A member of a 'flexi unit' from Strathclyde Police, formed to tackle gang violence in the East End of Glasgow, searches for a group of boys armed with airguns, September 2006.

Gang Violence Worldwide

CONTEXT, CULTURE, AND COUNTRY

5

INTRODUCTION: AN INTERNATIONAL APPROACH TO GANG VIOLENCE

Trinidad and Tobago's reputation as a model of stability in the Caribbean, home to tourism, manufacturing, and petroleum, is now under siege. While the economy has grown strongly over the last decade in this country of 1.3 million residents, so has the murder rate. There were 98 homicides in 1998, but 550 in 2008. The attention normally reserved for sandy beaches is increasingly directed at gangs, responsible for more than half of the country's homicides in 2008 (Townsend, 2009, p. 18).

In the last 20 years, gangs and gang violence have increasingly captured the attention of the media, the general public, policy-makers, and researchers. High-profile cases of seemingly haphazard, often public gang violence—such as that experienced in Trinidad and Tobago,[1] Salinas, California,[2] or the 2009 spate of gang stabbings in London[3]—consistently make headline news.

The conceptual and practical importance accorded to understanding gangs and gang behaviour largely reflects the well-known risks associated with gang involvement. Using various methodologies, research has consistently found a link between gangs and violence. For example, one study of high-risk youth in the United States found that while gang members comprised only 31 per cent of the sample, they were responsible for 82 per cent of violent acts (Thornberry et al., 2003, p. 50).

Much of our knowledge about gang violence comes from research based on gangs and gang violence in the United States. This is largely due to a long-standing presence of gangs in the country and nearly nine decades of research, including the systematic collection of gang-related data. Yet the turn of the millennium ushered in a growing wave of research on the problems associated with gangs and violence around the globe, with scholars exploring the transnational and global aspects of gangs.[4] Part of this interest is a result of the Eurogang research platform, a summit convened to bring together researchers to assess the problem of gangs and violence in European nations (and beyond) by systematically collecting data for comparative research. While the nature and extent of gang violence differs across countries, there are parallels in terms of how gang violence manifests itself. This chapter reviews and synthesizes scholarly contributions on gang violence from around the globe and identifies themes from the research. Recognizing the similarities and differences of gang violence from an international perspective is a key to providing responses and solutions to the problem.

The chapter examines the scope and scale of gang violence around the world, including similarities and differences across countries, and considers some of the most persuasive explanations for such violence. Its key findings include:

- Gangs are a key risk factor for violence and victimization.
- Gang violence, including homicide, is most often directed against other gang members. Gang homicide rates are estimated at up to 100 times that of the broader population.

- The level of gun use by gangs often appears to be related to the availability of guns in the countries where they are active.
- Motives for gang violence—including racial or ethnic conflict, economic gain, and respect or power—share similarities across regions.

The chapter begins by defining the problem—gangs and gang violence—in a global context. It then presents research into the scope and scale of gang violence around the globe, focusing particularly on the United States, where systematic data on gang homicide has been gathered. In its final section, the chapter examines various explanations for gang violence. The chapter puts particular emphasis on the role of gangs and gang members in small arms use.

DEFINING GANGS AND GANG VIOLENCE IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT

Considerable variation remains in the way gangs are defined. The task of defining a gang has absorbed countless scholarly journal and book pages. Many researchers shy away from the term 'gang', opting for less stigmatizing terms such as 'informal youth group', 'delinquent peer group', 'delinquent networks', and 'troublesome youth groups'.

Graffiti marks a neighbourhood as dominated by the Mara Salvatrucha in San Salvador, 2007. © Trevor Snapp/Corbis

Regardless of semantic differences, it is readily understood that groupings of youthful individuals take on certain characteristics, and that the group itself takes on a specific meaning. The delinquent and criminal activity associated with gang members is what distinguishes them as a group. But defining gangs in a global context is important; the development of universally consistent definitions is essential to being able to draw comparisons across countries. Without definitional uniformity, it would be difficult to draw meaning from European gang violence research when contrasting its findings with those of the larger body of United States research.

Researchers in the Eurogang programme took on this task over the last decade and concluded that gangs exhibit five defining characteristics (Klein and Maxson, 2006):

- durability (with respect to the group over time),
- street-oriented lifestyle (activities are oriented around places open to the public),
- youthfulness (members tend to be in their teens and early 20s),
- illegal activity (law-violating—delinquent or criminal—behaviour), and
- identity (in that illegal activities help define the group identity).

This chapter uses the Eurogang definition, which was developed by more than 100 US and European researchers over a four-year period and allows for the consistent identification of a gang across jurisdictions. Factors that are not part of the Eurogang definition—such as the size of the gang, its structure, organization, ethnicity, symbols, gender, and cohesiveness—capture the variation and diversity of gangs, but are not necessary for defining a group as a gang.

The question of what constitutes a gang remains relatively open.

Notwithstanding the recent advances in defining a gang, the question of what constitutes gang violence remains relatively open. To understand the extent of gang violence in a global context, it is necessary to establish whether an act of violence was attributable to a gang. At first glance this may appear a simple task; however, law enforcement agencies have employed two differing approaches—member-based and motive-based—for determining whether acts of gang violence were the product of a gang. The more inclusive member-based approach emphasizes the participation of the individual gang member in the act. In other words, if a gang member is an offender or a victim of a violent crime, it is classified as gang-related. This method is used by the city of Los Angeles, California, as well as a number of other jurisdictions in measuring the scope of gang member crime. The more restrictive motive-based approach emphasizes the motivation behind the crime, in particular whether it furthers the goals of the gang. This approach is used by cities such as Chicago, Illinois, and requires investigators to establish whether the act of violence was driven by economic gain, retaliatory violence, territorial conflict, or other incentives furthering the interests of the gang.

The implications of these definitions are substantial. Maxson and Klein (1990) pose the question 'twice as great, or half as great?' after comparing Los Angeles and Chicago gang homicide records. They find that the member-based definition yielded nearly twice as many gang homicides as the motive-based definition (Maxson and Klein, 1990; 1996). This is an important example of how definitions of gang-related concepts (such as gangs, gang members, gang homicides) can radically alter conclusions about gangs. Beyond sheer volume, however, there were no empirical, conceptual, or policy differences in the characteristics of these homicides that would argue in favour of employing a member- or motive-based definition (Maxson and Klein, 1990). For the purposes of this chapter, when comparing gang violence across countries, the characteristics and participation of gang members are the important markers for identifying gang violence. For this reason, the member-based definition is applied.

THE SCOPE AND SCALE OF GANG VIOLENCE AROUND THE GLOBE

The global extent of gang violence is emerging from a variety of research platforms. Politicians and academics alike are attempting to gauge the pervasiveness of this violence, and recent anthologies have attempted to provide meaning to gangs 'beyond America'.[5] It is important to note that gang violence has both direct and indirect consequences (see Box 5.1). The direct consequences, of course, include the victims themselves. But the indirect consequences include the broader circle of family, friends, and neighbours whose lives are also affected by gang violence. This section reviews the existing literature on gang violence around the world, by region.[6] While gangs and gang violence have existed outside of the United States for some time, the same cannot be said for the systematic collection of gang-related data. It is for this reason that this chapter begins by focusing on gang violence in the United States.

United States and Canada

Since the classical studies of US gangs from the early 20th century (Asbury, 1928; Thrasher, 1927), researchers have taken great interest in gang violence; yet it was not until the late 1970s that attempts were made to systematically collect data on gang homicides in large cities (Miller, 1982). This information revealed that in nine US cities, gang homicides comprised a sizeable portion of the overall homicides (Miller, 1982). This recognition of the gang–violence nexus gave impetus to the pursuit of a broader understanding of gangs. From 1967 to 1980, the number of gang homicides grew from 181 to 633—nearly a 250 per cent increase (Miller, 1982, as cited in Howell, 1999, p. 208). Since then, a number of researchers have collected and analysed gang homicide data in the United States. In 1995 this task was assumed by the National Youth Gang Center, which merged into the National Gang Center in October 2009. The Center collects data annually from policing agencies and publishes findings with regard to various types of gang-related statistics, such as gang problems, homicides, and demographics (NYGC, 2007).

