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Youth Gangs in Texas: Part II

Introduction

Today, attention to crime in general and youth crime in particular has increased. Though recent figures demonstrate a decline in crime and violence, public concern remains high, demonstrating itself in "get tough" legislation at both the state and federal level. One factor that is suggested to have contributed to past growth in violent youth crime is gangs. Findings reported by the National Institute of Justice do little to ease the rising concern about youth gangs. Using even the most conservative estimate, NIJ calculated the number of gangs in 1993 to be 8,625 and the number of gang members to be 378,807. These are increases of 76.7 percent and 51.9 percent, respectively from the 1991 estimates (Curry, Ball and Decker 1996). Texas has not been left behind in the growth of youth gangs. A recent Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention bulletin reports from their 1995 National Youth Gang Survey that Texas is led only by California in the total number of gangs (Bilchik 1997).

Beyond the growth in the number of gangs, research suggests that changes have also occurred in the membership and structure of youth gangs. The purpose of this bulletin is to explore the membership and organizational structure of Texas' youth gangs.

Background

Problems with making an accurate and reliable assessment of the number and nature of gangs begin with difficulties in defining the term "gang." The literature demonstrates a

wide range of definitions used by researchers, legislators and criminal justice agencies. Variations in defining the term lead to difficulties in assessing not only the number of gangs and gang members but also the level of gang activity and the contribution of gangs to the crime rate. The definitional differences also impede cross-jurisdictional comparisons (see, for example Maxson and Klein 1990).

For purposes of this bulletin, a "gang" is defined as "...three or more persons having a common identifying sign or symbol or an identifiable leadership who continually or regularly associate in the commission of criminal activities" (Texas Penal Code). A youth gang is composed largely of individuals age 17 and under.

Despite the difficulties in defining gangs, efforts have been made to assess the number and nature of youth gangs in America today. Beyond the increases in the number of gangs and gang members mentioned above, changes in their demographic composition and structure have also occurred. For example, researchers have documented important changes regarding the age of gang members. Spergel (1990) suggests that in recent decades the age range of gang members has expanded, with members remaining in gangs longer than ever before. Howell (1994) reports that gang members range in age from approximately 12 to 25, with the peak around 17. He also reports that in cities where gangs only recently emerged, juveniles make up approximately 90 percent of the members, while in cities with more established gangs, 74 percent may be adults.

Changes have also been noted in youth gangs' gender and racial/ethnic composition. Although most gang members are male, research indicates an increase in female participation. According to Spergel (1990), "females are most likely to be members of auxiliaries to male youth gangs, occasionally to be members of mixed-sex gangs, and least likely to be members of independent or unaffiliated female gangs" (p. 220). Changes have also occurred in the race and ethnicity of gangs, with mixed race/ethnic membership patterns no longer uncommon (Spergel 1990).

Though the findings are less consistent, research suggests that changes have taken place in the organization of youth gangs, as well. For example, the spread of gangs to small towns has led to questions concerning local gang connections to a larger gang network. A purposeful spread of gangs could be an indication of an increase in organizational structure. Most research, however, suggests that the spread to small towns is a result of family movement or the creation of local gangs (Maxson and Klein 1993).

Finally, two important changes in the criminal activities of youth gangs have occurred. First, while historically youth gangs were rarely involved in controlled substance offenses (Spergel 1990), studies have found that some gangs are now involved in drug trafficking (Fagan 1990; Klein and Maxson 1990). Second, research indicates an increase in violent crimes committed (Spergel 1990). Some associate this increase with the increase of weaponry sophistication used by gang members (Klein and Maxson 1989; Spergel 1990).

The Survey

Interest in the nature of youth gangs in Texas prompted this month's bulletin. Agencies were asked to report on the total number of youth gangs in their jurisdiction. They were then asked to provide more detailed information on the five most serious gangs, including age, gender and racial/ethnic composition, organizational level, territory, and criminal activities. Questionnaires were returned from 38 agencies.


