

*A SPECIAL NGCRC REPORT:*

**The Problem of Gangs and Security Threat  
Groups (STG's) in American Prisons  
and Jails Today:  
Recent Findings from the 2012 NGCRC National  
Gang/STG Survey**

by

George W. Knox, Ph.D.  
Executive Director  
NGCRC

*Abstract*

*A mail survey of N = 148 adult prisons and county jails in N = 48 states developed new and useful insights into gang recruiting and other problems behind bars today. Gangs and security threat groups (STG's) control a variety of income-producing enterprises. How prisons and county jails control and respond to gang and STG problems are described. The predictions for the future include an increased gang/STG threat in adult American corrections*

**INTRODUCTION**

Reported here are the preliminary findings from a statistical analysis of the 2012 NGCRC National STG Survey. The survey data collection time period was from the Fall of 2011 to Spring 2012 and resulted in a useable sample size of N = 148 facilities from N = 48 states. It focuses on the adult portion of American corrections and includes both county jails and state prisons as the unit of analysis.

Adult corrections reflects the more serious side of gang/STG problems in America today. While it is true that almost all juvenile correctional facilities have gang/STG problems, the deadlier version of gang conflict is found in the adult system. The adult portion of the American gang/STG problem therefore reflects a higher level of threat.

Generally, any gang problem found in jails is also found in prisons. Jails are for persons awaiting trial, while prisons are for sentenced prisoners. But the gang/STG problem in any state is going to be inextricably intertwined when it comes to the county jail and the state prison. The county jail inmates, once convicted, flow into the state prisons. Both the jail and the prison manifest serious aspects of the gang/STG problem. Both types of facilities have similar needs and functions when it comes to gang/STG intelligence.

**PRIOR RESEARCH**

Some of the best research on prison gangs has been published in the *Journal of Gang Research*, the official publication of the National Gang Crime Research Center now in its 20<sup>th</sup> year as a professional quarterly, over the last two decades. Still other valuable research arises from the prison system itself, particularly the federal Bureau of Prisons. Gaes, et al (2001) reported empirical research based on federal inmates which was able to confirm some of the findings earlier reported by Stone (2000), particularly chapter 9 about a gang classification system in the Stone reader. In the Stone

(2000) reader, the authors from the National Gang Crime Research Center had collected data on over 4,000 incarcerated gang members nationwide. Among other things, it demonstrated that gang members were a more significant disciplinary problem and threat generally than non-gang members behind bars. This covered fights, disciplinary reports, etc., at the individual unit of analysis and technically represented probably the single largest sample size of gang members ever developed in the previously reported literature.

### **DEFINITIONS**

A security threat group (STG) is any group of three (3) or more persons with recurring threatening or disruptive behavior (i.e., violations of the disciplinary rules where said violations were openly known or conferred benefit upon the group would suffice for a prison environment), including but not limited to gang crime or gang violence (i.e., crime of any sort would automatically make the group a gang, and as a gang in custody it would logically be an STG). In some jurisdictions the Security Threat Group is also called a “Disruptive Group”. STG’s or disruptive groups would include any group of three or more inmates who were members of the same street gang, or prison gang, or the same extremist political or ideological group where such extremist ideology is potentially a security problem in the correctional setting (i.e., could inflame attitudes, exacerbate racial tensions, spread hatred, etc).

Definitions of STG’s do exist which are more liberal and allow for any group of “two or more persons” to define an STG and this apparently became the ACA (American Correctional Association) definition over a decade ago (“two or more inmates, acting together, who pose a threat to the security or safety of staff/inmates, and/or are disruptive to programs and/or to the orderly management of the facility/system”, see ACA quote in Allen, Simonsen, Latessa, 2004: p. 196). The problem with two is that this is only a social dyad at best. The social dyad is not capable of the primordial act of any organization: delegation, as can occur in a true social group (which must have 3 or more persons in it). The definition advanced here is more consistent with the larger literature, and American law, on the definition of “gang”.

The definition of an STG in the Arizona Department of Corrections is typical of those definitions which emphasize certain issues and ignore others, let us examine it here:

“What is a Security Threat Group? Any organization, club, association or group of individuals, formal or informal (including traditional prison gangs), that may have a common name, identifying sign or symbol, and whose members engage in activities that would include, but are not limited to planning, organizing, threatening, financing, soliciting, committing, or attempting to commit unlawful acts or an act that would violate the departments written instructions, which would detract from the safe orderly operations of prisons” (Arizona Dept. Of Corrections, 2004).

Note that size of the group is not important, but that the STG “may have” a common name or symbol; the list of “may have’s” could be very extensive. Just as the list of behavior’s could be prohibitively long: it may be sufficient to say “any crime, deviance, or rule breaking”.

A prison gang, correctly defined, is any gang (where a gang is a group of three or more persons who recurrently commit crime, and where the crime is openly known to the group) that operates in prison. However, a tradition has developed “in practice” within the context of applied ideas about prison gangs, where the correctional practitioner defines a prison gang exclusively as “a gang that originated in the prison”. Thus, gangs like the Aryan Brotherhood and the Black Guerilla Family and the Melanics would be “pure prison gangs” in this respect, because these were not street gangs imported into the prison system, these are gangs that originated within the prison system itself. The Lyman (1989) definition of prison gang centers around the commission of crime, without the crime a prison group could violate rules and regulations and still be a security threat group.

Can there be a disruptive group that is not necessarily a gang? Yes, of course, if the collective identity of the group is such that it seeks to challenge the legitimacy of the correctional system itself. In Texas, for example, the pre-service and in-service “gang/STG training” includes information about a group called the “Self Defense Family (SDF)”. The SDF is mostly Black with one white inmate, but objectively it is a group that just likes to file law suits against the prison system, the members of the SDF are “prison lawyers”: not real lawyers, self-taught inmates who have become very adept at frivolous law suits. The SDF may not qualify as a “gang”, because after all what they are doing is “lawful”, but they are a “threat” to the Institutional Division of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice.

“Stigged” to “STG’d” means to the process by which any group of inmates is determined to be and becomes officially labeled as a Security Threat Group. This often goes according to official policy and procedure for declaring an inmate group a STG, there are written guidelines and there usually exists a burden of proof requirement — such a the need to show a pattern of abuses or

documenting offenses (disciplinary rules, assaults, violence, etc) over time in a time series approach. Typically this process begins at the institutional level where the group is a problem, and the central administration reviews the recommendation, and then if the evidence is sufficient, the inmate group becomes classified as a Security Threat Group statewide, i.e., throughout the entire prison system.

“Validated” refers to the “validation process”, a process by which an inmate is determined, usually after continuing to be a gang banger in prison, to be a “security threat group member” by the prison officials. In California, most gang members behind bars are not “validated”, the stigma of “validated” means the inmate would have had a continued career of conspicuous gang banging violence behind bars. Thus, officially for decades, California’s prison system has reported to researchers that it has a “low gang density”, because these estimates of gang density (the percentage of inmates who are gang/STG members) are based upon “validated gang/STG members”. So the way “validated” has worked in some jurisdictions like California is that it refers to a process where after posting many warnings and cautioning inmates against engaging in crime or violence on behalf of their gang, after of course being put in prison for the same thing, the inmate continues to be caught for gang violence behind bars, and the correctional system has no other recourse than to say “we’ve had enough, now you are a validated gang member”. Validated gang members can be given special security levels and more restricted housing environments.

Gang denial is a social policy whereby the entity involved — the city, the facility, the company, the school, or the entire state corrections agency — denies there is a gang problem or reports a significantly lower gang problem than actually exists. Sometimes called the “Ostrich phenomenon”, it means ignoring the problem, hoping it will go away on its own. In some jurisdictions, it is politically imposed because awareness could have implications for the local tourism trade. Or more typically, there is an assumption that if the entity reports a gang problem, it attracts further “bad news”. It is hard to attract new employees to low paying high turnover jobs in corrections when the newspapers are reporting gang fights behind bars. It usually takes a serious crisis or a local news media investigation to reverse a “gang denial policy”.

The term “validation process” as used in California was their innovative way of dealing with a high gang density rate: it is reasonable to believe that California’s prison system, as a producer of gangs, that is as a major national epicenter of gangs, is probably comparable to Illinois with regard to gang density. In Illinois, approximately 80 to 90 percent of the inmates coming into the prison system were gang members on the streets. Gang inmates are told to behave, and if they do not, they face the risk of being a “validated gang member”.

Thus, when California reports to a prison researcher that “six percent of our inmates are STG/prison gang members” they are couching this unbelievably low statistic in the magical language of “validated gang members”: those who within the inmate population continued to be gang bangers and we caught them doing it in very serious offenses after being incarcerated. One might ask, of course, is this policy of obscuring the gang problem the way it is reported to the public — a variation on the “gang denial” theme — a policy that could also encourage a greater personal safety threat to the correctional officers who work there?

Gang density means the percentage of inmates who are members of a street or prison gang. Gang members rarely give up their gang upon being incarcerated, they continue their gang involvement in most cases. Gangs are the dominant subculture in the entire American correctional system today (jails, juvenile and adult correctional facilities, public and private).

Some practitioners in their writing like to make a distinction between traditional prison gangs and untraditional prison gangs, where what they really mean is that the traditional prison gangs were those first on the scene (Aryan Brotherhood, Black Guerilla Family, etc) and that untraditional or non-traditional would therefore be “anything else”. This is not a particularly useful distinction when it is known that some gangs considered “traditional prison gangs” have long ago made the transition to the street. A better, more analytically sound, distinction would be to classify these prison gangs in terms of the level of their organizational threat: are they in a national gang alliance system, do they have a national impact, and a large number of empirical measurements that can be taken on gang groups and gang organizations in terms of the features of their social organization (Knox, 2000).

#### **Four Charged With “Gang Assault” On Inmate at the Attica State Prison in New York**

This is not what is meant in the present report for what constitutes a “gang assault” in a prison or correctional environment. This does not involve a well known street or prison gang and its members attacking a rival gang member or neutron. This is the sad story of four correctional officers under indictment for felony charges of gang assault, conspiracy and tampering with evidence.

In mid-December, 2011, four correctional officers (Keith Swack, 37; Sean Warner, 37; Matthew Raddemacher, 29; and Erik Hibsich, 28) were arrested after being indicted on the felony charges. The gang assault charge carries a 5 to 25 year sentence if convicted. The four correctional officers, all of whom worked at the Attica prison, bonded out at \$25,000 each.

The alleged victim is an inmate named George Williams, 29, who suffered broken bones and fractures in an attack on August 9, 2011. The alleged attack was associated with shakedowns for weapons and drugs going on or about the same time frame.