Box 5.1 The direct and indirect consequences of gangs and gang violence

Gang violence has both tangible (such as physical and economic) and intangible (such as psychological and social) consequences for communities. As this chapter shows, the number of gun deaths among gang members is staggering; the incidence of non-lethal firearm injury is even greater. Gang violence casts a wide net, however–one that is not limited to violent assault. There are additional physical and economic costs borne by community residents as a result of gang violence. For example, individuals residing in neighbourhoods that are subject to gang conflict are limited in their hours of recreation, face declines in property values, and have difficulty attracting and retaining businesses. Furthermore, gang violence may result in the loss of residents who have a stake in the neighbourhood and are a source of informal social control (that is, they are willing to call the police or intervene in response to disorder). Such a 'tailspin' was observed in the United States in the 1960s, when many urban regions experienced an exodus of middle-class residents. While gang violence is not the sole source of the inner-city population exodus today, it continues to hamper the growth and revitalization of violence-plagued neighbourhoods.[7]

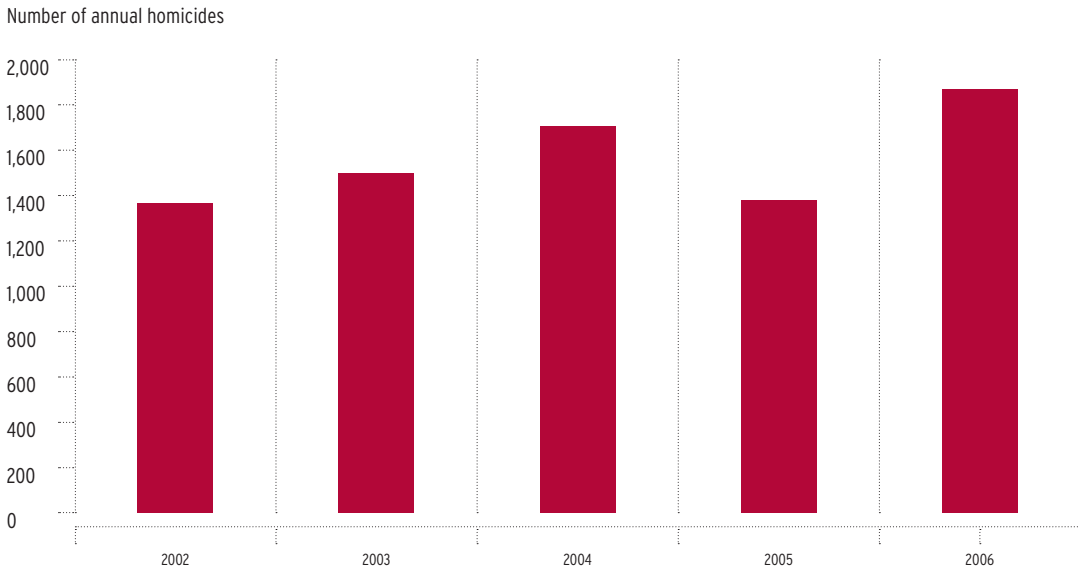
Other, less tangible consequences of gang violence include the intimidation of residents or a broader fear of gang violence that constrains individual behaviour (such as travel or movement through the neighbourhood). For example, recent violent confrontations between black and Latino gangs in Los Angeles resulted in territorial boundaries that could not be crossed by black or Latino residents, not just gang members. The psychological toll–including post-traumatic stress disorder–is shared by gang members and neighbourhood residents alike (Klein, 1995; Hipp, Tita, and Boggess, 2009; Ralphs, Medina, and Aldridge, 2009; Garvey and McGreevy, 2007).

Members of the Eastside Crips flash gang signs as they arrive at the funeral of Stanley Tookie Williams, co-founder of the Crips. © Lucas Jackson/Reuters

Figure 5.1 presents the frequency of gang homicides in the 100 largest US cities from 2002 through 2006.[8] Population sizes of these cities ranged from nearly 9 million residents in New York City to cities with some 200,000 residents. The United States recorded roughly 7,800 gang homicides in this five-year time span, averaging approximately 1,500 homicides per year. The majority of large US cities (between 51 and 76 per cent, depending on the year) reported fewer than ten gang-related homicides each, while a smaller portion (between 12 and 21 per cent) reported no gang-related homicides. During the five-year period, gang homicides comprised about 25 per cent of the total number of homicides in these cities, highlighting the central involvement of gangs in urban homicide tallies.

To get a better idea of underlying trends, rates of gang homicide can also be computed, allowing for comparisons between cities and between the general population and gang members.[9] The annual gang homicide rate was 2.73 per 100,000 citizens for the 100 largest cities in the United States. This figure, which does not reflect homicides committed by non-gang members in the same population sample, is greater than the homicide rates of many industrialized countries. Moreover, this rate varied between cities from 0 to over 10, with some of the larger US cities experiencing gang homicide rates much higher than others.

Figure 5.1 **Gang-related homicide in the 100 largest US cities, 2002–06**



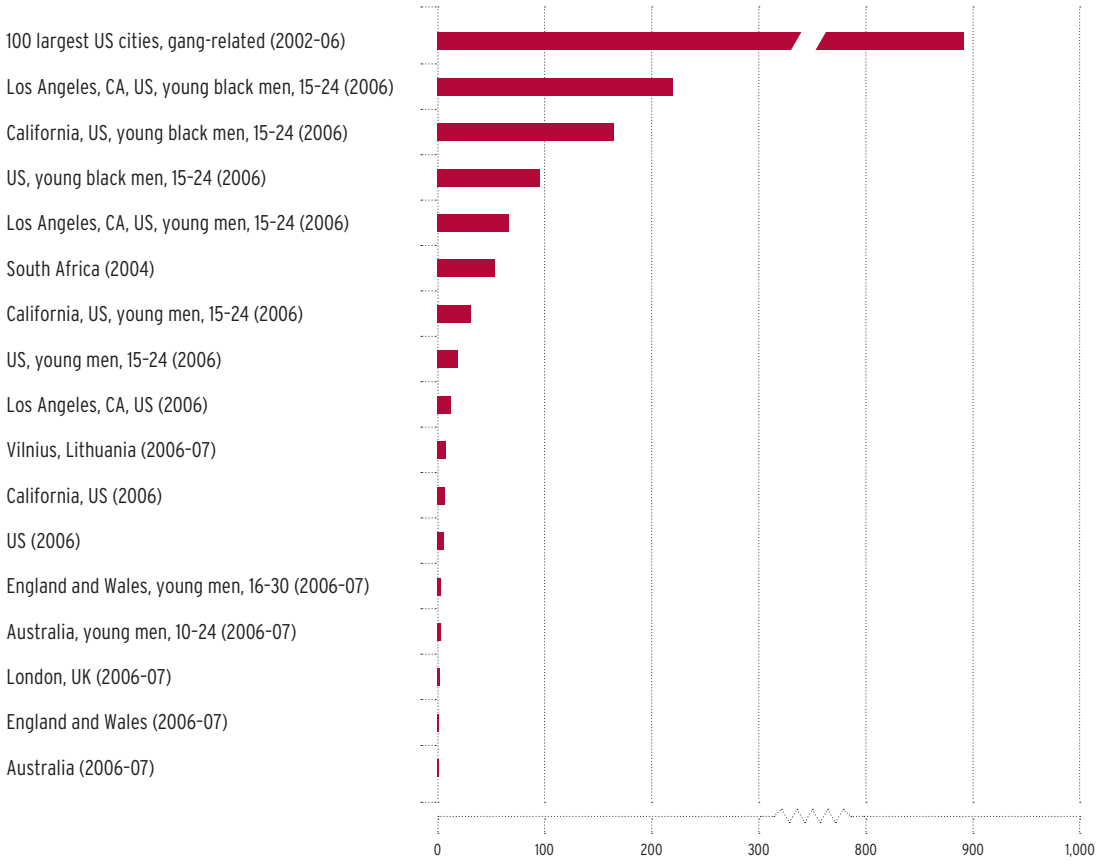
Comparing gang homicide to aggregate city population only hints at the extent of the problem, however. For the same five-year period, the mean gang-related homicide rate was 893.4 per 100,000 *gang members*. If all law enforcement agencies employed a motive-based classification model and Maxson and Klein's 'half as great' was equally true for large cities in the United States, a conservative estimate would be in the range of 450 gang-related homicides per 100,000 gang members—consistent with the figures reported by Maxson (1999, p. 244). Even this homicide rate is alarmingly high, especially when compared to the overall homicide rate in the United States (5.7 per 100,000) and to other countries such as Australia, England and Wales, or even South Africa (1.2, 1.6, and 54.0 per 100,000, respectively).[10]

This number acquires added significance when compared to the homicide rate of other high-risk demographic groups, such as young black men in the United States (96.1 per 100,000) or young black men in the city of Los Angeles (220.2 per 100,000). Gang-related homicides have the ability to drive overall homicide rates in cities, as shown by Maxson, Curry, and Howell (2002, pp. 125–30) regarding the 1990s and by this chapter for the following decade. Figure 5.2 illustrates the exceptionally high rates of lethal violence experienced among US gang members.

