

# Research



September 1996

# Bulletin

## Street gangs and crime

### Patterns and trends in Chicago

A special report to the Governor's Commission on Gangs in Illinois

#### INTRODUCTION

**C**riminal street gangs are a major concern in Illinois and across the nation. Violence, drug trafficking and other crimes attributed to street gangs have increased in recent years, and gang problems have emerged in previously unaffected jurisdictions. Today, no community, regardless of size or geographic location, can rightfully feel immune from gang activity.

In Illinois, an Institute for Intergovernmental Research survey of 229 law enforcement agencies found that 197 of them reported gang problems in 1995. These agencies said there were more than 42,000 gang members in their jurisdictions.

While it is clear that street gangs are involved in drugs, violence and other criminal activity, documenting the extent and nature of the problem with any precision is difficult. One major reason for this is the lack of standard definitions across jurisdictions regarding exactly what constitutes a gang-related incident. For example, one jurisdiction might classify a homicide as gang related whenever the perpetrator or victim is associated with a street gang, regardless of the circumstances or motivation for the incident. Another jurisdiction might classify a homicide as gang related only when the incident is specifically related to street gang activity. Another reason it is difficult to document the extent and nature of the problem is the lack of a statewide mechanism for gathering and sharing data on gang-related criminal incidents.

While more and more attention has been focused on criminal street gangs by government officials, the media and others, information on the extent and nature of the problem is more often anecdotal than the result of systematic assessment. If we are to develop and implement effective strategies for combatting

street gangs in Illinois, we must have an accurate understanding of the problem, one that is based on empirical research.

In this spirit, the Research and Analysis Unit of the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority analyzed patterns and trends in gang crime activity using the best data available in Illinois. The data capture information on every gang-related homicide from 1965 to 1994, as

#### Key findings:

- Lethal street gang violence increased dramatically in recent years, as has the risk of becoming either a victim or an offender;
- The risk of becoming either a victim or an offender in street gang-related homicide peaks between the ages of 15 and 19;
- The age of offenders in street gang-related homicide and nonlethal drug offenses is declining, but not in nonlethal violence;
- Street gangs tend to specialize in either violence or entrepreneurial activities.
- Most street gang violence involves inter-gang conflicts, but intragang violence is surprisingly common;
- Gang-related firearm homicides have increased, particularly those committed with semi-automatic weapons;
- Street gang-related homicide is more likely to grow out of turf violence than drug markets, but drug markets indirectly influence violence by bringing rival gang members into proximity with one another.



well as every nonlethal gang-related criminal incident from 1987 to 1994 recorded by Chicago police.

While Chicago may not necessarily be representative of other communities in Illinois, the analysis provides a framework for understanding street gang crime in greater detail than ever before. In the absence of statewide data, we believe the lessons we learn will be useful for prevention and intervention efforts throughout the state.

### **Included in this report:**

In the following pages we present detailed analyses in each of the following areas:

- The overall scope of the street gang problem;
- The risk of becoming a victim or an offender by race/ethnicity, gender and age, including an assessment of whether gang offenders are getting younger;
- Intergang, intragang, and nongang member victimization;
- Street gang specialization in specific types of criminal activity; and
- Factors contributing to street gang-related violence, including weapon use and the relationship of drugs.

## **DATA SOURCES**

### **The Chicago Datasets**

This analysis is based on two Chicago datasets. One contains information on all homicides committed in Chicago between 1965 and 1994; the other contains information on all street gang-related offenses that occurred in Chicago from 1987 through 1995. Both datasets have been collected with the close cooperation of the Chicago Police Department.

The Chicago Homicide Dataset contains detailed information on the almost 23,000 homicides recorded by the police from 1965 through 1994. With this resource, which is the largest, most detailed dataset on violence available in the United States, we can answer questions about patterns of risk for specific types of lethal violence for specific groups in the population.

The Homicide Dataset contains information from the police point of view, meaning it includes all cases that police investigators determined to be homicides, regardless of court or other outcome. Police-determined justifiable homicides are not included, though cases in which the offender was found not guilty or the case was not prosecuted are. Offenders in the Dataset are all those who were determined by the police to have committed the homicide, whether or not they were arrested.

The street gang-related offense dataset contains information on 63,141 street gang-motivated incidents

recorded in Chicago from 1987 through 1994 (every offense flagged as “street gang-related” by police investigation [see Definitions, below]). This information is extracted from a citywide incident data file by the Chicago Police Department and provided regularly to the Authority for analysis.

These incidents consist of many specific types of offenses, but can be generally categorized into four types: homicide, other violence, drug or liquor offenses, and other offenses. Other violence includes serious violence (aggravated assault and battery, mob action, robbery) as well as less serious violence (simple assault, telephone threats). Similarly, drug or liquor offenses include serious offenses (manufacture or delivery of a controlled substance) as well as simple possession of cannabis or liquor license violation. In the nonlethal data, we have no information as to whether or not a violent offense was drug related, though we do have that information for homicides. Other street gang-motivated offenses (neither violent nor drug) include such crimes as vandalism and graffiti.

Of the 63,141 gang-related incidents recorded from 1987 to 1994, 1.5 percent were homicides, 39 percent were nonlethal violent offenses, 43 percent were drug or liquor offenses, and 16 percent were other offenses. However, these proportions vary from one year to the next. In this analysis, we use the street gang-related offense data primarily to examine nonlethal incidents.

## **DEFINITIONS**

### **Street gang**

This research is based on the Chicago Police Department’s 1992 definition for a street gang (CPD, 1992:1):

An association of individuals who exhibit the following characteristics in varying degrees:

- a gang name and recognizable symbols;
- a geographic territory;
- a regular meeting pattern; and
- an organized, continuous course of criminality.

### **Street gang-related offense**

The Chicago Police Department’s determination that an offense was street gang-related is based upon the motive of the offender. The preponderance of evidence must indicate that the incident grew out of a street gang function. Gang membership of either party is not enough, by itself, to determine gang-relatedness, unless other elements of the case establish a relationship.

Police investigators reviewing a case report determine



gang-relatedness according to the following descriptors of possible street gang motives (CPD, 1992:11-12):

- Representing: the offense (frequently robbery or assault) grew out of a signification of gang identity or alliance (by hand signs, language, clothing, and so on);
- Recruitment: offense related to recruiting of members for a street gang;
- Intimidation of a victim or witness (ranging from spoken threats to severe physical beatings or death);
- Turf violation: offense committed to disrespect another gang's territory, often the defacing of one street gang's logo by another;
- Prestige: offense committed either to glorify the street gang or to gain rank within the gang;
- Personal conflict: within the rank and file of a gang, either conflicts over leadership or punitive action when violation of street gang rules results in a member being "violated" by other gang members;
- Extortion: efforts to compel membership or to exact tribute for the gang, including protection money from local business or a "street tax" from independent narcotics dealers within the street gang's turf;
- Vice: generally the street level distribution of narcotics by street gang members; and
- Retaliation: repayment for offenses against the gang by rival gang members, nongang victims or complaining witnesses, often resulting in a cycle of violence.

For example, when witnesses confirm that a street gang sign is flashed and members of a rival street gang react, or when a grandfather is killed for refusing to let his grandson be recruited, the offender's primary motivation is the street gang and the incident is street gang-motivated. An exception to this definition of street gang-motivated applies to vice offenses (narcotics, prostitution, gambling). In 1987, the Chicago Police Department's Gang Crimes Section began to count vice offenses as gang-related if they involved a known gang member. As a result, the number of reported street gang-related vice offenses depends partly on the resources the Department devotes to drug intervention. Fortunately, this record-keeping policy does not apply to homicide or to any other offense but vice offenses.

### **Alternative definitions of street gang-related offense**

Although street gang members may commit many crimes, not every crime committed by a street gang

member is related to the street gang affiliation. A street gang member who beats his girlfriend has not committed a street gang-motivated crime unless his action was inspired by membership in the street gang. A drug deal among street gang members that goes bad and results in death is not a street gang homicide unless the drug deal was street gang-motivated (for example, an argument over street gang marketing turfs).

The Los Angeles city and county police departments define street gang-related offenses by affiliation rather than motivation. If the crime was committed by a street gang member, it is considered gang-related, even if the incident had no relationship to a street gang function. This definitional difference results in a substantially greater number of "street gang-related" crimes in Los Angeles than in Chicago. The accuracy of a membership definition depends on the accuracy of the list of street gang members. Such lists may be outdated, may not differentiate between core and peripheral members, and may expand or contract according to police resources rather than actual street gang membership. For example, an officer in the Los Angeles County Police Department told the *Juvenile Justice Digest* (Jan. 24, 1990) that, "one reason for the higher number of gang-related killings was the growing list of known gang members that enables police to blame more killings on gang activity."

Both definitions of street gang-related crime are reasonable, depending on the question being asked. To discover the rates of gang membership within a neighborhood or the vulnerability of gang members to become a victim or an offender, we would need data on offenses attributed to gang members (the Los Angeles definition). On the other hand, to accurately describe the harm done (people murdered, thefts committed, vandalism) by street gang activity, and to discover patterns across time or place of offenses generated by street gangs, we need data on offenses motivated by street gang activity (the Chicago definition). In this report, we ask the latter questions, and use the "street gang-motivated" definition.

### **Gang affiliation of street gang-motivated incidents**

There are several possible definitions for the street gang affiliation of a criminal incident. These alternatives include the street gang affiliation of the offender or offenders, the affiliation of the victim or victims (if any), or the location of an incident within the boundaries of a gang turf.

In this analysis, we have used the offender's gang affiliation, not the victim's gang affiliation, to denote the affiliation of the incident.



## Drug-related offenses

The street gang-related homicides are defined as drug-related if drugs were a motivation for the crime or if the victim or offender was under the influence of drugs during the incident. Drug-motivated homicides, following Goldstein's (1985) "tripartite" definition, are those involving the business or sale of drugs, those which resulted from a crime committed to get drugs or money for drugs, those resulting from an argument or confrontation about drugs, and "other" (such as an infant starving to death because both parents were high).

There is no information in the nonlethal gang-related data as to whether or not a violent or "other" offense was drug-related. Drug-related or drug-motivated information is not available for the nonlethal incidents, only the nature of the incident itself. Thus, we have information on street gang-motivated drug offenses, such as possession or manufacture/delivery, but we do not know whether the motive for a street gang robbery or assault was drug-related.

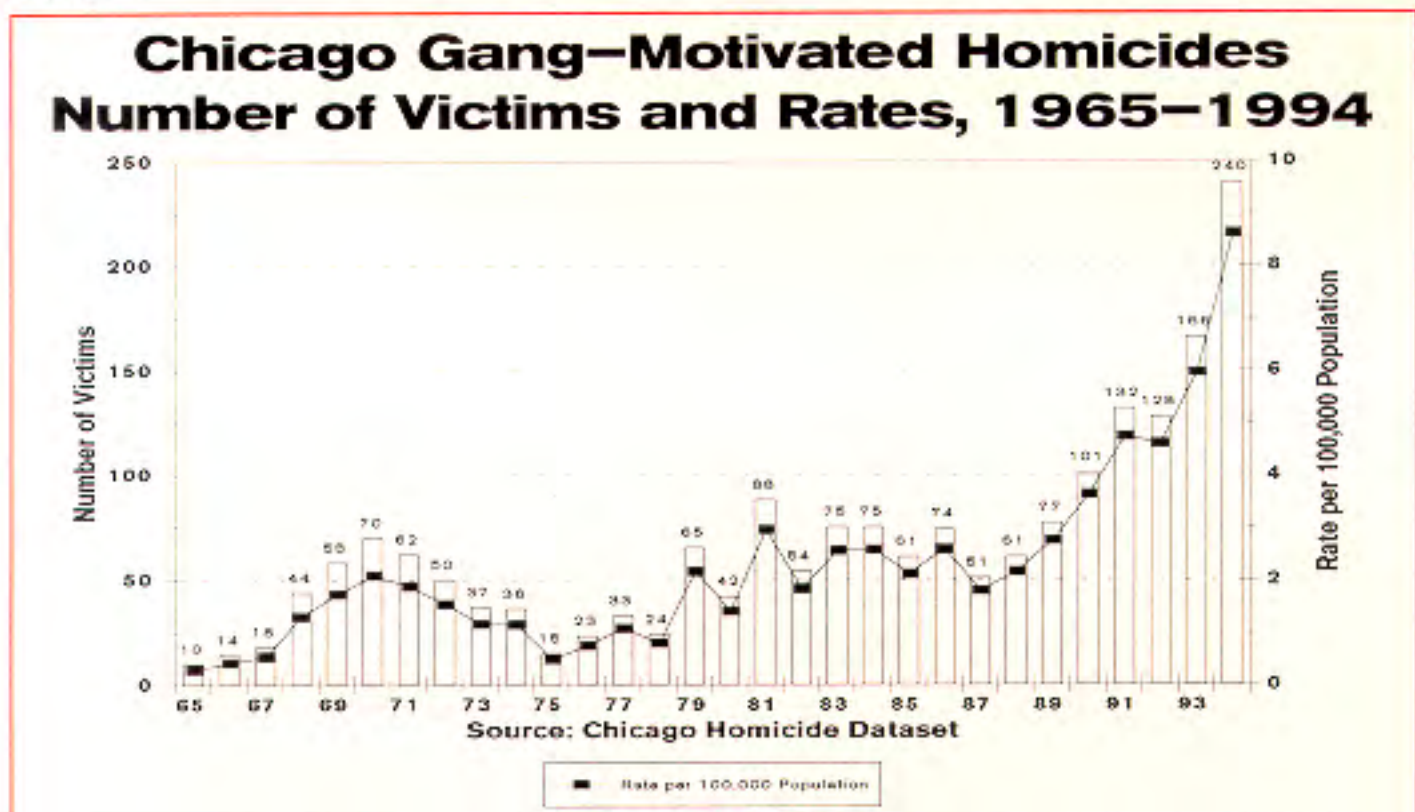
## CHICAGO GANG ACTIVITY Scope of the problem

In 1996, the Chicago Police Department estimated there were 132 Chicago street gangs, and more than 75 different street gangs were represented at least once in the 63,141 street gang-related criminal offenses in Chicago between 1987 and 1994.

