

GANGS in Texas: An Overview



GANGS in Texas

OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

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GANGS in Texas

an overview

The definitions used in the Attorney General's gang reports follow usage common to many law enforcement agencies and much of the literature on gangs. There is wide variation in the way all of these terms are used, however, even among professionals in the same field.

What is a Gang?

Section 71.01(d) of the Texas Penal Code defines a criminal street gang as “three or more persons having a common identifying sign or symbol or an identifiable leadership who continuously or regularly associate in the commission of criminal activities.”

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

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

Much of what gangs do is non-criminal. Many gang members spend most of their gang-time “hanging out” and “kicking back.” What distinguishes a gang from other groups is criminality or delinquency. This agency does not recognize any benefit in tracking or labeling as gangs any groups that are not involved in committing delinquent or criminal offenses.

It is not enough for one member to have committed an offense. Two or more members acting together as a group must have committed an offense at least once. The illegal activity may range from truancy, status offenses, tagging, and disruptive behavior, to severe assaults and homicides. What is characteristic of a group that is a gang is the fact that some of the group's activities are illegal, disruptive, and harmful.

Four Basic Kinds of Gangs

A general definition applicable to all gangs must necessarily obscure important differences. Within the great variety of individual gangs, some common patterns are discernible. Types of gangs are sometimes distinguished on the basis of race and ethnicity (“**Black**” gangs, “**White**” gangs, “**Hispanic**” gangs, “**Asian**” gangs). Although many gangs do in fact consist of members of only one race or ethnicity, the kinds of gangs presented here are distinguished on the basis of their members' activities, primarily because gangs are delinquent or criminal groups. In any case, race and ethnicity are not appropriate criteria for any determination regarding delinquent or criminal association, especially since race is becoming less of an identifying factor as gangs in Texas adopt more multi-ethnic memberships.

In this report, gangs are sorted into the four types described below for several reasons:

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

The definitions below can enrich communication and help avoid some misunderstandings. They may help clarify some debates over whether groups are or are not gangs. However, this nomenclature cannot capture the very rich diversity of gangs and also is not intended as a legal tool.

Delinquent Youth Gang

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

Traditional Turf-Based Gang

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

as a result of rivalry between this gang and another gang.

Gain-Oriented Gang

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

Violent/Hate Gang

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

A **turf-oriented** gang whose members occasionally steal is very similar to a relatively inactive **gain-oriented** gang that operates in a specific geographic area. The key point is whether the members as a gang have collaborated in a profitable criminal enterprise.

Other Common Gang Terms

The terms “party” or “rave” crew, or “club,” and “clique” are all commonly used by groups of juveniles who may or may not be involved

in criminal gang activity. The fact that a group does not consider itself a gang does not mean that the group isn't actually a gang; their behavior could be consistent with gang activities.

Some additional, distinctive kinds of gangs have been identified by law enforcement officials. Most of them fit into one of the four categories described above.

Prison gangs

Prison gangs form and exist primarily in correctional institutions, although anecdotal information supports a trend toward prison gangs "taking over" criminal street gangs in some parts of Texas. Inmates who join may wear identifying tattoos. Communications and signs between gang members tend to be highly secret, often encoded. Major prison gangs in Texas state correctional institutions have ties with prison gangs in other states and in federal institutions. The gangs tend to be more violent than most street gangs. Inmates who join prison gangs are expected to remain members for life, maintaining their inside gang contacts after their release. Prison gangs are allegedly involved in numerous illegal enterprises, including drug trafficking and protection both inside and outside prisons. Members who try to break away from the gangs may be threatened with execution.

Once incarcerated, youth who are involved in street gangs may naturally fall into association with prison gangs. For many, the new affiliation results in a drastic hardening process: they may find themselves committed to a higher level of violence and criminal organization than they bargained for, with no way to back out. A released inmate who has joined a prison gang can be a dangerous negative influence if he reestablishes contact with his former street gang.

Posses

The term refers primarily to narcotic-dealing organizations based in Kingston, Jamaica.

Almost exclusively a major urban phenomenon, the posses are best known for establishing crack trade inside housing projects, using very young children as lookouts and runners, sometimes corrupting entire families in the process. The posses have a reputation for ruthless enforcement against unwelcome competition and associates who cross them.

Cults

Groups that are bound together by ideology or religious beliefs, however unusual, are legal. They are exercising rights protected by the Constitution and are not appropriately regarded as gangs unless their beliefs or practices culminate in illegal acts such as assaults or destruction of property.

White Supremacists

Skinheads, neo-Nazis, and other racist groups fall within the category of violent/hate gangs. Their rhetoric is generally protected by constitutional guarantees of freedom of speech but, when their activities include hate crimes, they may be appropriately targeted as gangs.

Satanic Cults

There have been reports of secretive intergenerational groups of devil-worshippers who practice animal sacrifice, child sexual abuse, even arson, rape and murder, as part of their religious ceremonies. However, the FBI has been unable to substantiate these claims. Some teenagers, influenced by "heavy metal" rock groups and occult literature, affect Satanic symbols in their graffiti and in their dress, but the vast majority of these youth do not actually harm animals or people.

Girl Gangs

About five to ten percent of all gang members are girls, although there is a trend in Texas toward girls becoming full-fledged members of boy's gangs. For the most part, girls are not members of boys' gangs but form girl gangs that are auxiliaries to boys' gangs. Girls are

generally excluded from the planning and execution of major gang activities. The girls most often play supporting roles, driving getaway cars, carrying weapons, and holding illegal substances when there is danger of arrest, on the theory that police officers are not as likely to arrest and search girls. Girls' "membership," however, often includes an initiation rite, either being physically beaten or having sex with a certain number of gang members or HIV positive gang members. A few girl gangs are independent organizations that mimic the activities of boy gangs, but these are the exception. If they don't form their own auxiliary groups, girls may nevertheless become involved in gangs as girlfriends and family members of male gangsters.

Tagging Crews

"Taggers," who sometimes cluster in groups known as "tagging crews," vandalize property through graffiti. They are motivated by a desire for attention and use graffiti to create an identity for themselves and their crew. Taggers often consider their tags of "pieces" to be "artwork." Although spray paint is the most common medium used, taggers—also referred to as "piecers" or "writers"—may use magic markers or etching tools in their graffiti. The images used by taggers in their graffiti are often not gang-related.

Tagbangers

Tagbangers are tagging crews that have evolved into gangs. These groups began as typical taggers, whose primary motivation was gaining attention by vandalizing property. However, competition among tagging crews led tagbanger groups to increase and expand the range of their criminal activity, resulting in behavior that mirrors that of criminal street gangs.

Gang Nations

This is not a term with a hard and fast definition, but it may be used to denote very large gangs, most conspicuously the two major Los

Angeles gangs, the Bloods and the Crips, and the two major Chicago gangs, People and Folks. The gang nations are made up of smaller "sets" that share certain symbols and loyalties. Thus different sets of the same gang may not even know each other except by recognizing common signs and insignia. They may develop rivalries among themselves, but they may also rally together against a common enemy. Gang nations and their affiliations generally extend to within prison populations.

Franchise Gangs

This term refers to a well-established and successful gain-oriented gang whose members use gang profits to set up new and similar criminal operations in new territories. Usually the intent is to escape the pressure of sophisticated big-city police departments. Thus, an inner-city, crack-dealing gang might invest a part of its inventory to sell drugs inexpensively in a smaller, quieter town, in an effort to establish itself in a new and safer market.

Bikers

These highly mobile and hierarchical organizations periodically move in groups and congregate. Bikers tend to be older than street gang members, and biker gang membership tends to be long-standing. A biker's rank or office within the club is generally indicated by the insignia and colors on his jacket. Affiliations between groups often span state lines, and some international affiliations exist as well. Group activities may be disruptive and very violent, and may involve drug trade and prostitution.

Levels of Gang Involvement

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

"Regulars" are those gang members who "hang out" with the group on a daily basis.

They are familiar with and aware of most gang activities. They will likely be present during gang offenses, frequently as participants.

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

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

“**Associates**” are friends, acquaintances and relatives who are somewhat knowledgeable about gang activities and occasionally participate in gang activities. They may be “**business associates**” who provide services such as supplying illegal substances or disposing of stolen property. Other “**peripherals**” include self-proclaimed or aspiring gang members (“**wannabes**”) who are not fully trusted or accepted and who are not fully informed about gang activities.

“**Juniors**” are aspiring gang members too young to be fully accepted. Siblings or other young relatives (cousins, nephews and nieces) of gang members are particularly at risk of developing more serious levels of gang involvement. It is a particularly sinister feature of gangs that adult members may use very young children as pawns, lookouts or couriers to avoid prosecution in the more severe adult criminal justice system. In some families, intergenerational gang membership is so entrenched that older family members teach toddlers their gang’s hand signs, much the same as other families teach their children the “hook ’em Horns” or “gig ’em Aggies” signs.

