, by contrast, saw growth in the incidence of assaults and burglaries, along with a more modest drop in robbery reports.

In order to control for the effects of seasonal fluctuations and external variables, Bynum and Varano conducted a time-series analysis of gun-related crime trends. They found that the initiative was associated with a statistically significant reduction in gun-related crime in the Ninth Precinct. Gun crime also fell in the Fourth Precinct, but the decline was nonsignificant—a result that the researchers

attributed to the low incidence of gun crime in the area. The researchers concluded that the Detroit Anti-Gang Initiative had reduced the number of gun-related offenses in the Ninth Precinct by 112 crimes per month, and that it may also have reduced the level of gun-related crime in the Fourth Precinct by eight crimes per month.

These results may say more about the researchers' selection of a time frame for comparison than about the effectiveness of gang suppression efforts in Detroit. The three-month period the researchers selected to measure levels of crime “before” the intervention included a dramatic spike in gun crime in one of the target precincts. Monthly gun-crime reports reached roughly *300 per month* in the Ninth Precinct at the end of 1996 before dropping back to a more typical 150 per month at the beginning of 1997.² The selection of a time period that includes such a dramatic crime spike inflates estimates of preintervention crime and all but guarantees that the intervention will “succeed” when crime returns to historic levels.

The three-month period selected to measure postintervention crime levels is similarly problematic. The authors explain that they picked the last quarter of 1997, rather than the end of the intervention period, in order to control for seasonal variations, and because “most of the components had been implemented” by that point. The choice is fortuitous for proponents of the Anti-Gang Initiative since both the Fourth and Ninth Precincts saw gun-related crime hit four-year *lows* during the last quarter of 1997 before beginning to climb back toward preintervention levels. The number of gun-related crime in the “control” precinct, by contrast, hit a four-year *high* at the end of 1997.

The time frame selection problems could be solved by comparing the incidence of crime during the second and third quarters of 1996—a time period that immediately preceded the spike in gun crime—with the incidence of crime during the second and third quarters of 1998, when the intervention ended. The results would look quite different, as is evident from Figure 7.3, depicting gun crimes in the target and control precincts.

Figure 7.3 shows that the incidence of gun-related crime was *higher* in the Ninth Precinct at the end of the intervention period than during mid-1996. By the time the intervention ended, the Ninth Precinct was receiving more than 200 reports of

² Gun-related crime information is derived from Figure 9.2 Comparisons of Pre- and Postintervention Effects for Target and Control Precincts in Bynum and Varano 2003.

gun-related crimes per month—well above typical preintervention levels.

The incidence of gun-related crime in the Fourth Precinct at the end of the intervention period was a bit below mid-1996 levels. But within three months of the program's end, the number of monthly gun-related crime reports in the Fourth Precinct hit a four-year record *high*. Large investments of money and time in gang suppression clearly did not achieve substantial and lasting reductions in levels of gun crime in Detroit's Fourth and Ninth Precincts—a result that casts further doubt on the notion that aggressive “public order” policing (use of traffic laws and city ordinances to stop and question residents, for example) can deliver community safety.

Suppression remains a popular response to gang violence, despite the failure of such tactics to reduce crime. A recent spike in gun violence led Boston police to launch a series of neighborhood sweeps. Of approximately 1,250 people taken into custody during an eight-month period, only 16 percent were arrested on violent crime charges and just over 4 percent were arrested on gun charges (Smalley 2006). The operations angered community leaders, who alleged that police were targeting the wrong youth. Police officials eventually acknowledged that “the sweeps were not as effective as they had hoped and led primarily to arrests for trespassing, drug possession, and other misdemeanors.... [Some suspects] were taken into custody just on motor vehicle violations.”

Gang injunctions

Civil gang injunctions are legal tools that are designed to enhance targeted suppression efforts. The injunctions treat gangs as unincorporated associations whose members can be held responsible by civil courts for creating a public nuisance and enjoined from otherwise lawful behaviors. Enforcement of gang injunctions requires a heavy and sustained police presence, much like other suppression tactics. But injunctions apply only to named (alleged) gang members rather than to all youth who hang out on the street, skip school, or violate city ordinances.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) sued unsuccessfully to block enforcement of a gang injunction in San Jose, California, in the mid-1990s (Siegel 2003). Individuals named in the original San Jose injunction, or subsequently added to it, were prohibited from “standing, sitting, walking, driving, gathering, or appearing anywhere in public view” with a suspected gang member. Alleged gang mem-

bers were also prohibited from “approaching vehicles, engaging in conversation or otherwise communicating with the occupants of any vehicle.” Violation of the injunction could result in arrest, a six-month jail sentence, and a fine of \$1,000.

Gang membership is often established based on very loose criteria. In the San Jose case, police admitted that “a person could be labeled a gang member if he or she were seen on just one occasion wearing clothing indicative of gang membership, such as a blue jean jacket, cut-off sweat pants, any clothing associated with the Los Angeles Raiders, or white, blue, gray, black, khaki, or any other ‘neutral’ colored item.”

The use of gang injunctions is most widespread in Southern California, where, Cheryl Maxson, Karen Hennigan, and David Sloane report, “at least 30 gang injunctions were issued” between 1993 and 2000 (2003). More than two-thirds of the injunctions were issued in Los Angeles County. Maxson and her colleagues conducted a survey of Southern California gang officers to gather information on their use of injunctions. Most considered gang injunctions a “last resort” when “a gang is entrenched in a small area or ...gang-related violence is so far out of authorities’ control that it is worth the resources that are required to obtain and maintain an injunction.” One officer described injunctions as a measure that “severely restricts [the] movement of citizens—like martial law.”

The restrictions to civil liberties that accompany a gang injunction are justified by a perceived need to save communities from a gang-imposed “state of siege.” But community residents often play little or no role in the process. Two-thirds of Southern California law enforcement respondents told the researchers that they “did not feel that community support was crucial” to the success of an injunction. Roughly half “did not suggest that the community played any role at all in the development of injunctions.”

Law enforcement and the media report impressive reductions in crime and fear through the use of gang injunctions. Maxson and her colleagues observe that these stories “are often compelling, but are never buttressed with supporting evidence that meets minimal scientific standards of evaluation.” A typical gang injunction implemented in Inglewood, California, is “cited as a success in the practitioner literature.” But Maxson and Theresa Allen found “little support for a positive effect” when they examined crime patterns before and after the injunction (Maxson, Hennigan, and Sloane 2003).

The ACLU Foundation of Southern California examined trends in San Fernando Valley police reporting districts covered by the Blythe Street gang injunction and came to an even more disturbing conclusion. The organization reported that implementation of the injunction was associated with an *increase* in violent crime: “The Blythe Street gang injunction was preceded, and has been followed, by elaborate claims for its effectiveness in cutting crime and making communities safer. According to statistical materials provided by the LAPD, the truth is precisely the opposite” (cited in Maxson, Hennigan, and Sloane 2003).

An analysis by Jeffrey Grogger of 14 Los Angeles County injunctions, on the other hand, provides evidence that the injunctions were associated with modest 5 to 10 percent reductions in violent crime. The impact of the injunctions appeared to be “concentrated in reductions in assault, rather than robbery” and did not extend to property crimes (cited in Maxson, Hennigan, and Sloane 2003).

Maxson, Hennigan, and Sloane also found that a gang injunction in San Bernardino had reduced “the visibility of gang members, gang intimidation, fear of gang confrontation, and fear of crime.” But the researchers determined that the injunction had not led to improvements in indicators of “neighborhood efficacy, social cohesion, or informal social control” (Klein and Maxson 2006). The positive effects were limited to areas that were described as “most disordered.” Less disordered areas experienced “more gang visibility and property victimization and less belief that the neighborhood could solve its own problems.”

Klein and Maxson conclude that changes in residents’ experiences and perceptions of their communities brought about through gang injunctions could “evolve into increased collective efficacy and the buttressing of social control via expanded social linkages.” In other words, gang injunctions could empower community members and provide breathing room to rebuild community institutions that have been weakened by neglect. But they caution not only that such an outcome would require time and “vigilant attention to ongoing implementation,” but also that it “appears unlikely in the face of a lack of investment in the social fabric of communities”:

[The San Bernardino] injunction was largely a one-man show, and that man was the police, employing the new injunction penalties in a suppression operation. To do otherwise would have required law enforcement to engage com-

munity members in a process that promoted social ties, provided a forum for the development of mutual trust or social cohesion among neighbors, and reactivated the mechanisms of informal social control. Admittedly, this is a lot to ask of law enforcement, but community engagement is the sole parameter that distinguishes injunctions as an innovative strategy for improving gang neighborhoods from a run-of-the-mill gang suppression strategy.

Targeting “hard-core” gang members

The “targeting” of selected gang members by the criminal justice system is a second popular response to gang problems. Proponents argue that focusing attention and resources on “hard-core” gang members will deter them from criminal behavior by increasing the certainty and severity of punishment, or prevent them from committing new crimes in the community through incarceration.