Under New York state law “a person is guilty of gang assault in the second degree when, with intent to cause physical injury to another person and when aided by two or more persons actually present, he causes serious physical injury to such person or to a third person. Gang assault in the second degree is a class C felony” (New York Penal law 120.06). If the intent was to “cause serious physical injury”, then it rises to a class B felony (New York Penal Law 120.07).

These laws were passed to fight against gangs and STG’s, they were not likely designed to be used against correctional officers. Because they are so general, they have been interpreted as allowing for the prosecution of anyone, including correctional officers, regardless of “gang membership”, regardless of gang or STG affiliation by any of the assailants.

The way to make it a gang/STG law would be to use the kind of language like this that specifically targets gangs/STG’s: “A person is guilty of gang assault in the first degree when, with intent to cause physical injury to another person and when aided by two or more persons who are members of the same gang or security threat group, he causes serious physical injury to such person or to a third person”. New York state policy makers did not do that though. The left the law intentionally vague and ambiguous with regard to actual gang status of the assailants.

## **METHODOLOGY**

A random sample of prisons and jails were identified in 2011 and contacted by mail. The first point of contact was with the superintendent or warden. In some cases where we did not receive a response, we would contact someone lower in the chain of command that we might know from the NGCRC mailing list. By spring of 2012, we had received N = 148 completed surveys representing 48 of the 50 states.

### **1. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESPONDING CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES**

Here we examine some of the characteristics of the sample of N = 148 American correctional facilities. We describe some of the most important aspects of the nature and type of correctional facilities used in this analysis. These kind of sample characteristics include: level of governmental jurisdiction, the inmate population size representing in the sample, and level of security reflected in the sample.

#### **LEVEL OF GOVERNMENT: COUNTY OR STATE**

A question on the survey asked what level of governmental jurisdiction their facility falls into. The choices were County or State government. Some 43.9 percent were at the county level of government, basically county jails. Some 56.1 percent were at the state level, basically state correctional institutions. A small number of respondents were private facilities contracted to serve the state correctional system and are included at the state level of jurisdiction even though they are private for-profit contractors.

#### **ALL TOGETHER THE SAMPLE FACILITIES HELD A TOTAL OF NEARLY 150,000 INMATES**

The survey asked for inmate population counts. The sum of male inmates was 135,704 inmates and the sum of female inmates was 9,031.

#### **THE SECURITY LEVEL OF FACILITIES RESPONDING TO THE SURVEY**

The survey included the question “what level of security is your institution” and they were given three response mode choices: minimum, medium, or maximum. Some 18.5 percent were Minimum, some 35.6 percent were medium security, and most (45.9%) of the institutions in this sample are maximum security correctional facilities.

#### **HOW PREVALENT IS PRISON OVERCROWDING?**

The survey asked the question “generally, is overcrowding a problem in your facility”? Only 36.2 percent of the respondents answered “yes”, that overcrowding is a problem. Most (63.8%) reported that overcrowding was not a problem in their correctional facility.

#### **ZIP CODES**

We do analyze zipcodes and included it in the survey, the values ranged from 01440 thru 99664. Some 91 percent of the respondents indicated in the survey that it was okay to use the zip code

or geographical identifier of the responding agency in the analysis and reporting of the research results.

#### **MOST RESPONDENTS WANTED A COPY OF THE REPORT**

Some 92.2 percent of the respondents wanted to receive a copy of the report. The NGCRC made sure they were the very first to receive a copy of the report.

#### **DOES THE FACILITY HAVE A FULL-TIME STAFF PERSON WHO SERVES AS AN STG INTELLIGENCE COORDINATOR**

The survey included the question “does your institution have any full-time staff person who serves as a STG intelligence coordinator”? The results show that just over half (58.6%) of the facilities have a staff person who serves the function of being an STG coordinator. Still, some 41.4 percent of the facilities did not have the benefits of an STG coordinator position in the organizational structure of their jail or prison. More often than not it was the STG coordinator who completed the survey.

## **2. SCOPE AND EXTENT OF THE GANG/STG PROBLEM IN AMERICAN CORRECTIONS**

Here we examine a variety of aspects which provide quantitative estimates of the scope and extent of the gang/STG problem in American corrections today. From a systems point of view, gang members are mostly imported into the correctional system when they are prosecuted and convicted. It is possible to join the gang inside prison, just as it is possible to quit the gang inside prison, although not very easily. When we are talking about the gang or security threat group (STG) problem behind bars, in a jail or prison, we need to use the concept of “gang density”: it is the percentage of inmates who are gang or STG members.

Generally, the gang density in American correctional institutions has been steadily increasing for the last two decades.

#### **PERCENTAGE OF INMATES WHO WERE PROBABLY GANG MEMBERS ON THE STREETS**

Since the study by Jacobs (1974) of Stateville prison gangs, the concept of importation has helped us understand that in places like Illinois, most of the gang members are imported into the correctional system when gang members are convicted of felony crimes. So, in the Stateville example of gang members behind bars, these are not gang members who first joined inside a prison, they had been gang members prior to entering into the correctional stem. The vast majority of gang members behind bars might therefore be presumed to be imported.

Nevertheless, there are still cases where people join gangs or security threat groups (STG's) for the first time officially while they are incarcerated, it is just not something that has been widely studied in an empirical way.

Respondents were asked in the survey to estimate the percentage of inmates in their institution who were probably gang members on the streets.

The percentile ranged from zero percent to a high of 100 percent for male inmates, and the mean or arithmetic average was 30.2 percent.

The percentile ranged from zero percent to a high of 100 percent for female inmates, and the mean or arithmetic average was 8.8 percent.

Gang density level refers specifically the percentage of inmates who are gang members. It consists of those who came into the facility as gang members, the imported and larger portion of the gang density statistic, as well as those who joined while incarcerated. The percentage of inmates who first joined a gang while in custody can be likened to a “contamination density level”. That is, if a neutron (non gang member) joins the gang while in custody, it is explained by the contamination from other gang members in custody.

Respondents to the survey reported information on the “threshold” for when gang density represents a severe problem for correctional administrators, and the mean score for that threshold was 22.6 percent — so that if gang density rises above 22.6 percent, the respondents from our survey felt that a severe gang problem exists.

#### **ESTIMATE OF GANG DENSITY IN CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTIONS**

The survey asked the question “overall, considering the percentage who were gang members before they came to your institution and considering the percentage who joined or quit after they came to your institution, what percentage of the inmates in your facility are gang members?”. The results ranged from zero to 90 percent for males, with a mean score of 29.5 percent. The results for female gang density showed a range from zero to 30 percent, with a mean score of 3.61 percent.

Thus, over recent years, it appears that the national gang density parameter has increased inside American correctional institutions. Secondly, the prison gang problem remains mostly a male problem, with female inmates having a significantly lower gang density rate.

### **ESTIMATES OF THE PERCENTAGE OF INMATES WHO ARE IMPORTED GANG MEMBERS WITH PERMANENT GANG TATTOOS**

One of the survey questions asked the respondents to “please estimate what percentage of inmates who came into your facility as gang members have permanent gang tattoos?”.

The fact is most gang members have such permanent gang tattoos. Not surprisingly, the range of percentage values ranged from a low of zero to a high of 100 percent, but the overall mean was 48.2 percent for males, and 26.9 percent for females.

### **A FOURTH OF THE CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES REPORT THAT GANG MEMBERS HAVE BEEN A PROBLEM IN TERMS OF ASSAULTS ON STAFF**

The survey included the question “have gang members been a problem in terms of assaults on your staff”? Some 25 percent indicated “yes”. Thus, in three-fourths of the facilities gang members have not been a problem in terms of assaults on staff.

### **HALF OF THE CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES REPORT THAT GANG MEMBERS HAVE BEEN A PROBLEM IN TERMS OF THREATS ON STAFF**

The survey included the question “have gang members been a problem in terms of threats on staff”? The results show that about half (49%) of the correctional facilities do in fact report that gang members have been a problem in terms of threats on staff. And, half (51%), report that gang members are not a problem in terms of threats on staff.

### **WHAT PERCENTAGE OF JAIL/PRISON MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS ARE CAUSED BY GANGS?**

The survey included the question “in your estimate, what percentage of all institutional management problems in your facility are caused by gangs or gang members”? The results showed a range between a low of zero percent to a high of 100 percent. The mean score was 27.2, meaning that on the average, gangs and gang members cause about a fourth (27.2%) of all management problems in prisons and jails.

### **WHAT PERCENTAGE OF ALL VIOLENCE AMONG INMATES IS CAUSED BY GANGS?**

The survey included the question “in your estimate, what percentage of all violence among inmates in your facility is caused by gangs or gang members”? The results showed a range of values between a low of zero to a high of 100 percent. The mean score was 33.7, meaning that on the average, gangs and gang members cause about a third (33.7%) of all the violence among inmates.

### **WHAT IS MORE DANGEROUS: STREET GANG OR PRISON GANG?**

The survey asked the question “in general, which type of gang group poses more danger to your facility: a street gang (has its origins outside of prison), or a prison gang (has its origins inside of prison)?” It is interesting that most, 58.5 percent, picked “street gang”. While 41.5 percent felt that the prison gang posed the greater danger.

### **ARE THE MORE DANGEROUS GANGS IN PRISONS THE SAME ONES THAT EXIST OUTSIDE OF PRISON?**

The survey asked the question “do the more dangerous security threat groups that exist in your facility also exist by the same name in communities outside of the correctional environment”? Here the evidence is clear: yes, in most cases, as 89.5 percent of the respondents reported that “yes”, the more dangerous STG’s exist by the same names on the street. Only 10.5 percent of the respondents reported that their most dangerous STG’s did not exist by the same name on the streets.

A good example of how prison gangs also exist outside of prison as a crime problem would be the Nuestra Familia prison gang which was found to be responsible for a murder spree in the Santa Rosa, California (Geniella, 2001). The Nuestra Familia is a Hispanic gang whose epicenter is northern California and who exist as the primary enemy of the Mexican Mafia from southern California. The Nuestra Familia had for a long time been in the business of ordering “hits” on rival gang members, even their own errant members, and having younger members on the street carry out these contract murders. At one point, with seven dead bodies to their credit, the Nuestra Familia felt so emboldened that it wanted to assassinate an aggressive no-nonsense prosecutor from Sonoma County, California. The killings continued until someone noticed in 1998 that a pattern seemed to account for a lot of homicides and many other crimes. It was only at this point that local officials “discovered” that the Nuestra Familia was not just a prison gang, that it also operated on the streets of California communities.

