



Violence Policy Center

Youth Gang Violence and Guns: Data Collection in California



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February 2009

The Violence Policy Center (VPC) is a national non-profit educational organization that conducts research and public education on violence in America and provides information and analysis to policymakers, journalists, advocates, and the general public. This report was authored by VPC Executive Director Josh Sugarmann and VPC Senior Analyst Tom Diaz. Research assistance was provided by VPC Communications Associate Mandy Wimmer and VPC Policy Analyst Marty Langley. The study is funded by a grant from The California Wellness Foundation (TCWF). Created in 1992 as an independent, private foundation, TCWF's mission is to improve the health of the people of California by making grants for health promotion, wellness education and disease prevention. Past VPC studies include:

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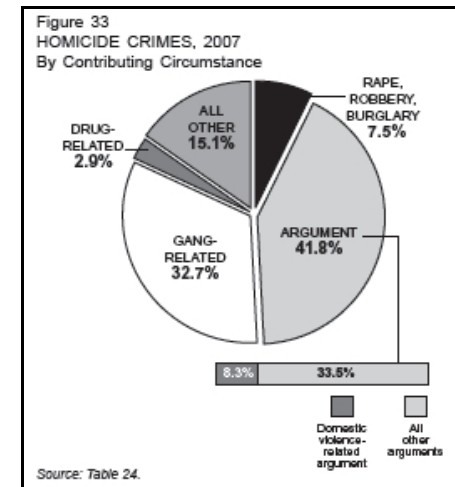
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Introduction

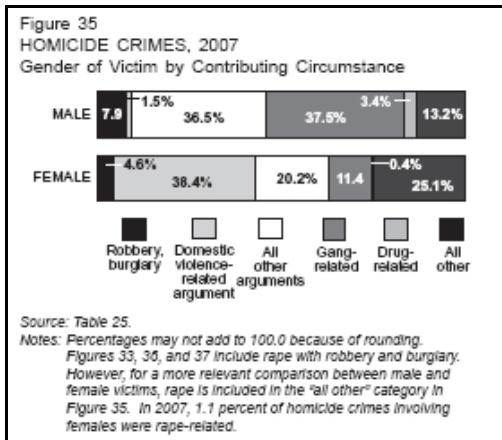
While all who work to reduce gang-related violence acknowledge the major role that firearms play in the problem, little comprehensive data is available regarding how firearms are obtained by gang members, what types of guns and/or design features are favored by gang members, how changes in the design and firepower of firearms have affected the lethality of youth gang violence, and, most importantly, what prevention policies can be put in place to aid in reducing firearms death and injury connected to youth gang violence.

In California, the debilitating effects of lethal gang violence and the devastating role that firearms play are clear. According to the California Department of Justice, in 2007:

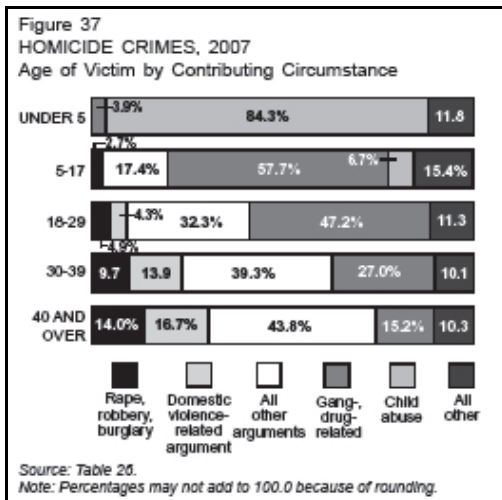
- For homicides in which the contributing circumstances were known, 32.7 percent were gang related, second only to arguments (41.8 percent).¹



¹ California Department of Justice, Division of California Justice Information Services, Bureau of Criminal Information and Analysis, Criminal Justice Statistics Center, "Homicide in California 2007," <http://ag.ca.gov/cjsc/publications/homicide/hm07/preface.pdf>, p. 21.



- The largest percentage of male homicide victims (37.5 percent) were victims of gang-related homicides.²

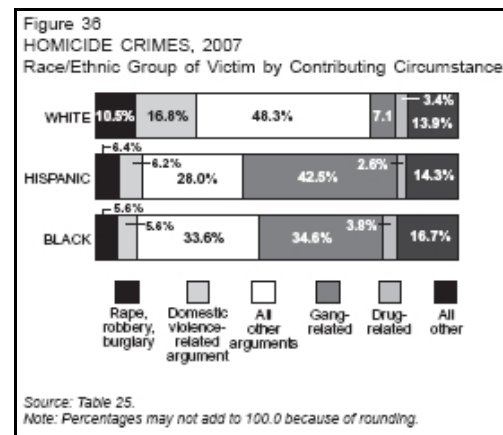


- The largest percentage of homicide victims aged five to 17 (57.7 percent) and aged 18 to 29 (47.2 percent) were killed as a result of gang- or drug-related activities.³

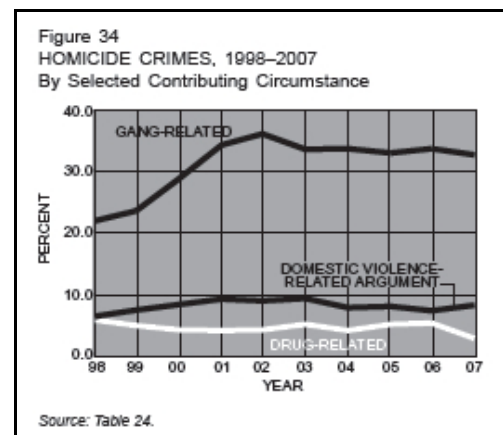
² "Homicide in California 2007," p. 22.

³ "Homicide in California 2007," p. 23.

- The proportion of gang-related homicides was much larger for Hispanics (42.5 percent) and blacks (34.6 percent) than for whites (7.1 percent).⁴



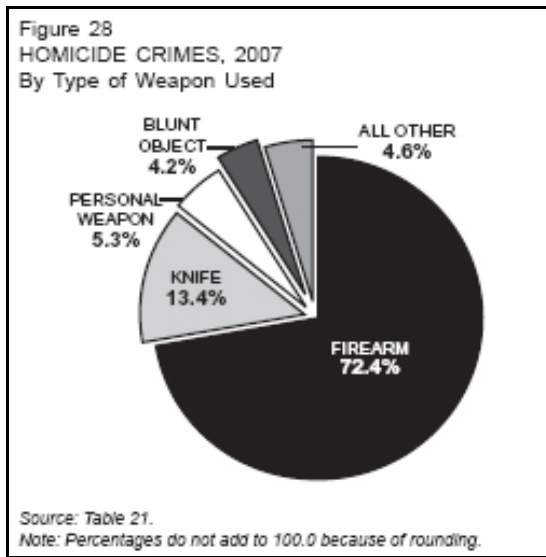
- Comparing 1998 to 2007, the percentage of homicides in which the contributing circumstance was gang-related increased from 22.0 percent to 32.7 percent.⁵



⁴ "Homicide in California 2007," p. 22.

⁵ "Homicide in California 2007," p. 21.

In California, like the nation as a whole, firearms, primarily handguns, are the leading mechanism for homicide.

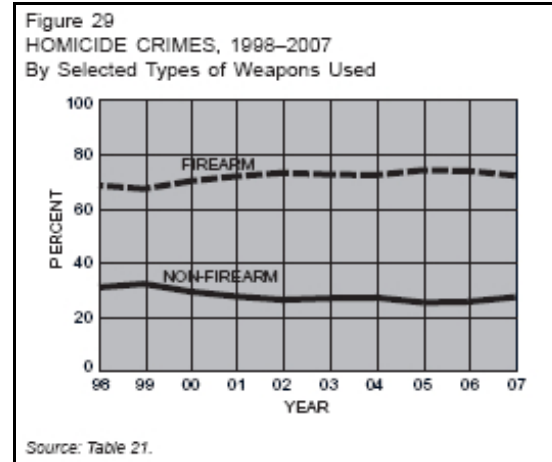


- In 2007, when homicides were classified by the type of weapon used, 72.4 percent resulted from the use of firearms. Handguns were used in 61.7 percent of homicides. Other types of firearms were used in 10.7 percent of homicides. Using these figures, handguns were used in 85.2 percent of all firearm homicides.

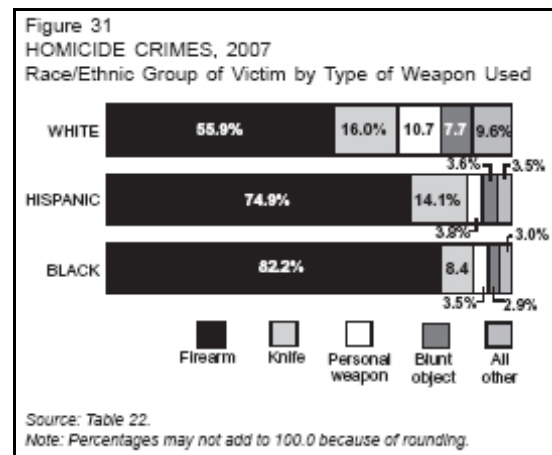
The percentages of other weapons used in homicides were: 13.4 percent resulted from the use of knives; 5.3 percent resulted from the use of personal weapons (hands, feet, etc.); 4.2 percent resulted from the use of blunt objects (clubs, etc.); and, 4.6 percent resulted from the use of weapons grouped in the “all other” category.⁶

⁶ “Homicide in California 2007,” p. 18.