The tactics employed to target gang members can include sentencing enhancements, special prosecution units, and stepped-up surveillance by law enforcement and corrections officials. Some jurisdictions focus on a single targeting tactic, while others set up comprehensive programs. A task force initiative launched in Westminster, California, under the acronym TARGET (Tri-Agency Resource Gang Enforcement Team) is a good example of a comprehensive program. The primary components of TARGET were:

- (1) Vigorous arrests of identified target subjects;
- (2) Effective prosecution and conviction of target subjects;
- (3) Vigilant supervision of target subject probationers;
- (4) Expanded intelligence and information-sharing between cooperating agencies;
- (5) Development and implementation of innovative crime reduction tools.

(Kent and Smith 2001)

Targeting, like suppression, faces a number of challenges. The first and foremost is the difficulty of identifying the right targets. One common approach is to target alleged gang “leaders,” but gang researchers largely report that leadership functions are fluid in youth gangs. Many have also found that gang violence is more likely to be initiated by rank-and-file members than by leaders.

A second approach targets so-called “hard-core” gang members who are believed to be responsible for the bulk of gang crime. This task is easier said than done. The majority of youth who join gangs remain involved for periods of a year or less. Their delinquent behavior rises sharply during periods of gang activity and falls thereafter. There is no way to predict how long an individual will remain in a gang, which makes it difficult to distinguish those who continue to pose a risk to public safety from others whose days of serious offending are behind them.

Further, research findings indicate that young gang members with limited criminal records may be responsible for a disproportionate share of serious gang violence. A RAND Corporation research team found that “new baldies”—new gang members intent on proving themselves to older members—were committing much of the violence in the Hollenbeck area of Los Angeles (Tita, Riley, and Greenwood 2003). These individuals are difficult to target successfully because much of the damage is done before they are identified by law enforcement.

The second challenge is to intervene with targeted gang members in ways that do not exacerbate the problem over the long run. The most likely outcome of targeting is the incarceration of gang members in youth detention facilities, jails, or prisons. And there is evidence that these institutions not only weaken the capacity of incarcerated individuals to lead law-abiding lives upon release but also strengthen gang ties. Jeremy Travis has documented the many obstacles to success that face former prisoners when they return to their communities, ranging from difficulty securing housing to a paucity of medical, mental health, and addiction treatment services (2006). A report recently released by the Justice Policy Institute found that the detention of juveniles is associated with a number of negative outcomes, including higher rates of future offending (Holman and Ziegenberg 2006).

Nor does incarceration necessarily suspend gang involvement. Some incarcerated gang members remain active participants in the life of their old gangs, some develop new gang affiliations behind bars, and some do both. Incarcerating the “right” gang members often does little more than postpone the community’s day of reckoning until the incarcerated individual returns. And incarcerating the “wrong” individuals risks trapping youth who would otherwise have outgrown gang activity in a life of crime. Decker notes that the “latent consequence [of incarceration] is to

get them together in prison. [Gang members] get out largely unchanged, maybe worse, with more contacts and older” (personal communication).

The research literature on targeting is much weaker than the literature on neighborhood-based suppression efforts. Just three studies were found in the current literature survey, and two of them suffer from serious methodological problems. Neither study of gang task force initiatives could show that the programs examined had actually changed the treatment of targeted individuals in the criminal justice system, much less that the programs had reduced crime.

Gang task forces in San Diego and Westminster, California

San Diego

Jurisdictions United for Drug Gang Enforcement (JUDGE) was formed in California in 1998 as a multi-jurisdictional task force to combat drug trafficking by gang members in San Diego County. Researchers with the San Diego Association of Governments attempted to conduct a process and impact evaluation of the program in the early 1990s and published their results in 1996 (Pennell and Melton 2002).

When the JUDGE program began, San Diego County reported 27 active street gangs with an estimated 2,300 members in an initial grant application. The document described the county’s gang problem as follows: “The current situation of gang related narcotics control has created a wave of violence involving several drive-by shootings and homicides. Street gangs have begun to resemble modern organized crime operations in terms of sophistication and tactics.” It is worth noting that this diagnosis is at odds with the results of in-depth studies of gang violence in several jurisdictions (including nearby Los Angeles), which found that the role of the drug trade in gang violence has been vastly overstated by law enforcement (see Kennedy, Braga, and Piehl 2001, and Tita, Riley, and Greenwood 2003).

Task force members responded by targeting juvenile gang members who were either on probation for narcotics offenses or known to be involved in drug distribution. Youth were considered to be documented gang members if they met one of five criteria, which ranged from admitted gang membership to having a close association with known gang members. Targeted individuals were subject to:

- intensive supervision by the probation department’s Narcotics Task Force;

- special enforcement operations by law enforcement; and
- stepped-up prosecution by the district attorney's office, which committed to "vertical" prosecution, opposing pretrial release, and seeking the most severe possible sentence.

During the first two years of the program, nearly all of the JUDGE targets were black (45 percent) or Hispanic (52 percent); and male (98 percent). The overwhelming majority were between the ages of 14 and 17 when they were targeted, with 16- and 17-year-olds constituting the largest group (56 percent of JUDGE targets). All were identified as gang members, and 96 percent had been convicted or arrested for a drug offense. Just one in five (22 percent) had been arrested for a violent offense.

The research team initially sought to compare recidivism outcomes for JUDGE targets with outcomes for gang members who were not targeted by the program. This approach proved impracticable because too many control group members were eventually targeted. Instead, the researchers compared the criminal records of JUDGE targets before and after they were targeted.

A large majority (83 percent) of JUDGE targets were rearrested in the two years after targeting. Felonies accounted for just 30 percent of new arrests, down from 58 percent in the two years before targeting. Probation violations accounted for 37 percent of new arrests, up from 10 percent in the earlier period.

The researchers determined that under the program, JUDGE targets were assigned a greater number of probation conditions, ranging from drug-testing requirements to prohibitions on riding in vehicles with other juveniles. The average number of probation

violation arrests per youth jumped more than three-fold, from 0.3 to 1.0, while the average number of felony and misdemeanor arrests fell from 3.7 to 2.0.

The research team also found that JUDGE targets "spent a considerable amount of time behind bars during their JUDGE tenure." Two in five spent a year or more in a juvenile hall or other local institution, while another 25 percent spent six months to a year in custody. But the absence of a suitable control group made it impossible for the team to determine whether the JUDGE targets spent more time behind bars as a result of the program than they would have without the program. The researchers note that the harsher treatment youth received after being targeted could have been the result of longer exposure to the criminal justice system and the advancing age of the targets rather than an effect of the program.

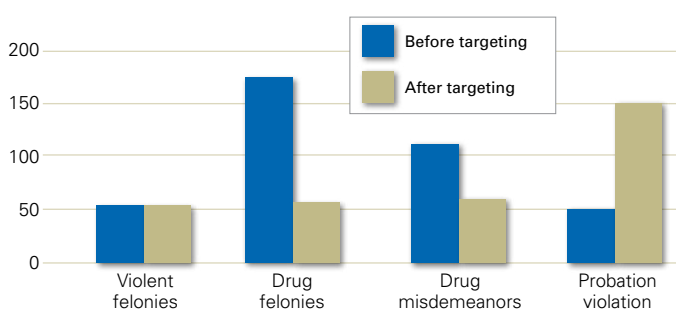
Concerns about youth gang violence were put forward as part of the initial rationale for the program. But the arrest data do not indicate that the program reduced violent behavior. The number of JUDGE targets arrested for violent felonies was identical before and after targeting (62 in each period).

In 1995, four years after the initial evaluation period, the research team reviewed updated files on the 279 JUDGE targets. They found that new court cases had been filed against two in three (64 percent) targets, with an average of three cases per person. This finding suggested to the researchers that "many JUDGE targets remained involved in criminal activity and that the task force had appropriately focused on isolating a small segment of offenders who appear particularly crime-prone, monitoring their behavior closely, and applying sanctions swiftly and with certainty."

Yet swift and certain application of sanctions apparently failed to deter the large majority of JUDGE targets from committing further crimes. The researchers acknowledge that the program might have done more harm than good: "[The long-term recidivism] finding is difficult to interpret because not enough is known about this group of offenders to determine whether they are particularly crime-prone or the extent to which an enforcement approach actually contributes to reoffending because it does not address other issues such as drug treatment, education, and employment."

The notion that JUDGE may have *increased* recidivism among targeted youth is supported by research findings on the dangers of juvenile detention. If the program did meet goals to "resist the release of defen-

Figure 7.4. San Diego JUDGE targets arrested before and after targeting



Source: Pennell and Melton 2002

dants from custody before the trial or hearing” and “ensure that the most severe possible sentence is imposed,” it may have increased the likelihood that targeted youth would be detained and made them more, rather than less, prone to crime.