In Los Angeles, the relationship between homicides and the presence of gangs in a neighbourhood is especially glaring (Robinson et al., 2009). A comparison of neighbourhoods in relation to the density of street gangs (that is, the number of gangs) reveals a stark difference in homicide rates between gang and non-gang neighbourhoods. In neighbourhoods that have no gangs within a two-mile radius, there was an average of 3.4 homicides per square mile over a nine-year period. On the other hand, if 1–10, 11–20, 21–30, and 30+ gangs were active within a two-mile radius, neighbourhoods had an average of 11.5, 29.1, 41.8, and 61.1 homicides per square mile, respectively (Robinson et al., 2009, p. 518). Even neighbourhoods with only a few gangs had about three times more homicides per square mile than gang-free neighbourhoods.

The above homicide statistics have been corroborated through a number of studies examining the phenomenon of gang violence in the United States (Howell, 1999; Maxson, 1999). Qualitative research has documented the instrumental function of violence within gangs.[11] Quantitative explorations have recorded the disproportionate involvement

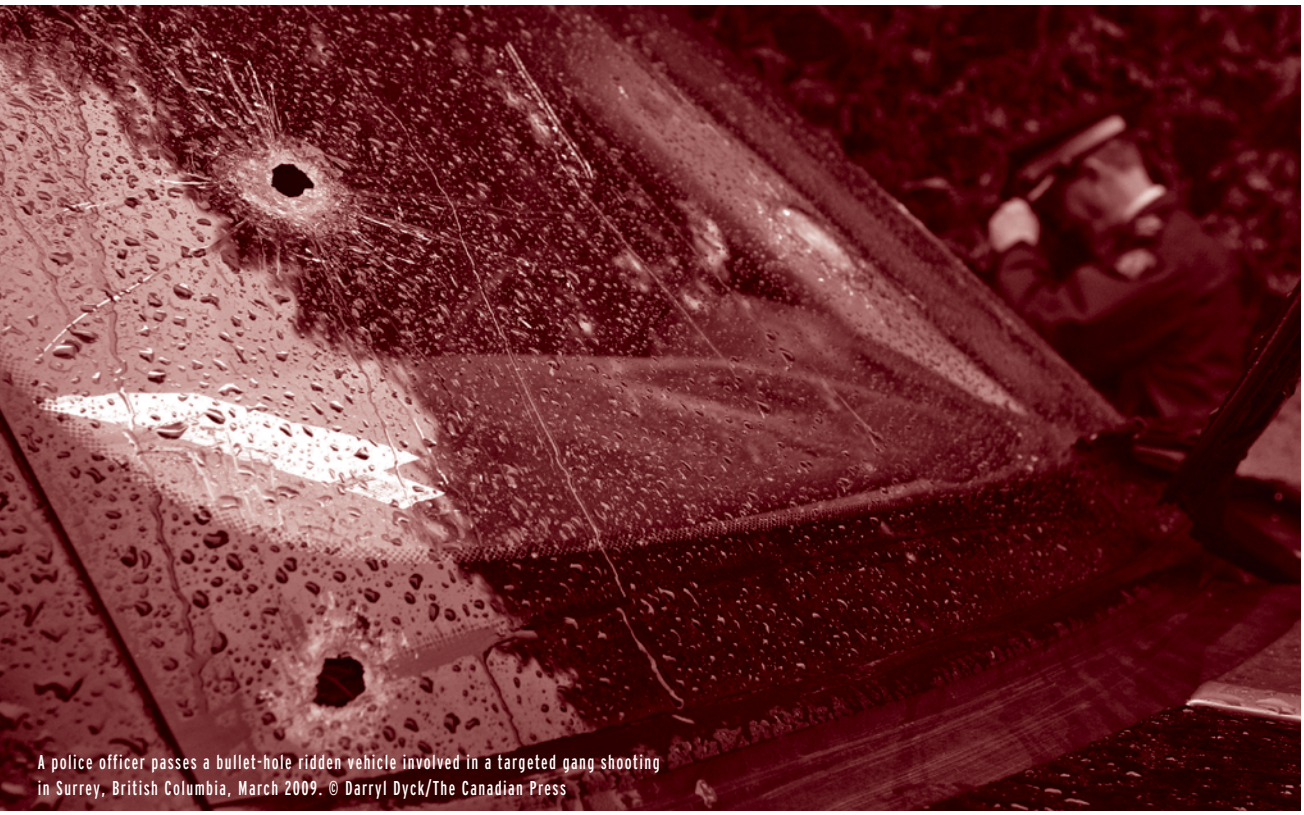
Figure 5.2 **Homicide rates per 100,000 residents across geographic areas**



of gang members compared to non-gang youths in violent acts.[12] In a study carried out in St. Louis, Missouri, of 99 gang members interviewed in the early 1990s, 28 lost their lives due to violence within ten years (Decker and Van Winkle, 1996; Taylor et al., 2007, p. 356).

Canada also has gangs and gang violence, although not on the same scale as in the United States. A recent estimate from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police notes the presence of 7,071 gang members in Canada, most of them in the Province of Ontario (RCMP, 2006, p. 26). Gang violence is also present in Canada.[13] Between 1992 and 2000, the Canadian Homicide Survey revealed that annual gang homicides had increased from 19 to 72, before declining sharply to 45 in 2002 (Savoie, 2003). Even with this decrease, however, one out of every 13 Canadian homicides was identified as gang-related (Savoie, 2003, p. 5). By 2005, the number of gang homicides had increased to 107, the highest point in the trend (Dauvergne and Li, 2006, p. 8). Gang-related homicides are more likely to occur in public places and to involve firearms than other (such as domestic or robbery-related) homicides. They also often involve young offenders and victims, much like gang homicides in the United States (Dauvergne and Li, 2006).

A study of Canadian gang networks focused on two groups: the Hells Angels motorcycle gang and two street-level gangs associated with drug distribution in Montreal and the state of Quebec (Morselli, 2008). The conflict that raged between the Hells Angels and the rival Alliance group saw 126 murders, 135 attempted murders, as well as



A police officer passes a bullet-hole ridden vehicle involved in a targeted gang shooting in Surrey, British Columbia, March 2009. © Darryl Dyck/The Canadian Press

the murder of two prison guards and the death of a journalist within a seven-year period (Morselli, 2008, pp. 147–48). This violence has led to growing awareness and quicker response from Canadian authorities, comparable to the situation in the United States during the late 1980s and 1990s.

Europe

While the levels of violence in Europe may pale in comparison to those in the United States, there is a noticeable presence of gangs across European countries. The research findings produced by members of the Eurogang network have identified gangs in 50 European cities and 16 European countries (Klein, Weerman, and Thornberry, 2006, p. 433). Nevertheless, many researchers in Europe have approached gang research with scepticism, tending to study subcultures, networks, and troublesome youths rather than 'gangs' because of the potential stigma, racism, and oppression associated with the term (Aldridge, Medina, and Ralphs, 2008).

European gangs tend to be smaller, less organized, and less violent than their US counterparts. Two notable quantitative studies have undertaken comparative assessments of US and European gang violence levels. One four-year longitudinal study compared youths in Denver, Colorado, to youths in Bremen, Germany, utilizing similar survey instruments (Huizinga and Schumann, 2001). Gang members comprised 14 per cent of the Denver sample and 13 per cent of the Bremen sample. In both cases, gang members contributed disproportionately to the sample's cumulative violent delinquency, with Denver gang youths being responsible for 64 per cent and Bremen youths for 44 per cent of the violent acts reported. Despite the differences in proportions, this suggests gang youths as a whole

are disproportionately responsible for roughly three to four times more violent delinquency than non-gang youth, regardless of country of origin (Huizinga and Schumann, 2001, p. 239).

Another study replicated these findings with US and Dutch youths (Esbensen and Weerman, 2005). The US sample consisted of nearly 6,000 youths, with data collected in middle school settings across 11 cities (urban, suburban, and rural). The Dutch sample consisted of nearly 2,000 youths with data collected in comparable school settings. Gang members comprised eight per cent of the US sample and six per cent of the Dutch sample. Similar to the Denver–Bremen findings, gang youths, compared to non-gang youths, in the United States and the Netherlands were disproportionately involved in violent offences. Indeed, both US and Dutch gang youths reported nearly four times as many violent delinquent offences than non-gang youths (Esbensen and Weerman, 2005, p. 23). Other European research also found gang members to be disproportionately involved in violent offences compared to non-gang respondents: among a sample of 2,725 English and Welsh arrestees (Bennett and Holloway, 2004, p. 311) and among a sample of 4,299 adolescent youths in Edinburgh, Scotland (Bradshaw, 2005, p. 210).

