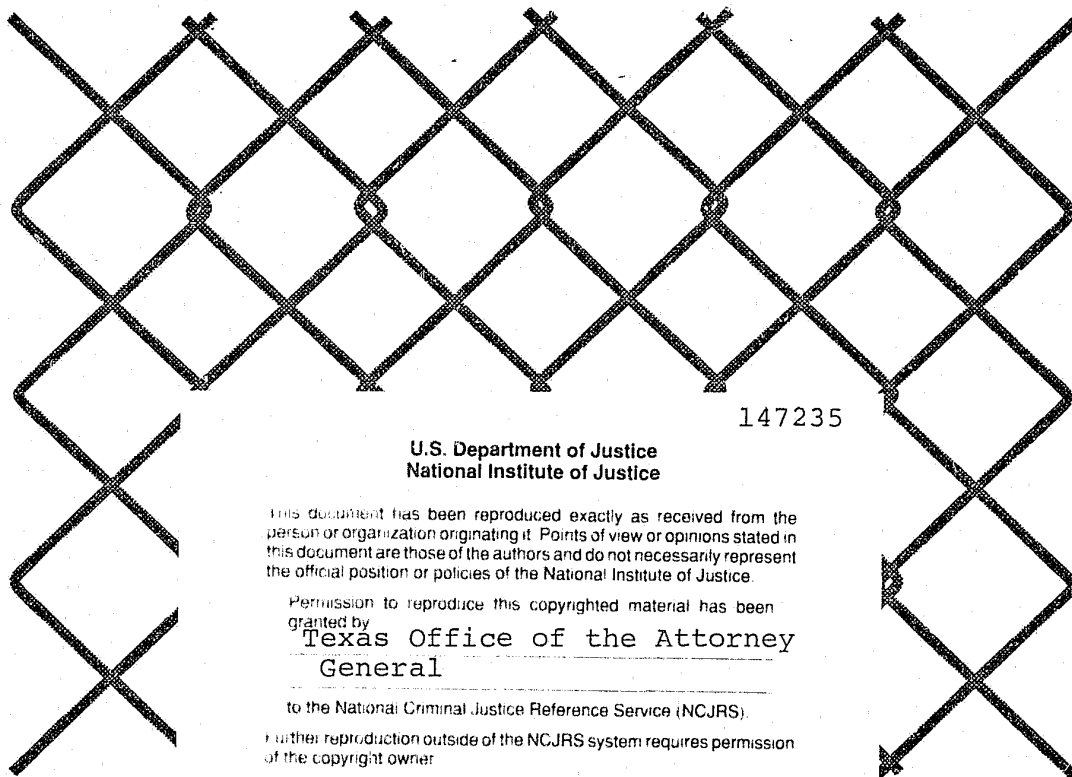


147235

The 1992 Texas Attorney General's **GANG REPORT**



147235

U.S. Department of Justice
National Institute of Justice

This document has been reproduced exactly as received from the person or organization originating it. Points of view or opinions stated in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the National Institute of Justice.

Permission to reproduce this copyrighted material has been granted by
Texas Office of the Attorney General

to the National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS).

Further reproduction outside of the NCJRS system requires permission of the copyright owner.



D0120

DAN MORALES
Attorney General



1471235

Office of the Attorney General
State of Texas

DAN MORALES
ATTORNEY GENERAL

March 30, 1992

Dear Concerned Texan:

Last June we released the first statewide assessment of the Texas gang problem. That report, *Gangs in Texas Cities*, revealed that literally thousands of young people all across our state belong to delinquent and criminal street gangs. Our communities and our schools are being torn by violence, while too many of our children are neglecting to build solid foundations for their own future lives.

Today, as I release the 1992 gang report, I can assure you that we have been hard at work in the fight to curtail and prevent gang activity. In collaboration with other state agencies and with communities, we are working to develop an effective state-level gang policy. We are also providing technical assistance for gang prevention and intervention efforts throughout the state.

Many Texas communities are already well on their way to setting standards for excellence in gang prevention and intervention. In September of 1991 we published the Attorney General's *Model Programs Report*, an anthology describing successful programs in Texas cities, to help guide communities that are just starting out with anti-gang initiatives. We are engaged in developing new ways to evaluate the effectiveness of youth service programs, and we hope to be instrumental in bringing in more federal technical and financial assistance for gang prevention and intervention.

In December of 1991 we hosted a training conference on gang policy. Over a hundred law enforcement professionals, educators, administrators and community leaders came to Austin from 50 Texas cities to learn from nationally recognized experts on gangs, school safety and juvenile crime. As a result of the December training conference we formed a State Team on Gang Policy which supports community-based programs in their efforts to address the youth gang problem. The team consists of the following agencies:


- The Office of the Attorney General
- The Department of Human Services (DHS)
- The Texas Youth Commission (TYC)
- The Office of the Governor
- The Texas Education Agency (TEA)
- The Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ)
- The Texas Juvenile Probation Commission (TJPC)
- The Comptroller of Public Accounts
- The Texas Network of Youth Services

Every one of these agencies is committed to bringing its resources to bear on this tremendously important issue. In the coming months, we will expand the State Team's functions to develop a multiagency state policy on gangs and to provide local anti-gang programs a voice in the State Capitol.

The numbers of gang-involved youth are still increasing, and much remains to be done. We must take a hard look at the laws that govern both our adult and our juvenile justice systems. We must adopt clear-cut, incident-driven criteria for identifying serious habitual offenders, and we must give them priority in corrections. We must divert the less deeply compromised would-be offenders that are joining gangs with the most effective gang intervention strategies known. We must work closely with our communities to promote awareness and safety in our schools and neighborhoods.

The Office of the Attorney General will continue to address the gang problem until our gang reports tell us that we are winning back our youth. Until then, I urge you---every parent, every teacher and every citizen---to stay informed and to express your concern about the future of our children at risk.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Dan Morales". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. The first name "Dan" is written with a large, looped 'D' and a small 'an'. The last name "Morales" is written with a large 'M' and a long, sweeping tail that extends to the right.

Dan Morales
Attorney General

The 1992 Texas Attorney General's Gang Report

General Background & Definitional Issues page 3

The 1992 Survey Results page 11

Implications for a Policy on Gangs page 27

DAN MORALES
Texas Attorney General

Office of the Attorney General
Research & Policy Management Division
Jeanie R. Stanley, Ph.D., Director

Report compiled by
Elizabeth T. Buhmann, Ph.D.
Research Specialist

**Special thanks to the following gang specialists and their departments,
for their generous cooperation in this study:**

Lt. Bill Anderson, Odessa
Sgt. Mike Bozeman, Houston
Det. Arnulfo Chavarria, San Antonio
Det. Luis Carlos DeLeon, Harlingen
Mr. Mike Edgar, Tyler
Sgt. Lupe Fernandez, Dallas
Sgt. Jesse Hernandez, Fort Worth
Sgt. Robert Hernandez, El Paso
S.P.O. Tony Hipolito, Austin
Lt. E.D. McConley, Corpus Christi
Off. Lee Reed, Abilene
Sgt. Raymond Rubio and Off. Harold Beasley, Galveston

Executive Summary

This year's survey confirms above all that the Texas gang situation is a moving target for study. Numbers of gangs and gang members appear to have risen in most cities and fallen in a few others since the last Attorney General's survey nearly a year ago. Overall, gang activity in Texas has evidently increased, but changes in reporting procedures make it difficult to say exactly how much and where.

The 1992 Texas Attorney General's Gang Report offers discussions and proposals on definitional issues, new data on gangs in Texas cities and some general recommendations on state and local gang policies. While much remains to be done in the area of research, it is not too soon to move forward with solutions based on what is already known.

Research has shown that the Texas gang problem is complex. There are many kinds of gangs, and many levels of gang involvement. For the purposes of the 1992 Attorney General's gang survey, gangs were sorted into four general categories:

- Delinquent Youth Gangs
- Traditional Turf-Based Gangs
- Gain-Oriented Gangs
- Violent/Hate Gangs

The different kinds of gangs tend to reflect different cultural and economic circumstances. They call for different strategies of prevention and intervention, and they require different tactical responses from law enforcement.

The typical medium-sized Texas city (population 50,000-100,000) has delinquent youth gangs and at least one other more serious kind of gang. These gangs are posing a moderate law enforcement problem. Larger cities show a wider range of kinds of gangs and a greater prevalence of the more seriously criminal kinds of gangs.

The surveys reveal that a substantial share of the state's gang inventory consists of delinquent youth gangs, most of whose "crimes" are, by definition, of a relatively low level of seriousness. However, turf-rivalry and gain-oriented gangs are present in all large cities and many small ones. Violent/hate gangs, though less common than other types, are found in many areas as well.

Drugs rank high with theft and robbery in the activities of gain-oriented gangs, yet only a small portion of gangs (even in most large cities) are involved in serious drug traffic. There is little support for sensational images of gangs as heavily armed and highly organized narcotics distribution networks. Gangs of this description exist, however, in some of the larger cities.

