Guns Out:
The Splintering of Jamaica’s Gangs

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**Acronyms**

- CSJP - Citizen Security and Justice Programme
- FID - Financial Investigative Division
- GOJ - Government of Jamaica
- JCF - Jamaica Constabulary Force
- JLP - Jamaica Labour Party
- MNS - Ministry of National Security
- MOCA - Major Organised Crime and Anti-Corruption Agency
- NGO - Non-government Organization
- POCA - Proceeds of Crime Act
- PMI - Peace Management Initiative
- PNP - People's National Party
- SOE - State of Emergency
- UNDP - United Nations Development Programme
- UNODC - United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
- ZOSO - Zones of Special Operations
Executive Summary

Deaths as a result of gang-related violence

Gangs, organized crime, and violence, and the nexus between them, are Jamaica’s biggest citizen security challenge. With the second highest murder rate in the Latin America and Caribbean region in 2019, Jamaica’s extreme violence is often attributed to gangs. Between 2008 and 2018, gang-related violence was responsible for 56 percent of murders in Jamaica, with a high of 78 percent in 2013. Jamaica is a violent country in other ways, with extraordinarily high rates of domestic violence, including intimate partner (IPV) and gender-based violence (GBV). Jamaica’s violence problem is so pernicious that the country has come to be described by academics and policy makers as having a “culture of violence.”

In an effort to bring focused attention to Jamaica’s gang problem, with the objective of advancing knowledge towards more effective policies and programmes for gang prevention and control, this report synthesizes what is known about:

1. The current scenario regarding gangs, violence, and organized crime in its various iterations, in Jamaica, with an emphasis on the post-2010 situation;
2. The difficulties Jamaica has had in resolving the gang problem;
3. The current strategies being employed to deal with the gang problem; and
4. The success or failure of these strategies.

Jamaica’s violence problem is not new: since the mid 1970s the island’s per capita murder rate has steadily increased, by an average of 4.4 percent per year, from 19.8 per 100,000 in 1977, to 60 per 100,000 in 2017. With a global average homicide rate at 6.1, even in Jamaica’s more peaceful times, the country was still one of the most violent countries in the world.

Since 2011, however, Jamaica’s gang situation—the context, structure, and dynamics—has changed. The May 2010 West Kingston Special Operation dislodged the country’s most established organized crime entity, the Shower Posse, and was followed by an intensive crackdown targeting gang leaders, across the island. Jamaica’s murder rate fell from 62 in 2009 to 36 per 100,000 in 2014. The crackdown was not sustained, nor was the decline in murder, and by 2017 Jamaica’s homicide rate had risen steeply.

With the second highest murder rate in the Latin America and Caribbean region in 2019, Jamaica’s extreme violence is often attributed to gangs.
Jamaican gangs have since splintered: there are many more of them, and they are more loosely-organized. The number of gangs in Jamaica has since increased from 191 in 2010 to 381 in 2018, with Kingston and St. Andrew experiencing most of the increases. As the number of gangs has increased, so has the murder rate. They are well-armed, and able to virtually grow currency to purchase new, high-powered weapons. Guns are a critical aspect of Jamaica’s gang problem because the majority of murders are committed with guns; between 2010 and 2018, 76 percent of murders were committed using firearms. It is thought that 97% of gang murders are committed with guns. The gangs are extremely violent, often carrying out murders where there is no material motive.

Other changes include how gangs engage in organized and transnational crime. Many gangs do engage in organized crime as regards localized extortion rackets, contract killings, robbery, and scamming. They are also engaged in cross border criminal activities, such as illegal drug trafficking where the drugs are primarily traded for arms. The links between transnational organized crime networks and Jamaica’s violent gangs, however, are far more fluid and transient than once obtained, and to the extent that high level transnational organized crime is happening in Jamaica, it suits those actors better to avoid association with the violent gangs than to be involved with them.

