



Bureau of Justice Statistics

# Special Report

October 2010, NCJ 230071

## Census of Law Enforcement Gang Units, 2007

# Gang Units in Large Local Law Enforcement Agencies, 2007

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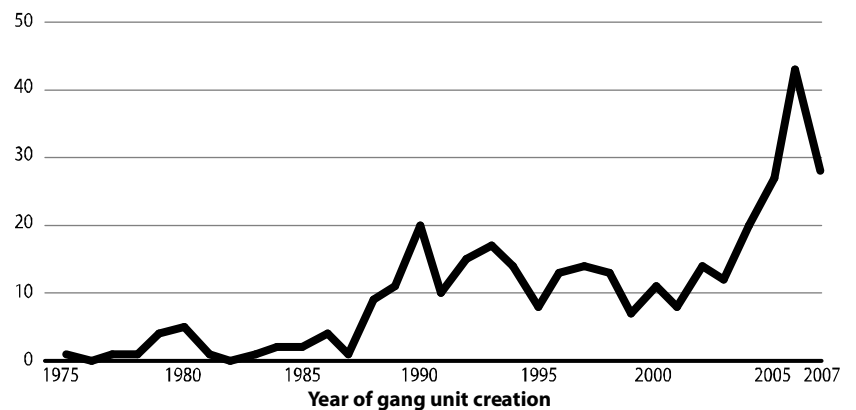
In 2007, 365 of the nation's large police departments and sheriffs' offices had specialized gang units, employing more than 4,300 sworn officers dedicated to addressing gang-related activities. Thirty-five percent (35%) of these units were established between 2004 and 2007, suggesting a recent heightened interest in using specialized units to address gang issues (figure 1).

Gangs and gang-related activities are pervasive, nationwide problems. Gangs can contribute to higher violent crime rates, induce community deterioration through behaviors such as vandalism, graffiti, and drug dealing, and increase public fear of victimization. One way for law enforcement agencies to address gang-related problems is to form specialized gang units. The consolidation of

Figure 1.

Number of specialized gang units established per year in large law enforcement agencies that had 100 or more sworn officers, 1975-2007

Number of currently active gang units



Note: Data on the year of gang unit creation available for 92.3% of gang units.

### Highlights

- In 2007, 365 of the nation's large (100 or more sworn officers) police departments and sheriffs' offices had specialized gang units, employing a median of 5 officers per unit and more than 4,300 full-time equivalent sworn officers nationwide.
- About 15% of local law enforcement gang units regularly dealt with organized crime families (15%) and terrorist organizations (14%).
- Of the 337 gang units that reported their year of establishment, 35% were formed between 2004 and 2007. The year 2006 marked the peak of gang unit formation with 43 new units created.
- About 2 in 3 gang units spent the greatest percentage of time on either intelligence gathering (33%) or investigative functions (32%).
- About 9 in 10 gang units monitored gang graffiti (94%), tracked individual gang members (93%), monitored internet sites for communication among gang members (93%), engaged in directed patrols (91%), and performed undercover surveillance operations (87%).
- About 30% of specialized gang units examined a prospective officer's financial and credit history before allowing the officer to serve in the unit.
- Fewer than half (45%) of gang units collaborated with the state or local prosecutor's office to the extent that the office assigned personnel to regularly work with the unit.
- Nearly all (98%) specialized gang units shared criminal intelligence information with neighboring law enforcement agencies.
- Fewer than 20% of gang units submitted records to the FBI's Violent Gang and Terrorist Organization File (VGTOF) in 2007.

an agency's gang enforcement activities and resources into a single unit can allow gang unit officers to develop specific expertise and technical skills related to local gang characteristics, behaviors, and gang prevention and suppression.

The 2007 Census of Law Enforcement Gang Units (CLEGU) collected data on 365 local police departments and sheriffs' offices that had 100 or more sworn officers with at least one officer dedicated solely to addressing gang activity. Based primarily on findings from the CLEGU, this report details the types of problems handled by specialized gang units, followed by findings about unit operations, gang officers, and the attributes of the agencies and jurisdictions that contain these specialized units.

### Majority of gang units routinely dealt with street gangs, tagger groups, and motorcycle gangs

Specialized gang units most commonly dealt with street gangs (98%), tagger groups (80%), and motorcycle gangs (57%) in 2007 (table 1). Over 40% of these units routinely responded to the activities of prison gangs (43%) and extremist groups (43%), such as white supremacy organizations and other hate groups. It was less common for gang units to

regularly deal with the activities of organized crime families (15%) and terrorist organizations (14%). Gang units located in large local law enforcement agencies reported routinely addressing the gang-related activities of four different types of gangs, on average (not shown in table).

With the exception of street gangs and tagger groups that emulate the gang lifestyle but commit few actual crimes, the percentage of units that addressed various gang types was slightly higher among units serving a population of 500,000 residents or more than among units serving fewer than 50,000 residents. By region, units in the West were more likely to encounter motorcycle gangs, prison gangs, and extremist groups than units in other regions. Units in the Northeast were more likely to encounter organized crime families and terrorist organizations. Single-officer gang units were slightly more likely to report dealing with extremist groups and motorcycle gangs, compared to larger units.

**Table 1.**  
Number and type of groups routinely addressed by gang units, 2007

Type of group	Gang units	
	Number	Percent
<b>Total gang units</b>	365	100 %
Street gang <sup>a</sup>	357	98 %
Tagger or party crew <sup>b</sup>	290	80
Motorcycle gang	207	57
Prison gang	158	43
Extremist group	155	43
Organized crime family	53	15
Terrorist organization	51	14
Other <sup>c</sup>	14	4

Note: Includes gang units located within local police departments and sheriffs' offices with 100 or more sworn officers. The CLEGU did not provide respondents with definitions of the types of groups. Each gang unit identified the types of groups routinely addressed based on internal classification of area gangs.

<sup>a</sup>Data on street gangs available for 363 (99.5%) gang units.

<sup>b</sup>Groups that emulate the gang lifestyle, but commit few actual crimes.

<sup>c</sup>Other responses included drug trafficking groups, hybrid gangs (4 responses each), school groups, juvenile gangs, and county jail groups.

## Census of Law Enforcement Gang Units (CLEGU) and the Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics (LEMAS) survey

The Census of Law Enforcement Gang Units (CLEGU) was designed to gather information on the practices and procedures of gang units. To identify law enforcement agencies with a gang unit or at least one officer dedicated solely to addressing gang activity, researchers conducted a phone survey of the 1,084 local police departments and sheriff's agencies in the United States with 100 or more sworn officers. Agencies that fit the criterion of having at least one officer whose sole responsibility was to deal with gang issues received the survey questionnaire. The majority of this report is based on the data collected from the 365 agencies that completed the CLEGU questionnaire.