A recent literature survey on the impact of incarcerating youth in detention and other secure facilities found that first incarceration experiences make youth more likely to commit new crimes. Research on youth committed to state facilities in Arkansas found that prior incarceration was a stronger predictor of future recidivism than gang membership, carrying a weapon, or a poor parental relationship (Benda and Tollett 1999).

Such targeting efforts also run the risk of devoting a greater and greater share of resources to detecting and imposing sanctions on less and less serious criminal conduct. This is a particular risk with juvenile gang members, who may go through periods of heightened offending followed by sharp drops in delinquent behavior that are associated with maturation and the weakening of gang ties.

The majority of youth targeted by JUDGE had already passed the age of peak gang participation (15 years old) by the time they were identified by the program, and most became adults during the two-year follow-up period. It is possible that many who came to the attention of San Diego law enforcement during periods of heightened offending continue to be targeted and punished for minor delinquent behavior despite posing little risk to public safety. There is some evidence to support this view: before targeting, half of arrests involved felony charges and just over half (52 percent) of youth were held in custody at arrest. After targeting, the proportion of felony arrests fell to just 30 percent while the proportion of youth held in custody at arrest rose to more than two in three (68 percent).

Westminster

Criminal justice officials in Westminster, California, adopted a similar approach to reducing gang crime. The Tri-Agency Resource Gang Enforcement Team (TARGET) was launched in 1992 as a collaborative effort of the Westminster Police Department, the Orange County district attorney’s office, and the county probation department to identify “repeat gang offenders” and remove them from the community.

A team of researchers examined program results and declared TARGET a successful model that should be considered for replication (Kent et al. 2000). But a closer analysis reveals that the researchers

failed to gather enough information to determine whether the program had any impact at all on the target population.

On its face, TARGET appears to have achieved remarkable results. The number of reported gang crimes dropped sharply in the first year of the program—from nearly 30 per month at the beginning of 1992 to fewer than 15 per month at the end of the year—and remained below preintervention levels for the entire evaluation period. By the end of 1997, the researchers found a 47 percent cumulative reduction in gang crime.

The drop in gang crime that took place during the first year of the program coincided with a nearly fivefold jump in the number of target subjects in custody, appearing to confirm the hypothesis that removing “repeat gang offenders” from the community was an effective crime-control strategy. The researchers also examined overall crime trends and determined that gang crime had fallen more rapidly than nongang crime during the first year of the program, lending support to the notion that the drop in gang crime was due to the intervention rather than part of a larger decline in crime.

Finally, the research team found that violent crime rates fell further in Westminster than in two comparison communities during the intervention period. The researchers conclude based on these findings that the program was successful in reducing gang violence and that it should be considered for replication.

There are serious flaws, however, in the TARGET evaluation design that undermine the research findings. The researchers argue that an experimental research design, which compares outcomes for a “treatment” group and a nontreatment control group, is neither practical nor desirable in the context of gang enforcement.

They instead employ a “logic model” research design that tracks variables related to the program’s ultimate goals and intermediate variables related to how the program proposes to achieve its goal. If both sets of variables move in the expected direction, and if the evaluation can demonstrate a positive relationship between them, then the program is deemed a success.

The TARGET evaluators selected the number of targeted “repeat gang offenders” in custody as their intermediate variable and the number of monthly gang-related crimes as their final outcome variable. Their logic model proposes that the TARGET program will increase the likelihood that “repeat gang

offenders” will end up in custody and that incapacitating more “repeat gang offenders” will reduce levels of gang crime.

But the research team never provides evidence that the intervention increased the time targeted individuals spent behind bars. Gang members with prior criminal convictions would have been strong candidates for detention and incarceration under any circumstances. The relevant measure of the program’s effect is not how many of the targets end up in custody, but how many *more* are placed into custody as a result of the intervention. Unfortunately, without a control group or a baseline, it is impossible to assess the program’s impact on the disposition of target cases.

Nor can the research team demonstrate that more people who met the “repeat gang offender” profile were in custody during the intervention period than before the intervention because they track only the custody status of the targets and not the larger pool of “repeat gang offenders.” Their data show that roughly 40 targets were added to custody at the end of the first program year.

But the researchers fail to examine how many previously detained or incarcerated “repeat gang offenders” were released back to Westminster during the same year.³ In order to prove the logic model, the researchers would have to change their measure from the number of *targets* in custody to the total number of “repeat gang offenders” in custody *including* those who were detained or incarcerated before the program began.

There are also problems with the researchers’ use of gang crime as a primary measure of the project’s success, since the police department did not track gang crime before the program began. The researchers produced a retrospective count of gang crime during the preintervention period using 12 months of police data. These data show a sharp spike in gang-related crime immediately preceding the intervention.

Without more than a year’s worth of data, it is impossible to know whether the change that took place during the intervention period represented a real change or merely a return to normal levels of gang crime following a temporary surge. As the researchers note, “because baseline observations are limited

³ The researchers can no more determine whether the total population of “repeat gang offenders” in custody has increased or decreased than a new clerk can tell whether the number of hotel guests has increased or decreased based solely on how many people he or she checked in and how long they stay.

to 12 months, and because the baseline trend is not stable, interpretation of the gang crime pattern is subject to plausible alternative explanation.”

Gang prosecution units in Las Vegas and Reno, Nevada

An evaluation of the use of gang prosecution units in Las Vegas and Reno, Nevada, bolsters the suspicion that programs setting out to “target gang offenders” may have little concrete effect. Terance Miethe and Richard McCorkle found that gang members prosecuted by specialized gang units were no more likely to be convicted or imprisoned than defendants whose cases were handled by prosecutors in traditional “track” units (2002).

The Clark County district attorney’s office, which serves the Las Vegas metropolitan area, established a gang prosecution unit in 1991. State lawmakers had recently enacted a series of penalty enhancements for crimes that were considered gang-related, including a statute that doubled penalties for felonies committed to further gang activity. Three full-time deputy district attorneys screened and prosecuted felony complaints involving gang members. The unit worked closely with the Special Enforcement Detail of the Las Vegas Police Department and attempted to enhance communication between law enforcement and other agencies concerned with gang activity.

Three years later, the Washoe County district attorney’s office, which serves Reno, launched a Dangerous Youth Offender prosecution team to handle gang and nongang cases involving youth who were “considered a threat to the community.” The team “rapidly became a specialized gang unit after the number of gang-related offenses in Reno rose from 77 to 193 in the last 6 months of 1994.” The unit’s goals were to “rigorously prosecute the minority of gang members who commit serious crimes” and to provide “community alternatives for at-risk youths who are just marginally involved in gang activity.”

Both the Clark and Washoe County gang prosecution units employed vertical prosecution “whereby the same attorney follows a case through successive stages of criminal processing.” Vertical prosecution is often promoted as a more effective means for handling gang cases than horizontal prosecutions because it permits prosecutors to become more familiar with the details of a case and address gang-specific concerns (the possibility of witness intimidation, for example).

Miethe and McCorkle found no evidence that consolidating gang-related cases in the gang unit resulted in more successful prosecutions or tougher penalties than the traditional process. Defendants prosecuted by gang units were more likely to be imprisoned than defendants whose cases went to track units, and they also received longer prison terms. But these differences were entirely attributable to factors such as prior record, age, and the number of charges. There were “no statistically significant differences between gang units and track units in the likelihood of conviction and imprisonment upon conviction” after controlling for relevant variables.

The establishment of Clark County’s gang prosecution unit also failed to increase the conviction rate for gang members, which remained stable before and after the change. The researchers concluded that “gang prosecution units do not enhance the success of criminal processing beyond that provided by other nongang prosecution units.” These results reinforce a point that should be obvious: gang members who commit serious crimes and have extensive criminal records are likely to receive harsh penalties whether or not they have been “targeted” by a task force or special prosecution unit.

Gang sentencing enhancements in California and Nevada

California’s Street Terrorism Enforcement and Prevention (STEP) Act

In 1993 California enacted a far-reaching piece of legislation designed to heighten penalties for gang crime. The Street Terrorism Enforcement and Prevention Act has two relevant provisions. One makes “knowing participation and willful furtherance of felonious conduct by members of a criminal street gang” a separate crime. The other creates a sentencing enhancement that applies to “any felony or misdemeanor committed for the benefit of a criminal street gang” (Jackson 2004). The penalties under the second provision are severe: an extra two to four years of imprisonment for “garden-variety” felonies, five years for “serious” felonies, 10 years for violent felonies, and life terms for crimes such as carjacking and committing drive-by shootings.

Proving the elements of the second enhancement provision is simple. The prosecutor must show that the defendant is a member of—or that his or her actions benefit—a group of three or more people with a common sign or symbol, and that two or more of the group’s members have been convicted of or adju-

icated for one of 25 designated crimes.⁴ And as Los Angeles County deputy district attorney Alan Jackson notes, “*the prosecutor does not even have to prove that the defendant is a member of the gang*, as long as his conduct promotes or benefits the gang” (emphasis added).