### **3. THE ISSUE OF GANG RECRUITMENT BEHIND BARS**

Here we examine a number of different considerations in understanding the problem of gang recruitment behind bars. It is an issue drawing the attention of legislative proposals in Congress in recent years. Still, until this study, there has been no hard information “gang recruitment” per se,

behind bars. There is a good deal of previous research on gangs/STG problems behind bars, a lot of it produced by the NGCRC since the first such study in 1990.

But “gang recruitment” behind bars is a special aspect of the gang/STG problem. So, below we examine some of the first hard data on the problem ever to surface in the research literature. It is indeed a genuine problem is what the findings show.

### **IS GANG RECRUITMENT BEHIND BARS A VERY REAL PROBLEM?**

Yes, apparently it is a very real problem in American corrections today. The 2012 NGCRC Adult Corrections Survey included the question “Do you believe that some inmates may have voluntarily joined (sought out) or may have been recruited into a gang while incarcerated?”.

The results of the survey showed that 86.8 percent (N = 125) of the respondents felt that yes indeed some inmates may have voluntarily joined the gang or may have been recruited into the gang while incarcerated, it is a very common experience according to the overwhelming majority of these respondents.

Only 13.2 percent (N = 19), a minority of the respondents did not feel that there were any inmates joining a gang for any reason while in custody.

### **ESTIMATES OF THE AMOUNT OF GANG JOINING BEHAVIOR BEHIND BARS**

Recall that most of the gang members behind bars were imported into the correctional system, as a result of committing and/or being convicted of a crime. But most prison gang members or STG inmates were hooked up before they came into custody. The present analysis provides one of, if not the very first, true quantitative estimate of the scope and extent to which inmates join gangs after they enter the correctional system.

An inmate may enter the correctional system as a neutron, non-gang aligned, and still join or be recruited into a gang. In other cases, an inmate may enter the correctional system not as a full gang member, but as perhaps an associate of a gang or who may have a brother or relative or close friend in the gang. And then, again while in custody, they formally join the gang that they had a casual association with.

The 2012 NGCRC Corrections STG Survey asked the question “please estimate what percentage of inmates were not gang members on the streets, but who did in fact join a gang or an STG after entering your institution.”.

The statistical estimates for male inmates first joining a gang while in correctional custody ranged from a low of zero percent to a high of 97 percent. The mean, or arithmetic average, was 19.8 percent of the inmates. Or literally, one out of five inmates in America may be joining a gang for the first time after they enter the correctional system.

The statistical estimates for female inmates were somewhat lower, with the values showing a range between zero to a high of 98 percent, but with an overall mean of 13.1 percent.

### **DO ADULT CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES HAVE RULES AGAINST GANG RECRUITMENT?**

The survey asked the question “does your facility have specific disciplinary rules that prohibit gang recruitment?”. Some 58.6 percent (N = 85) indicated that yes they did have specific disciplinary rules that prohibit gang recruitment. Just under half of the correctional facilities though (41.4%, N = 60) did not have disciplinary rules that prohibited gang recruitment.

Thus, in many prisons and jails in America it is still “open season” for gang members to freely recruit other gang members while they are behind bars, and not even face disciplinary sanctions.

### **INMATES COMPLAINING ABOUT GANGS/STG's TRYING TO RECRUIT THEM BEHIND BARS**

Apparently it is an issue that has just not captured much attention over the years, but it is a real issue, and a real problem: the problem of gang recruitment behind bars. The survey included the question “do you get complaints from non-gang inmates that gangs or STG's are trying to recruit them while incarcerated”? The results show that 44.1 percent of the respondents do in fact report such complaints about gangs/STG's recruiting inmates behind bars. About half of the facilities (55.9%) report no such complaints from inmates about gang recruitment behind bars.

### **LOW LEVEL OF CONTAMINATION FROM THE MIM**

Some types of political extremist groups try to recruit inmates and prisoners in America, they can do this through the U.S. Postal Service. These groups often have sophisticated websites as well. The Maoist International Movement (MIM) exists to spread communist ideology among inmates incarcerated in American jails and prisons. It seeks to radicalize prison inmates and give them a platform for organizing resistance against the American government. If your inmates are corresponding with MIM, you might have a problem brewing.

The survey included the question “have any of the inmates in your facility corresponded with the Maoist International Movement (MIM)”? Only 4.6 percent of the respondents indicated that their inmates have been in contact with MIM. Thus, it would appear that MIM is not effectively reaching out to the vast majority of American inmates. Not yet at least. Alternatively, maybe such contact with MIM is going under the radar of prison and jail officials.

#### **ESTIMATE IS LOW FOR HOME-GROWN TERRORIST RECRUITMENT**

The survey included the question “what percentage of inmates in your facility are so hostile towards their society that if they were approached by a foreign terrorist organization, what we call today’s inmates could be tomorrow’s terrorists”? The estimates ranged from a low of zero to a high of 75 percent. The mean score was 6.17 percent.

#### **4. THE ISSUES AND CONTROVERSIES ABOUT RELIGIOUS WORSHIP FOR INMATES AND PRISONERS**

There are a myriad of problems involving religion that overlap with gangs, STG’s, racial conflict, extremism, and other challenges to the correctional system. The correctional system has to maintain safety and security as a foremost goal. We will see that there are new challenges facing corrections today from the abuse of religious practices behind bars.

#### **FEW CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES REPORT ABUSE OF RLUIPA**

RLUIPA stands for “Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act”. Persons wanting to know more about how this impacts on corrections can go to the website sponsored by the Becket Fund — [www . RLUIPA . Com](http://www.RLUIPA.Com) — and see that many correctional agencies have been sued over this federal law that went into effect in the year 2000. What this new law did was extend certain new statutory rights to prison inmates, said inmates quickly learned they had a new weapon to use against correctional administrators, and a massive onslaught of frivolous lawsuits were soon unleashed against correctional agencies nationwide. Additionally, gangs got into the “prisoner religious rights” business and began to operate as a religious front, using RLUIPA as the basis for holding their meetings.

It is helpful to summarize the recent case from Ohio regarding this statute (Trout, 2004). Basically, what RLUIPA did for adult correctional institutions was to increase the review requirements for placing any restrictions on inmates that might pertain to religion. Prior to the passage of RLUIPA the rational review doctrine applied: this meant that disciplinary measures and restrictions could be placed on inmates regarding religion simply if the prison administration rationally decides it is in the best interests of safety and security to do so. After 2000, though, RLUIPA established the strict scrutiny doctrine under which the burden of proof shifts from the inmate needing to prove his rights were violated to the prison needing to prove it is not violating the rights of inmates. In other words, under the strict scrutiny doctrine American prisons are under strict scrutiny and assumed to want to systematically violate the rights of inmates, such that any restriction on an inmate’s religious practices is assumed to require extra special scrutiny.

In establishing the strict scrutiny doctrine, RLUIPA also created two classes of inmates: those whose rights are protected when they operate under the cloak of a religion, and those whose rights are not protected when they do not. Thus, those inmates who might want to advance a hatred of anything but Caucasian people could easily do so by organizing their religious service under a wide variety of banners (Christian Identity, WCOTC, etc), and when they possess inflammatory materials along these lines, they are a religion and the inmates can claim it is constitutionally protected. At the same time, an ordinary neo-nazi who does the same thing, but who does not claim it is a religious practice, will face summary disciplinary procedures under the rational review doctrine. Over the years it appears that inmates have learned that it “pays off” to take on the special status of a religion.

The Ohio adult prison system won a major victory against RLUIPA: the portion of the law applying to prisoners was found to be unconstitutional in the Sixth Circuit.

The survey question in the 2012 NGCRC National STG Survey was constructed as follows: “has your facility experienced any abuses of religious freedoms as a result of the RLUIPA?”

Some 18.7 percent reported “yes” in fact they had experienced abuses of RLUIPA.

#### **DO PRISONERS NEED GROUP WORSHIP?**

The survey question in the 2012 NGCRC National STG Survey was constructed as follows: “do you believe prisoners can meet their religious needs individually without group worship?”

Some 78.9 (N = 112) percent of the respondents felt, yes, that prisoners can meet their religious needs individually without group worship.

Thus, about a fifth 21.1 (N = 30) percent felt therefore that prisoners need the group worship.

**ARE INMATES GETTING THE SATANIC BIBLE IN PRISON?**

The survey asked "Have any of the inmates in your facility request or have actually ordered and possessed as their property in your facility, the Satanic Bible by Anton Le Vey?". The survey results show that 26.8 percent of the correctional facilities report that inmates are requesting or getting access to this book about Satanism.

**ARE INMATES GETTING THE BOOK OF SHADOWS IN PRISON?**

The survey asked "Have any of the inmates in your facility, past or present, ever possessed or manufactured a *Book of Shadows*?". The results showed that 19.4 percent (N = 26) of the facilities reported inmates found with this book.

The *Book of Shadows* is a Wiccan book containing "spells" and instructions for magical witchcraft rituals.

**DO INMATES REQUEST TO CONDUCT A BLOD RITE BEHIND BARS?**

The survey asked "have any of the inmates in your facility requested to conduct the Blod Rite in your facility?". Only 6.7 percent (N = 9) of the correctional facilities reported that inmates had requested to conduct the Blod Rite ceremony. This "Blod Rite" ritual is used in the Odinist religion, where the priest or priestess gather others who worship the white God of Valhalla (Odin). Odinism could obviously be a front for white racist extremism, at least this would be consistent with the analysis by Blazak (2002).

**WHAT ARE THE MOST POPULAR TYPE OF RELIGIOUS SERVICES THAT INMATES ACTUALLY ATTEND BEHIND BARS?**

We are not familiar with any estimates of this kind of behavior: the actual religion attendance data behind bars. Who attends what kind of religious service is generally a complete mystery when it comes to what goes on in our nation's jails and prisons. If anyone is keeping track, no one is analyzing it and reporting the results.

But this survey asked the respondents to estimate the breakdown of the percentage of inmates attending religious services in their facility for five separate categories of "religious service".

Least attended are Muslim services, with only 12.8 percent of the inmates in jails and prisons attending Muslim services. Only 15.9 percent attend Catholic services. Some 20.6 percent attend Protestant services. Some 17.05 percent attend an "other" type of service: such as Odinism, or Wicca, or any religion other than Muslim, Protestant, Catholic. But the single most popular option was to attend nothing: 42.2 percent of the inmates attend no type of religious services at all.

So, non-believers are the single largest category of inmate when it comes to what religious service they prefer, the single largest group (42.2%) attend nothing and are receiving no religious influence of any kind in American jails and prisons today.

An average of 5.29 different religious groups are being provided with time and space for group worship meetings in the typical American prison or jail facility.

An average of 18.2 inmates per institution are on a "special religious diet".

