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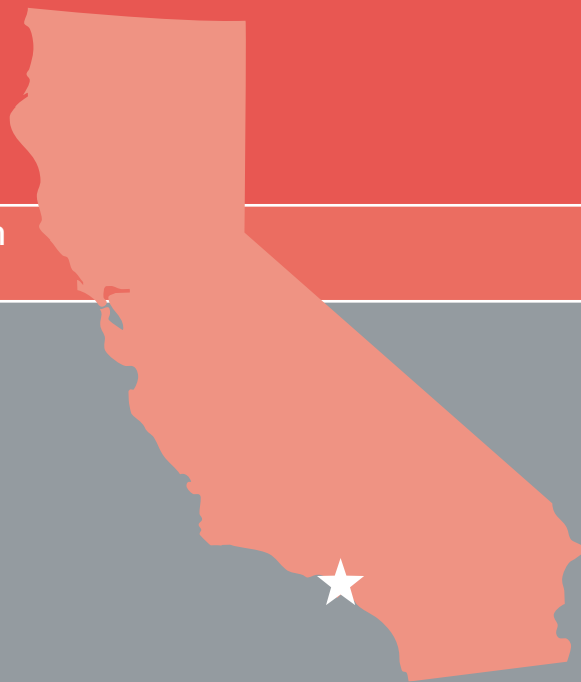
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**NIJ**

Research Report

# Reducing Gun Violence

Operation Ceasefire in  
Los Angeles



**U.S. Department of Justice  
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## Reducing Gun Violence: Operation Ceasefire in Los Angeles

Findings and conclusions of the research reported here are those of the authors and do not reflect the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

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## Foreword

This Research Report is part of the National Institute of Justice's (NIJ's) Reducing Gun Violence publication series. Each report in the series describes the implementation and effects of an individual, NIJ-funded, local-level program designed to reduce firearm-related violence in a particular U.S. city. Some studies received co-funding from the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services; one also received funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Justice Department's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

Each report in the series describes in detail the problem targeted; the program designed to address it; the problems confronted in designing, implementing, and evaluating the effort; and the

strategies adopted in responding to any obstacles encountered. Both successes and failures are discussed, and recommendations are made for future programs.

While the series includes impact evaluation components, it primarily highlights implementation problems and issues that arose in designing, conducting, and assessing the respective programs.

The Research Reports should be of particular value to anyone interested in adopting a strategic, data-driven, problem-solving approach to reducing gun violence and other crime and disorder problems in communities.

The series reports on firearm violence reduction programs in Boston, Indianapolis, St. Louis, Los Angeles, Atlanta, and Detroit.

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*George E. Tita, K. Jack Riley, Greg Ridgeway, and Peter W. Greenwood*

## The Need for an Intervention

This report is based on “Reducing Gun Violence: Results from an Intervention in East Los Angeles,” final report by the authors with Clifford Grammich and Allan F. Abrahamse to the National Institute of Justice, 2003, available at [www.rand.org/publications/MR/MR1764/MR1764.pdf](http://www.rand.org/publications/MR/MR1764/MR1764.pdf).

### About the Authors

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On October 8, 2000, a particularly brazen “walk by” shooting took place in the Hollenbeck area of the city of Los Angeles. According to police, several members of the Cuatro Flats gang, armed with handguns and at least one high-powered semi-automatic assault weapon, climbed out of a van and opened fire on a group of rival TMC (The Mob Crew) gang members. They left one TMC member dead, along with a 10-year-old girl who was riding her scooter nearby. The double homicide, in an area notorious for its gun crime and predatory gang killings, set in motion an intervention that came to be known as Operation Ceasefire in Los Angeles. The initiative was intended to send gang members the message that there would be consequences for *all* members of a gang if any *one* member committed a crime involving guns.

Almost immediately after the crime, and for the next several weeks, police beefed up patrols in the area, attempting to locate gang members who had outstanding arrest

warrants or had violated probation or parole regulations. Gang members who had violated public housing rules, failed to pay child support, or were similarly vulnerable were also subjected to stringent enforcement. Gang members knew it was coming. The message that something would happen if gun violence continued had been conveyed—or “retailed”—to them in advance. Information about available support to help them turn their lives around was also included. The strategy and tactics resulted from months of meticulous planning and coordination by 19 public and private agencies throughout the city and county of Los Angeles, all of whom came together to work with researchers in defining the problem and designing a response.