State policy makers have never evaluated the effectiveness of the STEP Act, but a glance at the daily news from Los Angeles indicates that the statute has done little or nothing to resolve the city’s gang problems.

Nevada’s gang sentencing enhancements

Several years before STEP took effect, Nevada’s legislature enacted an even tougher set of gang penalties and sentencing enhancements. The lawmakers were spurred on by a series of high-profile gang crimes and dire statements by law enforcement officials about the growing gang menace. A subsequent analysis determined that gang members were responsible for a small share of the crime problem: just 6 percent of violent crime charges and 5 percent of drug trafficking charges were filed against known gang members (Miethe and McCorkle 2002).

Miethe and McCorkle examined the use of Nevada’s antigang statutes and found that the charges were comparatively rare (2002). An enhancement doubling the length of confinement for crimes committed to promote the activities of a criminal gang was charged 263 times in Clark County and 24 times in Washoe County over a four-year period, resulting in just 41 convictions. A statute prohibiting the discharge of a firearm from a motor vehicle (i.e., a drive-by shooting) was charged 199 times in Clark County and 26 times in Washoe County over a six-year period, resulting in a total of 23 convictions. The authors note that many of the drive-by shooting charges were multiple counts filed against the same defendant for a single criminal incident.

Prosecutors and judges argued that the enhancements played an important role in plea bargaining, but the researchers could find no evidence of such an effect. Conviction rates did not change in gang cases after enactment of the enhancement statute. Nor did the enhancements appear to affect the use of other felony charges in cases involving gang members.

⁴ The three offenses required to prove the STEP enhancement—the current offense and the two predicate offenses committed by members of the gang that “benefits” from the current offense—must have taken place within three years of one another, which means that neither the time between the first and second predicate offense nor the time between the second predicate offense and the current offense can exceed three years.

“Balanced” approaches to gang enforcement

Public officials who recognize the failure of traditional suppression and targeting efforts to reduce gang violence have sought to develop more “balanced” models of gang enforcement. The two best-known models for balanced gang enforcement are Operation Ceasefire, an initiative launched in Boston to reduce youth gun violence, and the U.S. Justice Department’s Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) Comprehensive Gang Model, which was developed by researcher Irving Spergel in Chicago.

Both models require law enforcement and other key institutions to change how they work with one another, and how they respond to gang problems. Each aims to:

- “Balance” suppression and other enforcement activities with efforts to provide services, supports, and opportunities to both gang-involved youth and gang problem communities.
- Specify the role of law enforcement by delineating which tactics support the overall initiative and which should be avoided because they could be counterproductive.
- Engage a broader group of stakeholders—including schools, social service providers, and grassroots community groups—in the development of gang policy.
- Collaborate with researchers on the design, implementation, and evaluation of the initiative.
- Keep the focus on reducing gang *violence* rather than mounting a fruitless effort to eliminate gangs or gang crime.

The Ceasefire and Spergel models appear to have achieved notable successes in their pilot phase, but the results of replication efforts have been much less promising. Replications of the Ceasefire model in Los Angeles and Indianapolis produced no evidence that efforts to “retail” a deterrence message—communicating the message directly to targeted individuals—had changed the behavior of gang members, casting doubt on a central premise of the Ceasefire model. Meanwhile, replications of the Spergel model in five cities produced mixed results, with just two sites reporting reductions in participants’ violent behavior that approached statistical significance.

There are several possible explanations for the failure of the replication efforts to achieve the desired results. The results of the Ceasefire replication efforts

strongly suggest flaws in the theory behind “retailing deterrence.” It is equally possible, however, that the models work, but only under a narrow set of circumstances. The Ceasefire and Spergel model replication efforts both attempted to transplant successful initiatives to cities with very different demographics, geographies, and gang problems.

Finally, the fundamental problem may be that the models require unrealistic changes in the behavior of the institutions charged with implementation. Results from several of the replication efforts suggest that law enforcement agencies may be unwilling to abandon “real” police work in favor of activities that produce fewer arrests, or to share power with community groups. On the other hand, the replication efforts demonstrate that most of the community stakeholders lack the resources necessary to become real partners in collaborative gang control efforts.

The Ceasefire model: “Pulling levers” and “retailing deterrence”

Boston

Killings rose dramatically in Boston at the end of the 1980s, peaking at 152 homicides in 1990. Roughly half of homicide victims that year were under the age of 25. The incidence of such youth homicides fell sharply between 1990 and 1991 but remained substantially above 1980s levels throughout the early 1990s (Kennedy, Braga, and Piehl 2001).

City officials, law enforcement, and community allies launched a number of initiatives in response to the surge in violence committed both by and against youth. Police and probation officers conducted joint patrols as part of the well-publicized Operation Night Light. The police department began to collaborate with the Ten Point Coalition, a group of black clergy formed after a gang attack on mourners at a funeral. But none of the measures implemented prior to Operation Ceasefire appeared to significantly affect youth violence.

In 1994 Boston police commissioner Paul Evans invited Harvard University researchers Anthony Braga, David Kennedy, and Anne Piehl to examine the problem of youth homicide and design an intervention. The research team conducted a review of homicides involving youth offenders and victims. They found that a majority of cases (60 percent or more) were gang-related, but that the cases did not fit the stereotype of gang violence motivated by “drug trafficking or other ‘business’ interests.” Instead, the researchers concluded that youth homicides had been driven up

by chronic “beefs” between gangs, as well as spiraling fear of violence that led more youth to carry and use handguns.

The research results were presented to a working group made up of researchers and frontline staff from key law enforcement and social service agencies. The working group concluded that the best way to reduce the number of youth homicides was to begin persuading gang members to break the cycle of retaliatory violence. The group believed that this aim could be accomplished through an exercise in focused deterrence that provided strong incentives for aggrieved gang members not to retaliate. They proposed:

- Targeting gangs engaged in violent behavior.
- Reaching out directly to members of the targeted gangs.
- Delivering an explicit message that violence would not be tolerated.
- Backing up that message by “pulling every lever” legally available (i.e., applying appropriate sanctions from a varied menu of possible law enforcement actions) when violence occurred. (Kennedy, Braga, and Piehl 2001)

At the same time, social service agencies, probation and parole officers, and community groups (including churches) were to offer gang members services and opportunities that might provide a viable alternative to gang life. The hope was that a combination of “sticks,” “carrots,” and efforts to get the word out about the new initiative could create a “firebreak” that would allow fear and violence to reach a new, lower equilibrium point. The strategy was dubbed Operation Ceasefire.

The Operation Ceasefire approach was inspired by a 1994 police effort to reduce gun violence among members of the Wendover Street gang. The street was quiet by the time the operations ended, and gang members were reportedly “walking up to [the Youth Violence Strike Force’s] Warren Street headquarters with paper bags full of guns and dropping them off.”

Officers credited the success of the operation to a combination of focused attention and “honesty.” They pulled every legal lever at their disposal to disrupt the gang and make its members uncomfortable. But they also told the gang members how to make it stop: end the violence and hand over the illegal guns. “‘We’re here because of the shooting,’ the authorities had said. ‘We’re not going to leave until it stops. And until it does, nobody is going to so much as jaywalk, nor make any money, nor have any fun.’”

The tactics employed in the Wendover Street action and adopted by Operation Ceasefire are largely familiar: saturation patrols, home visits by police and probation officers, enforcement of local ordinances, and so on. But the strategy of trading zero-tolerance fantasies of eradicating gangs, drugs, and low-level criminality for leverage over youth violence was a radical departure from law enforcement orthodoxy:

Operation Ceasefire’s Working Group understood that law enforcement agencies do not have the capacity to “eliminate” all gangs or powerfully respond to all gang offending in gang-troubled jurisdictions. Pledges to do so, although common, are simply not credible. (Braga et al. 2001)

The researchers argue that the strategy entailed not a “deal ... [to] win gangs the freedom to deal drugs or commit other crimes” if they refrained from violence but rather a “promise” to bring the weight of the justice system down on gangs whose members engaged in gun violence (Kennedy, Braga, and Piehl 2001). Yet the strategy was premised on the belief that youth gang members would rather “make money” (read “sell drugs”) and “have fun” (read “engage in low-level delinquency”) than spend all of their time fighting with the police.

Most gang enforcement initiatives view the existence of gangs and the persistence of gang crime as the problem. The architects of Boston’s Operation Ceasefire saw an opportunity to use the gang structure as a means for transmitting their message, and they saw nonviolent delinquency as a source of leverage for addressing the real problem of youth violence. Their strategy aimed to turn “gang offenders’ behaviors against themselves, taking advantage of the vulnerabilities created by their chronic misbehavior and turning them into a violence prevention tool.” And it sought to use the same group dynamics that contributed to the rise in violence to constrain gang members, if not for themselves then for the sake of the gang.