- Comparing 1998 to 2007:
 - The proportion of homicides that resulted from the use of firearms increased slightly, from 68.8 percent to 72.4 percent.⁷
 - The proportion of homicides that resulted from the use of non-firearms decreased, from 31.2 percent to 27.6 percent.⁸



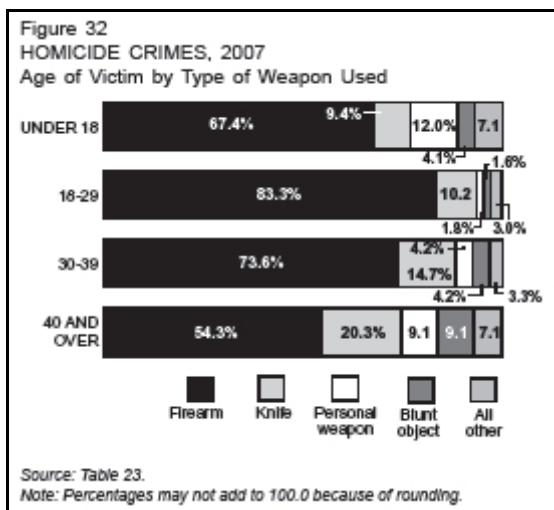
- In 2007, for all races and ethnic groups, firearms were the most common weapon type used in homicides:
 - 82.2 percent of all black homicide victims were killed with firearms;
 - 74.9 percent of all Hispanic homicide victims were killed with firearms;
 - 55.9 percent of all white homicide victims were killed with firearms.⁹



⁷ "Homicide in California 2007," p. 18.

⁸ "Homicide in California 2007," p. 67.

⁹ "Homicide in California 2007," p. 19.



- In 2007, a greater percentage of victims aged 18 to 29 were killed with firearms (83.3 percent) than were victims in any other age group.¹⁰

According to unpublished 2006 FBI Supplementary Homicide Report data tabulated by the Violence Policy Center, of the 626 gang-related homicides that occurred in California that year, 94 percent resulted from the use of firearms. Of these firearm homicides, 93 percent involved a handgun. Yet despite the clear and pervasive role that both firearms and gang violence play in homicide in California, little is known as to how these two factors interact. Despite California's comprehensive reporting on both homicide as well as firearms ownership and use, the discrete nature of the databases involved, coupled with limitations of the databases and a lack of integration, leave many basic questions unanswered and hinder the development of more effective prevention policies.

Information is the foundation for sound public policy. The goal of this study is to offer an overview of California databases containing gun and/or gang information—from the California Department of Justice, to California's Violent Death Reporting System (CalVDRS), to local law enforcement agencies—to ascertain the type of information being collected regarding youth gang violence and firearms, how it is being collected and any

¹⁰ "Homicide in California 2007," p. 20.

inconsistencies that may exist, and to what degree it is accessible to aid in answering the many questions surrounding the issue of youth gang violence and firearms.

This study is divided into four sections.

- **Section One: *California Youth Gangs and Firearms Violence*** offers a short history of gang violence in California and discusses the role that increased firepower and capacity of firearms has played in gang-related death and injury.
- **Section Two: *Select Databases in California Containing Information on Firearms and/or Gangs*** offers an overview of select criminal justice and public health databases in California that include information on firearms or gang violence.
- **Section Three: *VPC Survey of California Law Enforcement Agencies Regarding Collection of Information on Firearms and Gang Violence*** details the results of a survey conducted by the Violence Policy Center in January 2008 of California law enforcement agencies regarding their recordkeeping of incidents involving gang members and firearms. The section presents an overview of the responses and key themes that emerged from the survey as well as a chart detailing the specific responses contained in each survey returned to the VPC, including comments from respondents.
- **Section Four: *Information for Effective Policy*** discusses the need for comprehensive data for the development of effective violence-prevention strategies, reviews the key findings of the study, and offers further areas for study and analysis.

Section One: California Youth Gangs and Firearms Violence

A Brief History of California Gangs

In the last four decades, firearms violence has in the minds of many come to define the problem of youth gangs. Youth gangs have emerged in different countries and different cultures since at least the Middle Ages, especially during periods of mass immigration or severe economic and cultural dislocation. But a convergence of factors in the latter 20th and early 21st centuries—among them mass marketing of increasingly lethal firearms, profound economic restructuring, and the transnational integration of the illicit drug trade—conspired to make the use of firearms a regular and accepted part of youth gang life in America. Nowhere has this been more poignantly true than in California. Yet, aside from law enforcement investigative records not easily accessible to the public and anecdotal media reports, limited organized information is available to help policymakers and public health analysts understand the dynamic relationships between youth gangs and guns.

Almost 75 percent of the 10,000 youth gang homicides that occurred in California between 1981 and 2001 took place in Los Angeles. “This extraordinary disproportion cannot be explained by LA’s large population, nor by its age, racial or ethnic composition,” according to a 2004 study by the California Attorney General’s Office.¹¹ In examining these 20 years’ of youth gang homicides, the authors of that study concluded that “what truly sets Los Angeles apart from the remainder of California is not a general propensity for violent behavior, but rather the existence of a specific milieu that has fostered the development of a violent gang culture unlike any other gang culture in the state.”¹² Yet, even in Los Angeles, firearms were an insignificant part of youth gang life until well into the latter half of the 20th century. Understanding what changed, much less current and future trends with respect to youth gangs and firearms, will remain elusive until better data is available.

¹¹ George Tita and Allan Abrahamse, “Gang Homicide in LA, 1981-2001,” *At the Local Level: Perspectives on Violence Prevention*, no. 3 (Sacramento, California Attorney General’s Office, 2004), p. 2.

¹² George Tita and Allan Abrahamse, “Gang Homicide in LA, 1981-2001,” p. 16.

The earliest youth gangs in Los Angeles were a “mixed bag” of Mexican, Irish, and Russian immigrants.¹³ In the 1920s, East Los Angeles was a “California version” of New York’s Lower East Side.¹⁴ These prototypical forms can hardly be called gangs in the sense of today’s street gang. They were “unsophisticated clutches of teens.” The police called them “tomato gangs” because their fist fights were often preceded by exchanged volleys of fruits and vegetables stolen from vendors’ carts.¹⁵

“Fighting gangs”—those that defined themselves in significant degree by an ethos of fighting to defend a merged identity of self, gang, and neighborhood—first emerged in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Their members in large degree were drawn from the ever-expanding pool of “second generation” youth—the children of migrants and immigrants who were estranged from the culture of their parents and rejected by the dominant society as racially or ethnically inferior. They were often left largely on their own and the institution of the neighborhood gang grew stronger as these dispossessed children found in the gang their surrogate family, street school, and government services. When communities grew and interacted, youth gangs inevitably rubbed against each other, and fighting became an accepted part of the youth gang code.

Still, gangs fought in these formative years within the confines of a code of informal but widely accepted rules. Their primary weapons were fists. Women, children, and families were not to be attacked or involved in violence. If a gang member had a beef with a member of another gang, it was considered more manly to call him out when he was not with his family, wife, girlfriend, or child, and duke it out man to man in what was known as a “fair fight.” One’s fellow members provided backup as necessary, for example, if the opponent’s fellow gang

¹³ William Dunn, *The Gangs of Los Angeles* (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse 2007), p. 31.

¹⁴ Ruben Martinez, “East Side Stories: Joseph Rodriguez’s Images of East L.A.,” in *East Side Stories: Gang Life in East L.A., Photographs by Joseph Rodriguez* (New York: powerHouse Books, 2000), p. 14.

¹⁵ Dunn, *The Gangs of Los Angeles*, p. 39.

members tried to interfere. “The fair fight established a pecking order, both within the gang and between gangs, and did so in a highly personal fashion that tested the mettle of the fighters in a way that guns cannot do.”¹⁶

In the late 1930s, arsenals were expanded to include sticks, clubs, chains, and knives but—at this point—rarely guns. When guns appeared, they were usually home-made “zip guns.”¹⁷ The White Fence gang in East Los Angeles was apparently a leader in escalating the violence, and may have been the first to regularly use commercially made firearms.¹⁸ Gang life was fundamentally changed in the 1940s. For one thing, the violence became more lethal. Teenagers began to be killed in inter-gang clashes or other gang-related violence. Nobody called them “tomato gangs” any more. They became known as “boy gangs,” and they increasingly attracted the attention of the police.¹⁹

In spite of increasing law enforcement attempts at “gang suppression,” youth gang violence continued to accelerate during the 1950s and 1960s. Although violence moved in fits and starts—up one year, down the next—the overall trend of greater violence and increased lethality was upward. California has experienced three periods during which its overall homicide rate steadily increased to new peaks, fell back briefly, and then rose again: from 1965 through 1980, from 1989 through 1993, and from 1999 to the present.²⁰ Part of this phenomenon reflects similar national trends. Over the last 25 years of the 20th century, the increase in homicides in the United States

¹⁶ Joan W. Moore, *Going Down to the Barrio: Homeboys and Homegirls in Change* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), p. 60.

¹⁷ James Diego Vigil, *Barrio Gangs: Street Life and Identity in Southern California* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988), p. 130.

¹⁸ Joan W. Moore, *Homeboys: Gangs, Drugs and Prison in the Barrios of Los Angeles* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), pp. 65-66.

¹⁹ Dunn, *The Gangs of Los Angeles*, pp. 57-58.

²⁰ George Tita and Allan Abrahamse, “Gang Homicide in LA, 1981-2001.”

was so great that it became a major public health issue.²¹ But a substantial part of the increase in California was driven by gang homicides, especially in Los Angeles County.

By the mid-1970s “guns were normal, and a fair fight (one person on one person without weapons) was fairly unusual” and the old gang code was junked as gang members started shooting into houses where mothers and other “non-combatants” lived.²² The practice of “drive-by shootings”—firing numerous rounds with a firearm from a moving car—started in the 1970s, and true firearms (as opposed to the old zip guns) were used to kill and maim enemies, rather than scare them off.²³ One explanation for the increased gun violence among Latino gangs was the tendency for each generation to try to outdo the preceding generation of gang members in *locura*, or crazy behavior. The illicit drug trade was also becoming a significant part of youth gang life. But perhaps most important was the significant increase in the number of handguns on the civilian market during the 1960s and 1970s, not only in California but nationwide. The American gun industry deliberately played on widespread public fear of public disorder and vague threats of criminal violence as a means of mass marketing handguns in particular during this period.