To avoid duplication with other BJS survey efforts, the CLEGU did not collect data on the characteristics of law enforcement agencies with specialized gang units. The BJS 2007 LEMAS survey, which was distributed to all local law enforcement agencies with 100 or more sworn officers, was used to supplement information on the size and operating budgets of the agencies with gang units. The LEMAS survey also included one question pertaining to the presence of a gang unit.

The LEMAS survey produced a higher prevalence rate of gang units among large local law enforcement agencies than was obtained by the CLEGU. Information on the differences between the two data collections, as well as a comparison of the characteristics of agencies with gang units reported in each survey, is detailed in the *Methodology*.

## Over 90% of gang units dealt with gangs that were financed through street-level drug sales

Specialized gang units respond to the particular types of gangs and gang activities within their jurisdiction. One way gangs can be distinguished is by the methods through which they bring in money. Gangs financed through drug trafficking or weapons trafficking, for example, are certainly engaged in serious criminal activity (trafficking at a minimum), while gangs composed of members who maintain legitimate employment may not engage in the same level or frequency of criminal activity. In other words, the financing methods used by gangs within a jurisdiction are a proxy for the range and seriousness of gang crimes addressed by specialized gang units.

The 2007 CLEGU asked gang units to report the financing methods used by gangs in their jurisdictions. Overall, the greatest percentage of units dealt with gangs financed through three methods: street-level drug sales (93%), drug trafficking (88%), and weapons trafficking (71%) (table 2). About half of the gang units encountered gangs financed by dues from paying members who maintained legitimate employment (48%) and gangs that profited from economic crimes (47%),

such as credit card theft, money laundering, and embezzlement. About 4 in 10 units addressed area gangs financed through prostitution (41%) and the sale of forged identity documents (39%).

Gang units in different sized jurisdictions reported variations in the financing methods used by area gangs. With a few exceptions, as population size increased, the percentage of units that encountered each of the different gang financing methods also increased. For example, a quarter (25%) of gang units serving a resident population of under 50,000 dealt with area gangs financed through economic crimes, while 64% of units serving 500,000 residents or more addressed gangs financed through economic crimes.

Because most gang financing methods reported by gang units involved illegal activities, the greater the number of financing methods used by area gangs, the greater the range of gang crimes addressed by specialized gang units. Gang units, on average, encountered 5 different methods of gang financing in 2007. The average number of gang financing methods within a jurisdiction increased based on the population served, from 3 methods among gang units serving fewer than 50,000 residents to 6 among units serving 500,000 residents or more (not shown in table).

Table 2.

**Gang financing methods reported by specialized gang units, by method of financing and population served, 2007**

Method of financing	Total gang units		Percent of gang units by population served				
	Number	Percent	Under 50,000	50,000-99,999	100,000-249,999	250,000-499,999	500,000 or more
<b>Number of gang units</b>	365	100 %	16	96	119	56	78
Street-level drug sales <sup>a</sup>	340	93 %	81 %	94 %	95 %	89 %	95 %
Drug trafficking <sup>a</sup>	320	88	69	89	86	89	92
Weapons trafficking	258	71	50	64	70	73	85
Dues paid by members with legitimate employment	177	48	31	38	53	52	56
Economic crimes <sup>b</sup>	173	47	25	38	45	54	64
Prostitution	150	41	25	32	33	45	65
Sales of forged identity documents	142	39	13	29	34	50	56
Gambling	114	31	38	30	21	32	45
Human trafficking	57	16	6	15	7	13	35
Other <sup>c</sup>	47	13	0	9	18	13	13
Pornography	32	9	0	5	5	7	22

<sup>a</sup>Street-level drug sales typically involve individual sellers who deal in small amounts for personal use rather than for resale. Street-level drug sales are distinguished from drug-trafficking, which involves the production and distribution of large amounts of controlled substances for the purpose of buyer resale.

<sup>b</sup>Includes such offenses as credit card theft, forged checks, money laundering, embezzlement, and mortgage fraud.

<sup>c</sup>Includes such offenses as burglary, robbery, auto theft, theft of auto parts, and extortion.

### Law enforcement agencies in the Northeast formed about 75% of area gang units between 2000 and 2007

Nearly half (48%) of the 337 gang units that reported the year they were established were formed between 2000 and 2007 (table 3). Approximately 13% of the units were created prior to 1990, with the oldest active unit formed in 1975.

About 60% of gang units in the South and 75% of those in the Northeast were established between 2000 and 2007. About a third of the specialized gang units located in the Midwest (31%) and West (30%) were also formed during that time. In contrast, about half of the gang units in the West (46%) and Midwest (52%) reported in the CLEGU were created during the 1990s.

Approximately half (52%) of the 163 gang units formed between 2000 and 2007 were established by law enforcement agencies in the South. Five of the 7 units formed in the 1970s were in law enforcement agencies in the West (not shown in table).

### About 4 in 10 gang units followed a statutorily determined definition of a gang and gang member

About 90% of gang units had at least one formal definition that either a group or an individual had to meet before being classified as a gang or a gang member (table 4). Seventy-seven percent of units utilized formal definitions to classify both gangs

and individual gang members. Ten percent of gang units had no formal definition of a gang or gang member.

Specialized gang units with formal classifications of a gang, gang member, or both used definitions that had been set by a state or municipal statute or created by the unit. About 4 in 10 (44%) gang units used statutorily determined definitions of both a gang and a gang member. Of the units using a statutory definition of either a gang or gang member, a greater percentage used a statute defining a gang (12%) than a gang member (3%).

Regardless of the source of the gang or gang member definition, the defining language varied substantially. Local law enforcement agencies in 2007 did not use a uniform definition of a gang or a gang member.

### About a third of gang units reported spending the greatest percentage of time gathering intelligence in 2007

The CLEGU asked gang units to rank five law enforcement functions—intelligence, investigation, support, suppression, and prevention—in terms of how the unit dedicated its time (table 5). Over 60% of gang units spent the greatest percentage of time either gathering intelligence or investigating gang activity in 2007. About a third (33%) of gang units spent the largest percentage of time gathering intelligence; 32% dedicated the most time to investigating gang activities. A quarter (25%) of

Table 3.

Number of gang units established by decade, and percent of units formed by region, 1970-2007

Decade established	Number of units	Percent of gang units by region*			
		Northeast	Midwest	South	West
<b>Total</b>	337	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %
1970 - 1979	7	0 %	4 %	0 %	5 %
1980 - 1989	36	2	14	7	20
1990 - 1999	131	23	52	35	46
2000 - 2007	163	75	31	58	29
<b>Number of gang units</b>	337	47	52	146	92

Note: Data available for 337 (92%) gang units.