The research team conducted a time-series analysis of crime trends before and after the first lever-pulling meeting and concluded that the intervention was associated with statistically significant reductions in youth and gun violence (Braga et al. 2001). These reductions included a 63 percent decrease in youth homicides; a 32 percent reduction in shots-fired calls; and a 25 percent drop in gun assaults. A comparison of violent crime patterns in 39 major U.S. cities and 29 major New England cities showed that the

crime reduction could not be explained by national or regional trends, although a large number of cities also experienced a “sudden, significant reduction in youth homicides” during the 1990s.⁵

These results should be interpreted with caution because they are based on a relatively small number of incidents and occurred during a time when violence was trending down. Richard Rosenfeld, Robert Fornango, and Eric Baumer conducted their own analysis of the numbers, comparing Boston’s reduction in youth homicides to trends in other cities (2005). Rosenfeld and his colleagues integrated homicide data for the nation’s 95 largest cities into a statistical model that incorporated other explanatory variables, including measures of economic disadvantage, population density, policing levels, and incarceration rates. They report that Boston appeared to outperform the average, but that the difference did not reach the level of statistical significance:

After adjusting the changes for the effects of the covariates, Boston’s youth firearm homicide rate fell an estimated 30% per year during the intervention period [while] the [95-city] average rate fell by 16%. Although the estimated decline in Boston’s rate was nearly double that of the sample average in the conditional model, the difference is not statistically significant. . . . The lack of statistical significance reflects Boston’s low youth firearm homicide counts during the intervention period (ranging from 21 in 1996 to 10 in 1999).

The failure of replications of the Ceasefire model in Los Angeles and Indianapolis to achieve comparable results provides further cause for caution. Evaluations of these efforts cast doubt on the effectiveness of retailing deterrence and suggest that the model may work under a very narrow set of circumstances, if it works at all.

Los Angeles

The RAND Corporation led an effort to determine whether elements of the Boston model could be used to address gang violence in Los Angeles (Tita, Riley, and Greenwood 2003). A team of researchers began collaborating with law enforcement and community groups in early 1999, with support from the National Institute of Justice, to identify places in Los Angeles County where an intervention might have the great-

est impact. The working group eventually settled on Hollenbeck, an area with entrenched gangs and high levels of youth violence despite relatively low overall crime rates.

Law enforcement and community sources attributed the violence to the narcotics trade, which was said to be “the underlying cause of nearly every violent act involving a gang member.” The research team’s analysis of homicide data found, however, that the killings had very little to do with drug activity. A drug motive was present in just one in five homicides committed by gang members and fewer than one in ten homicides defined by investigators as “gang-motivated.” Further, the motives in drug-related gang homicides typically related to disputes between business partners, or the attempted robbery of drug sellers, rather than to struggles to control drug markets.

Gang homicides in Hollenbeck were being driven instead by gang rivalries. The researchers described the typical killing as one in which a gang member “drives up or walks up to a youth from a rival neighborhood and asks the question, ‘Where are you from?’ ” The research team mapped the social networks of 37 Hollenbeck street gangs and identified the Boyle Heights community as a place where a coordinated intervention might break a relatively self-contained cycle of retaliatory violence.

The working group found it difficult to identify levers for changing the behavior of targeted members of the four most active gangs. Few of those identified by law enforcement as “shot-callers” or “shooters” had probation or parole conditions that could serve as a source of leverage. More than 70 gang members had outstanding warrants—many for nonviolent offenses—but personnel were not available to serve them in a coordinated fashion. Finally, a disproportionate number of violent crimes were committed by “new baldies”—a term for recently initiated gang members who “act brazenly or outside the control of the more established gang members in an effort to gain the respect of their older peers.” The “new baldies” were less likely not only to consider the consequences of their actions, but also to be subject to probation conditions or outstanding warrants.

The limited capacity of Operation Ceasefire to generate individualized responses to outbreaks of gang violence forced the initiative to rely heavily on the use of police patrols in the territory of gangs whose members were responsible for violent incidents. The Boyle Heights community was concerned by the possibility that Operation Ceasefire would be another heavy-

⁵ The authors report that Dallas, Jacksonville, Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia, and Tucson all reported sharp drops in youth homicides during the period.

handed exercise in gang suppression. Community leaders insisted that pulling levers should be paired with violence prevention programming and other services designed to support the efforts of gang members and their families to break the cycle of gang violence.

But events overtook the development of the community's capacity to provide gang prevention and intervention services. An escalation in violence between the Mob Crew and Cuatro Flats gangs culminated in a walk-by shooting that left a gang member and a 10-year-old girl dead. The police increased patrols in the five reporting districts that encompassed the two gangs' territory and the site of the homicide, and placed two officers on mounted patrol. Additional officers were deployed from specialized units including Metro Unit (home of the SWAT team) and the Special Enforcement Unit and Traffic Bureau working out of the Operations Central Bureau.

Police and probation officers visited the residences of more than 30 members of both gangs over the next three months, making eight arrests. The city deployed health and child welfare agency staff to inspect the properties where gang members gathered. Speed bumps were installed in the area of the homicide, and a nearby alley was fenced off. A \$5,000 reward was posted for information related to recent violent incidents between the two gangs. Operation Ceasefire was up and running without the ability to offer carrots alongside the enforcement sticks.

Before the intervention, police and community groups collaborated in efforts to retail the message that violence would no longer be tolerated in Boyle Heights. They promised to meet each incident of gang violence in the neighborhood by pulling levers on members of the offending groups, while offering services to those who were willing to refrain from violence. Once the operation was launched, however, "the working group members did not constantly reprioritize and reallocate resources after each violent incident, but rather focused almost exclusively on the two gangs involved in the triggering incident." Other shootings took place in the week following the walk-by killings, for example, but the incidents did not produce a similar response from Operation Ceasefire.

The RAND research team conducted an extensive analysis of crime patterns to determine whether the intervention had reduced violent, gang, or gun crime in the six months following the triggering incident. The researchers set up three comparisons to test whether the intervention had generated greater reductions in crime than would have taken place in its absence:

- Boyle Heights versus the remainder of Hollenbeck;
- the five police reporting districts where the bulk of the enforcement actions were taken versus the remainder of Boyle Heights; and
- the target census blocks versus a matched set of census blocks in Boyle Heights.

The first comparison was designed to test the effectiveness of efforts to retail the message throughout Boyle Heights. The second and third were designed to measure the effect of the police suppression and follow-up deterrence efforts. The results of the analysis are mixed at best. Violence declined in Boyle Heights and the rest of Hollenbeck at exactly the same rate—a 28 percent reduction between the six months that preceded the intervention and the six months that followed—indicating that the intervention had no effect on the neighborhood as a whole. The target areas saw modest reductions in violence compared to the rest of Boyle Heights and large gains compared to the matched comparison blocks, which suggests a localized impact.

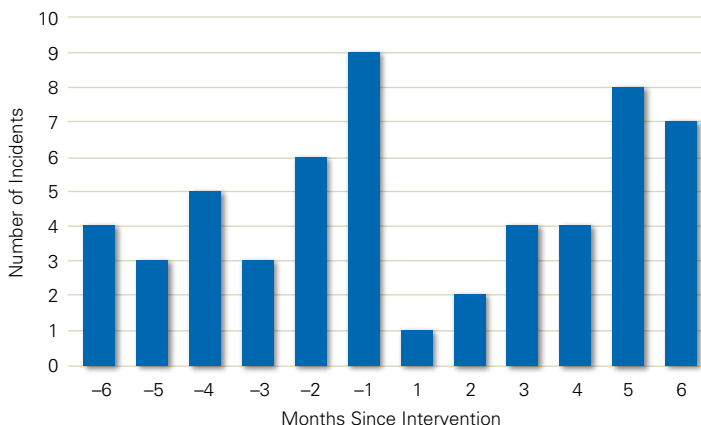
Gang and gun crime reports dropped much more

Table 7.2. Findings of RAND analysis of Los Angeles Operation Ceasefire intervention effects

Crime type	Boyle Heights vs. rest of Hollenbeck	Target districts vs. rest of Boyle Heights	Target blocks vs. matched blocks
Violent	None	Positive	Positive
Gang	Positive	Mixed	None
Gun	Positive	None	None

Source: Tita et al. 2003

Figure 7.5. Hollenbeck Area Crimes involving TMC or Cuatro Flats Gang Members Before and After Operation Ceasefire



Source: Tita et al. 2003.

quickly in Boyle Heights than in the rest of Hollenbeck during both the four-month “suppression” period and the two-month “deterrence” period of the intervention. The apparent effect vanishes, however, in the target areas, where patterns of gang and gun crime did not differ significantly from those of either the rest of Boyle Heights or the matched comparison blocks.

