OJJDP NYGC Fact Sheet

June 2002 #01

# 2000 Survey of Youth Gangs in Indian Country

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## Background

Since 1995, the National Youth Gang Center (NYGC) has conducted an annual survey of law enforcement agencies regarding gang activity. The National Youth Gang Survey (NYGS) is based on a nationally representative sample of more than 3,000 law enforcement agencies serving larger cities, suburban counties, smaller cities, and rural counties. As tribal police departments are not included in the survey sample, detailed data about youth gang activity in Indian country[1] has largely been absent. In 2001, NYGC implemented a survey of youth gangs in Indian country, surveying 577 federally recognized tribal communities to measure the presence, size, and activity of youth gangs in these communities.

## Definitions

The survey defines an Indian "community" as:

> [P]ersons of American Indian, Alaska Native, or Aleut heritage who reside within the limits of Indian reservations, pueblos, rancherias, villages, dependent Indian communities, or Indian allotments, and who together comprise a federally recognized tribe or community. Communities also include people who have been recognized by the United States government as a tribe or tribal community, but who do not occupy tribal trust, tribally owned, or Indian allotment lands. Communities are the people and land together or tribal community viewed as a group. Land without the people is not considered a community for the purpose of this survey.

Survey respondents provided information for "youth gangs," defined as groups of youth or young adults in their community that they or "other responsible tribal members or service providers [were] willing to identify or classify" as "gangs."

## Response Rates

Survey distribution efforts initially targeted tribal leaders. To increase response rates, NYGC later extended efforts to include law enforcement agencies that serve tribal communities. Overall, 300 (52 percent) of the communities responded to the survey. Survey findings are based solely on completed surveys and are not necessarily representative of all Indian communities.

## Findings

Twenty-three percent (n=69) of Indian communities reported active youth gangs during 2000 (see Figure 1). For the remainder of this Fact Sheet, these will be called the "respondents." Seventy percent of communities reported no gang activity, and 7 percent reported they could not make a determination.[2]

The estimated number of youth gangs reported by respondents ranged from 1 to 40 gangs per Indian country community. As shown in Figure 2, 59 percent reported 1 to 5 gangs, 19 percent indicated 6 to 10, and 6 percent reported more than 10. Sixteen percent could not provide an estimate. The estimated number of gang members per community reported by respondents ranged from 4 to 750. Figure 3 reveals that 32 percent reported 25 or fewer gang members, 12 percent identified 26 to 50, 16 percent reported more than 50, and 41 percent did not know.[3]

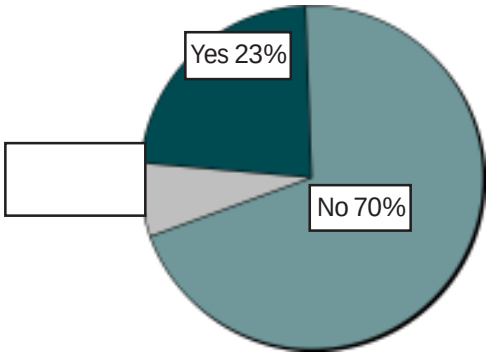


Figure 1: Youth Gang Activity in Indian Country, 2000 (n=300)

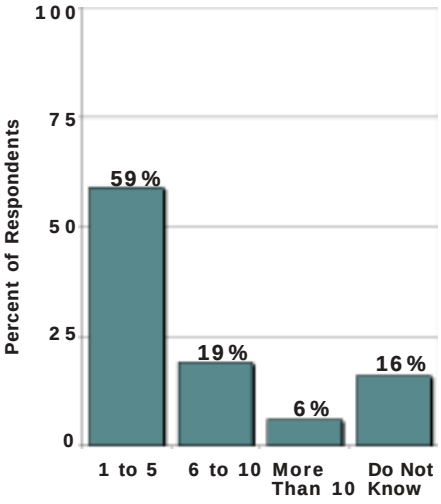


Figure 2: Number of Gangs in Indian Country, 2000 (n=69)