Of 27,302 homicides in Los Angeles County from January 1979 through December 1994, law enforcement determined that 7,288 (26.7 percent) were gang related. In 1979, gang-related homicides accounted for 18.1 percent of all homicides in Los Angeles County. By 1994, they accounted for 43.0 percent. A detailed study of more than 5,000 of these gang-related murders, published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, found that 56.6 percent of the victims were Hispanic and 36.7 percent of the victims were black.²⁴

²¹ H. Range Hutson, et al., “The Epidemic of Gang-Related Homicides in Los Angeles County from 1979 Through 1994,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 274, no. 13 (1995), p. 1031.

²² Moore, *Homeboys*, p. 40.

²³ Moore, *Going Down to the Barrio*, pp. 59-60.

²⁴ Hutson, et al., “The Epidemic of Gang-Related Homicides in Los Angeles County from 1979 Through 1994,” pp. 1032-1033.

A prime factor during the 1980s was the mass marketing of high-capacity semiautomatic pistols. Known as the “wonder nines,” these 9mm handguns quickly became gang favorites. The proportion of Los Angeles County gang homicides in which semiautomatic pistols were used skyrocketed between 1986 and 1994.²⁵ Armed encounters were more lethal—more likely to result in death—because more rounds of ammunition could be carried in a semiautomatic pistol (10 to as many as 19) and fired more quickly than through the old-fashioned six-shot revolvers, or wheelguns, that dominated the century before the 1980s. This heightened firepower dramatically increased the likelihood that someone, not necessarily the intended target, would be hit by one of the rounds sprayed out during increasingly popular drive-by shootings.

What changed during this period, according to former Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) Chief Daryl Gates was “not only the proliferation of guns, but their sophistication.” In addition to high-capacity semiautomatic pistols, assault weapons were mass-marketed from the middle 1980s. Gates wrote that the “deadly AK-47 [semiautomatic assault rifle] became the weapon of choice among the drug-dealing gang members in south central L.A.”²⁶ The same escalation in firepower occurred across America, wherever the so-called “crack wars” were fought. As a consequence, the crack epidemic “is associated with a doubling of the number of murdered black males aged 14 to 17, a 30 percent increase for those aged 18 to 24, and a 10 percent increase for those 25 and over.”²⁷

Although the precise locations of youth gang firearms violence ebb and flow geographically over time, there is no evidence that youth killing each other and innocent bystanders with firearms is about to end, even after decades of various law enforcement and community programs to “stop the violence.” Although most observers agree that guns are at the nub of the youth gang problem, there is little agreement even among informed law enforcement observers about the “topography” of firearms and youth gangs other than a few generalized observations. Most law enforcement personnel interviewed by Violence Policy Center staff agreed that handguns

²⁵ Hutson, et al., “The Epidemic of Gang-Related Homicides in Los Angeles County from 1979 Through 1994,” p. 1034.

²⁶ Daryl F. Gates, *Chief: My Life in the LAPD* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), pp. 295-296.

²⁷ Steven D. Levitt and Kevin M. Murphy, *Capital Ideas: Selected Papers on Price Theory*, “How Bad Was Crack Cocaine? The Economics of an Illicit Drug Market,” April 2006, <http://www.chicagogsb.edu/capideas/apr06/5.aspx>.

are the “day to day” tool of the youth gang. But some pointed out that, when a youth gang wants to “do business,” it will often turn to the assault weapon.

One anecdote researched in detail illustrates the point. On the morning of Monday, September 5, 1994, the *Los Angeles Times* briefly noted the murder of an unnamed man and woman “killed early Sunday when...rifle fire from the sidewalk riddled their passing car in a drug- and gang-infested area near Downtown Los Angeles.” The note of 100 words, deep in the paper’s Metro section, reported that police “knew of no motive in the killings.”²⁸ In fact, Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) homicide detectives suspected from the start that the carnage was a gang hit connected to the Columbia Lil’ Cycos, a “clique” of the 18th Street gang. The crime scene stretched for a block and a half along Burlington Street between 5th Street and Maryland Avenue. The 34 shell casings police recovered were later determined to have come from two different semiautomatic AK-47 rifles. More than 25 rounds had slammed through the vehicle.

“The sheer firepower was one of the worst I’ve seen, almost akin to the old Chicago gangland killings,” LAPD detective Robert Bub told the *Los Angeles Times* a few years later.²⁹

Six years after the shooting, a federal investigation into the gang would confirm that the murders of the driver, Carlos Alberto “Truco” Lopez, 26, and his passenger, Donatilla Contreras, 57, were the result of intramural gang warfare.

The case starkly illustrates the heightened lethality that stems from the increased firepower readily available on the civilian market. At the same time, it raises the tandem issue of how information on guns used in gang violence is collected, maintained, and possibly utilized by other institutional entities outside of law enforcement to reduce gang violence. Other than the isolated files and court records (the trial transcript and prosecutor’s pleadings) in this case, no way exists to integrate the use of these particular assault weapons (and a potpourri of

²⁸ “Man, Woman Slain Near Downtown,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 5, 1994.

²⁹ Debra Cano, Rich Connell, and Robert J. Lopez, “An Inside Look at 18th St.’s Menace,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 17, 1996.

other firearms involved in the case) to the phenomenon of youth gang life in general. The same is true of hundreds, if not thousands, of other violent interactions involving members of youth gangs each year across California.

Lack of Comprehensive Data on Gang-Related Firearms Violence

There is much anecdotal evidence that youth gangs continue to be a problem in California. Most notable among this evidence are news media, government, and law enforcement reports of violent crimes said to be associated with such gangs. However, the precise nature and dimensions of the youth gang phenomenon are as vague in California today as they are elsewhere in the United States.

The uncertainty starts with the basic questions of how many youth gangs exist, how many members do the gangs have, and how many and what kind of crimes do they commit. “Exactly how many gangs and how many gang members there are in the country is presently not known with any degree of certainty,” the authors of one highly regarded text recently observed. “In fact, there are as many estimates as there are estimators!”³⁰ In the mid-1990s, for example, “expert” estimates of gang membership in the United States as a whole ranged from 660,000 to 1.5 million, an enormous disparity.³¹ Estimates of California’s gang population today are no better. A senior law enforcement source in Los Angeles told a VPC researcher that according to the state’s official CalGang database,³² as of June 1, 2008, there were 7,703 gangs and 223,828 gang members in California.³³ But in March

³⁰ Randall G. Shelden, Sharon K. Tracy, and William B. Brown, *Youth Gangs in American Society* (2d ed.) (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2001), 26.

³¹ Finn-Aage Esbensen, et al., “Youth Gangs and Definitional Issues: When Is a Gang a Gang, and Why Does It Matter?” in Finn-Aage Esbensen, Stephen G. Tibbetts, and Larry Gaines, *American Youth Gangs at the Millennium*, (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc. 2004), p. 53.

³² For additional information on CalGang, please see Section Two.

³³ Confidential conversation between Violence Policy Center Senior Policy Analyst Tom Diaz and a senior law enforcement official in Los Angeles, June 17, 2008.

2007, Los Angeles City Attorney Rocky Delgadillo was quoted as stating that there were only 3,700 street gangs in California (half as many as the CalGang estimate) and 150,000 members (a third less).³⁴

Several factors underlie these disparities. To begin with, there is no universal definition of what constitutes a gang, gang membership, or gang activity. Even if there were, there is no consistent, uniform, well-maintained system for recording data about gangs and gang members. What constitutes a gang crime is defined in significantly differently ways by different jurisdictions. Databases such as CalGang exist as useful “pointer” tools for “gang intelligence” (providing clues, for example, about whether a given “set” or “clique” exists in a given locality). But they are notoriously inadequate to the production of solid, fact-based quantitative data. “California Department of Justice has never had a realistic number for anything,” a retired law enforcement official widely regarded as the intellectual architect of the CalGang system told a VPC researcher during an interview about Latino gangs in particular.

Therefore, with very few exceptions, the numbers about gangs, gang crimes, and gang membership that one finds are extraordinarily soft estimates. They tend to harden into concrete—often regardless of their integrity—as they progress up the information chain. Academics have also noted that “those providing most of these estimates are law-enforcement bureaucracies and...the amount of federal dollars flowing into these bureaucracies should arouse the curiosity of any critical reader.”³⁵

At the same time, information on the firearms used in youth gang violence often fails to extend beyond observational analysis at times peppered by uninformed hyperbole. Assault weapons and handguns are cited in news accounts, police reports, and court records. Yet little comprehensive information is gathered on a widespread, long-term basis to more fully understand the sources of firearms favored by youth gang members, the specific types of firearms (including make and model) favored by youth gang members and why, the effects of changing firearms technology on youth gang violence, and, most importantly, how this information can be used in prevention strategies to reduce such violence.

³⁴ Jordan Rau, “Democrats stake out turf war on gangs,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 16, 2007.

³⁵ Shelden, et al., *Youth Gangs in American Society*, p. 27.

Section Two: Select Databases in California Containing Information on Firearms and/or Gangs

California has a wide range of databases dealing with firearms and violence. These include the following sets of information reviewed in this section.

- California Department of Justice databases that contain information related to firearm purchase, possession, or eligibility—
 - Consolidated Firearms Information System (CFIS)
 - Automated Firearms Systems (AFS)
 - Firearms Eligibility Applicant File (FEAF)
 - Armed and Prohibited Persons System (APPS)
 - Mental Health Firearms Prohibition System
- Select California Department of Justice databases that contain crime, gang, or firearm information not related to firearm transfers:
 - Homicide Database
 - CalGang Database
- Select California Department of Public Health databases that contain crime, gang, or firearm information not related to firearm transfers:
 - California's Violent Death Reporting System (CalVDRS), utilizing the California Electronic Death Registration System (CA-EDRS)

At first glance, the number and scope of California's firearm, criminal justice, and public health databases leave the immediate impression of a comprehensive source of information that could be called upon to answer any questions regarding firearms, crime, gang violence, and how these factors interact with one another. This is not the case.