Signs of Gang Involvement

Some signs of gang involvement are:

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

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

Posing in gang photos and wearing gang tattoos are less ambiguous signs. Gang photos are like official team or group portraits, and members typically appear in full gang dress, flashing signs. To appear in such a photo with known gang members, an individual must generally be accepted as a member by the group. Any aspiring gang member can get a gang tattoo, but the danger that could be associated with an indelible mark of that nature is so great that this can be taken as a more serious sign of involvement than wearing a cap or a jacket. When a youth has been stopped by police or field-interviewed in the company of gang members, this is reason to believe that he is associating with them; however, his association could be a first-time or unusual occurrence. By itself, this sign is warning that the youth in question may be involved in gangs.

Criteria for Gang Membership and Gang Offenses

For the purposes of maintaining a database of local gang youth, various criteria may be used. A regular gang member—one of those actually committing offenses and creating a law enforcement problem—is any individual who has been arrested in the company of other gang members for a gang-related offense and meets one or more of the following conditions:

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

Some police departments track the incidence of gang-related crime, in addition to tracking gang membership. An offense may generally be considered gang-related if a gang member is arrested for the offense and any one of the following additional conditions applies:

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

Thus, an offense is not generally considered gang-related simply because a gang member is involved. For example, if a gang member gets into a fight at home and commits assault, the assault is not a gang-related crime unless gang business somehow gave rise to the assault.

Reporting About Gangs

While many of the terms and definitions in this first chapter are widely used, it is important to bear in mind that communications about gangs are subject to wide variations in interpretation. The problem is more than semantic: people differ not only in the way they use words, but they use these words to describe very different situations. The word “gang” may refer to the media image of a West Coast narcotics-trafficking organization, or it may refer to a local group of young people hanging out after curfew, depending on the context.

In this report, terms are used as far as possible in accordance with the definitions and concepts set forth in Part One. However, in Part Two especially, it is unavoidable that other usage comes into play. The Attorney General’s definitions were included in the 1995 survey, and many departments were already familiar with those definitions from earlier Attorney General gang reports. However, the number of gangs reported by a small town in West Texas, and the number of gangs reported by a major urban jurisdiction in East or Central Texas, are not straightforwardly comparable due to disputes in definitions.

Ultimately, no single definition will serve the purposes of everyone who needs to talk about the gang problem, while it is useful to gather information about the magnitude and growth of the problem around the state, an effort to nail down one “accurate” total number of gangs or gang members would be misdirected. Clarity and a firm body of fact are both needed—up to the point of diminishing returns. These definitions and surveys ultimately serve more important objectives: understanding the phenomenon of gangs and developing sound policies to deal with them.

1997 Survey and response

The 1997 Attorney General Gang Survey was mailed to a total of 1281 police chiefs, sheriffs, district attorneys, criminal district attorneys, and county attorneys. The overall response rate to the survey was 33%. Of the 945 police departments and sheriff's offices, 359 responded (38%), while 58 of 336 prosecutors responded (17%).

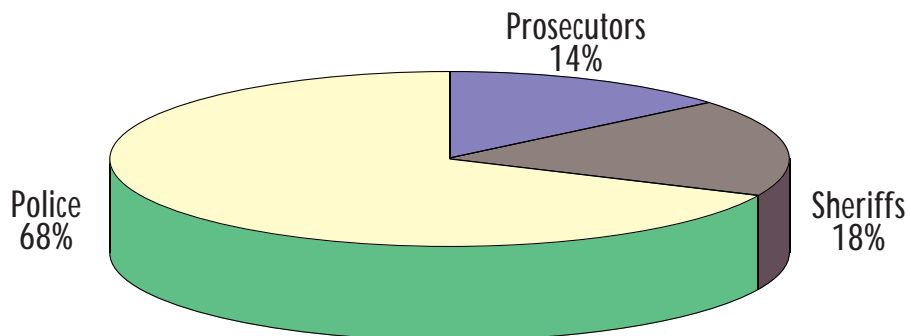
Written responses were mailed or faxed to the Office of the Attorney General in early 1997. A copy of the survey instrument is provided at the end of this report. Respondents submitted

the surveys with the understanding that the information they provided would be considered criminal intelligence and thus be treated as confidential. Consequently, in this report, results for specific cities are not presented.

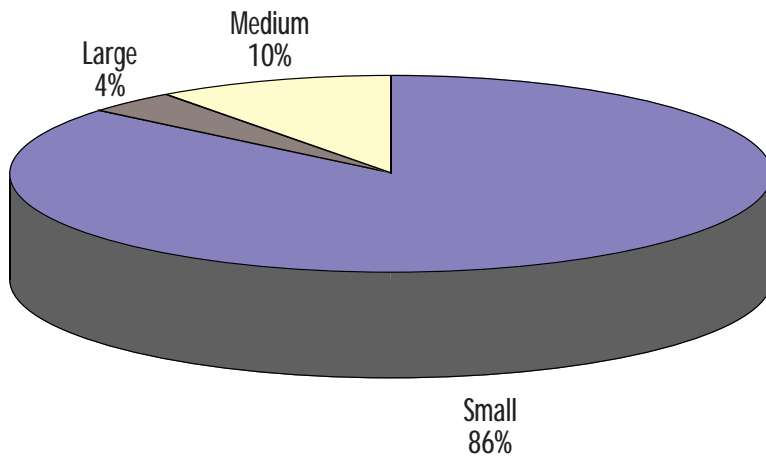
Respondents included police departments in all of the major metropolitan jurisdictions, plus sheriff's offices in most of the largest counties (population greater than 100,000). Respondents represented all geographical areas in the state. The majority of respondents were police.

Population:	<50,000	50k-500k	>50,000	TOTAL
Police	242	35	6	283
Sheriff	57	15	4	76
Prosecutors	33	20	5	58
TOTAL:	332	70	15	417

Distribution of Response: Type of Agency



Distribution of Respondents: By Population



The great majority of survey returns (335, or 80%) came from small jurisdictions (those with a population of fewer than 50,000 persons). As a result, overall results tend to mirror the situation in small towns and rural counties. With respect to many questions, results are quite different for medium-sized (50,000-500,000 persons) and large (greater than 500,000 persons) jurisdictions. Therefore, when appropriate, the survey results in this report have been broken down by jurisdiction size, to give a clearer and more accurate picture of the effect gangs are having on our state.

For the most part, results are not strikingly different when broken down by type of agency responding. Exceptions are noted. Some questions on the 1997 survey are similar to ques-

tions that appeared on the 1995 Attorney General Gang Survey. Where trends are discernible, they have been noted.