Overall, of the 22,985 homicides occurring in Chicago between 1965 and 1994, 8.6 percent were street gang-related, less than the proportion accounted for by homicides of intimate partners (11.4 percent) or by robbery or other instrumental homicides (17.3 percent) (Block and Christakos, 1995). However, this has varied widely from year to year, from lows in 1965 (2.5 percent of the 397 homicides) and 1975 (1.8 percent of the 822 homicides) to peaks in 1991 (14.3 percent of 921) and 1994 (26.2 percent of 916 homicides).

The number of street gang-related homicides recorded annually in Chicago increased almost five fold between 1987 and 1994, jumping from 51 to 240 (Figure 1). The spurt in the early 1990s is of an unprecedented scale, and represents a street gang homicide death rate approaching nine per 100,000 population (8.62), compared to rates well below 3.00 in all years prior to 1990.

Figure 1





## Street gang offenders

The 63,141 street gang-related criminal incidents occurring in Chicago from 1987 to 1994 involved 114,197 offenders. Offender trends are affected by offense trends, and also by changes over time in the number of offenders per incident. More than one offender is involved in many street gang-related offenses, and the proportion of offenses with multiple offenders varies according to the type of offense. Of the 22,583 lethal and nonlethal street gang violent incidents from 1987 to 1994 in which the number of offenders was known, 8,815 (39 percent) were committed by a single offender, including 54 percent of the 894 homicide incidents and 38 percent of the 21,689 nonlethal violent incidents. Fifteen percent of the nonlethal violent offenses but only 4 percent of the homicides involved both multiple victims and multiple offenders.

Of all street gang-related homicides between 1987 and 1994, 212 were committed by two offenders, 119 by three, and 82 by four or more. The maximum number of offenders in any street gang homicide was 11. In the nonlethal violent offenses, the number of offenders was as high as 62 (a mob action incident), with 7,197 two-offender incidents, 2,636 three-offender incidents, and 3,525 incidents with four or more offenders.

## Risk of gang victimization

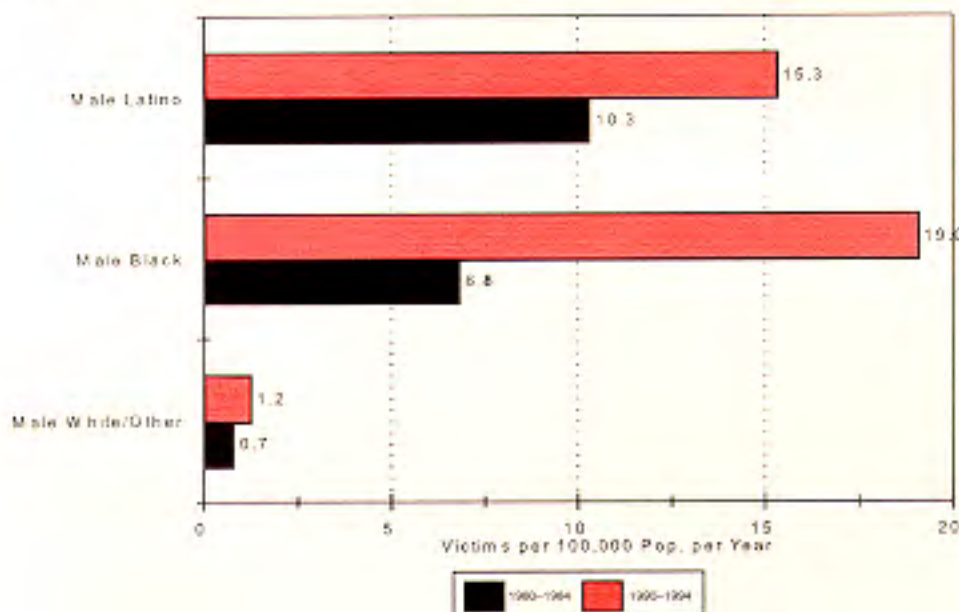
In the early 1990s, the annual death rate for victims of street gang-motivated homicide averaged 19 deaths per 100,000 per year for male African-Americans, and 15 deaths for male Latinos. Non-Latino white males and all groups of females had a much lower risk of being killed in a street gang-related homicide (Figure 2). The victimization risk in the early 1990s was much higher than the risk 10 years earlier, despite the spurt of street gang violence from 1981 to 1986 (see Figure 1). In the early 1980s (1980 to 1984), the average annual death rate was seven per 100,000 for African-American males, 10 per 100,000 for Latino males, and much lower for all other groups. At the time, these rates were unprecedented. However, the huge spurt in the 1990s has broken all records.

Though the current high number and rate of street gang-related homicide victims in Chicago was unprecedented, it does not reflect a steady increase over time. Unlike other kinds of homicide, street gang homicide does not tend to follow a smooth trend of increases or decreases from year to year. Instead, it increases and decreases in spurts, each spurt reflecting a specific gang conflict, usually over turf boundaries or over control of a drug market. When the specific conflict is settled, the number of fatalities may decline sharply.

Further, just as Chicago is one of the most segregated cities in the country, the street gangs in Chicago also tend to be divided across racial and ethnic lines. There-

Figure 2

### Chicago Gang Homicide, Annual Risk of Male Victimization, 1980-84 & 1990-94



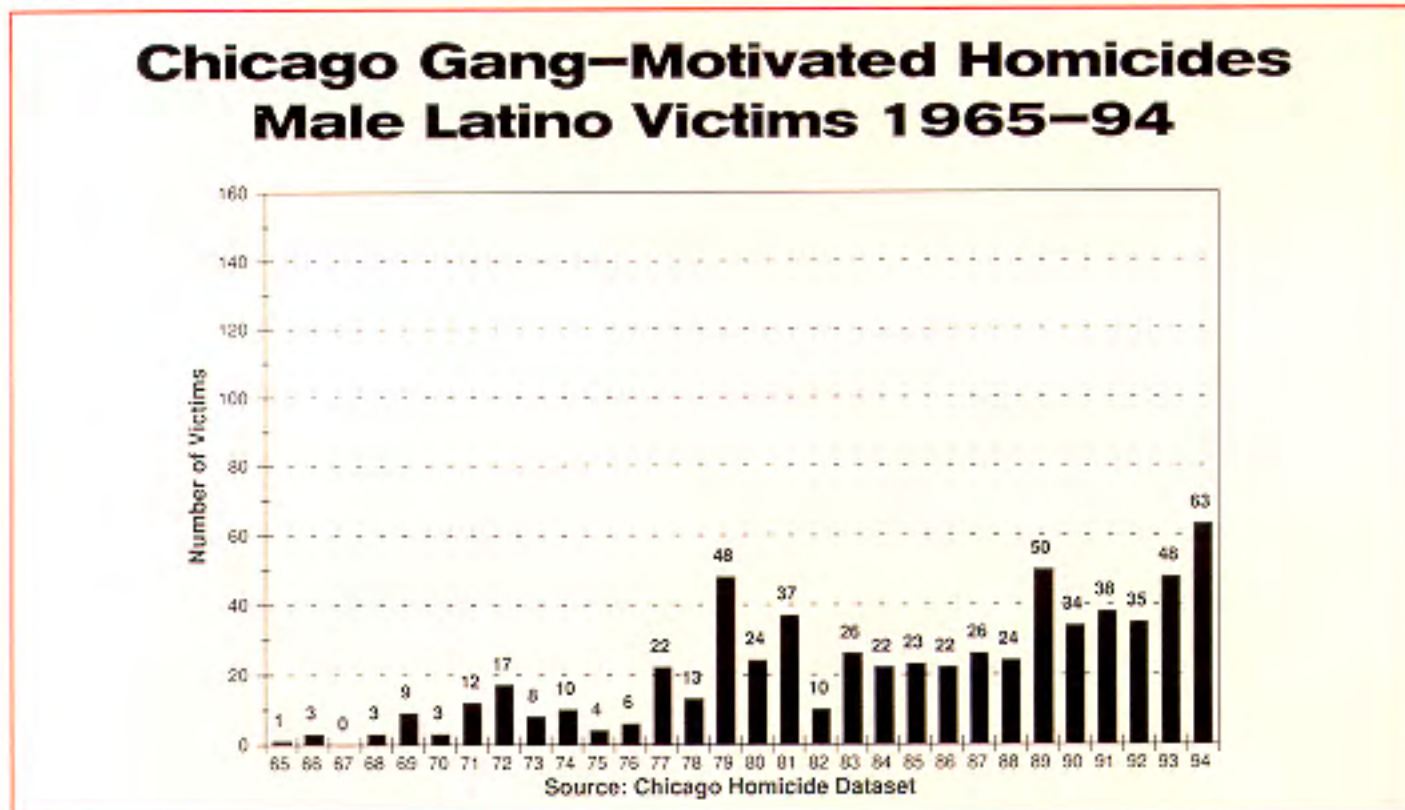
fore, the spurts in street gang violence tend to occur at different times, as well as in different areas of the city, for different racial/ethnic groups. This can be seen, for ex-

ample, in the yearly number of male African-American gang homicide victims from 1965 to 1994 (Figure 3), compared to male Latino victims (Figure 4). While the risk of being murdered in street gang violence is consis-

**Figure 3**



**Figure 4**





tently extremely high for both African-American and Latino males in every year, whether one rate is higher than the other varies from year to year, reflecting specific spurts of violence occurring in the two communities.

Death rates for females climbed sharply in the 1990s, though they were always much lower than death rates for males. From 1965 to 1974, there were four Non-Latino white, 19 African-American and two Latina victims, from 1975 to 1984, there were three, five and five, respectively, but from 1985 to 1994 there were five, 33 and 23, respectively. The highest annual victimization rates per 100,000 for females in any years were .33 in 1990 for Non-Latino whites, 1.88 in 1992 for African-Americans and 2.30 in 1994 for Latinas.

### Race/ethnicity and gender: offenders

The risk of becoming an offender in a lethal or nonlethal street gang offense is much higher for males, and among males it is much higher for Latinos and African-Americans. During the recent spurt of gang-related lethal and nonlethal offenses, for example, the annual risk of becoming a homicide offender was 32 per 100,000 for African-American males and 26.5 per 100,000 for Latino males, but only 1.9 for Non-Latino white males and less than 1.0 for all female groups (Figure 5).

Offender risk patterns for nonlethal offenses differ for violent offenses and drug offenses. For street gang-related nonlethal violent offenses, the risk for male Latinos (937 per 100,000 per year) was higher than for male African-Americans (853 per 100,000 per year), but for street gang-related drug offenses, the risk for male African-Americans was higher than for male Latinos (61 versus 31 per 100,000 per year).

Over time, the risk of becoming an offender in a street gang-related homicide generally follows the same pattern of spurts as the risk of becoming a victim, but because of multiple offenders the risk is higher.

Even though street gang homicide victimization rates for females increased in the 1990s, the risk of becoming an offender did not increase. Over the entire 30-year period, there were only four Non-Latino white, 18 African-American, and 14 Latina female offenders in Chicago street gang-related homicides, with the incidents scattered sporadically across the years.