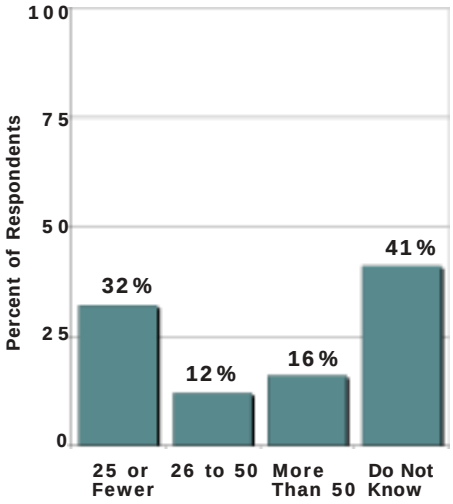


Figure 3: Number of Gang Members in Indian Country, 2000 (n=69)

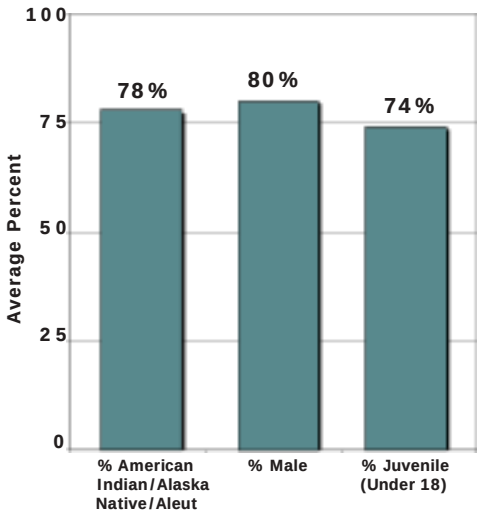


Figure 4: Demographic Characteristics of Gang Members in Indian Country, 2000 (n≥55)

Respondents estimated that, on average, 80 percent of gang members in Indian country were male and 20 percent were female.[4] They reported that the vast majority (78 percent) of gang members in Indian country were American Indian, Alaska Native or Aleut, followed by Hispanic/Latino (12 percent), Caucasian (7 percent), African American (2 percent), and Asian (2 percent). Respondents reported that approximately one-quarter of the gang members in their community were younger than 15 and that almost half were between 15 and 17 years old, suggesting that almost 75 percent were juveniles (younger than 18). Figure 4 highlights a few of the most significant findings related to demographic characteristics.

Respondents also estimated, on average, that 82 percent of the identified gangs included both male and female members, 10 percent were female-dominated (more than 50 percent of the gang members were female), and 35 percent were racially/ethnically mixed.

According to respondents, the offense that gang members were most frequently involved in was graffiti (47 percent of gang problem communities reported a high degree of involvement for this offense), followed by vandalism (40 percent), drug sales (22 percent), and aggravated assault (15 percent) (see Figure 5). Seventy-eight percent of respondents reported no gang-related homicides, 14 percent reported one, and 8 percent reported two or more gang-related homicides in 2000.

Figure 6 is a cumulative time line of when those respondents who reported gang activity in 2000 first identified a gang problem in their community. Less than 10 percent of respondents reported youth gang activity in their communities before 1988, suggesting the relatively recent emergence of gang problems in most of the communities (see Figure 6). Seventy-four percent of the communities reported their year of gang problem onset after 1990.

Forty-nine percent of respondents indicated that, when compared with 1999, their youth gang problem in 2000 had stayed about the same. Thirty-four percent reported that it had worsened, and 17 percent indicated that it had improved.

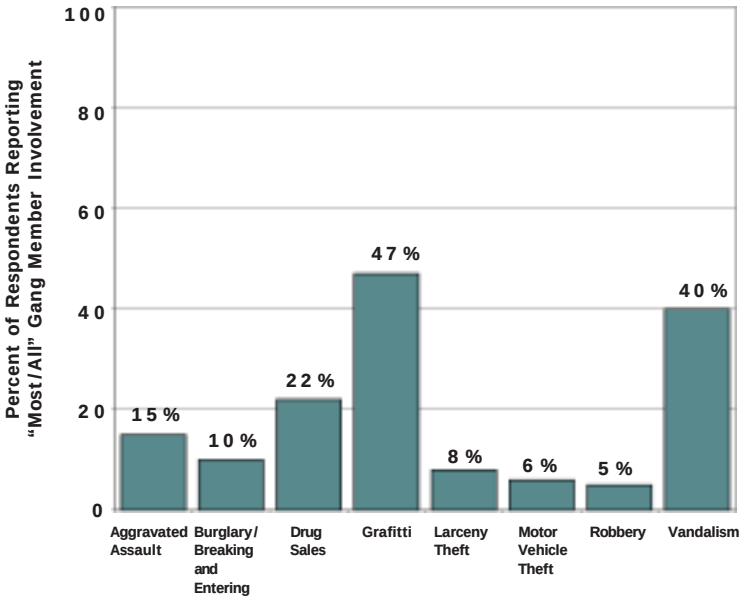


Figure 5: Gang Member Involvement in Offenses in Indian Country, 2000 (n≥66)