**GANGS WILL USE RELIGION AS A "FRONT" FOR MEETINGS IN PRISON**

The survey included the question "have inmates attempted to use religious services as a front for a Security Threat Group or gang"? Some 62.4 percent of the respondents indicated "yes", that inmates have tried to use religious services for their gang. Only 37.6 percent of the respondents reported not seeing this kind of abuse of religion behind bars.

**DO ISLAMIC INMATES HAVE A SEPARATE GANG?**

The survey included the question "do Islamic inmates have a separate gang"? Some 23.6 percent of the respondents answered "yes", that Islamic inmates had a separate gang in their correctional facility. About three-fourths of the correctional facilities reported that Islamic inmates did not have a separate gang.

**MOST JAILS AND PRISONS DO NOT HAVE A STAFF PERSON PHYSICALLY PRESENT DURING RELIGIOUS SERVICES**

The survey asked "do you have a staff person physically in the room during all religious services"? Only 36.5 percent of the respondents indicated that "yes" they had a staff person present during all religious services. Thus, in most cases (63.5%) there is not a staff person physically present during inmate religious services.

**MOST JAILS AND PRISONS DO HAVE AUDITORY/VISUAL SUPERVISION OF RELIGIOUS SERVICES**

Many jails and prisons can use a surveillance camera in the room designed for religious services. So the survey included the question "do you have auditory/visual supervision of all religious services"? Here we see that about two-thirds of prisons and jails (65.5%) have this kind of audio/visual

supervision capability. Still, a third (34.5%) of the respondents did not have this kind of audio-visual capability for inmate religious services.

### **HAVE GANG MEMBERS TRIED TO CONTROL ANY RELIGIOUS PROGRAM CHOICES IN PRISONS AND JAILS?**

The survey included the question “have gang members tried to control any religious program choices at your facility”? Some 27.9 percent of the respondents answered “yes”, that gang members have tried to control religious services inside their correctional institution. Still, some 72.1 percent reported no such attempts by gangs to control religious program choices.

### **MILITARISTIC BEHAVIOR BY RELIGIOUS GROUPS IS ALMOST UNIFORMLY PROHIBITED IN MOST JAILS AND PRISONS**

The Melanics in the Michigan Department of Corrections were one of the most militaristic prison gangs in the United States. This gang would have its members dress alike, walk and run in formation, do exercises on the prison yard with cadence calls from one of their leaders, saluting, marching, and always ready for battle. The Melanics used the religion they made up called the Melanic Islamic Palace of the Rising Sun (MIPRS). After a long federal court case, the Melanics are no longer able to function in the way they once did, and are now regarded as a Security Threat Group.

The survey included the question “is militaristic behavior allowed by religious groups in your facility (e.g., saluting, marching, cadence, etc)”. The overwhelming majority of respondents from jails and prisons (95.2%) indicated “no”, that this kind of behavior was not allowed in their correctional facility. Only 4.8 percent of the respondents indicated that religious groups behind bars were actually allowed to display militaristic behavior.

### **ABOUT A THIRD OF THE CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES ALLOW INMATES TO LEAD RELIGIOUS SERVICES**

The survey asked the question “do you allow prisoners to lead services when volunteers/chaplains are not qualified/available for services”. Two thirds of the respondents (66.4%) indicated “no”, that they do not allow prisoners to lead religious services. Still, about a third of the respondents (33.6%), indicated “yes” that their correctional facilities allow prisoners to lead the service in such situations.

### **FEW CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES ALLOW PRISONERS TO USE RELIGIOUS TITLES OF AUTHORITY**

The survey asked the question “Do you allow prisoners to refer to themselves with religious titles of power or authority (Grand Sheik, Imam, Supreme Pontificate, etc)”. Only 14.5 percent of the jails and prisons responding to the survey indicated that “yes”, they allow prisoners to use such titles. Most correctional facilities (85.5%) simply do not allow prisoners to use religious titles of authority or power.

### **MOST FACILITIES HAVE WRITTEN STANDARDS REGARDING WHAT IS APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR AND LANGUAGE FOR RELIGIOUS STAFF AND VISITING CHAPLAINS**

The survey included the question “has your facility developed written standards and guidelines for religious staff and visiting chaplains regarding what is appropriate behavior and language for a secure correctional environment”? Some 82.7 of the respondents indicated “yes”, that their facility had such written guidelines. Only 17.3 percent of the facilities reported that they do in fact lack such written guidelines and policies.

### **FEW PRISONS AND JAILS USE TELE-RELIGIOUS PROGRAMMING**

The survey included the question “does your facility use videotaped or televised services when a chaplain/volunteer is not available for inmate worship services”? Only 17.5 percent of the respondents indicated “yes”, that their facilities used this kind of religious service. Most of the prisons and jails (82.5%) reported they did not use such televised services when they do not have an actual chaplain/volunteer on hand to provide the service.

### **BUT MANY RESPONDENTS LIKE THE IDEA OF TAKING AWAY THE “GROUP PARTICIPATION” COMPONENT OF PRISONER RELIGIOUS WORSHIP SERVICES**

The survey included the question “do you feel that prisoners could practice their religious beliefs in the privacy of their cell/room (or by means of closed circuit televised broadcast), without the need for group participation”? Here we find only 18.9 percent responding “no”. The majority here, some 81.1 percent, report that “yes”: they feel prisoners could practice their religious beliefs without the need for group participation.

On the other hand, some may say that the “group” or sharing part of the service is exactly what makes it a worthwhile as opposed to unsatisfactory mode of worship.

#### **FOUR-FIFTHS OF RESPONDENTS AGREE THAT RLUIPA MIGHT NEED MODIFICATION**

The survey included the question “do you feel that federal legislators need to modify the RLUIPA in regard to the security issues facing adult correctional institutions where inmates might be expected to abuse religious rights”? Some 81.5 percent of the respondents agreed that RLUIPA may need to be modified. Only about a fifth (18.5%) did not feel that RLUIPA needed to be modified.

#### **5. THE ISSUE OF RACIAL EXTREMISM AND RACIAL CONFLICT BEHIND BARS**

Few problems are as entrenched as that of racial conflict behind bars in American corrections. It is characterized by the existence of white racial extremism among inmates which is itself supported and nourished by white racist extremist groups in the free world. It is an entrenched problem, and as we will see, it is directly related to the gang/STG problem.

It is a problem that something can and should be done about. Yet we will see that there is not much support for the idea of intervention in this area. Those working in corrections are very pessimistic about the prospects for reducing the problem and few if any program resources exist in American corrections to deal with this enduring problem.

#### **A MAJORITY OF ADULT CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTIONS REPORT THAT WHITE INMATES HAVE A SEPARATE GANG**

The survey asked “do white inmates have a separate gang?”. A majority of the institutions responding to the survey, some 70.1 percent (N = 96) reported “yes” that white inmates have a separate gang. Typically, this would entail something like the Aryan Brotherhood, which is pretty much a “whites only” type of gang.

#### **ARE INMATES GETTING THE WHITE MAN’S BIBLE IN PRISON?**

The survey asked “Have any of the inmates in your facility request or have actually ordered and possessed as their property in your facility, the White Man’s Bible?”. Only 12 percent (N = 16) of the facilities indicated inmates have requested or ordered this white racist extremist book.

#### **ARE INMATES GETTING ARYAN EXTREMIST BOOKS IN PRISON?**

The survey asked “Have any of the inmates in your facility request or have actually ordered and possessed as their property in your facility, the Temple of Woton: The Holy Book of the Aryan Tribes, by the 14 Word Press?”. The survey results show that 20 percent of the facilities report inmates trying to order or actually getting this book used by white racist extremists.

#### **WHITE EXTREMIST RELIGIOUS GROUPS PROSELYTIZING AMERICAN INMATES**

A series of three questions were designed to evaluate the extent to which white racist extremist religious groups have been proselytizing American inmates. The survey asked “Has your facility received any prison ministry literature from any of the following groups”.

Some 16.5 percent (N = 21) reported receiving prison ministry materials from the Kingdom Identity Ministries, a well-known Christian Identity group.

Some 26.2 percent (N = 34) reported receiving prison ministry materials from the Church of Jesus Christ Christian group.

And some 26.9 percent (N = 35) reported receiving prison ministry materials from the World Church of the Creator or Creativity (WCOTC).

#### **IS GANG CONFLICT BEHIND BARS OFTEN RACIAL CONFLICT AS WELL?**

Prison gangs have historically been homogeneous with respect to race. Gangs like the Aryan Brotherhood want white members, while gangs like the Black Guerilla Family want Black members. It is also true that conflicts involving Hispanic/Latino/Mexican gangs found in conflict with African-American gangs, can manifest racial conflict as well. Anything that increases racial conflict behind bars also increases the gang problem behind bars.

It is not known if the reverse is true: would any program designed to reduce racial conflict behind bars automatically reduce the gang/STG problem too? The biggest reason for a lack of such knowledge is of course the fact that no one is promoting programs for “racial harmony” behind bars. It is not a popular feature of adult American corrections to find “programs designed for the reduction of racial/ethnic conflict among the inmates”. Would it be hard for such a program to have a reverse-intended effect? Probably.

Among gang experts, it is reasonable to assume that racial conflict is a surrogate measure of gang conflict, and this is true whether we are looking at gang/race conflicts in high schools, the community, or correctional settings.

#### **COULD HOUSING ALL MEMBERS OF ONE GANG TOGETHER ALSO REDUCE RACIAL CONFLICT?**

The survey answered this question for the first time in gang/STG empirical research. The

survey asked “do you believe housing all members of one gang together could reduce the racial conflict among inmates in your facility”? There is little support for the idea that this is true. The majority of respondents (72.2%) felt that “no”, housing all members of one gang together would not reduce racial conflict. Only about a fourth (27.8%) believed that housing all members of one gang together could reduce racial conflict. So this issue is still alive and well it seems from the findings of this survey.

#### **UNDER TEN PERCENT OF AMERICAN JAILS AND PRISONS HAVE ANY PROGRAMS TO IMPROVE RACE RELATIONS AMONG INMATES**

The survey included the question “does your facility have any programs for inmates which seek to improve race relations among inmates”. Only 8.5 percent of the respondents indicated in the affirmative, that “yes”, their facility had a program for inmates which seeks to improve race relations. For the overwhelming vast majority of cases, though (91.5%), respondents indicated that their correctional facility does not have such a program feature.

#### **ABOUT HALF BELIEVE NOTHING CAN BE DONE TO REDUCE RACIAL CONFLICTS**

The survey included the question “do you think anything can be done to reduce racial conflicts among inmates”? The results show almost a 50/50 split, with 51.5 percent responding “yes”, they do believe something can be done to reduce racial conflict. And the other half (48.5%) are skeptical, and do not believe anything can be done to reduce racial conflicts among inmates.