### Age: Risk for males by age and racial/ethnic group

Although offenders in street gang-related homicides ranged from age 11 to age 56 over the 30-year period from 1965 to 1994, 64 percent were between the ages of 15 and 19. Victims of street gang-related homicide ranged from age 1 to age 78, with 52 percent between

Figure 5

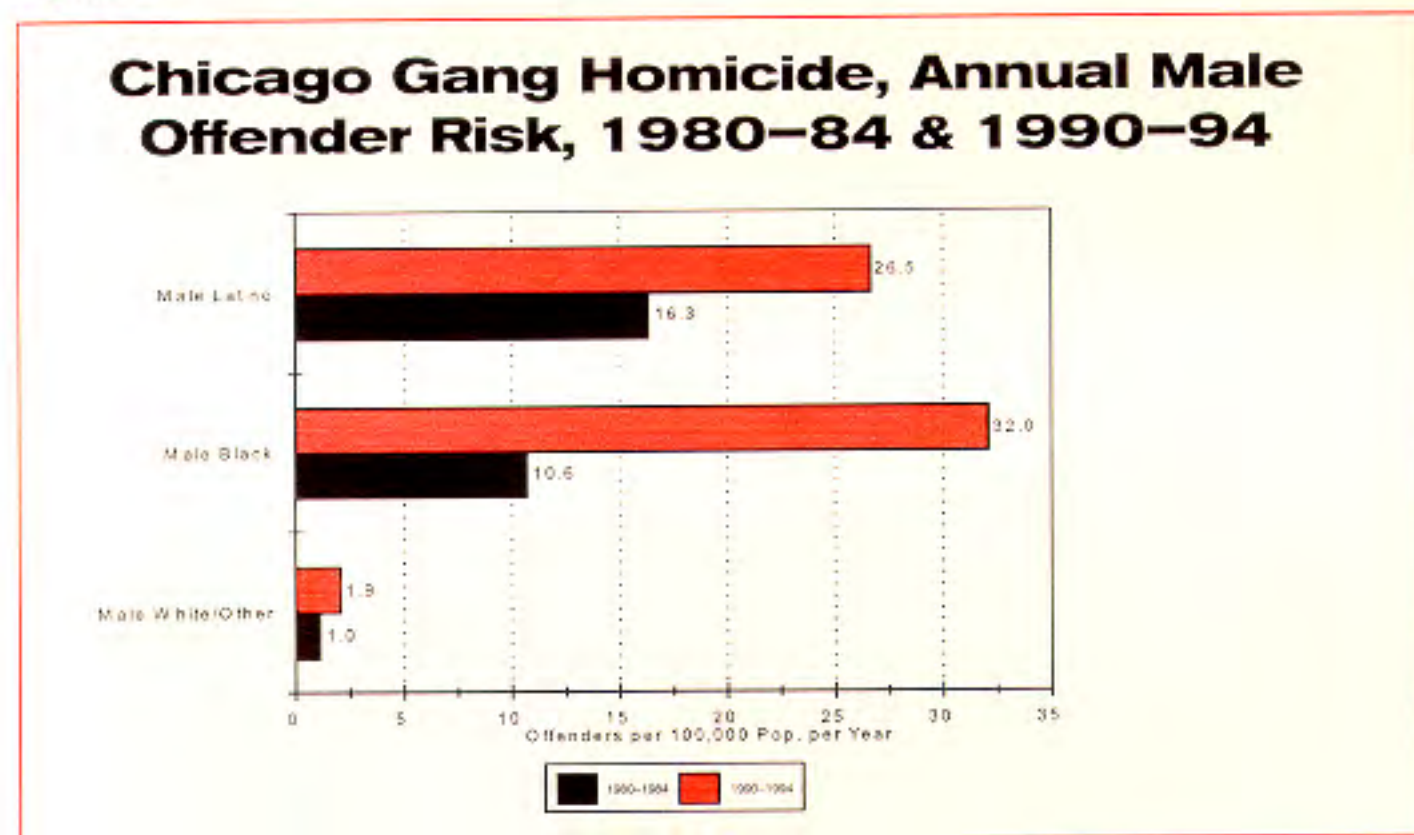
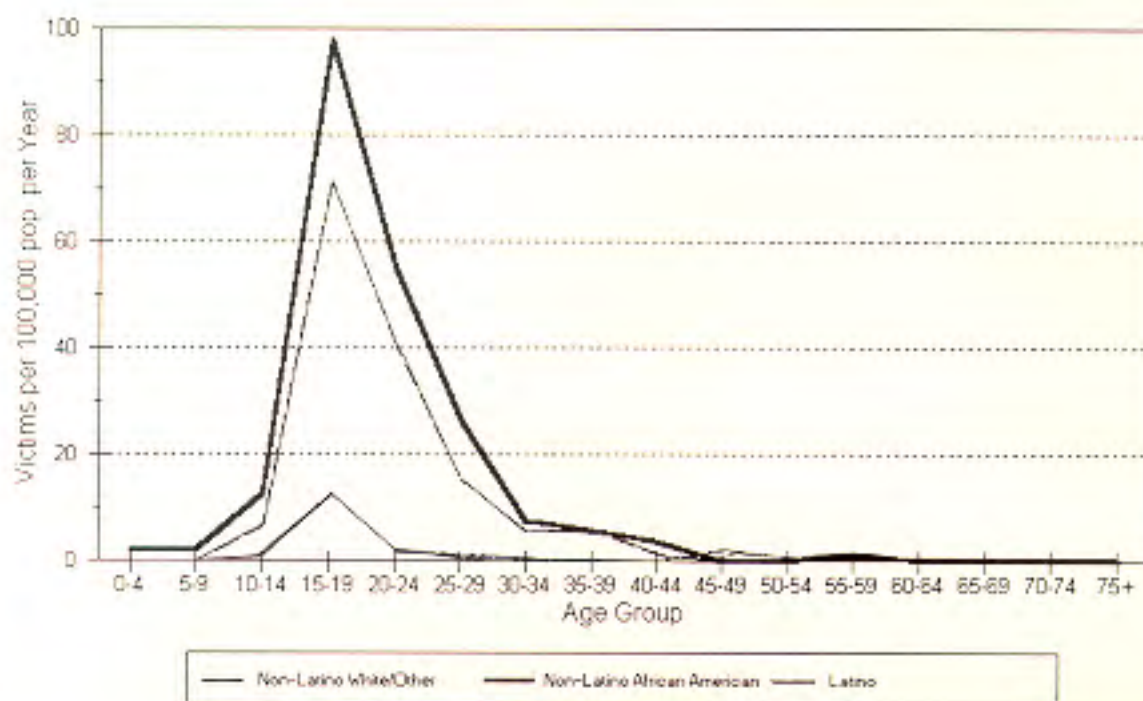




Figure 6

## Chicago Gang-Motivated Homicide, Male Victimization Risk, 1990-94



the ages of 15 and 19. The age-specific risks of being victimized or becoming an offender in a street gang homicide vary from year to year, following the spurts of homicides as a whole. The 1990s thus far, particularly 1994, are extremely high for every age group, but especially for teenagers from 15 to 19. In 1994, 104 teens were murdered (51 per 100,000) and 227 teens became homicide offenders (112 per 100,000) in a street gang conflict.

Since the risk of becoming a victim or becoming an offender in a street gang-related homicide is so much higher for teenage and young adult males who are either African-American or Latino, the risk of specific age, gender and racial/ethnic groups is extremely high. For example, the annual risk of becoming a street gang-related homicide offender, during the period 1990 to 1994, was as high as 214 per 100,000 for African-American males aged 15 to 19, and 161 per 100,000 for Latino males aged 15 to 19. The risk of being murdered in a street gang-related homicide was 98 and 72 per 100,000 for 15-to-19-year-old African-American and Latino males, respectively (Figure 6).

The risk of becoming a victim or becoming an of-

fender in a street gang-related homicide peaks strongly in the age group 15 to 19. While it is clear that homicide victims also include infants, young children and the elderly, teenagers and young adults are most at risk. Among street gang homicide offenders, there are very few younger than 15 or older than 25. Offenders in Chicago street gang criminal incidents tend to cluster within the teenager and young adult years. The most common ages are 15, 16, 17 and 18, with the numbers declining sharply after age 17. The peak age for homicide offenders is slightly older at 18 (224 of the 1,586 offenders), compared to age 17 for nonlethal violence (8,188 of 52,251 offenders), drug offenses (4,600 of 38,906 offenders), and for other (nonviolent and nondrug) offenses (3,286 of 20,454 offenders).

### Are street gang offenders getting younger?

Comparing the annual population-based risk of becoming a victim or offender in a street gang homicide in recent years to the risk 10 years previously, it is clear that both the risk of victimization and the risk of becoming an offender for males were much higher between 1990



Figure 7

## Is the Age of Street Gang Offenders Decreasing?

Age of Offender	NonLethal Violent Offenses (% of Total)		Drug Offenses (% of Total)			
	1987	1994	Manuf. or Del.		Possession	
	1987	1994	1987	1994	1987	1994
10	.1	.3	.0	.0	.0	.0
11	.3	.4	.0	.0	.0	.1
12	1.1	1.2	.0	.5	.3	.4
13	2.4	3.5	.7	1.6	.3	1.7
14	6.4	7.5	2.2	4.8	1.2	5.6
15	13.1	13.1	3.0	11.2	4.0	11.2
16	18.3	16.7	9.7	14.3	9.2	15.9
17	18.4	15.4	13.4	13.0	13.5	15.5
18	14.6	13.7	11.2	10.6	14.1	11.0
19	8.4	8.0	11.2	10.6	12.5	9.4
20	8.2	9.8	12.7	9.5	11.1	8.0
21	2.9	4.2	6.0	8.2	9.8	7.0
22	2.6	3.1	10.4	5.9	8.9	5.4
23	1.6	2.5	11.9	6.3	8.9	4.7
24	1.5	1.5	7.5	4.6	6.3	4.0
Total Offenders	3,866	9,559	134	624	1,167	10,570

and 1994 than they were from 1980 to 1984, regardless of age or racial/ethnic group. For example, the risk of becoming an offender increased from 10 to 24 per 100,000 for 15-to-19-year old Non-Latino white males (125 percent), from 50 to 214 per 100,000 for African-Americans (325 percent), and from 109 to 161 per 100,000 for Latinos (47 percent). The risk for younger males from age 10 to 14 also increased sharply, though this is based on a small number of cases. The risk of offending also generally increased for the age group 25-to-29. For African-American males aged 30 to 34 or 35 to 39, however, the risk of becoming a street gang homicide offender declined between the early 1980s and the early 1990s, though the risk for Latino males increased at those ages. Thus, there is some indication that street gang homicide offenders are getting younger.

However, to determine whether the numbers of young offenders increased disproportionately to the total increase, we need to compare the age distributions of offenders in the earlier versus the later period. Population-based rates have the advantage of controlling for changes in the age structure of the population, but the available five-year age categories are perhaps too broad to determine whether offenders of specific ages are disproportionately increasing. In addition, homicide may show a different age pattern than nonlethal

offenses. To address these issues, we look at street gang offenders aged 10 to 24 in the nonlethal dataset, comparing the proportions of violent or drug offenders who were at each individual age in the years 1987 vs. 1994 (Figure 7).

This comparison shows the age of nonlethal violent offenders has not been declining. Although the total number of offenders increased dramatically between 1987 and 1994, the percentage younger than 15 was very similar in the two years (10.4 percent in 1987 and 12.9 percent in 1994). The proportion aged 15 was the same in the two years, and the proportions aged 16 or 17 declined. In contrast, the proportions of nonlethal violent offenders who were aged 20 to 24 increased from 16.8 percent in 1987 to 21.2 percent in 1994. Thus, the age of offenders in nonlethal violence seems to have increased, while the age of offenders in lethal violence has

declined. This suggests that the risk of a fatality in a violent offense committed by a young vs. an older street gang offender has increased. A possible reason for this is the differential trend in weapon use for young vs. older offenders, discussed below.

While offenders in nonlethal violent street gang-related offenses may be getting older, offenders in street gang-related drug offenses are getting younger (Figure 7). In 1987, 1.8 percent of offenders in street gang drug offenses were younger than 15, compared to 7.7 percent of drug offenders in 1994. This decline in the age distribution occurred for the serious drug offenses as well as for possession. Specifically, focusing on the 134 offenders in street gang-related manufacture or delivery offenses who were between ages 10 and 24, four (3 percent) were younger than age 15 in 1987, compared to 43 (6.9 percent) of the 624 in 1994. For the possession offenses, 20 (1.8 percent) of the 1,167 offenders in 1987 were younger than age 15, compared to 824 (7.8 percent) of the 10,570 offenders in 1994.

In Chicago, two major gangs associated with drug offenses are the Black Gangster Disciples (BGD) and the Vice Lords. The decline in the age of offenders in drug offenses is even more evident in offenses attributed to these two gangs. Of the 370 BGD offenders involved in drug offenses in 1987, only four (1.1 percent) were



younger than age 15, compared to 429 (8.7 percent) of the 4,639 offenders in 1994. Similarly, of the 442 Vice Lord offenders in drug offenses in 1987, five (1.1 percent) were under age 15, compared to 144 (6.4 percent) of the 2,236 offenders in 1994. For both gangs, the proportions aged 15, 16 or 17 all increased between 1987 and 1994, while the proportions who were any of the older ages all declined.