Number of youth gangs. Information was obtained on 175 different youth gangs. Responses to questions on the number and names of the five most serious gangs are reported in Table 1. It is interesting to note that every respondent reported at least two youth gangs. There is, however, a wide range in the number of youth gangs per agency. While the average is 49, the number ranges from two reported by the Rosenberg Police Department (note, however, that Rosenberg appears to have reported on sets rather than individual gangs) to 797 reported by the San Antonio Police Department. Six other agencies report over 100 youth gangs—El Paso, Garland, Arlington, Euless, and Fort Worth police departments, and Harris County Sheriff's Department.

Gang membership and structure. Agencies were asked a series of questions about the membership and structure of the youth gangs labeled as the most serious in their jurisdiction (see Table 2). Of the 175 gangs, the average number of members in each gang is 170. However, it should be noted that there is a wide range in the number of members per gang. The smallest gang, the Southside 13, reported by the Cleburne Police Department, has five members. The largest gang consisting of 1,000 members is the WSV Kings reported by the San Antonio Police Department. Table 2 also displays findings indicating changes in membership since the gang's inception. Of the 175 gangs, 63 percent are reported to have a membership that has increased, 23 percent have remained the same and 9 percent have decreased.

Respondents were queried as to the gangs' age range, gender and ethnic composition and their perception of the overall level of organization (see Table 2). A majority (91%) of all the gangs had members whose ages ranged from under 10 to adulthood. Only a small percentage (6%) had a membership that was limited to youths under the age of 18. In terms of gender, the findings support the idea that female gang participation is growing. While exclusively female gangs are rare (<1% of the reported 175 gangs), those consisting of both males and females are the most common (63% of the sample). Exclusively male gangs comprised 36 percent of all those reported in the survey. Regarding ethnicity, exclusively Hispanic gangs make up 34 percent of the total, followed by African American (17%), other (3%), Vietnamese (2%), and Caucasian (2%). However, the majority (42%), consist of individuals from more than one ethnic or racial group. When asked about the organization of the gangs, respondents reported that 12 percent of the gangs were "very unorganized" and 20 percent were "unorganized." Most, however, are perceived to have achieved some level of organization. Forty-five percent are "somewhat organized," 18 percent "organized" and 5 percent "very organized."


Gang establishment and area. Respondents were next asked a series of questions about when the gang was first established and the extent of their territory. As shown in Table 3, none of the gangs identified as one of the five most serious in the respondents' jurisdiction were established less than 6 months ago. Five percent were established six months to a year ago, 18 percent between one to two years, and 33 percent between two to five years ago. The largest percent (42%) was established more than five years ago.

Two questions were asked to determine the territory in which the youth gang was established and its relationship to a larger set. Fifty-five percent of the gangs that respondents identified as the most serious in their jurisdiction were believed to cover the agency's entire jurisdiction. Thirty-



five percent had a territory covering two or three neighborhoods and 10 percent were limited to one neighborhood. In terms of connections to another gang or a larger set, the majority (53%) identified are specific to the agency's jurisdiction and do not have connections to a state-, region- or nationwide gang. Although over half of the gangs are identified as jurisdiction-specific, 16 percent have region-, 22 percent have nation- and 4 percent have statewide gang connections.


Gang-related crimes. The last section of the survey asked respondents to indicate the types of criminal offenses the gang is thought to be involved in and for which gang members have been arrested. As Table 4 indicates, the gangs identified are believed to be involved in a wide variety of criminal activities. The most common crime is weapons offenses, representing 92 percent of the gangs, followed by serious assault (89%) and auto theft (86%). The least common offenses are involvement in prostitution (5%), home invasion (14%) and sexual assault (39%). Although murder, the most serious offense, is not the most common, it is interesting to note that 55 percent of all the gangs are thought to be involved in this crime.