The results from the law enforcement components were surprisingly good even though the intervention did not proceed exactly as planned. In the area of Hollenbeck where the two gangs were most active and enforcement was most intensive, both gang crime

and violent crime fell. The retailing component, however, turned out to be less effective. The planned coupling of enforcement with provision of social services did not fully materialize, and other deviations from the original plan also emerged. Nevertheless, Operation Ceasefire in Los Angeles

demonstrated the potential for using data-driven research to identify problems and design interventions, obtain the commitment of disparate criminal justice agencies to work together on a discrete problem, and secure the support of an array of partners in the community.

## Borrowing From Boston

Myriad approaches to gang violence in Los Angeles in recent decades had failed, so Boston's Operation Ceasefire became a possible model. Begun in 1996, the Boston project used a combination of sanctions and incentives in a highly successful attempt to reduce youth homicide.<sup>1</sup> Could it work in Los Angeles?

### Los Angeles is not Boston

The Boston experience could not simply be pulled off the shelf. The type of problem Los Angeles faced was different; the nature of the intervention had to be different. The gangs responsible for much of the violence in Los Angeles are bigger and more entrenched than those in Boston. In Boston, most gang members are African-American; in Los Angeles, the majority are Latino.

The two cities are vastly different geographically and politically. Los Angeles County sprawls over a huge area covering dozens of municipalities. This means it has no single point of political

leverage; rather, it has a network of overlapping power centers. The implication was that bringing all stakeholders to the table would be more difficult in Los Angeles.

### The process is paramount

What Los Angeles transferred from Boston was the process governing the design and implementation of the intervention. Like Boston, Los Angeles set a manageable and measurable objective, focusing on the specific problem of gun violence.<sup>2</sup> Working on a small scale and selecting a defined locale offered two benefits: it gave project participants the opportunity to pinpoint the more immediate causes of youth violence, identify the actors, and cultivate close collaboration with the community; and it held out the possibility of immediate payoff.

Key to the process was the working group, also adopted from Boston. Researchers served as convenors/facilitators, analyzing crime



data and other information. Criminal justice agencies and community- and faith-based organizations identified the locale where an intervention would have a likely impact, and they decided what to do with the results of the researchers' analyses. (See "Working Group Members" for a list of participating agencies.)

From Boston, Los Angeles also adopted a menu of "sticks" and "carrots." Sticks were a range of sanctions or "levers" used to make gang members desist from violence by holding all of them accountable for violence committed by any one of

them.<sup>3</sup> Saturation patrol by the police is an example of a lever. The levers would be pulled or activated in response to a serious crime (the triggering event). In advance of lever-pulling, the message would be retailed; that is, gang members would be told not only of the consequences that would result from gun violence but also of social services and alternatives to violence available to them. Carrots were the prevention component of alternative services, a measure of the community's determination to intervene early in the lives of at-risk youths.

## DEFINITIONS

Researchers defined the terms in this study as follows:

**Violent crime:** Homicide and attempted homicide, robbery, assault, and kidnaping.

**Gang crime:** Gang member-committed violent crime and terror threats, firearm discharge, vandalism, and graffiti.

**Gun crime:** Any violent or gang crime that involves the use of a firearm.

**Levers/lever pulling:** A crime deterrence strategy that attempts to prevent violent behavior by using a targeted individual or group's vulnerability to law enforcement as a means of gaining their compliance.

**Retailing:** Forewarning gang members that violent crime would have consequences and offering services as an incentive to turn away from crime.

