AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

Perspectives on Violence Prevention

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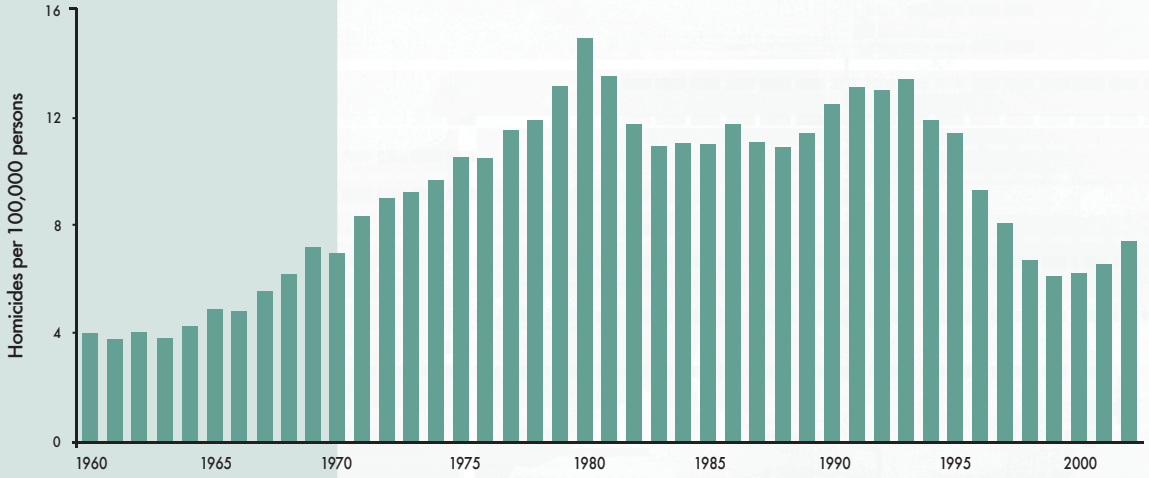
Gang Homicide in LA, 1981-2001

By George Tita and Allan Abrahamse

During the last forty years, as Figure 1 shows, California experienced three "epochs" of increasing homicide rates: a prolonged fifteen year climb between 1965 and 1980, a five year period from 1989 through 1993, and a period that began about 1999 and appears to be continuing today.

Figure 1 - Homicide rate in California, 1961-2002



Attorney General's Message

In this third issue of **At the Local Level: Perspectives on Violence Prevention**, we return to the formidable problem of youth gang homicide, particularly as it has manifested in Los Angeles County. According to Professor George Tita, a criminologist, and Allan Abrahamse, a mathematician, almost 75% of the 10,000 youth gang homicides that have taken place in California over the past 21 years (1981-2001) occurred in Los Angeles. This extraordinary disproportion cannot be explained by LA's large population, nor by its age, racial, or ethnic composition. Paradoxically, non-gang homicides are no more likely to occur in LA than in the rest of the state (when demographics are considered), and several subcategories of non-gang homicides are in fact less prevalent in Los Angeles. This suggests to the authors "that what truly sets Los Angeles apart from the remainder of California is not a general propensity for violent behavior, but rather ... a specific milieu that has fostered the development of a violent gang culture unlike any other gang culture in the state."

It is apparent that Los Angeles suffers from a **long-term epidemic** of youth gang homicide and violence. While there are short-term solutions that can achieve some immediate relief, it is also true that long-term social problems require long-term strategies supported by community-wide planning, participation, data collection, and investment. Leadership must come from the local level, and state government, including my office, must support the locally-driven strategies. Moreover, we must resist the temptation to focus on gang homicide only when it is climbing. As the authors here demonstrate, LA has had a disproportionate share of youth gang homicides for more than 20 years, regardless of whether the numbers themselves were waxing or waning. Only a long-term commitment of leadership and resources can impact LA's enduring epidemic of violence.

Bill Lockyer
Attorney General

This paper examines the period following the first epoch and characterizes the overall patterns in terms of the demographic composition of victims and the motivating circumstances of the incident. In particular, we consider how the most recent, seemingly ongoing epoch comparess in terms of demography and circumstances (especially factors relating to gangs) with the 1989-1993 period of increase. Similarities between the two time periods suggest that the current upward trend might be relatively short-lived. With overall rates of violence at or below historic lows at the beginning of the most recent increase, one can only hope that short-lived or not, it will not result in the intense violence experienced in the early 1990s.

Broadly stated, our goal is to quantify how changes in the pattern and level of homicide in Los Angeles County compare with similar changes in the remainder of the state. Being the most populated area of the state, some say that Los Angeles County "drives" California's homicide rate and that gang homicide is largely responsible for changes in the local Los Angeles rate. We show that there is some support for this point of view; furthermore, that changes in levels and patterns of homicide in Los Angeles could serve as an early indicator of change for the rest of the state.

Next, we move beyond the aggregate state and county-level data to portray violence within one particularly violent area of the city of Los Angeles. As part of an on-going study of the impact of racial/ethnic succession on local homicide rates, we have collected data directly from police files for a study on the changing nature of homicide in the Southeast Area of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD). This area, which includes the community of Watts, often ranks as either the first or second most violent place among the 18 LAPD Areas. In addition to examining changes in the patterns of the demographic composition of victims and perpetrators of homicide, the data also include a more refined treatment of the motivating circumstances of the event. Unlike the annual Cal-DOJ Homicide File, these data permit one to bifurcate the universe of "gang homicide" into "gang motivated" homicides and simply "gang member" homicides. The former is strictly predicated on the activities of the collective group (a drive-by against one's enemy; settling a score within the gang; a dispute over respect or turf). The latter include those activities undertaken by members of gangs, but not for the promotion of the gang's reputation or power, and include robberies, arguments, and domestic/familial homicides where either the victim or the offender is a known gang member.