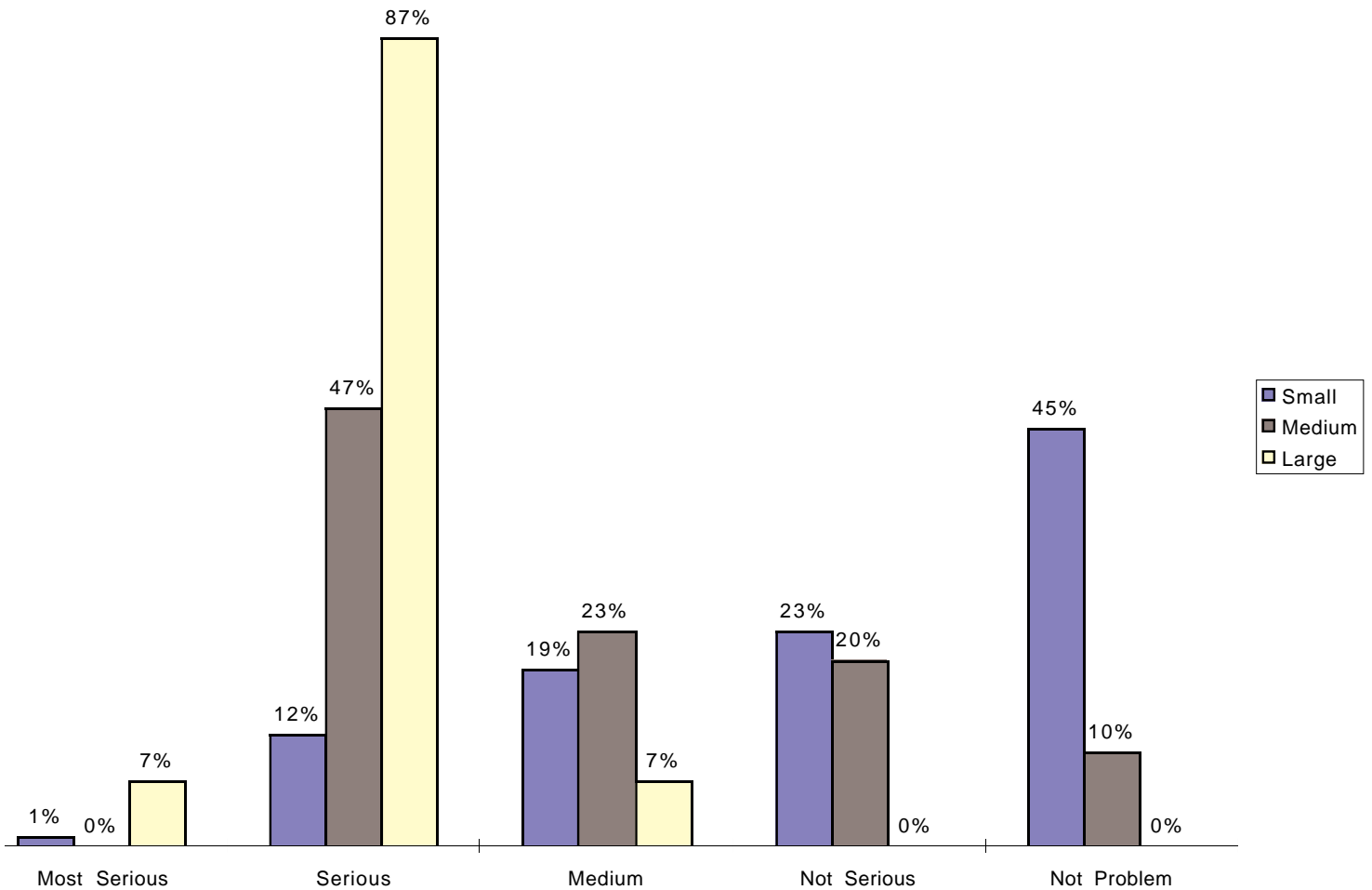
How Serious is the Problem?

Respondents were asked to rate the seriousness of the gang problem in their jurisdictions. Overall, only 1% of respondents reported that the gang problem was “one of the most serious law enforcement problems we face” and 158 respondents (38%) reported that gangs are “not much of a problem.” This result reflects the fact that the great majority of respon-

dents were from small towns or rural counties (jurisdictions with populations of fewer than 50,000 people).

When the results are broken out by size of jurisdiction, a sharply different picture emerges for the 15 respondents from major metropolitan areas, of whom 13 out of 15 (86%) report that gangs are a serious problem, and none report that gangs are less than a medium-priority problem. Medium-sized jurisdictions (50,000-500,000) were less likely to report serious problems than large jurisdictions, but they were much more likely to report serious problems than the small towns. And even among the 335 small jurisdictions, two-thirds of which report little or no problems, 42 communities (13%) report serious problems.

How Serious is the Gang Problem?



Results of the 1995 Gang Survey were similar. In 1995, it was clear that the gang problem was mild in many small towns and rural areas. However, in 1995 as in 1997, it was evident that medium-sized and large jurisdictions had much more serious problems. Additionally, both surveys showed that the gang problem is significant in some small towns.

The table on the next page provides a comparison between the results in 1995 and 1997 for respondents from small towns and for respondents from the largest jurisdictions. The samples of small jurisdictions are comparable in size (in 1995, n=354 and in 1997 n=335), and the 4-5% differences between 1995 and 1997

results are not conclusive. Evidently, the situation has not significantly worsened in small jurisdictions in the space of two years; about one-third of these communities have moderate or serious problems with gangs. And the situation remains serious in just about all the major metropolitan areas.

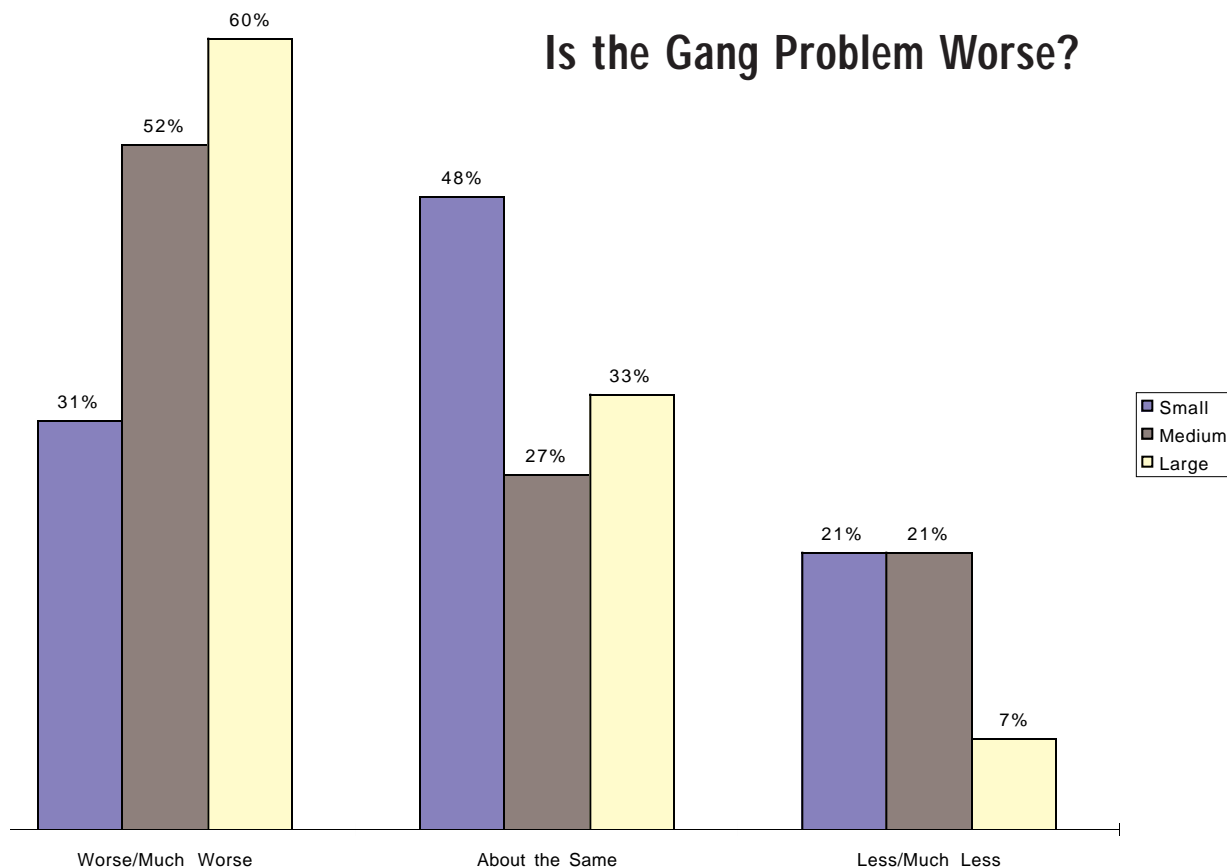
Respondents to the 1997 survey were also asked to indicate whether the gang problem had gotten worse, stayed the same, or improved in the last two years. Here again, the overall results reflect the response from the small jurisdictions that comprise the majority of respondents. When results are broken down by size of jurisdiction, it is apparent that in

How Serious is the Gang Problem? 1995 vs. 1997

	1995 Survey Results		1997 Survey Results	
	Pop. <50k	Pop. > 250k	Pop. <50k	Pop. >500k
Serious	9%	12 (86%)	13%	14 (93%)
Moderate Problem	26%	1 (7%)	19%	1 (7%)
Minor/No Problem	64%	1 (7%)	68%	0

about half of all small towns and rural areas, the problem has stayed the same in the last two years. In some cases, it has gotten worse, in other cases it has gotten better. Among respondents from major metropolitan areas, 60% report that the problem has gotten worse. Only one large jurisdiction reports that it has improved. Jurisdictions ranging from 50,000 to 500,000 are not far behind, with 52% reporting that the problem is worse or much worse.

With respect to this question, the results of the 1995 survey can again be compared to the results of the 1997 survey. In the smallest jurisdictions, in 1995, 51% thought the problem was worse or much worse, 33% thought it was about the same, and 15% thought gangs were less of a problem. In 1997, 31% of all respondents thought the problem was worse or much worse, 48% thought it was about the same, and 21% thought gangs were less of a problem.