#### **OVER A FOURTH SEE ANTI-GANG VALUE IN HAVING A PROGRAM TO IMPROVE RACE RELATIONS**

The survey included the question “do you believe a program that sought to improve race relations among inmates could reduce the gang violence problem in your facility”? Some 30.7 percent of the respondents agreed that a program to improve race relations could reduce the gang problem as well. Most (69.3%) did not agree with this premise that a program that sought to improve race relations among inmates could reduce the gang problem as well.

#### **MOST PRISON AND JAIL HAVE REPORT RECEIVING TRAINING IN CULTURAL DIVERSITY**

The survey included the question “have most of your staff and employees received training in cultural diversity”? Only 22.9 percent of the respondents reported “no”, that most of their staff had not received cultural diversity training. Three-fourths (77.1%) of the respondents, though, reported that most of their staff had received cultural diversity training.

### **6. THE ISSUE OF GANG RENUNCIATION: GETTING OUT OF THE GANG BEHIND BARS**

We have reviewed the scope and extent to which street gang members become our jail and prison STG members when they are sent to jail or prison. We have also reviewed how some persons join gangs, often being conscripted into gangs or pressured to join STG's, while in custody. It is now important to also examine how, if at all, inmates and prisoners might be able to get out of the gang behind bars.

We will assert that this is a tremendously underutilized option for inmate programming, because previous research shows these same inmates have tried to quit the gang, they just do not have any safe place to do it in. There is no recycling project for them: they are trapped in the gang life pretty much until they are released from prison. This is true because few resources exist to help they quit gang life while behind bars. It is our recommendation in this report that for purposes of public safety our Nation needs to fund more resources in this regard to take some of the bang out of the gang.

#### **GANG RENUNCIATION PROGRAMS RARE IN PRISON**

The survey included the question “does your facility have a special program that is able to get inmates to quit gang life?”. Only 14.4 percent (N = 21) of the respondents indicated that they had such a program. The vast majority (85.5%, N = 124) did not have a gang renunciation program.

#### **FEW JAILS AND PRISONS HAVE A PROGRAM TO ENCOURAGE INMATES TO RENOUNCE GANG LIFE**

The survey included the question “does your facility have a special program for inmates who want to renounce gang life and live gang free”? Only 16.8 percent of the jails and prisons reported “yes” that they have such a program. The vast majority of jails and prisons in America, some 83.2 percent, responded “no” that they do not have such a program.

#### **RARE TO FIND GANG TATTOO REMOVAL SERVICES FOR INMATES**

It is very common for gang reclamation and gang intervention programs, where they have a member of a gang who wants to quit gang life, but who has a gang tattoo, often in a prominent area of the body, face, hand, arm, etc — and it is common to find gang tattoo removal services as an

effective tool to help people leave gang life behind.

It is a very effective tool for gang denunciation programs, where persons inside correctional facilities who have been gang members are offered the opportunity to drop their ties to gang life, and having a gang tattoo removal service is essential in the effort to change the social identity of a gang member.

The survey asked the question “does your facility have a gang tattoo removal program for inmates who want to quit gang life?”. Only a small percentage, 2.1 percent (N = 3) reported having such a service.

The overwhelming vast majority of adult correctional facilities responding to the survey reported that they did not have a gang tattoo removal service for their inmates. It is going to be very hard to assist inmates and prisoners to leave the gang life if they face such an uphill battle to get rid of their gang tattoos.

### **FIRST ESTIMATED PERCENTAGE OF INMATES WHO QUIT GANG LIFE WHILE IN CORRECTIONAL CUSTODY**

It must happen, inmates quitting the gang while incarcerated, but there has never been any prior systematic attempt to estimate the extent to which this actually happens. Further, it is important to have such an estimate because there are a few, isolated programs of unknown capability that do exist in American correctional institutions that are designed to encourage gang affiliated inmates to “drop their flag”, to get out of the gang. It is also important to know more about this kind of statistic from the viewpoint of providing a more solid understanding of the gang population behind bars.

The survey asked the question, as a followup about having a program encouraging inmates to quit the gang, “what percentage of the inmates who come in as gang members actually quit their gang?”. The results ranged from a low of zero percent to a high of 30 percent, with a mean score of 6.19 percent. In other words, there is not any massive exodus from gangs for American inmates today.

There are many reasons why an inmate may quit the gang, and it may be unrelated to the existence or nonexistence of a program or service designed to encourage inmates to detach from the gang life. The present finding strongly indicates that the parameter for inmates exiting from gang life is quite small, overall, in the big picture of American adult corrections.

The extent to which gang inmates quit the gang gives us the best picture of the inactive gang population. It would appear from this research, that the inactive gang population is quite small in American prisons and jails. For self-protection perhaps, they may need to be active gang members.

### **7. HOUSING GANG INMATES SEPARATE OR TOGETHER: WHICH IS BEST?**

No one really knows which is best, we have only limited information over the years on whether housing gang inmates together is a good strategy or whether separating them is a better strategy in terms of, presumably, reducing gang/STG violence behind bars. And we need to clarify that too: what is the fundamental goal when it comes to responding to the gang problem behind bars? Certainly, we must assume even if it is not very effectively vocalized that it does indeed entail the need to reduce or prevent violence against inmate and staff — remembering the primary goal of corrections being to maintain safety and security of the facility.

It is the recommendation of this report that more detailed research be undertaken to evaluate the issues of housing gang inmates.

### **ANOTHER CONTROVERSY: SEGREGATE THE GANG/STG MEMBERS BY TYPE OF GANG OR MIX THEM ALL UP?**

What do you do with all the gang members once you have them in your jail or prison? Do you keep all the white gang members in one housing unit and keep all the African American gang members in a different housing unit? Do you keep all the Bloods in one unit, and all the Crips in a different unit? Or do you carefully mix them all up: like a formula so that no individual specific gang gets control “given to it” by the system.

If you assign the gang/STG inmates to housing so that they are always held in a housing unit with their same or allied gang members, then you give a unique power to the gang by recognizing it in this way. Those that argue in favor of keeping the inmates locked in with their own gang preference will typically claim that this reduces conflicts between the gangs.

The survey asked “In your opinion, would it be best to incarcerate members of the same gang in the same prison housing area, or is it better to mix them up and disperse gang/STG members?”

The findings of the survey show that 28.1 percent felt we should segregate gang/STG members by their specific gang identity, e.g., let all Crips stay together in a Crip wing/dorm/building.

But the majority, some 71.9 percent, over two thirds of the respondents, felt the reverse was true: that we need to mix them up, disperse the Crips with Bloods and neotrons throughout the facility.

So the debate continues, apparently, on which is the best approach in this regard. One thing

is known for sure: when the inmates “flip”, when they become informants against their own gang, for example as occurs when they need to testify in court, then the inmates get the “snitch” label, or the “informant” label. Facilities often have special facilities for snitches, and gang snitches are almost always mixed together.

### **COULD HOUSING ALL MEMBERS OF ONE GANG TOGETHER MAKE THEM STRONGER?**

The survey asked “Do you believe that housing all members of one gang together could make that gang stronger and more powerful”. Here we are starting to see some consensus, because 83 percent responded “yes”. Only 17 percent did not believe that housing all members of one gang together would make them stronger.

So, the overwhelming majority of gang experts, the respondents to this survey being the STG coordinators at the county jail and state prison levels of adult corrections, believe that a kind of “Hogan’s Heroes” phenomenon can occur: where perhaps solidarity and the ability to organize may be enhanced as a result of having a homogeneous housing policy for gang/STG members (e.g., keeping them housed by the same gang).

### **IF WE MIX THEM UP DO WE INDIRECTLY ENCOURAGE THEM TO FIGHT?**

If we have a cell block that holds 50 inmates - - - if we put in 25 Crips and 25 Bloods, or 25 Surenos and 25 Nortenos, or 25 Folks and 25 Peoples - - - are we through environmental design facilitating gang conflict behind bars? Is it not equivalent to putting 25 democrats and 25 republicans in the same room and expecting them to just “get along”. Would you in good conscience put 25 Aryan Brotherhood members in the same prison housing unit with 25 members of the Black Guerilla Family — that particular “mix” is a recipe for disaster. So part of what an STG Coordinator does is finely tune that “mix”, it is more of an art than a science. Prisoners are going to fight at the smallest provocation. Someone might raise this as a possible objection to using a “mix them up” policy for housing gang/STG inmates. And yet the alternative is to house them homogeneously: give them greater gang identity because they will for sure control the unit if they are housed homogeneously.

In terms of the level of evidence that would be suitable in court, we need substantial research and analytical improvements beyond the scope of the present survey. We would need “inmate conflict” or “inmate fight” reports, injury reports, etc. And we would need to compare these over the same time frame for similar types of gangs of the same level of gang density, controlling for the type of housing policy used in the facility. That level of gang/STG research has not yet surfaced in the research literature. But it is sorely needed.

### **COULD HOUSING ALL MEMBERS OF ONE GANG TOGETHER REDUCE GANG VIOLENCE BEHIND BARS?**

The survey asked this very same question “do you believe that housing all members of one gang together could result in a reduction of violence in your facility”? The results show that about two-thirds (67.7%) felt that “no”, housing them together would not provide a gain in terms of reduced violence. Only a third (32.3%) of the respondents felt that housing all members of the same gang together might result in a reduction in violence in their correctional facility.

## **8. THE POLITICS OF GANG/STG PROBLEMS IN AMERICAN CORRECTIONS**

There are many political dimensions of the gang/STG problem in American corrections and a number of these issues were addressed in the survey. Getting prison wardens and STG coordinators to participate in a gang/STG survey like that conducted and reported herein faces a major obstacle of “prison politics”. Many prisons have formidable obstacles to overcome before representatives of the prison system are allowed to complete surveys.

Some states “hamstring” the wardens and do not allow them to answer any surveys that are not approved by the central office of the state’s director. Many states are facing negative press and some facing lawsuits pertaining to gang/STG issues and so as a matter of policy they are not going to talk about gang/STG issues to anyone outside of their agency.

For many years, states like California reported in official reports that they had a gang density rate of 6.0 percent, they would fudge the statistics to make it appear California’s adult corrections agency did not have a gang/STG problem. Actually, when the feds came knocking California reported only 3 percent as a gang density rate (Camp and Camp, 1985), and when ACA came knocking it went up a little to 6 percent (Baugh, 1993) when all along it was probably equivalent to the density rates in Illinois. For many years, the State of Virginia’s state correctional system was in complete gang denial, they even threatened legal action against the NGCRC if we did not cease and desist from trying to collect data from their state prisons and state correctional programs. Politics in criminal justice is never good. Below we find some dimensions of the problem that clearly have persisted over time.