## **WORKING GROUP MEMBERS**

### **Criminal Justice Agencies**

- Los Angeles Police Department
- Los Angeles County Department of Probation
- California Division of Corrections, Parole and Community Services Division
- California Youth Authority (Juvenile Parole)
- U.S. Attorney's Office for the Central District of California
- Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office
- Los Angeles City Attorney's Office
- City of Los Angeles Housing Authority
- Los Angeles Unified School District Police

### **Community-Based Organizations**

- Soledad Enrichment Action
- Homeboy Industries/Jobs for a Future
- East Los Angeles Community Development Corporation
- Boyle Heights Chamber of Commerce
- Mothers of East L.A.
- Local parent-teacher associations
- Association of Community Based Gang Intervention Workers

### **Faith-Based/Other Institutions**

- Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles—East Los Angeles Deanery
- Dolores Mission
- White Memorial Medical Center

### **Researchers**

- RAND Corporation
- University of California, Irvine

## What Lay Behind Hollenbeck's Violence?

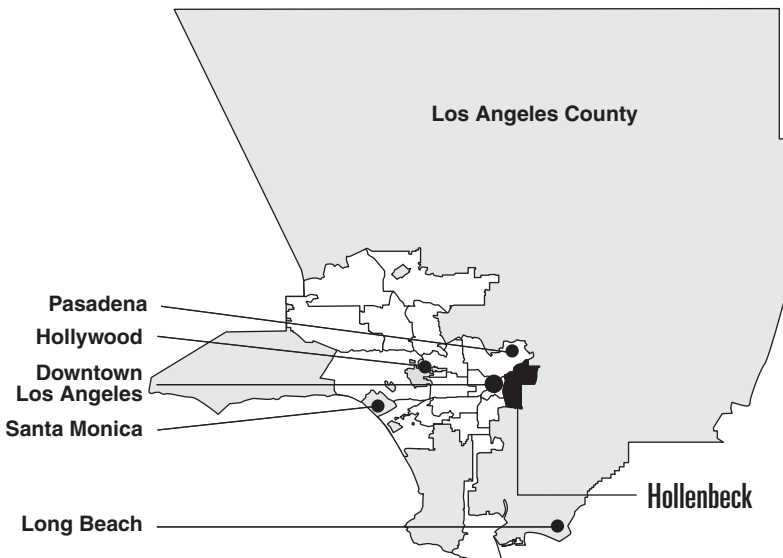
The working group, which began meeting in early 1999, examined trouble spots to find a locale where an intervention would have an impact. It selected the Hollenbeck section of Los Angeles, chiefly because of its high crime rate (see exhibit 1).<sup>4</sup> Among the 18 policing areas in the city, Hollenbeck has consistently ranked near the top in violent crime. In recent years, the homicide

rate has been higher in Hollenbeck than in Los Angeles overall and the country as a whole.

### A gang crime hot spot

In the community's view, gangs were at the core of homicides and gun violence in Hollenbeck. The researchers' analysis confirmed that this belief was well founded.

**Exhibit 1. Hollenbeck, Los Angeles: The intervention site**



Most of the nearly 200 homicides committed in Hollenbeck between 1995 and 1998 involved gangs. In half of the killings, the motive was an issue of “respect” among gang members or a dispute over turf. Another one-fourth were not gang motivated, but either the victim or offender was a gang member. Drugs played a minor role; they were the cause of only about 20 percent of the homicides. When drugs were the motive, homicides were more likely to be the result of a dispute over issues such as drug quality or quantity than over control of markets.<sup>5</sup>

Aside from being a hot spot for gang crime, Hollenbeck also offered the prospect of committed partners from the community. In addition to having a long tradition of “street gang workers,” it had a solid infrastructure of community organizations, including faith-based institutions whose missions included youth violence and gangs. The commitment of the churches was evident from the start: At the first meeting of the working group, 14 of 17 participants were Catholic priests from area parishes. A number of the community-based organizations offer a variety of services to young people who want to break with their

