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CAN WE KEEP GUNS AWAY FROM KIDS?

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The Brady Bill is finally law. Congress will likely follow it with a ban on assault weapons, perhaps accompanied by a few frills like fee hikes for federally-licensed gun dealers and tax hikes on ammunition. Mainstream gun control forces will have won the largest points on their agenda. And the killing in our core cities, especially the killing of young black men by other young black men, will continue almost as if nothing has happened. And for all practical purposes, nothing will have happened. Neither current gun control measures, nor any with even remote political possibilities, will much affect the growing wave of urban gun violence.

Yet something must surely be done -- if it can be. The statistics are stark enough. The youth gun homicide rate has been rising sharply since the mid-1980s. It is now higher for teenagers than for the general population, and far higher for black teenage males: in 1989, 83.4 per 100,000 population for ages 15-19 (versus 7.5 for white teenage males).[1] The gun homicide rate conceals a mass of nonfatal woundings: some 5.7 for every death. And it is not getting better. Overall violent crime stayed level in 1993, but youth gun violence continued to rise.

The reality on the street is even starker. The shootings are highly concentrated in core urban areas, and where the violence is worst it is almost unimaginably bad. A recent survey by Joseph Sheley and James Wright of minority communities in four troubled cities showed nearly half of high school students having been shot at or

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[1] These figures are drawn from *Understanding and Preventing Violence*, Panel on the Understanding and Control of Violent Behavior (National Research Council, 1993).

threatened with a gun.[2] A 1993 national poll by LH Research found 30% of black adults knowing a child who was wounded or killed by another child with a gun.[3] Drive through the streets of southwest Washington, within rifleshot of the White House, and look at all the young black men with canes; they were not maimed playing football. In Cabrini Green, one of Chicago's appalling high-rise housing projects, I have talked with mothers who will not let their children out of their apartments except to escort them to and from school. Children in these communities feel it a danger to go to school or to have friends, or a danger not to be armed or have armed friends, and talk not about "when" they grow up, but "if." The whole country experiences these killings, if not in their neighborhoods then in their newspapers. It is arguable -- I think it is true -- that there is nothing more responsible for the growing fear felt all across America.

This is almost entirely a matter of kids shooting each other with handguns. Sheley and Wright found 22% of male high school students owning guns at the time of the survey (one student, when asked what caliber gun he owned, pulled it out of his clothes to check). Nearly half had friends who routinely carried guns. Forty-one percent of students said obtaining guns was "no trouble at all," and street prices for firearms were well below normal retail prices.[4] Research by Carolyn and Richard Block in Chicago

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[2] Sheley, Joseph F. and James D. Wright, "Gun Acquisition and Possession in Selected Juvenile Samples," National Institute of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Research in Brief, December 1993. See also Wright, James D., Joseph F. Sheley, and M. Dwayne Smith, "Kids, Guns, and Killing Fields", *Society*, November/December 1992. 84-87

[3] "A Survey of the American People On Guns As a Children's Health Issue", LH Research, Inc, Study 930018, June 1993.

[4] Sheley and Wright, "Gun Acquisition and Possession in Selected Juvenile Samples."

suggests that virtually all of the increase in gang-related killing over the last few years is attributable to bigger, better handguns.[5]

Can we do anything to keep guns out of kids' hands?

THE LIMITED REACH OF TRADITIONAL GUN CONTROL

"Gun control" means, primarily, the web of federal, state, and local laws governing the transfer, possession, carrying, and use of firearms. It can also refer to other strategies to restrict trade in firearms, to better monitor that trade, and to lessen the chance that firearms will be used for ill (recent examples are proposals to raise fees for federal firearms licenses and to mandate safety training for gun purchasers). There is, unfortunately, little reason to think that widening and strengthening this sort of gun control will have more than a marginal impact on youth gun violence.

In most cities with serious juvenile gun problems -- including, notably, Washington, DC; New York; Boston; Chicago; and Los Angeles--juvenile purchase, possession, and carrying of guns are already illegal. Federal law forbids licensed dealers from selling a firearm to a minor (but does not forbid small-scale, unlicensed dealers from so doing, or bar minors from possessing firearms). State laws vary, but many bar transfers to minors, eighteen states bar minors from possessing handguns, and nearly all bar minors from carrying concealed weapons. City regulations on, for instance, the issuance of carry permits tighten the web further.