While these databases work to fulfill the distinct purposes for which they were originally designed (e.g., ensuring that those in prohibited categories are not allowed to purchase or possess firearms, detailing crime in the state, aiding law enforcement in combating gang-related violence, or morbidity and mortality reporting), there are wide gaps in the reporting and data collection regarding firearms and gang violence that limit the potential for integration of information and hinder comprehensive analysis.

Primary information for this section was obtained from the following sources: "Attorney General Bill Lockyer, Written Testimony, Little Hoover Commission, Government Technology Hearing," February 24, 2000; *Feasibility Study Report, Automated Firearms System (AFS) Migration*, State of California Department of Justice, V1.2, May 2007; interviews and communications with California Department of Justice staff; the web site of the Office of the California Attorney General, (<http://ag.ca.gov/>); interviews and communications with California's Violent Death Reporting System (CalVDRS) staff; the web site for California's Violent Death Reporting System, (<http://ww2.cdph.ca.gov/PROGRAMS/Pages/CalVDRS.aspx>); and, the web site for the California Electronic Death Registration System (CA-EDRS), (<http://www.edrs.us/edrs/index.jsp>).

**California Department of Justice Databases that Contain Information
Related to Firearm Purchase, Possession, or Eligibility**

Consolidated Firearms Information System (CFIS)

The Consolidated Firearms Information System (CFIS) is used primarily to process information to decide a person’s eligibility to purchase a gun. Using information from a Dealer’s Record of Sale (DROS) form and a valid form of identification, gun dealers enter information into the CFIS database. This transaction starts the Basic Firearms Eligibility Check (BFEC), which results in a background check query being sent to other state and national databases to identify any disqualifying information. In addition to handgun, rifle, and shotgun purchases, CFIS is also used to confirm eligibility for, and maintains information on, additional activities, including: Assault Weapon Registration (AWR); Carry Concealed Weapon (CCW) licenses; gun dealer licenses; and, Certificates of Eligibility (COE) for individuals involved in gun sales (dealers, dealer employees, gun show promoters, etc.), or explosives use (for example, construction). Information relating to handguns, legally possessed assault weapons and .50 BMG sniper rifles, and voluntarily registered rifles and shotguns is maintained indefinitely. For all other rifle and shotgun transfers, once the background check is completed, all information regarding the transfer is purged immediately. Sales denials and CCW denials are also maintained in the CFIS database. In the case of DROS, CCW, or AWR information, the record is passed from CFIS in an abbreviated form to the Automated Firearms System (AFS) for access by criminal justice agencies statewide.

Consolidated Firearms Information System (CFIS)	Yes	No	Notes
Published Reports		X	
Data Available to Public		X	
Data Available to Researchers		X	
Contains Firearms Information	X		
Contains Gang Information		X	
Contains Firearm Sale/Transfer Information	X		

Automated Firearms Systems (AFS)

The Automated Firearms Systems (AFS) provides information on firearm owners, firearm transfers (including dealer and private sales, weapons pawned or redeemed, new resident reports of gun ownership, intra-familial transfers such as inheritance), as well as guns that are reported lost or stolen. The system also contains information on individuals who possess Carry Concealed Weapon (CCW) licenses. The primary purpose of AFS is to serve law enforcement personnel in the field. After 15 years, records are purged from the on-line system and are then contained in off-line data files. For these data tapes, the search must be conducted separately from the on-line system of more current firearms and the information is not immediately accessible. Firearms included in AFS are handguns, voluntarily registered long guns, and legally possessed assault weapons and .50 BMG sniper rifles. AFS contains more than 13 million records and is updated both from the Consolidated Firearms Information System and law enforcement agencies statewide.

Automated Firearms Systems (AFS)	Yes	No	Notes
Published Reports	X		Select statistics (e.g., number of CCW holders, Dealer's Record of Sale (DROS) aggregate data) published on web site.
Data Available to Public		X	Select statistics, primarily aggregate data, are made available to the public in response to outside requests (media, etc.).
Data Available to Researchers	X		Scholarly researchers are allowed to apply for use of AFS data within confines of penal code.
Contains Firearms Information	X		
Contains Gang Information		X	
Contains Firearm Sale/Transfer Information	X		

Firearms Eligibility Applicant File (FEAF)

The Firearms Eligibility Applicant File (FEAF) contains applicant record information on peace officers, certain security guards, and Carry Concealed Weapon (CCW) applicants that the Department of Justice clears for firearms eligibility. There are more than 376,000 records in the database.

Firearms Eligibility Applicant File (FEAF)	Yes	No	Notes
Published Reports		X	
Data Available to Public		X	
Data Available to Researchers		X	
Contains Firearms Information		X	
Contains Gang Information		X	
Contains Firearm Sale/Transfer Information		X	

Armed and Prohibited Persons System (APPS)

The purpose of the Armed and Prohibited Persons System (APPS) is to identify prohibited persons who possess firearms as the result of a prohibitive conviction or judgment subsequent to their firearm purchase. Consolidated Firearms Information System (CFIS) purchase and possession information is cross-referenced with information in various databases containing prohibiting information (e.g., felony conviction, domestic violence restraining order, misdemeanor domestic violence conviction, mental health prohibition, etc.). Any matches are then placed in the APPS and the information is made available statewide to local law enforcement which can then take preemptive action and remove illegally possessed weapons. Studies conducted prior to the database’s inception estimate that there are currently more than 70,000 California residents who should no longer legally possess firearms as the result of a disqualifying conviction or judgment. As of May 2008 there were more than 11,000 such individuals in the database available to be investigated.

Armed and Prohibited Persons Database (APPS)	Yes	No	Notes
Published Reports		X	
Data Available to Public		X	Select statistics, primarily aggregate data, are made available to the public in response to outside requests (media, etc.).
Data Available to Researchers		X	
Contains Firearms Information	X		
Contains Gang Information		X	
Contains Firearm Sale/Transfer Information	X		

Mental Health Firearms Prohibition System

The Mental Health Firearms Prohibition System is an on-line database with statewide inquiry capability which contains information on voluntary and involuntary mental health and juvenile firearm prohibition reports as well as other prohibitive firearm fields. There are approximately 1.6 million firearm-prohibiting records on file in the database.

Mental Health Firearms Prohibition System	Yes	No	Notes
Published Reports		X	
Data Available to Public		X	Aggregate data within privacy restrictions.
Data Available to Researchers		X	
Contains Firearms Information		X	
Contains Gang Information		X	
Contains Firearm Sale/Transfer Information		X	

Select California Department of Justice Databases that Contain Crime, Gang, or Firearms Information Not Related to Firearm Transfers

California Uniform Crime Reporting Program and Supplementary Homicide Reports

The Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) program for the state of California is maintained by the Criminal Justice Statistics Center (CJSC) and is overseen by the Office of the Attorney General. Law enforcement agencies report crime data to the CJSC, which conducts its own analyses while forwarding the information to the federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) for publication in the annual compilation of Uniform Crime Report data, *Crime in the United States*. The Criminal Justice Statistics Center is comprised of two sections, the Statistical Data Center (SDC) and the Statistical Analysis Center (SAC), and maintains 16 statewide data systems containing criminal justice statistical information.³⁶ For homicides, reported information includes: age, sex, race, Hispanic ethnicity; victim/offender relationship; day and month of the homicide; location; type of weapon used (handgun, rifle, and shotgun for firearms); and, the precipitating event.³⁷ Since 1992 the California Supplementary Homicide Report has included a data code for “gang member” as either victim or offender. “Gang killing(s)—(street gangs, motorcycle gangs)” and “drive-by shooting” are also included among the data code options for the “precipitating event” leading to a homicide(s).³⁸ For non-homicide crimes, the only gang data collected is when the highest level charge on the arrest is for the specific crime of participating in a street gang. Supplementary Homicide Report (SHR) data for the

³⁶ The Criminal Justice Statistics Center maintains 16 statewide data systems containing criminal justice statistical information: Adult Felony Arrest Dispositions; Adult Probation; Anti-Reproductive-Rights Crimes; Arrests, Arson; Citizens’ Complaints Against Peace Officers; Crimes; Death in Custody; Domestic Violence-Related Calls for Assistance; Hate Crime Prosecution Survey; Hate Crimes; Homicides; Juvenile Court and Probation; Law Enforcement Officers Killed or Assaulted; Law Enforcement Personnel and Criminal Justice Personnel Survey; and, Violent Crimes Committed Against Senior Citizens (see <http://ag.ca.gov/cjsc/statisticsdatatabs/databss.php>).

³⁷ Publications containing homicide data include: *Crime in California* (<http://ag.ca.gov/cjsc/pubs.php#crime>), *Homicide in California* (<http://ag.ca.gov/cjsc/pubs.php#homicide>), and the *Criminal Justice Profile* series (<http://ag.ca.gov/cjsc/pubs.php#profiles>).

³⁸ *Technical Manual for the 2005 California Homicide Data File*, California Department of Justice, Criminal Justice Information Services Division, Bureau of Criminal Information and Analysis, Criminal Justice Statistics Center, Cindy Souza, Crime Studies Technician, Statistical Analysis Center, Special Request Unit.

state of California can be obtained both from CJSC and the federal Uniform Crime Reports Division of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

California Uniform Crime Reporting Program and Supplementary Homicide Reports	Yes	No	Notes
Published Reports	X		
Data Available to Public	X		
Data Available to Researchers	X		
Contains Firearms Information	X		
Contains Gang Information	X		
Contains Firearm Sale/Transfer Information		X	

CalGang

CalGang,³⁹ designed to aid law enforcement in investigating gang-related crimes, contains more than 150 fields for information including gangs, gang members, identifying tattoos, street names, firearms, criminal activities and histories, vehicles, and numerous other categories. Information may be submitted by local, state, federal, and tribal law enforcement agencies in California. Contributing agencies have the option of inputting gun seizure information into the system. Currently, the database has no method by which to comprehensively retrieve firearms information from the system (for example, submitting a request for all types of guns that have been seized from gang members). Recently, the CalGang executive board approved a measure to modify the system to make such information retrievable.