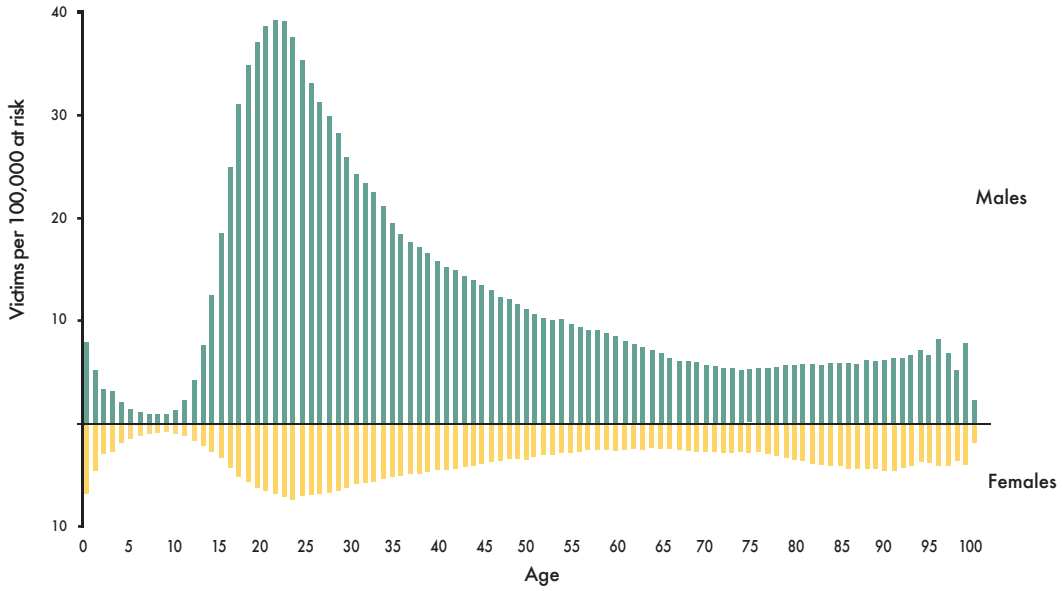
Finally, this research concludes with a set of recommendations for how policy makers can best address homicide throughout the state. Recognizing that many types of homicides have fallen, and that the majority of citizens are now facing much lower risk of violent victimization than at any time in the last twenty years, we first remind policy makers to "do no harm." That is, we should determine why most types of homicides have demonstrated dramatic decreases over time and be sure that any new policy does not disturb the existing programs/efforts aimed at reducing such types of homicide as intimate partner/domestic. Unfortunately, while rates have dropped, homicide still remains as the leading cause of death for young minority males, especially African Americans, living in impoverished urban settings. Too, much of this violence appears to be centered on gang activity within Los Angeles County/City. In closing, we caution against the development and implementation of any policy aimed at reducing violence without first looking more closely at the appropriate types of data. The usefulness of a "problem solving approach" is well documented and we adhere to the principles that "more information is better than less information" when formulating policy strategies.

On The Risk of Becoming a Homicide Victim in California, 1981–2001

This section provides a broad summary of the nature of homicide in California over the two decades between 1981 and 2001. All statistics are calculated using the entire 21-year data series, a viewpoint that obscures some important trends that have occurred over this period of time, but allows us to focus on some broad facts about homicide that have remained essentially the same. (We will turn to examining some of these trends in the next section.) The broad facts about homicide that we want to highlight are these: that the risk of becoming a homicide victim depends strongly on gender, age, ethnicity, and where you live, and depending on these demographic facts, different types of homicides pose different risks.

As Figure 2 shows, the risk of becoming a homicide victim depends strongly on gender and age. However, the relationship between homicide risk and age and gender is complicated. While both sexes face a maximum risk during early adulthood, except for the youngest victims males always face a higher risk than females. The risk is appallingly high for neonates, relatively low for elementary school kids; it rises rapidly during the teen-age years, falls steadily during most of early adulthood and middle age, then begins to rise again among the elderly. What's going on here?

Figure 2 - Homicide rates by age and gender



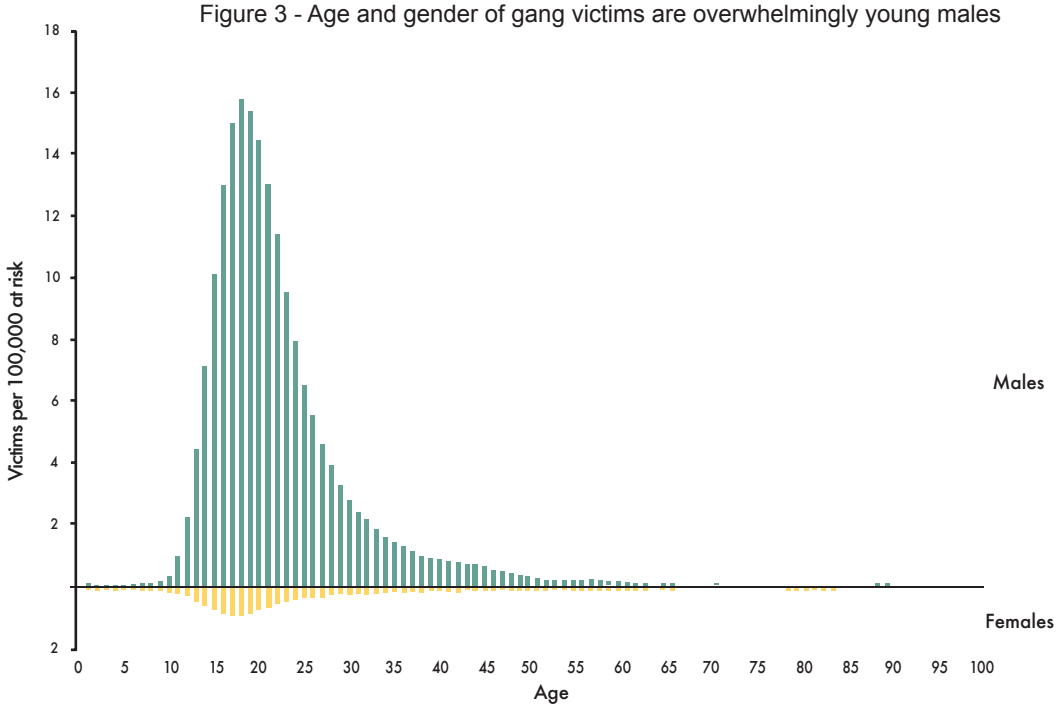
The answer is: there are different kinds of homicides, and these different kinds of homicides pose different risks for men and women, the young, the middle aged and the old. We have identified nine distinct types of homicides, listed in Table 1, that differ strongly in the age and gender characteristics of victims. In all but two of these types, most victims are males. The two exceptions are homicides that occur in the course of rape, and spousal or intimate partner homicides. Homicides in which the victim was related to or acquainted with the offender and no gun was involved account for a very large fraction of homicides of children. Homicides that occurred in the course of some other crime but in which no gun was involved (e.g., strong-arm robbery, burglary) account for many of the homicides of older victims. Fights, arguments, gang killings and other gun-related homicides largely involve males, mostly young ones, and these types of homicides will be considered in more detail below.