\*Based on the U.S. Census Bureau's division of states into four regions <[http://www.census.gov/geo/www/us\\_regdiv.pdf](http://www.census.gov/geo/www/us_regdiv.pdf)>. See *Methodology* for a listing of states in each region.

Table 4.

Origins of formal definitions used by gang units to classify gangs and gang members, 2007

Origin of definition used to classify a "gang"	Origin of definition used to classify a "gang member"			
	Total row percent	Statutory definition	Gang unit's definition	No definition
<b>Total column percent</b>	100 %	51	36	14
Statutory definition	60 %	44	12	3
Gang unit's definition	21 %	3	18	1
No definition	20 %	4	6	10

Note: Data are based on 363 (99.5%) total gang units that provided data.

gang units reported spending the most time providing support to other components in the agency; 13% reported spending the largest percentage of time on gang suppression activities, such as patrolling gang neighborhoods, initiating field and traffic stops, and making arrests. These findings suggest that most gang units focused more on developing specialized knowledge about area gangs, gang members, and gang activities than on developing specialized tactics for neutralizing gang activities.

Fourteen specialized gang units (4%) reported dedicating the greatest percentage of time to prevention programs, such as providing counseling geared towards at-risk youth or community

education about gangs. Of these 14 units, 5 reported that at least one other function simultaneously occupied the top ranking category (not shown in table).

### More than 9 in 10 gang units monitored gang graffiti and tracked individual gang members

Regardless of how gang units spent the greatest percentage of time, over 90% gathered intelligence about gangs by monitoring gang graffiti (94%) and tracking individual gang members (93%) (table 6). The percentage of gang units monitoring gang-related graffiti decreased among larger gang units, while the percentage of units tracking gang members increased with the size of the unit. Among the 337 units that tracked individual gang members, 91% used a computerized tracking system, such as GangNET®, CalGang®,<sup>1</sup> or a gang-tracking system created within the department. Less than half (46%) of the units also used a paper system to track gang members.

About 9 in 10 gang units engaged in undercover surveillance operations (87%) and monitored internet sites for communication among or about gang members and gang activities (93%). Fewer than half of the gang units used technologies, such

<sup>1</sup>GangNET® <<http://www.sra.com/gangnet/>> and the CalGang® system are registered trademarks of SRA International <<http://ag.ca.gov/calgang/>>.

Table 5.

#### Law enforcement functions performed by gang units, by percent of time spent and average ranking, 2007

Function	Percent of gang units dedicating the largest share of time	Average ranking
Intelligence	33 %	2.2
Investigation	32	2.4
Support	25	2.7
Suppression	13	3.2
Prevention programs	4	4.3

Note: Data available for 363 (99%) gang units. The CPDO asked gang units to rank five functions in terms of how the unit spent the largest (1=greatest) to least (5=smallest) amount of time. Percents do not sum to 100% due to some gang units assigning a "1" to multiple functions.

Table 6.

#### Percent of gang units performing operational anti-gang activities, by number of full-time equivalent (FTE) sworn officers per unit, 2007

Gang unit operations	Total gang units	Percent of gang units by number of FTE officers <sup>a</sup>			
		1	2 to 5	6 to 10	11 or more
<b>Number of gang units</b>	365	44	142	93	82
<b>Intelligence operations</b>					
Monitor gang graffiti	94 %	95 %	96 %	95 %	89 %
Track individual gang members—	93 %	86 %	92 %	97 %	96 %
Through a computerized system <sup>b</sup>	91	90	89	93	94
Through a paper system <sup>b</sup>	46	45	48	46	44
<b>Investigative operations</b>					
Undercover activities					
Surveillance operations	87 %	61 %	87 %	91 %	96 %
Gang infiltration	23	5	18	29	35
Investigative technologies used—					
Monitor internet sites	93 %	86 %	94 %	96 %	93 %
Crime analysis software	54	43	49	56	68
GPS tracking devices	36	14	29	46	49
Closed circuit cameras in gang areas	35	23	27	39	55
Electronic listening devices	30	16	20	38	48
<b>Suppression operations</b>					
Patrols					
Directed at high crime areas	91 %	77 %	87 %	98 %	98 %
Routine	76	59	77	83	74
Foot	48	39	47	51	51
Bicycle	17	11	16	24	13
<b>Support operations</b>					
Respond to general calls for service	41 %	45 %	42 %	42 %	33 %

<sup>a</sup>Data on gang unit size available for 361 (99%) gang units. FTE is a computed statistic calculated by adding the number full-time officers to the number of part-time officers divided by two, under the assumption that each part-time officer works half the number of hours as a full-time officer.

<sup>b</sup>Percentages based on gang units that tracked individual gang members.



as GPS tracking devices (36%), closed circuit cameras in gang areas (35%), and electronic listening devices (30%), to assist in the investigation of suspected gang crimes. Less than a quarter (23%) of gang units sent undercover officers to infiltrate area gangs. The likelihood of a gang unit performing undercover operations or utilizing various investigative technologies increased as the number of sworn officers in the unit increased.

Most (93%) gang units engaged in some form of patrol to carry out anti-gang suppression operations (not shown in table). The majority of gang units performed directed patrols targeted to high crime areas (91%) and routine patrols (76%). A smaller percentage of gang units conducted foot (48%) and bicycle (17%) patrols.

About 40% of gang units responded to general calls for service in 2007. About half of gang units with one officer responded to calls for service (46%), compared to a third of units with 11 or more full-time equivalent (FTE) sworn officers (33%).

### Gang units spent the largest share of investigative time on serious violent felony (44%) and narcotics investigations (29%)

In 2007, gang units spent the largest share of investigative time on incidents involving serious violent felonies (44%) (table 7). Narcotics offenses took up 29% of gang units' investigative time, followed by investigations into graffiti (16%), and other offenses. Other offenses included economic offenses, such as mortgage fraud and credit card fraud (5%), immigration offenses (3%), and prostitution (2%) (not shown in table). Time spent investigating one type of offense over another reflects the types of offenses attributed to area gangs and to the complexity of the investigation by offense category.

The time spent investigating specific offenses varied by the type of law enforcement agency (local police department or sheriff's office) and the size of the gang unit. Among gang units located in police departments, the time spent investigating serious violent felonies increased as the size of the unit increased. In contrast, the percentage of time these gang units spent investigating graffiti offenses decreased as the size of the unit increased. Time spent investigating narcotics and other offenses did not change consistently based on the size of a local police department's gang unit.

Among units located in sheriffs' offices, the percentage of time spent investigating graffiti offenses ranged from 33% among single-officer units to 5% for units with more than 10 FTE sworn officers. The percentage of time spent on narcotics investigations more than doubled from 15% to 32% as the size of the unit increased from 1 to 2 or more sworn officers.