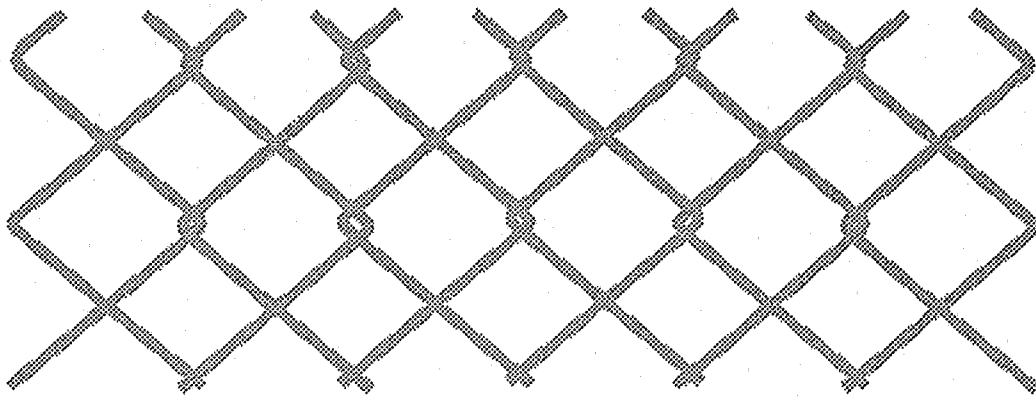
For the state as a whole, the surveys give little reason for hope that the problem will go away on its own anytime soon. The very widespread presence of delinquent youth gangs, even in very small towns, is ominous. Although the majority of delinquent youth gangs do not evolve into more serious kinds of gangs, it is not advisable to ignore experimentation with gang subcultures among large numbers of young people.

A comprehensive gang policy cannot be any simpler than the problem itself. An effective solution must provide appropriate responses for all kinds of gangs and all levels of gang involvement. The overall plan must address public safety issues and, beyond that, the well-being and future self-sufficiency of at-risk and disadvantaged youth. The problem has to be addressed on both the state and local level, cooperatively. The goal must always be the most efficient and effective allocation of resources in response to a community's unique situation.

Suppressive tactics should generally be reserved for hard-core gang members (or leaders) who commit serious offenses and instigate criminal behavior in others. Given the volume of offenders and the capacity of the corrections system, efficiency demands that less serious offenders should be diverted from gang-involvement if possible. Preventive efforts must help children find alternative ways of getting the things that gangs offer: companionship, acceptance and a setting in which they can be successful.

Communities must forge effective working partnerships among schools, law enforcement and service providers. State government can help by providing information, references and technical support. The recently formed State Team on Gang Policy is a state-level, interagency collaboration to support community-based programs in their efforts to address the youth gang problem. In difficult economic times, it is unlikely that expensive solutions---however just or needed---will be available. Progress will have to come through cooperation, collaboration and accountability, using the most effective and efficient programming strategies that can be found.

The 1992 Texas Attorney General's Gang Report



Introduction

Youth gangs are not an entirely new phenomenon. The literature on gangs in this country extends back to the eighteenth century. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the northeastern United States, gangs were associated with various immigrant populations in large cities---there were Irish gangs, Polish gangs and Jewish gangs, for example. By and large, these gangs were regarded as integral parts of an immigrant community and not as significant threats to public safety or law enforcement. Membership in a gang was a fairly normal rite of passage among young men in certain cultural settings.

Much of the traditional nature of gangs is preserved in the gangs that exist today. There is one very significant difference, however: in many major urban settings, gangs are now regarded as an extremely serious threat to public safety and law enforcement. Many explanations have been offered for this fact: drugs, weapons, the disintegration of the nuclear family, lack of economic opportunity for many young people, an educational

system in disarray, an ineffective criminal justice system, and a dearth of resources for recreation, child care and other desperately needed family services.

This complicated situation is further obscured by media coverage that is too frequently superficial and sensational. A comprehensive and realistic perspective is not easily achieved in this climate. So far Texas has not produced the kind of systematic research on gangs that has occurred in southern California, Milwaukee, Detroit, Chicago, and New York, and it is well beyond the scope of this report to fill that void. This study provides direction in terms of definitions and criteria, suggestive results of law enforcement surveys and guidelines for the development of a coherent state policy on gangs.

PART ONE: General Background & Definitional Issues

In the most general terms, a gang is a loosely organized group of three or more individuals. The group has a name, may have a leader or leaders, and may have developed identifying signs such as distinctive clothing, jewelry, tattoos, "colors" or hand signs. Members perceive themselves as a gang, associate regularly and collaborate in committing delinquent and/or criminal offenses.

Any more specific or determinate description of a gang is defeated by the sheer diversity of gangs occurring in Texas today. The most that can be said is that *typically* a gang has identifying colors, style of dress, hand signs, and so on. But any of these characteristics may be absent, and in some cases all of them are absent. Gangs may vary in their degree of organization, the presence or absence of a leader or leaders, their identifying signs, and the nature of their illegal activities. The essential elements are the group, the fact that the group perceives itself as a gang, and the collaboration in violating the law.

Much of what gangs do is non-criminal---many gang members spend most of their gang-time "hanging out" and "kicking back"---but what distinguishes a gang from other groups is criminality or delinquency. This agency does not recognize any benefit in tracking or recognizing as gangs any groups that are not involved in committing delinquent or criminal offenses. It is not enough for one member to have committed an offense. Two or more members, acting together as a group, must have committed an offense at least once. The illegal activity may not be very serious---truancy, status offenses, public nuisance, disruptive behavior---or it may be very serious, including severe assaults and homicides.

Kinds of Gangs

A very general definition applicable to all gangs must necessarily obscure important differences. Within the great variety of individual gangs, some common patterns are discernible. Most Texas gangs can be sorted into four general categories:

Delinquent Youth Gang. This is a loosely structured group of young people (mostly juveniles) who "hang out" together. The group has a name, and typically members have developed identifying signs such as similar clothing style, colors, and/or hand signs. Members engage in delinquent or undesirable behavior often enough to attract negative attention from law enforcement and/or neighborhood residents and/or school officials. A key defining point is that *no member has ever been arrested for a serious offense.*

Traditional Turf-Based Gang. This is a loosely structured, named group committed to defending its reputation and status as a gang. It is usually associated with a geographic territory but may simply defend its perceived interests against rival gangs. Members are young people (juveniles and/or adults) who typically use identifying signs such as clothing style, colors, tattoos or hand signs. The members usually mark the gang's turf with graffiti. ***At least one shooting (assault, homicide or drive-by) has occurred in the last year as a result of rivalry between this gang and another gang.***

Gain-Oriented Gang. This is a loosely structured, named local group of young people (juveniles and/or adults) who repeatedly engage in criminal activities for economic gain. ***On at least one occasion in the last year, two or more gang members have worked together in a gain-oriented criminal offense such as robbery, burglary, or the sale of a controlled substance.*** The group may share many characteristics of turf-based gangs and may defend a territory, but when the group acts together as a gang for economic gain, it should be classified as a gain-oriented gang.

Violent/Hate Gang. This is a named group (of juveniles and/or adults) that does not qualify as either a gain-oriented or a traditional turf-based gang, according to the definitions above. Typically, the group has developed identifying signs such as a style of dress, haircut, or insignia. ***Two or more of its members have, at least once in the last year, collectively committed an assault, a homicide, or an offense that could be reported under the federal Hate Crimes Act (vandalism, assault or homicide).*** This type of gang includes groups whose violence has an ideological or religious rationale, such as racism or satanism. This type also includes groups whose members are randomly or senselessly violent.

The kinds of gangs are distinguished primarily on the basis of their activities, rather than the characteristics of the gang members. Some degree of vagueness is unavoidable, and some classifications will inevitably be borderline:

- "Copycat" juvenile groups resemble delinquent youth gangs: the key defining point is the commission of status or minor offenses (such as truancy or consumption of alcohol) as part of the group's activities.
- "Crews" of three or four people working together in theft or burglary may resemble gain-oriented gangs, but compared to a gang, a crew is an ephemeral association, unlikely to have a clear identity as a group.
- A turf-oriented gang whose members occasionally steal is very similar to a relatively inactive gain-oriented gang that operates in a specific geographic area. The key point is whether the members *as a gang* have collaborated in a profitable criminal enterprise.

In principle, gangs also resemble what is familiarly called "organized crime" except that gangs tend to be less structured and their members tend to be younger. There is, moreover, little organized crime in Texas, and virtually no evidence of interaction between Texas street gangs and organized crime. Some of the largest, most persistent, and most virulent gangs on the west coast resemble organized crime more closely than any gang indigenous to this state.

Levels of Gang Involvement

There are many levels of involvement in gangs. The common terminology is roughly as follows:

"Regulars" are those gang members who "hang out" with the group on a more or less daily basis. They are familiar with and aware of most gang activities. They are liable to be present during gang offenses, frequently as participants.

The **"hard-core"** of a gang consists of the most deeply committed regular gang members---those who are responsible for instigating and actually committing the most serious offenses attributable to their gangs. **"Shooters"** are just what their name implies: trigger men.

Sometimes one hard-core member is the **"leader"** of the group, but in many gangs, this role is passed from one person to another depending on the occasion. The leader in a time of retaliation may be the shooter; the leader for a car theft may be the member with special expertise in that activity.

"Associates" are friends, acquaintances and relatives who are somewhat knowledgeable about gang activities and occasionally participate in gang activities. Other **"peripherals"** include self-proclaimed or aspiring gang members---**"wannabes"**---who are not fully trusted or accepted and who are not fully informed about gang activities.

"Juniors" are aspiring gang members too young to be fully accepted. Siblings or other young relatives (cousins, nephews and nieces) of gang members are particularly at risk of developing more serious levels of gang involvement.

Who Joins Gangs?

Taking into consideration all kinds of gangs and all levels of involvement, it can probably be said that young people of all kinds are joining gangs. However, the most deeply committed members of gangs, particularly gain-oriented and turf-based gangs,

tend to share certain characteristics, according to the literature. These young people tend to be:

- Low academic achievers and truants
- Non-participants in extracurricular activities
- Siblings or other kin to other gang members

Their life histories generally show a background of economic deprivation and a lack of parental supervision. Among children whose experience is more mainstream and whose personal resources are not so scarce, there may be some who flirt with gang membership as part of normal adolescent risk-taking and grouping behavior. But among children whose gang involvement is early and profound, there are very likely to be compound and deep-seated unanswered needs.