Table 1 - Nine homicide types

Description	Number	Pct male	Average age of victim	Frequent mode for:
Rape	717	3	35	Women
Killed by relative without gun	2250	57	22	Infants
Spouse, intimate partner	3243	32	41	Women
Fight, argument, etc., without gun	4732	79	34	Older adults
Other crime (e.g., robbery) without gun	5457	70	42	Adults over age 65
Killed by acquaintance without gun	6115	74	32	Children
Other crime (e.g., robbery) with gun	9884	90	33	Males
Gang killing	10138	95	22	Males age 10-17
Fight, argument, etc., with gun	19379	85	30	Men, all other ages
All homicides	61915	80	31	

Figure 3 shows the risk of becoming a gang-homicide victim by age and gender. Males between the ages of 15 and 35 face the bulk of the risk, with a sharp rise for teenagers, a rapid fall after age 20.

Figure 3 - Age and gender of gang victims are overwhelmingly young males



The reader will probably not be surprised to note that homicide victimization rates differ sharply by race/ethnicity. As Table 2 shows, the victimization rate among African Americans is higher than that among persons of Hispanic origin, and that rate, in turn, is higher than the rate for everyone else. This contrast holds for almost all types of homicides. These facts have important consequences for an ethnically diverse state like California, especially in Los Angeles County.

Table 2 -- Homicides per 100,000
by homicide type, race/ethnicity and gender

	African-American		Hispanic		Everyone Else	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Rape	0.0	0.8	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.2
Argument, relative, no gun	1.5	1.0	0.5	0.3	0.3	0.2
Spouse, intimate partner	1.5	1.4	0.2	0.6	0.3	0.6
Argument, stranger, no gun	3.2	1.2	2.0	0.2	0.6	0.2
Felony, no gun	3.7	1.5	1.3	0.3	0.9	0.5
Argument, acquaintance, no gun	5.4	1.9	1.9	0.4	0.8	0.4
Robbery, burglary, etc., with gun	14.1	1.4	3.6	0.3	1.3	0.2
Gang killing	14.7	1.0	6.5	0.3	0.3	0.0
Argument, stranger, with gun	23.1	3.8	8.2	1.0	2.1	0.6
All homicides	67.3	14.1	24.1	3.5	6.7	3.1

The homicide victimization is sharply higher in Los Angeles than in the rest of the state. As Table 3 shows, this contrast holds across all homicide types, but it is particularly pronounced for gang homicides. The overall victimization rate in Los Angeles County is a little over twice that in the rest of the state, the gang victimization rate is almost seven times higher.

Table 3 -- Victimization rates in Los Angeles County
contrasted with rest of the state

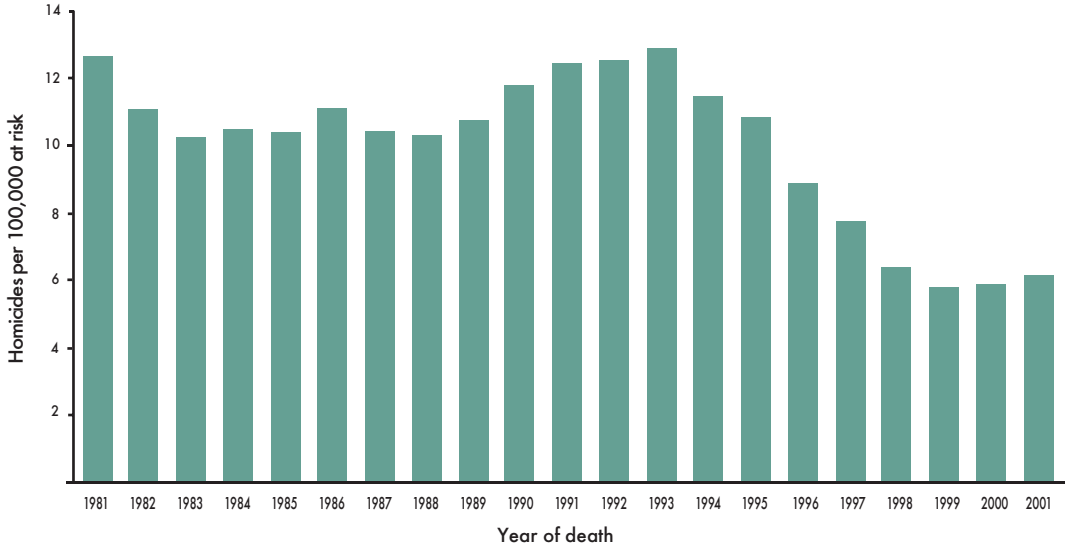
	Los Angeles	Rest of California
Rape	0.2	0.1
Argument, relative, no gun	0.4	0.3
Spouse, intimate partner	0.6	0.5
Argument, stranger, no gun	1.0	0.6
Felony, no gun	1.2	0.7
Argument, acquaintance, no gun	1.2	0.9
Robbery, burglary, etc., with gun	2.7	1.1
Gang killing	4.0	0.6
Argument, stranger, with gun	4.6	2.5
All homicides	15.9	7.3

Homicide Trends, 1981–2001

The statistics we have presented were obtained from data aggregated over the previous two decades. As promised, we now turn to an examination of trends that can be seen during this period.

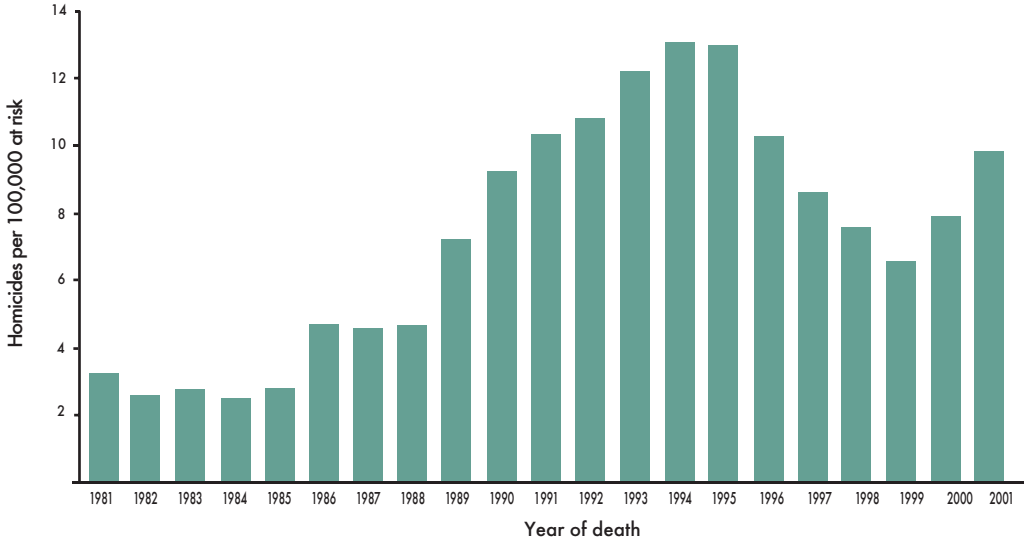
As Figure 4 shows, after a decade of relatively high homicide rates in California, from 1993 until 1999 rates declined every year. In 1998, they fell to a level that had not been seen since the late 1960s. In 2000, we experienced the first increase in six years, followed by a sharper increase in 2001.