These findings are important because they allow comparisons between countries as well as between gang and non-gang individuals, providing insight into the inherent problems associated with gang involvement. While these findings may seem to undermine Klein et al.'s (2006) argument that European gangs are less violent and less delinquent than US gangs, the qualitative research in Europe generally supports this contention.[14] Whereas 'reports of gang-related homicides are almost entirely absent from the Eurogang studies' (Klein, Weerman, and Thornberry, 2006, p. 430), studies of US gangs report high levels of gang involvement in homicide. Most of the qualitative Eurogang research reports that while conflicts do indeed exist between youth gangs, the members do not use violence, and especially not gun violence, with the same frequency and consistency as their US counterparts. Clearly one major difference between the US and European gang scene is the presence of firearms among gangs in the United States. European and Canadian gangs are more alike on this measure. While homicide rates may be relatively low in European countries, research has found the threat of violence to be clearly identifiable (Van Gemert, 2001).

One major difference between the US and European gang scene is the presence of firearms among gangs in the United States.

Gangs in Manchester, UK, could represent an exception to the theories about what distinguishes US from European gangs. A study of the violent offending characteristics of four South Manchester gangs shows a series of rivalries, conflicts, and retaliatory violence between the gangs (Bullock and Tilley, 2002). Between 1997 and 2000, there were 270 shootings in Manchester, with nearly 60 per cent considered gang-related. Of the 29 shooting deaths, nearly 80 per cent involved a gang member either as an offender, victim, or both (Bullock and Tilley, 2002, pp. 15, 33, 36). In US terms, 29 shooting deaths may appear modest over 3.5 years for a city of nearly half a million residents; however, gang violence accounts for a greater proportion of all violence in Manchester than in most US cities. It is rare to find a US city where gangs are involved in violence to the same degree (relative to non-gang residents) as in Manchester.[15] The Manchester violence problem is, in essence, a Manchester *gang violence* problem.

Gang activity in the Kazan region of the Russian Federation has come to be known as the 'Kazan phenomenon' (Covey, 2003; Salagaev, 2001; Salagaev et al., 2005). In a 2005 survey of youths in Moscow and Kazan, researchers report that Moscow youths were more likely to be involved in gangs as well as delinquent activities (Salagaev et al., 2005). Qualitative research has shown, however, that the Kazan gangs were far more involved in more serious delinquency (such as extortion and racketeering) than the Moscow youths, with the Kazan gangs taking on the characteristics of mafia-like organizations (Salagaev, 2001). These findings have been characterized as an aberration in the European comparative literature, much like the violence in Manchester (Klein, Weerman, and Thornberry, 2006).

The reality is that the scale, extent, and characteristics of European gang violence are still relatively unknown. As noted above, the Eurogang research platform has provided a consistent definition of gangs and has greatly bolstered our knowledge of European gangs, yet many of the existing studies are city- or country-specific. Without additional reports on gang homicide and inter-city and inter-country comparative rates of violence, a large gap in our knowledge remains. Better comparable data is needed, in particular, before evidence-based legislation and policy can be developed. Given the high public profile of gang violence in Western European countries during 2009 (especially in the UK) and the potential need for new legislation, further research is important. While Europe may be beginning to understand its gang violence problem, in much of the rest of the world a gaping research void exists on gangs and gang violence.

Latin America and the Caribbean

In many Latin American and Caribbean countries, youth violence is widespread. However, it is difficult to obtain clear information on rates of gang homicide, despite the fact that it is readily known that many of these countries have among the highest homicide rates in the world. In 2004, homicide rates per 100,000 residents in Latin American and Caribbean countries such as Brazil (≈28.5), Colombia (≈53.3), the Dominican Republic (≈20.5), El Salvador (≈56.9), Guatemala (≈31.3), and Mexico (≈11.1) greatly exceeded those of European countries, the United States, and

Box 5.2 Gangs in Central America

It is well known that Central American countries—Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama—are home to gangs and that gang violence is present across the region; however, this information is largely based on anecdotes and specialized reports rather than systematic evidence.

There are two distinct types of gangs in Central America: *pandillas* and *maras,* each of which make unique contributions to the region's violence (Jütersonke, Muggah, and Rodgers, 2009). *Pandillas* grew in Central American neighbourhoods in response to conflict with other groups (such as other neighbourhood youths or social control agents), a common theme in the gang literature. These gangs are territorial and serve as community 'protectors', though some research suggests that this role has changed over time (Rodgers, 2006). *Pandillas* used to be present across Central America but are now found primarily in Nicaragua and Costa Rica, with *maras* predominating following their 'invasion' of the region (Jütersonke, Muggah, and Rodgers, 2009).

Unlike the *pandillas, maras*—the most prominent of which are Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and Mara Dieciocho—originated in Los Angeles, California. Public officials and the media often refer to *maras* as 'transnational gangs'. They formed in Central America due to US immigration policies, which aggressively deported immigrant criminals and Los Angeles gang members to their country of origin. Since the deportees brought gang behaviour and patterns of association with them, the *maras* have transnational origins, yet it is questionable whether they are linked transnationally (Maxson, 2009). The hard-line policies taken by Central American countries—Mano Dura (El Salvador), Plan Escoba (Guatemala), Cero Tolerancia (Honduras)—coupled with severe social and economic deprivation have had substantial repercussions for the institutionalization of gangs in these regions, all of which are still reeling from civil war (Jütersonke, Muggah, and Rodgers, 2009).

El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras experience greater levels of gang violence than other Central American countries. This disparity has been partly attributed to economic conditions, but it is also thought to result from the greater presence of *maras* in the three countries. Official estimates put *mara* membership at 10,500 in El Salvador, 14,000 in Guatemala, and 36,000 in Honduras, compared to 2,200 in Nicaragua and 38,000 in the United States (USAID, 2006, p. 17). The United States deported most immigrant criminals to their country of origin, primarily El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. This has resulted in the proliferation of *maras* and *mara* violence in the three countries.

Members of various churches and social organizations take part in a torch rally in San Bartolo to call for peace and an end to violence, El Salvador, September 2006. © Yuri Cortez/AFP

Canada (UNODC, 2006). Many of these regions are subject to considerable governmental instability or pervasive drug trafficking markets (e.g. Colombia, Honduras, Mexico). At the same time, research from these states has reported the presence of gangs and gang violence. Reports from the Central America region estimate anywhere from 69,000 (official figures) to 200,000 (academic figures) gang members (UNODC, 2007).[16]

The nexus of violence and gangs in Latin America and the Caribbean has become increasingly clear (see Boxes 5.2, 5.3, and 5.4). Recent essays in foreign policy journals have talked about how 'street gangs took Central America' (Arana, 2005) and how 'gangs went global' (Papachristos, 2005), with particular attention to Latin American countries. While these countries do have home-grown gangs, the United States has had a hand in this region's gang problem as it has been governmental practice to 'export' undocumented residents who are gang members to their country of origin.[17] A Washington Office on Latin America report quotes a Department of Homeland Security statement that of the 2,179 criminal aliens deported, 'approximately 370 of [the] deportees were thought to be members of MS-13' (Thale and Falkenburger, 2006, p. 4).[18] While these numbers have surely fluctuated over time, it is understood that these deportations have been occurring since the 1990s.

This immigration enforcement policy has been a Pandora's box, serving to fuel gang formation (Vigil, 2006). As the number of United States 'exports' grew, so did the gang problems of countries such as El Salvador and Nicaragua. The response to these groups—by both the governments and vigilante groups—were 'death squads' and crackdown

Box 5.3 Mexican drug violence

Not surprisingly, given its proximity to the United States, Mexico has experienced gang problems. However, gang problems in Mexico reflect the country's importance to the drug and weapon trade more than the migration or emulation of US gangs. In North America, historically, drugs have moved from south to north, while weapons and money move from north to south (Decker and Townsend, 2008). These patterns reflect a variety of factors, including: 1) the widespread and easy availability of guns in the United States, including high-powered weapons; 2) the demand for drugs in the United States; 3) a Mexican government that has suffered from corruption and ineffective law enforcement; and 4) historic patterns of trade and exchange (legal and illicit) between Mexico and its northern neighbour.

The problem of violence and weapons has been exacerbated by the recent shift in drug trafficking routes from the Caribbean to Mexico (Decker and Townsend, 2008). This shift has created Mexican drug cartels that have successfully resisted government attempts to curb their activities. Levels of violence, and exceptional acts of violence, including the killing of Mexican police and judges, highlight the challenges that these changes in drug trafficking present. Despite its restrictive gun laws, and a lower rate of civilian ownership of firearms than in the United States or Canada, Mexico has high rates of gun violence (Cook, Cukier, and Krause, 2009). A recent report noted that Mexican officials seized 30,000 firearms in 2008, and while 7,200 were turned over to US authorities, only about 4,000 could be traced (Stewart and Burton, 2009). Of this group, nearly 90 per cent had initially been sold in the United States. While a recent Government Accounting Office report has called considerable attention to this issue (GAO, 2009), it remains impossible to know the country of origin for the majority of guns seized, much less used in violence, in Mexico. Two facts, however, remain indisputable: guns of all types are heavily implicated in drug and cartel violence in Mexico, and drug and arms smuggling are highly correlated activities.