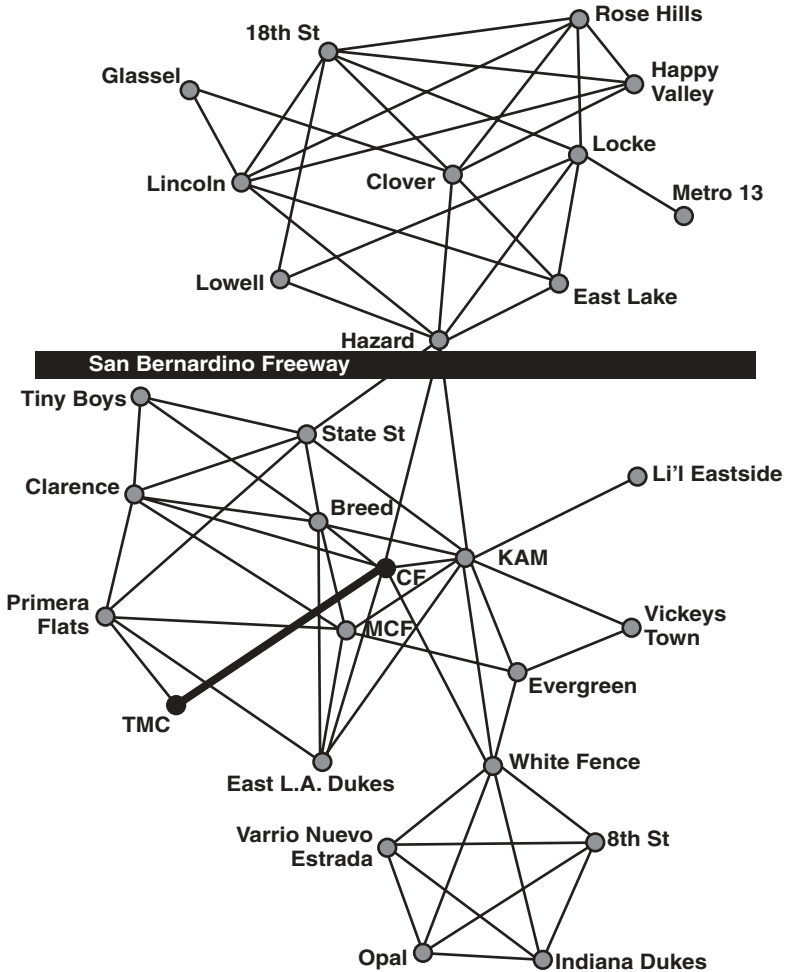
gangs. Homeboy Industries/ Jobs for a Future, a local job referral/training center established by a priest, is one of the most active of these organizations.

## Why Boyle Heights?

When the researchers analyzed gang activity to define an intervention point, they uncovered a dense network of rivalries among Hollenbeck’s 29 gangs (see exhibit 2).<sup>6</sup> They also found, however, that each gang kept to itself. Because gang violence was concentrated, the researchers felt it would be best to focus resources, particularly law enforcement, on a small area, perhaps consisting of only a few blocks.

Further analysis revealed that the most intense gang rivalries played out in the southern part of Hollenbeck—the Boyle Heights neighborhood. Gun crime was even more concentrated there than in the rest of Hollenbeck. Another reason for choosing Boyle Heights was geography. The San Bernardino Freeway (I-10) forms a distinct boundary separating Boyle Heights from the rest of Hollenbeck to the north. With one minor exception, no gang rivalries crossed the freeway.

**Exhibit 2. Network of gang rivalries in Hollenbeck**



**CF = Cuatro Flats**  
 KAM = Krazy Ass Mexicans  
 MCF = Michigan Crime Force  
**TMC = The Mob Crew**

Note: Exhibit is based on violent relationships and is not meant to reflect the geographic distribution of gangs.

Adapted from G. Tita et al., *Reducing Gun Violence: Results from an Intervention in East Los Angeles* (MR-1764-NIJ), Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2003. Used with permission.

## Launching Operation Ceasefire in Los Angeles

The working group decided which violent crimes would set the intervention in motion. These triggering events were defined as any serious crimes by a gang member or any gang crimes in which a gun was used. The double homicide involving two Boyle Heights gangs, Cuatro Flats and TMC, qualified. In response, the police and other agencies pulled the levers; that is, they activated the sticks part of the intervention.

However, because the carrots, or prevention component, ran into some difficulty, implementation did not proceed exactly as planned. (“Sticks and Carrots in Hollenbeck” lists the levers and positive inducements used or planned.)