### **POLITICAL INTERFERENCE IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM IS GENERALLY A CORRUPT INFLUENCE**

As a rule of thumb, political interference is political encroachment when it comes to policing and corrections. It smacks of political corruption, or extra-legal functions within the legal system. The American public does not want to tolerate politicians telling the police or wardens what to do, unless it is through legislation. Legislation is the proper way to change policy. Threatening an investigation or using some other show of force, such as a threat to decimate the correctional budget, maybe to eliminate a prison or something, would be an improper use of political clout to achieve some specific advantage for some vocal or powerful constituent. Those who work in law enforcement and corrections know that it is always going to exist at the municipal, county and state level — but it is much less of a problem at the federal level. We are just trying to set the stage for what is obviously a similar issue related to the gang/STG problem in American corrections today.

In foreign and third world countries, where gangs can become so powerful they sometimes operate as a parallel government, and where cartels are known to control local and some national politics, gangs have been able to use elected politicians as a mechanism for their defense and protection. Is it happening in America. Apparently yes.

### **FEW REPORT PRESSURE TO “PLAY DOWN” THE GANG PROBLEM**

The survey included the question “do you receive any pressure from state officials to “play down” gang activity?”. Only 6.3 percent of the respondents gave a “yes” response. The overwhelming vast majority of respondents (93.7%) indicated “no” — that there was no pressure to play down the gang problem.

### **DO GANGS OR GANG LEADERS HAVE POLITICAL INFLUENCE IN AMERICA?**

The survey asked “do you feel that gangs or gang leaders are able to influence politicians in your state”? The results show that about two-thirds (66.2%) felt “no”, that gangs or gang leaders did not have this capability in their state. Still, it appears to be a sizeable problem if a third of the respondents (33.8%) do in fact believe that gangs or gang leaders are able to influence politicians in their state.

So, basically in basically one out of three cases, a gang or gang leader probably has political influence.

The 2004 report on prison gangs and STG's by the NGCRC helps to put this statistic into perspective, it included data on this factor for previous years. Many of the questions or items in the 2012 survey were replicated from previous NGCRC surveys.

|     | 1994  | 1995  | 1999  | 2004  |
|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| YES | 20.3% | 23.6% | 25.4% | 29.3% |
| NO  | 79.7% | 76.4% | 74.6% | 70.7% |

## **9. GANG/STG ABUSE OF MAIL AND TELEPHONE COMMUNICATIONS IN AMERICAN CORRECTIONS**

Here we examine some of the issues pertaining to the abuse of mail and telephone communications by inmates and prisoners in jails and prisons in America. This includes issues such as the transfer of funds to other inmates: should we let gangs collect directly from their extortion victims, probably not. There are other issues as well: including the matter of gang leaders having cell phones smuggled into them behind bars.

### **VERY RARE FOR PRISONERS TO BE ALLOWED TO EXCHANGE FUNDS**

The survey included the question “do you allow prisoners to exchange funds with each other”? The overwhelming vast majority (98.6%) of respondents indicated “no” that this was not allowed. Only 1.4 percent of the respondents indicated that prisoners are allowed to exchange funds with each other.

Allowing inmates to exchange funds with each other is generally considered a policy that contributes to abuse of such privileges. Where it is allowed, gangs and STG's are able to collect directly from the inmates they extort. The typical collection strategy is to have the inmate mail the money to a third party known or controlled by the gang/STG on the streets.

### **ABOUT HALF OF THE FACILITIES ALLOW PRISONER TO PRISONER MAIL**

The survey included the question “is prisoner to prisoner mail allowed in your facility”? Gang members routinely communicate this way, using various ploys and methods and intermediary contacts, as they often need to transmit messages to other institutions and to the outside world. Some 47.3 percent of the facilities do in fact allow prisoner to prisoner mail is what this survey shows. Thus, in about half the cases (52.7%), prisoners are not allowed to send mail to other prisoners.

In Pelican Bay, gang members are not allowed to write to other inmates. In spite of this, gang members developed their own technique for evading this rule or regulation. They used a bounce-back technique: A. They write the letter that is designed to be a message intended for another inmate, B. They mail this letter to a cooperative third party who knows both persons, typically a female friend of the gang who gives the letter the "bounce", and C. It is then just sent to the inmate it was intended for. This is a technique gang leaders have perfected at Pelican Bay (Geniella, 2001).

Inmates have a lot of time to develop special codes and ciphers to encode important "gang business" messages. Cryptanalysts are able to make a forensic examination of these written communications, and in the gang world often find hidden messages: beneath the overt message of "AHG to Sammy" or "All Honorable Greetings to Sammy", might contain the alphanumeric childhood code of A = 1, G = 7, H = 8, thus what it really says in California illiterate-level gang cryptology is "187 to Sammy" or "kill Sammy". Staff who work in the mail room and who monitor phones and visitation rooms need to know a lot more about the hidden codes and many words and phrases that have "double meanings" to most gangs. This includes special words for drugs and money and payment procedures, as well as coded identifiers for the names of important figures in the gang business. It is fair to characterize this area as a "growing field of study" that promises to provide a wealth of useful training material for correctional personnel in the future.

### **MOST AGREE THAT PRISONER TO PRISONER MAIL IS A MAJOR SECURITY PROBLEM**

The survey asked the question "in your opinion is prisoner to prisoner mail a major security problem in the field of corrections". Most of the correctional facilities responding to the survey (88.9%) said "yes" that in their opinion allowing prisoner to prisoner mail is a major security problem. Only 11.1 percent of the respondents did not feel it was a major security problem to allow prisoner to prisoner mail.

### **ARE GANGS/STGS INVOLVED WITH SMUGGLING CELL PHONES INTO JAILS AND PRISONS**

The survey included the question "in your opinion, have gangs/STG's tended to result in more cell phones being smuggled in for use by inmates in your facility"? Some 47.2 percent of the respondents said "yes". Half of the respondents (52.8%) indicated "no" that gangs/STG's have not tended to result in more cell phones being smuggled into their jail or prison.

### **MOST AGREE THAT TELEPHONE MONITORING IS AN EFFECTIVE TECHNIQUE AGAINST GANG LEADERS**

The survey included the question "in your opinion, is telephone monitoring an effective technique to prevent gang leaders from maintaining their ties to outside gang members"? Some 82.7 percent agreed that telephone monitoring is effective as a way to deal with incarcerated gang leaders. Only 17.3 percent of the respondents did not agree that telephone monitoring is effective in this regard.

### **MOST ALSO AGREE THAT MAIL MONITORING IS AN EFFECTIVE TECHNIQUE AGAINST GANG LEADERS**

The survey included the question "in your opinion, is mail monitoring an effective technique to prevent gang leaders from maintaining their ties to outside gang members"? Some 87.2 percent agreed that mail monitoring is effective as a technique to deal with incarcerated gang leaders. Only 12.8 percent did not agree that mail monitoring is effective in this regard.

## **10. OTHER TYPES OF PROBLEMS BEHIND BARS CAUSED BY GANGS/STGs**

Gangs and security threat groups (STG's) cause a long list of problems behind bars because crime is one of their primary goals and because violence is one of their primary tools of accomplishing their goals. Here we will review some of the "hidden dimensions" of the gang and STG problem behind bars in American corrections today.

### **HAVE GANG MEMBERS SIGNIFICANTLY AFFECTED THE CORRECTIONAL ENVIRONMENT?**

The survey asked the question "do you believe that gang members have significantly affected your correctional environment"? Some 58.5 percent said "yes", that gang members have significantly affected their correctional environments. Still, some 41.5 percent indicated "no", that gang members have not significantly affected their environment.

### **DO GANG MEMBERS FILE MORE LAW SUITS?**

The survey included the question "do gang members generally tend to file more law suits against your institution than non-gang member inmates"? Only 13.3 percent of the respondents reported that gang members are more litigious. Most of the respondents (86.7%) reported that gang

members do not file more law suits than non-gang members.

### **DOES PRISON STRENGTHEN OR ERODE THE INMATES TIE TO THE GANG?**

The survey asked “do you believe that gang members generally have a stronger affiliation with their gang after serving time”? The results of the survey show that 88 percent felt, “yes”, that the incarceration experience enhances the ties to the gang, that serving time increases their tie to the gang. Only 12 percent disagreed with the concept.

### **OVERWHELMING MAJORITY BELIEVE THAT GANG MEMBERS HAVE A HIGHER RECIDIVISM RATE**

The survey included the question “in your opinion, do gang members tend to have a higher recidivism rate”? The research literature generally shows that is it correct to answer in the affirmative. Not surprisingly, 90.1 percent of the respondents to this survey also answered in the affirmative by saying “yes”, that gang members do in fact tend to have a higher rate of recidivism. Only 9.9 percent disagreed, not believing that gang members tend to have a higher recidivism rate.

When gang members have a higher recidivism rate, they need more effective re-entry services, and more specialized supervision by a gang certified parole officer. A gang certification in “Dealing With Gang Members in Probation and Parole” will require 24 hours of specialized training in dealing with a myriad of gang issues.

### **THE CHANGING NATURE OF PRISON RIOTS IN AMERICA**

Prison culture has certainly changed with the increase in gang density in American corrections. Thus, the nature of prison riots has changed as well. There are basically three types of prison riots that occur in American jails and prisons today: (1) gang riots, (2) race riots, and (3) religious riots. Riots are also called disturbances or group disruptions.

A series of three questions were used in the survey to examine the scope and extent of modern prison riot behavior.

The first question asked, “during the last twelve month period, have there been any disturbances related to gang members in your facility”? Here we find that 61.1 percent of the respondents report a gang riot in the last year.

The second question asked “during the last twelve month period, have there been any disturbances related to racial conflict in your facility”? Here we find that 45.1 percent of the respondents reported a race riot in the last year. Gang riots and race riots sometimes overlap.

Finally, the survey asked “during the last twelve month period, have there been any disturbances related to religious conflicts in your facility”? This is a new type of prison riot in America. And 9.1 percent of the respondents reported having such a religious riot in the last year. It is easy to see how some radical religions could be related to gang conflict and racial conflict as well.

There is no type of group or force more powerful than the gang/STG inside American correctional facilities today, so that if a riot does erupt among inmates, it is likely to involve gang and STG members by the very nature of the prison culture. Gangs dominate the prison culture today.

In the 2002 Folsom prison gang riot, there apparently there was a unique factor. When the Mexican Mafia (Surenos) attacked their rival the Nuestra Familia (Nortenos), a claim that surfaced in the media coverage of the event was that the associate warden, Michael D. Bunnell, who allowed the two gangs together into the prison yard, was himself associated with the Mexican Mafia (Thompson, 2004a). There were over 20 inmates injured in the riot, but most importantly one correctional officer subsequently committed suicide — Capt. D.F. Pieper. He had been demoted after the riot, and his suicide note claimed corruption in corrections, such that his wife believes a criminal coverup continues. However, federal authorities found no abuses in the aftermath of this riot, as many of the gang member inmates had been in lockdown 23 hours a day for 21 months after the riot. The internal investigation by California state officials found no criminal wrongdoing by correctional administrators.