Gang Involvement

Some signs of gang involvement are:

- Claiming gang membership
- Wearing gang clothing or using hand signs
- Posing in gang photos or wearing gang tattoos
- Being stopped or field-interviewed by police in the company of gang members

The first two items on this list are highly context-dependent. Admitting to gang membership, for example, may be mere bravado if it occurs among relatively young, uninvolved youth. It may be the result of intimidation, if a young person is asked about his affiliation in front of other gang members. In some contexts, however, it may be a fairly straightforward statement of fact.

Similarly, gang clothing, paraphernalia, and hand signs may be a mere fashion statement, particularly if the "affiliation" is to major and remote gangs that have been glamorized in films, and particularly if the display takes place in a relatively safe, neutral setting like school property. However, wearing local gang "colors" in known local gang "hangouts" is unlikely to be innocent mimicry.

Posing in gang photos and wearing gang tattoos are less ambiguous signs. Gang photos are like official team or group portraits, and members typically appear in full gang dress, flashing signs. To appear in such a photo with known gang members, an individual must generally be accepted as a member by the group. Any aspiring gang member can get a gang tattoo, but the danger that could be associated with an indelible mark of that nature

is so great that this can be taken as a more serious sign of involvement than wearing a cap or a jacket.

When a youth has been stopped by police or field-interviewed in the company of gang members, this is reason to believe that he is associating with them; however, his association could be a first time or an unusual occurrence. By itself, this sign is warning that the youth in question *may* be involved in gangs.

Criteria for Gang Membership

For the purposes of estimating a gang's full scope of influence on local youth, the following list of criteria is suitable. Count as *gang-involved* an individual who meets any one of the following:

- ☐ *Freely admits to gang membership*
- ☐ *Wears gang clothing or uses hand signs in known gang hangouts*
- ☐ *Has been found in gang photos or wearing gang tattoos*
- ☐ *Has been stopped or field-interviewed by police in the company of gang members more than once*
- ☐ *Is reported to be a gang member by a parent or guardian*
- ☐ *Is reported to be a gang member by a reliable informant*

This set of criteria yields a gang member count that includes leaders, hard-cores, regulars, associates, peripherals, juniors and wannabes. A *regular gang member*---one of those actually committing offenses and creating a law enforcement problem---is any individual who meets any of the criteria listed above *and who has been arrested in the company of other gang members for a gang-related offense.*

What is a Gang-Related Offense?

An offense is gang-related if a gang member is arrested and any one of the following conditions applies:

- ☐ *Gang identifiers are displayed at the time of the offense*
- ☐ *More than one gang member is involved*
- ☐ *A participant claims to be acting as a gang member*
- ☐ *An informant reports that the participants were acting as gang*
- ☐ *The activity benefits or promotes the gang in some way*

By this measure, it is not enough for gang members to be involved; they must be acting as a gang in committing the offense.

A tally of gang-related offenses is not a full measure of the impact gangs may have on a community. Research shows that gang-involvement tends to prolong and intensify a criminal career. Youth involved in gangs commit more offenses, and more serious offenses, than delinquent youth who are not involved in gangs. The gang subculture tends to promote a violent way of life. It may also be that gang membership inclines youth to carry weapons. In any case, the great probability is that crimes and violence committed by gang members inflate the level of violence in a community by more than just the incidence of actual gang-related crime.

There is an even broader concept of gang-related violence, encompassing acts that do not involve gang members either as victims or as perpetrators. The mere presence of gangs in a community or school may be threatening to residents or students, who may be more likely to carry weapons as a result. In such an atmosphere, the danger of retaliation, accidental shooting and impulsive assault may be significantly greater than it would be in a gang-free setting.

Uniform Definitions

As it stands, the language of gang reporting varies enormously from one locality to the next. This is partly due to the fact that local police departments have independently formulated their own definitions. It is also due to the fact that the nature of the gang problem itself varies from one jurisdiction to the next. In a city with a preponderance of turf-based gangs, having and defending geographic turf may be regarded as an essential characteristic of a gang. In a city with nothing more serious than delinquent youth gang activity, the definition of the word "gang" may focus on colors, signs, the group's perception of itself, and the community's displeasure.

The impact of definitional issues on gang counts is not a small one. The number of gangs counted may vary by as much as a factor of seven, depending on whether "gang" is defined narrowly (to encompass only the most serious gangs) or broadly (to encompass delinquent juvenile groups as well). The number of gang members per gang may vary by a factor of three, depending on how restrictive the criteria for gang membership are (whether the count includes only regulars and hard-core or peripherals and associates as well). In a medium-sized city with population of 100,000, for example, local authorities could report two (very violent) gangs with a total of 30 (regular) members; or 14 gangs (all kinds) with a total of 630 gang members (and associates, juniors, etc.). These wildly

different assessments might both be perfectly reasonable. They are simply based on different definitions.

For prosecutorial purposes, gangs may be regarded simply as a species of organized criminal activity, as defined in Chapter 71, Section 71.01 of the Penal Code, or as a criminal street gang, under a definition for "criminal street gang" that was introduced to the Texas Penal Code in 1991(Chapter 71, Section 71.02):

"...three or more persons having a common identifying sign or symbol or an identifiable leadership who continuously or regularly associate in the commission of criminal activities."

For the purpose of assessing and comparing gang problems across the state, no single definition, not even the statutory definition, solves the kind of problem described above. Most single definitions are vague enough to be applied very narrowly, very broadly or anywhere in between. If an explicitly *narrow* definition is used, gang problems in smaller cities drop out of sight. If a *broad* definition is used, gang problems in large cities are off-scale. In practice, major cities use more restrictive definitions than small cities, and comparisons tend to be invalid as a result.

What is needed is a typology to distinguish low-level delinquent youth groups from seriously violent criminal organizations. The former category is needed for gang counts in smaller cities, where less serious forms of gang activity can, nonetheless, be disruptive. In large cities, counting every delinquent youth group may be impractical. A gang that is a problem in a small town might not be noticeable in a city of a million. If both cases are to be accommodated, the small town must count delinquent youth groups, and the large city must count serious criminal organizations.

For the purposes of the 1992 Attorney General's gang survey, gangs were sorted into the four types described at the beginning of Part One for several reasons:

- The different kinds of gangs tend to reflect different cultural and economic circumstances;
- They call for different strategies of prevention and intervention;
- They require different tactical responses from law enforcement; and
- Many police departments already report separate tallies for these four kinds of gangs.

Uniform Criteria for Gang Membership

Like gangs, gang members can be counted more or less restrictively. By some local standards, juniors, "wannabes" and associates are all counted as gang members, and are conceivably eligible for enhanced penalties under the new gang law. By other local standards, only regular and hard-core members would qualify for the harsher penalties. Fairness would seem to require a single standard for all offenders.

Different ways of counting gang members are appropriate for different purposes. For the purposes of problem assessment and service delivery, a relatively wide net is useful. The criteria for gang-involvement listed above (anyone wearing colors, using hand signs, claiming membership, etc.) are suitable for determining whether a community is in the early stages of developing a gang problem or for determining whether anti-gang school programming is needed. Often the less-deeply committed youth are the most amenable to diversion.

For more suppressive law enforcement purposes such as targeting, tracking and enhanced sentencing, it is more appropriate to focus on those individuals who are regular or hard-core gang members actually committing offenses and creating a law enforcement problem. A gang member, therefore, is defined above as someone who meets at least one of the criteria for gang involvement and has been arrested with other gang members in connection with a gang-related crime.

Clarity and uniformity of language are desirable for many reasons---research, needs assessment, program evaluation and interagency communication, to name a few. Probably the most compelling reason to articulate the meanings of the key terms is the fact that these terms now carry with them the possibility of special treatment under law. It will require some flexibility and compromise if consensus is to be achieved. But definitions and criteria along the lines of those presented here can and should be adopted on a statewide basis.

PART TWO: The 1992 Survey Results

Two surveys were conducted by the Attorney General's Office in December, 1991 and January, 1992. One was a short preliminary survey administered to juvenile officers from 20 small and medium-sized cities. The other was a more detailed survey completed by gang or intelligence specialists in 12 cities, including seven with populations greater than 250,000. Three cities were represented in both surveys.

Results of this year's research confirm above all that the Texas gang situation is a moving target for study. Numbers of gangs and gang members appear to have risen in most cities and fallen in a few others. Overall, gang activity in Texas has evidently increased, but changes in reporting procedures make it difficult to say exactly how much and where. Despite the introduction of definitions and criteria in the survey instrument, local variations continue to compromise firm comparisons between different jurisdictions.

Nevertheless, the surveys reveal much about the kinds of gangs occurring in Texas cities, about gang activity, weapons, migration, and police reporting practices. The surveys reveal that a substantial share of the state's gang inventory consists of delinquent youth gangs, most of whose "crimes" are, by definition, of a relatively low level of seriousness. However turf-rivalry, and its associated violence, are found to be quite widespread, and gain-oriented gangs are present in many cities. Violent/hate gangs, though less common than other types, are found in many areas as well.

Definitions Used

Survey participants filled out written questionnaires, using definitions and criteria supplied by the Attorney General's Office. Key terms were defined approximately as presented in Part One of this report. In the long survey, respondents were asked to estimate numbers of gangs and gang members on the basis of the definitions provided in the questionnaire. All such estimates in the past---for Attorney General surveys and in all other reports---have been based on local definitions. The fact that terms were defined within the survey introduces an element of comparability between local reports for the first time.