The sample of largest jurisdictions is a very small group of respondents (14 in 1995, 15 in 1997), consisting of agencies from almost exactly the same selection of large cities. In 1995, 10 reported that the problem was worse, while in 1997, 9 reported that the problem was worse. In 1997, 5 thought the problem was the same (versus only 2 in 1995), but since 10 of 14 reported having serious problems to begin with in 1995, this is not especially good news. The situation among the mid-sized communities is cause for concern, as well: almost half reported serious problems, and a little more than half reported that the problem is worse than it was a year ago.

Types of Texas Gangs

For the 1997 survey, as with the 1995 survey, gangs are sorted into four broad categories: delinquent youth gangs, traditional turf-based gangs, gain-oriented gangs, and violent/hate gangs. The terms are defined as follows:

Delinquent Youth Gang

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

Traditional Turf-Based Gang

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

Gain-Oriented Gang

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

Violent/Hate Gang

This is a named group (juveniles and/or adults) that does not qualify as either a gain-oriented or a traditional turf-based gang, according to the definitions above. Typically, the group has developed identifying signs such as a style of

Has the Problem Gotten Worse? 1995 vs. 1997

	1995 Survey Results		1997 Survey Results	
	<50,000	> 250,000	<50,000	>500,000
Worse/Much Worse	51%	71%	31%	60%
About the Same	33%	14%	48%	33%
A Little/Much Less	15%	14%	21%	7%

Respondents with Pop. 50,000-500,000: 1997 Survey (n=70)

How serious is the problem? (number of respondents)		Is it getting worse? (number of respondents)	
Serious problem	33	Worse/much worse	36
Moderate problem	16	About the same	19
Minor/no problem	21	A Little/Much less	15

dress, haircut, or insignia. Two or more of its members have, at least once in the last year, collectively committed an assault, a homicide, or an offense that could be reported under the federal Hate Crimes Act (vandalism, assault or homicide). This type of gang includes groups whose violence has an ideological or religious rationale, such as racism or Satanism. This type of gang also includes groups whose members are randomly or senselessly violent.

Respondents were asked to indicate what kinds of gangs were present in their jurisdictions. The table below shows, for each kind of gang, the number of respondents who report the presence of that kind of gang. Respondents could choose more than one option. Overall, 279 respondents indicated the presence of delinquent youth gangs. In the smallest jurisdictions, these gangs were chosen by many more respondents than any other kind of gang.

Overall, 82 agencies (79 small, 3 medium) report that delinquent youth gangs are the only type of gang found in their jurisdiction. In medium-sized jurisdictions, turf-based and gain-oriented gangs were indicated almost as often as youth gangs, and in the largest jurisdictions, it appears that generally all kinds of gangs are present.

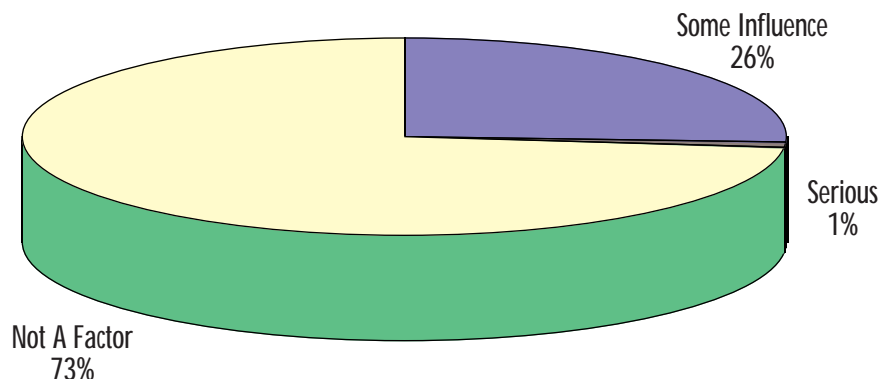
Only 5 respondents overall indicated that prison gangs were a serious problem. The five departments reporting a serious problem with prison gangs are all in South and West Texas. Three-quarters of all respondents reported that prison gangs are not a factor in their jurisdictions.

Motorcycle gangs are regarded as an “occasional” problem by only 27 out of 415 respondents (7%). No agency reported that biker gangs were “often” a problem.

Kinds of Gangs: All Respondents & by Population

	All Respondents	Small Pop. <50,000	Medium Pop. 50-500K	Large Pop. >500,000
Delinquent youth gangs	279	210	61	8
Turf-based gangs	177	114	52	11
Gain-oriented gangs	144	85	48	11
Violence/hate gangs	78	37	30	11

Prison Gangs



Number of Gangs and Gang Members

Respondents were asked to estimate the number of gangs and gang members in their jurisdictions. Police reported a total of about 3200 gangs. Sheriffs reported close to 1600 gangs, and prosecutors reported close to 6000 gangs. Almost certainly there is substantial overlap in these estimates; some gangs have in all probability been counted in the estimates of more than one respondent. A gang that ranges from one town to another, or is known to both the police and the sheriff or to one or more prosecutors' offices as well, could be counted several times.

On the other hand, there are almost certainly gaps in these gang counts; only about a third of all agencies responded to the survey, and those who did not respond are undoubtedly aware of some gangs that are not counted in these survey results. To make matters even more obscure, agencies use different definitions of the word "gang" and many do not maintain a formal database of gangs. In the absence of a statewide gang database, there are no more precise estimates of the number of gangs than the estimates of individual law

enforcement agencies. These estimates cannot simply be added up to produce a total for the state as a whole.

Police reported a total of about 84,000 gang members; sheriffs reported about 21,000 gang members; and prosecutors reported about 38,000. Here, again, it is likely that the estimates overlap, and it is also likely that there are more gang members unreported in jurisdictions that did not respond to the survey. As approximate as these numbers are, they are based on the best information available. The number of youths arrested and/or adjudicated for gang offenses can be more readily and accurately determined, but that statistic does not come any closer to pinpointing the number of youths who are gang-involved. Many gang members have not been arrested or adjudicated, and many gang-related offenses are not identified as such.

The largest cities account for more than their share of gangs and gang members. In 1997, police (no sheriffs) in six of the largest cities in the state reported 1,540 gangs and 47,000 gang members. Respondents overall estimated on average that about 13% of all gang members were girls and 75% were juveniles.

Gang Activities

Respondents were asked to indicate what types of offenses were committed by gangs in their jurisdictions. Respondents were asked only what types of gang crimes occur, not how frequently these offenses occur. The table below indicates what percentage of respondents chose each option.

Theft/burglary and assault were the options chosen by the largest number of respondents in jurisdictions of all sizes. These offenses, along with drug trafficking, car theft, drive-by shootings and homicides were reported as occurring in 100% of the jurisdictions with populations of more than one-half million. The top three gang activities that are profitable were report-

edly drug and narcotics trafficking, burglary/theft and auto theft, in that order.

Offenses such as home invasions, homicides and sexual assaults, previously associated solely with the major metropolitan areas, now occur in mid-range communities. Robberies and drive-by shootings, already prevalent in mid-size cities, are each up more than 10% from the rates reported in the *1995 OAG Gang Survey*.