When considering actual arrests of gang members, the most and least common offenses remain the same although the percent arrested is smaller than the percent thought to be involved. Members in 86 percent of the gangs have been arrested for weapons offenses, followed by serious assault (82%), and auto theft (79%). The least common offenses for which members have been arrested remain prostitution (3%), followed by home invasion (9%) and sexual assault (29%).

Organized Gangs

The final section of the analysis highlights five youth gangs that were among the nine defined as "very organized" by respondents. Although they vary in size and ethnic composition, each is made up of both males and females, has members ranging in age from child- to adulthood, has connections to a gang outside the agency's jurisdiction, and participates in a wide range of criminal activities.



Asian Assassin Posse. One of the most serious youth gangs reported by the Garland Police Department is the Asian Assassin Posse, consisting of 100 to 175 members who range in age from 13 to 24. Asian Assassin Posse has both Vietnamese or Laotian males and females. The gang was established in Garland between two to five years ago and has since increased its membership. The Garland police report the members to be involved in a wide range of criminal activities, including murder, serious and sexual assault, drug dealing, criminal mischief, weapons offenses, home invasion, forgery, counterfeiting checks, and cell phone reprogramming.

Folk Nation. According to the El Paso Police Department, the Folk Nation youth gang was established in El Paso two to five years ago. Folk Nation has approximately 100 members composed of both males and females ranging in ages from 11 to 30. Its membership is made up of Caucasian, Hispanic and African American racial groups. The El Paso police believe the membership to be increasing. They also report that Folk Nation's territory is citywide and that it has connections to a nationwide gang. Members are thought to be involved in murder, serious and sexual assault, robbery, burglary, theft, auto theft, drug dealing and use, criminal mischief, public disorder, and weapons offenses.

North Side 23 Crips. The Tyler Police Department indicated that of the 20 youth gangs in their jurisdiction, the North Side 23 Crips was one of the five most serious. The gang has a membership of approximately 25 individuals who are exclusively African American males and females. The Tyler Police Department indicates the gang was established in their jurisdiction one to two years ago and its membership appears to be growing. The North Side 23 Crips' territory is citywide and it has connections to a nationwide gang. Members are believed to be involved in murder, serious assault, robbery, burglary, theft, auto theft, drug use and sales, criminal mischief, public disorder, and weapons offenses.

Kemp Edition Players (KEP). The Wichita Falls Police Department reported that one of the most serious youth gangs in its jurisdiction is the Kemp Edition Players (KEP), with approximately 145 members ranging from 12 to 30 years of age. The Kemp Edition Players is exclusively African American and has both males and females among its members. Believed to have been established more than five years ago, its membership appears to be increasing. The gang's territory is across two or three neighborhoods, but it has nationwide connections. The members are believed to be involved in murder, serious assault, sexual assault, robbery, burglary, theft, auto theft, drug sales and use, public disorder, and weapons offenses. The Wichita Falls police report that at least one of the gang members has been arrested for capital murder.

Little Saigon Hoodlums. In Richardson, a Vietnamese gang, Little Saigon Hoodlums, is one of the most serious youth gangs reported. There are approximately 60 members ranging in age from 14 to 18. Members include both males and females, and the size of the gang is reported to be increasing. Believed to have been established in Richardson between six months to a year ago, the Richardson Police Department indicates that the gang's territory is citywide and that it has connections to a regionwide gang. Its members are thought to be involved in serious assault, robbery, auto theft, drug sales, weapons offenses, and home invasion.