The use of the word 'gang' to describe drug cartels in Mexico may be inaccurate. These cartels include many older members, are generally better organized than street gangs, and have a more instrumental focus than US street gangs (Decker, 1996). The organizational linkages between drug production and distribution in Mexico and the United States are described in a recent Office of National Drug Control Policy report (ONDC, 2009). Mexican cartels may establish *branch offices* in the United States that are tightly controlled by US-based Mexicans and run from Mexico. A second organizational structure is the franchise, which gives local distribution groups in the United States more autonomy and control over retail sales. *Market-based* structures ensure a steady supply of drugs in bulk quantities to wholesale groups in the United States. In the *pure market* model, free-market principles of supply and demand govern organizational linkages. This fourth model is by far the most dynamic and difficult to control, although the branch office model has stronger internal controls and secrecy than the other models. Regardless of how relationships between drug suppliers and distributors are structured at the wholesale level, they are dynamic, lucrative, and create an appetite for high-calibre weapons (GAO, 2009).

policies such as Mano Dura (Hume, 2007; Thale and Falkenburger, 2006). Other forces aided the institutionalization of gangs in these countries, neighbourhoods, and cities, including conflicts between gangs—such as Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) vs. Mara Dieciocho (18th Street or Mara 18)—continued deportation, and structural disadvantage (such as poverty, marginalization, and limited opportunity).

It was noted more than a decade ago that the data on Latin American gangs was by and large descriptive and qualitative (Rodgers, 1999, p. 4). Despite the persistence and increase in gang activity in the region, this situation has not changed much. Nevertheless, the research has provided rich insight into gang violence across Latin American countries, including on the Hispanic gang influence on US culture. Gangs such as Mara Salvatrucha and Mara 18 have achieved mythic status. A report in *Newsweek* called Mara Salvatrucha 'the most dangerous gang in America' (Campo-Flores, 2005), bolstering their reputation domestically and abroad. Images of young Salvadoran and Honduran men with their faces covered with gang tattoos have sparked media and public interest. Films such as *Sin Nombre* (2009) have also contributed to popular understandings of gang violence in Central America.

Much of the work on Latin American gangs is consistent with research from the United States. Reports that ten per cent of all homicides in Cali, Colombia, were attributable to gangs in the first six months of 1993 (Weaver and Maddaleno, 1999, p. 338) are comparable to findings in the United States (Curry, Egley, and Howell, 2004; Tita and Abrahamse, 2004). Across Central America, it has been estimated that anywhere between 10 and 60 per cent of all criminal violence can be attributed to gangs (UNODC, 2007, p. 61). Key factors in the problem of gang violence appear to include the accessibility of weapons to gang youths, especially socially marginalized youths who often view guns as a proxy for power and respect (Bevan and Florquin, 2006), along with the inability of governments to control delinquent behaviour and organized crime. These conditions are aggravated by the widespread availability of guns in many Latin American countries, especially those that are recovering from civil war, revolutions, and counter-insurgencies. Gang research in Brazil (Batista and Burgos, 2008), El Salvador (DeCesare, 2003), Guatemala (Winton, 2005), and Nicaragua (Maclure and Sotelo, 2004; Rodgers, 2006) supports these conclusions.

Public displays of gang violence are rampant in many Latin American countries. Numerous news reports from San Salvador, El Salvador, document a number of grenade attacks carried out by gang members in public.[19] A study that reviews 100 patients admitted to hospitals with firearm wounds in San Salvador finds that half were unintentionally caught up in gang fights and 26 per cent of them were active participants in gang fights (Paniagua et al., 2005). More than 90 per cent of the victims were wounded in public, either on the street or on public transportation. Gangs often charge 'safety tolls' for buses to pass through public roads (Rodriguez, 2001); armed attacks of buses are common (Winton, 2005). This type of violence—along with the killing of judges and police officials—not only compromises public safety, but can also undermine the ability of local and state-wide government to maintain order and enforce the law.

Box 5.4 Gangs, guns, and violence in Trinidad and Tobago

On many measures, Trinidad and Tobago now rivals Jamaica as the most violent country in the Caribbean, with the number of annual murders rising sharply from 98 to 550 over the past ten years (Heeralal, 2009; Townsend, 2009). Gangs and guns have become the chief suspects in the search for causes.

There were 293 gang-related murders in 2008, placing the national gang homicide rate at 22 per 100,000 citizens–twice the highest US city rate. Homicides are not evenly distributed across Trinidad and Tobago. More than half of the homicides took place in only seven of the country's 71 policing districts between 2001 and 2007 (Maguire et al., 2008 p. 62). The country's most populous urban area, Port of Spain, is the epicentre of gang violence–especially its poorer eastern suburbs. Three of these–Beetham, Morvant, and Laventille–were the sites of 60 per cent of the nation's homicides (Townsend, 2009, p. 27). In particular, more than 20 per cent of the nation's homicides took place in the Besson Street policing district in Laventille (Maguire et al., 2008, p. 62). Nineteen gangs were reportedly active in this district, and as many as 385 gang members (Katz and Choate, 2006). The Besson Street district homicide rate was 249 per 100,000 in 2005, making it the most dangerous region in the country, if not the world (Maguire et al., 2008, p. 60).

A prime factor in Trinidad and Tobago homicides is the relationship between gangs and guns. While gun ownership is tightly regulated and there is no domestic manufacturer of firearms, approximately 80 per cent of homicides in 2008 involved guns (Townsend, 2009, pp. 21, 24). In a recent survey of arrestees in Trinidad and Tobago, 15 per cent of the sample reported having owned a gun at some time; however, gun ownership was conditioned by gang membership, as 53 per cent of the gang members compared to 9 per cent of the non-gang arrestees owned guns (Wells, Katz, and Kim, 2010). Furthermore, a survey of school youths in Trinidad and Tobago found that gang members reported greater availability of and access to guns than their non-gang peers (Katz and Fox, forthcoming).

Strong economic development over the last decade has come at the price of instability. The influx of guns, in combination with the growth of gangs, has spelled disaster for Trinidad and Tobago (Katz and Fox, forthcoming; Townsend, 2009).

Some have claimed that while the problem of youth gang violence is undoubtedly present in Latin America, it has been largely overstated and sensationalized by media outlets (Reisman, 2006; Strocka, 2006). This mirrors research in Barcelona, Spain, which found that the Latin King gang issue was more a media construction than a true outbreak of gang problems (Feixa et al., 2008). This view is a double-edged sword, especially for Latin American countries without Eurogang-like research coordination. On the one hand, media stories potentially exploit the circumstances by drawing attention to the gangs and violence problems of the regions; yet, on the other hand, this 'exploitation' draws the attention of those who have the capability to fund the research that is needed to provide data to policy-makers seeking to assess the problem, especially when 'transnational threats' are part of the discussion. While it is well understood that many Latin American and Caribbean countries have a gang violence problem and high rates of violence, especially homicide, the proportion of violence that can be attributed to gangs is not fully known.

Africa and Asia-Pacific

Gangs have been identified in Africa and Asia-Pacific; however, there is even less information and research about gang violence in these regions than elsewhere in the world. This dearth may be partly attributed to the fact that gangs have not caught the attention of scholars, policy-makers, or the media as they have in the Western hemisphere. Latin American gangs are often studied in conjunction with the violence associated with drug and human trafficking—subjects that command the attention government officials. European gang research is largely inspired by US empiricism, bolstered by a large and generally receptive scholarly audience along with generous funding.

Much of the violence in Africa relates to war, coups, and other civil strife.

These factors are not shared by African and Asia-Pacific countries. Nevertheless, a growing gang violence literature has concentrated on certain 'hotspots', such as South Africa and some Australian cities.

Much of the violence in Africa relates to war, coups, and civil strife. Rather than 'gang' violence, military action and civil unrest often appear most prominently, although the line between gangs and armed groups is frequently blurred in countries engaged in, or emerging from, civil conflict. Researchers and journalists have documented a gang presence in African states such as Kenya, Liberia, Nigeria, South Africa, and Uganda (Covey, 2003). Nevertheless, of those countries only South Africa has accumulated a sizeable literature on gang violence.

South Africa has a recognized history of gangs that stretches back to the 1920s. In the post-apartheid period, once the country was no longer internationally isolated, existing gangs morphed into larger enterprises (Kynoch, 1999). It appears that gangs are now proliferating in South Africa, and there is a direct relationship between prison and street gangs (Berg and Kinnes, 2009).[20] Some of this may stem from the influence the media appears to wield in the cultural transmission of gang images, symbols, and behaviour (Maxson, 1998).