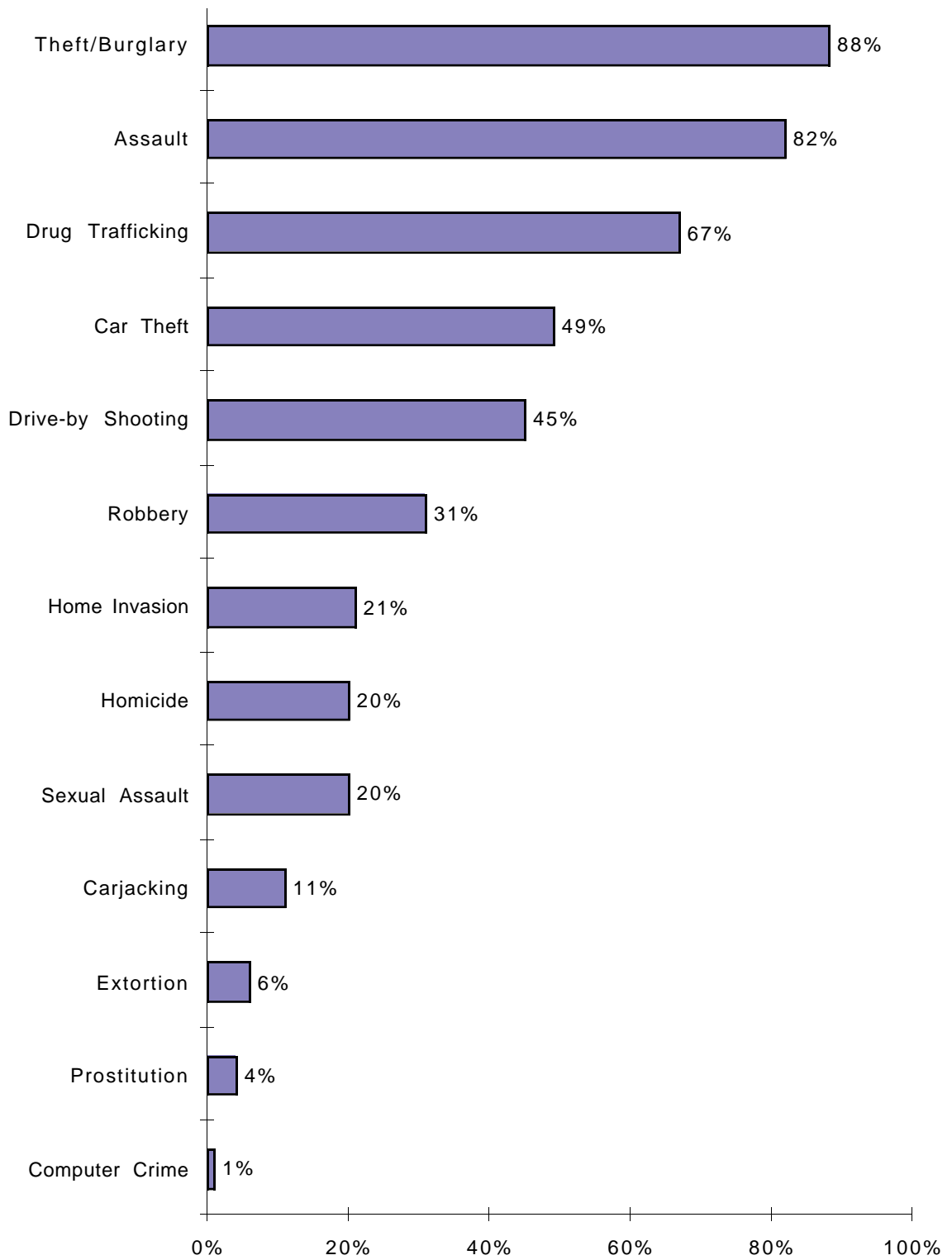
The 110 police respondents who keep tallies of drive-by shootings reported a total of about 2100 incidents. Just six police respondents from among the largest jurisdictions accounted for 1470 (70%) of the total number of drive-by shootings.

Gang Offenses by Percentage of Respondents and by Population of Jurisdiction

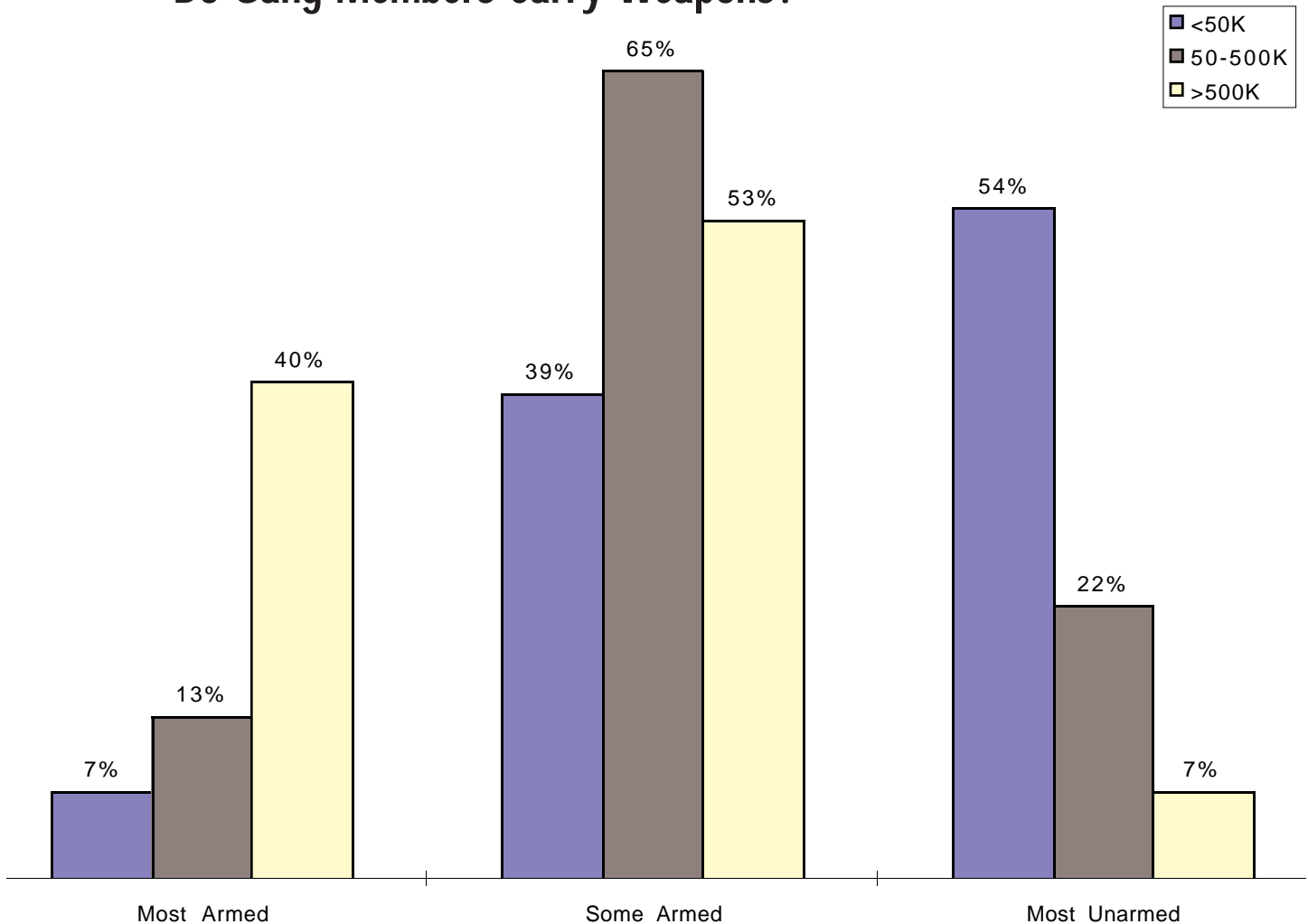
(Respondents could select more than one option.)

	Pop. <50,000	Pop. 50k-500k	Pop. >500,000	All (n=335)
Theft/Burglary	86%	92%	100%	88%
Assault	78%	95%	100%	82%
Drug Trafficking	59%	88%	100%	67%
Car Theft	39%	77%	100%	49%
Drive-by Shooting	31%	86%	100%	45%
Robbery	17%	73%	93%	31%
Home Invasion	13%	42%	67%	21%
Homicide	7%	53%	100%	20%
Sexual Assault	11%	39%	80%	20%
Carjacking	4%	24%	80%	11%
Extortion	2%	17%	33%	6%
Prostitution	1%	14%	20%	4%
Computer Crime	0%	2%	7%	1%

What Kind of Offenses?



Do Gang Members Carry Weapons?



Overall, 9% of respondents reported that most gang members are armed, 45% reported that some gang members were armed and others were not, and almost half (46%) reported that the gangs in their areas were for the most part unarmed. Once again, the overall results are colored by the situation in the small towns and rural areas that make up the majority of responding agencies. In the large urban communities, gangs tend to be armed. The graffiti problem is also much more prevalent in larger cities than in small town, as the table above shows.

Sources of Influence on Texas Gangs

Respondents were asked to indicate whether various sources of influence were causing problems in their jurisdictions. They were also asked to describe how this outside influence occurs. Overall and in the smallest jurisdictions, the greatest influence was felt to be other Texas cities — meaning the major cities, or nearby larger cities. A total of 77 respondents reported that they had no problems with outside influences.