Figure 4 - Homicide victims per 100,000 population, 1981-2001



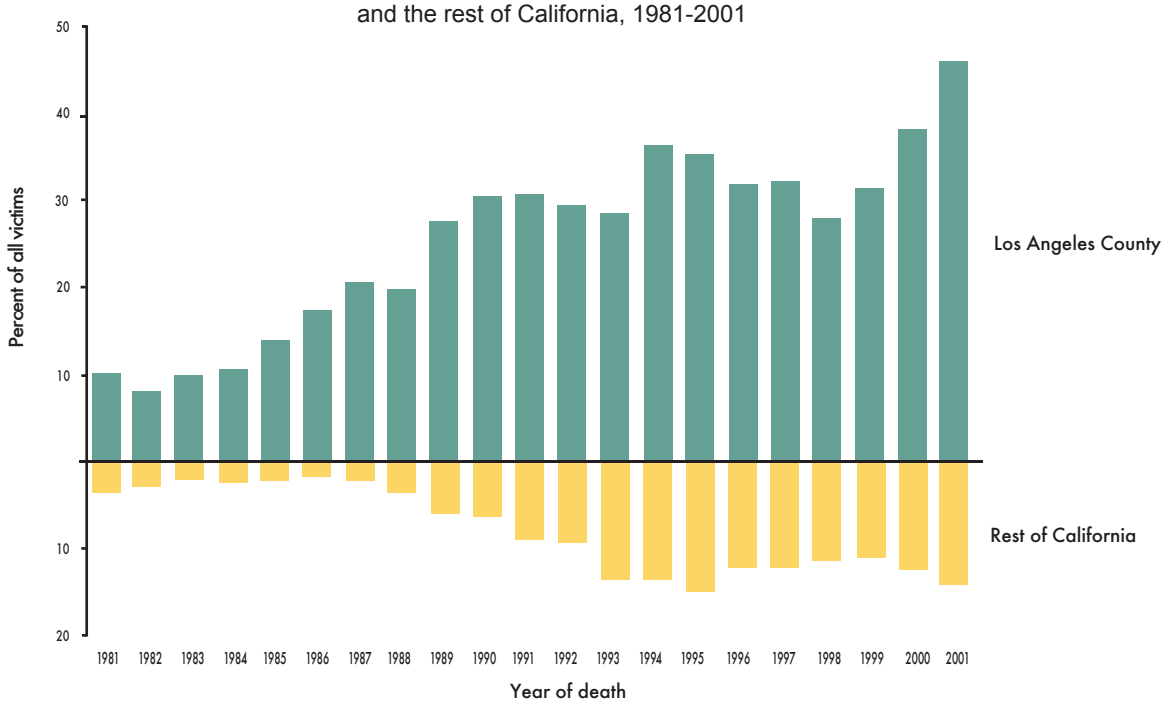
The trend in gang-related homicides has a similar shape, but the contrasts are much sharper. Figure 5 shows that changes in the homicide rate for gang killings of males are more pronounced than are changes in the overall rate. Between 1999 and 2001, the overall rate rose by about 7%; gang killings among males age 18-24 almost doubled.

Figure 5 - Gang killings of males age 18-24 per 100,000 at risk, 1981-2001



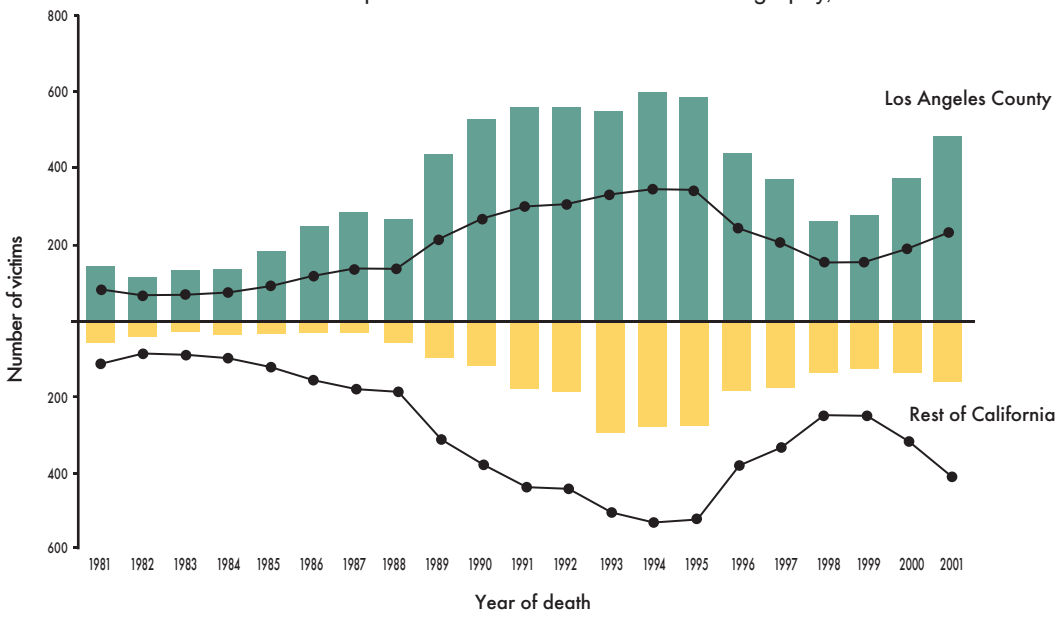
Gang-related homicides have always represented a larger fraction of all homicides in Los Angeles than outside Los Angeles, and this contrast has grown over the last two decades, and especially in the last few years. Figure 6 illustrates this fact. In 1981, gang killings represented about 10% of all Los Angeles homicides, compared to about 4% in the rest of the state. In 2001, almost half of all homicides in Los Angeles were gang-related, compared to about 14% elsewhere.

Figure 6 - Percent of all homicides that are gang killings in Los Angeles County and the rest of California, 1981-2001



It is probable that law enforcement is lately more inclined to identify certain classes of homicides as gang-related than in earlier years, and possible that Los Angeles law enforcement agencies are more likely to do so than agencies in other parts of the state. However, it seems unlikely that such reporting differences could explain the entire contrast seen here.