CalGang	Yes	No	Notes
Published Reports		X	
Data Available to Public		X	
Data Available to Researchers		X	
Contains Firearms Information	X		
Contains Gang Information	X		
Contains Firearm Sale/Transfer Information		X	

³⁹ <http://ag.ca.gov/calgang/>.

Select California Department of Public Health Databases that Contain Crime, Gang, or Firearm Information Not Related to Firearm Transfers

California’s Violent Death Reporting System (CalVDRS)

California’s Violent Death Reporting System⁴⁰ (CalVDRS) collects data on violent death utilizing death certificates, coroner/medical examiner records, police reports, and crime laboratory records to obtain more detailed information on circumstances and weapon involvement in violent deaths, including homicides, suicides, and murder-suicides. CalVDRS is currently operating as a pilot program in five California counties: Alameda, Los Angeles, Riverside, San Francisco, and Santa Clara—which include the cities of Los Angeles, Oakland, San Francisco, and San Jose. However, not all potential data sources provide information to the system (e.g., the Los Angeles Police Department, Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department, and the San Jose Police Department do not contribute data).

California’s Violent Death Reporting System (CalVDRS)	Yes	No	Notes
Published Reports	X		Reports in process (as of September 2008).
Data Available to Public	X		Public web-based data query system in development.
Data Available to Researchers	X		De-identified data available from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Restricted Access Database (RAD).
Contains Firearms Information	X		
Contains Gang Information	X		
Contains Firearm Sale/Transfer Information		X	

⁴⁰ CalVDRS (<http://www.cdph.ca.gov/PROGRAMS/Pages/CalVDRS.aspx>) is run by the Epidemiology and Prevention for Injury Control (EPIC) Branch of the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) and is funded by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as part of its National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS). California is one of 17 states participating in NVDRS (<http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/profiles/nvdrs/default.htm>).

California Electronic Death Registration System (CA-EDRS)

CA-EDRS is California's system for electronic death certificate origination and registration. California processes more than 250,000 new death certificates per year (1 in 10 deaths in the U.S.). The web-based CA-EDRS system allows coroners, funeral directors, doctors, and hospitals to submit electronic death certificates for registration 24 hours a day.⁴¹ Not all California counties use the system to file death certificates, and of those that do, not all are using the system to report violent deaths to CalVDRS. CalVDRS has developed a supplement to CA-EDRS to electronically capture details from coroners, in addition to the death certificate. This process began in 2007. County coroners that are currently using CA-EDRS to report circumstantial information on homicides and other violent deaths are those in Kern, Monterey, Sacramento, San Mateo, Santa Clara, San Joaquin, Solano, Stanislaus, and Yolo. It is expected that additional counties will begin transferring violent death data to CalVDRS in 2009.

California Electronic Death Registration System (CA-EDRS)	Yes	No	Notes
Published Reports	X		None published yet from violent death supplement.
Data Available to Public	X		Aggregated de-identified data will be available via a web site.
Data Available to Researchers	X		De-identified data will be available.
Contains Firearms Information	X		
Contains Gang Information	X		Currently, whether victim was a gang member (and which gang, if known) per coroner records. In the future, this will be changed to whether a homicide is "gang-related."
Contains Firearm Sale/Transfer Information		X	Has field for relationship of gun owner to victim, but no sale or transfer information.

⁴¹ <http://www.edrs.us/edrs/index.jsp>.

Section Three: VPC Survey of California Law Enforcement Agencies Regarding Collection of Information on Firearms and Gang Violence

Survey for California Law Enforcement Agencies on Firearms Data Collection and Gang Violence

1. Does your agency collect information linking specific firearms to use or possession by individuals involved in gang violence? (For each question, please check all boxes that apply.)

Yes. Please continue with question 2.

No. Please skip to question 7.

2. In which cases does your agency collect information linking firearms to individuals involved in gang violence?

All cases in which a firearm is linked to an individual or individuals involved in gang violence, whether or not the firearm is known or suspected to have been used in a criminal offense. (For example, if a firearm is seized in a search that involves a gang member or a firearm is illegally possessed by a gang member, the information would be recorded.)

Only cases in which the firearm is known or suspected to have been used in the furtherance of a crime. (For example, if the firearm were known or suspected to have been used in a shooting.)

Other. Please describe: -----

3. How does your agency record the information?

The information is entered into a searchable data base.

The information is recorded in files relating to a specific investigation, but is not entered into a broader, searchable data base.

Other. Please describe: -----

4. What level of detail is recorded about each firearm?

Only general firearm type (check all boxes that apply):

Long gun: rifle shotgun
 Handgun: pistol revolver

More detailed description of firearm (check all boxes that apply):

Make, for: pistol revolver rifle shotgun
 Model, for: pistol revolver rifle shotgun
 Caliber, for: pistol revolver rifle shotgun
 "Assault weapon" under California law.

Other. Please describe: -----

5. How is gang violence defined for the purpose of collecting this data?

Presence of a gang member as either victim or offender.

Presence of a gang member as either victim or offender AND the requirement of a gang motive for the crime.

6. Does your agency publish summary reports of data detailing firearms and individuals involved in gang violence?

Yes. Please describe (title and how often): -----

No.

7. What information about firearms and individuals involved in gang violence would your agency like to have available that it does not now have access to?

OPTIONAL: Contact Information for Survey Respondent: -----

Thank you for taking the time to respond to this survey. Please return it to the Violence Policy Center, 1730 Rhode Island Ave., NW, Suite 1014, Washington, DC 20036 in the postage-paid envelope included with the survey. If you have any additional questions, please contact Marty Langley at 202-822-8200 x109 or mlangley@vpc.org.

In January 2008, the Violence Policy Center conducted a survey of California law enforcement agencies regarding their recordkeeping of incidents involving gang members and firearms. The VPC obtained a mailing list for all California police chiefs and sheriffs departments from an outside list vendor. From this list, totaling 415, the VPC sent out a short two-page, seven-question survey (see prior page) with a personalized cover letter.

By April 1, 2008, the VPC had received 136 responses to the questionnaire for a response rate of 33 percent—a measure of the strong interest in the issues raised by the survey. This section presents an overview of the responses and key themes that emerged from the survey. At the end of this section is a chart detailing the specific responses contained in each survey returned to the VPC, including comments from respondents.

In the cover letter accompanying the survey, respondents were told that they could answer the survey anonymously, and that if they chose to add contact information no information would be cited specifically to their response. Of the 136 responses, 63 included identifying information and were received from the jurisdictions of Alameda County, Anaheim, Atherton, Atwater, Barstow, Belmont, Berkeley, Brea, California City, Calistoga, Campbell, Carmel, Chico, Claremont, Coalinga, Culver City, Dinuba, El Cajon, Emeryville, Escondido, Glendale, Healdsburg, Hemet, Hillsborough, Imperial, Inyo County, Jackson, Kensington, Mammoth Lakes, Marin County, Marina, Mendocino County, Merced, Monterey, Morro Bay, National City, Oakland, Ontario, Pasadena, Placentia, Port Hueneme, Port of Stockton, Red Bluff, Redlands, Redondo Beach, Riverside, Riverside County, San Benito, San Bernardino, San Carlos, San Fernando, San Joaquin County, San Leandro, San Luis Obispo, San Luis Obispo County, San Rafael, Santa Ana, Santa Barbara, South Pasadena, Twin Cities, Vernon, Watsonville, and, Yreka. Seventy-three did not include identifying information.

Agencies That Do Collect Information Linking Guns and Gang Violence

1. Does your agency collect information linking specific firearms to use or possession by individuals involved in gang violence? (For each question, please check all boxes that apply.)

- Yes. Please continue with question 2.
- No. Please skip to question 7.

Sixty-six of the 136 respondents stated that they “collect information linking specific firearms to use or possession by individuals involved in gang violence.” Seventy stated that they did not.

<p>2. In which cases does your agency collect information linking firearms to individuals involved in gang violence?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> All cases in which a firearm is linked to an individual or individuals involved in gang violence, whether or not the firearm is known or suspected to have been used in a criminal offense. (For example, if a firearm is seized in a search that involves a gang member or a firearm is illegally possessed by a gang member, the information would be recorded.)<input type="checkbox"/> Only cases in which the firearm is known or suspected to have been used in the furtherance of a crime. (For example, if the firearm were known or suspected to have been used in a shooting.)<input type="checkbox"/> Other. Please describe: - - - - -
--

Forty-nine of the 66 collected the information for, “All cases in which a firearm is linked to an individual or individuals involved in gang violence, whether or not the firearm is known or suspected to have been used in a criminal offense.” (For example, if a firearm is seized in a search that involves a gang member or a firearm is illegally possessed by a gang member, the information would be recorded.)

Thirteen of the 66 collected the information, “Only cases in which the firearm is known or suspected to have been used in the furtherance of a crime.” (For example, if the firearm were known or suspected to have been used in a shooting.)⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Four were listed as “other.”

3. How does your agency record the information?

- The information is entered into a searchable data base.
- The information is recorded in files relating to a specific investigation, but is not entered into a broader, searchable data base.
- Other. Please describe: -----

Forty of the 66 entered the information into a searchable database. Twenty-two of the 66 recorded the information in files relating to a specific investigation, but did not enter it into a broader, searchable database.⁴⁶

4. What level of detail is recorded about each firearm?

- Only general firearm type (check all boxes that apply):
 - Long gun: rifle shotgun
 - Handgun: pistol revolver
- More detailed description of firearm (check all boxes that apply):
 - Make, for: pistol revolver rifle shotgun
 - Model, for: pistol revolver rifle shotgun
 - Caliber, for: pistol revolver rifle shotgun
 - "Assault weapon" under California law.

Regarding the level of detail for each firearm entered in their records, 56 of the 66 detailed specific firearm type—pistol, revolver, rifle, and shotgun—as well as information regarding the make, model, and caliber of the gun. Three of the 66 recorded some level of detailed firearm description beyond general firearm type, and seven of the

⁴⁶ Four were listed as "other."