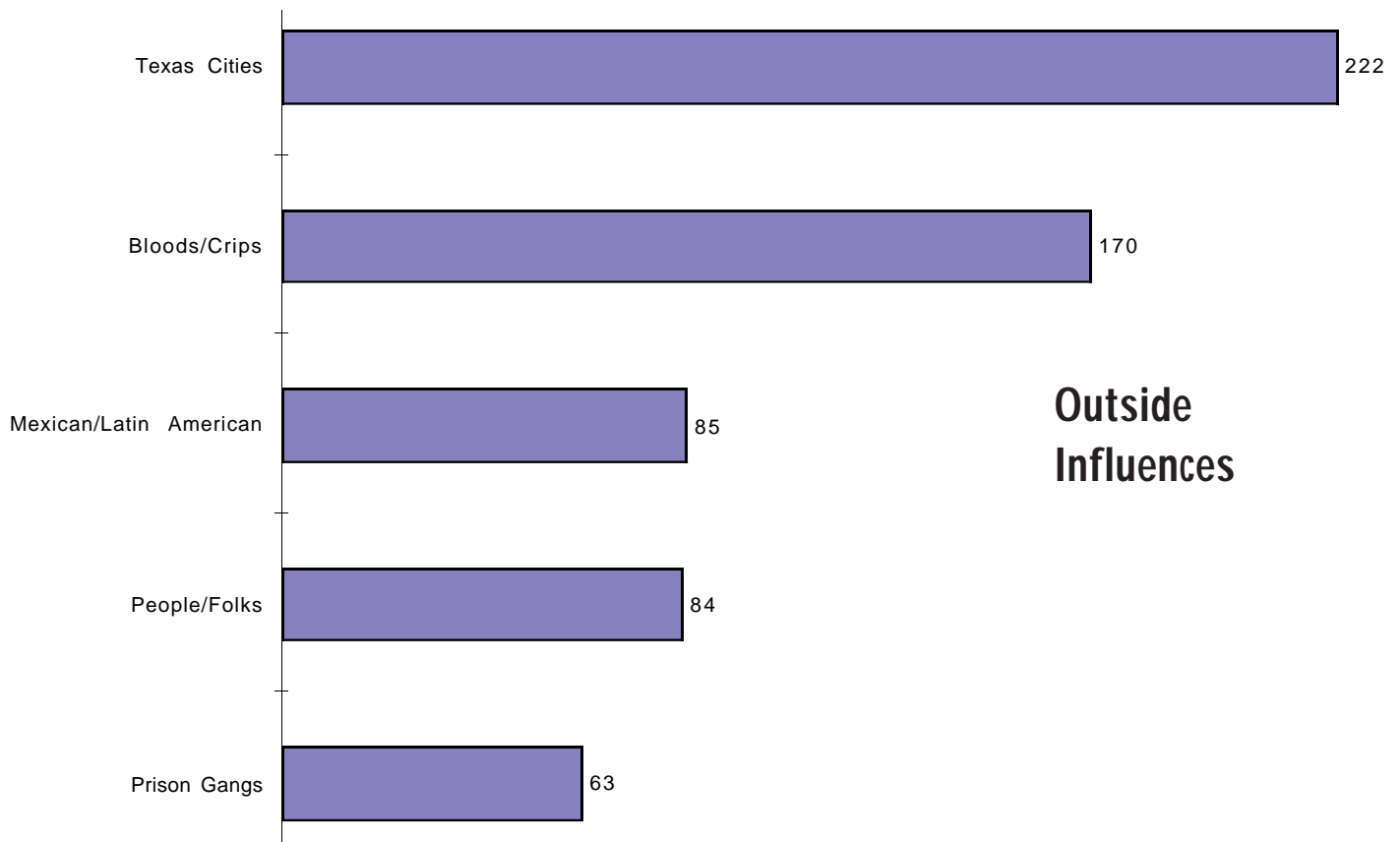
Is There a Problem with Graffiti or Tagging?

(408 Responses)	All (number)	All (percent)	Small (<50,000)	Medium (50-500K)	Large (>500K)
Frequent gang graffiti	101	25%	16%	50%	87%
Occasional gang graffiti	144	35%	37%	31%	7%*
Tagging only	38	9%	11%	4%	0%
Little or no graffiti	109	27%	32%	9%	0%

* An additional 16 respondents checked both "Frequent gang graffiti" and "Tagging only."

The strongest sources of influence in the major metropolitan areas comes from outside the state. Of the 15 respondents, 13 (80%) reported that gangs from the Midwest and West Coast exert an influence in their cities. Out of the 15, 11 reported influence by prison gangs, and just over half reported problems with influence from Latin American gangs.

West Coast gangs are major sources of influence in medium-sized jurisdictions as well. The Bloods and Crips constituted the strongest outside influence on gangs in mid-range Texas cities and counties (reported by 77% of all respondents of this size), surpassing the influence felt from other Texas cities. More than half of these respondents (52%) also reported



Source of Influence	Small	Medium	Large	All
Other Texas cities	57%	69%	33%	58%
West Coast gangs	36%	77%	80%	45%
Midwest gangs	13%	51%	80%	22%
Latin America	17%	38%	53%	22%
Prison gangs	12%	26%	73%	17%
No outside influence	23%	9%	13%	20%

influence from Midwestern gangs, such as the People, the Folks, and the Vice Lords.

Among small cities and counties, the greatest source of influence felt in small communities is other Texas cities. The next strongest influence comes from West Coast gangs, reported by 36% of respondents. The influence of Midwestern, Latin American, and prison gangs is not felt by very many of the small jurisdictions.

In terms of how the outside influences occur, among the largest jurisdictions, movement of gangs from other regions or states into the area, affiliation with prison gangs, media portrayals and copy-cattling are the predominant forms of influence on gangs and potential gang members. Mobile gangs, which enter a jurisdiction, commit crimes or engage in gang “business” and then leave, are also a substan-

tial form of influence in major metropolitan areas (reported by 47% of respondents). Spreading from nearby communities is the least common form of influence.

Copy-cattling and influx of gangs from other parts of the state or country are the most common forms of influence in both mid-size and small cities and counties. Media portrayals also have a strong influence. Gangs moving over from other nearby cities are a serious problem for these communities. A total of 55 respondents said there were no problems from this list of options.

Taken together, these charts demonstrate how out-of-state gangs move into and spread through Texas communities. Gangs from the West Coast and Midwest, and less frequently from Latin America, have established them-

How does it happen?	Small	Medium	Large	All
Copy-cattling	53%	70%	67%	57%
Outside gangs move in	43%	73%	80%	49%
Media portrayal	41%	59%	73%	46%
Spread from nearby cities	38%	55%	13%	40%
Mobile gangs	22%	38%	47%	26%
Prison gang affiliation	16%	32%	73%	21%
No outside influence	16%	8%	13%	15%

With whom do you share information? (n=70)

	Police	Sheriffs	Prosecutors
Probation/parole	69%	69%	74%
Schools	76%	73%	60%
Other nearby law enforcement	79%	69%	55%
District attorney	50%	42%	42%
Human services	14%	17%	19%
Don't share with other local agencies	6%	10%	9%

selves in the major metropolitan areas. They are now reaching out to build organizations in nearby medium-size cities and, to a lesser extent, into small communities. Media portrayals generate familiarity with gang symbols and activities, which when combined with peer-driven copy-catting create a fertile ground for recruiting new members in these smaller cities and towns.

Information Sharing

Respondents were asked to list the local agencies with whom they share information on gangs. It appears that a high degree of sharing takes place among local law enforcement agencies, prosecutors and parole/probation officers. Schools are also usually included in this activity, while social service agencies are least likely to be included. This analysis holds true across jurisdictions of all sizes.

The high level of information sharing by prosecutors is particularly notable. Most gang-related information sharing involves intelligence reports, evidence collection, checking

rap sheets, and so forth. According to the survey data, the state's prosecutors are almost as active in collecting and sharing this information as the law enforcement agencies that initially gather and process it.

Respondents were also asked about the extent to which they share information with agencies outside their own jurisdiction, including non-local police and sheriff's departments, state agencies and federal law enforcement officials. Police and sheriffs reported that they share information with comparable agencies outside their jurisdictions almost as much as with nearby law enforcement agencies.

This trend among police and sheriffs holds true for jurisdictions of all sizes. However, only the major metropolitan areas report a high degree of information sharing with state and federal law enforcement agencies (twelve of fourteen respondents in each category). The fact that the smallest jurisdictions are less likely to share information about gangs may well be due to the fact that many of these areas do not report serious problems with gangs.

Information Sharing with Agencies Outside the Jurisdiction

By type of agency

	Police	Sheriffs	Prosecutors
Non-local police departments	83%	71%	41%
Non-local county sheriff's offices	59%	67%	35%
DPS	37%	41%	28%
Federal agencies	19%	10%	24%
TDCJ	21%	24%	13%
Do not share with non-local agencies	13%	20%	48%

Information Sharing with Agencies Outside the Jurisdiction

By size of jurisdiction

	Small	Medium	Large
Non-local police departments	74%	78%	86%
Non-local county sheriff's offices	56%	59%	79%
DPS	34%	39%	86%
TDCJ	15%	35%	86%
Federal agencies	9%	42%	86%
Do not share with non-local agencies	20%	16%	0%

Interagency Task Forces

Some cities and counties have found interagency gang task forces to be a useful tool for sharing gang intelligence, coordinating enforcement efforts, and organizing intervention and prevention programs. Most respondents reported that they do not have interagency task forces. Overall, 288 respondents (78%) report having no local interagency task force present in their jurisdictions. However, of these, 246 are agencies in small jurisdictions, where gang problems may be minor. By con-

trast, only 3 major metropolitan agencies report that there is no task force.

