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## Report: Anti-Gang Strategy Failing Badly

Report: Anti-Gang Strategy Should Focus on Intervention, Not Imprisonment

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*The Associated Press*

### LOS ANGELES

Anti-gang legislation and police crackdowns are failing so badly that they are strengthening the criminal organizations and making U.S. cities more dangerous, according to a report being released Wednesday.

Mass arrests, stiff prison sentences often served with other gang members and other strategies that focus on law enforcement rather than intervention actually strengthen gang ties and further marginalize angry young men, according to the Justice Policy Institute, a Washington, D.C., think tank that advocates alternatives to incarceration.

"We're talking about 12-, 13-, 14-, 15-year-olds whose involvement in gangs is likely to be ephemeral unless they are pulled off the street and put in prison, where they will come out with much stronger gang allegiances," said Judith Greene, co-author of "Gang Wars: The Failure of Enforcement Tactics and the Need for Effective Public Safety Strategies."

The report is based on interviews and analysis of hundreds of pages of previously published statistics and reports. And though it is valid and accurate, the ideas raised in it are not new, said Arthur Lurigio, a psychologist and criminal justice professor at Loyola University of Chicago.

"These approaches, although they sound novel, are just old wine in new bottles," he said. "Gang crime and violence in poor urban neighborhoods have been a problem since the latter parts of the 19th century."

Lurigio, other academics and gang intervention workers have echoed elements of the report that found gangs need to be viewed as a symptom of other problems in poor communities, such as violence, teen pregnancy, drug abuse and unemployment.

The report says Los Angeles and Chicago are losing the war on gangs because they focus on law enforcement and are short on intervention.

It cites a report this year by civil rights attorney Connie Rice, who was hired by Los Angeles to evaluate its failing anti-gang programs. Her report called for an initiative to provide jobs and recreational programs in impoverished neighborhoods.

Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and Police Chief William Bratton both commended Rice's report. But in February, they unveiled a strategy that focused on targeting the city's worst gangs with arrests and civil injunctions that prohibit known gang members from associating with one another in public. Rice describes the city's policy on arresting the city's estimated 39,000 gang members as "stuck on stupid."

Wes McBride, executive director of the California Gang Investigators Association, dismissed the findings of the report, which he said was written by "thug-huggers." The investigators association is a professional organization for police officers.

"Are they saying we can't put a thief in jail, we can't put a murderer in jail, that we should spank them, put a diaper on them, pat them on the bottom, hug them and let them go?" McBride said. "It's obviously a think tank report, and they didn't leave their ivory tower and spend any time on the streets."

"Gang Wars" also criticizes politicians who overstate the threat of criminal gangs and seek tougher sentences.

Greene specifically criticized a bill introduced by Sens. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., and Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, that would make it illegal to be a member of a criminal gang and would make it easier to prosecute some minors as adults.

But Feinstein spokesman Scott Gerber said the bill also calls for spending more than \$400 million on gang prevention and intervention programs, which he said would be the largest single investment of its kind.

Associated Press writer Dan Strumpf in Chicago contributed to this report.

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