### **Gender: female gang involvement**

During the 30 years between 1965 and 1994, 99 females (5 percent) were among the 1,984 victims of a street gang-related homicide, and 36 females (1.1 percent) were among the 3,370 offenders. This varies by racial/ethnic group: 4.5 percent of Latino victims of street gang-related homicide were female, compared to 7.9 percent of non-Latino white and 5 percent of African-American victims. Among the 3,370 homicide offenders, 1.4 percent of the Latinos, 1.8 percent of the non-Latino whites and 0.9 percent of the African-American offenders in a street gang-related homicide were female.

The kinds of street gang-related offenses in which female offenders are involved differ from the typical offenses for male offenders. For all offenders, possession of a controlled substance constitutes about 30 percent of street gang offenses. For male offenders, however, the proportion of serious violence (homicide, aggravated battery, aggravated assault, or robbery) is relatively high, compared to the offenses of female offenders. Violence attributed to a female street gang offender is more likely to be a simple battery or simple assault. In addition, female offenses are more likely to be violations of liquor laws, while male offenses are relatively more likely to be "other" (largely vandalism and graffiti).

Female offenders in a street gang-related homicide were much more likely than males to be involved with at least one other offender, who was usually male. In the years from 1987 to 1994, there was only one street gang-related homicide with a single female offender, and 12 multiple-offender homicides in which one of the offenders was female. In nine of the 12, the other offenders included one or more male. In contrast, there were 446 single-offender male street gang-motivated homicides and 392 all-male multiple-offender homicides, compared to only nine in which one or more of the offenders was female. Less detail is available for the nonlethal data, but for incidents with a single offender, the ratio of males to females was 15.6:1 for nonlethal violence, 39.1:1 for drug offenses, and 36.2:1 for other offenses (mostly vandalism, such as graffiti).

## **INTRAGANG, INTERGANG AND NONGANG MEMBER VICTIMIZATION**

The characteristics of victims and offenders depend upon type of street gang-related violence. One important consideration is whether the violence occurs *within* the same gang (for example, a dispute over power or control), whether it occurs between rival gangs (turf battles or drug market competition), or whether the victim is a nongang member (caught in crossfire or attacked to punish a gang member's relative). Of the 956 street gang-related homicides from 1987 to 1994, 10.8 percent were intragang, 74.8 percent were intergang, and 14.4 percent were murders of nongang victims by a gang member (Figure 8).

### **Intergang violence**

Intergang violence tends to cluster according to patterns of conflict between specific gangs. On the West Side, for example, there is a longstanding rivalry between the Two-Six and the Latin Kings. Of the 17 street gang homicides attributed to Two-Sixers, 10 (59 percent) of the victims were Latin Kings; of the 116 homicides attributed to Latin Kings, 18 (16 percent) of the victims were Two-Sixers. Rivalry between the Latin Kings and Latin Disciples also generates considerable violence in other parts of the city; 13 (28 percent) of the 47 Latin Disciple homicides were of a Latin King victim, and 10 (9 percent) of the Latin King homicides were against a Latin Disciple. In addition, these lethal violence cases reflect conflict between the BGDs and Vice Lords (with 25 percent of the BGD homicides against a Vice Lord and 43 percent of the Vice Lord homicides against a BGD), and between the BGDs and the Black Disciples (with 12 percent of the BGD homicides against a Black Disciple and 59 percent of the Black Disciple homicides against a BGD).

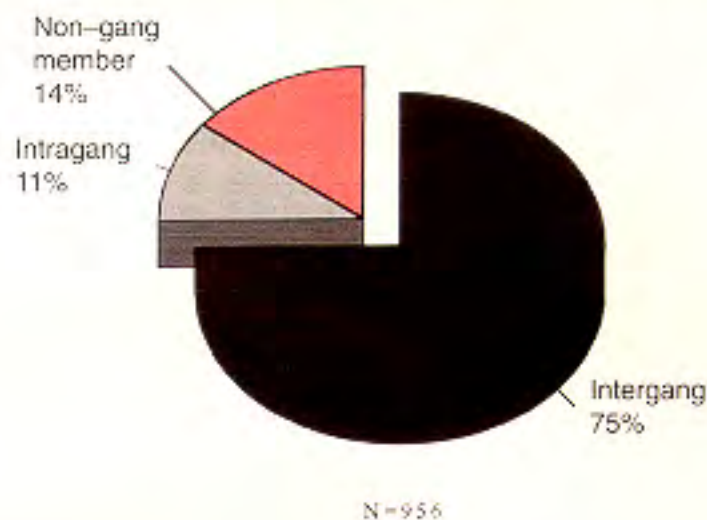
Information on the victim's gang affiliation is limited for nonlethal violence but is available for 51 percent of handgun battery cases. The pattern of gang affiliation of victims and offenders in these 2,177 incidents is similar to the pattern for homicides. Rivalries between the Two-Six and the Latin Kings, between the Latin Kings and the Latin Disciples, between the Vice Lords and the BGDs, and between the BGDs and the Black Disciples are evident in the handgun batteries that did not have a fatal outcome, just as the same rivalries are evident in the homicides.

Many of these intergang conflicts are concentrated in specific areas of the city, defined by conflicts over gang territory. Thus, for example, even though the Latin



Figure 8

## Intergang, Intragang and Non-gang Member Victimization, Homicides, 1987–1994



Kings are involved in conflict with both the Two-Sixers and the Latin Disciples, the two conflicts tend to be focused in different neighborhoods. Similarly, the hub of the Vice Lord/ BGD and the Black Disciple/ BGD conflicts are centered in different neighborhoods. Spatial analysis suggests a "marauder" pattern, in which members of rival gangs travel to the hub of their enemy's territory in search of potential victims. In Chicago's Little Village area, the hub of Two-Six and Latin King territories are indicated by the densest concentrations where the most active Two-Six offenders live and the densest areas in which the most active Latin King offenders live (see Map 1, next page). However, offenses attributed to the Two-Six do not coincide with their own territory; they tend to coincide with Latin King territory (see Map 2, next page). By the same token, the densest concentrations of Latin King offenses tend to overlap the Two-Six home turf (Map 2). This suggests that the two rival gangs search out their enemies where they are most likely to be found—in the central hub of enemy territory.

Street gang violence tends to occur within the confines of a relatively small area, usually close to the offenders' home addresses. For example, most of the offenders in the 79 street gang-related homicides that occurred in 1994 in four of Chicago's police districts lived well within a mile of the location of the incident.

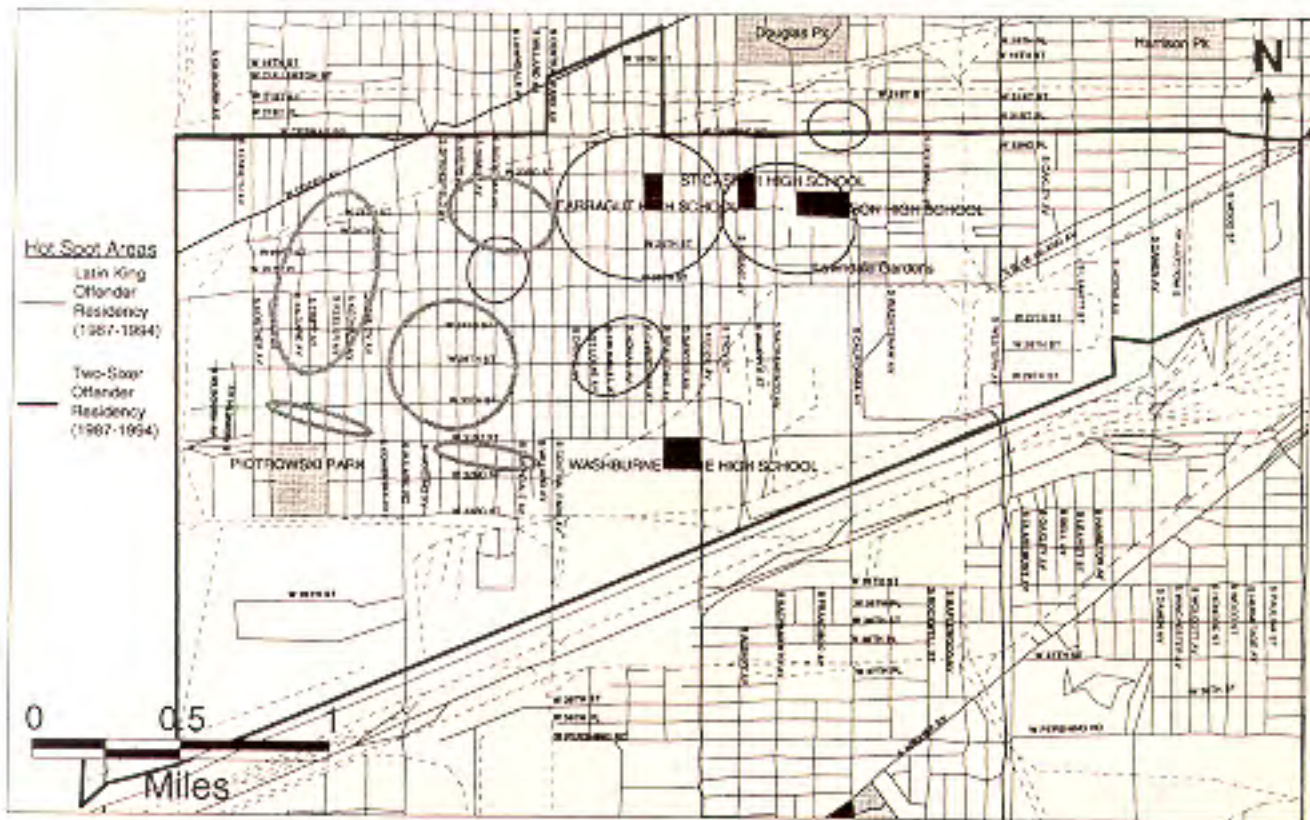
### Intragang violence

The high proportion of gang violence that occurs within the gang may be surprising. Intragang violence varies from gang to gang, and tends to occur in spurts over time, following the dispute patterns within specific gangs. Of seven gangs studied, the percent of all homicides from 1987 to 1994 in which the victim and the offenders were from the same gang ranged from zero (the Two-Sixers) to 24 percent (the Vice Lords).

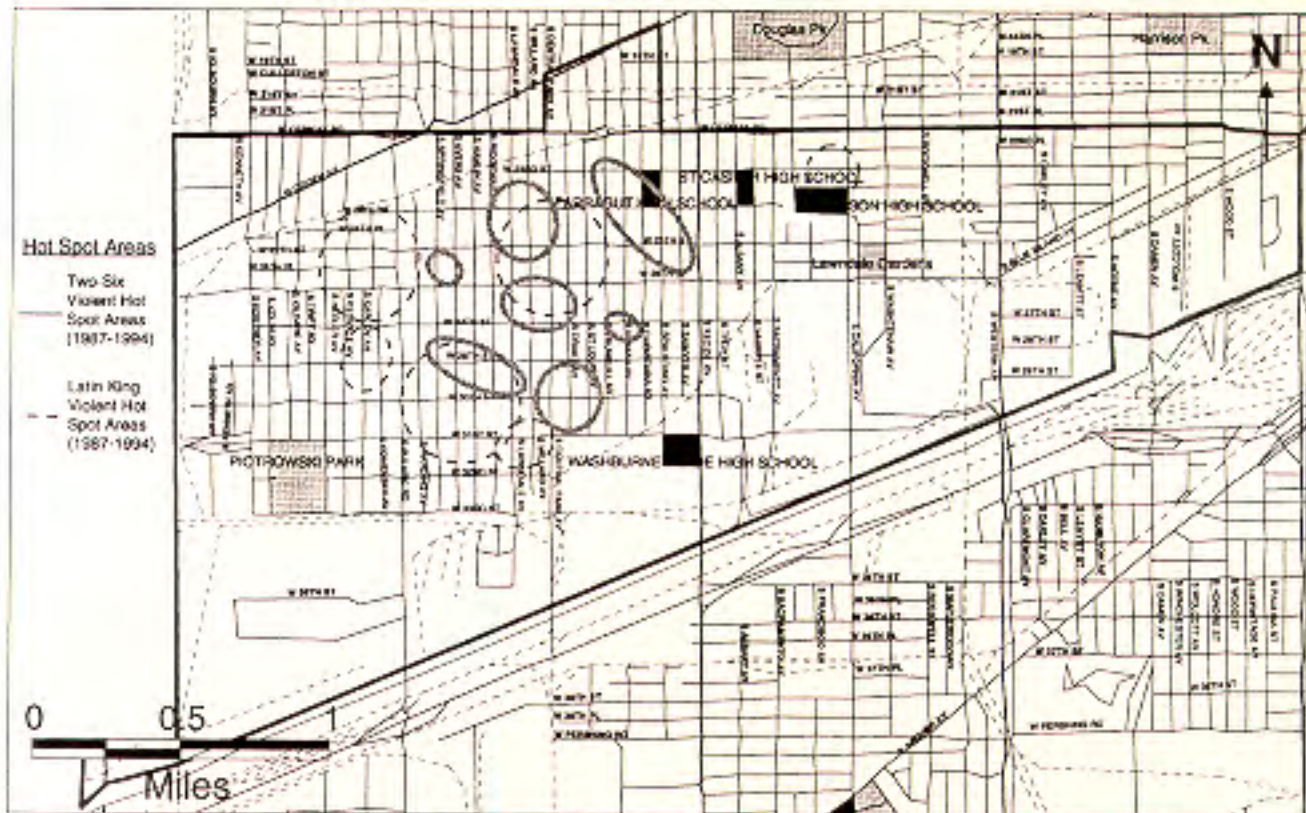
Spurts of intragang violence can happen in any gang, but one example occurring in Chicago in recent years involved the Vice Lords. In almost a fourth of Vice Lord homicides and 16 percent of Vice Lord handgun batteries from 1987 to 1994, the victim was another Vice Lord. This relatively high proportion of intragang violence reflects a power struggle among Vice Lord factions that escalated after Willie Lloyd, leader of the Unknown Vice Lords, was released from the Lincoln Correctional Facility in December 1993. Lloyd's attempt to unite the Vice Lords' factions under his leadership precipitated a bitter conflict throughout 1994. Of the 33 Vice Lord intragang homicides that occurred from 1987 to 1994, all but one happened after 1989 and 13 (39 percent) happened in 1994. Thus, intragang conflict is in large part responsible for the spurt of Vice Lord violence in 1994, in which 39 victims died.