These laws have clearly not helped much. This should not be much of a surprise. The laws, and those who enforce them, are overwhelmed by the realities of the gun

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[5] Block, Carolyn Rebecca, and Richard Block, "Street Gang Crime in Chicago," National Institute of Justice, Research in Brief, December 1993.

market. Traditional gun controls simply cannot prevent the workings of robust black markets in firearms.

Illegally obtained guns presently include a considerable volume improperly sold by dealers to proscribed persons. Tighter point-of-purchase controls could prevent some of those sales, but there are still some 200 million guns in private hands in the United States, with draconian solutions like confiscating and destroying them a flat political impossibility. There is enormous leakage from this huge stockpile through theft and direct sale (and, in the case of kids, simple borrowing), and from sources like thefts from gun stores. The result is that those who wish to get guns illegally can, and will be able to do so for a long time to come regardless of any gun control measures the country may take. A 1986 felon study by James Wright and Peter Rossi found "handgun predators" committed to gun crimes confident, on the basis of experience, that they could arm themselves immediately upon release from prison, half within a few hours and almost all within a few days. Perhaps worse, handgun predators unable to acquire handguns were liable to turn to cut-down long guns, which are even deadlier than handguns.[6] This is no idle concern; a visit to any big-city police property room will turn up rack upon rack of vicious-looking sawed-off shotguns and rifles.

Gun control laws focusing on possession and use have shown some, though not overwhelming, promise. Some entail penalties for illegal possession and carrying of firearms, and some entail additional penalties for using a firearm to commit a crime. Such laws depend for their effectiveness on the commitment of police, prosecutors, and courts to apply them, and the availability of prison space to back them up. The first is

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[6] Wright, James D., and Peter H. Rossi, *Armed and Considered Dangerous: A Survey of Felons and their Firearms* (Aldine de Gruyter, 1986).

difficult to obtain (police, prosecutors, and courts tend to adjust their actions to fit their sense of the equities of particular cases), and the second is in increasingly short supply. And for some offenders, the prospect of even severe punishment may seem so unreal, or so meaningless, as to vitiate these approaches. Washington, D.C.'s Office of Criminal Justice Plans and Analysis interviewed a number of young killers and concluded that "being arrested and imprisoned are not viewed as a stigma, but rather as a rite of passage to manhood...[they] do not expect to live long."[7]

The bleak prospects for traditional gun controls, and the importance of the black market in delivering guns into the wrong hands, have recently led to an interest in attacking illegal markets directly. "Like 'drug-related violence,' 'gun violence' may best be understood in terms of illegal markets and reduced through tactics that police already apply in illegal drug markets," says the National Academy of Science's Panel on the Understanding and Control of Violent Behavior in its 1993 report, Understanding and Preventing Violence.[8] The idea of preventing criminal trafficking in guns is an attractive one. Operationally, it holds the promise of reaching the most harmful part of the firearm trade. Politically, as my colleague Mark Moore points out, it holds the promise of sidestepping the entrenched gun control debate, and proceeding through clever new applications of current authority rather than through sweeping and controversial new authorities.[9]

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[7] "Homicide Report," Statistical Analysis Center, Office of Criminal Justice Plans and Programs, Government of the District of Columbia, April 1992.

[8] "Understanding and Preventing Violence."

[9] See Moore, Mark H., "Alternative Policy Approaches to the Control of Handgun Abuse," nd, unpublished paper available from the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University; "Keeping Handguns From Criminal Offenders",

THE ILLEGAL GUN MARKET

Unfortunately, examinations of illegal gun markets suggest that they will be tough nuts to crack. The illicit gun trade is difficult to locate and identify. Since buying and selling guns are not necessarily crimes, there is no easy way to tell whether a seller, a buyer, or a particular transaction is outside the law. A seller can be legitimate in one transaction (to a legal customer, of a legal firearm) and illegal in another (to a proscribed customer, or of a stolen or proscribed weapon). Sales to a particular customer can be actionable (if a licensed dealer knows the customer is proscribed) or not (if a licensed dealer does not know, or if the sale is made by a private dealer not covered by a restrictive state law). A buyer can be legal in one transaction, illegal in another (outside, for instance, his state of residence), or change status from one day to the next (after, for instance, a felony conviction or a birthday). A great deal of difficult-to-come-by information is required to assess and classify a firearm sale.