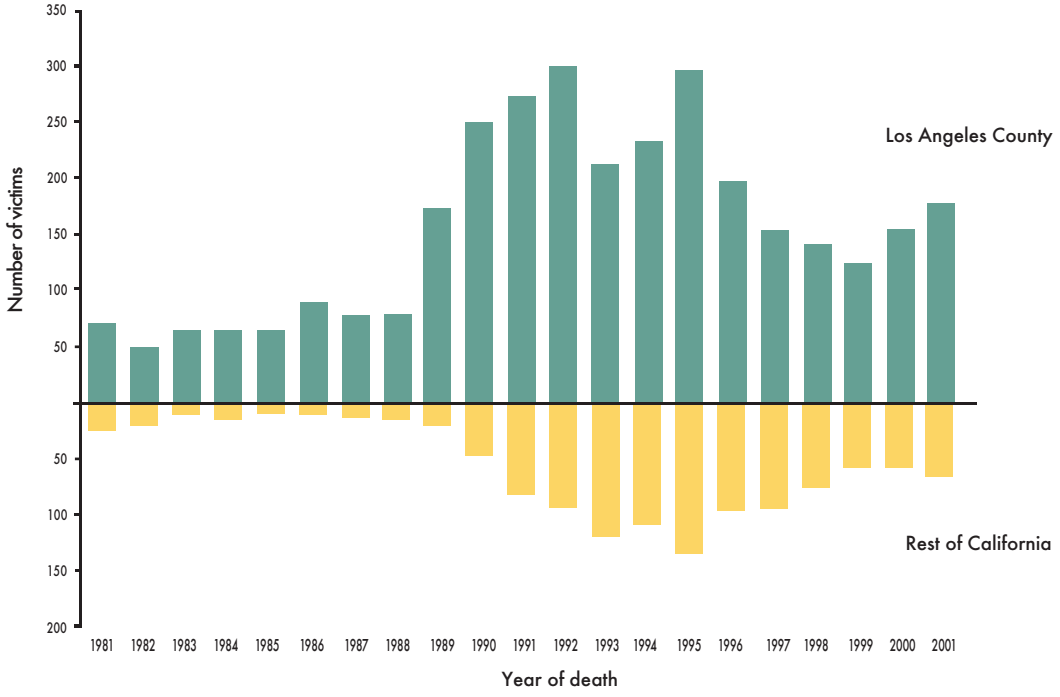
Figure 7 - Number of gang killings in Los Angeles County and in the rest of California contrasted with the expected number on the basis of demography, 1981-2001[1]



The recent rise in gang killings is much steeper in Los Angeles than in the rest of the state. Furthermore, there are more gang killings in Los Angeles than would be expected on the basis of demography alone. Assuming similar demographic composition of victims, Figure 7 compares the actual number of gang homicides with the number that would have occurred in these two places if the homicides were directly proportional to the population size, controlling for age and race. As the chart shows, there are far more gang killings in Los Angeles County, as compared to the rest of the state, than can be accounted for by differences in the composition of the population.

1 The height of the bars in this figure represents actual counts. The plot points connected by lines represent estimates of the number of homicides that would have been seen if the number of homicides was directly proportional to the population, controlling for age and race. For example, in 2001 there were nine African American homicide victims under the age of 10; five of them in Los Angeles, four in the rest of the state. That year, about 37% of the African Americans in California under the age of 10 lived in Los Angeles County, so if the number of homicides among members of this population group had been proportional to the actual population, three of these homicides (37% of nine) would have occurred in Los Angeles county, the remaining six elsewhere.

Figure 8 - Gang killings of Hispanic males age 10-24



California experienced a dramatic increase in gang killings of young Hispanic males in the late 1980s. Figure 8 plots the number of such killings for the twenty-year period in Los Angeles and outside Los Angeles; Table 4 shows the actual numbers for the five-year period in Los Angeles, for younger and older members of this age class.

Table 4 -- Gang homicides of Hispanic males in Los Angeles County, 1988-1992

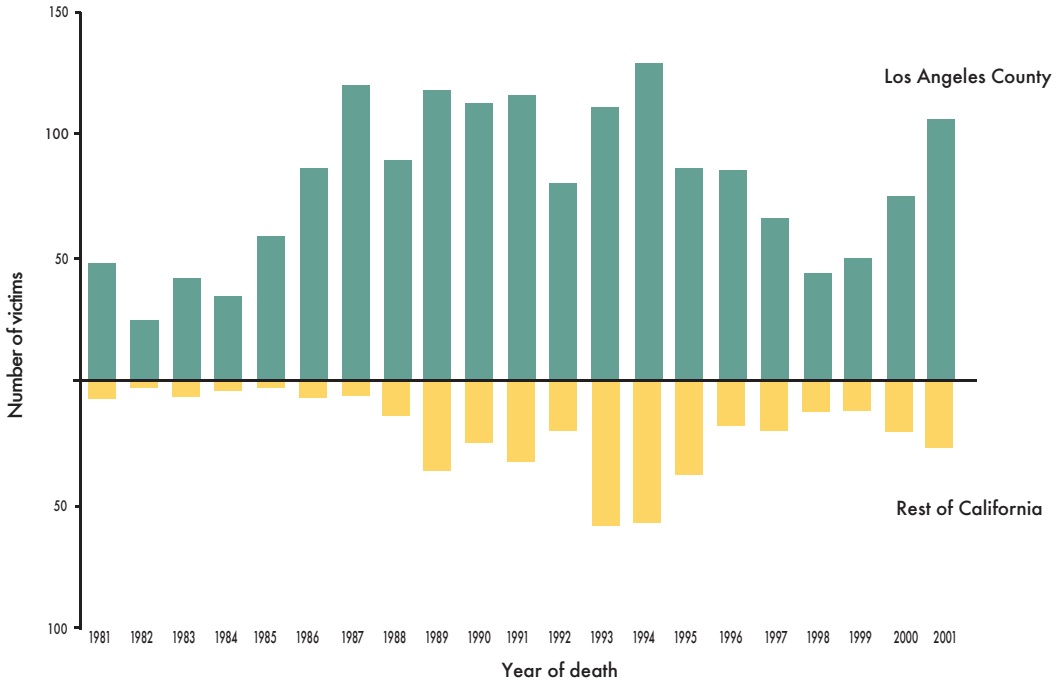
	10-17	18-24	Both groups
1988	25	54	79
1989	71	101	172
1990	99	152	251
1991	104	169	273
1992	120	179	299

For the younger group, the number of such killings nearly tripled between 1988 and 1989. The number of such deaths declined after 1992 but has never returned to the levels prior to 1989. The sharp rise in Hispanic gang killings in 1988 in Los Angeles County was followed, about a year later, with a somewhat less pronounced rise outside of Los Angeles.