**Map 1:  
Latin King and Two Six Offender Residency Hot Spot Areas**



**Map 2:  
Latin King and Two Six Violent Hot Spot Areas, 1987-1994**





## Gang violence against nongang members

A third situation in street gang-related violence occurs when the victim is not a gang member — he or she is an innocent bystander to the gang conflict. Over the entire 30-year period, 277 nongang victims were murdered in a street gang-related homicide, 138 of these between 1987 and 1994. These victims have very different characteristics from other victims of street gang conflict. They are more likely to be very young or elderly, and slightly more likely to be female. Of the 138 nongang victims from 1987 to 1994, 12 were aged 0 to 9 compared to none of the gang member victims, and 22 (15.9 percent) were 35 or older, compared to 19 (2.3 percent) of the gang member victims. Of the nongang victims, 28 (20.3 percent) were female, compared to 26 (3.2 percent) of the 818 gang member victims.

Homicides of nongang members also tend to differ in their circumstances. From 1987 to 1994 for example, six (4.3 percent) of the nongang victims vs. 55 (39.9 percent) of the gang member victims were killed in a drive-by shooting, and 82 (59.4 percent) of the nongang victims compared to 21 (15.2 percent) of the gang member victims were innocent bystanders who were shot in crossfire or otherwise killed in a gang-related conflict in which they were not involved. Some were victims of mistaken identity. For example, one offender testified that he thought the occupants of a car were “Folks” because they had their hats tilted to the right; in another case, an offender thought a deaf-mute victim was flashing a sign when the victim was actually using sign language. It was also common for shots to be fired into a group, killing nongang victims, or for a relative of the intended victim to be accidentally killed in a home invasion aimed at killing the gang member. In total, there were 112 nongang members killed as passive bystanders to a street gang conflict over the 30 years, and 82 from 1987 to 1994.

In some cases, a nongang member or innocent victim was deliberately targeted by the gang. Five victims were killed to silence them and avoid their potential testimony against the offender(s) in court. Another victim was an off-duty police officer who was killed while trying to quell a gang disturbance, and two on-duty officers were deliberately called to an area and shot by offenders who wanted to enhance their reputation in the gang. In other instances, a relative was killed because his gang-member relation had not paid taxes due to the Four Corner Hustlers, which controlled drug sales in the area; a nongang member was killed because he used the public phones when the gang had told everyone not to do so; and a neighbor who told gang members “not to be bringing

gang stuff on the block” was killed. Some nongang victims were killed when they refused to join the offender’s gang, and a mother was killed when she refused to let her sons join a gang. Other victims were shot during a gang war or as retaliation for an earlier gang incident, even though the offenders knew they were not gang members, but because they were on the street in rival territory.

## Gang specialization: entrepreneurial vs. turf activities

Earlier analysis (Block and Block, 1993) found that street gangs in Chicago tend to specialize in either violence or entrepreneurial activities. This same specialization has been found in other gangs across the country. Data for the years 1987 through 1994 continue to show that certain gangs tend to specialize in certain kinds of gang-related activity. Aggravated battery, for example, made up 20 percent (1,621) of the 8,079 incidents attributed to the Latin Kings and 22 percent (538) of the 2,452 incidents attributed to the Latin Disciples, compared to only 9.5 percent (1,091) of the 11,484 incidents attributed to the Vice Lords and 11 percent (2,108) of the 19,739 incidents attributed to the BGDs.

In general, a greater proportion of the offenses attributed to Latino gangs tend to be violent offenses, compared to the offenses attributed to African-American gangs. In contrast, African-American gangs tend to specialize in drug offenses. Figure 9 summarizes the specialization of Chicago gangs in four general types of offense: homicides, nonlethal violence, drug offenses, and all other offenses (mostly graffiti-related vandalism offenses) from 1987 to 1994. In general, both lethal and nonlethal violence make up a greater proportion of the offenses of Latino gangs and non-Latino white gangs, compared to African-American gangs. More than half of the offenses of both the Latin Kings and the Latin Disciples were nonlethal violence, compared to 35 percent of the offenses attributed to the BGD and 28 percent of Vice Lord offenses.

As Block and Block (1993) found in earlier analysis, homicides occurred with relative frequency among the small Latino gangs, which are often battling fiercely over the constricted boundaries of a small area. For one African-American gang, however, the Black P Stones, the proportion of offenses that were homicides was as high as the proportion for the small Latino gangs, even though the proportion of nonlethal violence was not particularly high. Thus, the fatality rate (deaths per violent offense) was very high for the Black P Stones. This may reflect a battle for prominence, similar to the battles among the small Latino gangs. In contrast to the turf bat-



Figure 9

## Specialization of Chicago Street Gangs, 1987–1994

Gang Affiliation	Type of Offense								Total
	Homicide		Nonlethal Viol.		Drug Offenses		Other Offenses		
	Num.	%	Num.	%	Num.	%	Num.	%	
Black Gangster Disciples	213	1.1	6,990	35.4	10,050	50.9	2,486	12.6	19,739
Vice Lords	135	1.2	3,218	28.0	6,663	58.0	1,468	12.8	11,484
Latin Kings	116	1.4	4,161	51.5	1,757	21.7	2,045	25.3	8,079
Black P Stones	61	2.1	841	29.4	1,462	51.2	493	17.3	2,857
Latin Disciples	47	1.9	1,299	53.0	554	22.6	552	22.5	2,452
Other African-American Gangs	74	1.8	1,343	33.2	2,025	50.0	608	15.0	4,050
Other Latino Gangs	201	2.1	4,261	45.3	2,415	25.7	2,522	26.8	9,399
NonLatino White Gangs	21	1.2	835	49.5	223	13.2	608	36.0	1,687
Racially Mixed or Other Gangs	23	1.2	921	46.9	639	32.6	380	19.4	1,963
Unknown or Unclear	65	4.5	863	60.3	281	19.6	222	15.5	1,431

ties of the Latino gangs, however, the high proportion of drug offenses (51 percent) may indicate that the battles of the Black P Stones were over control of drug market territory.

In addition to a predominance of violent incidents, both Latino and non-Latino white gangs tend to have a high proportion of other offenses (nonviolent and non-drug). These offenses are mostly vandalism, usually graffiti, which is a way of declaring the boundaries of gang territory. They may be thought of as precursors to turf-related gang violence, lethal or nonlethal, and so tend to occur where violence occurs. Concentrated Hot Spot Areas of street gang violence and Hot Spot Areas of "other" street gang offenses tend to coincide with each other (Block and Block, 1993).

Though Latino gangs tend to have a higher proportion of violent offenses than drug offenses, for African-American gangs, the opposite is the case; half or more of the offenses attributed to each of the African-American gangs (Figure 9) were drug offenses. In contrast, drug offenses accounted for well under a fourth of the offenses of each of the Latino gangs, and for only 13 percent of the offenses of the non-Latino white gangs.

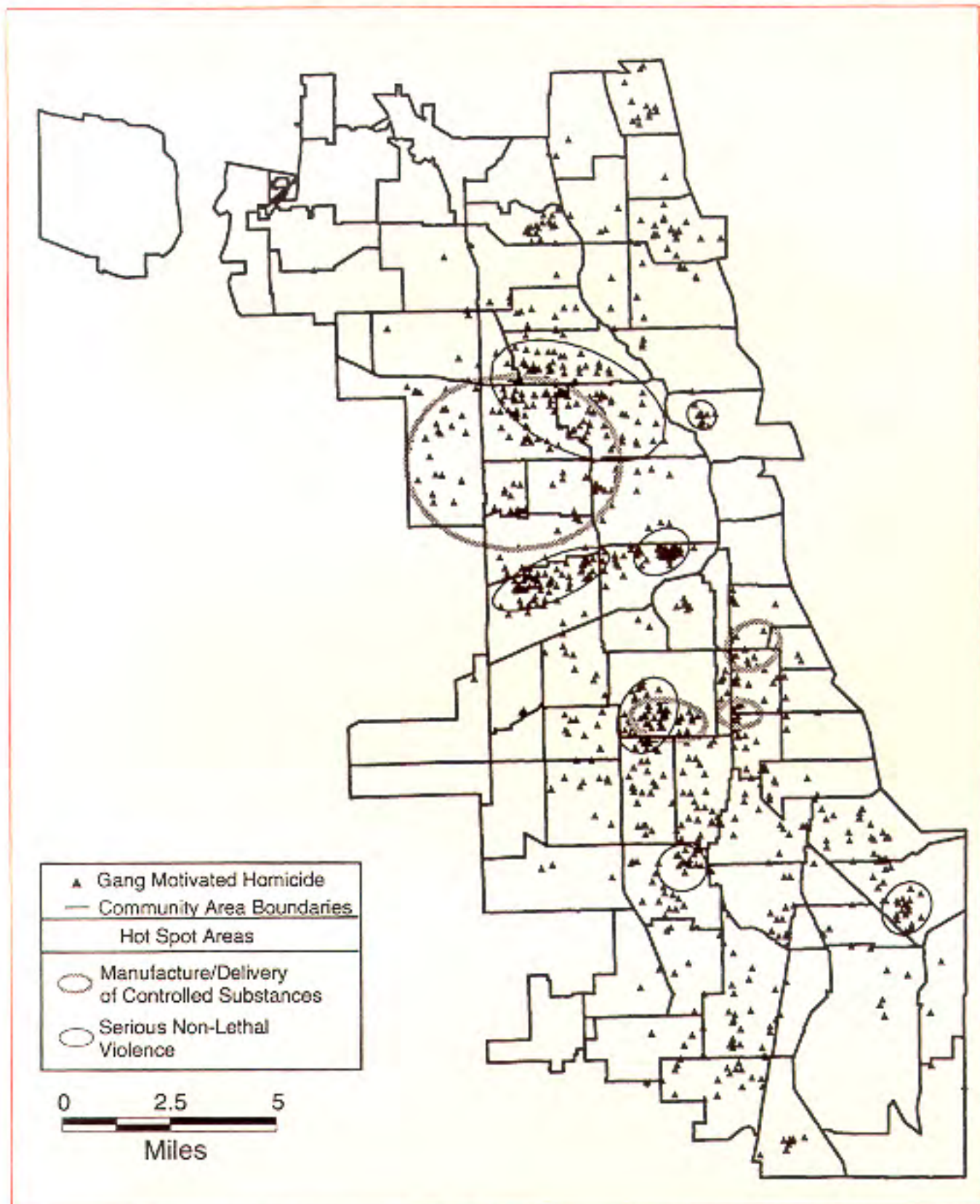
This specialization is reflected in the degree to which the various gangs are responsible for the total number of Chicago street gang offenses. For example, 12 percent of all street gang homicides and 17 percent of nonviolent offenses from 1987 to 1994 were attributed to the Latin Kings, but only 7 percent of all street gang-related drug

offenses. This pattern is stronger for the many small Latino gangs. They accounted for 21 percent of street gang homicides and for 17 percent of nonlethal violence, but for only 9 percent of drug offenses. In contrast, the BGDs accounted for 39 percent of drug offenses, but only 22 percent of homicides and 28 percent of nonlethal violence. The Vice Lords accounted for 26 percent of drug offenses, but for only 14 percent of homicides and 13 percent of nonlethal violence.