The introduction of new language is only a beginning, however. The definitions used in the survey were unfamiliar to the respondents and were untested. Key terms, like "delinquent youth gang" and "turf-based gang" have established usages and connotations. To some degree, respondents are bound to have relied on their preconceptions about how

to apply these terms. In general, standardization of terminology requires training, not just the postulation of formal definitions.

Another reason for caution: respondents were being asked to estimate numbers of gangs and gang members based on the definitions and criteria provided in the survey, whereas their observations and records for the year were based on local methods of reporting. The introduction of new terms and/or new meanings must necessarily have introduced an element of uncertainty to many of the estimates.

Until a set of definitions has been thoroughly revised and refined for actual practice and until reporting officers have become thoroughly accustomed to their use, truly statewide numbers will not be available. After those steps have been taken, data will have to be gathered using the new terminology from the beginning of the reporting period. In the meantime, the introduction of new definitions and criteria in the 1992 survey has at least shifted the direction of interagency gang data reporting, from the collection of basically unrelated figures, toward an extremely rough approximation of a uniform report.

The Preliminary Survey

The preliminary survey was completed in December of 1991 by juvenile officers from 20 cities ranging between 20,000 and 110,000 in population. Respondents were not gang specialists, and their answers were their own opinions, not the official views of their departments.

Two respondents represented cities with populations between 100,000 and 110,000. More than half of the represented cities (13) were between 50,000 and 100,000 in population, and five were under 50,000 in population. Average and median size were both between 65,000 and 70,000 population.

Nineteen of the 20 respondents reported the presence of gangs in their cities. The majority (12) of the 20 respondents reported that gangs were a moderate problem. Four reported that gangs were a serious problem, and four said that gangs were not a significant problem.

Delinquent youth gangs were by far the most commonly occurring kind of gang: they were reportedly present in 16 of the 20 cities. Turf-based gangs were reportedly present in nine cities, and gain-oriented gangs were only slightly less prevalent (present in eight cities). Violent/hate gangs were less common, reportedly occurring in only five cities.

Gangs in Smaller Cities

Results of the Preliminary Survey

December 1991

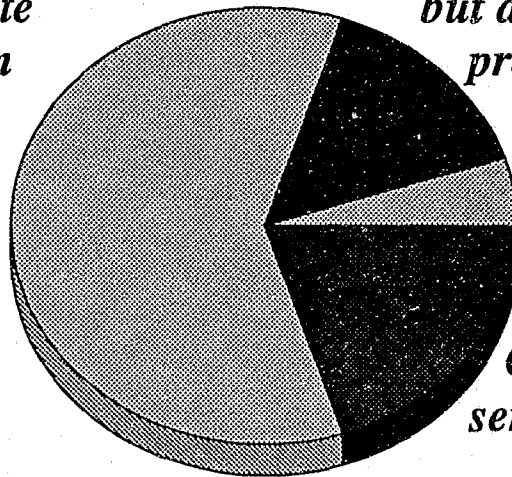
(pop. 20,000-110,000)

*Gangs are a
moderate
problem
(60%)*

*Gangs are present
but are not a
problem (15%)*

*No gangs
(5%)*

*Gangs are a
serious problem
(20%)*



Do you ever have occasion to share information about gangs or gang members with other law enforcement agencies? (responses from 20 cities)

<i>Very frequently</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Rarely</i>
7	12	1

How useful would a central state gang intelligence database or a regional gang database (eg, countywide) be for your department? (responses from 20 cities)

<i>Very useful</i>	<i>Moderately</i>	<i>Not very</i>
13	5	2

Would your department be willing to adopt uniform statewide definitions for key terms such as "gang" and "gang member"? (responses from 20 cities)

<i>Very willing</i>	<i>Possibly</i>	<i>Probably not</i>
9	10	1

A majority of cities (eleven) had delinquent youth gangs plus one or two other kinds of gangs. Four cities had only delinquent youth gangs. All other combinations were unique. Only one city reported having all four kinds of gangs, and only one city reported having absolutely no gangs of any kind. One city had only gain-oriented gangs, another had only turf-based gangs, and one reportedly had every kind of gang *except* delinquent youth gangs.

Police departments in 14 of the 20 cities maintain lists of gangs and gang members. Only two have automated databases, though most (15) have access to personal computers. Nineteen out of the 20 respondents sometimes or frequently have occasion to share information about gangs or gang members with other law enforcement agencies. Two-thirds thought that a centralized state gang intelligence database would be "very useful", and all but one of the 20 would be receptive to uniform definitions and criteria.

The Long Survey

Twelve cities participated in the longer survey. They included seven of the eight Texas cities with populations greater than 250,000, plus five other cities of various sizes, ranging from about 50,000-110,000. The smaller cities were not chosen at random and are not necessarily representative. They were included either because they had a history of participating in Attorney General gang surveys (Abilene and Harlingen) or because they had demonstrated special interest, expertise or concern. As in previous surveys, no attempt has been made to corroborate official views one way or another: results reflect the professional opinions of metropolitan police specialists.

Long Survey Participants:

City	Population
Abilene	106,654
Austin	465,622
Corpus Christi	257,453
Dallas	1,006,877
El Paso	515,342
Fort Worth	447,619
Galveston	59,070
Harlingen	48,735
Houston	1,630,553
Odessa	89,699
San Antonio	935,933
Tyler	75,450

Long Survey Results

The great majority of respondents (ten out of 12) reported the presence of all four kinds of gangs. Harlingen and Abilene were alone in reporting the presence of only delinquent youth gangs, which are by definition gangs committing no more serious offenses than status offenses and minor property crimes. However, Abilene's situation is at least marginal: the city reports a number of "drive-by" shootings. These are the signature crimes of traditional turf-based gangs and, by the definitions being used, not the work of delinquent youth gangs.

Harlingen's report of only delinquent youth groups is consistent with responses from other cities of its size participating in the short survey. Galveston, Odessa and Tyler, all of which fall in the population range of the preliminary survey, show somewhat more serious gang problems than the average mid-sized city. But it was for this reason that they were included in the longer survey in the first place.

Total Numbers of Gangs and Gang Members

The table on the next page shows total numbers of gangs and gang members reported in the long survey, with the new definitions, alongside last year's totals. Again, the results of the 1991 Attorney General's gang survey were based on local definitions. The 1992 results are therefore not straightforwardly comparable to 1991 figures. Totals for both years are available from nine cities. Of these, only three (Corpus Christi, Fort Worth and Houston) appear to offer unproblematic longitudinal data. The two big cities show small increases (less than 10%), while Corpus Christi shows a somewhat sharper rise.

Other totals were generally higher than numbers reported last year, with two exceptions: Harlingen and Dallas. Dallas' lower number is partly attributable to the deletion of all inactive entries in the database. Harlingen's high numbers in 1991 now appear to have been based on a very broad count. All other cities show many more gangs in 1992. This is at least partly because more delinquent youth gangs are included in the 1992 count.

When numbers of gang members are taken into consideration, Austin joins Harlingen and Dallas in showing a marked decrease. Austin's 1991 total below is a much broader count than the 1992 total; however, Austin police report that the count of *regular* gang members is down from 739 in 1991 to 571 in 1992. All other cities show some increase in the number of gang members. The very large increase in San Antonio's total is deceptive: the 1991 total was for hard-core gang members only, whereas the 1992 count is a broad count that includes a large number of peripherals and delinquent youth gang members.

Raw Data: Total Numbers of Gangs, Gang Members					
1991 & 1992					
<i>Reported totals are not adjusted to account for varying local reporting procedures.</i>					
City:	Population:	Number of Gangs:		Number of Gang Members:*	
		1992 (1992 survey definitions)	1991 (local definitions)	1992 (1992 survey definitions)	1991 (local definitions)
Abilene	106,654	25	5	90	66
Austin	465,622	69	50	571***	1885*
Corpus Christi	257,453	17	12-15	700	600
Dallas	1,006,877	34	221	320	3,695
El Paso	515,342	268	200	4,594	3,476
Fort Worth	447,619	119	115	1,657	1,542
Galveston	59,070	30	NA**	338	NA**
Harlingen	48,735	1	7	15	300
Houston	1,630,553	108	102	1,123	1,098
Odessa	89,699	18	NA**	175	NA**
San Antonio	935,933	47	24	3832*	600***
Tyler	75,450	14	NA**	65	NA**

**Totals marked with asterisks include associates and peripherals.*

All other totals indicate numbers of regular gang members.

***Did not participate in 1991 survey*

****Total for hard-core gang members of all kinds of gangs.*

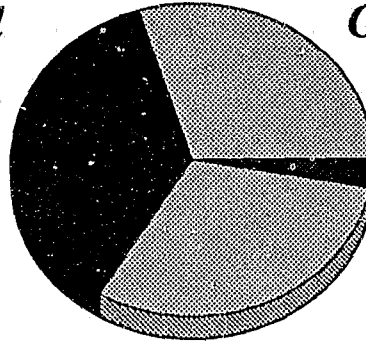
Kinds of Gangs in Survey Cities

Overall, delinquent youth gangs accounted for 30% of total gangs; turf-based gangs were 34% of all gangs; gain-oriented gangs were 32% of all gangs; and violent/hate gangs trailed all other kinds, representing only 4% of the total. The distribution of gang members by the kind of gang they belong to was similar, except that turf-based gangs accounted for a slightly larger share (37% of all gang members versus 30% in delinquent youth gangs, 31% belonging to gain-oriented gangs, and 3% belonging to violent/hate gangs). Fort Worth does not include delinquent youth gangs in its database and did not attempt to estimate how many there were in the city. Delinquent youth gangs may, therefore, actually represent a somewhat higher proportion of all gangs than it appears from these results.