The following chart shows which local agencies are most likely to be included, for the 81 agencies who report having an interagency task force in place. Schools are the most likely agency to be included (74%), while social service providers (housing, human services, etc.) are least likely to be included in an interagency task force. This follows the trend shown in the data regarding information sharing with local agencies.

Agencies Included in Interagency Gang Task Force

Total of 81 respondents with task forces	All (number)	All (percent)
Schools	60	74%
Juvenile Probation/Parole	55	68%
District Attorney	43	53%
Other local government	39	48%
Adult Probation/Parole	29	36%
Housing Authority	12	15%

Effective Strategies for Gang Control

Respondents were asked to indicate what strategies were effective for addressing gang problems. The chart on Effective Strategies shows what portion of the 370 respondents who answered this question selected each option (respondents could choose more than one option).

The options chosen by the greatest number of respondents were community policing and graffiti control. This was true for all sizes of jurisdiction. Targeting of gang leaders for prosecution is favored in some small communities, and it is a popular strategy in many larger jurisdictions.

Diversion, alternative sentencing and employment programs are viewed as having little effect. Code enforcement, the use of nuisance abatement laws to close buildings used for drug and vice offenses, has primarily been used in the major metropolitan areas, although it is used as an anti-gang tool in mid-size (40% support) and smaller cities (33% support) as well.

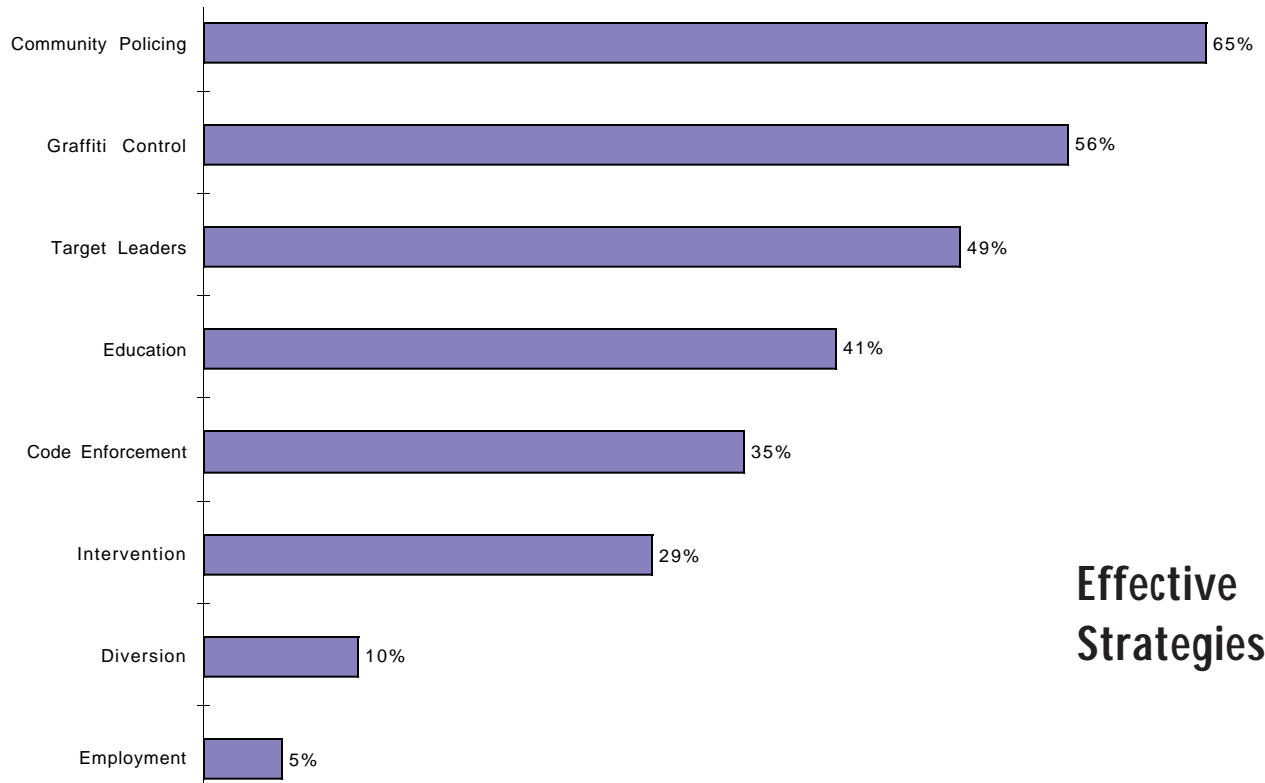
The tactic of targeting gang leaders for prosecution is based on the premise that many gangs are centered around a few individuals.

The theory is that, if these individuals are removed from the gang, the gang will disintegrate. Some of the less committed members will gravitate to other activities and may even be good candidates for intervention programs. This tactic is less popular in mid-size (69%) and small communities (44%), which may reflect the fact that gangs in small cities and towns do not have the highly developed organization and leadership structure found in gangs in large cities. It may also reflect the fact that gangs in small towns commit fewer and less serious offenses that leaders could be prosecuted for.

Law enforcement agencies, particularly police departments, have a much higher opinion of the usefulness of graffiti control, community policing and code enforcement than do prosecutors.

Tracking Gangs, Gang Members, and Gang Offenses

Unfortunately, record keeping on gangs and gang-related activity varies widely, both by type of agency and size of jurisdiction. Many agencies report that they do not keep formal records on gangs or gang activity, possibly because the gang problem is not severe enough in their area to warrant a detailed tracking system. In addition,

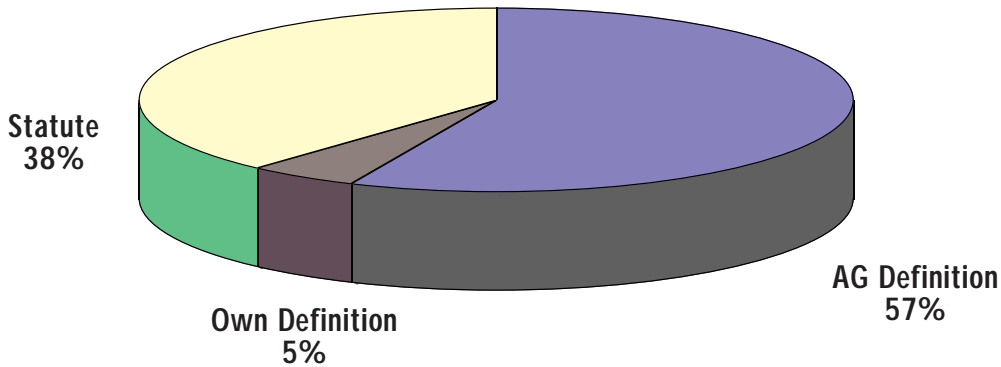


tion, a variety of definitions and criteria are used by those who do track gangs, making it difficult to compare the extent of gang activity from one city or county to the next. This may also make it difficult for different law enforcement agencies within a county or metropolitan area to share information on gang activities and spot trends in their area.

Respondents were asked to tell what definition they use when deciding whether or not a group of individuals in their area constitutes a gang. More than 100 respondents use the common language understanding of the word “gang.” Of those who base their gang tracking systems on a single formal definition, 63 use the Attorney General’s definitions, 43 use the statutory definition, and 6 have their own definitions.

	Police	Sheriffs	Prosecutors
Community Policing	70%	59%	46%
Graffiti Control	59%	57%	37%
Target Leaders	50%	43%	56%
Education/Outreach	41%	45%	37%
Code Enforcement	41%	21%	20%
Intervention	29%	31%	29%
Diversion/Alternative Sentencing	9%	14%	12%
Employment Programs	6%	3%	5%