### Enforcement levers

The array of agencies that pulled enforcement levers

### STICKS AND CARROTS IN HOLLENBECK

Organization Responsible	Sticks		Carrots
	Primary Levers	Secondary Levers	Prevention Services
Parole	Enforce parole regulations		Job training and development
Probation	Enforce probation regulations		Tattoo removal, substance abuse treatment
Los Angeles Police Department	Serve warrants; conduct saturation patrols for drug market abatement		
Housing Authority Police	Enforce public housing residency	Enforce property code	
Hospital			Tattoo removal, substance abuse treatment
Homeboy Industries/ Jobs for a Future			Tattoo removal, job training and development
Various city agencies		Enforce child support payments or property code violations	Job training and development

was a testament to the level of coordination achieved among diverse enforcement agencies. The Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) quickly allocated additional resources, stepping up patrol in the five police reporting districts of Boyle Heights in and around the homicide site (see exhibit 3), which was in TMC territory (although the reporting district itself was claimed by both TMC and Cuatro Flats). Officers from several special units were deployed, and each weekend for 2 months after the shooting, mounted police patrolled the parks and adjacent public housing developments in the targeted area. The County Housing Authority police stepped up patrol in a housing complex that was a hotbed of Cuatro Flats activity.

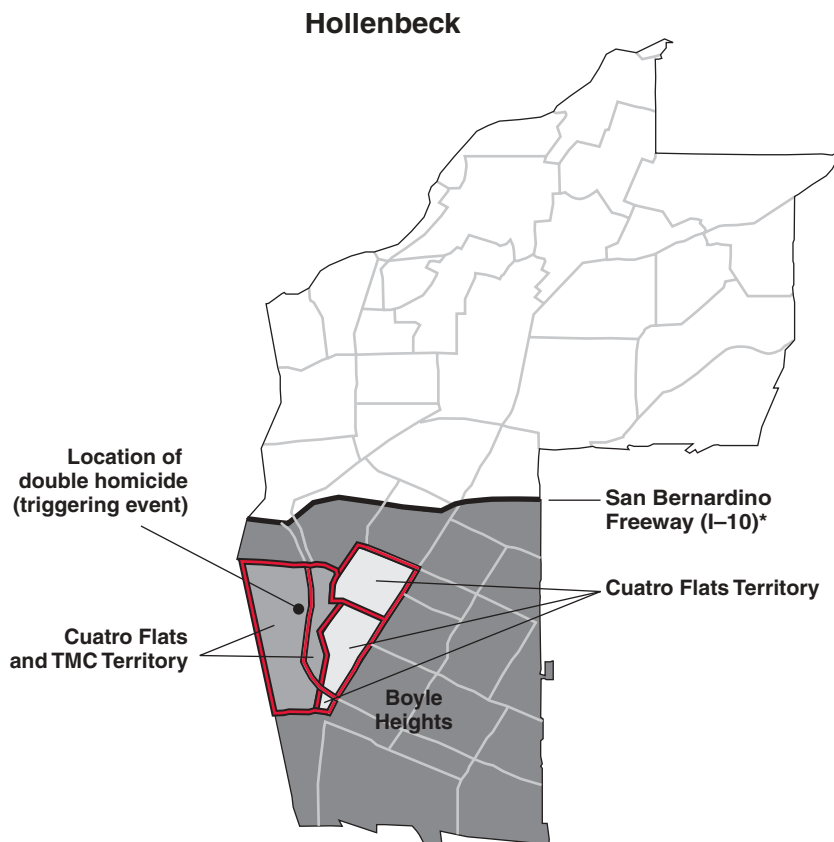
Police and probation officers visited the homes of several well-known Cuatro Flats members, arresting three who had outstanding warrants or probation violations. At each visit, the officers made clear that their actions were a direct result of the violence committed by the

gang. Over the next 3 months, they arrested or revoked the parole of five more gang members, seized illegal guns, and referred several gun cases to the U.S. Attorney for prosecution.

Other levers included inspections by health and child welfare agencies at properties where gang members congregated. Public housing occupancy rules, for example, were strictly enforced. With the aid of a city council member, speed bumps were installed at the site of the double homicide, and the alleyway behind it was fenced off, making future attacks and escape more difficult.