### Nearly half of gang units took part in prevention programs with youth gang members

Distributing gang prevention literature to schools, parents, and other community groups and members was the most common gang prevention activity (74% of gang units) in 2007 (table 8). About 6 in 10 (56%) gang units participated in activities geared toward keeping area youth from joining gangs, such as mentoring programs, social skills and leadership training, drug prevention groups, and self-esteem building programs. Nearly half of all units took part in gang prevention activities with gang-involved youth (48%) or joined with faith-based organizations in gang prevention programs (49%).

Table 7.

Time spent by gang units on crime investigations, by type of offense, type of unit, and number of full-time equivalent (FTE) sworn officers, 2007

Number of officers	Number of units	Average percentage of time gang units spent investigating—			
		Serious violent felonies	Narcotics	Graffiti	Other offenses <sup>a</sup>
<b>Total gang units</b>	365	44 %	29 %	16 %	11 %
<b>Local police units<sup>b</sup></b>	268	44 %	29 %	16 %	10 %
1 officer	32	35	27	26	12
2-5	96	42	30	16	12
6-10	73	47	30	15	8
11 officers or more	71	53	27	12	8
<b>Sheriff's office units<sup>b</sup></b>	97	41 %	30 %	16 %	13 %
1 officer	12	45	15	33	8
2-5	46	40	32	17	12
6-10	20	37	33	15	16
11 officers or more	17	48	33	5	13

<sup>a</sup>Includes economic offenses, such as credit card fraud, forged checks, and mortgage fraud, prostitution, and immigration offenses.

<sup>b</sup>Data on gang unit size available for 361 (99%) gang units. FTE is a computed statistic calculated by adding the number full-time officers to the number of part-time officers divided by two, under the assumption that each part-time officer works half the number of hours as a full-time officer.

A third of units (33%) had officers who taught prevention programs, such as the Gang Resistance Education And Training Program (G.R.E.A.T.). Overall, a greater percentage of larger gang units participated in prevention activities, compared to smaller gang units.

### About 6 in 10 gang units participated in a local or regional gang task force in 2007

The majority of gang units engaged in some form of collaboration with federal law enforcement, other neighboring law enforcement, or other criminal justice agencies in 2007. Collaborating with federal, local, or regional law enforcement or other criminal

justice agencies was more common among large gang units (11 sworn officers or more) than among small units (1 sworn officer) (table 9).

Over half of all gang units worked with federal law enforcement agencies, such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) or Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), through participation in a federal gang task force (52%), for operational planning purposes (58%), or in the investigation of crimes (77%). About 6 in 10 (63%) gang units were part of a gang task force in which the unit combined its resources with other regional law enforcement agencies to address area gang activity.

Table 8.

### Percent of gang units engaging in prevention activities, by type of activity and number of full-time equivalent (FTE) gang unit officers, 2007

Prevention activities <sup>b</sup>	Total gang units	Percent of gang units by number of FTE officers <sup>a</sup>			
		1	2 to 5	6 to 10	11 or more
<b>Number of gang units</b>	351	42	135	90	81
<b>Distribution of gang prevention literature</b>	74 %	62 %	73 %	78 %	80 %
<b>Activities with youth—</b>					
Not involved in gangs	56	48	56	59	59
Gang involved	48	45	42	52	57
<b>Activities with faith-based organizations</b>	49	33	49	47	62
<b>Instruction of prevention programs<sup>c</sup></b>	33	24	24	38	47
<b>Other<sup>d</sup></b>	19	10	19	21	23

<sup>a</sup>Data on gang unit size available for 361 (99%) of gang units. FTE is a computed statistic calculated by adding the number full-time officers to the number of part-time officers divided by two, under the assumption that each part-time officer works half the number of hours as a full-time officer.

<sup>b</sup>Data on prevention activities available for 351 (96%) of gang units.

<sup>c</sup>Includes instruction of the Gang Resistance Education And Training (G.R.E.A.T.) program.

<sup>d</sup>Includes community meetings and outreach programs, gang awareness seminars and presentations, participation in neighborhood watch programs, partnering with community-based organizations, participating in police activity leagues, and working with schools and school administrators.

Table 9.

### Gang unit collaboration with other law enforcement or criminal justice agencies, by type of collaboration and number of full-time equivalent (FTE) gang unit officers, 2007

Type of collaboration	Total gang units	Percent of gang units by number of FTE officers*			
		1	2 to 5	6 to 10	11 or more
<b>Number of gang units</b>	365	44	142	93	82
<b>Federal law enforcement</b>					
Investigation of crimes	77 %	55 %	69 %	88 %	90 %
Enforcement and operational planning	58	39	48	68	77
Federal task force participation	52	36	43	59	67
Screening of cases	46	32	33	59	63
<b>Local or regional law enforcement agencies</b>					
Sharing of criminal intelligence	98 %	95 %	97 %	100 %	98 %
Sharing of non-criminal intelligence	89	89	84	94	94
Gang task force participation	63	50	61	65	70
<b>Criminal justice agencies</b>					
Probation	48 %	39 %	42 %	57 %	57 %
State or local prosecutor	45	30	39	53	56
Parole	43	39	37	45	55
Detention facilities	36	39	31	35	46
Housing authority	9	7	7	9	15

\*Data on gang unit size available for 361 (99%) gang units. FTE is a computed statistic calculated by adding the number full-time officers to the number of part-time officers divided by two, under the assumption that each part-time officer works half the number of hours as a full-time officer.

Approximately 3 in 4 (72%) gang units regularly worked with personnel in at least one non-law enforcement criminal justice agency (not shown in table). The largest percentage of gang units collaborated with probation agencies (48%), followed by state or local prosecutor offices (45%), parole agencies (43%), and detention facilities (36%). Fewer than 10% of gang units regularly worked with a housing authority.

### Nearly all gang units (98%) shared criminal intelligence information with neighboring law enforcement agencies

Criminal intelligence information refers to data used by law enforcement to identify an individual or specific group suspected of being involved in a particular criminal activity. All but two gang units shared criminal intelligence information with other units in their department in 2007 (table 10). Nearly all units (98%) also shared intelligence information with department command staff and neighboring law enforcement agencies. The majority of units (70%) provided intelligence information to other criminal justice agencies, such as prisons, jails, and probation departments.

A smaller percentage of gang units shared non-intelligence information with other units (93%), the command staff within the department (93%), and neighboring law enforcement agencies (89%) than the percentage of units that shared criminal intelligence information. This suggests that it was more common for a gang unit to communicate information that could assist in making arrests than to share general knowledge about gangs and gang activities. About half of gang units shared non-intelligence information with the public (54%),

non-criminal justice agencies (52%), and media outlets (46%).