66 recorded only general firearm type. Forty-three of the 66 recorded whether the firearm was classified as an “assault weapon” under California law, 23 of 66 did not.

5. How is gang violence defined for the purpose of collecting this data?

- Presence of a gang member as either victim or offender.
- Presence of a gang member as either victim or offender AND the requirement of a gang motive for the crime.

For purposes of collecting their data, 55 of the 66 defined gang violence as the “presence of a gang member as either victim or offender.” Eleven of the 66 defined gang violence as the “presence of a gang member as either victim or offender AND the requirement of a gang motive for the crime.”

6. Does your agency publish summary reports of data detailing firearms and individuals involved in gang violence?

- Yes. Please describe (title and how often): -----
- No.

Only three of the responding agencies published “summary reports of data detailing firearms and individuals involved in gang violence.” Sixty-three of the 66 did not.

7. What information about firearms and individuals involved in gang violence would your agency like to have available that it does not now have access to?

The responses to Question 7, soliciting comments from respondents, are discussed later in this section.

Agencies That Do Not Collect Information Linking Guns and Gang Violence

1. Does your agency collect information linking specific firearms to use or possession by individuals involved in gang violence? (For each question, please check all boxes that apply.)

- Yes. Please continue with question 2.
- No. Please skip to question 7.

Seventy respondents stated that they did not “collect information linking specific firearms to use or possession by individuals involved in gang violence.” These respondents were asked to skip questions two through six and respond to Question 7.

7. What information about firearms and individuals involved in gang violence would your agency like to have available that it does not now have access to?

The responses to Question 7, soliciting comments from respondents, are discussed later in this section.

Themes That Emerged From the Survey Responses

For those agencies that did collect information linking guns and gang violence, 13 of the 66 stated that they needed no additional information or had access to the information they needed, 27 offered no comment. For those respondents that did offer additional comments, themes that emerged included:

- expansion and integration of databases, including improved accuracy and consistency of information entered into systems and easier access to such information;

- identification of trends revealing firearms most commonly used by gang members in crime;
- the ability, through ballistics or other means, to more effectively link firearms to prior crimes or gang use;
- a desire for more detailed information linking firearms use to incidents involving gang violence;
- greater detail on the firearms seized in connection with gang violence (for example, make, model, caliber, barrel length, finish, etc.);
- more information on each firearm's history from its point of sale and the processes by which gang members obtain guns;
- improved tracking for long guns; and,
- additional information on criminal offenders.

Two respondents raised the specific issue that database information connected with long gun transfers was not maintained and urged that the records be retained post-transfer to improve tracking.

For those agencies that did not collect information linking guns and gang violence, 23 of the 70 stated that they needed no additional information or had access to the information they needed. Eleven offered no comment. Many of those who stated they had no need for additional information cited the fact that they currently had no gang problem. For the remaining 36, additional comments for the most part mirrored the issues raised by the agencies that did collect information.

**Key to Chart of Responses from Law Enforcement Agencies That Do Collect
Information Linking Guns and Gang Violence**

Linking Gun to Individual	How is Information Recorded	Firearm Details	Assault Weapon Recorded	Gang Violence Definition	Comments
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Linking Gun to Individual

Question 2: In which cases does your agency collect information linking firearms to individuals involved in gang violence?

All = All cases in which a firearm is linked to an individual or individuals involved in gang violence, whether or not the firearm is known or suspected to have been used in a criminal offense. (For example, if a firearm is seized in a search that involves a gang member or a firearm is illegally possessed by a gang member, the information would be recorded.)

Crime = Only cases in which the firearm is known or suspected to have been used in the furtherance of a crime. (For example, if the firearm were known or suspected to have been used in a shooting.)

How Information is Recorded

Question 3: How does your agency record the information?

Searchable = The information is entered into a searchable database.

Files = The information is recorded in files relating to a specific investigation, but is not entered into a broader, searchable database.

Firearm Details

Question 4: What level of detail is recorded about each firearm?

All = Respondents that record make, model, and caliber of all firearms.

Limited = Respondents that record some detailed firearm descriptions in addition to general firearm type.

General = Respondents that record only general firearm type.

Question 4, Part II: Assault Weapon Recorded?

Yes = Respondent records assault weapon as defined by California law.

No = Respondent does not record assault weapon as defined by California law.

Gang Violence Definition

Question 5: How is gang violence defined for the purpose of collecting this data?

Presence = Presence of a gang member as either victim or offender.

Motive = Presence of a gang member as either victim or offender AND the requirement of a gang motive for the crime.

Comments

Question 7: What information about firearms and individuals involved in gang violence would your agency like to have available that it does not now have access to?

Responses are comments offered by respondents to this question.

**Chart of Responses from Law Enforcement Agencies That Do
Collect Information Linking Guns and Gang Violence**

Linking Gun to Individual	How is Information Recorded	Firearm Details	Assault Weapon Recorded	Gang Violence Definition	Comments
All	Searchable	Limited	Yes	Presence	No response
All	Files	All	No	Presence	"How many of the firearms are legally purchased versus stolen, what connection does the person who legally purchased the gun have with the gang member who used or was in possession of it."
All	Searchable	All	Yes	Presence	No response
All	Searchable	All	Yes	Presence	No response
All	Searchable	All	Yes	Presence	No response
All	Searchable	All	Yes	Presence	No response
All	Searchable	All	Yes	Presence	No response
All	Files	All	No	Presence	"An improved RMS [Records Management System] system that would better provide the ability to search and produce reports, such as summaries. A link analysis software platform that could tie info into an RMS system."
All	Files	All	Yes	Motive	No response
All	Searchable	All	Yes	Presence	No response
All	Searchable ⁴⁷	All ⁴⁸	Yes	Presence	No response
All	Searchable	All	Yes	Motive	"N/A"
All	Searchable	All	Yes	Presence	"How do they get the firearm?"

⁴⁷ "However, info may not be cross-referenced to gang."

⁴⁸ "MG [machine gun] or SMG [submachine gun]."

All	Files	All ⁴⁹	Yes	Presence	"We only have CalGang access now and our own intelligence files."
All	Searchable	All	No	Motive	No response
All	Searchable	All	No	Presence	"We do all of this via ATF eTrace as we research firearms that we recover and list with whom they were associated to include gang members. We can get reports, but we do not publish them."
All ⁵⁰	Other ⁵¹	All	Yes	Presence	"Commonly used/seized firearms, location firearm was seized from, emerging weapons trends."
All	Files	All	Yes	Presence	No response
All	Searchable	All	Yes	Motive	No response
All	Files	All	No	Presence	"Ensure all California agencies input their gang arrests into CalGang like they should."
All	Searchable	All	Yes	Presence	"N/A"
All	Searchable	General	No	Presence	No response
All	Searchable	All	Yes	Presence	No response
Crime	Searchable	All	Yes	Motive	No response
All	Searchable	All	No	Presence	"Better technology"
Crime	Searchable	All	No	Presence	No response
Crime	Files	All	Yes	Motive	No response
Crime	Searchable	All	Yes	Presence	"Statewide trends re: type and crimes."
Crime	Files	All	Yes	Presence	"None."
Crime	Searchable	All	Yes	Presence	"None."

⁴⁹ "We collect as much information as possible."

⁵⁰ "Our agency turns seized firearms over to the county crime lab who in turn test fires and attempts to link the weapon(s) to other crimes."

⁵¹ "Refer to previous answer."

Crime	Searchable	All	Yes	Presence	"Our department has access to every database that is useful to us."
Crime	Files	General	No	Motive	No response
Other ⁵²	Files	All	Yes	Presence	"None."
Other ⁵³	Other ⁵⁴	All ⁵⁵	No	Presence	"N/A"
Other ⁵⁶	Searchable ⁵⁷	All	Yes	Motive	"A specific database compatible with current department hardware/software."
All	Searchable	All	Yes	Motive	"[Our jurisdiction] addresses gang and firearm violence in an aggressive task force style. Information generated is shared with the other agencies.... By applying this style of investigative technique... citizens...are better served. This shared information also heightens officer safety. I am unable to identify a resource...[our]...office does not possess to assist in firearm and gang violence."
All	Searchable	Limited	Yes	Presence	"Countrywide database to compare shell casings found at crime scenes. This is in order to link shootings together."
All	Searchable	All	Yes	Presence	No response
All	Files	All	Yes	Presence	"Nothing at this time."

⁵² "The information could be retrieved but is not currently being documented or tracked."

⁵³ "Guns that enter our custody via arrest, search warrant, crime evidence, are, if applicable, submitted for cartridge entry into NIBIN [National Integrated Ballistic Information Network]."

⁵⁴ "The information is recorded in NIBIN."

⁵⁵ "The info is recorded with the weapon type."

⁵⁶ "All cases in which a firearm is linked whether a gang member or not is recorded."

⁵⁷ "The searchable database is not specific to gang members."

All	Files ⁵⁸	All ⁵⁹	Yes	Presence	"A better way of tracking long guns...."
Crime	Searchable	All	Yes	Presence	"Weapons of choice, how obtaining, alerts for pending law enforcement assaults."
All	Files	All	No	Presence	"A nationwide searchable database involving gangs."
Crime	Files	All	No	Presence	"I would like to see a database which includes information on firearms, ammunition, cartridge cases or any firearm-related items in the possession of documented gang members."
Crime	Files	General	No	Presence	No response
All	Files	All	Yes	Presence	No response
All	Files	All	No	Presence	"It would be helpful to have the ability to trace the history of any weapon from purchase to latest registered owner."
All	Files	General ⁶⁰	Yes	Presence	"We would like to have DROS (Dealer's Record of Sales) information in California for long guns in the state database. Presently, we only get handgun DROS info. We would also like to have a national computer database for DROS information and any state gun registry databases. Presently, we only get 'hits' on firearms in NLETS [National Law Enforcement Telecommunications System] that are stolen."
Crime	Searchable	General	No	Presence	No response
All	Searchable	General	No	Motive	"We can get most information we need, but it would be nice for an easier way to pull data. Age of offender, location, caliber used, gun stolen—straw purchase, etc. (where did the gang member get the gun)."
Other ⁶¹	Searchable ⁶²	All	No	Presence	"We have access to what we would need."