Table 1
Number and Five Most Serious Gangs by Department

Agency	Number	Five Most Serious Gangs
San Antonio Police Department	797	Ambrose, L.A. Boyz, Bad Company (BC's), WSV Kings, Wheatley Courts Texas
El Paso Police Department	471	Folk Nation, Los Fatherless, Nasty Boys, Varrio Northeast, White Fence
Harris County Sheriff's Dept.	250	Cloverleaf, Eastside Chicos, Eastside Homies, Latin Kings, Kingwood Chongos
Fort Worth Police Department	280	Crips—All Sets, Bloods—All Sets, Varrio Diamond Hill, Varrio Rock Island, Varrio Central
Garland Police Department	231	Asian Assassin Posse, East Park Crips, Chink Power, West Side Bloods, Trey Five Seven Crips
Arlington Police Department	145	5x2 Hoova Crips, Mid City Stoners, Latin Kings, B-Boyz, Shorty Folk
Eules Police Department	135	9x2 Hoova Crips, Latin Familia, Lao Crips, South Pacific Islanders & Tongan Crip, 5x2 Hoova Crips
Dallas County Sheriff's Dept.	99	Eastside Homeboys, East Side Locos, Jr. Homeboys, Midnight Dreamers, Vagos 18
Mesquite Police Department	99	Eastside Homeboys, AKA, Tre-Five-Seven-Crips, Rolling 30-Crips, Eastside Locos
Fort Bend County Sheriff's Dept.	85	5th Street Gang, 707 Browns, Chicano Mob, La Raza 13, South Main Posse
Dallas Police Department	77	Eastside Homeboys, Eastside Locos, Jr. Homeboys, Midnight Dreamers, Vagos 18
Galveston Police Department	77	*
Grand Prairie Police Department	74	Midnite Dreamers, Southside Criminals, Royal Knights, Southside Posse, Pothead Crew
Austin Police Department	73	Bloods, Crips, Latin Kings, Brothas, E.G.V./Outlawz
Pasadena Police Department	69	*
El Paso County Sheriff's Dept.	37	Barrio Compestre Locos, Barrio Fabens Locos, Moon City Locos, Barrio Nuevo, Nasty Boys
Irving Police Department	35	Mara Salvatrucha, Latin Kings, Midnight Creamers, 457 West Side Family Bloods, Latin Violence
Amarillo Police Department	28	Varrio 16 Locos Northside, Eastside 40 Avalon Gangster Crips, Watts Varrio Grape 103, Asian Bride Crip, Eastside
Bryan Police Department	27	Latin Kings, Castle Height Crime Posse, La Primera, Bloods—All Sets, Crips—All Sets
Richardson Police Department	24	North Side Locos, Five Deuce Hoova Crips, Eastside Homeboys, Hamilton Park House, Little Saigon Hoodlums

Table 1—Continued

Agency	Number	Five Most Serious Gangs
Midland Police Department	23	East Side Homies, Southside Locos, Eastside AEK (Another Evil Klan), Hoova Crips 11.2, Brown Town Homies
Odessa Police Department	21	Mi Clicka, Rolling 60's-Crips, Six Three Loco's, Kinfolks-Crips, KGL—Krazy Girls Living
Jefferson County Sheriff's Dept.	20	5/9 Hoover Crips, Vatos Locos, Brockman Ave Crips "BAC," Vothz Posse, Viet Pride Gangsters "VPG"
No. Richland Hills Police Department	20	Angel Boys, Eastside Gangster Crips, Lao Bloods, Lao Crips, Latin Kings
Tyler Police Department	20	West Side Bloods, Saint Louis Crips-SLC, East Side Locos, North Side 23 Crips, Nortenos
Texarkana Police Department	15	49 Kings, Crips, West Side Crips, House of Pain, 74 Hoover Crips
Victoria Police Department	15	La Raza, East Side Vacarrios, Navidad Raiders, da Crew**
Wichita Falls Police Department	13	112 Hoova Crips, Kemp Edition Players—KEP, Puro lil Mafia—PLM, Varrio Carnales—VC, Eastside Mafia Crips—EMC
Lubbock Police Department	10	Bloods, Crips, East Side Trece, North Side Locos, Vario South Side
Plano Police Department	7	4th Street, Parker Road Crips, 18th Street, North Side Locos, Young Gangsta Bloods
Carrollton Police Department	6	Uns-Vario Northside, Latin Kings, MND—Midnight Dreamers, Crips—All Sets, Bloods—All Sets
Deer Park Police Department	6	Latin Kings, Sunset Players, Ruthless Assisins, Southeast Crips, Five Deuce Hoova Crips
Cleburne Police Department	5	5x2 Hoova Crips, 4x3 Crips, Southwest Latin Kings, Los Primos, Southside 13th
Orange County Sheriff's Dept.	5	Bloods, Crips***
Addison Police Department	4	Midnight Dreamers, Love Field Players, Varrio North Side, North Dallas Vatos**
Abilene Police Department	3	Crips, Bloods, Junior Vatos***
College Station Police Department	3	Crips—All Sets, Latin Kings, 400 St., Bloods—Various Sets***
Rosenberg Police Department	2	Bloods (RMW, La Familia, PM), Rebels***