### **Retailing: The ideal versus the reality**

The intention was to tightly couple the levers with prevention services. Before the intervention, a great deal of retailing was done throughout Boyle Heights by Homeboy Industries, the police, and the churches. It began in the second half of 1999, when gang members were

**Exhibit 3. Five police reporting districts targeted for intensive law enforcement**

Note: The grey boundaries are those of Hollenbeck's police reporting districts. The red boundaries show the five targeted districts.

\*Separates Boyle Heights from the rest of Hollenbeck.

Adapted from G. Tita et al., *Reducing Gun Violence: Results from an Intervention in East Los Angeles* (MR-1764-NIJ), Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2003. Used with permission.



put on notice that a project with the goal of reducing gun violence was being planned. They were not apprised of the specifics of what would happen, but they were told that accountability for a single violent crime would be collective.

The other component of retailing was the message that services would be available to help gang members cultivate alternatives to violent behavior. The services included job training and development opportunities, substance abuse treatment, and tattoo removal. They would be offered through or by police and probation officers, area hospitals, various other city agencies, and the employment referral center.

The plan did not fully materialize, however, because a

few days before the double homicide, community representatives urged that the law enforcement component of the intervention be put into effect immediately, even before any triggering event and before services were ready. Their reasoning was that people perceived violent crime to be escalating rapidly in the area and that TMC and Cuatro Flats activities were especially troubling. The situation was so urgent, they believed, that there was not enough time to coordinate services with law enforcement. Retailing continued throughout Boyle Heights during the first 3 months of the intervention, but programs and services were not consistently or widely available. Events had overtaken the carefully laid plans.

## Did Violence Decline?

The law enforcement levers were pulled largely in the parts of Boyle Heights where Cuatro Flats and TMC were most active. This meant that, although the intervention was directed at the gangs the community was most concerned about, the researchers were limited to measuring the effect on crime only in a relatively small area of Boyle Heights. Retailing, on the other hand, was carried out throughout Boyle Heights, so its effect could be measured more broadly, even though it was not implemented as comprehensively as intended.

The researchers wanted to find out whether the intervention reduced three categories of offenses—violent crime, gang crime, and gun crime—and whether it did so both during the time the intervention was taking place—the suppression phase—and during the months following—the deterrence phase. (The method used to measure crime levels is described in “Conducting the Evaluation.”)

### **Retailing—a weak component**

In Boyle Heights, where retailing was carried out and some increased social services were offered, all three types of crime—violent, gang, and gun—declined.<sup>7</sup> However, the differences between Boyle Heights and the rest of Hollenbeck, where there was no intervention, were not statistically significant. Thus, the researchers concluded that retailing would have to be conducted aggressively to affect crime.

### **Enforcement levers do a better job**

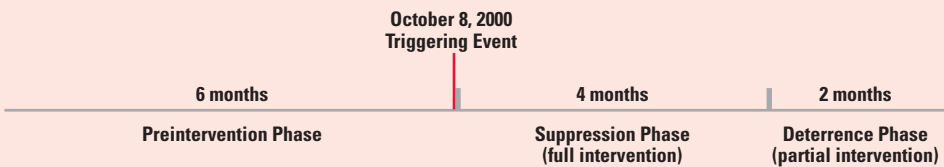
Intensive law enforcement took place in the five police reporting districts of Boyle Heights where Cuatro Flats and TMC were most active. In these districts, violent crime fell during the suppression phase, and the decline was even stronger in the deterrence phase (37 percent overall, compared with 24 percent in the rest of Boyle

## CONDUCTING THE EVALUATION

To find out whether retailing and intensive law enforcement reduced crime, the researchers measured crime rates before and after these interventions, examining the effects on violent, gang, and gun crime. They compared crime rates in the intervention areas with crime rates outside those areas.

### Comparing before and after crime rates

Crime rates in the 6 months leading up to the intervention (the preintervention phase) were compared with crime rates in the following 6 months—the period after the triggering event, when the intervention was carried out. The first 4 months of the intervention were considered the suppression phase because, during that time, all elements of the intervention were applied. During the next 2 months, only selected parts of the intervention were consistently applied. This period was termed the “deterrence phase” because if crime continued to fall after intensive suppression ended, the intervention could be considered to have a longer term effect.



