



Press Release

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SUPPRESSION OF STREET GANGS SHOWS LIMITED RESULTS

Addressing motivations that lead youths to join gangs appears essential

Street gangs show surprising resilience to common law enforcement tactics, such as police sweeps, curfews, and longer prison sentences for gang members, a new report finds. Such 'suppression' tactics are designed to disrupt gang structures, eliminate leadership, and deter youths from remaining in gangs. In many cases, however, they either fail in their long-term objectives or actually increase insecurity.

According to the *Small Arms Survey 2010: Gangs, Groups, and Guns*, gang suppression alone may temporarily lower violence but can also lead to unintended consequences. The incarceration of gang leaders, for example, can help gangs consolidate and propagate within prisons, and project power into the community. Prison gangs also rely on re-incarceration to make their threats over their non-imprisoned members credible.

Suppression tactics fail to tackle the reasons that lead youths to become gang members, effectively guaranteeing that gangs will adapt to heavy-handed policing. 'Since gangs serve cultural, social, and economic needs, they survive many gang-eradication efforts,' said Small Arms Survey Managing Director Eric Berman. 'Given this, addressing the underlying motivations for youths to join gangs appears to be an important component in gang violence prevention planning.'

Drawing on examples from many contexts, the Survey reviews current knowledge on gang-related violence and efforts to curb it. It finds that measures that combine suppression—or its threat—with community outreach, social services, and treatment and prevention strategies are more effective than suppression alone. Recognizing and capitalizing on features of gangs that attract youths, such as social cohesion, mutual respect, and artistic expression, has also shown promise in some contexts.

Apart from its focus on street gangs, this edition also explores non-state armed groups. Unlike gangs, armed groups may seek to advance an ideology or seize power, or simply take community security into their own hands. They span the spectrum from rebels and insurgents to vigilante groups and paramilitaries that support the state. Despite their differences, gangs and armed groups share a number of features, including the willingness to use violence to achieve their objectives.

This edition of the *Survey* reveals that:

- Authorized international transfers of ammunition for small arms and light weapons—including undocumented transfers—are estimated to have averaged USD 4.3 billion annually between 2006 and 2009. Small arms ammunition comprised USD 1.8 billion of this total, with ammunition for light weapons (excluding man-portable guided missiles and single-shot, disposable rockets) accounting for USD 2.5 billion.
- A combination of this year's findings with those of the *Small Arms Survey 2009* shows that the global authorized trade in small arms and ammunition is significantly greater than USD 6 billion per year, much larger than previous estimates.
- Of some 875 million firearms worldwide, it appears gangs have no more than 10 million (just over one per cent). Other non-state armed groups have roughly 1.4 million altogether (less than 0.2 per cent), of which some 350,000 belong to groups that were actively fighting in 2009.
- Levels of violence and arms use vary greatly among gangs around the world. Nevertheless, research from the United States and elsewhere shows that gang members are far more likely than ordinary citizens to commit or suffer from armed violence. In the largest US cities, gang homicide rates are estimated at up to 100 times that of the broader population.
- Girls and women are committed supporters and members of gangs around the world, but, contrary to some media accounts, they engage in less frequent and severe violence than boys and men, and rarely use firearms.

Published by Cambridge University Press, the *Small Arms Survey 2010: Gangs, Groups, and Guns* is the Survey's tenth annual global analysis of small arms and related issues. An independent research project funded by numerous governments, the Small Arms Survey is the principle source of public information and analysis on all aspects of small arms and armed violence. ■

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