⁵⁸ "Information is recorded with NCIC [National Crime Information Center], AFS [Automated Firearms System], and Crimegun."

⁵⁹ "Type (pistol, revolver...), category (single shot, semi-automatic, automatic, pump...), serial number, length of barrel, finish (chrome, blue steel, cast iron)."

⁶⁰ "Only type of firearm is recorded. No other specific info is recorded. It can, however, be researched in agency-specific databases."

All	Searchable	All	No	Presence	No response
All	Searchable	All	No	Presence	"Name of person arrested with firearm including arresting agency's case number. Type or name of crime gun was used in. Name of arrested person's gang."
Crime	Files	All	No	Presence	"Automation only. Most stats are kept in case files."
All	Searchable	All	Yes	Presence	"Victim info, offender info, criminal history, caliber of gun, description of gun."
All ⁶³	Searchable ⁶⁴	All	Yes	Presence ⁶⁵	"Same information we submit to DRUGFIRE. Full description, results of test fire, and whom the weapon was taken from."

⁶¹ "This information would be part of a case file/investigation."

⁶² "CLETS—California Law Enforcement Telecommunications System."

⁶³ "All guns seized from gang members are taken as evidence and transported to the local county lab where they are fired and the results are entered as computer data in the DRUGFIRE database available for comparison."

⁶⁴ "Gang members are entered into CalGang which is a searchable database which directs people to the entering agency. We keep gang cards on all gang member contacts which would list any guns associated with that gang member."

⁶⁵ "Gang member as defined by California state law."

All ⁶⁶	Searchable ⁶⁷	Limited ⁶⁸	No	Presence	"Specifically, the department would like to receive information about gang members residing in or visiting our city who are in possession of firearms or who use firearms in other jurisdictions. We would like this information on a continuous basis. Generally, we do not need statistical gang violence or firearm possession trend information."
All ⁶⁹	Searchable ⁷⁰	All ⁷¹	Yes	Presence	"Unknown if the Gang Unit would need any additional information. They have recently worked with [the District Attorney's office] to obtain a gang injunction in the courts. Gang info seems readily available to them."
All	Searchable	All	Yes	Presence	"Weapon and suspect history."
All	Other ⁷²	All ⁷³	Yes	Presence	"None."

⁶⁶ "Note that this is dependent, first, on the accuracy of the officer's report and second, on the data entry."

⁶⁷ "The possession of firearms and all other weapons are entered as to each person involved in a case, as is their gang membership. Recovered firearms are listed in a separate electronic file as evidence to the case, and are linked to the suspect in the report."

⁶⁸ "The caliber field is a free form field where it is entered as a weapon used by a person in the case file. The model, manufacturer and serial number are entered in the evidence file linked to the case and person files in the database."

⁶⁹ "The CA Department of Justice mandates entry of all firearms into the Automated Firearms System which is their system. The entries are crime gun, evidence, safekeeping, found, lost and destruction. The crime gun code we use is 186.22—active participation in street gang."

⁷⁰ "The Gang Unit keeps their own database. All firearms are entered...[into a]...barcode system. This is a searchable database used department-wide."

⁷¹ "Color, barrel length, importer, any owner applied numbers or info, special grips, and add-on equipment such as scopes, silencers, or sights."

⁷² "The information is collected for purposes of tracing firearms through ATF's gun tracing system, but is not maintained in this department."

⁷³ "Make, model, serial number, importer, and country of origin are now recorded for all firearms—as all of it is needed for tracing."

All	Searchable	All	Yes	Presence	"Nothing further! We have our own, JDIC [Justice Data Interface Controller], and CalGang databases."
All	Files	All ⁷⁴	Yes	Presence	No response
All	Other ⁷⁵	General	No	Presence	No response
All	Searchable	All	Yes	Presence	"None."
All	Searchable	All	No	Presence	No response
All	Files	All	Yes	Presence	"All information if possible."
All	Files	All	Yes	Motive	"Searchable database by gang and by gang member. Also, searchable database as to what crimes are specifically tied to a weapon."

⁷⁴ "Color (stainless steel, blue steel, etc.)"

⁷⁵ "Our gang unit is funded by a grant from the Office of Emergency Services. We are required to provide quarterly statistics regarding seizure of weapons."

**Key to Chart of Responses From Law Enforcement Agencies That Do Not
Collect Information Linking Guns and Gang Violence**

Comments

Comments

Question 7 = What information about firearms and individuals involved in gang violence would your agency like to have available that it does not now have access to?

Responses are comments offered made by respondents to this question.

Chart of Responses From Law Enforcement Agencies That Do Not Collect Information Linking Guns and Gang Violence

Comments
"Any and all information that could be accessed on gang members with or connected to guns would be useful."
"Unsure at this time—very small community."
"One database that ballistic tests can be run through."
"Individuals involved in gang violence, police contacts outside of this agency's jurisdiction, type of firearm individual has used in past crimes and whether the individual has been contacted with firearms, and whether individual has access to firearms, such as in residence."
"None—firearm information is not that valuable as these guys trade/switch/buy/sell and steal firearms so frequently, that to work them to an individual is impossible."
"Trends or most common firearms used in gang violence."
"Firearms history—to trace origin. We currently have a county-wide database for reports, but [it] does not link gangs-firearms specifically."
"The ability to search IBIS [Integrated Ballistics Identification System] records on an agency level."
"Whenever a firearm is used in a crime, we detail related information in a police report which can be retrieved, cross referenced and reviewed electronically. If a firearm were used in a gang-related incident, we would charge accordingly and share related firearms info with law enforcement jurisdictions dealing with gangs. Because we are a relatively small city and affluent, we have been blessed with no gang problems."
"Access to a searchable database containing local individuals and incidents. Descriptions of seized weapons involved in gang violence in local database."
"We don't really have a gang problem in our city."
"A database that would link gang members to crimes and types of weapons used by gangs."
"A database linking a gang member or particular gang with a gun or type of gun."
"Nothing—we are fortunate to not have a gang problem in our city."
"None."
"Our agency uses CalGang database."
"None."

"Have the ability to run a weapon through ATF, so they could check computerized files for anything related to that firearm."
"We currently link all firearms or firearm evidence to crimes via ATF's IBIS [Integrated Ballistics Identification System] data system. I am unclear as to what specific benefit we would achieve by having the information discussed here."
"Nothing we can think of. We are a small rural area and thankfully free of gang violence seen in metropolitan areas. However, the marijuana cultivation problem has been attracting gangster types who have firearms."
"Make, model, and caliber of weapons being used by local gang members (or in a regional breakdown). Notification ability of regional agencies when a gang member is arrested with a firearm in order to possibly link that firearm with crimes in other agencies' jurisdiction."
"None."
"The tracking of gang members and weapons that are used by gang members."
"Not sure. The only issue we have with gangs is graffiti. So far, we have yet to have an issue with guns or gangs."
"What type of weapon a suspect used that includes the make, model and caliber. Be able to look up a suspect for weapons used."
"Statewide or nationwide database where any time a gun is recovered, it will be test fired and the bullet and casing is entered into the database to compare it to see if it matches bullets or casings recovered at a crime scene."
"Specific firearms recovered linked to specific gangs/gang members."
"Any."
"Link Analysis on types of weapons more commonly being used by gangs."
"A centralized database linking gang member data to firearms data, similar to the California Prohibited Armed Persons file. Example: Run gang member in the system and associated weapons come up. Run weapon and associated gang member comes up."
"Direct input/access to NIBIN [National Integrated Ballistics Information Network]. Direct access to database that contains history of a specific firearm. Direct access to database that contains info on suspects who used firearms in prior crimes."
"N/A"
"A searchable database of subjects and associated weapons."
"I'll be surprised if you find much data on this subject. Most agencies do not keep specific records on gang-related violence, including possession or use of firearms by gang members. The state Department of Justice does not collect information from local agencies on gang-related incidents. This should be done and would be the first step towards collecting data on firearms and gang violence."
"[Our jurisdiction]...does not have a gang violence problem."
"None."
"Access to IBIS (Integrated Ballistics Identification System) on all gun cases."

"Database with information on specific guns or types of guns used by specific gangs. This would assist in linking gang crimes."
"There is no software-database that currently links a specific gun serial number to a gang or gang member. I don't know what type of resources are available, but it would be helpful if we could query a gang or gang member and see how many arrests involved guns. This would be helpful in doing probation/parole compliance checks."
"[Our jurisdiction]...is a purely residential, extremely affluent town with no gang activity."
"The preferred firearms of choice and how they obtained them."
"We have encountered drug trafficking organizations transporting narcotics and firearms through our county...to other areas. We now have intel that organized motorcycle gangs are trafficking narcotics in our area and they are armed."
"To date, our community has not had any firearms related gang violence. We have not (yet) had the need for gang-related firearms tracking outside of what is available now."
"Any and all information that relates to any persons that live in our community...in connection to firearms or gang violence (persons involved in)."
"Any agency that is gathered through your survey would be of interest. We currently do not have a gang problem in our jurisdiction."
"1. Would like to have a system that links firearms to various crimes, i.e. lab results that compare rounds from various crimes and links them to cases. 2. Central location that shows/lists gang members associated with firearms usage and types of crimes."
"We are a small...town and have no gangs (yet). However, we have a county gang task force that is dealing with an influx of LA gangs. Any statistical data would be of benefit, i.e. guns of choice, whether the firearm was seized from a gang member and what gang, etc."
"Any Internet access for gang task force updates and officer safety information."
"Database that will outline gang, member's name, weapon make and caliber and if case was filed."
"General demographic information."
"It would be extremely beneficial to have information on the funding resources for firearm "buyback" programs, as well as updated bulletins on the make and models of the firearms used during gang-related incidents and current gang trends throughout the state/nation. It would also be beneficial to have a statewide/national data system which could be used for law enforcement intelligence and information sharing. Understanding that there are some data systems available, it would be more beneficial to have one that could be checked daily for the above mentioned information (i.e. firearms, updates, gang trends, etc.)."
"Currently, our agency maintains no databases or any other means by which to track the association of a gang member or a group of gang members to a particular firearm. Certainly, if a federal or statewide database exists which would allow us access to this information, our agency would appreciate the ability to gain that access."
"We have access to CalGang."