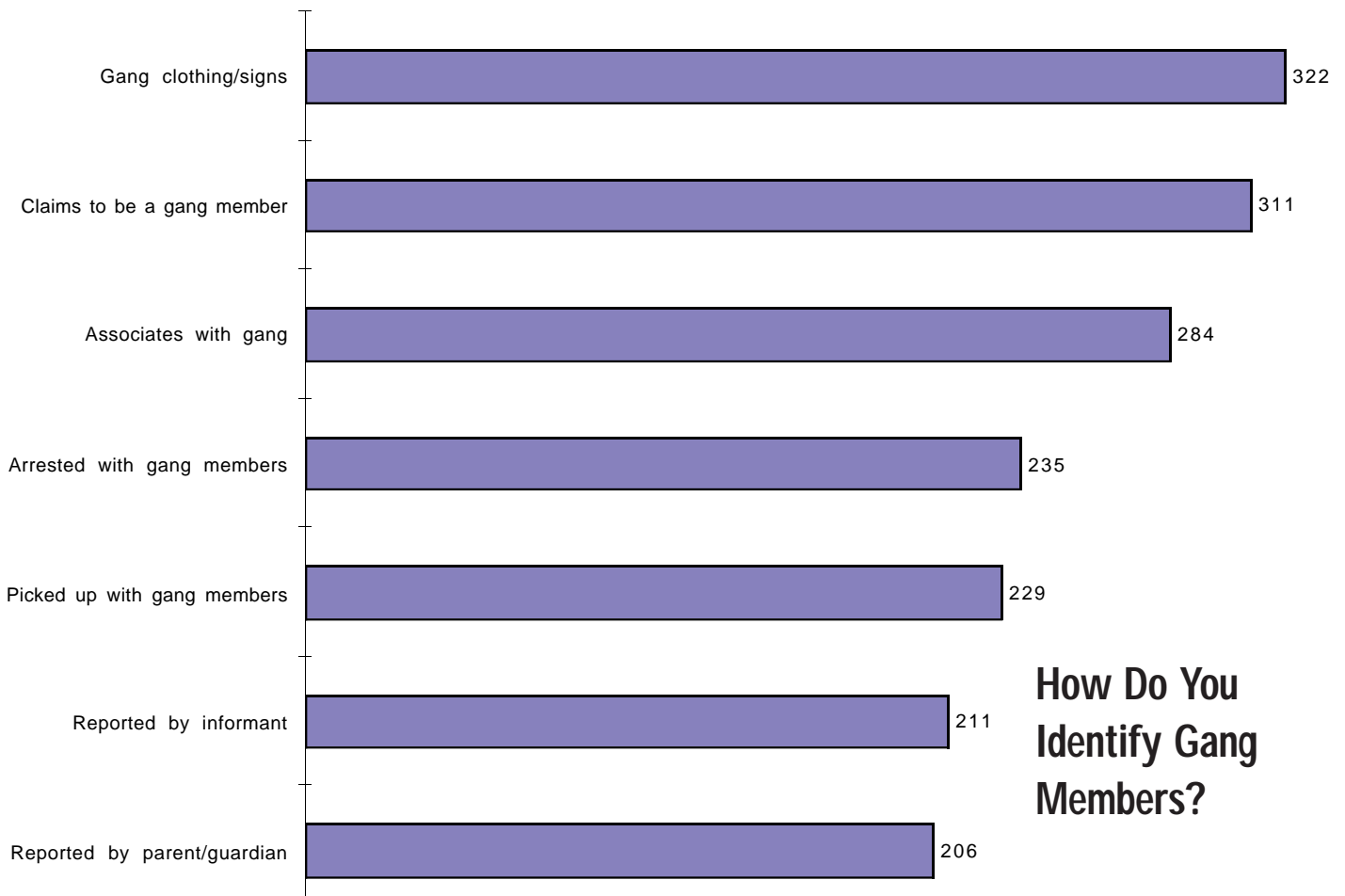
Definition of a Gang



Survey respondents were asked to indicate the criteria used to identify gang members. The chart below shows how many respondents selected each option. Respondents could select more than one.

Respondents were also asked to list the criteria they use to flag offenses as gang-related. Of the 231 who answered the question, 173 (75%)

indicated that they call an offense gang-related if it has been committed by gang members. This criterion is used by an even higher percentage of agencies in large jurisdictions, possibly because gang members are more likely to be tracked and identified by these agencies. Results of this question are presented in the following table. Respondents could choose more than one.



How Do You Identify Gang Members?

On What Basis is an Offense Flagged as Gang-Related?

	All Respondents		By Population		
	Number	Percent	Small	Medium	Large
Committed by gang members	173	75%	69%	89%	93%
Gang paraphernalia or signs present	150	65%	62%	69%	79%
Resulted from gang rivalry or initiation	120	52%	39%	80%	93%
Reported as such by informants	115	50%	46%	56%	71%

Graffiti Tracking

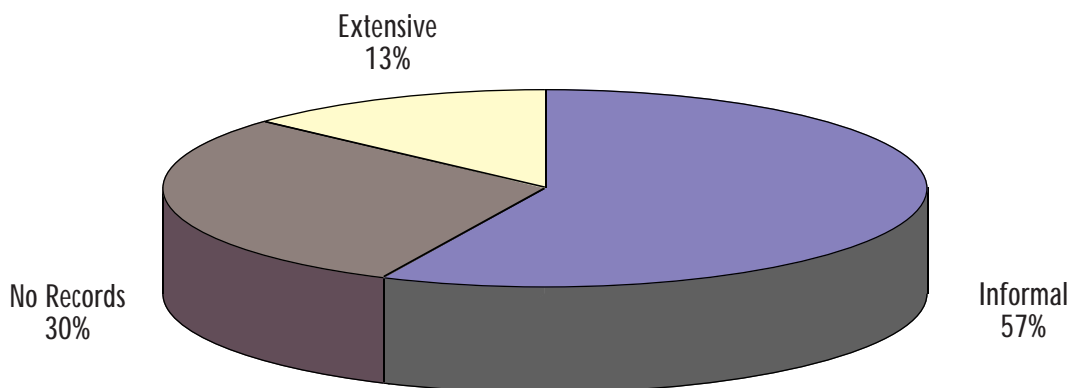
Respondents were asked to describe the extent to which they monitor and record graffiti that occurs in their jurisdiction. Agencies that track graffiti are most likely to do so informally. These results, along with the results to the two earlier questions about graffiti (whether and how frequently gang graffiti occurs, rating the effectiveness of graffiti control), vary significantly with the size of the responding jurisdiction.

Generally, the larger the jurisdiction, the more likely it is that graffiti occurs and the more

important it is to control graffiti. In the larger jurisdictions, agencies are also more inclined to monitor and track graffiti. Even so, less than 30% of the largest agencies keep extensive records.

Just under one-third of the jurisdictions at the small and medium level (30% and 32% respectively), reported that they do not keep records on graffiti. Over half of the respondents at all levels reported keeping only limited and informal records. Four of the respondents from major metropolitan areas (three police departments and one district attorney), reported keeping extensive records.

Monitoring Graffiti



Drive-By Shootings

Over 60% of the agencies from small jurisdictions indicated they do not keep a tally of drive-by shootings. Just under half of the respondents from large areas reported that they do track these events. Results were the same in 1995: about 60% of small jurisdictions did not count drive-by shootings and a little under half of the large jurisdictions did track these offenses. Keeping a tally of drive-by shootings, if done at all, is usually done by police departments (only one of the prosecutors and two sheriffs departments from the major metropolitan areas reported keeping a tally).

The Conclusion: gangs in Texas

The 1997 Attorney General Gang Survey, the fourth since 1991, confirms the presence of gangs and gang problems in all of the major metropolitan areas of the state, most of the medium-sized towns and cities, and even a significant portion of rural and small town jurisdictions. Slightly fewer law enforcement agencies report that their gang problems are still getting worse, but this is not reassuring, in view of the fact that so many reported that the gang problem was already serious in 1995.

The estimated numbers of gang members does appear to have increased significantly in the last two years. In 1995, police reporting from eight jurisdictions with populations greater than 250,000 estimated that they had a total of almost 35,000 gang members. Six police departments from the largest cities in 1997 reported a total of 47,000 gang members. Even allowing for the fact that the selection of large cities is slightly different and for the highly approximate number of these estimates, this increase of 12,000 (in a smaller sample) is worth noting.

In 1997, as in 1995, respondents reported a high rate of information sharing, particularly with school, probation and parole, and other law enforcement agencies. The largest jurisdictions, which are also those with the most serious gang problems, are particularly active in sharing information. On the other hand, definitions remain somewhat diverse. Standardized terminology and a statewide database are not yet established among Texas law enforcement agencies.

It is encouraging that a few more agencies reported that the gang problem is a little less severe in their communities. Police, sheriffs, and prosecutors alike have indicated their confidence in community policing and graffiti control as the most effective means of combating gang activity. Six years ago, Texas was generally regarded as having an emerging gang problem. Today, although the situation appears to be more chronic, it also appears that tools are becoming available to slow the development of gangs and to help control the spread of their influence.

Juvenile Crime Intervention Division

Resources

Other Publications and Services Available from the Juvenile Crime Intervention Division:

- **Gangs 101**
(gang awareness training for parents and other adults who work with youth)
- **Gangs and Community Response**
(available in English and Spanish)
- **Index of Juvenile Justice Opinions of the Attorney General**
- **Juvenile Justice Handbook for Cities**
- **Penal Code Offenses by Punishment Range**
- **School Crime and Discipline Handbook**
- **Youth Resource Manual**

For More Information, Contact:

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