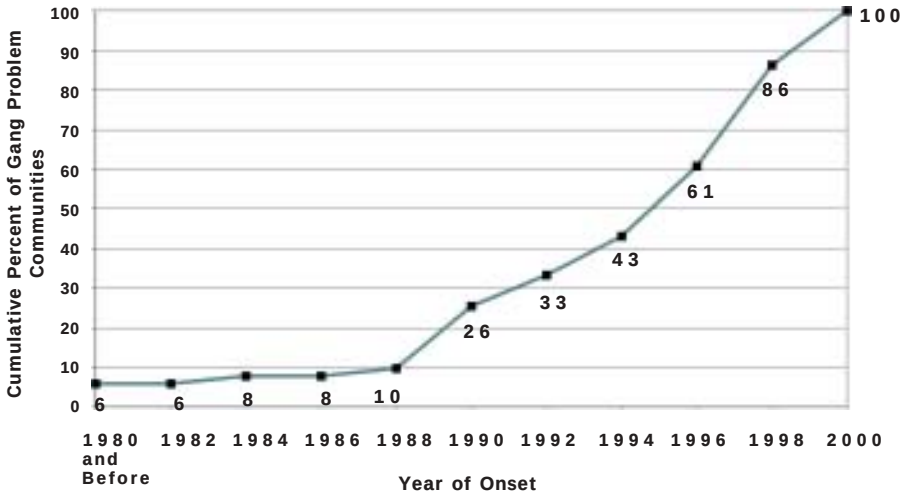


Figure 6: Proliferation of Gang Activity in Indian Country Communities with Gang Problems in 2000 (n=51)

When respondents were asked to rate the seriousness of various social problems in their community, 96 percent reported alcohol abuse as a serious or very serious problem, followed by drug abuse (88 percent), and domestic violence (80 percent). Of the eight social problems respondents were asked to rate, youth gangs ranked second to last as a problem (52 percent of communities), above violent juvenile crime (42 percent).

## Summary

Twenty-three percent of responding tribal communities reported experiencing a youth gang problem in 2000. The extent of the gang problem varied considerably among communities, with many reporting comparatively few youth gangs and gang members. Gang members were most often reported to be juvenile and male. Although gang members' reported involvement in crime varied, it most often included graffiti and vandalism.

These findings add to the current understanding of the presence and impact of gang activity in Indian country and have important implications for subsequent policy and practice regarding tribal youth. Recognizing that the majority of gang members in Indian country are young and many are female, gang prevention efforts should target all youth during late childhood and early adolescence. Additional programs addressing a range of strategies devoted to the prevention, control, and reduction of youth crime in Indian country, such as the Tribal Youth Program,[5] should be established in these communities. Furthermore, as the gang problem in Indian country appears to be an extension of more serious community problems, policies aimed at improving overall conditions of these areas most likely will have a concurrent positive impact on the community's gang problem.

## Notes

1. "Indian country" is defined in 18 U.S.C. §1151(a)- (c).
2. Communities reporting "do not know" are presented here due to their appreciable number. Unless noted, elsewhere in this Fact Sheet "do not know" responses are excluded from the analysis.
3. Percentages do not total 100 due to rounding.
4. Throughout this Fact Sheet, all results are based on unweighted data due to the significant reduction in eligible cases for weighting procedures. Therefore, caution must be exercised when interpreting these results.
5. For more information about the tribal youth program, which is administered by OJJDP, see Andrews, Chyrl, 1999; *Tribal Youth Program*. Fact Sheet. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

## For Further Information

Additional analyses of the 2000 Survey of Youth Gangs in Indian Country are ongoing and a comprehensive report of the findings is forthcoming. For additional information about youth gangs, contact NYGC at (800) 446-0912, or www.iir.com/nygc/.

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