Cook and Laub have named these sorts of lasting structural changes as "hang overs" of the youth homicide epidemic that peaked nationally in 1993. For Hispanics involved in gang homicide, 1995 was the peak year. Though not as pronounced, we are again experiencing an increase in Hispanic victimization.

The patterns for African American victims of gang violence are somewhat similar to those of Hispanics, though the increase for African Americans began several years prior to the Hispanic increase and peaked one year earlier, in 1994. Figure 9 shows the number of such homicides of African American males age 10-24.

Figure 9 - Gang killings of African American males age 10-24



What is most troubling is that after a dramatic decrease of more than 50% from the peak in 1994 to the bottom of the trough in 1998, the 2001 rate for Los Angeles County is once again at 1994 levels. While the rate of decline was similar among African American and Hispanic victims of gang violence, the most recent rate of growth for African American victimization far exceeds the rate of growth for Hispanic victims.

To examine the issue in more depth, we use a detailed longitudinal data set of homicides in the Southeast Policing Area of Los Angeles. The data include all homicides recorded between 1980 and 2000 and includes information taken from two sources: the actual LAPD homicide case file, and a summary database maintained by LAPD's Robbery Homicide Division named "HitMan." The summary data provided detailed information on the offender(s) and victim, but tended to include less specific information about the motivation behind the killing.

Southeast is a historically black area that includes the neighborhoods of Athens Park, Avalon Gardens, and Watts. It also contains some of the largest concentrations of public housing west of the Mississippi River, including Nickerson Gardens and Jordan Downs. Southeast Los Angeles has experienced both economic and social problems over the last two decades including high levels of poverty, dense public housing, and – through the processes of "de-industrialization" – a shrinking job base. This area is also known for its open-air drug markets, urban street gangs and high levels of violence. According to 1990 census figures, Southeast represents almost four percent (3.75%) of the city's total population. However, from 1980 – 2000, this area accounted for more than eleven percent (11.8%) of all homicides, illustrating a concentration of violence in this area of the city.

The Southeast neighborhoods are also experiencing substantial racial and ethnic succession. Until recently, the population of Southeast was almost exclusively black. However, beginning in the 1980s and continuing today, the black population is migrating out of Southeast and is being replaced by Latinos from Mexico, Honduras and El Salvador. In 1980, nearly 80% of the population described itself as Black, with Hispanics comprising only 16%. The 1990 Census reports that African-Americans maintain a slim majority in Southeast comprising 56% of the population while the percent of population that is Hispanic has increased to 40%.

While the demographic composition of the neighborhood has changed dramatically, the composition of its homicide victims has not. African Americans always represent the majority of homicide victims in the neighborhood (see Figure 10). For most of the period, the number of homicide victims in both groups has risen and fallen in tandem and the Latino rate has consistently been approximately 2.5 – 3 times lower than the Black rate. However, what is striking in this graph is the divergence of patterns beginning in 2000/2001 (and anecdotally continuing for 2002). The growth of homicide in Southeast and other communities of the city of Los Angeles that still contain a sizable population of African Americans is exclusively the result of Black-on-Black violence, mostly concentrated within gang disputes.

Figure 10 - Homicides in Southeast Los Angeles

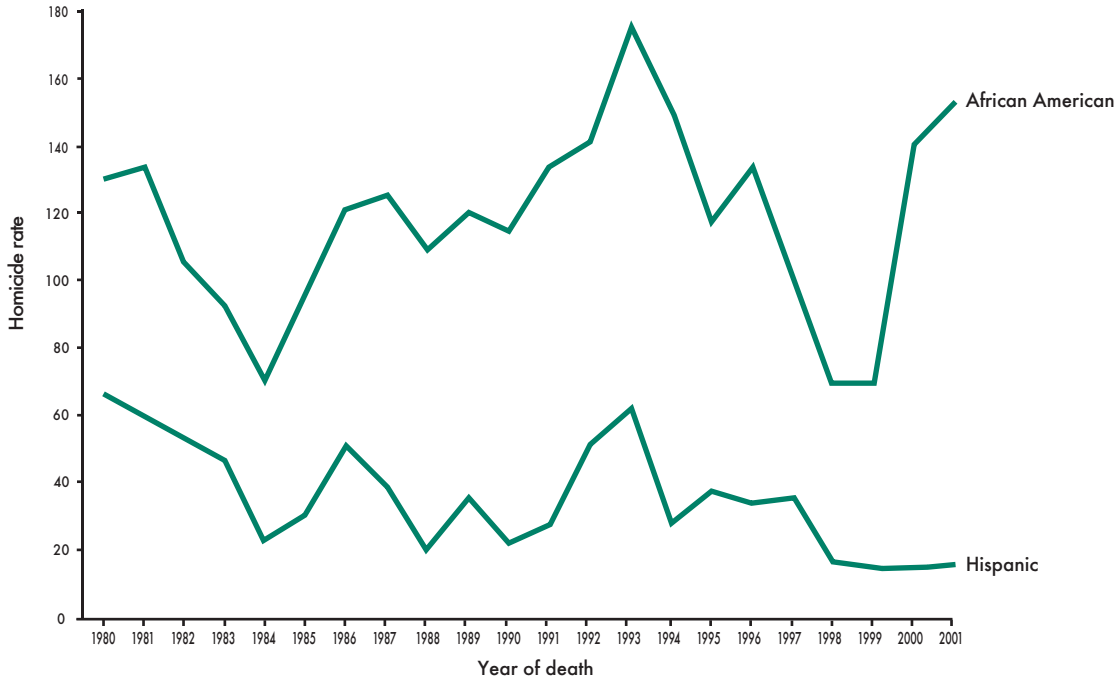


Table 5 provides the distribution of homicides by motive over the study period. Homicide involving gang members is the single largest category among the data, representing 29% of all homicides, followed closely by the escalation of arguments (includes both stranger and non-stranger victim-offender relationships) at nearly 23% of all events.

Table 5 -- Number of homicides in Southeast, by type

Homicide type	Count	Percent
Gang	578	29
Drug	138	7
Domestic violence	144	7
Robbery	383	19
Fights and arguments	454	23
Other	299	15
Total	1996	100

As defined above, the gang category captures any homicide involving a gang member as either victim or offender. Looking closer, we found that of the 578 events known to involve a gang member, 308 centered on inter-gang disputes, 43 involved intra-gang disputes, 28 of the homicides had no information in the case file regarding the motive, and an additional 39 cases spread among all other motive classifications. The summary information contained within "HitMan" did not elaborate beyond "gang" for motive and includes the remaining 160 cases.[2] Consistent with other research on this issue, these gangs do not appear to be killing each other over drug issues, at least not in ways apparent within the homicide case files.[3]

2 In an effort to ensure consistency in the coding, we found high levels of agreement on motive between the summary data maintained by LAPD and the characterization of the homicide by the coders culling information from the actual homicide files. Therefore, we expect that these 160 are similar in their distribution of motives to the other 418 cases.