### Fewer than 20% of gang units submitted records to the FBI's Violent Gang and Terrorist Organization File in 2007

The FBI's National Crime Information Center houses the Violent Gang and Terrorist Organization File (VGTOF), which provides law enforcement with a secure way to exchange identifying information about specific criminal gangs and gang members. In 2007, 17% of gang units (61 units) submitted records to the VGTOF (table 11). A submission refers to any entry into the file, such as establishing a new record for a group not previously included in the file, updating descriptive information about a particular gang member, noting the association between two known gang members, or adding cautionary notes regarding any threats made or the types of weapons carried by a gang or gang member. The percent of gang units that submitted VGTOF records was lower among units with more than 10 sworn officers (10%) compared to units with fewer than 10 sworn officers (about 19%) (not shown in table). The CLEGU asked gang units participating in the VGTOF to provide the number of submission to the VGTOF for the previous month. Over half of the gang units (57%) did not have any submissions during the previous month (not shown in table). The 26 gang units that reported at least one submission during the previous month submitted a total of 736 records to the VGTOF.

Table 10.

#### Percent of gang units sharing criminal intelligence and non-intelligence information, by type of group receiving the shared information, 2007

Types of groups	Percent of gang units sharing—	
	Criminal intelligence information	Non-intelligence information
Other units within the department	100 %*	93 %
Department command staff	98	93
Neighboring law enforcement agencies	98	89
Other criminal justice agencies	70	84
General public	~	54
Non-criminal justice agencies	~	52
Media outlets	~	46

Note: Based on 365 gang units.

~Not applicable. Criminal intelligence information would not be shared with these types of groups.

\*Two units (0.5%) did not share criminal intelligence information with other units within the department.

Table 11.

#### Gang unit submissions to the National Crime Information Center's Violent Gang and Terrorist Organization File (VGTOF), 2007

Gang units that submitted VGTOF records*	Number
VGTOF submissions in past month	61
Median	0
Mean	12
Maximum	300
Total submissions	736

Note: Data available for 363 (99.5%) gang units.

\*A submission refers to any entry into the file, such as establishing a new record for a group not previously included, noting the association between two known gang members, or adding cautionary notes regarding threats made or weapons carried by known gang members.



## In 2007, over 90% of full-time equivalent (FTE) sworn gang unit officers were male

In 2007, 4,312 FTE sworn officers were assigned to gang units located in 365 large local law enforcement agencies (table 12). Nearly all sworn gang unit officers (91%) were employed full-time. The size of gang units ranged from 1 officer to the nearly 350 officers across all divisions of the Los Angeles Police Department. Gang units had a median of 5 officers per unit (not shown in table).

White, non-Hispanic (61%) and male (94%) officers made up the majority of gang unit officers in 2007. Nationwide, fewer than 300 female officers were assigned to gang units. Gang units also reported employing a total of 256 non-sworn FTE personnel in 2007 (not shown in table). Twenty-six percent of reporting gang units retained 1 or more non-sworn employee.

## The majority of agencies (53%) used a competitive selection process to select officers for the gang unit

In 2007, 53% of large local law enforcement agencies used a competitive selection process to bring officers into the gang unit (table 13). For 34% of the gang units, agency command staff selected officers for and assigned officers to the unit.

About 3 in 4 agencies with gang units considered an officer's discipline history (78%), complaint history (76%), and use-of-force record (73%) before selecting the officer for the unit. Of the agencies that considered each of these three selection criteria, approximately 35% held gang unit officers to a higher selection standard than other officers (not shown in table). About 1 in 4 (29%) agencies looked at an officer's financial and credit history to determine whether the officer was eligible to serve in the unit.

Approximately 1 in 10 (13%) agencies with gang units set a limit on the amount of time an officer could serve in the unit. Of the 48 agencies that had a maximum service allowance for gang unit officers, 39 agencies (80%) allowed officers to serve no more than 5 years in the unit.

Table 12.

### Sworn personnel assigned to gang unit, by sex, race, ethnicity, and employment status of officers, 2007

Officer characteristics	FTE sworn personnel <sup>a</sup>		Employment status	
	Number	Percent	Full-time	Part-time
<b>Total sworn officers</b>	4,312	100 %	4,106	411
<b>Sex</b>				
Male	4,051	94 %	3,873	356
Female	267	6	241	51
<b>Race/Hispanic origin</b>				
White <sup>b</sup>	2,629	61 %	2,472	314
Hispanic	835	19	815	48
Black <sup>b</sup>	490	11	470	40
Asian <sup>b</sup>	85	2	84	2
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander <sup>b</sup>	43	1	41	3
American Indian or Alaskan native <sup>b</sup>	27	1	26	2
Two or more races	22	1	20	3
Unknown	171	4	169	3

Note: Total number of sworn officers by sex and by race/ethnicity do not sum to the same total due to missing data. Total sworn officers is the average of total officers by race/ethnicity and total officers by sex. Data available for 99% of gang units.

<sup>a</sup>Full-time equivalent (FTE) is a computed statistic calculated by adding the number full-time officers to the number of part-time officers divided by two, under the assumption that each part-time officer works half the number of hours as a full-time officer.

<sup>b</sup>Excludes persons of Hispanic/Latino origin.

Table 13.

### Standards for selecting and retaining gang unit officers, 2007

Standard	Total gang units	
	Number	Percent
<b>Total gang units</b>	365	100 %
<b>Selection process</b>		
Competitive selection as positions become available	191	53 %
Command staff selects line officers for the unit	123	34
Current gang unit officers select line officers for the unit	11	3
Other*	37	10
<b>Selection criteria</b>		
Discipline history	286	78 %
Complaint history	276	76
Use-of-force record	268	73
Financial/credit history	105	29
All four criteria considered	103	28
<b>Maximum service limit</b>		
No	315	87 %
Yes	48	13
1-3 years	15	31 %
4-5	24	50
More than 5 years	9	19

Note: Data on gang unit selection available for 362 (99%) gang units, and data on gang unit maximum service allowance available for 363 (99%) of gang units.

\*Includes selection based on seniority, transfer from other specialized units, voluntary assignment, and a combination of competitive bidding and command staff selection.

### More than a third of gang units experienced difficulties recruiting officers with certain characteristics

Thirty-six percent of gang units reported difficulties in recruiting officers with specifically desired or unique characteristics (table 14). Of the 133 units that had difficulty recruiting officers with specific characteristics, 92 units (70%) had trouble enlisting bilingual or multilingual officers (not shown in table).

### Nearly all new gang unit members received special training related to gangs

Nearly all gang units in 2007 provided new gang officers with formal on-the-job training related to gangs (96%) and sent new unit members to conferences and seminars on gang issues (95%) (table 15). Eighty-five percent of gang units provided new members with specialized gang training at a law enforcement academy.