The researchers reported that the target districts outperformed the rest of the neighborhood in reducing gang crime during the suppression period of the intervention. Yet the *net* drop in gang crime between the pre- and post-intervention periods was *smaller* in the target reporting districts (19 percent) than in the rest of Boyle Heights (45 percent).

A comparison of violent, gang, and gun crime trends during the suppression and deterrence phases of the project also produced inconsistent results, particularly with regard to gang crime. The researchers found statistically significant reductions in gang crime *only during the deterrence phase* in the interneighborhood comparison; *only during the suppression phase* in the first intraneighborhood comparison; and *not at all* in the second intraneighborhood comparison.

There are several ways to interpret such varied results, but the most compelling interpretation is that the intervention simply did not work. An analysis of crimes involving the Mob Crew and Cuatro Flats gang members in the pre- and postintervention period provides a clearer picture. The number of incidents spiked immediately before the intervention began, dropped sharply in the first month of suppression activities, and climbed steadily thereafter. By the fifth and sixth months of the operation (the deterrence period), crime committed by members of the targeted gangs exceeded preintervention levels. If the intervention worked at all, it did not work for long.

The RAND report authors conclude that efforts to retail the message had “no discernible effect on crime in the immediate aftermath of implementation or during the suppression period.” They have a more positive evaluation of law enforcement activities in the target areas, noting that four of six violent and gang crime comparisons showed “reductions of crime in these areas during the suppression period to be significantly greater than in the comparison areas.”

There are several reasons to question the meaning and significance of these conclusions. First, it is possible that the drop in violence following the trigger incident was nothing more than an example of regression to the mean—a built-in tendency of numbers to

trend from high and low points back toward average levels. Sudden drops in gang violence are common and may have no more to do with law enforcement activity than the surges that preceded them. Second, there are methodological problems with the use of gang crime as a measure, since gang crime statistics are sensitive to changes in law enforcement practice.

Third, the findings are based on a small number of incidents: an average of just 25 violent crimes, nine gun crimes, and five to six gang crimes per month in the targeted areas during the preintervention period. The targeted areas saw a drop in violence that was 13 percent greater than the drop in the rest of Boyle Heights (37 percent versus 24 percent), and 31 percent greater than the matched comparison blocks (34 percent versus 3 percent). This means that the intervention might have averted between three and eight violent crimes per month. A larger *number* of violent incidents were averted in the *nontargeted* sections of Boyle Heights, where the monthly average fell from 67 in the preintervention period to 51 in the postintervention period.

At best, Operation Ceasefire can lay claim to a modest, localized, and temporary reduction in gang violence, a program effect that was too small to affect violent crime rates in Boyle Heights and too insubstantial to persist after police scaled back suppression activities. At worst, Operation Ceasefire did nothing more than dump law enforcement resources on a neighborhood *after* violence had peaked and then claim credit for an inevitable return to normal—if unacceptable—levels of violence. In either case, the fears of local residents were realized: the initiative became yet another suppression-heavy, “Band-Aid” response to entrenched gang violence.

The latter point is particularly important. Despite the best intentions of the plan’s architects, Los Angeles’ Operation Ceasefire was unable to balance law enforcement suppression with opportunities for gang members seeking a new life or supports for residents who wanted to rebuild their community. The RAND research team concluded that a resource imbalance between law enforcement and community groups made this outcome all but inevitable:

Thus the stick side of the intervention, when it finally developed, had a lot of power and force behind it. This is not the case with our community partners. Although equally committed to the goals of the project, they have far less flexibility in terms of resources committed to the project, and less experience in mounting a

coordinated ongoing effort with other agencies. *We suspect that the carrot side of these interventions will always lag far behind the stick side in spite of the best intentions that it not do so, unless some extraordinary efforts are made to provide the community-based organizations with additional resources and the kinds of training that can help them become much more effective partners.* (Tita, Riley, and Greenwood 2003, emphasis added)

Indianapolis

Indianapolis experienced a rise in homicides during the late 1990s. The number of murders, which had fluctuated from 60 to 90 per year during most of the 1980s, rose steadily and peaked at 157 in 1997 (McGarrell and Chermak 2003). Conventional wisdom held that the violence was produced by the late arrival of crack cocaine to Indianapolis, although researchers Edmund McGarrell and Steven Chermak note that the proportion of arrestees testing positive for cocaine peaked three years earlier.

City leaders began to search for possible solutions to the homicide epidemic and quickly seized on Boston's Operation Ceasefire. A multiagency working group, the Indiana Violence Reduction Partnership (IVRP), was formed with the participation of corrections; the courts; and local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies.

The group began its investigation with a review of 1997 homicide cases and determined that a majority of cases involved drugs (52.7 percent); that many suspects were young (median age 23); and that most suspects belonged to groups of "known, chronic offenders" (58.9 percent). Use of the term "known, chronic offenders" reflected "the lack of a consensual definition of a gang and the reality that much gang activity in Indianapolis is of relatively loose structure." McGarrell and Chermak observe that many groups of known, chronic offenders "have names and colors, but their membership is fluid and many are not territorial."

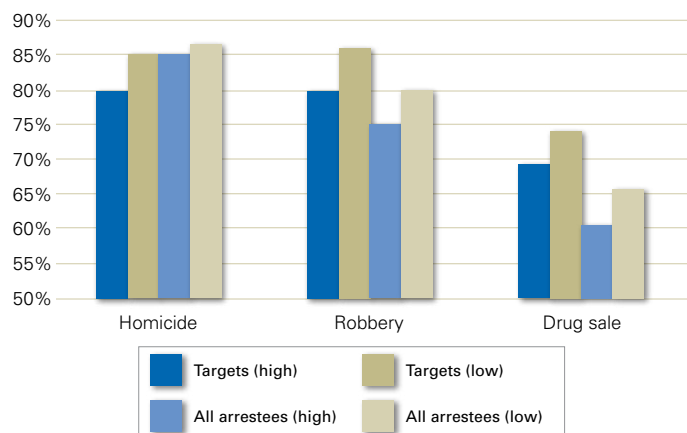
The working group's conclusion that drugs were involved in half of homicides is at odds with the findings from Boston and elsewhere that drug motives and efforts to control drug markets play a minor role in gang-related killings. The difference may reflect particular local circumstances. It may also result from the use of an extraordinarily broad definition of "drug-involved," which included not only homicides with drug motives but also any homicide involving a known drug user or drug seller.

The working group settled on two strategies for reducing homicide levels: first, to increase "the arrest, prosecution, and incarceration of the most violent offenders" through a program with the ominous name of VIPER (Violence Impact Enhanced Response); and second, to engage in "lever pulling" with high-risk individuals by persuading them that they faced serious criminal sanctions and offering them "legitimate opportunities and services." The latter strategy, inspired by Boston's Operation Ceasefire, generated a series of meetings launched in late 1998 in which 220 probationers and parolees received presentations from law enforcement officials about the legal consequences for violent crime and presentations from community representatives to express their concerns about elevated levels of violence.

The plan called for "regular responses to homicides involving groups or gangs, chronic hot-spot locations, and/or drug markets" in the form of "directed police patrol, narcotics enforcement, warrant service, and similar enforcement efforts." McGarrell and Chermak report that these responses took place "fairly regularly" in 1999 and "much less frequently" during 2000. The meetings and responses were organized by neighborhood but not, as in Boston, by gang. IVRP also launched a public ad campaign in 2000 that was "designed to communicate the dangers of violent crime as well as advertise the punishments available to the criminal justice system when offenders commit violent crimes" (McGarrell and Chermak 2004).

The research team used several measures to gauge the effectiveness of the IVRP and VIPER initiatives. First, the researchers tracked homicide and other vio-

Figure 7.6. Proportion of Indianapolis arrestees who perceived the chances of being sanctioned for a crime as "good" or "very good"



Source: McGarrell and Chermak 2004.

lent crime trends to determine whether the intervention was associated with a reduction in killings. They report that homicide levels remained high in Indianapolis “from the beginning of the project in 1998 through early 1999.” The pattern changed around the time of a crackdown on a major drug-dealing organization. The April 1999 bust was the result of a separate long-term investigation and not the efforts of IVRP, but the working group nonetheless used the publicity surrounding the operation in their efforts to retail the deterrence message.

The arrests of 16 alleged Brightwood Gang members were associated with a decline in homicides from 149 in the prior 12 months to 101 in the following 12 months. The researchers conducted time-series analyses of violent crime trends and concluded that the timing of the Brightwood arrests correlated to statistically significant reductions in both citywide homicides and incidents of serious violence in Brightwood.

The research team’s statistical models explained 22 percent of the variation in monthly citywide homicide totals and show an estimated 42 percent drop in homicide levels at the time of the intervention. The models also explained between 5 and 17 percent of the variance in armed robbery and gun assaults within the Brightwood neighborhood, producing an estimated reduction in serious violence of two to three offenses per month. The models showed no statistically significant effect of the Brightwood arrests on the citywide incidence of armed robbery and gun assaults.