There are a lot of examples of prison gang riots that have also been prevented by a good STG intelligence system, having STG coordinators in every prison. Such was the case when Mickey Cobra gang leader William James, Sr., in the Wisconsin corrections system decided he wanted to start a gang riot. This shows useful factual and historical information from case law decisions, because after having been found guilty of violating severe disciplinary rules such as “do not start a riot”, this gang leader sued his state corrections system and it ended up in court. What James tried to do is work with other gangs to start a riot, the problem was there were two informants who relayed the information on how four different gangs were working together to ignite a riot, and the riot was prevented. In a 2002 decision by the Court of Appeals, the appeal by James to have his disciplinary code conviction overturned was rejected and the prison disciplinary decision was affirmed (James v. McCaughtry, Wisc.).

On April 11, 1993, Easter Sunday, a group of Islamic inmates started Ohio's deadliest riot ever. As the riot unfolded, two other gangs got involved: the Aryan Brotherhood took charge of an area, and the Gangster Disciples took charge of another area of the same cell block. Eleven days later, nine inmates and one correctional officer were dead, most of the inmates were executed by a roving "death squad" intent on killing snitches (Pfeifer, 2002). The case of *State v. LaMar* (2002) provides fertile historical and factual information on the nature of this kind of prison riot. The sad message of this riot is why society has prisons in the first place, without legitimate authority around, in the case of this riot, complete mayhem and anarchy was the rule of the day at the prison. Keith LaMar was the inmate in charge of the death squad. LaMar was subsequently convicted and sentenced to the death penalty. LaMar was not even a part of any of the gangs involved in the riot, he was just willing to work for them once the riot was underway.

There are also examples from around the world of the STG problem, thus reviewing a few of these will help place the present findings in a larger international context. In the country of Turkey, a notorious gang from Istanbul known as the Karagumruk gang in November 2000 instigated a massive prison riot, taking 29 staff as hostages (including their equivalent of the warden and his four associate wardens). Two days later five were dead as troops stormed the prison. Gangs are still active in and out of prison in Turkey.

The gang-turf war has long ago spread from the streets to the prison system. Jails routinely experience this kind of gang riot, such as occurred in July 2004 at the Carrizalez-Rucker Detention Center in Cameron County, Texas. In this gang riot a fight occurred between members of the Vallucos and the Texas Syndicate, the latter being a well-known and established gang. Different cell blocks began fighting almost simultaneously. Over 100 inmates took part in the riot, about a dozen of whom were injured.

On August 18, 2004 a gang riot resulted in 31 inmates being killed in a San Salvador jail; typical of overcrowding which also contributes to disorder, this jail held over 3,000 inmates when it was designed to hold 800. The most problematic gang in this riot was the Mara Salvatrucha 18 (Mara 18). Most American gang experts know about MS 13, and some have noticed a MS 18 presence, but the MS 18 is much more well known in their country of origin (El Salvador). The Mara 18 gang was the first wave of immigrant children who turned to street gangs, primarily in the Los Angeles area, where there was a longstanding gang known as "18<sup>th</sup> Street". Some of the new kids from El Salvador joined the 18<sup>th</sup> Street gang and in doing so created an allied but new gang called "Mara 18", and when deported back to their country of origin, the Mara 18 culture came back home as well.

Guatemala's prison system is similarly overcrowded, there a gang riot occurred because the inmates wanted to kill a gang leader named Cesar Beteta Raymundo, who was among 17 inmates hacked to death with machetes and improvised blade weapons; the victims were often decapitated, or burned. The gang leader's head was put on a stick and it was paraded around the prison (see "17 Killed in Gory Guatemala Prison Riot", *Daily Times*, Dec. 27, 2002).

The gang riot in the prison in El Dorado, Venezuela in August of 1997 where 29 prisoners were killed, set a new standard in brutality. The local gang tricked an STG consisting entirely of Guajiro Indians into dropping their homemade weapons. The local gang gave a standard inmate code alarm that the correctional officers were on the way to shake down the prison. The Guajiro Indians had killed a gang leader a few days earlier. The Guajiro Indians believed the gambit that there really was a massive "shake down" coming, and they dropped or discarded their weapons, at which point they were attacked from all sides. Two of the Guajiro Indians were decapitated, and their heads were used by local gang members to play soccer, who joyfully kicking the heads from one end of the prison cell block to the other end (See "29 Inmates Killed in Venezuela Prison Riot", August 29, 1997, *CNN World News*).

Again in November, 2003 seven inmates were killed in a gang riot at the Vista Hermosa prison in Venezuela; the gangs were fighting over control of the rackets inside the prison; this was a troubled prison system, in the time frame of one year 2001-2002 some 240 convicts were killed (Coleman, 2003).

What are some places that are "ripe" or potentially "overdue" for gang riots, places the educated ready would probably not be surprised if gang riots erupt there in the future? Los Angeles County Jail and Cook County Jail in Chicago both have major problems as mega jails. In late 2003 and early 2004, five inmates were killed in Los Angeles County Jail, and these were gang-related for the most part (LeDuff, 2004). In places like Cook County Jail that have tremendous staffing shortages while dealing with overloaded inmate populations, this is a "critical indicator": a much more serious gang riot could erupt at any time at either of these two county jails.

#### **WHAT KIND OF RACKETS TO GANGS RUN BEHIND BARS?**

The survey asked "what kind of economic rackets do gangs try to operate or control in your

facility"? Here are the results in the order of their reported severity.

66.9% gambling  
 60.8% drugs  
 60.1% food  
 57.4% protection  
 56.1% extortion  
 29.7% loansharking  
 28.4% clothing  
 16.9% sex

To help interpret here, 66.9 percent of the prisons and jails are reporting that gangs try to operate or control the gambling rackets operated by inmates. In over half (57.4%) of the prisons and jails, gangs try to operate or control the protection rackets operated by inmates. Gambling, drugs, food and protection/extortion are the main interests of gangs. Only 16.9 percent of the prisons and jails reported gangs trying to control or operate the sex rackets behind bars.

#### **HALF OF THE RESPONDENTS REPORT THAT GANGS/STG's HAVE RESULTED IN MORE IMPROVISED WEAPONS**

The survey included the question "in your opinion, have gangs/STG's tended to result in more improvised weapons production (e.g., shanks, etc) among inmates in your facility"? Some 53.2 percent of the respondents indicated "yes", that the gangs/STG's have resulted in more improvised weapons production. Still some 46.8 percent reported no such increase in weapons production among the inmates.

The sale or manufacture of improvised weapons behind bars is itself a "racket" or type of illegal behavior.

### **11. STRATEGIES TO CONTROL GANGS/STG's BEHIND BARS**

As we know from elsewhere in this report, telephone and mail monitoring are very commonly used as strategies to control gangs. This is true because the monitoring of mail and phone information provides raw actionable intelligence on gangs and gang members. But because there are so many dimensions to the gang/STG problem behind bars, there are many different strategies that have been used over the years as well. The purpose of this section of the report is to provide results of the recent national gang/STG problem behind bars with a special focus on "what is being done about it".

#### **MAJORITY OF CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES HAVE A CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM THAT TAKES GANG MEMBERSHIP INTO ACCOUNT**

The survey included the question "does your institutional classification system take gang membership into account"? Some 69.8 percent of the respondents indicated "yes" that their classification system takes gang membership into account. Still, some 30.2 percent said "no", that their classification system does not take gang membership into account.

#### **THE CONTROVERSY ABOUT "NO HUMAN CONTACT STATUS"**

The controversy about "no human contact status" for disruptive prisoners is the claim that it is cruel and unusual punishment. The survey included the question "do you believe no human contact status is effective for the control of gang members"? The results show that some 44.4 percent of the respondents said "yes", that they believe it is an effective strategy. Just over half though, some 55.6%, said "no"; that they do not believe it is an effective strategy.

One of the criticisms of the no human contact status option is that it might have a negative impact on the mental health of the inmates. The survey included a question about mental illness, and the results show that when asked to estimate what percentage of the inmates are mentally ill, we get a mean score of 17.7 percent.

#### **STRATEGIES USED TO CONTROL GANGS**

The survey included the question "what strategies does your facility use to control gangs" and asked the respondent to "check all those that apply". So some 19 different tactics or methods were provided as response modes for 19 different variables. Below are the rank ordered strategies used to control gangs.

Strategy Used: Percent Using This Strategy

Monitor phone calls 75.7%  
 Monitor Mail 75.0%  
 Case by case dealings 64.9%  
 Use of Informers 59.5%

Transfers 58.1%  
 Segregation 55.4%  
 Interrupting communications 46.6%  
 Lockdown 41.2%  
 Balance the number of Rival gang members Living in the same unit 38.5%  
 Displacing members to Different facilities 37.8%  
 Isolating leaders 34.5%  
 Task Force to Monitor Track Gang Members 34.5%  
 Locking up gang leaders In high security facilities 24.3%  
 Meeting With Gang Leaders on an “as needed” Basis 23.0%  
 Prosecution 25.7%  
 Joint meetings between various gang leaders 5.4%  
 Ignoring their existence 4.7%  
 Infiltration 4.1%  
 Coopting of prisoners To control gangs 2.7%

We would assume that “case by case dealings” means you show a lot of discretion, you look at each situation individually.

## **12. WHAT SHOULD BE DONE TO RESPOND TO THE GANG/STG PROBLEM?**

The survey addressed a number of issues about what should be done to deal with the gang/STG problem in American corrections today. While there are a variety of proposals that have surfaced in federal legislation, few of these have gotten very far in Congress (see: [www.ngcrc.com/congress.html](http://www.ngcrc.com/congress.html)). The problem with some of the Congressional proposals is that just when you see a bill that makes sense (criminalizing forcible gang recruitment or gang conscripting behind bars), you see a proposal for providing martial arts classes to gang members. Some of these Congressional ideas are just not very well thought out is what the record shows, and because of that perhaps, we have seen no new legislation appear in recent years.

Below we examine some of the input and ideas from those who really work on the front lines: those working in American jails and prisons.

### **OVERWHELMING MAJORITY (85.3%) SUPPORT CRIMINALIZING GANG RECRUITMENT BEHIND BARS**

The survey question in the 2012 NGCRC National STG Survey was constructed as follows: “do you believe it would be beneficial to have a new federal criminal law making it a felony to recruit new gang members while incarcerated?”