**Table 14.**  
**Difficulties in recruiting gang unit officers with specific characteristics, 2007**

Characteristic	Percent of gang units
No recruiting difficulties	64 %
Difficulty recruiting officers who are— <sup>a</sup>	36 %
Bilingual or multilingual	25
Female	18
Raised in typical gang neighborhoods	17
Members of a racial or ethnic minority	12
Other <sup>b</sup>	4

Note: Based on 365 gang units.

<sup>a</sup>Percentages do not sum to 36% because some units had more than one recruiting difficulty.

<sup>b</sup>Includes officers with more than 5 years of experience in the department and general difficulties recruiting any officers.

**Table 15.**  
**Gang-related training received by new members of the gang unit, 2007**

Type of formal training	Gang units that provided training	
	Number	Percent
On-the-job	351	96 %
Conference	346	95
Academy	307	85

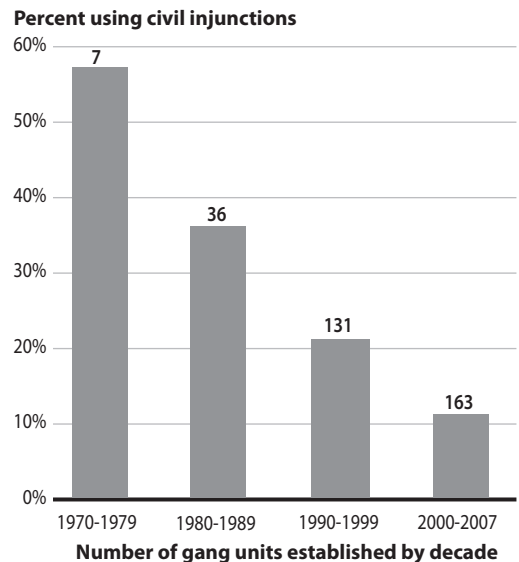
Note: Data available for 363 (99.5%) gang units.

### Jurisdictions with older gang units were more likely to make use of civil gang injunctions

A civil gang injunction is a court-issued order prohibiting specific gangs or gang members from congregating in particular public areas and engaging in nuisance behaviors, such as loitering, cursing, making certain hand gestures, and listening to loud music. Police officers can arrest gang members for engaging in activities that violate the terms of the injunction, even if the activity is not criminal.

Eleven percent of the 163 jurisdictions with gang units formed between 2000 and 2007 made use of civil gang injunctions (figure 2). Among the 131 jurisdictions with gang units formed between 1990 and 1999, the percentage using injunctions was nearly double (21%). This finding may suggest that jurisdictions with older gang units had longer-standing gang-related problems, and over time had implemented tools, such as injunctions, to reduce gang visibility, graffiti, and fear of gang victimization. In the late 1990s, civil gang injunctions also faced legal challenges that may have deterred some jurisdictions from implementing injunctions in recent years.

**Figure 2.**  
**Jurisdictions that made use of civil gang participation injunctions, by the decade of gang unit formation, 1970-2007**



## Training on gangs-related topics in law enforcement training academies, 2006

The BJS 2006 *Census of State and Local Law Enforcement Training Academies* (CSLLETA) collected data on academies that provided basic and in-service training related to gangs and law enforcement's response to gangs. While the CSLLETA data does not link to the CLEGU, it provides general information about the types of gang training at law enforcement academies.

Of the 648 training academies, 560 (86%) covered at least one topic pertaining to gangs or the response to gangs during the course of either basic training or in-service training. Approximately 7 in 10 training academies provided basic training on the history of gangs (69%), the nature and scope of gangs (70%), and the operations of national or local gangs (71%) (figure 3). Between 35% and 40% of training academies provided in-service training on gang topics.

In 2006, the most common basic training classes on law enforcement's response to gangs covered the laws and ordinances related to gangs (57%), community or individual risk factors of gang activity (53%), and the role of community policing in response to gangs (51%) (figure 4). Thirty percent (30%) of training academies provided in-service training on laws and ordinances related to gangs and documenting gang-related crimes.

Among the 500 academies that provided basic training on gang topics, an average of 8 hours, out of the average 760 required training hours, were dedicated to gang-related topics. In-service training related to gangs averaged about 13 hours (not shown in table).

Figure 3.

Percent of law enforcement training academies offering basic or in-service training on topics related to gangs, 2006

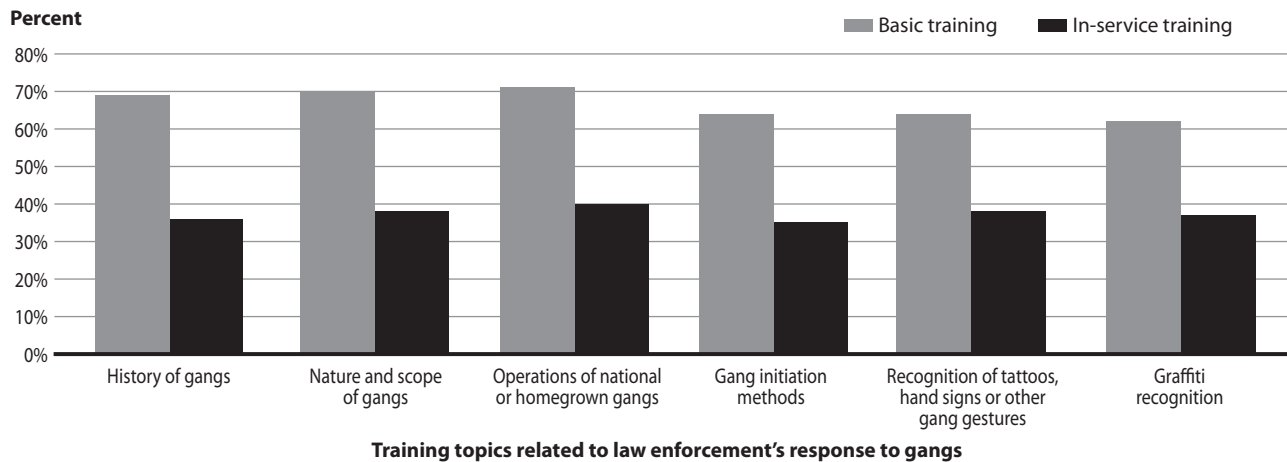
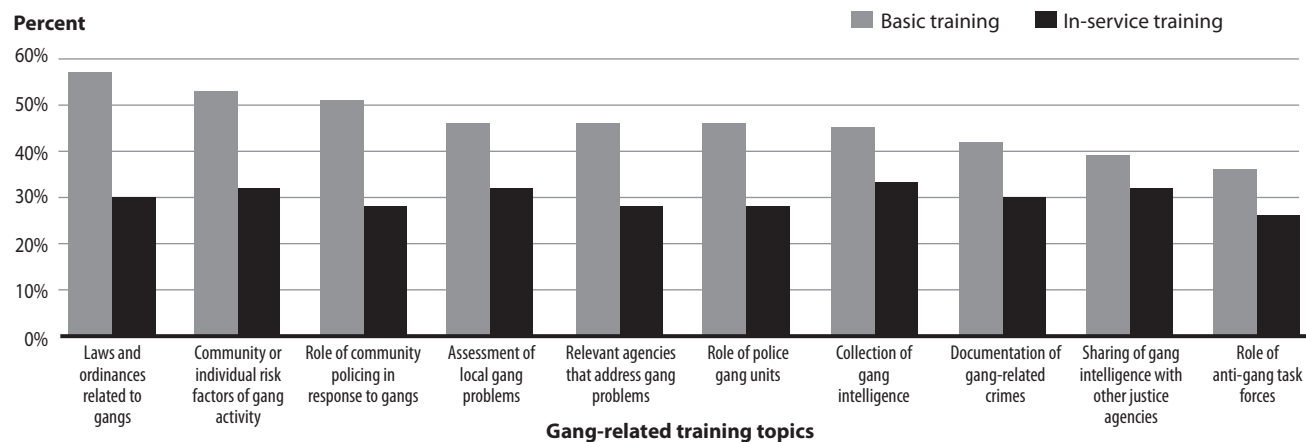