Second, McGarrell and Chermak measured arrestees’ perceptions of law enforcement efforts by adding questions about various program components to the Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring (ADAM) survey, which is given quarterly to a random sample of arrestees. Arrestees reported low awareness of both initiatives: between 3 and 10 percent had heard of IVRP and 8 to 17 percent knew of VIPER. One in five was familiar with the lever-pulling meetings in the first wave of interviews, although the ratio fell to one in 11 by the end of 2001. More arrestees reported knowledge of probation contacts and sweeps (roughly a third) and police stops (over half).

Awareness of program components did not increase with successive waves of interviews, although it did spike during the second quarter of 1999, when the Brightwood arrests took place. Lever-pulling meeting attendees demonstrated greater familiarity with the initiatives and probation activities than other arrestees but were slightly less likely than their counterparts to report knowledge of police stops. One in

five meeting attendees was familiar with IVRP (20.5 percent), and just over a third knew of VIPER (35.9 percent). Surprisingly, just three in four lever-pulling meeting attendees (74.4 percent) reported that they had heard of the lever-pulling meetings.

A large majority of arrestees reported having seen television commercials (77.1 percent), billboards (63.7 percent), or bus signs (62.9 percent) sponsored by the initiative after the ad campaign was launched in January 2001. But the significance of this finding is undermined by the fact that most arrestees from the previous wave of interviews *thought* that they had seen IVRP television commercials (56.9 percent), billboards (51.4 percent), or bus signs (41.1 percent) *before* the campaign was launched. The false-positive responses to questions about a media campaign that did not yet exist indicate that the popular culture may already be so saturated with tough-on-crime messages that the impact of new messages is marginal.

Meeting attendees were more likely than other arrestees to report that their chances of being arrested, charged, convicted, or imprisoned for a robbery or drug sale were “good” or “very good.” The researchers considered this finding “evidence that the direct communication of the lever-pulling message to probationers and parolees had some effect” (2003). The fact that the respondents had just been arrested, however, suggests that the effect was not the intended one. The meeting attendees appear to have continued to engage in criminal conduct even after “getting the message”—an indication that there may be serious flaws in the theory of retailing deterrence or its application in Indianapolis.

Meeting attendees also appear to have received the wrong message. The Boston Operation Ceasefire and IVRP initiatives were purportedly designed to deliver the message that *homicides* would trigger a robust law enforcement response. Yet the IVRP meeting participants were slightly *less* likely than other arrestees to believe that the chances of being sanctioned for homicide were “good” or “very good.”

Meeting participants rated their chances of being sanctioned for a homicide (80 to 85 percent “good” or “very good”) *the same* as their chances of being sanctioned for a robbery (80 to 87 percent “good” or “very good”), and *not much higher* than their chances of being sanctioned for a drug sale (69 to 74 percent “good” or “very good”). Other arrestees, by contrast, had a more accurate picture of the response of the justice system to various crimes. They perceived the

chances of being sanctioned as “good” or “very good” 85 to 87 percent of the time for a homicide; 75 to 80 percent of the time for a robbery; and 60 to 66 percent of the time for a drug sale.

Perhaps meeting attendees were simply more likely than other arrestees to have been arrested for a robbery or a drug sale, raising their perceptions of the likelihood of sanctions for those crimes. But it is also possible that the intended message, “We’re coming after you if the killings don’t stop,” was heard simply as “We’re coming after you.” The latter message may be music to the ears of police, but it violates a core principle of the Ceasefire model that law enforcement responses focus on—and be directly tied to—lethal and potentially lethal violence. In place of a laser focus on homicide, IVRP communicated a deterrence message about everything *but* homicide.

Third, the research team attempted to assess the impact of the lever-pulling meetings by comparing attendees’ behavior to that of other probationers convicted of similar offenses. This effort was hampered by difficulty in finding a suitable comparison sample and reaching the target probationers, many of whom failed to show up for appointments or had moved without providing a forwarding address. But the researchers were ultimately able to collect surveys from 69 meeting participants and criminal record information for the whole group. And they were able to identify a control group that matched the attendee group in terms of gender, age, marital status, and education (but not race or income).

The researchers found that the meeting attendees surveyed were not only more likely than control group members to have heard of the IVRP program elements, but also “more likely in *every case* to believe more strongly in the effectiveness of the strategies for deterring crime” (emphasis in original). But the meeting participants were just as likely as their counterparts to commit new offenses.

Close to half (44.6 percent) of meeting participants were arrested while they were on probation for the current offense, and nearly a third (31.3 percent) were arrested after attending a lever-pulling meeting. Control group members were rearrested on probation at a slightly lower rate (36 percent). None of the differences between meeting participants and control group members on measures of criminality (arrests, convictions, sentences to probation or incarceration) were statistically significant. As the researchers observe:

It seems that the offenders who attended the

meetings were slightly more likely to be aware of the initiatives of the Indianapolis Violence Reduction Partnership and to believe in their effectiveness. Unfortunately, their corresponding behavior does not reflect a change in their willingness to change their offending habits. Similarly, most attendees understood and remembered at least one of the lever-pulling messages though, again, their behavior did not correspond to the lever-pulling message.

A comparison of attendees’ and control group members’ perceptions of the likelihood of criminal justice sanctions produced results that were nearly identical to those generated by the ADAM surveys. Lever-pulling meeting participants were more likely than control group members to rate their chances of being sanctioned for a robbery or drug sale as “good” or “very good,” but there were no meaningful differences when it came to homicide—further evidence that IVRP targets got the reverse of the intended message.

Finally, IVRP appears to have failed miserably in its efforts to link meeting participants with services and opportunities that could draw them away from a life of crime. Less than a third (29 percent) of meeting participants reported getting a job or employment training. Less than a quarter (23.2 percent) said that they were “hanging out with different friends.” And fewer than 15 percent of attendees had started school, entered substance abuse treatment, or begun going to church regularly. Worse, these figures may exaggerate the successes of meeting attendees because they include only those who could be located and persuaded to complete a survey.

Control group members were far more likely to report positive changes in their lives over the previous six months. Close to half (44.9 percent) got jobs or training; two in five (40.4 percent) had begun treatment and/or were hanging out with a different crowd (42.9 percent); and a quarter had enrolled in an education program (29.6 percent) and/or started going to church (24.4 percent). The only area in which control group members reported worse results than meeting attendees was missed meetings with probation officers: one in five control group members reported missing a meeting compared to one in 10 attendees.

Limitations in the research design make it impossible to draw strong conclusions from the differences between outcomes for attendees and control group members. But the results do suggest that the meetings did little or nothing to connect at-risk individuals with opportunities and services.

The murder rate fell sharply in Indianapolis during the time when an initiative based on the Boston model was active. McGarrell and Chermak provide some evidence that an operation unrelated to the Ceasefire replication could have contributed to the reduction in violence. The arrest of 16 Brightwood Gang members may have helped to facilitate a return to more normal levels of serious violence in the Brightwood neighborhood, and more normal levels of homicide throughout Indianapolis.

But the evidence collected by the research team strongly indicates that the drop had nothing to do with activities undertaken by IVRP. Probationers who participated in lever-pulling meetings were as likely as their counterparts to commit new crimes. They were no more likely to anticipate that committing a homicide would result in criminal justice sanctions. And they were much *less* likely than control group members to report recent positive life changes. Finally, there is no reason to believe that the Brightwood arrests had an impact on other forms of serious or gun violence outside the Brightwood neighborhood, or that IVRP had any impact on crime whatsoever.

There are two likely explanations for the failure of lever-pulling and deterrence-“retailing” strategies to change the behavior of probationers in Indianapolis. The first is that the strategies simply do not work, and that the sharp reduction of homicides in Boston is attributable to other law enforcement activities or unrelated factors.

The second possibility is that the lever pulling and message retailing worked in Boston due to a unique set of circumstances that were not present in India-

napolis. The Boston working group built its strategy around youth and young adults in small, highly territorial gangs that were involved in long-standing disputes with local rivals. The strategy gave the gang members an incentive to constrain lethal violence in order to avoid law enforcement interference with activities that were more pleasurable (“hanging out”) or lucrative (drug sales). Indianapolis authorities had to contend with youth gangs and groups that were more fluid and less territorial, making it more difficult to exert leverage over any one group.