"Undetermined at this time"

"We are fortunate in the fact that gang violence is nearly non-existent in our city."

"All weapons/firearms are checked in the State of California Department of Justice Automated Firearms System (DOJ/AFS). Due to the increases in this type of crime involving these type of offenders, it would be very beneficial to develop a new system that classifies Gang Violence, the known offenders, and the known firearms used into one area/system that is available to law enforcement agencies locally, statewide, and nationally."

"Right now we do not have a need for that information. We are extremely fortunate to not have a gang problem yet."

"We currently use the...CalGang database. [Our city] does not have the residence base or an on-going problem with gang violence."

"No gang problem as of yet."

Section Four: Information for Effective Policy

In his book *Private Guns, Public Health*, Harvard University Professor David Hemenway writes, “In criminal justice parlance, *surveillance* is the term for monitoring the behavior of suspicious individuals. The public health meaning of *surveillance* is quite different—it refers to the systematic and continuing collection of health data essential for determining the nature of the problem, suggesting effective interventions, and providing the information for policy evaluation.”⁷⁶ Hemenway observes,

“The proactive, community-oriented approach of public health can be contrasted to the often reactive, individual focus of therapeutic medicine and traditional criminal justice. Medicine’s principal focus is on curing the individual patient, one person at a time. Medical care providers across the country treat gunshot victims and their families on a daily basis, usually in humane and often heroic ways, but they do so one patient at a time.

“Similarly, the law enforcement and criminal justice systems seek to apprehend and punish those committing crimes, one perpetrator at a time. Although deterrence is an important goal of the criminal justice and tort systems and prevention is increasingly seen as a police function, most of the activity still takes place after the fact. By contrast, the goal of public health is neither to determine fault nor to punish perpetrators. Instead, public health focuses directly on prevention—eliminating the problem before something bad happens.”⁷⁷

Regardless of the approach taken, it is clear that there is a desire, and a need, for more accurate and comprehensive data on youth gang violence and firearms.

As noted earlier in this study, like the nation as a whole, firearms play a key role in homicide in California. In 2007, when homicides were examined by type of weapon used, 72.4 percent resulted from the use of a firearm

⁷⁶ David Hemenway, *Private Guns, Public Health* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2004), p. 218.

⁷⁷ Hemenway, *Private Guns, Public Health*, pp. 8-9.

(61.7 percent handgun, 10.7 percent all other firearms).⁷⁸ From 1998 to 2007, the proportion of homicides that resulted from the use of firearms increased from 68.8 percent to 72.4 percent.⁷⁹ At the same time, gang violence is a key factor in homicide in California. In 2007, for homicides in which the contributing circumstances were known, 32.7 percent were gang related, second only to arguments (41.8 percent).⁸⁰ The largest percentage of male homicide victims (37.5 percent) were victims of gang-related homicides.⁸¹

The issue of youth gang violence and firearms is defined far more by what is not known, than what is known. The unknowns include:

- the types of firearms (pistol, revolver, rifle, shotgun, assault weapon as defined by California law) most often linked to youth gang violence;
- the manufacturer, model, caliber, and age of firearms used in youth gang violence;
- any trends associated with firearm type or design changes in guns that may impact youth gang violence;
- how youth gang members obtain firearms; and,
- comprehensive information on sources (states of origin, specific Federal Firearms License (FFL) holders) of firearms used in youth gang violence. (Until FY2004, comprehensive national crime gun trace data was released by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) under the Freedom of Information Act. Since then, the release of such information has been banned under a

⁷⁸ "Homicide in California 2007," p. 18.

⁷⁹ "Homicide in California 2007," p. 18.

⁸⁰ "Homicide in California 2007," p. 21.

⁸¹ "Homicide in California 2007," p. 22.

spending prohibition contained in ATF's appropriations, a measure commonly known as the Tiahrt Amendment, for its sponsor, Kansas Representative Todd Tiahrt.)

Currently, information collected on youth gang violence and firearms varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction in California with limited information reported on a statewide level by the California Department of Justice. Yet the importance of, and value placed on, comprehensive, accurate data by law enforcement is made clear by the responses received by the VPC in its survey of California law enforcement agencies. Comprehensive data is key in not only working to solve crimes, but in preventing crimes before they occur and identifying trends that help fuel violence. As cited earlier, key themes that emerged from the VPC law enforcement survey included the need for:

- identification of trends revealing firearms most commonly used by gang members in crime;
- a desire for more detailed information linking firearms use to incidents involving gang violence;
- greater detail on the firearms seized in connection with gang violence (for example, make, model, caliber, barrel length, finish, etc.);
- more information on each firearm's history from its point of sale and the processes by which gang members obtain guns;
- improved tracking for long guns;
- expansion and integration of databases, including improved accuracy and consistency of information entered into systems and easier access to such information;
- consistency in defining crimes as gang-related; and,
- additional information on criminal offenders.

In these areas (as well as others not stated), the goals of public health and law enforcement converge. Public health advocates work to identify points of intervention to help prevent violence and reduce injury and mortality. One key point of intervention in youth gang violence is identifying the types of firearms used in gang violence, trends associated with weapons use, how weapons are obtained, the circumstances in which they are used, and possible approaches to reduce firearms access.

As detailed in earlier sections, California has a wide range of databases containing firearms information, including purchase, possession, transfer, prohibited categories, and criminal use. Information is also contained on gang violence: ranging from law-enforcement restricted databases such as CalGang to publicly available information such as that collected for the California Supplementary Homicide Report (SHR).

Yet despite the amount of information being collected, a very limited amount can be successfully applied to more fully understand the role that firearms play in youth gang violence. Much of this is due to the fact that the most complete reporting on youth gang violence and firearms appears to be at the local law enforcement level, the degree and manner regarding how such information is gathered varies significantly, and the vast majority of this information is not published. This is in spite of the fact that there is strong interest from both law enforcement (as measured by the findings of the VPC's survey detailed in Section Three) and those involved in violence prevention from a public health perspective in obtaining such detailed information in the hope of reducing youth gang violence due to firearms.

On the local level, a wide range of information is being collected, varying from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Of comprehensive multi-jurisdictional databases that make their data public, only two offer any link between gang violence and firearms: the statewide California Supplementary Homicide Report, part of the federal Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) program; and, the California Violent Death Reporting System (CalVDRS). Both of these systems include in their tabulated information data submitted to them by local law enforcement agencies. Because of the limitations detailed above, firearms information is limited primarily to weapon type (rifle, shotgun, handgun). The role of gang involvement, primarily in homicide, is also limited (although superior to other states).

As noted earlier in the report, CalVDRS collects data on violent death utilizing death certificates, coroner/medical examiner records, police reports, and crime laboratory records to obtain more detailed information on circumstances and weapon involvement in violent deaths, including homicides, suicides, and murder-suicides.

CalVDRS is currently operating as a pilot project in five California counties: Alameda, Los Angeles, Riverside, San Francisco, and Santa Clara, which include the cities of Los Angeles, Oakland, San Francisco, and San Jose. However, as illustrated in the chart below, even as a pilot project, not all potential data sources provide information to the system (e.g., Los Angeles Police Department, Los Angeles County Sheriff, and the San Jose Police Department do not contribute data).

Records Submitted to CalVDRS From Participating Counties ⁸²					
County	Death Certificates	Coroner Records	Police Reports	Crime Lab Reports	Supplementary Homicide Reports
Alameda	EDRS	Yes	Oakland Police Department	No	Yes
Los Angeles	EDRS	Yes	No	No	Yes
Riverside	EDRS	Yes	Riverside County Sheriff	No	Yes
San Francisco	EDRS	Yes	San Francisco Police Department	No	Yes
Santa Clara	EDRS	Yes	Santa Clara County Sheriff	Yes	Yes

Despite the acknowledged need for such information, and California’s superior data collection, little remains known about youth gang members and guns. As one law enforcement respondent noted in his comments submitted in response to the VPC law enforcement survey: "I'll be surprised if you find much data on this subject. Most agencies do not keep specific records on gang-related violence, including possession or use of firearms by gang members." Yet the desire for such linked information remains clear, as articulated by another survey respondent who stated, "Due to the increases in this type of crime involving these type of offenders, it would be

⁸² Source: CalVDRS staff.

very beneficial to develop a new system that classifies Gang Violence, the known offenders, and the known firearms used into one area/system that is available to law enforcement agencies locally, statewide, and nationally."

From the research conducted for this study, areas for exploration to improve data collection in California could include:

- efforts to standardize and improve the collection of firearms information, including increased detail as regards make, model, caliber, etc., by local law enforcement agencies;
- identification of ways to improve data collection by local law enforcement agencies linking firearms to gang violence;
- efforts to standardize the definition of gang member as reported by local law enforcement agencies;
- exploration of ways to further utilize statewide databases to increase available information on firearms and gang violence;
- expansion of California's Violent Death Reporting System to include the entire state and increased participation by local agencies;
- repeal of the federal ban (Tiahrt Amendment) on the release of comprehensive national crime gun trace data; and,
- exploration of ways to improve the accuracy and currency of the information contained in the CalGang database.

For law enforcement and violence prevention advocates to begin answering the questions posed at the beginning of this report—how are firearms obtained by gang members, what types of guns and/or design features do gang members favor, how do changes in the design and firepower of firearms affect youth gang violence, and, most importantly, what prevention policies can be put in place to aid in reducing firearms death and injury connected with youth gang violence—the first step is to recognize that currently the answers to these questions

are not readily available. The second is to begin identifying approaches and collaborations to begin the process of answering them.



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