Because gang activity tends to be specialized, and because Chicago gangs tend to be concentrated in particular areas of the city, Chicago neighborhoods differ in the degree to which they suffer from violent gang activity vs. drug gang activity. Some neighborhoods, where the gangs specialize in violent turf battles, intersect with a "Hot Spot Area" of concentrated gang violence. Other neighborhoods intersect with a "Hot Spot Area" of densely concentrated gang drug offenses. For example, there are two dense concentrations of street gang violence in the Pilsen and Little Village neighborhoods on Chicago's West Side (Map 3). From 1987 to 1994, one area had 165 violent incidents per square mile, and another had 254 per square mile, compared to an average of 24 incidents per square mile citywide. There was no drug offense Hot Spot Area intersecting with these two areas. Just north of these areas, however, is a large concentration of drug offenses, where there were 39 drug offenses per square mile from 1987 to 1994, compared to an average of 6.8 citywide.



**Map 3:  
Gang-Motivated Homicides and Hot Spot Areas of Serious  
Non-lethal Violence\* and Drugs, Chicago, 1987-1994**



\*Based on incidents of aggravated battery and aggravated assault with a firearm.  
Source: CPD Offense Data, Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority



Street gang-related homicides tend to cluster within Hot Spot Areas of nonlethal violence, not within the densest concentrations of drug offense areas. For example, some of the densest concentrations of street gang-related homicides occur within nonlethal violence Hot Spot Areas, such as one in Little Village, which had 25.7 homicides per square mile; an area in Pilsen, which had 34.5 homicides per square mile; and one around Cabrini Green, which had 45.7 homicides per square mile. The concentration of street gang homicides was usually somewhat less in the Hot Spot Areas of street gang drug offenses. For example, the large drug Hot Spot Area on the West Side, which encompasses Vice Lord and BGD drug markets, contained only 9.1 street gang homicides per square mile (see Map 3).

However, though Hot Spot Areas of street gang drug offenses generally tend to have fewer homicides, when violent Hot Spot Areas and drug Hot Spot Areas intersect, the combination can produce a heavy concentration of gang-related homicides. Two such high-risk areas are in the West Side area around Humboldt Park, and in the center of the crack drug market wars on the South Side (see Map 3).

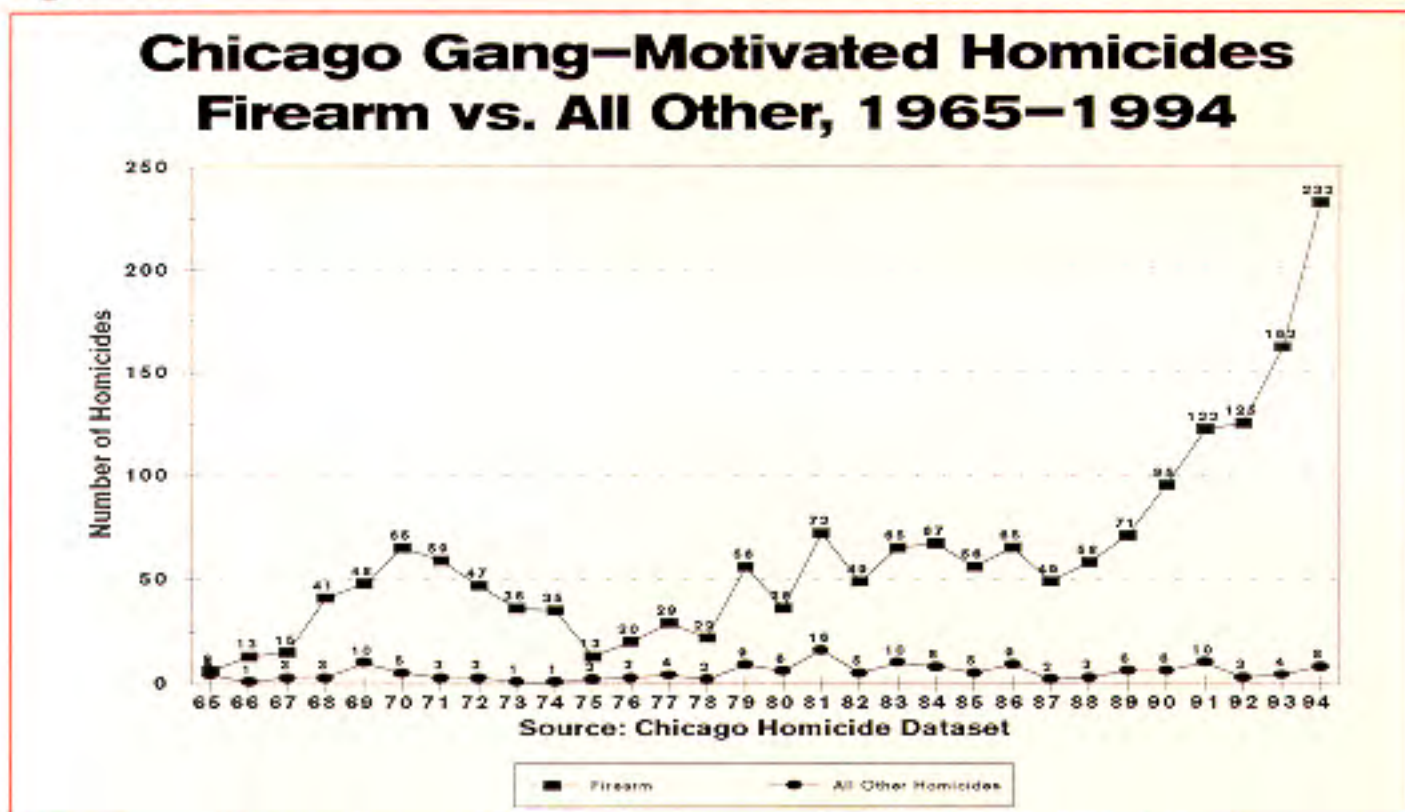
## CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO LEVELS OF VIOLENCE

### Weapon

Almost all street gang-related homicides in Chicago are committed with a firearm (92 percent over the 30 years). From 1987 to 1994, a firearm was the weapon in 96 percent of street gang homicides, 51 percent of aggravated batteries, 69.5 percent of aggravated assaults, and 24 percent of robberies. (Simple assault and simple battery, which account for 33.8 percent of nonlethal gang-related offenses from 1987 to 1994, were committed without a weapon, by definition.) Specifically, a semi-automatic was the weapon in 47 percent of street gang-related homicides, and a nonautomatic handgun in 35 percent. A handgun was the weapon in 47 percent of street gang-related aggravated batteries, 66 percent of aggravated assaults and 23 percent of robberies.

The number of street gang homicides that are committed with a firearm follows the same pattern of spurts from year to year as total gang-related homicides. In contrast, street gang homicides committed with other or no weapons are low and stable across the 30 years (Figure 10). In the years when there was a gang homicide spurt, the number and proportion of firearm homicides increased. In the spurt of 1970, for example, 93 percent of street gang homicides were committed with a firearm.

Figure 10





In the recent surge of street gang-related homicides, the number of firearm homicides reached 232 (97 percent) in 1994, compared to only eight nonfirearm homicides.

In the 1990s, there were large increases in the number of street gang homicides with a semi- or fully-automatic weapon, compared to moderate increases in nonautomatic handgun homicides and homicides in which the type of firearm was unknown (Figure 11). From 1987 to 1994, street gang homicides with a semi- or fully-automatic weapon increased almost 13 fold, from 11 to 150, while other handgun homicides increased from 22 to 52 and those with an unknown firearm increased from 13 to 24.

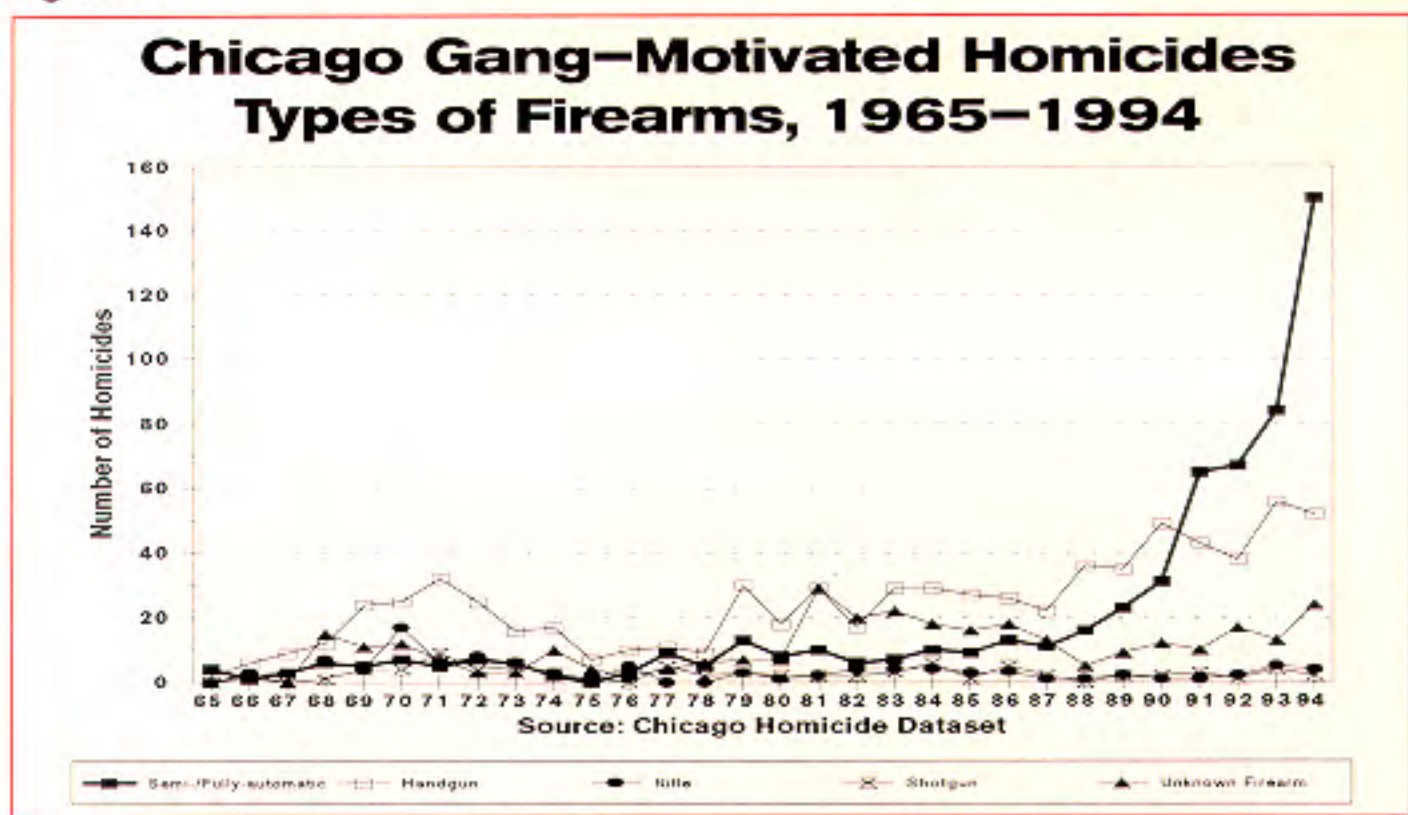
Over most of the 30-year period, the use of semi- or fully-automatic firearms was relatively rare in Chicago street gang homicides. The weapon of choice, increasing with the spurts around 1970 and 1979 to 1985, was a handgun, most often a .38 or lower caliber. When the recent homicide surge began, coinciding with gang wars over the crack market, homicides with a nonautomatic handgun, most of them .38 caliber, climbed rapidly. Beginning in 1991, however, the weapon of choice for street gang homicides appears to have changed. Nonautomatic handguns are holding their own, but most of the huge increase in deaths from 1990 to 1994 is accounted for by killings with a semi- or fully-automatic weapon.

We have seen that the recent increase in the proportion of young offenders in street gang offenses occurred in homicides, but not in nonlethal violence. This suggests that violence with a young offender has become more lethal, relative to violence with an older offender. From 1965 to 1994, there were 29 street gang-related homicide offenders aged 10 to 14 who used a semi- or fully-automatic weapon, but 25 of these (86 percent) homicides occurred between 1991 and 1994. By comparison, 367 (63 percent) of the homicides committed by the 569 offenders aged 15 to 19, and 143 (64 percent) of the 224 homicides committed by offenders aged 20 to 24 who used a semi- or fully-automatic weapon occurred between 1991 and 1994. For handgun homicides, 22 (42 percent) of the 52 offenders aged 10 to 14, 195 (26 percent) of the 758 offenders aged 15 to 19, and 73 (25 percent) of the 290 offenders aged 20 to 24 who used a handgun, were involved in recent offenses from 1991 to 1994. Though we do not have nonlethal data on comparable types of firearms, this suggests that an increased use of semi- or fully-automatic weapons may be a factor in the increased lethality of attacks by the youngest street gang offenders.

### Drive-by shootings

In the 30 years from 1965 to 1994, there were 120 drive-by shootings resulting in a homicide. These are defined as situations in which gang members "drive to a

Figure 11





location, find a target, jump out of the car, chase the victim down, and then flee in the car after the shooting" (Sanders, 1994:65). In the Chicago data, we have limited drive-by shootings to include only situations in which a car drives up or by a location and people standing at the location are shot (it is not necessary that the offenders leave the car). We have not included situations in which gang members in a car approach people in another car, ask them for their affiliation, and then engage in a battle on wheels, ending in either death by shooting or death in a traffic accident. We have also not included the several "drive-by" shootings in which a bicycle was the vehicle.