Kinds of Gangs

Based on Gang Members in Twelve Texas Cities
January 1992

*Traditional
turf-based
gangs
(37%)*



*Gain-oriented
gangs (31%)*

*Violent/hate
gangs (3%)*

Delinquent youth gangs (30%)

No city exemplified the overall distribution or even came very close to it. Though almost all cities have all kinds of gangs, they have them in very different proportions. The distributions reported by the 12 cities were as follows:

Kinds of Gangs in Survey Cities					
Based on Number of Gangs					
City	Population	%Delinquent	%Turf-based	%Gain-oriented	%Violent/hate
Abilene	106,654	100	0	0	0
Austin	465,622	12	58	29	1
Corpus Christi	257,453	47	29	12	12
Dallas	1,006,877	35	38	18	9
El Paso	515,342	29	41	25	4
Fort Worth	447,619	0*	55	37	8
Galveston	59,070	40	13	40	7
Harlingen	48,735	100	0	0	0
Houston	1,630,553	33	0	66	1
Odessa	89,699	44	17	28	11
San Antonio	935,933	68	19	13	0
Tyler	75,450	43	32	25	0

*Estimate not available

Delinquent Youth Gangs. Delinquent youth gangs are a large portion of the gang count in most cities. The exceptions were Fort Worth and Austin. Fort Worth has delinquent youth gangs but does not count them. To a lesser extent, the same is true in Austin: the low proportion of delinquent youth gangs reflects the fact that only a few such gangs are included in the city's gang database. The percentage in the table above is based on the number of delinquent youth gangs in the Austin gang database; it is not based on the total number of delinquent youth gangs in the city.

It is a plausible hypothesis that police in large cities tend to find it impractical and/or unnecessary to maintain awareness of all low-level delinquent gangs. Because large cities report larger numbers of gangs in total, the overall share of delinquent youth gangs looks a bit lower than it should. Further research is needed to confirm or disprove this theory. It is suggestive that, when Austin and Fort Worth are removed from the picture, delinquent youth gangs represent 39% of all gangs and 35% of all gang members.

Delinquent youth gangs are the largest group in seven cities, including Galveston, where delinquent youth and gain-oriented gangs occur in equal numbers. All gangs in Harlingen and Abilene are reportedly delinquent youth gangs, although Abilene also reports drive-by shootings. In San Antonio, delinquent youth gangs are two-thirds of all gangs. In Corpus Christi, Galveston and Odessa, delinquent youth gangs are nearly half of all gangs. Even in the larger cities---Dallas, Houston and El Paso---they are around a third of all gangs.

Traditional Turf-based Gangs. In most cities, turf-based gangs are very much in evidence. In every city but Odessa and Galveston, they make up a more substantial portion of the gang population than gain-oriented gangs. In four cities they are the largest group reported, in terms of numbers of gangs. In Austin and Fort Worth, they are over half of all gangs (though in both cases few or no delinquent youth gangs have been taken into account). In El Paso and Dallas turf-based gangs are around 40% of all gangs. In Tyler and Corpus they are about a third of all gangs. In San Antonio they are only 19% of all gangs, but they are the second largest group after delinquent youth gangs.

Only three cities out of the 12 were without turf-based gangs: Harlingen, the smallest city, which reportedly has nothing but delinquent gangs; Abilene, where there were drive-by shootings; and Houston. Houston police reported that the distinction between turf-based and gain-oriented gangs was unusable in their jurisdiction. Apparently the most common style of gang in Houston involves turf, rivalry, and gain-oriented criminal activity. These gangs, therefore, have been counted as gain-oriented gangs in the table above. (If half were counted as turf-based and half as gain-oriented, then Houston's distribution would very nearly represent the average.)

Gain-oriented Gangs. These were the most commonly occurring gangs in Houston (but they closely resembled turf-based gangs), and they were as prevalent as delinquent youth gangs in nearby Galveston. Odessa reported significant numbers of gain-oriented gangs---nearly a third, less numerous than delinquent youth gangs, but outnumbering turf-based gangs. Fort Worth's total of 37% gain-oriented gangs is high, but it is a large proportion of an overall count that does not include delinquent youth groups. In Fort Worth gain-oriented gangs trail turf-based gangs 55% to 37%. Elsewhere, gain-oriented gangs range from a quarter to a third of all gangs (Austin, El Paso) down to 18% in Dallas, and less than 15% in San Antonio and Corpus Christi.

Violent/Hate Gangs. In every case, violent/hate gangs were the smallest category; Corpus was exceptional in that this category was as prevalent as another kind (gain-oriented gangs) at 12%. Odessa and Dallas reported that about 10% of their gangs were violent gangs; in Austin and Houston numbers were lower---around 1%. Overall, these gangs ranged from zero to 12 percent of gangs. Eight of the 12 cities reported their presence. Abilene, Harlingen, San Antonio and Tyler were the exceptions.

In most cities, a look at the gang member population subtly shifts the distribution of the different types of gangs. Overall, delinquent youth gangs appear slightly less important, when gang members are taken into account. This may be partly because police are more likely to track members of more serious kinds of gangs.

Gang Size

Relatively little is known about what determines gang size. The literature traditionally depicts gangs as having 8-12 members, with 3-4 of those as hard-core and additional youth on the periphery. This picture was supported by the 1991 Attorney General's gang report. Gangs reportedly averaged 10-15 members, by and large, with looser counts tending to run about three times that number (40-50 members, when wannabes and associates are counted).

This year's data shows overall gang size ranging between four and 17 members in most cities. San Antonio and Corpus Christi show much larger overall gang size. In the case of San Antonio, the count is clearly a "loose" count (it is labelled as such) that includes peripherals. It still appears that both cities have larger than average gangs.

- o Austin's delinquent youth gangs are large, as are those in Corpus and San Antonio. Otherwise, this kind of gang ranges from three to 15 regulars. Average size is 17, even counting San Antonio and Corpus Christi. Without those two cities, average size is 11.

- Turf gangs tend to be a little larger. They are larger than youth gangs in Corpus Christi and the same as youth gangs (i.e., large) in San Antonio. They also run large in El Paso and Galveston. Average size is 23. Not counting Corpus Christi and San Antonio, average size is 13.
- Gain-oriented gangs range from three regular members to almost 200. Average is 37, counting all cities; average is 12, not counting Corpus Christi and San Antonio.
- Violent/hate gangs are smaller: they average 15. Without Corpus Christi (San Antonio has none), the average size is nine.

Gain-oriented gangs, varying over a narrow range in other cities, are off-scale in Corpus Christi and San Antonio, with 90 and 194 members per gang, respectively. This may indicate that Corpus Christi and San Antonio are experiencing more serious criminal networking than other cities.

Age, Stability and Activities of Gangs

Only El Paso reports a very old gang tradition of 20 years or more. Austin and Fort Worth report a 10-20 year gang tradition. Corpus Christi, Harlingen, Houston, Odessa and San Antonio report a five to ten year old problem, and the rest of the cities (Abilene, Dallas, Galveston and Tyler) report that they have developed significant gang problems only within the last five years.

Most cities report that most gangs change substantially in a year's time. Austin and Houston indicate that some gangs---not all---are more stable, maintaining their name, membership and leadership more than a year. El Paso, with the longest-standing gang tradition, reports stability more or less across the board.

Galveston, Houston, and Austin report high involvement of gangs in drug trafficking. The other nine report that a minority of gangs are involved in drugs. Among gain-oriented gangs, activities include drugs, (distribution, sale), theft, burglary, robbery, auto theft, stolen merchandise and prostitution. Odessa was alone in reporting that gang activities were driving property crime rates well above what they would be otherwise. A majority of respondents estimated that gangs were having a moderate effect on property crime rates.

The term "wilding" is sometimes used to refer to groupings, usually spontaneous and short-lived, for the purpose of committing senseless, random acts of destruction and violence. This kind of "recreational violence" (as it is also called) may include assaults, window smashings and arson. Abilene, Harlingen and Odessa reported that nothing of

that kind had ever happened in their cities, to their knowledge. The other nine cities have experienced this phenomenon. In El Paso, San Antonio and Dallas recreational violence sprees are a recurring problem.

Responses to Multiple Choice Questions

Twelve Texas Cities

January 1992

In your estimation, what percentage of the gangs in your local gang count are heavily involved in drug trafficking (not just dealing and using within the gang, and not just motivated by the desire for drugs, but trafficking?)

<i>Most</i>	<i>67-75%</i>	<i>Half</i>	<i>25-33%</i>	<i>Very few</i>
1	2	0	4	5

In your opinion, how do gain-oriented gangs impact local property crime rates (do not include vandalism in the form of graffiti)?

<i>Gangs drive rates way above normal</i>	<i>Gangs have a moderate effect</i>	<i>Gangs do not seem to have any impact</i>	<i>No information is available</i>
1	7	2	2

Have you observed any incidence of "wilding" or recreational violence in your jurisdiction?

<i>This is a recurring problem</i>	<i>This has happened</i>	<i>This has never happened</i>
3	6	3

Migration, Mobility and Weapons

Almost all of the cities report a lot of migration activity (gang members "moving to" or "changing residence to" their jurisdictions), both from out-of-state (11 of the 12) and from other parts of this state (9 out of 12). Typically, small towns name the nearest large Texas city and Los Angeles as the source cities. Large cities name other large Texas cities---and Los Angeles---as sources of migrating gang members. So far Los Angeles is the only city outside Texas that has been mentioned; reference to Chicago is conspicuously absent. In east Texas, Louisiana is reportedly a source of migrating gang members.

- Only Harlingen (the smallest respondent, with population less than 50,000) reported no migration activity.
- El Paso and San Antonio were exceptional in reporting migration only from Los Angeles, and not from any part of Texas.
- Austin reports the worst gang migration problem, possibly because of its central location. Austin police report migration from all over the state and from Los Angeles.
- No one Texas city stands out so far, as a source city for gang migration.