Complicating things considerably is the fact that both official and popular reaction to violations is somewhat unpredictable. The fact of an illegal transaction is often not sufficient to provoke either public outrage or official action. If a gun dealer illegally sells a weapon to an unemployed black youth, there will be anger, and likely there will be action. But if the same dealer illegally sells the same weapon to a middle-class white woman, both buyer and seller will be viewed by many with tolerance. Even the deadly use of illegal weapons can meet with considerable support, depending on context and public attitudes.

The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 1981; "The Bird in Hand: A Feasible Strategy for Gun Control," Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, Vol. 2, No. 2, 1983.

Finally, as Mark Moore has shown, there is nothing like the Medellin cartel when it comes to guns. The black market in guns appears to be, for the most part, composed of many small operations, often ones not solely engaged in gunrunning, rather than large dedicated operations.[10] The multiplicity and geographic coverage of sources for illegal weapons -- thefts from homes, thefts from gun dealers, improper sales from licensed dealers, private dealers -- and the ease and convenience of dealing them alongside other contraband seems to eliminate the need for powerful organizations to acquire and distribute black-market guns. Even operations to move weapons from states with loose gun laws to states with strict ones typically consist of only a few people with a car (or a gym bag and a bus ticket). Many black-market gun dealers appear to be fences selling guns as they would any other commodity, more or less as thieves bring them in.

THE ABSENCE OF LOCAL ENFORCEMENT

These considerations go some distance toward explaining the paucity of local efforts to attack illegal gun markets. It is a commonplace in gun control circles that one result of the national struggle over guns and gun control is a weak federal capacity to enforce firearms laws (including the administrative and record-keeping portions that might help identify and act against the black market). Less remarked upon is how little there is in the way of <u>local</u> police action against the illegal gun trade.

Given the opportunity, police are willing enough to make firearms arrests, but such charges tend to be incidental to other investigative and enforcement activities. Departments almost never make the black market in firearms a priority (as they

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[10] See Moore, "Keeping Handguns from Criminal Offenders".

routinely do with narcotics and vice), they tend not to take advantage of opportunities to identify and penetrate the gun trade (by, for instance, back-tracing illegal weapons used in crimes, demanding information about weapons sources as a condition of plea bargaining, mounting stings and undercover operations, and the like), and they are rarely sophisticated about working with federal authorities on gun cases (unlike, again, narcotics). Strategies and tactics routinely deployed against other crimes and threats to public safety are strikingly absent from the gun-crime landscape. "If we find a kid with a gun, we're happy to settle for a conviction," says Jim Jordan, Director of Policy Development for the Boston Police Department. "We don't even ask him where he got it."

One reason is the degree to which the very concept of gun control has been identified -- no less in police circles than elsewhere -- with national, legislative, point-of-purchase strategies. Another, though, is the complexity of the operational and political environment that local initiatives would face. The multitude of legitimate sources for guns, and the difficulty of identifying possible illegal transactions; the massive existing stock of illegal weapons; the diffuse nature of local firearms black markets, and the paucity of large, high-payoff targets; the ease of moving weapons from the legitimate to the illegal market; the lack of public support for intrusive enforcement approaches and for strict and certain sanctions; and the weakness of federal firearms authorities have made local attacks on illicit gun markets difficult, and of questionable return on investment.

THE IDEA OF MARKET DISRUPTION

Until recently, the idea of attacking illegal markets has pretty much meant

arresting sellers (and sometimes buyers) and seizing illegal goods -- the classic enforcement model, which has changed little from Prohibition to the war on drugs. The implicit idea is to put enough people in jail for long enough that neither they nor their potential replacements will choose to continue the business (and to bolster that impact by seizing hot property and profits). It has rarely worked very well.

