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## **THINK TANK: Report: Anti-gang tactics not working**

### **Recommendations include youth counseling, jobs**

By DAVID KIHARA  
REVIEW-JOURNAL

Police crackdowns and stiff prison sentences for reputed street gang members haven't stopped gang activity in cities like Los Angeles, Chicago and Las Vegas, according to a Washington, D.C.-based think tank.

The Justice Police Institute released a report early today that it says debunks gang "myths," including that more police and prisons have helped reduce gang activity. The report goes on to say that gangs in some cities are responsible for very little crime and that whites make up a large proportion of gang members.

"We found overall that the traditional approach to gangs has been an overwhelming failure either in terms of reducing gang crimes or even reducing the number of gangs," said Kevin Pranis, co-author of the study titled "Gang Wars: The Failure of Enforcement Tactics and the Need for Effective Public Safety Strategies." He is also a research analyst with the Justice Police Institute.

The Justice Policy Institute's Web site notes that it is a non-profit public policy group that wants to end "society's reliance on incarceration."

The report looked at gangs and police enforcement across the country. Among other things, it found that membership in gangs had decreased nationally from 850,000 in 1996 to 760,000 in 2004; that many gang members leave their gangs within a year and that non-Hispanic white youths account for about 40 percent of youth gangs.

It also stated that "heavy-handed" suppression tactics by police don't work and can actually make gangs stronger.

The report concentrated on Los Angeles and Chicago as two cities that have failed to curb the gang problem with stepped-up law enforcement.

The report recommended that cities provide an array of youth counseling, community-based programs and jobs for young people.

The report cited Las Vegas several times. It stated, for example, that people identified as gang members accounted for 6 percent of violent crime charges filed and 5 percent of drug charges filed from 1989 to 1995.

The report, however, didn't include any more current numbers for Las Vegas.

There are now 7,793 known gang members in Southern Nevada and at least 1,681 gangs in Las Vegas, according to the Metropolitan Police Department.

Those gangs include the 18th Street gang, the Crips and Bloods and dozens of graffiti tagging crews as well as newer hybrid gangs such as Money Over Bitches that have members from all walks of life, police said.

Lt. Bob Sebby of the Las Vegas police's gang unit said the department recently started focusing on "intelligence-led policing" to arrest the big fish in the gang world.

"Obviously we can't arrest ourselves out of this problem. But we go after the most active and violent gang members to reduce gang activity in the valley," he said.

The police also work with community members such as church leaders, school officials and city officials to try to improve crime-ridden neighborhoods. They have held vigils after a shooting takes place.

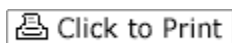
Sebby said these tactics have been working. From Jan. 1, 2006 to mid-July 2006, there were 24 gang-related homicides. For the same period of this year the total is 13, a 46 percent decrease.

For the same time period, gang shootings are down 28 percent, 147 last year compared with 106 this year.

Gang-related assaults and stabbings are also down 37 percent, with 24 this year compared with 38 last year during the same time period, he said.

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