Gangs such as the Russians and Bo-Tsotsi were the precursors to more common-day South African gangs.[21] Youth gangs in South Africa today use violence in a wide range of contexts, including bribery, territorial disputes, robbery, extortion, assaults, and homicides.[22] Anti-gang vigilante groups such as Pagad (People against Gangsterism and Drugs) have sparked waves of violence between these groups, gangs, and the police in Western Cape (Dixon and Johns, 2001). Interviews with schoolteachers in Western Cape have underlined the common nature of traumatic incidents stemming from gang violence in schoolyards and neighbourhoods surrounding schools (Reckson and Becker, 2005). Western Cape has as many as 137 gangs and 100,000 gang members who are responsible for as much as 40–60 per cent of the violent crime in that area (Reckson and Becker, 2005, p. 107).[23]

Asian nations are internationally known for their organized crime groups, such as the Chinese Tongs and Japanese Yakuza. But a gang presence has also been found in a number of Asian countries, including China, Hong

Police talk with teenagers in North Cronulla, Sydney, as they patrol streets as part of efforts to respond to a spate of racial attacks by youth gangs. © Will Burgess/Reuters

Kong, India, Japan, Korea, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Taiwan (Covey, 2003).[24] The extent of the gang violence in these countries is relatively unknown, as no attempts have been made to collect data. Much of the research on gangs in Asian countries is journalistic and blurs the line between gangs and organized crime groups. In one of the few attempts to study gangs in China, a survey of prison inmates revealed many similarities between US and Chinese gangs, including loose organization, core/peripheral members, and age-graded membership. However, few of the surveyed Chinese gang members had been incarcerated for violent crimes (Zhang et al., 1997).

Knowledge of Australian gangs has increased considerably over the last decade. The OzGang Research Network was founded after conservative political groups and media outlets sparked public concern about gangs in Australia.[25] The network collects information about the Australian gang problem, sketching out a history of gangs in the country similar to efforts in Europe. The term 'gang' is often used sparingly in OzGang research for fear of confounding sub-cultural and ethnic group activities with gang activity (White, 2006a).[26]

A review of research on gangs in Adelaide, Perth, Melbourne, and Sydney concludes that gang activities in Australia are comparable to those in Europe. Australian gang violence is described as 'highly targeted [. . .] rarely random, and occur[ing] on a frequent basis' (White, 2006b, p. 2). Ethnic and racial conflicts have become more prominent in Australia, especially in larger cosmopolitan cities with large minority enclaves. Research in Sydney has revealed that homicides between gang members are rarely motivated by gang concerns (such as protecting turf or group respect), but that they tend to be committed over disputes involving women and petty incidents (White, 2006a, p. 168). The current state of Australian youth culture appears ripe for accelerated gang formation, with ethnic tension, marginalization, and gang-like groupings of youths present in most of the major cities. Without corrective action, gangs may soon become institutionalized in Australia.

A regional comparison of key gang characteristics

Researchers have compared youth gang violence in Europe to that in the United States using four categories: weaponry, levels of violence, motives for violence, and victims of violence (Klein, Weerman, and Thornberry, 2006). A fifth category, location of violence, helps document the public nature of gang violence. Using these five categories, this section compares gang violence across different regions.

Weaponry

Regions can be divided relatively neatly with respect to weapons use. The Small Arms Survey estimates that there are roughly 650 million civilian firearms in the world (Karp, 2007, p. 39). There are regions with significant arms use and others with virtually no such use. The dispersion of these firearms is quite widespread across the world. Indeed, North America, South America, Europe, Africa, and Asia all have multiple countries that rank in the top 30 of all nations in terms of their civilian firearms possession. But firearm holdings and use are not perfectly correlated. North, Central, and South American states (with Canada as the exception), as well as African countries, have high levels of arms use. Some European nations (such as Germany) have high levels of civilian firearms holdings, but relatively low levels of firearm violence (Karp, 2007, pp. 47, 51). Asia-Pacific states generally fall into the low arms use category.

Box 5.5 Gang membership and gun carrying

Gangs and gang members in some regions of the world own, carry, and use guns, while others do not. Nearly 80 per cent of the gang members in one sample, for example, owned guns–four on average (Decker and Van Winkle, 1996, p. 176). Research has shown that gang members are more likely than non-gang youths to carry guns in public (Lizotte et al., 2000). This does not, however, prove a relationship between gangs and guns. If gang members carry weapons in public before joining their gang and continue to carry them after leaving their gang, then gun carrying is not a characteristic of the gang, but rather of the individuals who comprise the gang–inclined to carry guns irrespective of gang membership.

To resolve this question, researchers have used longitudinal surveys to collect information from adolescents during the time when gang membership is most likely, and also before, during, and after periods of gang membership. The evidence shows that gang membership increases the likelihood of gun carrying more than any other variable, whatever the reference group (future gang members, past gang members, current violent non-gang delinquents, or former violent non-gang delinquents). Future or former gang youths were no more likely than non-gang youths to carry guns (Thornberry et al., 2003). Current gang membership is, in other words, strongly associated with gun carrying. This is probably an important factor for understanding gang violence; it is something about gangs, rather than individuals, that produces gun carrying. This research could be usefully replicated in regions outside the United States, and with a focus on the carrying of other weapons (such as knives or brass knuckles).

The fiercest and most uncontrolled manifestations of violence are in Latin America, where recourse to grenades and other military weapons marks much of the gang violence. These patterns leave some states, particularly in Central America, struggling to cope with relatively well-organized and highly armed groups. Gun violence is also frequent in the United States, where a majority of gang homicides in large cities are carried out with guns (Howell, 1999, pp. 214–17). The evidence from other regions reveals little or no gun usage in gang-motivated, let alone gang-affiliated, violence. As in all such comparisons, context matters; rates of gun violence among gangs are highest where governments lack authority, firearms are widely available, and a tradition of weapons use prevails (see Box 5.5).

Levels of violence

Levels of gang violence also appear dichotomous, with regions exhibiting low or high levels. Violence mostly seems to follow firearms, with North and South America (except Canada) and Africa exhibiting high levels of violence, in contrast to Europe and Asia-Pacific, which have low levels.[27] Although there are exceptions, by and large it appears that levels of violence are contingent upon the propensity of gangs to employ arms during conflict, the ability of states to control this behaviour, and traditions of violence (Klein, Weerman, and Thornberry, 2006).

Levels of violence are contingent upon the propensity of gangs to employ arms during conflict.

Motives for violence

Motives for gang violence are remarkably similar across regions. Common themes in the literature include racial or ethnic conflict, economic gain, and respect or power. Research has highlighted the 'spur of the moment' and highly escalatory nature of gang violence, which can stem from turf disputes and be instigated by wrong looks (Townsend, 2009; White, 2006b, p. 2). Gang violence can stem from long-standing rivalries or contemporary conflicts, but across the regions it appears driven by 'codes' for violence that vary according to cultural differences (Anderson, 1999). If motives are similar across regions and gun possession is variable, then it is tempting to explain differences in levels of violence by differences in the availability of firearms as well as the ability of the state to control these weapons.

Victims of violence

One of the most consistent findings from US gang violence research is that the targets of violence are typically other gang members (Howell, 1999; Maxson, 1999). A review of the Eurogang literature also reveals that while non-gang individuals (such as local business owners or youths of other ethnic origins) were often targets of gang-related crimes, victims of violent crime were most often other gang members (Klein, Weerman, and Thornberry, 2006). Most gun violence in Manchester is also gang-on-gang (Bullock and Tilley, 2002). As the violence associated with a criminal event increases—such as from property damage or theft to aggravated assault or homicide—the likelihood that the target of that act is a member of a rival group appears to increase as well.

Location of violence

Given the street-oriented nature of gangs, it should be no surprise that gang violence largely occurs in public areas. Whether it be drive-by shootings in residential neighbourhoods, large fights in city centres, robbing buses, or grenade use on public streets, gang violence is overwhelmingly public violence. In these contexts, guns are the weapon of choice, in particular larger-calibre handguns. Fully automatic weapons are highly prized, but difficult to obtain; semi-automatic weapons are relatively easy to obtain (Legault and Lizotte, 2009). Where available, these weapons are more lethal and create greater collateral damage than other firearms, owing to their much higher rate of fire. This is one reason why they are highly prized by individuals deeply involved in gangs and violence (Thornberry et al., 2003). It is the public nature of gang violence that, for many communities, defines the 'gang problem', fuelling fear and intimidation in many parts of the world.

EXPLAINING GANG VIOLENCE

Gang violence does not happen in a vacuum. Explanations for gang violence must consider factors from a variety of domains. Explanations of gang violence often fail to recognize that gangs are groups composed of individuals that exist in a broader social context. It is the intersection between individual, group, and society that is missing in most attempts to understand gangs, gang members, and gang crime (Short, 1974; 1998). A more sophisticated understanding of gang violence would account for time, space, context, process, and social factors. Equally important, it is necessary to understand *why* gang membership is associated with an increase in violent actions, both for offenders and for victims.