A new set of market disruption approaches developed in community policing circles and deployed with great effectiveness against street drug markets may, however, hold new promise for attacking illegal gun markets -- especially youth gun markets. Over the last ten years or so, several cities faced with serious street drug markets, which are extremely resistant to traditional enforcement, have instead focused on so interfering in street trafficking that the drug trade was no longer sustainable. Police in Tampa, Florida, which mounted a model disruption operation against a widespread street crack problem, made it difficult for buyers to find dealers by using heavy enforcement to keep the dealers moving around; used community allies to locate and report new street dealing sites; made buyers feel vulnerable by publicizing "reverse stings" in which police posed as dealers and arrested buyers; interfered with business by loitering around dealing sites; used community allies to locate and seize drug stashes; cooperated with city authorities to knock down abandoned houses and shut down businesses being used for dealing; and used local ordinances to clear crowds from known trafficking sites. Where two years of traditional enforcement had failed, six months of QUAD (Quick Uniform Attack on Drugs) virtually eliminated public dealing. It is hard to tell which tactics, or the interaction of which tactics, contributed most to the success of the operation, but the disruption strategy appears to have caused, in relatively short order, the near-collapse of

the street market.[11]

Drug markets and gun markets are very different. But there are some initial reasons to hope that attempts to disrupt juvenile firearms markets might succeed. First, some of the legal and status issues that make dealing with the adult illicit market so difficult appear to be, at least, attenuated. Juvenile purchase, possession, and carrying of guns are already illegal in many jurisdictions and will likely soon be illegal in more, if not proscribed nationally by federal legislation. Kids caught buying and carrying guns, and people caught selling guns to them, are fairly obvious lawbreakers. This is a far more straightforward operational environment than the adult market.

Equally important, public feeling on youth and firearms is universally negative. Nobody thinks it a good idea for kids to carry guns. There would likely be strong official and community support for measures to disrupt the youth gun market. This is critically important. All of the successful strategies to disrupt street drug markets have depended heavily on active community cooperation. That will be as, if not more, true of gun-market strategies. But there is good reason to think that if disruption strategies can be designed, communities will help.

Whether they are likely to work turns on two points. One is the nature of youth demand for firearms; the other is the prospect for disrupting the supply and distribution system that puts firearms in kids' hands.

YOUTH DEMAND FOR FIREARMS

Why do young people acquire and use firearms, and how committed are they to

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[11] David M. Kennedy, "Closing the Market: Controlling the Drug Trade in Tampa, Florida," Program Focus series, National Institute of Justice, April 1993.

the practice? Are the young people who acquire and use firearms like Wright and Rossi's handgun predators, determined to get and use guns no matter what impediments are put in their path, or are they less motivated and more open to dissuasion? More realistically, what proportion of weapon-carrying, and what proportion of youth gun crime, is represented by each group?

Very little is known on these points. Three candidate accounts -- the drug trade, gangs, and a national culture of violence -- are commonly adduced. Each is plausible and has support, but none is entirely satisfactory. Moreover, they tend to focus on <u>why</u> youth want firearms, without addressing <u>how committed</u> they are to having firearms: an equally significant point when considering the possibility of prevention and control.

The drug trade

One explanation for the growth in youth gun crime is drug trafficking. There is no question that where there is serious drug dealing there will be guns and disputes settled with guns. Nor is there any question that the rise in juvenile black male homicide that began in the mid-1980s coincided with the entry into the urban drug market of crack cocaine. The crack market, in many cities, is characterized by a youthful minority work force and open-air trafficking with a high degree of turf-related and other violence. In some cities, like Washington, D.C. and New York, that saw huge increases in youth homicide in the mid- and late 1980s, the crack trade was almost surely the major contributor.

It is also true, however, that the connection between youth violence and the crack trade sometimes slips away on closer examination. The Block's research in Chicago suggests that very little of its spiralling youth violence rate is drug-related; it seems,

rather, to be turf-related, with recent increases in killings caused by gangs' use of more powerful guns.[12] The work of Robert Wasserman and his colleagues on drug-market killings in Richmond, Virginia, showed that the trafficking issues that sparked the killings were not importantly different from other kinds of disputes that the same sort of people got involved in and that also lead to violence. That is, something--the drug trade, the prevalence of guns, etc--has led to an environment is which people with very short fuses let conflicts escalate very rapidly to homicidal levels. Those conflicts include trafficking issues, but much of the drug market violence is not in any important way instrumental.

Another, and more serious, difficulty is that whatever the role of drug trafficking in driving youth violence in the mid- and late 1980s, violence and the demand for weapons no longer seem so closely associated with drug trafficking. In cities like Milwaukee and Washington, D.C., youth homicide rates continued to increase in the early 1990s even as the drug trade diminished. Many studies show a much higher prevalence of weapons than can plausibly be attributed to drug-related factors: in a statewide Centers for Disease Control survey of Massachusetts high school students, fully 37% of boys reported having armed themselves with guns, knives, or other weapons. Sheley and Wright report that 22% of the high school males they surveyed -- a population not heavily involved in drug crime -- owned a gun. Many of the homicides and assaults that most disturb communities do so precisely because they seem so inexplicable, unconnected to drugs or anything else meaningful: kids are killing one another over jewelry, sidelong glances, and for no apparent reason at all. The drug trade perhaps set this in motion, but it appears to be a less and less proximate cause.