### Measuring law enforcement and retailing

The effects of law enforcement and retailing were measured separately. Intensive law enforcement (saturation patrol, enforcement of probation and parole rules, arrests for outstanding warrants, and similar enforcement actions) took place in the five police reporting districts of Boyle

Heights). Gang crime also fell during the suppression phase, although it began to rise during the deterrence phase.

Gun crime, however, did not decline more steeply in the five districts than in the rest of Boyle Heights. It fell at almost the same rate (by about one-third) as where there was no law enforce-

ment intervention. One possible reason was the small number of gun crimes in the area (about 10 incidents per month), which made statistically meaningful measurement difficult.<sup>8</sup>

It is possible that the five targeted reporting districts were in some way different from the rest of Boyle Heights. If so, any decline in crime

Heights where the Cuatro Flats and TMC gangs were active.<sup>a</sup> Crime rates in these reporting districts were compared with crime rates in the rest of Boyle Heights, where only retailing had been conducted and some services had been made available.

According to criminological theory, places that are similar economically and socially will generally have similar crime levels. To make sure that the five reporting districts were representative of Boyle Heights and not an aberration, the researchers compared crime levels there with crime levels in an area closely matched economically and socially. The comparison was between six census blocks<sup>b</sup> in the five reporting districts and six census blocks that lay outside the area but were similar in median household income, percentage of households below the poverty line, percentage of households that rented their homes, population density, and population mobility. The comparison was intended to ensure that any difference in crime levels between the two areas could not be attributed to social and economic factors specific to the targeted census block groups.

Retailing the message—forewarning gang members that violent crime would have consequences and offering services as an incentive to turn away from crime—took place throughout Boyle Heights. Most of it happened in the first 3 months of the suppression phase. To see whether crime fell as a result of retailing, crime rates in Boyle Heights were compared with rates in the rest of Hollenbeck, where there had been no intervention. To avoid possible “contamination” from the effect of law enforcement on crime, data from the five targeted reporting districts were first eliminated.

## Notes

a. Boyle Heights has 18 police reporting districts, each of which is nearly the size of a census tract. (In Los Angeles, a census tract has between 2,500 and 8,000 people.)

b. Several census blocks make up a census tract.

might result from these differences, not from the intervention. To make the comparison more precise, the researchers identified areas in Hollenbeck that lay outside the reporting districts but were similar economically and socially to selected areas within the districts. Then they compared the effects of the intervention in both areas. They found a 3-percent decline in violent crime in the comparison area (outside the five districts) and

a 34-percent decline in violent crime in the selected areas within the districts. This 34-percent decline was consistent with the 37-percent overall decline in the five reporting districts, but far greater than the 3-percent decline in the comparison area.

The intervention seemed to be most effective during the suppression phase, with the effect declining slightly in the deterrence phase. However,

because the decline continued into the deterrence phase, the possibility of a longer term effect cannot be ruled out.

Gun and gang crime also declined, although not as much as violent crime; the

decline was not statistically significant for either type of crime, however. One reason may be that the area is small, making it difficult to accurately measure the relatively few gang and gun crimes that took place there.

## The Balance Sheet

The law enforcement (i.e., lever pulling) components of the intervention showed more promising effects than the retailing components, most notably in the measurable reductions in crime. Criminal justice system partners, especially LAPD and probation officers, were able to design a powerful law enforcement element, in part because of the resources available to them and the flexibility they had in using them.

It is difficult to say whether the successes of Operation Ceasefire in Los Angeles outweighed the failures or vice versa. Certainly, the methodical and inclusive process of planning and design can serve as a template for other communities grappling with gang violence.

### The plus side

Perhaps the most important success of the program was the working group. Using data analysis led by the researchers and relying on collaboration from many public and private agencies, the group came up with a well-designed intervention. The

group also served as a forum that enabled agency representatives to exchange ideas and, perhaps most important, to focus on a discrete and manageable problem.

The working group process proved that diverse criminal justice organizations can work together effectively. The experience confirmed what group members had supposed: Each agency has unique resources that, when pooled with those of other agencies, make it more effective than it would have been working alone.