Two different models can be used to explain gang violence. One focuses on the intersection between environmental and individual factors; the other emphasizes social processes. In the first approach, time, location, opportunity, and lifestyles converge in specific acts of gang violence. The social process approach stresses the importance of contagion, retaliation, threat, and group conflict. In the first model, violence is rooted in the lifestyle associated with gang membership, while in the second it is tied to processes associated with the promotion of gang activity. While the two approaches undoubtedly overlap, taken together they illustrate vividly that gang membership is a key factor in the rise in violence.

Environment, individuals, and routine activites

Gang violence does not happen in a vacuum.

Changes in the social environment can favour the emergence of gang violence. Factors such as poverty, population movement, race, and ethnicity, as well as the spatial concentration of gang violence, appear key. For example, in the 1960s and 1970s many US cities saw their middle-class residents leave for the suburbs, creating a concentration of disadvantaged residents vying for limited resources in city centres. The migration patterns of immigrant groups appear especially important to gang formation (Decker, Van Gemert, and Pyrooz, 2009). In general terms, the gang violence literature emphasizes the relationship between gang homicide and 'social disorganization' factors such as relative poverty, instability, and social change. Gang homicide often conforms to classic patterns of neighbourhood social disorganization and can be distinguished from non-gang homicide according to neighbourhood context (Rosenfeld, Bray, and Egley, 1999; Curry and Spergel, 1988).

These findings are echoed in a series of spatial studies in neighbourhoods in Chicago (Block and Block, 1993; Curry and Spergel, 1988; Mares, 2010), South Los Angeles (Robinson, 2009; Tita, Riley, and Greenwood, 2003), and Boston (Kennedy, Braga, and Piehl, 1998). They all report that gang homicides were geographically concentrated, with only limited areas of the city experiencing turf and drug market competition. Lower levels of social control—area abandonment and less guardianship—increase the likelihood that an area may become gang space (Tita, Cohen, and Engberg, 2005). The onset of gangs in already disadvantaged neighbourhoods exacerbates crime and makes intervention much more difficult. The ability of neighbourhoods to control the behaviour of youth, including gangs, is related to the strength of relationships that regulate conduct. Yet such relationships are weak in many disadvantaged neighbourhoods, leaving them less capable of controlling gang behaviour (Pyrooz, Fox, and Decker, 2010).

Explanations of gang violence that emphasize space are not complete, however, without considering the individual. Routine activities approaches underscore the convergence of the offender and victim at a specific time and place (Cohen and Felson, 1979; Felson, 2002). One such approach, centred on gang membership lifestyle, highlights risky routine activities that appear associated with gang violence (Hindelang, Gottfredson, and Garofalo, 1978; Taylor

et al. 2008). For example, longitudinal research has found that gang membership corresponds with a general increase in the commission of criminal offences (Thornberry et al., 2003). Some of this increase may be a product of gang-promoting activities (such as group fights or gang graffiti), while another component may stem from gang lifestyle (such as drug dealing or robbery). Gang lifestyles, in other words, seem to create more *opportunities* both for committing violent offences and for being victimized.

The social processes approach

The social process approach to gang violence emphasizes the role of the gang itself—as opposed to the individual gang member—and provides a more contextual description of displays of such violence. In the words of one researcher, 'neither individual characteristics nor social conditions kill people. "Youth" does not pull a trigger nor anomie strangle a victim' (Papachristos, 2009, p. 75). In other words, environmental and individual-level explanations may be *predictive* and *correlated* with gang homicide, but they are not *causal*; 'demography is not destiny' (Wright and Decker, 1996). In fact, gang violence often appears episodic, with peaks and troughs. Social process explanations of gang violence look beyond environmental and individual factors to highlight the social processes that fuel the escalation of violence.

Gang violence often appears episodic with peaks and troughs.

Interviews with gang members in St. Louis reveal a 'contagion' effect that marked incidents of violence, where gang members reported that their actions were more the result of retaliation or defensive action than premeditated or offensive action (Decker, 1996; Loftin, 1984). The concept of 'threat' can help explain such situations. Threat—whether real or perceived—during active periods of gang membership is the enhanced awareness of victimization and disrespect. Turf, rivalries, drug markets, and graffiti all serve as critical, yet haphazard, symbols of threat that can spark bouts of violence. Yet the key determinant of threat is the belief, generally reinforced by specific action, that gun violence is real, near, and likely (Decker, 1996; Anderson, 1999).

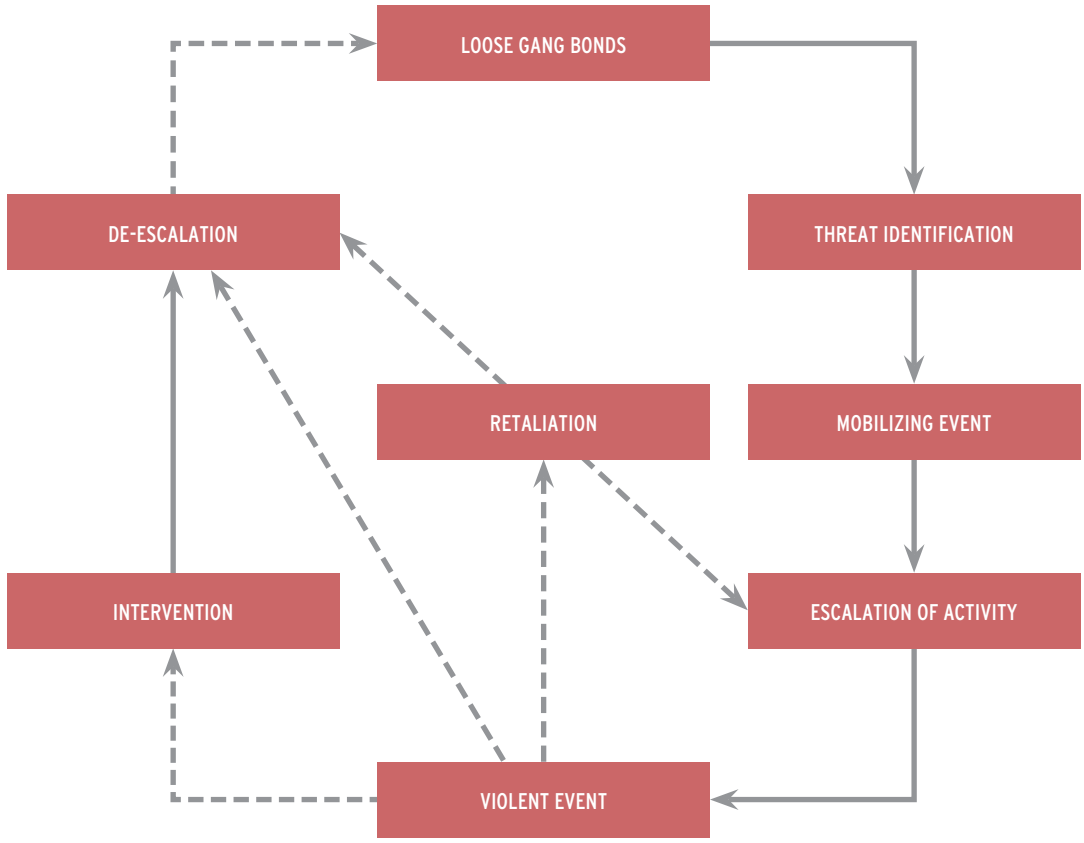
The organizational and normative structure of gangs and gang violence can be conceived in terms of a series of escalating and de-escalating stages, specifically:

1) loose bonds to the gang;
2) collective identification of threat, which increases gang cohesion;
3) a mobilizing event;
4) escalation of activity;
5) violent event;
6) rapid de-escalation; and
7) retaliation (adapted and expanded from Decker, 1996, p. 262).

Figure 5.3 adapts this model, including steps that typically lead to the de-escalation of conflict, namely, intervention (such as police deterrent, arrest, involvement of influential community groups, truces) and 'devastating violence' (such as the loss of leader or demoralizing events). As these stages of escalation and de-escalation do not appear culture- or country-specific, they may have relevance to other regions and societies. Such processes have a general character and transcend country borders.

Incidents of disrespect have been termed a 'gift' that has to be met with retaliation (Papachristos, 2009, p. 80). Nearly all of the gang homicides committed in Chicago in 1994 (98 per cent) were a result of expressive or symbolic

Figure 5.3 **Modelling the sequential nature of gang violence**



Source: adapted and expanded from Decker (1996)

threats (such as an argument or altercation) rather than instrumental factors (such as money or drugs), compared to 67 per cent of non-gang homicides. Furthermore, despite the transitory nature of gangs in Chicago, gang homicides appear institutionalized in that they persist over time (Papachristos, 2009, pp. 90–91, 100). In interviews conducted as part of the same study, Chicago gang members stressed the importance of pre-empting incidents of turf encroachment and disrespect in order to preserve the status of the gang (Papachristos, 2009, p. 104),[28] reinforcing the conclusion that gang homicide in the city was essentially expressive or symbolic in nature.