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[12] See "Street Gang Crime in Chicago."

Gangs

Another explanation is youth gangs, some drug-trafficking and some not, using guns to protect their turf and settle disputes. There is, again, a good deal of truth to this, particularly in cities like Los Angeles and Chicago where gangs and gang violence are particularly prominent. Assessing the importance of gangs is complicated by problems of definition. Gangs range from sophisticated economic organizations (some of which appear to eschew violence except for business purposes), to moderately organized geographic or ethnic groups, to little more than ad-hoc assemblies of friends. Since they tend to come to public attention only when they commit violent crimes, and since violence committed by any affiliated group tends to brand it as a gang, it is unclear that "gang violence" is in some cases much more than a tautology.

A more important problem is causality: do gangs cause violence, or does violence cause gangs? The assumption is usually the former, but it's easy to imagine the latter. A Boston police gang officer says that many of the kids he encounters "kind of feel they're stuck -- they're not particularly happy with their situation."[13] Kids living in violent areas band together for support and protection. Having done so, they are obliged to stand up for one another, and they become corporate actors and targets in cyclic exchanges of violence with other gangs. The ready availability of guns is, then, plausibly a significant contributing factor to the creation of gangs and gang violence, and measures to keep guns out of kids' hands might serve to attenuate both.

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[13] "Violent Crime in Boston and the Response of the Boston Police Department: An Evaluation of the Anti-Gang Violence Unit", Grace J. Suh, unpublished Policy Analysis Exercise, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, April 13, 1993.

Culture of violence

Another explanation is that significant numbers of young people are, for some reason or reasons, newly willing, even eager, to act extremely violently. On this account, youth violence, and youth carrying and use of guns, is more cultural and sociological, driven by factors like popular culture and the generational impact of domestic violence and sexual abuse. This has the appeal of explaining, after a fashion, the appalling "senseless" acts that seem more and more common, and linking them to an adult world that exhibits many of the same features.

Much public health analysis of youth violence uses this frame. Deborah Prothrow-Stith and others have written powerfully of how movies, television, music, and parents encourage youth violence; on the inability of many adolescents to imagine nonviolent resolutions of conflict; and of how youth culture encourages and rewards violent behavior. "I tell my boys, I got three boys, 'Come home and get the gun,'" a Detroit father told gang researcher Carl Taylor. "'Everybody got guns, so you got to protect yo'self.'"[14] The idea that violence, and instruments of violence, are attractive, even stylish, in some youth circles is borne out by accounts of young men unable to explain just why they carry guns, and of premium prices being charged for weapons that have already been used in homicides.

These arguments do not explain how presumably long-standing cultural factors could account for the explosive rise in youth homicide. Nor do they speak to whether guns primarily drive or are driven by a youth culture of violence. Is there a youth demand, akin to a felon's demand, that would seek out guns even if they were hard to

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[14] Taylor, Carl S. Dangerous Society (Michigan State University Press, 1990).

get or had higher associated costs, and that would -- as with some felons -- lead to the substitution of other, perhaps worse, weapons if handguns became less available? Or is youth violence so bad in part because guns are so prevalent and have the effect of polarizing groups and raising the risks of violent behavior, and would matters improve if they were less prevalent?

FEAR

Common to each of these accounts is a high degree of fear. This fear may be a primary driver of the youth gun market. In many communities, everyday life has become genuinely dangerous, anything can happen at any time, and having a gun for self-defense is a bracing and attractive option. Given the degree to which many urban minority youth feel trapped, geographically and economically, an apt metaphor might be prison culture: captive, lawless, dangerous, self-regulated, and with a heavy emphasis on image, standing, and group identification. While some kids have guns because of the drug and other criminal trades, and some because they are simply the sort of people who would have guns under any circumstances, others have them because the danger is real, guns are easily available, and carrying is reinforced by a culture that makes guns attractive and backing down unattractive and dangerous.