* Gangs not identified by name.

** Only four gang names identified.

*** Only set names identified.

Note: Spelling of gangs' names vary.

Table 3**Establishment and Area of Gang**

When did the gang first become established in your jurisdiction?

	Percent
More than five years ago	42
Between two to five years	33
Between one to two years	18
Between six months to one year	5
Unknown	2
Less than six months ago	0

How would you describe the territory of the gang?

City- or jurisdictionwide	55
Across two or three neighborhoods	35
Limited to one neighborhood	10

Is the gang specific to your jurisdiction or does it have connections to a statewide, regionwide or nationwide gang?

Jurisdiction	53
Nation	22
Region	16
Unknown	5
State	4

Table 2**Gang Membership and Structure**

Average Number of Members—204	
Change in Membership	Percent
Increasing	63
Remains the same	23
Decreasing	9
Unknown	5
Age Range	
Adult and younger	91
17 and younger	6
Missing data	3
Gender	
Male and female	63
All male	36
All female	<1
Ethnicity	
Mixed	42
Hispanic	34
African American	17
Other	3
Vietnamese	2
Caucasian	2
Organization	
Somewhat organized	45
Unorganized	20
Organized	18
Very unorganized	12
Very organized	5

Table 4**Gang-related Crimes and Actual Arrests**

	Percent Involved	Percent Arrested
Weapons offenses	92	86
Serious assault	89	82
Auto theft	86	79
Theft	85	78
Drug use	83	68
Robbery	78	69
Public disorder	72	66
Drug sales	72	57
Burglary	76	70
Criminal mischief	65	54
Murder	55	45
Sexual assault	39	29
Home invasion	14	9
Prostitution	5	3

Conclusion

Research on youth gangs in America has uncovered a number of important changes since the 1950s and 1960s. In particular, today's youth gangs are increasing in numbers and consist of a wider age range of members. Female gang participation has also increased, and mixed racial/ethnic membership patterns are not uncommon. The findings from this survey suggest that Texas gangs are following much the same pattern. Describing the characteristics of the five most serious gangs in their jurisdiction, the responding agencies reported on 175 youth gangs. Although the number of gang members varies considerably, the majority of the responding agencies view the gangs' membership to be increasing. Most of the youth gangs identified range in age from 10 to early adulthood. While there was only one all-female gang reported, most include both males and females. The greatest proportion in the sample consisted of more than one ethnic/racial group, followed by exclusively Hispanic and African American gangs.

The police perceived that a large number of the identified gangs have at least some level of organization. A majority of the five most serious gangs in the agency's jurisdiction were established more than five years ago. Most were reported to be specific to the agency's jurisdiction without connections to state-, region- or nationwide gangs. Police believe that many are involved in a wide range of criminal activities, including weapons offenses, serious assault and auto theft. Relatively few are involved in prostitution, home invasion and sexual assault.

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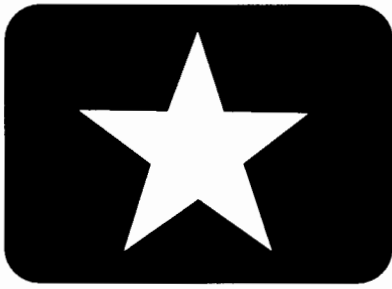
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