Figure 4.

Percent of law enforcement training academies offering basic or in-service training on topics related to law enforcement's response to gangs, 2006



### Nearly 70% of agencies with an operating budget of \$100 million or more operated a gang unit in 2007

The BJS 2007 Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics (LEMAS) survey collected data on the characteristics of local law enforcement agencies with 100 or more sworn officers, allowing agencies with a gang unit to be compared to the full universe of corresponding agencies. In 2007, an estimated 62% of agencies with 500 or more sworn officers operated a gang unit compared to 21% of agencies with 100 to 124 officers (table 16). A majority (57%) of large local law enforcement agencies serving a population of 500,000 or more had a gang unit compared to less than a fifth (18%) of agencies serving a population of 50,000 or under.

Also, a larger percentage of agencies with an operating budget of \$100 million or more (67%) operated a gang unit than agencies with a budget of less than \$20 million (21%).

A larger percentage of gang units were found in law enforcement agencies in the West (41%) than in the South (34%), Midwest (32%), or Northeast (33%). Large local police departments were also more likely to operate a gang unit (40%) than sheriffs' offices (25%) in 2007.

**Table 16.**

#### Characteristics of law enforcement agencies operating and jurisdictions served by large law enforcement agencies with gang units, 2007

Characteristic	Number of law enforcement agencies	Percent of agencies with a gang unit
<b>Type of agency</b>		
Local police department	629	40%
Sheriff's office	339	25
<b>Number of full time sworn officers</b>		
100-124	254	21%
125-149	148	20
150-249	242	34
250-499	188	48
500 or more	135	62
<b>Operating budget*</b>		
Less than \$20 million	413	21%
\$20 million - \$49,999,999	317	39
\$50 million - \$99,999,999	124	41
\$100 million or more	104	67
<b>Region</b>		
Northeast	147	33%
Midwest	167	32
South	436	34
West	218	41
<b>Population</b>		
Under 50,000	85	18%
50,000-99,999	313	27
100,000-249,999	313	35
250,000-499,999	126	43
500,000 or more	130	57

Note: Data on the number of local law enforcement agencies with 100 or more sworn officers from the 2007 Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics (LEMAS) survey. Twenty-six (7%) of the 365 gang units included in the CLEGU data did not provide LEMAS data and are excluded from the percentages.

\*2007 operating budget data available for 332 (98%) of the 339 agencies with a gang unit.

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## Methodology

### *Development of the CLEGU respondent list*

The data collection agent for the 2007 Census of Law Enforcement Gang Units (CLEGU) was the Institute for the Study and Prevention of Violence (ISPV) at Kent State University. To establish the universe of gang units to be included in the CLEGU, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) provided researchers from the ISPV with a list of all agencies that had 100 or more sworn officers according to the 2003 Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics (LEMAS) survey. The BJS list was then merged with a list of all law enforcement agencies with 100 or more sworn officers purchased from the National Public Safety Information Bureau. After duplicates were removed, the agency list included 1,084 local police departments and sheriffs' offices nationwide with 100 or more sworn officers. From September through November 2006, the ISPV researchers then called each of the agencies. Researchers spoke with a representative from the office of the head of the agency and asked whether the agency had a dedicated street gang unit or at least one officer whose sole responsibility was to coordinate the agency's response to gangs.

Following these calls, 562 agencies did not appear to either have a specialized gang unit or gang officer and were considered out of scope for the study (See appendix table 1 for description of the characteristics of the agencies not included in the CLEGU.) A universe of 522 agencies was initially determined eligible to receive the CLEGU survey form. Eligible agencies received the data collection instrument based on the following stated preferences for delivery: link to an online data collection tool (313 agencies), facsimile of the questionnaire (195 agencies), and instrument sent via the U.S. Postal Service (14 agencies).

The 522 local police departments or sheriffs' offices with 100 or more sworn officers and at least one officer dedicated solely to addressing gang problems received the CLEGU data collection instrument in March 2008. Ninety-one percent of these agencies (476) responded to the survey. Of these 476 agencies, 89 agencies reported not having a gang unit, 5 additional agencies were determined

to be duplicates, 6 agencies had fewer than 100 sworn officers, and 11 agencies had gang units established in 2008. A total of 365 large local law enforcement agencies provided adequate responses for inclusion in the analysis. Data collection efforts and follow-up continued through March 2009.

### *Development of the survey form*

Prior to developing the CLEGU questionnaire, project managers from the ISPV and BJS worked with specialized gang units and gang experts across the country to gain an understanding of the operations and responsibilities of gang unit officers. The ISPV organized a two-day, national meeting of gang officers and experts in November 2007 to discuss the topics and questions for inclusion in the data collection instrument. Attendees included top gang researchers; gang unit officers from the Virginia State Police, New Jersey State Police, Chicago Police Department, and the Worcester, Massachusetts Police Department; and representatives from the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the California Gang Investigators Association. The National Major Gang Task Force and the National Alliance of Gang Investigators also reviewed the survey instrument and provided comments and endorsement.

### *Collecting data on gang-related or -motivated arrests*

In addition to the data reported in *Gang Units in Large Local Law Enforcement Agencies, 2007*, the CLEGU attempted to collect information on the total number of arrests made by gang unit officers for gang-related or gang-motivated homicides, other violent offenses, property offenses, narcotics, economic offenses, and other misdemeanors in 2007. Seventy percent of gang units (256) were able to provide the number of gang-related or gang-motivated homicides, and of those that provided data, 41% (105 units) reported zero homicides in 2007. Forty-four percent of all gang units responded that they did not know the number of arrests for other violent offenses. Over half of gang units responded "Don't Know" to the number of arrests for property offenses (54%), narcotics (51%), economic offenses (67%), and other misdemeanors (57%).