Wright, Sheley, and M. Dwayne Smith report that for their high-school students, "the desire for protection and the need to arm oneself against enemies were the primary reasons to obtain a gun, easily outpacing all other motivations."[15] This was also true for the juvenile felons they surveyed, and has long been known to be true for adult felons;

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[15] See "Kids, Guns, and Killing Fields."

the remarkable development in these communities is that ordinary kids now feel as vulnerable as the dedicated street criminals who choose to live in a dangerous, weapon-laden world. John Silva, head of security for the Cambridge, Massachusetts school system, says that the most significant reason kids carry guns is "because they're afraid." He can no longer predict which students will arm themselves: it used to be only the tough kids, but now it could be any of them. In the 1993 LH Research poll, 33% of black adults reported knowing "a child who was so worried he or she got a gun for self protection."[16]

The more kids arm themselves, the more frightening life becomes and the more inured to violence kids become, the greater the chance of shootings, and the more readily kids arm themselves. Mix in childish impulsiveness and lack of realism and the result is assaults and other crimes that pretty much just happen, or happen and are fatal because guns are involved, or are part of a dynamic that would be different if guns were not involved. "The scariest thing," a Detroit high school senior told Carl Taylor, "is that you never know when they're going to get into an argument and start shooting."[17]

Many of the kids involved in this life have not chosen it in the same way that felons have, and are likely to be more open to dissuasion, more responsive to a change in the environment, and less likely to substitute more dangerous weapons. Less ready availability would ease tensions and diminish the deadliness of incidents. It might lead to clearer divisions between dangerous offenders and other less committed users, and allow responses more appropriately tailored to each class. A weapon-centered approach

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[16] See "A Survey of the American People On Guns As a Children's Health Issue."

[17] See Dangerous Society.

is certainly not a perfect or complete response to youth violence, but it would facilitate and reinforce other approaches.

It's possible, in particular, that other efforts to reduce kids' fear are also possible. Gun strategies and fear-reduction strategies would strongly reinforce each other. I will return to this possiblity after exploring the prospects for disrupting youth gun markets.

DISRUPTING THE YOUTH GUN MARKET

Can we do this?

If we can, it is likely to be through custom-designed local strategies, developed and implemented primarily by local authorities. There are several reasons for this. First, it is unlikely that any foreseeable federal gun control legislation would much interfere with the youth trade, or that federal enforcement capacity will be enhanced enough to be of substantial impact nationwide. The lead is going to have to be taken by local authorities, who have a largely unrealized capacity to attack key elements of local markets. Second, local markets are likely to differ sufficiently to require different disruption strategies. Patterns of acquisition and distribution are likely to be different in states like Georgia, which has few restrictions on gun sales, and Massachusetts, which is heavily regulated; and in cities like Chicago, where the killing is largely gang-related, and in cities like Washington, where it has more to do with drugs. The powers authorities have to act in different cities and states will often be different. Third, the youth gun problem is unlikely to be very vulnerable to strategies focused on one or a few of its aspects. Stiff penalties for selling and buying, measures to reduce the movement of guns from the legitimate to the black market, and measures to reduce youth's fear are, pursued piecemeal, unlikely to have much impact. A comprehensive strategy with

mutually reinforcing tactics tailored to local circumstances might.

Goals

Traditionally, police departments have judged their efforts in terms of numbers of arrests, cases cleared, seizures, and the like. Unfortunately, while such measures can do a good job of indicating the vigor with which police pursue their chosen strategy, they often fail to say much about its effectiveness.

The Tampa Police Department defined the goal of the QUAD drug-market disruption effort as making it "very difficult for dealers to make sales and for buyers to 'score.'" Arrests, seizures, and other traditional tactics were part of QUAD's arsenal, but they were valued not as ends in themselves but according to their utility for making dealers' and buyers' lives miserable (as were the various nontraditional tactics). The success of QUAD was to be marked by 1) the absence of street drug markets and related disorder; and 2) the absence of public concern about street drug dealing. QUAD's goal focused police attention on the disruption strategy (rather than any particular tactic or set of tactics), while its criteria for success focused attention on outcomes that had meaning to the community (rather than the level of police effort, or the immediate results of particular tactics).[18]

A similar framework is likely to hold for attempts to disrupt the youth gun market. Particular measures like arresting dealers or buying back weapons are probably best viewed as potential tactics of a larger strategy. Effectiveness is probably best evaluated in terms of fundamental changes in the environment. A plausible formulation

[18] See "Closing the Market."

of a goal for a youth market disruption strategy might be "to make it harder and less profitable to sell guns to kids, and harder and less attractive for kids to buy and have guns." The success of the strategy would be marked by a decrease in youth gun violence, and by a decrease in community fear (especially, perhaps, young people's fear) of youth gun violence.