Some 85.3 percent (N = 122) answered yes, only 14.7 percent (N = 21) did not believe it would be beneficial to have such a new law.

The N of cases (N =) will not equal the full sample of N = 148 in many instances because of missing data on the questions as is common in survey research.

### **ALMOST ALL BELIEVE WE NEED TOUGHER LAWS TO CONTROL GANGS IN PRISON**

The survey question in the 2012 NGCRC National STG Survey was constructed as follows: “Do you believe we need tougher laws to control the gangs in prison?”

Some 92.1 percent (N = 131) of the respondents who work in corrections felt that we need tougher laws to control gangs in prison. Only a minority of the respondents (N = 10, or 7.1%) did not feel we need tougher laws in this regard.

### **NEAR UNIFORM CONSENSUS EXISTS: FEDERAL AGENCIES NEED TO PLAY A GREATER ROLE AGAINST GANG CRIMES**

The survey asked “do you believe federal agencies should play a greater role in the investigation and prosecution of gang crimes”? The vast majority, some 86.3 percent, said “yes”. Only 13.7 percent said “no”.

### **STRONG SUPPORT FOR THE ZERO-TOLERANCE POLICY**

The survey included the attitudinal survey item “a zero-tolerance policy is the best approach for dealing with gangs and gang members” and the respondents were allowed to pick from five different response modes from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Some 61.5 percent answered “strongly agree”, another 26.6 percent answered “agree”. Only 9.8 percent answered “neither agree or disagree”. And some 2.1 percent answered “disagree”. No one answered “strongly disagree”.

So, overall, some 88.1 percent of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the zero-

tolerance policy is necessary in corrections.

### **IS NEGOTIATING WITH A GANG LEADER EQUIVALENT TO NEGOTIATING WITH A TERRORIST?**

This is an important debate that has continued over the years in the gang literature. The survey helps to shed an enormous amount of light on the topic by providing the viewpoints of those who work with gangs on daily basis, and who have the duty to protect society by keeping these same kind of gang leaders in custody. According to the typical STG coordinator, who is by most standards a true gang expert, responding to this survey, we get a refreshing amount of hard evidence on the topic for the first time.

The survey asked “in your opinion, would an official who tries to bargain with an inmate gang leader be similar to negotiating with terrorists?”

Some 68.4 percent of the respondents did indeed say “yes” that negotiating with an inmate gang leader is a bad idea. Still, the controversy continues, because some 31.6 percent said “no”.

### **NEGOTIATIONS WITH GANG MEMBERS TO KEEP THE PEACE**

The survey included the question “do staff in your facility sometimes find it necessary to negotiate with gang members in order to keep the peace”? Here we find that some 21.7 percent of the respondents indicated “yes”, that their staff sometimes find it necessary to negotiate with gang members in order to keep the peace. Still, in three-fourths of the cases (78.3), staff do not negotiate with gang members in this way.

### **SEPARATE CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES FOR CONFIDENTIAL INFORMANTS: SOMEWHAT RARE**

Basically, it makes sense to provide separate correctional housing units at least, if not a physically separate unit, at the prison level. So the presence off county jail respondents in the sample being analyzed here could artificially reduce the parameter. But the survey included the question “does your state have a separate correctional facility for confidential informants”? Only 13.6 percent of the respondents indicated “yes” that their state has such facilities.

Often the facility has a special name, like the “Special Management Unit”, and sometimes the correctional officers who work in the regular mainline correctional facilities will refer to it in a jocular fashion such as “on you mean the Smurf unit”. States that have high gang problems are likely to need such facilities. Because overall, some 86.4 percent of the respondents indicated that their states do not have such facilities. It is hard to convince a gang informant to testify if you cannot guarantee their physical safety.

### **IN ABOUT TWO THIRDS OF THE FACILITIES: STAFF RECEIVE FORMAL GANG TRAINING**

The survey included the question “do your staff receive formalized training in dealing with the gang problem”? Some 67.1 percent of the respondents said “yes”, that they receive formal gang training. Still, it signals a real need that about a third of the prisons and jails (32.9%) do not provide such formal training on gangs to their staff. A second follow-up question sought to evaluate the intensity of the gang training in terms of hours of duration, and this showed that the mean amount of gang training was 7.21 hours long.

Of related concern, and obviously something far beyond the scope of the present study, is to evaluate the quality of the training that is offered to staff and employees on gang/STG and disruptive group issues. From reviewing some of the “learning objectives” in the Texas adult corrections system it would seem an issue worth examining. Consider this possible error that could confuse Texas corrections staff: “*Street gangs are loosely knit as a whole with no written rules or constitution. Prison gangs are highly structured with by-laws and/or a constitution that is strictly enforced*” ([www.tcleose.state.tx](http://www.tcleose.state.tx), 2004: p. 2). Actually, almost all of the street gangs from the Chicago gang epicenter have written by-laws and constitutions. Thus, while it is fair to say that in a lot of the cases these street gang constitutions and by-laws were originally written by their imprisoned members, it might be problematic with regard to facts to claim street gangs as a whole have no written rules or constitution.

A lot of correctional officers in America are members of AFSCME which is why over a decade ago, AFSCME passed the “Gangs in Prisons and Jails” resolution calling for specific minimum standards on training for correctional officers:

“It is the policy of this International Union that formal instruction about understanding and evaluating prison gangs should be integrated into the preservice training for all correctional employees and that such instruction be continually updated through the in-service training that correctional employees receive”, and further

“That the training model on the subject of prison gangs include how and why gangs develop;

the different types of gangs; including those identified with a particular region or area of the country; gang structures; their body markings and any warning signs indicating their presence; how gangs communicate with each other; and the different strategies for dealing with prison gangs" (Lonzo, 1994).

Still the trend has been towards increases over the years in providing formal training on gangs, as evident in the trend documented by the following NGCRC survey results (which applied only to adult prisons, remember the current sample is a mix of both jails and prisons, and as a rule of thumb prisons probably get better gang/STG training than in jail):

|     |       |       |       |       |      |       |       |
|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|-------|-------|
|     | 1991  | 1992  | 1993  | 1994  | 1995 | 1999  | 2004  |
| YES | 40.8% | 45.4% | 46.8% | 49.5% | 58%  | 67.4% | 72.5% |
| NO  | 59.2% | 54.6% | 53.2% | 50.5% | 42%  | 32.6% | 27.5% |

### **OVER HALF BELIEVE IN A HIDDEN VALUE OF TUITION SUPPORT FOR STAFF**

The survey included the question "do you believe that providing tuition support for staff could help control the prison gang problem"? Slightly over half of the respondents, some 57.8 percent, indicated "yes" that this might help. And 42.2 percent did not believe that providing tuition support for staff could help control the prison gang problem.

And yet it is generally recognized that the greater the training, the greater the efficiency and effectiveness of the correctional facility. Investing in staff is a great investment, it pays off right away and has recurring benefits.

### **13. PREDICTIONS FOR THE YEARS AHEAD REGARDING GANG/STG PROBLEMS BEHIND BARS**

The NGCRC has been conducting this kind of survey since 1990. We have always been right on the money with regard to prison gang density rates nationwide. We have reported the results of these research projects on gangs behind bars faithfully and the results have been widely disseminated in the corrections community. Once again, sadly, we have some dire predictions about the future regarding gang and STG issues in American corrections. These are the predictions of those who work in correctional institutions. We are just reporting the results.

But based on previous forecasts reported by the NGCRC, we would give high validity value to these predictions.

#### **MOST EXPECT THE GANG PROBLEM TO INCREASE IN THE NEXT FEW YEARS**

The survey included the question "in your opinion, do you expect the gang problem in corrections to increase or decrease in the next few years, or do you think the problem will remain at the same level it is now"? Some 85.1 percent of the respondents expect the problem to increase. Less than one percent (0.7%) believe the problem will decrease. And 14.2 percent believe the problem will remain at about the same level.

#### **MOST EXPECT THE PROBLEM OF GANG VIOLENCE BEHIND BARS TO INCREASE IN THE NEXT FEW YEARS**

The survey included the question "in your opinion, do you expect the problem of inmate violence from gang members to increase or decrease in the next few years, or do you think the problem will remain at the same level it is now"? Some 81.4 percent of the respondents felt the problem of gang violence behind bars will increase in the next few years. Only 1.4 percent felt the problem will decrease. And 17.2 percent felt the problem will remain at current levels.

#### **MOST EXPECT THE PROBLEM OF GANG MEMBERS ABUSING THEIR RELIGIOUS RIGHTS TO INCREASE IN THE NEXT FEW YEARS**

The survey included the question "in your opinion, do you expect the problem of gang members abusing their religious rights to increase or decrease in the next few years, or do you think the problem will remain at the same level it is now"? The results of the survey show that 79.6 percent believe the problem will increase. Only 1.4 percent felt the problem will decrease. And 19 percent believed that the problem will remain at the same level.

#### **MAJORITY BELIEVE THE PROBLEM OF GANG MEMBERS ASSAULTING CORRECTIONAL OFFICERS WILL INCREASE IN THE NEXT FEW YEARS**

The survey included the question "in your opinion, do you expect the problem of gang members assaulting correctional officers and staff to increase or decrease in the next few years, or do you think the problem will remain at the same level it is now"? Some 62.5 percent of the respondents expressed the belief that the problem of gang members assaulting correctional officers and staff will increase in the next few years. Only 2.1 percent felt the problem will decrease. And over a third (35.4%) felt the problem would remain at the same level it is at now.

### **HALF BELIEVE THE PROBLEM OF RADICAL MILITANTISM AMONG ISLAMIC INMATES WILL INCREASE IN THE NEXT FEW YEARS**

The survey included the question “in your opinion, do you expect the problem of radical militantism among Islamic inmates to increase or decrease in the next few years, or do you think the problem will remain at the same level it is now”? Some 54.3 percent felt the problem would increase in the next few years. Only 3.6 percent felt the problem would decrease. And 42.1 percent felt the problem would remain at the same level it is at now.

### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

There are many complex and intricate aspects of the gang/STG problem behind bars. This study is the latest in a long series of prison gang/STG surveys conducted by the National Gang Crime Research Center (NGCRC) dating back to the early 1990's. We are not seeing the gang/STG problem level off yet, which means that gang density is on the rise. The fact is it may be possible at this point for gangs to claim that they run the jails and prisons, because of the power they wield there.

We are not seeing any optimism about the chances of reducing or curtailing the gang/STG problem behind bars. Most of the respondents were pessimistic about the future: they expect the gang or STG problem to increase in the next few years.

The NGCRC will take these findings into consideration as it enhances the training curriculum for correctional officers and especially the advanced training offered by the NGCRC for STG Coordinators.

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