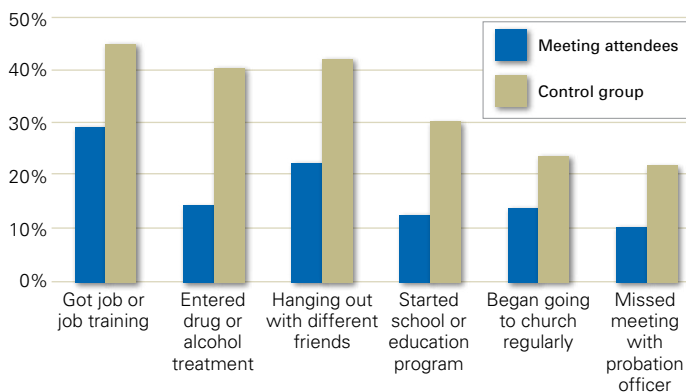
Two important lessons can be drawn from the Indianapolis and Los Angeles Ceasefire replication efforts. The first is that there is no such thing as a “balanced” approach to gang enforcement. The structural imbalance in power and resources between law enforcement and community groups ensures that suppression tactics will never be matched with an adequate level of services and supports. The continuing imbalance also ensures that community stakeholders will have little role in decision making. At the end of the day, the police will do what they think best, and residents will have no choice but to hope that it works.

The scale of the imbalance is evident from the evaluations of the Indianapolis and Los Angeles initiatives. Providing services and building community were clearly afterthoughts in Indianapolis, where the researchers failed to present an adequate measure of the supports provided to targeted probationers. The RAND research team made a much more concerted effort to engage community stakeholders and support their efforts. But Tita and his colleagues provided no concrete evidence of changes in the availability of critical services to gang members and their families. Further, the researchers concluded that such changes were unlikely to take place without a major infusion of resources.

The failure of Ceasefire replication efforts to demonstrate any gains in the provision of services to gang members or gang communities should not come as a complete surprise. The architects of Ceasefire incorporated carrots in their model but failed to report on how availability of services changed as a result of the program. Nor did Kennedy and his colleagues demonstrate a relationship between provision of services and the reduction in violence. The Ceasefire model pays lip service to a balance between sticks and carrots, but the program is really about using sticks to enforce compliance—and not about growing carrots.

The imbalance between law enforcement and social service responses to gang problems is not unique to

Figure 7.7. Changes in lives of Indianapolis “lever-pulling” meeting attendees and control group members



Source: McGarrell and Chermak 2004

Ceasefire but is structural. As Decker observes:

Give police money and they are ready to go tomorrow. But it takes six months to get an after-school program. Go to agencies that do intervention with active gang members, and those take six to nine months to roll out. We can get suppression out on the street tomorrow but other resources take longer to pull together. (Personal communication)

The second lesson is that lever pulling and deterrence retailing work under narrow and specific circumstances, if they work at all. Efforts to sell the deterrence message had no impact on violence in Boyle Heights, nor did they affect the behavior of probationers in Indianapolis. The Indianapolis lever-pulling meetings did leave an impression on participants, but it was not the intended one. These results may indicate that lever pulling and deterrence retailing never worked. Or the results may show that the strategies work only with small, territorial youth gangs whose members would rather sell drugs with minimal interference than fight with the police.

This is not to say that a coordinated law enforcement and community effort to target youth violence could not establish a “firebreak” that would allow violence to reach a new and lower equilibrium point. It is also conceivable that a single police operation against a criminal group (the Brightwood bust, for example) could facilitate a return to more normal levels of violence by changing the dynamic of conflict in a city.

Instead, we would argue that such successes are impossible to replicate because they depend on too many factors that are not only unknown but also beyond the control of policy makers. Criminologists know little about what produces drastic changes in murder and violent crime rates. They can produce models that attempt to measure the effect of an intervention after the fact but have been unable to develop a model that successfully predicts future spikes in violence.

The Comprehensive Gang Program Model

The Comprehensive Gang Program Model (also known as the “Spergel model” for its architect, Irving Spergel) is designed to provide both social controls and supports to gang members and youth at high risk of gang membership. The model was developed in Chicago’s Little Village neighborhood during the early and mid-1990s and replicated in five cities with support from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). It

requires extensive collaboration between law enforcement, schools, social service agencies, and community organizations.

The Little Village pilot program provided direct services to gang youth who were “active in carrying out or planning violent activity,” along with other youth considered at risk for gang involvement (Spergel, Wa, and Villareal Sosa 2006). Police and probation officers and youth workers were the frontline staff:

The youth workers emphasized individual youth and family counseling, referrals for jobs, and social services. Police and probation officers carried out their traditional law enforcement and supervision activities, targeting many of the same youth as the outreach youth workers and also referring target youth (and youth to be targeted) back to the youth workers for services. Youth workers clarified information about serious gang assaults, aiding project police to determine who were, and were not, offenders.

The research team tracked the behavior of program participants as well as the incidence of crime in the target neighborhood. Participation in the program was associated with a statistically significant reduction in serious violent crime arrests among older youth (ages 17 and up), although the differences were not significant among 14- to 16-year-old youth. The researchers also found a significant reduction in arrests for gang-motivated aggravated battery and assault at the neighborhood level. A higher rate of worker contacts was associated with reductions in violent behavior.

Drug arrests and gang involvement also declined among program youth, although the research team found no significant effect on the larger neighborhood. Program youth experienced fewer drug arrests in the program period than in the preprogram period, even though the number of gang-related drug arrests in the neighborhood rose by 1,000 percent. Program youth were more likely than their counterparts outside the program to reduce their gang activity; youth who received successful job placements or who were reenrolled in school showed the greatest reductions.

The organizers had difficulty institutionalizing the model in Chicago despite these accomplishments. The Chicago Police Department “chose not to integrate the project into its regular operations or its community policing program ... [because according to police officials] the department’s primary mission

was suppression not community organization or social work.” But OJJDP picked up the model and funded replication efforts at five sites: Mesa, Arizona; Riverside, California; Bloomington-Normal, Illinois; San Antonio, Texas; and Tucson, Arizona.

The results of the replication efforts were mixed at best. No site fully implemented the model, and most of the projects did not reduce arrests at either the individual youth or the neighborhood level. None of the sites achieved statistically significant reductions in arrests for violent offenses among program youth compared to nonprogram youth, although Mesa and Riverside both reported decreases that were marginally significant.⁶ Program youth increased their gang involvement at three sites (Mesa, Bloomington-Normal, and Tucson), while gang involvement remained unchanged in the remaining two sites. The effect of the program on arrests did not vary by level of gang involvement: gang members, gang “associates,” and nongang youth were equally likely to benefit (or not) from their participation in the program.

Target neighborhoods in Mesa and Riverside saw greater reductions in violent crime and drug crime arrests than comparison areas, but no significant changes in gang membership. Bloomington-Normal and San Antonio target neighborhoods experienced larger *increases* in overall and violent crime arrests than comparison areas, despite significant decreases in reported gang membership.

The largest effect found by the researchers across all six sites was not a program effect but regression to the mean. Arrests of youth with the greatest number of arrests during the preprogram period were likely to decline to more typical levels during the program period. The converse was true of youth with the smallest number of arrests in the preprogram period, who tended to be arrested more often in the program period. Age also had a significant effect on arrests. The oldest group of youth (age 19 and up) saw arrests decline in the program period, while the youngest group (16 and under) saw arrests rise.

The researchers collected extensive information covering not only program outcomes but also the nature of the specific services provided. They concluded that

the comprehensive gang program model was poorly implemented in Bloomington-Normal, San Antonio, and Tucson. Implementation problems at these sites ranged from lack of commitment on the part of the lead agency to difficulty engaging the criminal justice system to an overemphasis on suppression.

The research team found that implementing the model in San Antonio was a low priority for both the police department, which served as the lead agency, and neighborhood residents (Spergel, Wa, and Sosa 2005a). Bloomington-Normal law enforcement used the project as an opportunity to “mount an aggressive, no-nonsense campaign to repress African-American gangs” but solicited little input from grassroots groups (Spergel, Wa, and Sosa 2005b). Tucson’s program failed to involve a broad range of stakeholders and failed to develop education and employment opportunities (Spergel, Wa, and Sosa 2005c).

The researchers’ evaluation of implementation efforts in Riverside and Mesa was more positive, but both projects rated poorly on scales of grassroots involvement and received only “fair” marks for provision of educational, employment, and cultural opportunities (Spergel, Wa, and Sosa 2005d, e). Malcolm Klein and Cheryl Maxson argue that in its attempt to be comprehensive, the Spergel model may inadvertently have made implementation impossible: “The very complex process is both the source of the Spergel Model’s strength *and* a prescription for inadequate implementation. Every opportunity to bring about an effective component is at the same time an opportunity for things to go wrong” (2006).

The results of the Comprehensive Gang Program replications broadly correspond to those of the Los Angeles and Indianapolis Ceasefire replication efforts. In neither case could the replication site reproduce the positive outcomes attained at the pilot site. Both cases highlight the difficulty (if not the impossibility) of achieving a balance between criminal justice agencies and suppression tactics on the one hand, and community stakeholders and services on the other. Finally, each case highlights the challenge of transplanting model programs to places with different gang problems and political cultures.

⁶ The researchers define a “marginal decrease” as a difference between program and comparison group outcomes where the P value falls between .06 and .15 (i.e., a 6 to 15 percent chance that the program had no effect on the outcomes).