Information gathering and analysis

There is very little in the way of research on youth gun markets. Wright, Sheley, and Smith's work -- the notable exception -- suggests that in broad outline they do not look all that different from adult black markets: kids "borrow" guns from their homes and from friends, and buy them from friends, drug dealers, on the street, and to a limited extent from legitimate vendors. There is no research that is both rich enough and specific enough to inform an attack on any particular city's market. How do kids acquire guns in, say, Baltimore? Why do they? What proportion of kids with, or kids wanting, guns is dangerous repeat offenders, and what proportion is motivated more by fear and other factors? What motivates those who own guns to carry them? Do they buy from the same sources as adult offenders, or from different ones? Is there a distinct illicit gun market, or are they passed along channels also used for drugs and other contraband? Is the urban market essentially local, or intercity/interstate? Are there many sources of supply, or relatively few? How large is the current stockpile? How open is the trade? Do sellers feel totally secure, or are they wary; what makes them willing and unwilling to sell? Are there different supply channels to hardcore and soft consumers? Are particular weapons in vogue? How does information about sources of supply reach consumers, and how widely is it known?

Police departments would likely find that the answers to many of these questions are already known to department personnel, but -- absent any prior gun-market effort -- have not been collected and analyzed. A first step would be to consolidate existing information in a fashion that supports problem solving.

Additional sources of information would be important as a way of checking departmental impressions, creating a fuller picture, and providing operational intelligence during a disruption operation. Departments are likely to find, as they have in drug-market disruption and other problem-solving operations, that a wide variety of currently unutilized sources of information are available to them. Likely prospects include:

Kids. If youth gun markets are as vigorous as they appear to be -- they apparently include, in some cities, rental markets for busy weekends, parties, and such -- their workings will be fairly widely known. Some knowledgeable youth, both players and nonplayers, will be willing to talk to police, or to intermediaries, if their own safety can be ensured. Most departments will have to develop new attitudes toward, new relationships with, and new mechanisms for working with young people in order to learn what they need to know. Even departments dedicated to community policing have so far failed to attempt the same sort of alliances with kids that they have with other groups. Doing so will probably be an essential part of coming to grips with the youth gun problem.

Offenders. Experience with other problem-solving efforts suggests that criminals can be very useful sources of information. In Tampa, interviews with jailed criminals helped convince the department that measures to suppress street crack markets would reduce

crime and disorder. Boston's gang unit has found gang members willing to share information useful for understanding, and sometimes preventing, gang violence. Black market gun dealers and kids who have acquired weapons illegally are potentially rich sources of information. Street officers, detectives, prosecutors, and judges have numerous opportunities to learn from them.

Parents and other community sources. Parents in communities troubled by youth gun violence are potentially powerful sources of information. Many, one suspects, will know a good deal about who is dealing, who is carrying, and who is likely to use weapons. Some are likely to cooperate with police if they think their own children will be treated well, and if they can do so safely. Departments should explore ways to build working relationships with such parents.

School security authorities, teachers, youth social service workers, and perhaps church personnel are also likely to have, or be able to obtain, information on the youth gun market. Some will be willing to cooperate with police if their own professional and institutional interests are protected.

Gun dealers and gun regulators. Legitimate gun dealers may have information about how kids are obtaining or trying to obtain guns, or suspicions about adult intermediaries dealing guns to kids. Black market gun dealers may be willing to inform on rivals, or be open to trading information for favors when facing enforcement action. Federal gun-law authorities may have information local police are unaware of, and/or investigative and enforcement capacity to support local information gathering.

PUTTING IT TOGETHER

With some idea of the shape of the local youth gun trade, local authorities could aim a disruption strategy at vulnerable parts of the market. Strategies could be expected to differ from city to city depending on the nature of their markets, the capacities and inclinations of police and other parties to the operation, and the local legal environment. And -- and this is very important -- effective measures are likely to emerge both from close examination of particular markets, and from experience gained as particular disruption strategies evolve. We know so little about the real shape of the youth gun trade, and how to attack it, that we can presently do little more than guess at effective interventions. Richer information and operational experience could reveal unexpected opportunities.