Almost invariably, the interlopers join local gangs. Less often (half the time?) they start new chapters of their old gangs. Most of the time, out-of-state migrants are judged to have a significant impact on the local gang scene. Respondents were divided on how big a difference in-state migration was making in their gang problems. All cities but Harlingen and Tyler saw gang activity spreading within their jurisdictions into neighborhoods that had been gang-free in the past.

Most cities (7) reported occasional problems with remotely based, highly mobile gangs committing offenses in their jurisdictions. San Antonio and Dallas regularly experience this problem; Harlingen, Tyler and El Paso do not. Nine of the cities had problems with prison gangs.

In Harlingen, it is reported that gang members are usually not armed. In all other cities, many gang members are thought to be armed, much of the time, apparently with a wide variety of weapons. In three cities (San Antonio, Houston, Dallas) it is reported that gangs are armed with assault rifles and fully automatic weapons. Such weapons have been seen in Fort Worth, Austin, and Galveston. Reports of such weapons in five more cities are all unconfirmed.

Assault Rifles and/or Automatic Weapons...

...are definitely being used: *...have been seen here:* *...are reported but not confirmed:*

*Dallas
Houston
San Antonio*

*Austin
Fort Worth
Galveston*

*Abilene
Corpus Christi
El Paso
Odessa
Tyler*

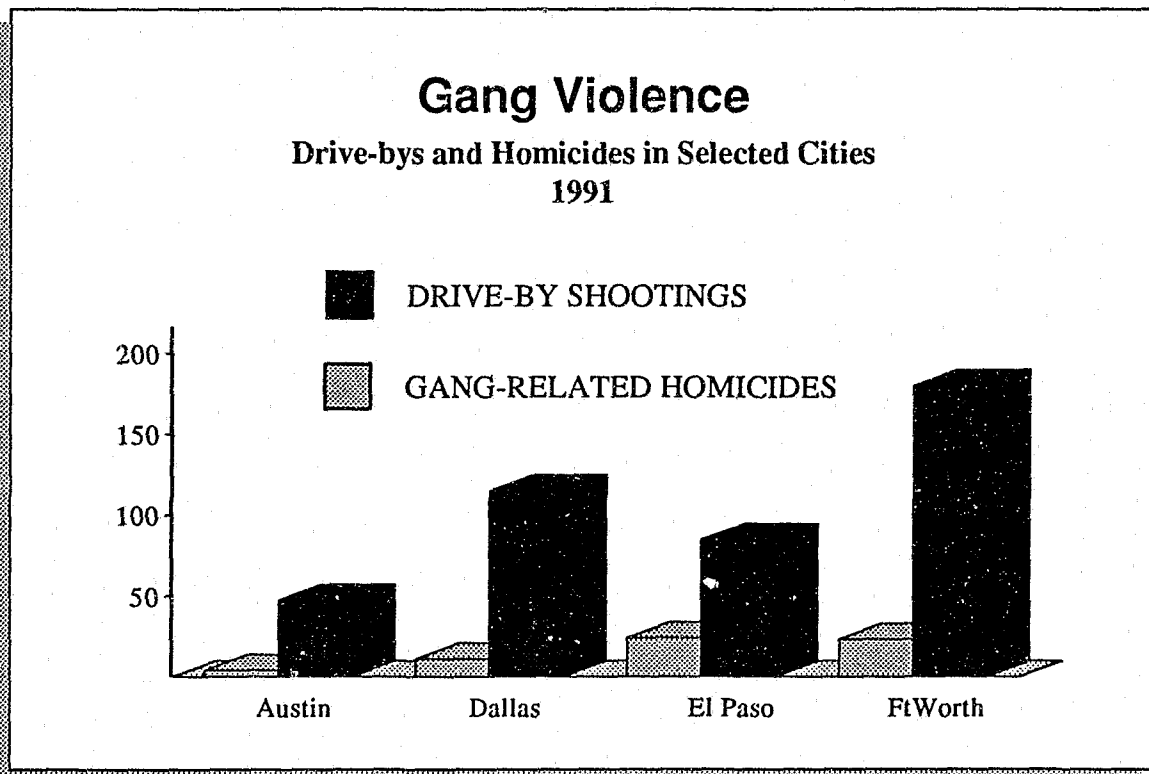
Only Harlingen reports that their gangs do not have such weapons.

Gang-Related Offenses

Reporting of gang-related index crime in 1991 is quite sketchy. Those departments reporting fairly complete numbers (Abilene, Austin and Fort Worth) attribute a fairly small percentage---less than 10%---of reported index crimes to gang activities. The exception, by a small margin, is homicide: in Austin and Fort Worth it is estimated that 12-13% of homicides are gang-related. By contrast, only 1-2% of car thefts and larcenies in Austin and Fort Worth are officially reported as gang crimes. In Austin and elsewhere these very low percentages may reflect the fact that police are still in the process of establishing procedures for flagging offenses for gang-relatedness.

Half of the survey cities (Abilene, Austin, Corpus Christi, Galveston, San Antonio and Tyler) reported ten or fewer homicides that were gang-related or for which a gang-member had been arrested. Dallas reported 11. El Paso and Fort Worth had 24 and 23 gang-related homicides in 1991, respectively. No statistics were available from Houston or Odessa.

Only Harlingen reports no drive-by shootings. The number of such incidents was unknown in San Antonio and Houston. Elsewhere, the numbers ranged from as many as 180 in Fort Worth to as few as 6 in Corpus Christi. Dallas reported 115 drive-bys, and El Paso was not far behind with 85. Austin, Abilene, Odessa and Tyler formed a middle range (25-75 drive-bys), while Galveston reported only 8.



Comparing Gang Prevalence in the Survey Cities

To account for differences in size, gang prevalence is expressed in the table below as a rate (gangs per 100,000 population). In order to focus on levels of more serious kinds of criminal activity, rates are calculated on the basis of the total number of gangs *excluding* delinquent youth gangs.

El Paso has the highest rate of criminal gang prevalence (well over 30 gangs per 100,000), followed by Galveston and Fort Worth (both with 25-30 gangs per 100,000). Austin, Odessa and Tyler form a third group, each with around 10-15 gangs per 100,000. All other cities trail with fewer than 5 gangs per 100,000 population.

City:	Population:	Gangs Per 100,000 pop. <i>Not Counting Delinquent Youth Gangs</i>
Abilene	106,654	0
Austin	465,622	13
Corpus Christi	257,453	3**
Dallas	1,006,877	2*
El Paso	515,342	37
Fort Worth	447,619	27
Galveston	59,070	30
Harlingen	48,735	0
Houston	1,630,553	4
Odessa	89,699	11
San Antonio	935,933	2**
Tyler	75,450	11

**The Dallas gang database has just recently been purged of all inactive entries.*

***But these gangs are quite large.*

The levels of activity reported for Austin, El Paso, Fort Worth and Houston are all entirely consistent with past reports. Dallas' rate has dropped very low, compared to last year's report; this is at least partly due to a purging of its database. The number of drive-by shootings in Dallas in the past year indicates that if Dallas' gangs are few, they are very active. Harlingen's and Abilene's rates are also below earlier reports, mainly because the rates shown in this report do not take delinquent youth gangs into account.

Galveston has a relatively high rate of criminal gang activity. A newcomer to the statewide survey, Galveston has some cause for concern; further research is needed to

determine whether factors other than actual gang prevalence are causing that city's numbers to look high in the context of this report. Galveston does report five gang-related homicides in 1991, a fairly high number for its size.

General Observations

Texas has what is often called an "emerging"---as opposed to "chronic"---gang problem, in the sense that the problem is recent, increasing, and changeable in nature. As Texas law enforcement agencies scramble to adapt, reported data varies not just with the gang situation but in response to changes in official perceptions and police procedures as well. A few generalities are supported by the data, however.

The preliminary survey suggests that the typical medium-sized Texas city (population 50,000-100,000) has delinquent youth gangs and at least one other more serious kind of gang. These gangs are posing a moderate law enforcement problem. Larger cities show a wider range of kinds of gangs and a greater prevalence of the more seriously criminal kinds of gangs. However, even in large cities, a significant portion (30%) of the "gang count" consists of delinquent youth gangs.

Turf-based gangs are widespread, accounting for the largest share (34%) of the overall gang count in the long survey. Gain-oriented gangs are not far behind, making up a little less than a third of the gang count in the 12 cities participating in the long survey. Violent/hate gangs are much less common than any other kind, comprising only 4% of all gangs.

Drugs rank high with theft and robbery in the activities of gain-oriented gangs; however, only a small portion of gangs (even in most large cities) are involved in serious drug traffic. There is little support for sensational images of gangs as heavily armed and highly organized narcotics distribution networks. Gangs of this ilk exist, however, in some of the larger cities.

Numbers of gangs and gang members generally appear to be on the rise. In addition, Texas is evidently on the receiving end of an active migratory path that originates in Los Angeles. El Paso and Fort Worth stand out as centers of relatively intense gang activity, but semantic differences continue to compromise statewide rankings. Galveston's situation would bear watching at this time. Odessa and Tyler appear to be fairly active, among medium-sized cities. A couple of cities---Austin, Dallas and Harlingen---may have experienced real decreases in gang totals in the past year, but they were exceptions.

For the state as a whole, the surveys give little reason for hope that the problem will go away on its own anytime soon. The very widespread presence of delinquent youth gangs, even in very small towns, is ominous. Though the majority of delinquent youth gangs do not evolve into more serious kinds of gangs, it is not advisable to ignore experimentation with gang subcultures among large numbers of young people.