Although the 'threat' perspective offers a persuasive explanation of gang violence in certain contexts, it is only one piece of the puzzle. Research in the United States has uncovered a wide range of factors that seem to underpin gang-motivated and gang-affiliated violence. Threat or contagion may be the driving factor for some types of violent acts but not others. If two people are in similar situations with high-risk lifestyles, and one is in a gang while the other is not, they do not have an equal risk of being the victim of a violent confrontation. It appears other attributes of gang membership, beyond the defence of turf and reputation, contribute to higher rates of victimization. Time, space, neighbourhood, routine activities, and lifestyle work in tandem with social processes, including threat and contagion, in fuelling gang violence. This conclusion is consistent with those of research conducted on gangs, gang members, and gang violence elsewhere in the world. In general, gangs and gang violence appear strikingly similar

across regions. Most often, it is the presence of arms, in particular firearms, that signals the greatest differences in gang violence.

CONCLUSION

There is great variation in the presence of gangs across the world. The likelihood of gangs emerging is conditioned primarily by criminal opportunities, the ability of the state to provide security and enforce the law, and prevailing norms and economic conditions. Gangs are less likely to arise in force in countries where a strong taboo on the use of violence exists, where criminal opportunities are rare due to a strong state apparatus, or where there are few deep motivations to engage in illicit activity. Conversely, weak state structures and a long history of societal violence contribute to the likelihood that gangs will emerge.

The presence of gangs appears to be a risk factor for armed violence regardless of context. This would appear to be the case because the motivations for gang members to use violence are surprisingly similar the world over. Almost universally, gang violence is a product of racial and ethnic conflict, economic competition, and the question of respect and power. Gang violence typically breaks out over territorial disputes and rapidly escalates. When gang members kill, they almost always kill other gang members, another fact true nearly everywhere in the world.

Despite these cross-regional similarities, available evidence shows a significant split in regions affected by serious gang violence. The deadliest, most heavily armed gangs in the world are found in the Western hemisphere—with the exception of Canada. Central and South America are home to the highest levels of gang-related gun violence in the world—often tied to the smuggling of drugs and human beings. Elsewhere, recorded gang violence levels pale in comparison. In Europe and Australia, gang violence is rare, though increasing.

The picture in Africa and Asia-Pacific remains partly obscure because of a lack of reliable data. While gangs have been documented in both regions, armed groups may be a more serious issue in most cases. In many African countries, for example, arms and disenchanted youths abound, but they are more likely to organize around political rather than expressly criminal goals, though goals may overlap and change over time. The exception on the continent is South Africa, where gangs proliferate.

This chapter has hypothesized that the dichotomy between countries with serious gang violence and those without is explicable primarily as a function of gangs' willingness to use weapons and their level of access to guns. Further research is needed, but gangs that emerge in societies where guns are readily accessible through civilian markets—or where the state is unable to prevent illicit trafficking or is susceptible to corruption—generally possess and use significant arsenals. Where guns are widely used, gang homicide rates can reach up to 100 times the rates for society as a whole. In countries with heavily armed gangs, the death toll from intra-gang violence can represent a significant fraction of overall homicides, rendering neighbourhoods and some entire city areas off limits, with a wide range of devastating direct and indirect impacts.

The current research base on gang violence remains overwhelmingly focused on US—and to some extent European—gangs, although this is changing. If our understanding of the relationship between gangs and armed violence is to come into sharper focus, however, it will require far more research on the many 'blank areas' where gangs are known to exist but for which data has been sparse. A more sophisticated understanding of gang violence, sensitive to context, culture, and country, is a long-term, but essential, goal if knowledge is to inform effective responses.

ENDNOTES

1 Townsend, for example, discusses the murder of Sean 'Bill' Francis, a community activist and gang leader. Francis's body was found riddled with 50 bullets in a suburban Port of Spain community. As Townsend states, '[s]uch violent deaths are not all that unusual' (Townsend, 2009, p. 18).

2 Controlling gang violence has become the top priority of this agricultural city of 150,000. During a one-week span in January 2009, the community was the site of six gang-related homicides. According to news reports, the city logged a record 29 homicides for 2009—all gang-related (KSBW.com, 2009).

3 See, for example, recent reports on apparently gang-related stabbings: BBC (2009); Mail Online (2009).

4 Klein (1995); Covey (2003); Hagedorn (2007); Johnson and Muhlhausen (2005).

5 Decker and Weerman (2005); Hagedorn (2007); Klein et al. (2001); Van Gemert, Peterson, and Lien (2008).

6 The chapter separates the Western hemisphere into two regions: (1) the United States and Canada, and (2) Latin American countries. To conform with the existing research patterns of the Eurogang network, the findings from the Russian Federation are discussed in the Europe section.

7 See, for example, Bursik and Grasmick (1993); Ralphs, Medina, and Aldridge (2009); Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls (1997).

8 The National Gang Center sends a questionnaire to law enforcement agencies. The same respondent is typically surveyed each year. The survey maintains a response rate of approximately 90 per cent (NGC, 2009).

9 The National Gang Center also collects law enforcement estimates of the number of gang members in different jurisdictions. While the number of gang members in a jurisdiction is an 'estimate', thus making the gang homicide rate an estimate as well, there are no better sources other than law enforcement to obtain statistics on gang-related patterns. The police are regularly interacting with gangs and gang members, as they are the sole governmental unit that consistently observes, identifies, documents, and addresses city-level gang trends. Some researchers have collected national-level data (Maxson and Klein, 1990; Miller, 1982; Needle and Stapleton, 1983); however, none of this research has been systematically collected over time.

10 Consult UNODC (2009); Eurostat (n.d.); Dearden and Jones (2008); FBI (n.d.).

11 See Decker and Van Winkle (1996), Fleisher (1995; 1998), Hagedorn (1988), Padilla (1992), Sanchez-Jankowski (1991), Short and Strodtbeck (1965), Thrasher (1927), Venkatesh (1997), and Vigil (1988).

12 See Esbensen and Huizinga (1993) and Thornberry et al. (2003).

13 Baron (1997); Gatti et al. (2005); Gordon (1998; 2000); Morselli (2008).

14 See Dekleva (2001), Feixa et al. (2008), Gatti et al. (2005), Lien (2005), Van Gemert (2001), Van Gemert and Fleisher (2005).

15 For example, compare Manchester to Chicago, Illinois, a 'traditional' gang city—meaning one with long-standing gang activity. Papachristos (2009, p. 89) reports that over the course of a nearly a decade (1994–2002), gang homicides comprised an average of 35 per cent of Chicago's total homicides.

16 These estimates should be interpreted with caution due to variation in data collection methods.

17 Arana (2005); DeCesare (2003); Papachristos (2005); Reisman (2006); Rodgers (1999); Thale and Falkenburger (2006).

18 Having identified MS-13, or Mara Salvatrucha, as among the most dangerous gangs in the United States, the Federal Bureau of Investigation has set up an MS-13 National Gang Task Force. See FBI (2005).

19 Escobar (2001); Maldonado (2001); Mejia (2001); Salguero (2001).

20 See also Houston and Prinsloo (1998).

21 See Kynoch (1999; 2005), Glaser (2000), and Pinnock and Douglas-Hamiltion (1998).

22 See Burnett (1999) and Pinnock and Douglas-Hamilton (1998).

23 See also Berg and Kinnes (2009).

24 See also Ter Haar (2000).

25 See White (2006a).

26 See also White et al. (1999).

27 Researchers have found no evidence of structured gang violence in Europe or Australia (Klein, Weerman, and Thornberry, 2006; White, 2006a).

28 Consider the following interview and description from Papachristos's research (2009, p. 104):

> *This is our 'hood, see? We got no choice but to protect it. If we back down, we ain't shit. Everyone will think we ain't nothin' but a bunch of punk-ass bitches. . . . How can we call ourselves 2-6, if we don't got this corner? We always had this spot. It's ours, man, no matter what those fuckers [Latin Lovers] come at us with. . . .Without that, what do we got? Nothing. Might as well join the fucking Boy Scouts if you ain't got a spot. If we back down, we look weak, man. . . . Can't let no slobs [Latin Lovers] try and just take that spot away.*

Papachristos explains:

> *[The interview subject's] colorful remarks point to two important aspects of gang turf. First, that the piece of turf in question (literally, a street corner) is partially what defines the Two-Six: it is a part of their history, collective memory, and persona. Second, defense of the spot is connected not only to such identity claims but also to positions of dominance.*

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