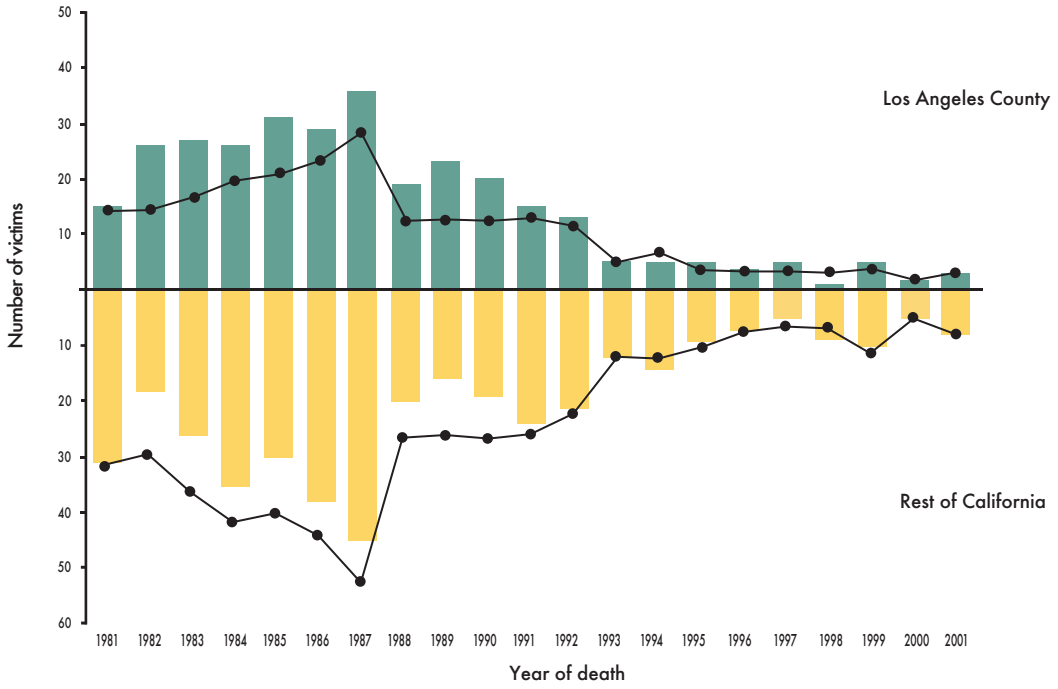
3 There does seem to be a consensus among police, probation and community street workers that the gangs in this area, especially the black gangs, are much more oriented around the drug trade than are the historically turf-oriented Latino gangs in areas such as Hollenbeck. Though no specific evidence has been presented, these entities argue that events that appear to be random drive-by shootings committed by one gang against a rival are often motivated by a drug deal gone bad. The drug-gang nexus in this neighborhood, and throughout the city, and its role in driving the recent upswing in violence merits further attention.

Other Kinds of Homicides Show a Different Pattern

It is important to point out that some other kinds of homicides have *not* been increasing recently, and in fact, have been falling steadily for the last twenty years. Furthermore, the distribution of these homicides between Los Angeles County and the rest of the state is strictly proportional to the population of these two regions.

Figure 11 shows the number of victims killed in the course of rape, in Los Angeles County and in the rest of the state, for the twenty-one year period under study. As in Figure 7, the bars represent actual counts, the lines represent estimated counts under the assumption that these killings would have been found in either of the two regions strictly on the basis of population, controlling for ethnicity and age.

Figure 11 - Homicides involving rape

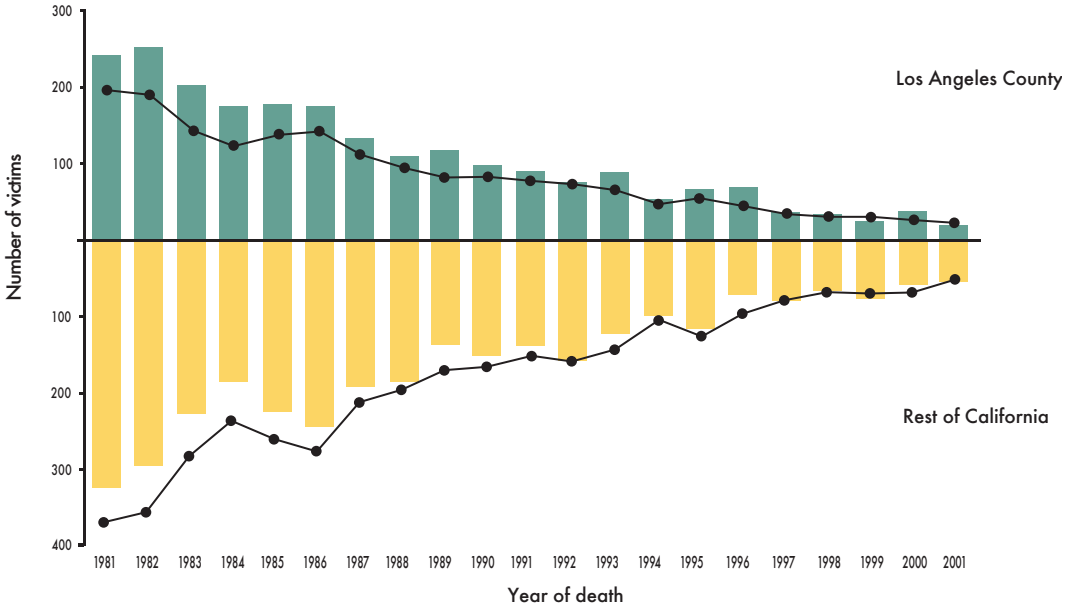


As the figure demonstrates, there has been a sharp decline in the number of rape-related homicides, a decline that began around 1987, and shows no sign of reversal. Furthermore, while during the first half of the two-decade period displayed here, Los Angeles County appeared to experience somewhat more of its share of these homicides in proportion to its ethnic and age distribution, that contrast disappeared around 1991.

Homicides called "arguments with a stranger, gun involved," a characterization that probably applies to most gang killings, rose in the late 1980s, and fell after that. While the drop has stalled in the last few years, these homicides have not begun to climb as rapidly as gang homicides. It is possible that many homicides classified as this type some years ago would now be classified as gang homicide.