PART THREE: Implications for a Policy on Gangs

The Attorney General surveys in 1991 and 1992 show that, in one form or another, gangs are a widespread and persistent presence in most Texas cities and towns today. In some places gangs are relatively harmless groups whose members commit minor offenses. But although a significant portion of gangs are delinquent youth gangs, a much more substantial portion are not. Seventy percent---more than two-thirds---of the gang members counted in the 1992 survey are involved in turf-based, gain-oriented or violent/hate gangs. By definition, these are groups associated with more than minor offenses. And while there is no firm empirical evidence that delinquent youth gangs naturally evolve into more serious kinds of gangs, it is widely believed by practitioners in the field that they often do.

In this report gangs are delinquent or criminal by definition, so there is some circularity in pointing out that gangs are an unwholesome fashion in adolescent groups. But there is substance to the claim: the values, behaviors, heroes and goals associated with the gang style tend to be both violent and criminal, even when the adherents to the style are not themselves violent or criminal. The fact that gangs are a form of adolescent grouping behavior (normal enough, in itself) makes them that much more undesirable: the destructive aspects of gang behavior are driven by such powerful forces as group identification and peer pressure.

The potential costs associated with the gangs in Texas cities are too great to be ignored. Gang involvement drives up the odds that a young person who experiments with delinquency and criminality will make worse mistakes, will have a harder time backing away from the brink, and will be more likely to end up in the adult criminal justice system. Wherever youth groups are emulating gang behavior, there is cause for concern and reason for action among educators, law enforcement officials, and leaders at all levels of government.

The Need for Balanced and Comprehensive Gang Policy

Research so far has shown that the Texas gang problem is complex. There are many kinds of gangs, and many levels of gang involvement. There is also more than one reason for public policy to focus on gangs. Gangs tend to be regarded as a law enforcement issue, and indeed they are at least that. However, much gang activity is not criminal, and members of many delinquent youth gangs are committing offenses that have little to do with public safety. Young people involved in truancy and substance abuse are harming themselves above all at great potential human and societal cost.

A comprehensive gang policy cannot be any simpler than the problem itself. An effective solution must provide appropriate responses for all kinds of gangs and all levels of gang involvement. The overall plan must address public safety issues and, beyond that, the well-being and future self-sufficiency of at-risk and disadvantaged youth. The problem has to be addressed on both the state and local level, cooperatively, and the goal must always be the most efficient and effective allocation of resources in response to a community's unique situation.

Community Response

Community response begins with an acknowledgment. In some cities, residents and officials are reluctant to admit that there is a gang problem. They may be concerned about their community's image, or they may be concerned about the negative effects of "labelling" young people as gang members. Some community leaders are even afraid that by giving the problem any attention, they will be encouraging gangs by giving them the notoriety they seek.

All of these concerns are legitimate, all should be addressed, and all can be met. Nothing can damage a community's image more than gang graffiti and drive-by shootings---and these do not go away when they are ignored. Inappropriate press coverage and negative labelling are best met head-on by community awareness and a deliberate, enlightened policy toward gang behavior in local youth.

Part of the antidote to "denial" lies in accurate and unexaggerated description of the local problem. Gangs have been studied on the state level, but only in the most general terms. Community organizations, schools and law enforcement agencies must come together and agree on the basics: what kinds of gangs are present? How many? What kinds of offenses are being committed? Armed with this empirical foundation, a community can first prioritize its needs and then look for ideas and resources to address them.

The State Team on Gang Policy

The State Team on Gang Policy is a state-level, interagency collaboration to support community-based programs in their efforts to address the youth gang problem. The team was formed as a result of a Federal Law Enforcement Training Center's Gang/Drug POLICY course, presented under the sponsorship of the US Department of Justice, at the invitation of the Attorney General, in Austin on December 9-13, 1991. In addition to the Office of the Attorney General, agencies represented on the state team include the Texas Education Agency, Texas Youth Commission (juvenile corrections), the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission, the Governor's Office, the Texas Department of Human Services,

the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (Institutional Division) and the Comptroller of Public Accounts.

The state team provides communities with technical assistance, information about model programs and funding, and a voice in the state capitol. The team's basic strategy is to use the combined existing resources and infrastructures of the component agencies to establish two-way communications between local community organizations and policymakers in state agency administration. The ongoing and major function of the interagency State Team on Gang Policy is to disseminate information and technical assistance to community organizations, particularly with regard to program design and evaluation. Many Texas communities are already well on their way to setting standards for excellence in gang prevention and intervention.

The Elements of Gang Policy

Gang policy generally is built out of three separate but interrelated strategies: suppression, intervention and prevention. Suppression is primarily a public safety-oriented strategy, and it is most appropriate in response to regular and hard-core members of the most serious kinds of gangs. The most deeply committed members of the most intensely criminal gangs may be as dangerous and destructive as any offenders entering the criminal justice system---perhaps more so, because they may control the actions of several other people. Whether they can be rehabilitated or not, they should be removed from the streets.

Intervention strategies are designed for less deeply committed gang-involved youth, who are less dangerous and much the worse for being gang-involved. Driving a wedge between these young people and their gangs may be sufficient to disarm them. Given the volume of offenders and the capacity of the corrections system, efficiency demands that these young people be diverted if possible. Because of the role that gang affiliation can play in delinquency and criminal behavior, it is arguable that gang intervention is a form of crime prevention.

Prevention has its theatre in the lowest levels of gang-involvement. The young and marginally gang-involved are standing at a crossroads. If nothing at all is done, most will never commit a very serious offense. Some will commit crimes that need not have occurred. Others will embark on full-blown criminal careers. Good policy can have a real impact on the outcome. A few young people will go wrong in any case, despite what anybody does. But many children who are at risk can be guided in the right direction before they have harmed themselves or anyone else.

Gangs as a Public Safety Concern

From a public safety standpoint, suppression is an indispensable part of gang policy. Suppression is primarily the work of police and prosecutors, and the fundamental suppressive tactic is to track hard-core gang members (or leaders) and target them for prosecution. The rationale for this program lies in the fact that, when gang leaders are removed from the streets, their gangs tend to break up, at least temporarily. It is in the nature of a gang that, typically, out of a group of collaborating offenders, a few are committing serious offenses and instigating criminal behavior in others. In that case, targeting the leaders is very efficient law enforcement policy.

The criminal intelligence function plays a central role in this stratagem. A knowledge of standing gang associations can be useful for clearing and even anticipating gang-related crimes. Knowing who the members are, how long they have been members, and what they say about each other can reveal who the leaders are in gang-related incidents. This kind of analytic effort only makes sense for serious gang activity and only for those individuals really earning the most severe law enforcement response: hard-core members of turf-based, gain-oriented or violent/hate gangs.

Specific Gang-Suppressive Tactics

Special police tactics should be specific to the kinds of gangs occurring locally. Some examples:

- Where delinquent youth gangs predominate, suppressive efforts should consist primarily of truancy interdiction and the enforcement of school dress and conduct codes. The first of these strategies should probably involve police; the second and third may be achieved primarily within schools or through collaborations between schools and police.
- Where turf gangs are prevalent, it is of paramount importance to monitor, document and paint over gang graffiti. Where gangs are particularly violent, it may be necessary to target leaders for prosecution on whatever charges can be brought and made to stick. It is essential for police to have deep networking with community groups, so as to be forewarned when rivalries are especially high and when rival gangs are on a discernible collision course.
- Where gain-oriented gangs predominate, tactics are dictated by the nature of the activities: narcotics traffic calls for sweeps, stings and the involvement of multiagency task forces. Where minor thefts and burglaries are very prevalent research shows that truancy interdiction can be very effective in reducing property crime rates.

- Where violent/hate gangs are a problem, cultural sensitivity is at a premium. Once again, for police, acceptance in the community may be important for clearing crimes and targeting leaders. In Dallas, swift and severe judicial response has been effective in suppressing racist gang activity in the past.

The important ingredients in good suppressive policy are efficiency and rapport with the community. With finite resources, law enforcement efforts must be accurately focused. Police forces cannot function as occupying armies. They must have the help and cooperation of the community to identify and stop the leaders of those gangs posing the greatest threat to the public safety.

Beyond Public Safety: Intervention

It is the aim of intervention to divert already gang-involved youth who do not require incarceration. In general, intervention must involve two elements: breaking up the relationship to the gang *and replacing it*. Gang membership generally serves a purpose in the gang member's life. To keep youth out of gangs, the needs met by gang involvement have to be met some other way.

Gang members are normally between the ages of 14 and 24. Most have not performed well at school, and many have dropped out. Very often, they have brothers or fathers or uncles who have been in gangs. Many have been undersupervised. Many are impoverished and without prospects. These young people turn to gangs in search of acceptance, companionship, recognition, and a feeling of success.

Particular intervention strategies vary with the age of the gang members and the kinds of gangs involved. With young gang members, some steps are almost always advisable:

- ***Notify parents.*** Parents often are not aware, or will not face the fact, that their children are involved in gangs. A letter, or better yet a visit, from a police officer or a teacher can sometimes help break through a parent's lack of awareness, fear or indecision.
- ***Mentoring.*** All young people need warm, supportive relationships with adults; research tends to show that gang-involved youth are likely to have lacked positive role models and adequate adult supervision.
- ***Recreational opportunities.*** Some youth simply lack adequate recreational opportunities. Even where recreational facilities and travel plans cannot be lavish, a search can produce willing adult supervisors and corporate sponsors.

- *Attention to educational needs.* Research shows that gang-involved young people are liable to be performing very poorly in school. Intervention must therefore be supported with remediation and with programming designed to make some measure of success and acceptance possible.
- *Decision-making classes.* Any young people involved in risk-taking behavior, whether through gangs or otherwise, can benefit from being taught to visualize and reason through the consequences of their actions.