The working group also helped build community support for the intervention that exceeded its expectations. One possible reason was that the project focused on criminal activity rather than on gang members. In other words, the community backed the intervention to the extent it was not directed against young people's affiliation with a gang but rather toward reduction of gun violence. Community support motivated the city attorney to assign a dedicated prosecutor and community organizer to the project.

## The minus side

Aside from the inconsistent and limited provision of services, a more general problem was that the working group did not follow the plan of responding to each triggering event as it occurred. Instead, because of immediate concern about Cuatro Flats and TMC, the group focused almost exclusively on these two gangs. As a result, shootings that involved other gangs did not receive as much attention. Because of this, Operation Ceasefire in Los Angeles failed to create the perception among gun users that *all* violence would provoke an immediate response, and it did not have the desired deterrent effect.

A sense of sustained ownership of the project never materialized. The working group's view that the intervention was a research project that would last only for the duration of the study persisted. The group did not have a sense that this was the beginning of a

transformation to ongoing, self-sustaining interagency collaboration and new operating procedures. One reason was frequent staff rotations, particularly in the LAPD. Another reason was that no single agency had resources sufficient to manage and maintain the collaboration. In fact, interagency collaboration was not a criterion used to judge staff performance, and agency budgets were not structured to encourage such collaboration.

Changes in the city's political leadership affected support for the project. In at least one key agency, project contacts changed frequently. The inability to marshal dedicated staff from participating agencies was an obstacle, although it was not unexpected because the agencies received no financial support. Where dedicated staff were assigned, they had to perform all their regular duties in addition to those of Operation Ceasefire.

## A Message to Other Jurisdictions

Perhaps the biggest lesson learned from this project is the need to create concrete mechanisms that promote interagency collaboration. Typically, criminal justice agencies do not work together on common problems. Judging the performance of agency heads on how well they collaborate with their partner agencies would be a step in the right direction.

Interagency collaboration is often viewed as cumbersome

and costly. These assumptions could be tested by collecting information about how much it costs to develop and sustain an intervention like Operation Ceasefire in Los Angeles. Evaluations generally focus on crime-reduction benefits, but if jurisdictions also were armed with cost information, they would be better positioned to decide whether the intervention is worth the effort.



## Notes

1. See *Reducing Gun Violence: The Boston Gun Project's Operation Ceasefire*, by David M. Kennedy, Anthony A. Braga, Anne M. Piehl, and Elin J. Waring, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice, September 2001, NCJ 188741.
2. The process used to design and carry out Operation Ceasefire in Los Angeles is documented in "From Boston to Boyle Heights: The Process and Prospects of a 'Pulling Levers' Strategy in a Los Angeles Barrio," by George Tita, K. Jack Riley, and Peter Greenwood, in *Policing Gangs and Youth Violence*, ed. Scott H. Decker, Belmont, CA: Wadsworth-Thomson Learning, 2003: 102–130. The outcome of the evaluation is presented in *Reducing Gun Violence: Results from an Intervention in East Los Angeles*, by George Tita, K. Jack Riley, Greg Ridgeway, Clifford Grammich, Allan Abrahamse, and Peter W. Greenwood, Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2003.
3. For a detailed discussion of the pulling levers strategy in the Boston Ceasefire Program, see Kennedy, D., "Pulling Levers: Getting Deterrence Right," *NIJ Journal* 236 (July 1998): 2–8.
4. A 15-square-mile area east of downtown Los Angeles, Hollenbeck has a population of 200,000, is largely Latino, and includes the communities of El Sereno, Lincoln Heights, and Boyle Heights.
5. This finding—that the motive for homicide was not likely to be fights among gangs for market control—confirmed other research that contended the links among youth gangs, drugs, and violence are overdrawn.
6. These 29 were Hollenbeck's "criminally active street gangs," a term used by the LAPD to describe problematic, violent groups.
7. Crime rates in Boyle Heights, where retailing took place, were compared with rates in the rest of Hollenbeck, where there was no retailing. Before the analysis, data on the five targeted police reporting districts of Boyle Heights were eliminated to exclude any results that might have been due to law enforcement rather than retailing.
8. Greater citizen involvement and police deployment may increase the reporting of crime. This may explain in part why the rates of gun crime did not decline.

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