Drive-by shootings have been a common factor in street gang attacks for many years, particularly in Los Angeles, and they have occurred in Chicago since 1966. However, they have been more frequent in the last 10 years. Of the 120 drive-by homicides in Chicago, 71 (59 percent) occurred from 1985 to 1994. The most common type of firearm in drive-by shootings was a nonautomatic handgun (44 percent), although semi-automatics are more common in recent years. In 23 percent, the type of firearm was unknown.

Drive-bys tend to be associated with battles over turf, and revenge or retaliation for earlier attacks, types of activities that are more common among Latino gangs. For example, of the 61 drive-by homicides from 1987 to 1994, 13 percent were attributed to unknown gangs. Latino gangs accounted for 66 percent, including the Latin Kings (18 percent), the Two-Sixers (5 percent), the Latin Disciples (11 percent), and other small Latino gangs (31 percent). African-American gangs accounted for 20 percent, including the BGDs (10 percent), the Black P Stones (3 percent), and the Vice Lords (7 percent).

### **Liquor or drug involvement**

In the nonlethal data, we have no information as to whether or not drugs were a motive for the crime, except for the drug offenses. For nonlethal violence or for the other nonlethal crimes, we do not know whether or not the violence occurred because of an altercation or dispute over drugs. However, we do have drug motive information for each street gang homicide for the 30-year period from 1965 to 1994. There are four categories of "drug motive" in the homicide data: the homicide was committed to further a drug business; the homicide was committed to obtain drugs or money to buy drugs; the homicide began as an altercation over the use of drugs; and other drug motives. Examples of each category would be the following: a rival gang member killed when he tried to sell outside his territory; a robbery committed to obtain money for drugs; two friends arguing

over how best to use the drugs they have just obtained; and a baby who starved to death because his parents were too high to feed him. A final category, "probable drug involvement," codes those cases in which the evidence as to drug motive is not positive. For example, if a known drug dealer is found dead with no other evidence, or if someone is found dead in a crack house surrounded by needles, these cases would be coded "probable drug involvement." In addition to drug motive, the homicide data also contain information as to whether drugs had been used by the victim or offender prior to the incident, and another variable on whether or not liquor had been used by the victim or offender.

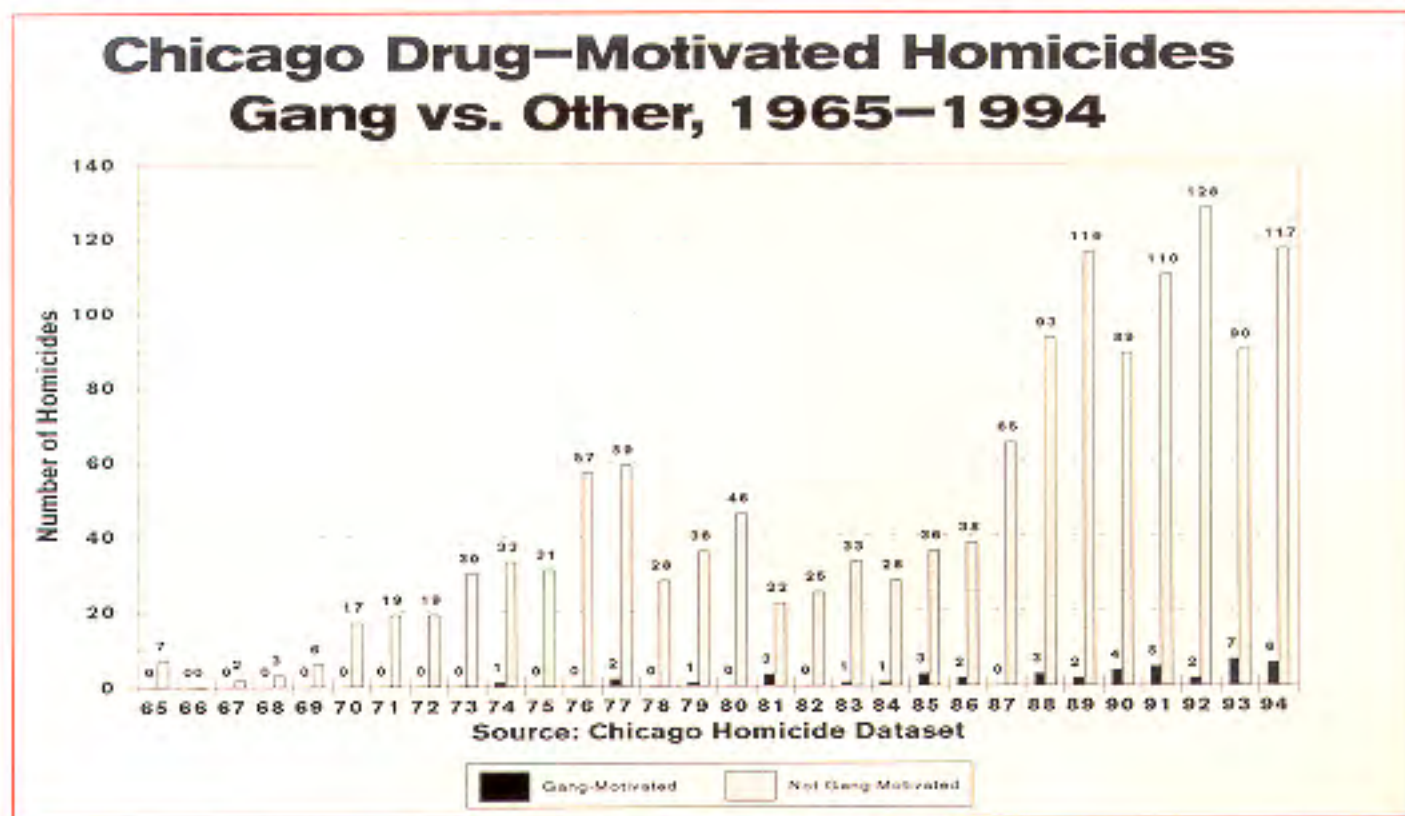
Over the 30 years from 1965 to 1994, only 43 (2.2 percent) of the 1,984 Chicago street gang-related homicides involved a drug motive (including five cases of probable drug involvement). Seven (0.4 percent) involved drug use and 181 (9.1 percent) involved liquor use. Liquor-involved street gang homicides occurred in spurts, following the major spurts in Chicago street gang violence. The most recent escalation, however, was characterized not only by a spurt in liquor-use homicide, but also by increases in drug-use homicide and drug-motive homicide.

There was only one drug-motive incident in the street gang homicides in the decade from 1965 to 1974, eight from 1975 to 1984, but 34 from 1985 to 1994. This increase, however, was dwarfed by the increase in drug-motivated homicides among Chicago homicides in general (Figure 12). From a low of 22 nongang-related drug motivated homicides in 1981, nongang drug homicides rose to peaks of 116 in 1989, 128 in 1992 and 117 in 1994, while there were only three gang-related drug motivated homicides recorded in 1981, two in 1989, two in 1992 and six in 1994. The street gang-motivated drug motive homicides differ sharply from those that are not gang motivated. A much higher proportion (67 percent) of the street gang-motivated offenses, compared to the other offenses (35 percent), involved the business of drugs. Arguments over drugs and getting money for drugs were much less frequently a part of the motive for a street gang homicide, and there were fewer "probable" drug motive cases (12 percent for the street gang homicides versus 26 percent for the other homicides).

Therefore, the type of drug-motivated homicide incident that is most similar to street gang drug homicides would be those involving the business of drugs. From 1990 to 1994, of the 298 drug-business homicides, 21 were street gang-related and 277 were not. Is there any evidence that some of the 277 drug-business homicides not considered to be street gang-motivated by police in-



Figure 12



investigation might actually have had a gang connection? To determine this, we looked carefully at the complete file, including the narrative, for each of the 277, and found some evidence of a gang relationship or gang membership in 31. There was one case where the victim was a rival gang member, and two cases where the victim and offender were members of the same gang. Without the complete police investigation file, it is impossible for us to “second guess” the determination that these cases were not gang-related. We concluded that, while it is theoretically possible that the police investigation would miss determining a street gang relationship in some drug-motivated incidents, it probably does not account for the large disparity shown in Figure 12.

The 277 nongang drug-business homicides are relatively dissimilar to the 21 street gang-related drug business homicides, although about a fourth of them occurred in 1994 (25 percent of nonstreet gang versus 29 percent of street gang). Of the 21 street gang drug-business offenses, 67 percent were committed with a semi- or fully-automatic weapon, compared to 47 percent of the nonstreet-gang drug business offenses. All 21 street gang offenses had one victim, compared to only 81 percent of the nonstreet gang offenses, but more of the street gang incidents had multiple offenders (48 percent versus 36 percent). Also, the gang-related homicides

tended to occur more frequently than the nongang-related homicides in neighborhoods where there were Hot Spot Areas of street gang activity. The ages of the 387 offenders in the nonstreet gang incidents tended to be older than the ages of the 47 offenders in street gang incidents. No street gang drug-motivated homicide offender was older than age 30, compared to 51 (14 percent) of the nonstreet gang offenders. Offenders in street gang incidents were somewhat more likely to be African-American (96 percent) than offenders in the non street gang incidents (86 percent).

Although it is commonly believed that the increase in drug-motivated violence is inextricably connected to street gangs, the finding that most drug business homicides are not gang-related agrees with other research nationwide. In an examination of Los Angeles crack dealing in 1984 and 1985, Klein, Maxson and Cunningham (1991) determined that two common beliefs, that street gangs are ideally suited for crack distribution, and that mid-level distributors employ street gangs to control drug market territories, are both false. Both Klein (1995) and Spergel (1991, 1995) have concluded that the typical organizational structure of street gangs are not particularly suited to the business of drugs. Both find that gang members do use drugs, and that individual gang members deal drugs, but contend that relationships among



“drug use, trafficking and participation in more lethal gang violence ... are not necessarily connected and are often quite distinct” (Spiegel, 1991: 54). Thus, the Chicago evidence that drug-business and other drug-motivated homicides tend not to be street gang-related does not appear to be accidental, but is consistent with a body of research from around the country.

The other side of the story – that street gang-related lethal violence is more likely to grow out of turf violence (Hot Spot Areas of nonlethal street gang violence) than from drug markets (Hot Spot Areas of street gang drug offenses) – also agrees with earlier studies in Chicago as well as studies nationwide. In general, the street gang situations that are potentially most lethal are those of escalating turf battles where gangs are battling over territory boundaries. In Chicago and Los Angeles, these traditional turf-based gangs tend to be Latino or non-Latino white, and the most violent tend to be the smaller gangs that control only a few, strongly-defended blocks. As we have seen, these are the street gangs that specialize in violence. Street gangs specializing in drug offenses (entrepreneurial gangs) tend to downplay and discourage violence, because it is bad for business. Despite this general pattern, however, entrepreneurial gangs can still be responsible for periodic spurts of lethal and nonlethal violence, when there is a conflict over control of the drug market. In Chicago, there have been two examples of such street gang “drug market wars” in recent years, both associated with the introduction of crack into the city. First is the conflict over control of the drug market between the BGDs and the Black Disciples, two “brother gangs” that were not traditionally in dispute, resulting in 45 BGD/Black Disciple homicides from 1987 to 1994. Second is the attempt by the Black P Stones to re-establish themselves as players in the drug market, resulting in 61 murders in only a few years.

Still, the belief persists that street gang violence and drug dealing always go hand-in-hand. One reason for the persistence of this belief is that it is true – but only for some specific neighborhoods and for some specific gangs. As we saw above in the discussion of specialization, some neighborhoods are plagued by a Hot Spot Area of gang violence, others by a Hot Spot Area of gang drug offenses, and still others by a combination of both. Officers and citizens who are most familiar with neighborhoods in the unfortunate third category may believe, accurately, that gangs, drugs and violence are connected.