In Tampa, for instance, equipping officers with digital beepers that allowed rapid, personal, but clandestine contact between the police and community supporters turned out to be critical to a robust flow of timely operational intelligence about street markets. And new tactics were developed during the operation that nobody could possibly have imagined ahead of time. Street dealers, for instance, generally hide stashes off their persons but nearby -- in a tree or a patch of tall grass -- in case they are robbed or arrested, and draw from them in the course of business. QUAD officers started getting calls from neighborhood sources, who were observing the dealers closely, telling them where the stashes were. Police simply seized them, with dire impact on dealers' cash flow. What the equivalent weaknesses in the youth gun trade might be is anybody's guess: but with any luck, serious analysis and work would reveal some.

Still, one can construct, for the sake of illustration, a hypothetical operation. To attack access to gun supplies, police could work with parents and kids to identify who

already had stockpiles of guns (parental authorization would be sufficient to allow police searches of houses and apartments); with private and nonprofit partners to offer residents in high-burglary areas trigger locks and advice on storing firearms securely; with Federal authorities to back-trace illegal weapons to licensed vendors and put them under close scrutiny or arrange for their licenses to be revoked; and with prosecutors and courts to ensure swift and stiff punishments for adult "straws" selling to kids. To attack the security of sellers, they could press for state laws making straws who sell guns to kids jointly liable for crimes committed with those guns, send youthful police officers undercover and cultivate confidential informants to buy guns illegally, and offer juvenile offenders caught with guns plea bargains based on giving up their suppliers. To attack the security of buyers, they could mount stings, offer black market dealers plea bargains based on giving up their clients, work with parole and probation officers to mount intensive supervision of kids who are court-involved for gun offenses, and negotiate protocols for street searches with representatives of troubled communities. To lower the incentive for black marketers to sell to kids, they could mount comprehensive enforcement efforts against drug and fencing organizations known to be selling guns to kids (thereby sending a signal that such dealing will trigger attacks on all fronts of one's business), and press for state laws allowing asset forfeiture for dealing guns to minors. To lower the income of buyers, they could suppress the street drug trade, which would take money out of the pockets of kids likely to buy and use guns. Raising the costs and lowering the benefits of the youth gun trade might dissuade new entrants into the business. To the extent that stores, bars, and other businesses were fronting for youth dealers, civil abatement proceedings could be used to shut them down.

OTHER STRATEGIES FOR FIGHTING FEAR

The more kids' fear can be reduced, the less they will want guns and the more effective market-disruption strategies will be. Three ideas deserve particular mention. First, street drug markets and gang disputes create high levels of violence, disorder, and fear. Cities should explore QUAD-type operations to shut down drug markets, and work with kids and others close to the street to prevent gang violence. Police units like the Boston antigang violence squad and grass-roots groups like Clementine Barfield's Save Our Sons and Daughters in Detroit have both had success preventing individual incidents from growing into vendettas. Second, criminal justice resources should be focused on taking repeat violent offenders off the streets; using federal gun statutes as part of such an operation would yield double benefits. Third, some community policing departments are developing innovative means to identify and address fear. In one model operation in Baltimore County, officers tamped down a budding racial conflict by separating bus stops that brought warring groups of black and white kids into regular contact, then worked with both groups to prevent further trouble.[19] More along these lines is possible.

No one of these measures is likely to make much of an impact. The power of market disruption and allied approaches would come from multiple insults, and the interaction of multiple insults, to the incentives and free functioning of the market. One suspects that the mounting of the operation would itself be a deterrent; in many jurisdictions buying and selling in the youth black market is a largely risk-free enterprise, and a clever operation (including a community actively mobilized to oppose the market) could hope to raise participants' sense of vulnerability considerably.

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[19] See Kennedy, David M. "Fighting Fear in Baltimore County," Kennedy School of Government Case C16-90-938.0 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1990).

It is too much to hope that any of this would end illegal dealing in guns. But an effective youth market strategy might serve to split the adult market off from the youth market, leaving illicit dealers still in the gun business but unwilling, or substantially less willing, to deal to kids. It might, along with other efforts to fight fear, arrest the spiralling juvenile arms race. Given the juvenile death toll, and the special contribution of armed kids to the disruption of troubled communities, that would be a success.