These measures will not suffice for young people joining gangs out of a fairly intense internal pressure. Some gang members may be living in seriously dysfunctional families; others may have serious emotional or physical illnesses. Recognizing and identifying this special needs group is a very important function of an intervention program. Although gang involvement may be part of the cause of juvenile delinquency, it can also be a symptom of a much deeper problem.

Specific Strategies of Intervention

More specific intervention strategies can be introduced for specific kinds of gangs. Where turf-based gangs are common, for example, a strong neighborhood tradition may be in place. The deep commitment to the neighborhood may actually work in favor of a community service-oriented intervention program.

Turf-based gangs have been characterized in the research as "fighting" gangs. Poor decision-making skills may be amplified by poor conflict resolution abilities (and by a gang tradition that values violent conflict resolution). Turf rivalries may be somewhat amenable to mediation. But mediation in specific situations may have only transitory value. It is more important to teach individuals to learn non-violent ways of resolving conflicts.

Recreational opportunities may be important for members of turf-based gangs, but there may need to be an emphasis on excitement. High-ropes courses are a popular solution. Where hiking, camping, rock climbing and other demanding, testing sports are possible, these can be exceptionally good settings for mentoring and for teaching various social interaction skills, like decision-making and non-violent forms of conflict-resolution.

Turf-based gangs are notorious for being involved in drive-by shootings. It may be important, in developing decision-making skills, for youth to see the grief they cause the families affected by such violence. Gang members also may not clearly understand the very severe consequences of committing such serious crimes.

Gain-oriented gangs require somewhat different tactics. Where youth in gangs see themselves as getting "busy" and getting "paid" the implication is clear. These youth are joining gangs in lieu of preparing for and pursuing legitimate employment. For young gang members involved in minor property crime (where truancy interdiction is the suppressive method of choice), remediation is of paramount importance. For older youth, job training and help with job placement are needed.

Decision-making skills may help these youth, too. The myth of the high-rolling drug dealer should be debunked once and for all. All but a very few drug dealers make a very poor wage in the course of a short career that most often ends in violence, arrest, or addiction. The same is true for other forms of crime for profit. Young people see images of successful criminal entrepreneurs in film and on television. In many cases they simply are not being shown the reality.

In situations where gain-oriented gangs are prevalent, the question must arise whether economic opportunity is a problem for young people growing up in a particular community and whether educational resources in that community are adequate. The answer may very well be "no". Most kids would really rather have a prospect of a good job than join a gang. A dead-end job won't do. These kids want a future. This problem is a hard one. It goes well beyond gang intervention, gang policy and the scope of this report.

Early Prevention

Gang prevention efforts must go beyond merely telling children not to join gangs in the first place. With prevention, as with intervention, children must be able to find alternative ways of getting the things that gangs offer: companionship, acceptance and a setting in which they can be successful. Prevention programs, like interventions, must also include some provision for identifying and attending to children with exceptionally difficult problems.

Early gang prevention is not really distinguishable from basic at-risk youth programs. Specifically anti-gang curricula may promote awareness in schools about what gangs are and how they may be destructive. But unless needy children are targeted and cared for, specific programs will have an impact only on the least at risk. It is not possible to predict gang involvement for any particular child, nor is there any real reason to focus resources on kids especially at risk of being gang-involved. At this level, the driving concern should be for the well-being of all children.

Truly preventive efforts must address educational needs, particularly early on. Most of what children seek in gangs can be found in school and school activities---provided that a child feels welcome, accepted and reasonably successful in school. Here again, solving the "gang problem" turns out to involve very broad and basic social necessities. Early gang prevention requires nothing less than shoring up the quality of a community's schools. In addition, latchkey programs can be helpful for children of working parents during the afterschool hours. Culturally rich curricula can promote pride and a sense of belonging.

Building Coalitions

The burden falls heavily on communities in every aspect of gang policy. Effective gang suppression hinges on the solid working partnership of schools, police and community organizations. Gang prevention and intervention end with the most difficult and fundamental challenges: how to provide a good education and a promising future for every child. State government can help by providing information, references and technical support. State government can help communities identify and obtain funds. In the end, gang-affected communities---parents, teachers, leaders and law enforcement---have to make it happen.

Anti-gang programs begin with a community that has come together and acknowledged that its youth are joining gangs. Residents, educators, parents, police, media and community leaders have to send a clear message to the gangs: graffiti will not be allowed to mar the walls of buildings. Newspapers and television can report the community's problems and its progress without glorifying any individual gang or act of violence. Many cities, towns and neighborhoods have demonstrated the power of united involvement and shrewd policy, even where funds were scarce.

Conclusion

Gang policy must be driven by a sharp awareness of all the interrelated facets of the problem. Different levels of gang-involvement and different kinds of gangs all require somewhat different strategies. And our goals are not just crime reduction and prevention, but individual and public welfare as well. On both the state and community levels, our response to the gang problem needs to be balanced in terms of suppression, intervention and prevention; and it needs to be prioritized on the basis of a sound assessment of unique local conditions.

At the state level, the first task in formulating a response to the emergence of gangs in Texas has been to study and assess the problem. The Office of the Attorney General has published three state-wide gang reports. Several police departments and community organizations have published local studies. Academic studies are now underway, and Texas has been the site of several conferences and training courses on gangs. Progress is being made on the definitional issues that have compromised the reporting of gang data up to now.

Though much remains to be done in the area of research, it is not too soon to move forward with solutions based on what is already known. The Legislature has formed committees to evaluate the need for statutory revisions affecting the prosecution of gang members. A number of state agencies are working to amplify their gang-related programming. The State Team on Gang Policy has been established to help communities seeking guidance with programming, funding and technical assistance. And many cities and towns have mobilized in the last year.

The 1992 Attorney General's Gang Survey shows that significant numbers of gangs, especially in the larger cities, are involved in serious criminal activities such as drive-by shootings, dealing drugs, stealing, and mounting senseless assaults on innocent people. Committed gang members of serious gangs should be targeted for prosecution and should have priority status in the criminal justice system. With limited resources available for law enforcement, it is especially important for police to concentrate their efforts on the most influential and dangerous gang members.

Many gang members are not and never will be a serious law enforcement problem. Delinquent youth gangs, by definition, are groups of young people who engage in no more serious offenses than truancy, drinking alcohol and experimenting with drugs. And many peripheral members of more serious gangs are not themselves committing serious crimes---if anything, they are jeopardizing their own safety by associating with serious criminals. They are most often impoverished and without prospects. They tend to be in

poor health and greatly at risk of being victims of violence. This has not so much to do with public safety as with chronic poverty, work force competence, productivity and the possibility of decent self-sufficiency.

Ultimately, the sheer numbers of young people flirting with gang behavior will force us to move beyond a single-minded, law enforcement-oriented approach to the gang problem. Community and state leaders alike will have to turn their attention to the pervasive social conditions that leave young children and families without adequate child care and allow significant numbers of children to fail at school. In difficult economic times, it is unlikely that expensive solutions---however just or needed---will be available. Progress will have to come through cooperation, collaboration, accountability and the most effective and efficient program strategies that can be found.

Additional Resources:

Also available from the Office of the Attorney General:

Gangs in Texas Cities: Background, Survey Results and State-level Policy Options, June 1991. *Last year's Attorney General Gang Report.*

Model Programs Report No. 1: Parks and Recreations, September 1991. *Articles describing promising gang prevention and intervention programs around the state.*

Available from other sources:

Rising above Gangs and Drugs: How to Start a Community Reclamation Project, Natalie Salazar (2041 Pacific Coast Highway, Suite 2B, Lomita, California 90717)

Gangs in Schools: Breaking Up is Hard to Do, National School Safety Center, (Pepperdine University, Malibu, California 90263)

National Youth Gang Suppression & Intervention Program technical assistance manuals, Irving Spergel *et al* (University of Chicago, School of Social Service Administration, 969 East 60th Street, Chicago, Illinois 60637)

Additional reading:

Barrio Gangs, James Diego Vigil (University of Texas Press, 1988).

Dangerous Society, Carl Taylor (Michigan State, 1989).

Deadly Consequences, Deborah Prothrow-Stith (Harper Collins, 1991).

Girls, Delinquency and Juvenile Justice, Meda Chesney-Lind (Brooks/Cole, 1992).

Islands in the Street, Martin Sanchez Jankowski (University of California Press, 1991).

What can we do about gangs?

✓ *Acknowledge the problem.*

In some communities, residents and officials are afraid to admit that there is a gang problem. They may be concerned about their community's image, or they may be concerned about the negative effects of "labelling" young people as gang members. Some people are even afraid that by giving the problem any attention, they will be encouraging gangs, by giving them the notoriety they seek. All of these concerns should be addressed, and all can be met. Denial is never beneficial. You cannot solve the problem until you admit that it exists.

✓ *Announce your intentions.*

Send a clear message to the gangs in your community that you plan to do something about your situation. One good way to do this is to call neighborhood meetings for citizens concerned about gangs. Another way to announce your intentions is to clean up graffiti---and keep it cleaned up. Arrange to hear about new graffiti promptly. Always photograph the marks for documentation. Graffiti is the newsletter of the gangs: read it, then paint it over. Involve parents and neighbors. These actions do not challenge the gangs, but they do communicate your determination to reclaim your streets.

✓ *Assess the problem.*

Every locality has its own version of the gang problem. Before you can begin to find solutions to your own situation, you must understand it. How many gangs and gang members are there? What kinds of gangs are present? Do you have an emerging or a chronic gang problem? What sorts of local conditions are contributing to gang activity? To gather this information you must establish cooperative relations between schools, police, and community organizations.

Dan Morales

Texas Attorney General