*Sources of data for Gang Units in Large Local Law Enforcement Agencies, 2007*

The CLEGU provided the data on the characteristics and operations of gang units. The 2007 Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics (LEMAS) Survey provided data on the characteristics of agencies with specialized gang units.

*Measuring the prevalence of gang units*

While the main intent of the CLEGU was to collect data on the characteristics and operations of gang units, the data could be used to compute a rate of gang units among large local law enforcement agencies. In 2007, 365 agencies reported having a gang unit out of the 1,084 agencies contacted during the development of the respondent list. Approximately 34% of large local agencies had a gang unit according to CLEGU findings.

At about the same period that the CLEGU was fielded, the 2007 Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics (LEMAS) Survey was distributed to all law enforcement agencies with 100

or more sworn officers. The BJS LEMAS survey has collected data on the operations, management, resources, policies, and officer characteristics of state, municipal, and county law enforcement agencies since 1987. The LEMAS Survey included the following question in 2007:

How does your agency address the following problems/tasks-gangs?

1. Agency has specialized unit with personnel assigned full-time to address gangs.
2. Agency does not have a specialized unit, but has dedicated personnel to address gangs.
3. Agency addresses gangs, but does not have dedicated personnel.
4. Agency does not formally address gangs.

Agencies that selected the first response option to this question could also be used to compute a rate of gang units or dedicated gang officers among large local law enforcement agencies. According to the LEMAS data from this question, 464 agencies (48%), out of the 968 included in LEMAS, reported having a specialized gang unit (appendix table 1).

**Appendix Table 1.**

**General characteristics of large local law enforcement agencies with a gang unit or designated gang personnel in the CLEGU and LEMAS, 2007**

Characteristic	Agencies with a gang unit or designated gang personnel			
	In the CLEGU		In LEMAS <sup>a</sup>	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
<b>Number of agencies</b>	365	100 %	464	100 %
<b>Type of agency</b>				
Local police	268	73 %	336	73 %
Sheriff	97	27	127	27
<b>Region</b>				
Northeast	53	15 %	57	12 %
Midwest	56	15	72	16
South	156	43	191	41
West	100	27	144	31
<b>Population served<sup>b</sup></b>				
Under 50,000 residents	16	4 %	22	5 %
50,000-99,999	96	26	110	24
100,000-249,999	119	33	164	35
250,000-499,999	56	15	76	16
500,000 residents or more	78	21	91	20
<b>Full-time sworn officers</b>				
100-124	64	18 %	62	14 %
125-149	30	8	47	10
150-249	87	24	117	25
250-499	97	27	130	28
500 or more	87	24	108	23
<b>Operating budget (in millions)<sup>b</sup></b>				
Less than \$20 million	92	28 %	114	25 %
\$20 - \$49	124	37	177	38
\$50 - \$99	50	15	82	18
\$100 million or more	67	20	89	19

Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

<sup>a</sup>Based on data from the 2007 Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics (LEMAS) Survey. Agencies were asked to report whether they had 'a specialized unit with personnel assigned full-time to address gangs. Gang unit data available for 91% of the 968 local police departments and sheriffs' offices with 100 or more sworn officers. Details may not sum to total due to LEMAS weights.

<sup>b</sup>Data available for 99% of LEMAS agencies with a gang unit and available for 91% of CLEGU agencies.

Because there was a 14% difference between the rates of gang units according to CLEGU (34%) versus LEMAS (48%), a rate was not reported in this report.

Of the 365 agencies that completed the CLEGU survey instrument, 269 (74%) reported having a gang unit in LEMAS, 49 (13%) reporting having dedicated personnel to address gangs, 21 (6%) reported no gang unit or dedicated personnel, and 26 (7%) did not respond to LEMAS. Of the 662 agencies that did not have a gang unit according to the CLEGU screener call or the survey instrument, 39% (261) also reported not having a gang unit in LEMAS. Another 213 (32%) agencies were either not included in or could not be matched to LEMAS. A total of 146 agencies (22%) that did not have a gang unit according to the CLEGU collection, however, did report having a gang unit in LEMAS.

There are many more instances where LEMAS identifies a gang unit when CLEGU (146) does not than the reverse (21). Given that CLEGU employed a more intensive, two stage screening process it is not surprising that fewer gang units were identified in this data collection relative to LEMAS. There are a number of other design differences between the two data collections that can contribute to differences in the rate of gang units, including different respondents for the same organization. Nonetheless, as the data in Appendix Table 1 indicate, the characteristics of the population of large agencies with gang units are very similar across the two data collections.

### Gang unit region of location

In the report, gang units were grouped by the four regions of the country: Northeast, Midwest, South, and West. The classification of gang units follows the United States Census Bureau classification of states into one of these four regions<sup>2</sup> (appendix table 2).

<sup>2</sup>Region classification based on United States Census Bureau, *Census Regions and Divisions of the United States* <[http://www.census.gov/geo/www/us\\_regdiv.pdf](http://www.census.gov/geo/www/us_regdiv.pdf)>.

## Appendix Table 2.

**Census regions of the United States, by states in each region, 2007**

Census regions of the United States			
Northeast	Midwest	South	West
Connecticut	Illinois	Alabama	Alaska
Maine	Indiana	Arkansas	Arizona
Massachusetts	Iowa	Delaware	California
New Hampshire	Kansas	District of Columbia	Colorado
New Jersey	Michigan	Florida	Hawaii
New York	Minnesota	Georgia	Idaho
Pennsylvania	Missouri	Kentucky	Montana
Rhode Island	Nebraska	Louisiana	Nevada
Vermont	North Dakota	Maryland	New Mexico
	Ohio	Mississippi	Oregon
	South Dakota	North Carolina	Utah
	Wisconsin	Oklahoma	Washington
		South Carolina	Wyoming
		Tennessee	
		Texas	
		Virginia	
		West Virginia	

Note: Region classification based on United States Census Bureau, *Census Regions and Divisions of the United States* <[http://www.census.gov/geo/www/us\\_regdiv.pdf](http://www.census.gov/geo/www/us_regdiv.pdf)>.



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The Bureau of Justice Statistics is the statistical agency of the U.S. Department of Justice. James P. Lynch is director.

This Special Report was written by Lynn Langton. Brian A. Reaves, Ph.D., verified the report.

Georgette Walsh and Jill Duncan edited the report, Barbara Quinn and Tina Dorsey produced the report, and Jayne E. Robinson prepared the report for final printing under the supervision of Doris J. James.

October 2010, NCJ 230071

This report in portable document format and in ASCII and its related statistical data and tables are available at the BJS World Wide Web Internet site: <<http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=2210>>.

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