Only 29 (3 percent) of the 956 street gang-related homicides in Chicago from 1987 to 1994 had a drug mo-

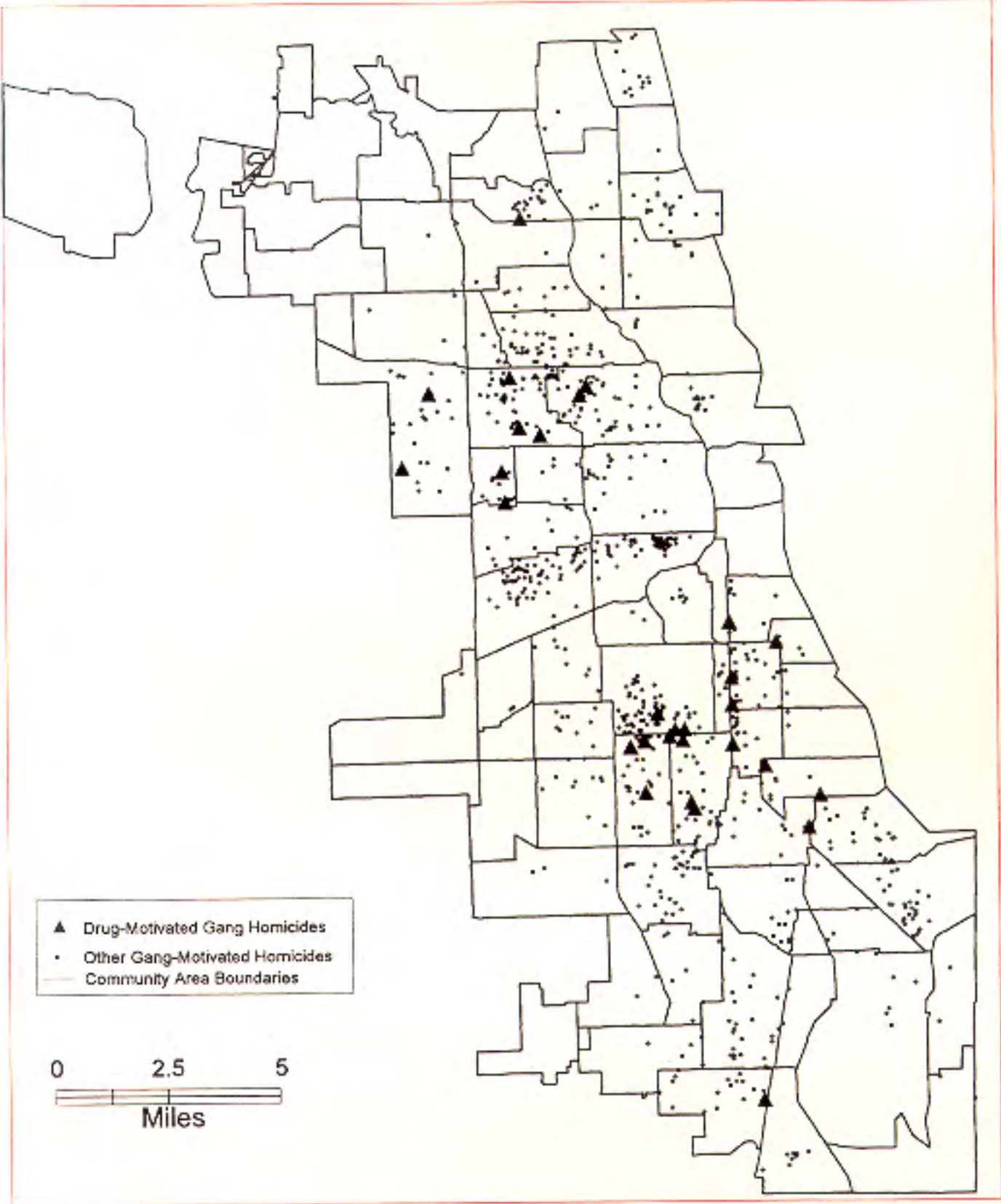
tive. However, these 29 were neither randomly scattered across the map, nor clustered in the same way as non-drug street gang homicides, but concentrated in two specific areas of the city (Map 4). The location of many of the street gang drug-motivated homicides from 1987 to 1994 is in or near the location of the densest clusters (Hot Spot Areas) of gang-related drug offenses, and there seems to be a particularly heavy concentration of homicides in the two areas where a drug Hot Spot Area intersects with a nonlethal violence Hot Spot Area. Thus, even though drug-motivated homicides constituted only 3 percent of all street gang homicides, this 3 percent had a big impact on a few neighborhoods. In these neighborhoods, therefore, prevention or intervention strategies for life-threatening violence cannot ignore the presence of street gang drug markets (producing drug offense Hot Spot Areas) in the community, especially if the community suffers from a concentration of gang violence (a turf Hot Spot Area) as well.

This concentration of drug-motivated homicides in or near the location of street gang-related drug offense Hot Spot Areas does not contradict the overall findings that (1) relatively few street gang-related homicides are drug-motivated, and that (2) relatively few drug-motivated homicides are street gang-related. All of the evidence indicates that the connection between street gang drug offenses and street gang violence is weak or nonexistent. However, recent analysis indicates that, while there may not always be a direct causal relationship between homicides, drug offenses, and gang activity, there could be an indirect relationship.

In the area encompassed by the street gang-related drug-offense Hot Spot Areas on Chicago’s West Side, both the Vice Lords and the BGDs have established drug markets that compete for clients and sometimes even overlap each other. From 1987 to 1994, there were 64 intergang street gang-motivated homicides between the Vice Lords and the BGD. Only five of these homicides were determined to be motivated by drugs. This was confirmed by a case-by-case analysis of the homicide narratives. However, many of the 59 other homicides may not have happened if the drug markets did not exist. In the typical case, gang members approached each other on the street, represented, fought, and someone was killed, with no indication of any specific drug motive in the narrative. But what brought the combatants together? How did they happen to be on the same street in the same neighborhood? One possible attraction to the area is the existence of the drug markets (see Map 5). Most homicides occurred in or close to either a BGD or a Vice Lord drug market. Many of the others occurred along routes between a drug market and

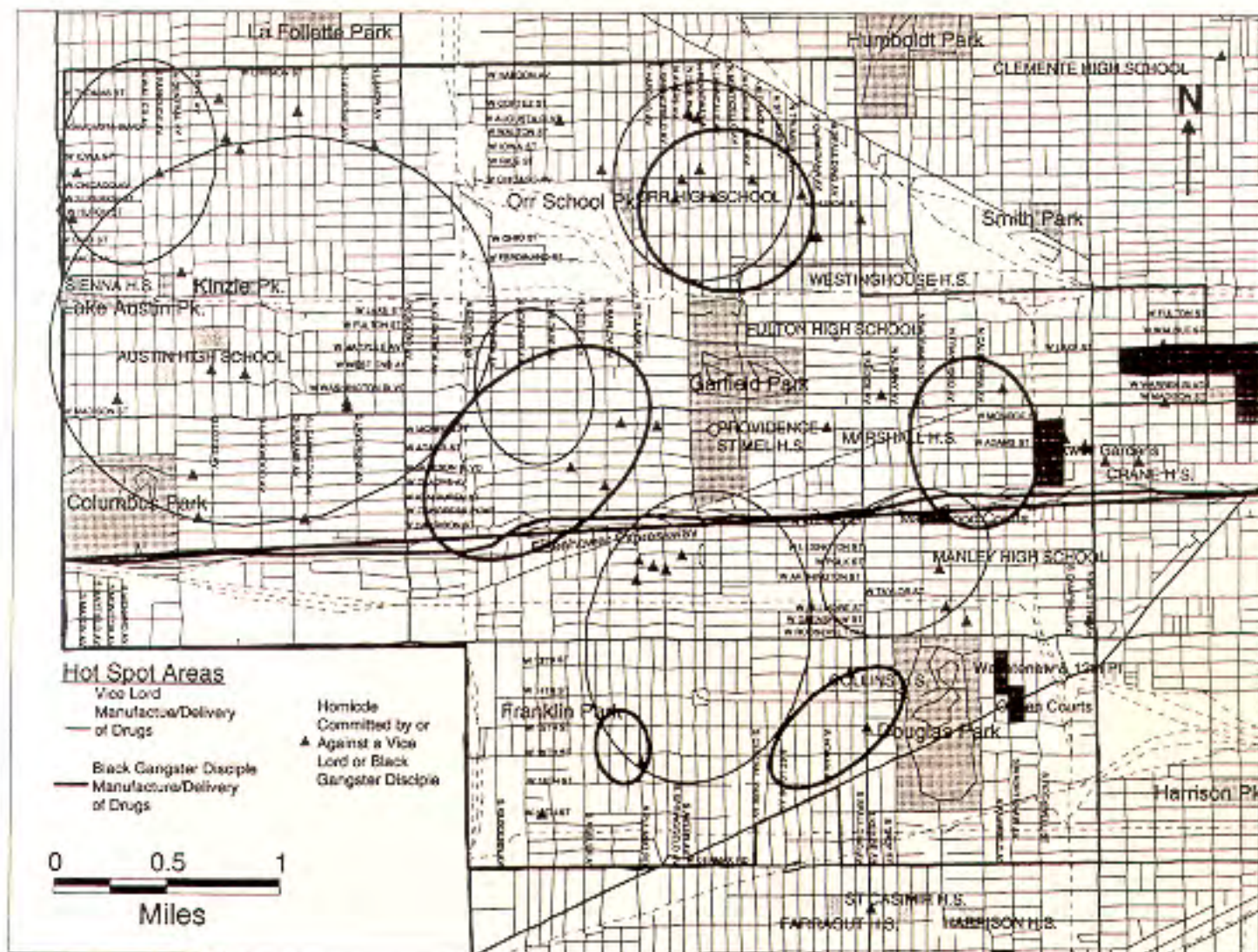


**Map 4:  
Chicago Gang-Motivated Homicides,  
Drug Motivated vs. Other, 1987-1994**





## Map 5: Vice Lord and Black Gangster Disciple Drug Hot Spot Areas and Homicides, 1987-1994



a high school or housing complex (for example, the homicides occurring between Crane High School, the Rockwell Gardens housing complex, and a BGD drug market.) This suggests that the existence of the drug market governed the routine activities of potential victims and offenders, drawing rival gang members to the same area. Once there, rival gang members were likely to encounter each other, confront each other, and possibly kill each other.

Thus, while the business of drugs may be a relatively infrequent direct cause of street gang homicide, the existence of street gang drug markets may be a frequent

indirect cause, providing the background situation under which street gang homicides are more likely to occur. If this is true, then effective homicide prevention and intervention strategies in street gang drug market areas should concentrate not only on drug business conflicts, but should also take into account traditional gang rivalries played out by representation, retaliation and revenge.



## CONCLUSIONS

Although street gang crime is attracting more attention than ever before, documenting the extent and nature of the problem with precision remains difficult. The lack of standard definitions for gang-related incidents across jurisdictions and the absence of a statewide mechanism for gathering gang-related crime data hamper our ability to understand and address the problem.

Despite our data deficiencies, it is clear that lethal street gang violence has increased in recent years, as has the risk of becoming a victim or an offender. The spurt in lethal street gang violence in the early 1990s is of an unprecedented scale, with street gang homicide death rates in Chicago approaching nine per 100,000 population compared to rates well below three in prior years. Almost all street gang-related homicides are committed with a firearm, and semi- and fully-automatic firearms are now the weapon of choice.

Street gang crime disproportionately involves young people. For example, the risk of becoming either a victim or an offender in gang-related homicide peaks between the ages of 15 and 19. Moreover, the age of offenders in gang-related homicide and nonlethal drug offenses is declining, though not in nonlethal violence.

Street gang-related violence and drug activity, however, are not necessarily synonymous. Street gangs tend to specialize in either violence or entrepreneurial activities like drug dealing, and gang-related lethal violence is more likely to grow out of turf violence than from drug markets. Drug markets indirectly influence violence by bringing rival gang members into proximity with one another, as most street gang violence involves intergang conflicts.

These findings suggest that street gang crime is not monolithic, but rather diverse, affecting different neighborhoods in different ways. One neighborhood may have a Hot Spot Area for street gang drug activity, while another nearby is a battleground for turf wars, and yet another is plagued by both. Strategies for reducing street gang crime must recognize these differences.

To be effective, intervention tactics must be tailored to the specialized activities of specific gangs and the manner in which street gang crime manifests itself in the community. For example, efforts to disrupt drug markets will likely have little influence on street gang violence in neighborhoods where street gangs are primarily involved in turf conflicts.

It is equally important for intervention efforts to attend to the disproportionate involvement of young people in street gang crime, both as victims and offend-

ers. Whether recruited by adults, pressured by peers, or attracted for some other reason, the dynamics that draw younger and younger offenders into street gang-related lethal violence and drug offending must be better understood and addressed. Reducing the availability of weapons, particularly the most deadly, also may have an appreciable impact on lethal violence.

Street gang-related violence and other crime is both rooted in chronic social problems and a function of acute conditions. Thus, strategies for combating street gang crime must be long-term, multi-disciplinary and coordinated. They must also be built on sound, timely information and analysis. Policies and programs that focus on the specific situation in a neighborhood, recognize the value of suppression, intervention and prevention to address these situations, and are subject to assessment are most likely to succeed. ■

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This special report was written by Carolyn Rebecca Block, Antigone Christakos, Ayad Jacob and Roger Przybylski; it was edited by Sharon Bond and Kristi Turnbaugh. For detailed information concerning data sources, methods, references and notes, see the complete technical report, *Lethal and Nonlethal Street Gang Activity in Chicago*, forthcoming. You also may contact the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority by calling 312-793-8550 or e-mailing rogerp@icjia.org.

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