Figure 12 describes "non-gun felony homicides," that is, homicides that occurred during the commission of a crime, but one in which a gun was not used. This is a homicide type that frequently results in the death of an older individual. Such homicides have been steadily declining for the last twenty years, and for the last ten years, at least, are no more prevalent in Los Angeles County than in the rest of the state, after controlling for ethnicity and the age distribution of the population.

Figure 12 - non-gun felony homicides



Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

The foregoing brief overview of homicide in California during the period 1981 through 2001 suggests the following:

1. A sharp decline in homicides that began about 1993 appears to have reversed itself beginning in 2000, and homicide rates are now increasing. This increase shares certain similarities with the historically high rates experienced in the early 1990s in that minority youth are once again over-represented among the population of participants. Both periods are also characterized by growth in gang homicide.

2. There are also important differences between the two upswings in violence. Much, if not most, of the current increase can be attributed to gang killings. In 1999 there were a total of 1,977 homicides in the state of California. In 2001, there were 2,178, an increase of 201 homicides. Over the same time period, the number of gang homicides in Los Angeles County rose from 277 in 1999 to 486 in 2001, an increase of 209 incidents. Given that our analysis has demonstrated that all other types of homicides continue to decrease or at least stay level over this period, clearly, gang homicide in Los Angeles County is solely responsible for the statewide increase. During the early 1990s all types of homicides were increasing.

3. The youth homicide epidemic that peaked in 1993 resulted in historically high levels for African-American youth (a group with a long history of high homicide rates). It also appears that whatever was driving the increase during that period "spread" into the Latino community. After years of relatively stable levels of violent victimization, young Latino males also experienced historically high rates of homicide victimization. During the current resurgence in violence, rates for both groups are rising, but African-American rates are rising much faster. This point is underscored below (see Point 5).

4. Los Angeles County appears to experience more gang killings than the rest of the state, even after controlling for ethnic, racial and age differences. For other kinds of homicide, Los Angeles' experience is similar to the rest of the state. This suggests that what truly sets Los Angeles apart from the remainder of California is not a general propensity for violent behavior, but rather the existence of a specific milieu that has fostered the development of a violent gang culture unlike any other gang culture in the state.

5. In the beginning, an increase in gang killings may affect only a small area (e.g., Southeast Los Angeles) and may involve only one demographic class (e.g., very young African-American males). But such violence may soon spread to other areas and groups. This has not been the case with respect to the current upswing in violence in Los Angeles. While the number of Latino gangs has always exceeded the number of Black gangs in the city, and Latino gangs have demonstrated an equal propensity for violent behavior (at least during the early 1990s), the

current increase in homicide is limited to lethal attacks among warring Black gangs. However, it should be noted that Latino gang violence lagged Black gang violence by 2 – 3 years in the late 1980s/early 1990s as well.

6. If an increase in gang killings is seen in Los Angeles, an increase may be seen very soon elsewhere in other parts of the state. There is, however, probably no reason to assume that problems *always* begin in Los Angeles. In trying to understand patterns of gang violence, one is often frustrated by the seemingly "random" nature of the changing levels of violence among gangs. Gangs in other cities are likely to react to "random" events within their own city, not to what is going on in Los Angeles.

These observations lead us to the following policy recommendations:

1. First of all, "do no harm." Significant decreases in some kinds of homicide have been seen in the last twenty years, and are continuing, and despite the recent rise in gang killings, the rate of such killings is much lower than it was a decade ago. We need to learn what has worked, and why, then reinforce these processes, and do nothing to disrupt them.

2. Tailor specific interventions to specific problems, in specific places. The immediate problem appears to have begun with African-American gangs in Los Angeles County. We need to deal with that problem, locally, and then guard against the problem spreading to other areas. We also must learn what is currently insulating Latino gangs from following the lead of the Black gangs and also participating in gang violence. In areas of the City of Los Angeles where racial/ethnic succession is resulting in Latinos now comprising the majority in what have traditionally been African-American neighborhoods, gangs comprised of Latino members often share the same geographic space with gangs comprised of African-American members. Yet these groups are displaying very different patterns and levels of violence. Contrary to many sociological theories, there is also very little inter-ethnic/inter-racial lethal violence.

3. Since the data suggest that problems that begin in one place may spread to another, the State should implement a homicide surveillance system, similar to systems used by the public health community, to provide an early warning of a rise in homicide within particular communities. The system needs to work fast enough to provide a warning within a few months of the beginning of the problem. It also needs to be fine-tuned with respect to geography and demography. It does not need to wait until a homicide is "solved," nor does it have to be highly concerned with details or even perfect accuracy. A system that could capture and publish a modest amount of information (age, race, sex, circumstance, census tract) about almost every suspected homicide victim (two or three thousand a year) within a month of the event would provide a important tool for detecting and reacting to upswings in violence in the State.

We conclude with the following general observation. There is no such thing as "A Homicide Problem." There are many homicide problems. Even labeling something as a "gang" homicide masks important aspects that need to be understood before enacting policy; for example, whether the homicide was motivated by gang rivalry, or the protection of drug markets, or was merely an argument that involved young males who happened to be gang members. This makes it difficult, at best, to offer more concrete policy recommendations for addressing the current upswing in violence. However, given that so much of the violence involves gangs, one might consider a "pulling levers" strategy first developed by Boston's Operation Ceasefire (also known as the Boston Gun Project.) This nationally renowned intervention, implemented to address Boston's youth gun violence problem during the mid-1990s, exploited the social structure of gangs by making it known that if a gang continued to commit acts of gun violence, then any member of that gang would receive increased attention from the criminal justice system by stepping up such activities as probation/parole searches and the enforcement of non-felony warrants. At the same time, the community and social service providers stood ready to offer their services and guidance to those youth ready to eschew a violent lifestyle. The results were remarkable, with youth gun homicide rates falling to nearly zero for an extended period of time.

This "pulling levers" approach has been demonstrated to work within several areas of California, including the city of Stockton and the Boyle Heights neighborhood of Los Angeles. Each of these efforts has relied on the "problem solving" approach where the design of the intervention is driven by data analysis. Both targeted an activity (gun violence) rather than an affiliation (gang membership.) What makes this approach especially appealing in Los Angeles is that the message trumpeted by the intervention is not one of "a war on gangs" – a message the community has grown weary of. Instead, the message of the project is both simple and clear – to reduce gun violence in a community where the great majority of these acts happen to be committed by gang members. It is much easier for a community to support an effort aimed at reducing the killing of its youth than it is to support an effort that declares war on its youth.

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The views expressed in this article are not necessarily those of the Attorney General's Office.

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