The historical relationship between partisan politics and gangs continues to transition from direct links between patronage, gang violence and the electoral cycle, to less distinctive relationships that are speculated about, and seldom substantiated. The social dynamic between violent gangs and the communities they are based in has evolved in tandem with the relationship between gangs and tribal politics. Police corruption is a problem, largely, it is thought, in the form of police taking payment for tipping off gangsters, or directly participating in gang criminal activity. This corruption is also not well evidenced.

The state is, or ought to be, the primary actor in crime control and violence prevention, and its mandate is to control violent crime as a basic and primary function. Since 2016, the Jamaican government has invested significantly more money into the security apparatus, a large portion of which is directly or indirectly meant to address the gang problem, via a mostly suppressive strategy that is heavy on policing. Attempts to attack the gang problem via legislation have been amplified and the Anti-Gang Act is being tested. Social interventions are essential to change the drivers and correlating factors that provide for the gangs’ ongoing existence and proliferation. For them to produce significant, measurable results, they must be evidence-based, sustained, and properly evaluated. Too many are not. That interventions might not be having desired effects at the national level, does not mean they should not be pursued, rather they should be appropriately designed, and supplied with sufficient resources, so they can yield positive changes.

Apart from policy recommendations to the Jamaican government, this report is aimed at informing and engaging civil society.
Recommendations

1. **Social interventions, done properly, are essential.** The government should provide more transparency around what social interventions are being invested in, how and why those interventions have been selected, and how they are to be measured. The state needs to be held more accountable as regards social interventions, particularly by civil society.

2. **Increase the scope and depth of financial investigations into criminal activity at all levels, not only financial crimes.** Pursue legislative change with regard to unexplained wealth orders to put the burden of proof on the owner of the suspected asset, and to asset recovery incentive schemes, having addressed any extant constitutional constraints. Empower, expand, and support the Financial Investigation Division (FID) to make it more effective and able to conduct investigations. Proactively engage the judiciary and the police to ensure they are aware of how and why financial investigations are critical, and how they can be used in the fight against gangs. Going after the proceeds of gang organized crime is a powerful disincentive and, symbol. (It doesn’t hurt that it raises revenue.)

3. **Modernize the evidence threshold for criminal and other prosecution, in particular to modify the restrictions around using electronically-generated evidence (such as videos), and witnesses testifying via video link.**

4. **Make further and ongoing use of the plea bargain option with incarcerated or otherwise convicted potential witnesses.**

5. **Maintain and emphasize the distinction between crime and violence.** The recently-established Violence Prevention Commission, given its mandate and membership, has the potential to put forward important evidence-based recommendations to deal specifically with the violence aspect of Jamaica’s gang problem. In doing its work the Commission should keep stakeholders and the public engaged in its findings, and proposals.

6. **Proceed with and engage the public on a bipartisan anti-crime consensus.** This will pave the way for bipartisan agreement on policies and programmes that will not be affected by changes in political administration, and will better ensure the continuity needed for policies to have an effect. The public’s engagement with the process and the resulting consensus is important for accountability and buy-in, and should be actively sought and supported.
These gangs are also implicated in contract killings in the area and beyond. This gruesome story, with all the attendant details, is not unusual for Jamaica, a country which suffers from an inordinately high murder rate. With the second highest in the Latin America and Caribbean region in 2019. Jamaica’s extreme violence is often attributed to gangs, such as the Clansman gang. Between 2008 and 2018, gang-related violence was responsible for 56 percent of murders in Jamaica, with a high of 78 percent in 2013.

Clansman gang
is reported to run an elaborate extortion racket earning
J$85 million a year.
Gangs Out: The Splintering of Jamaica’s Gangs

Jamaica’s violence problem is not new; since the mid 1970s the island’s per capita murder rate has steadily increased, by an average of 4.4 percent per year.10 from 19.8 per 100,000 (in 1977) to 60 per 100,000 in 2017,11 with a peak of 62 per 100,000 incidents in 2009.12 With a global average homicide rate of 6.1, even in Jamaica’s more peaceful times, the country was still one of the most violent countries in the world.13 As the number of gangs has increased, so has the murder rate (see figure 1).

Since 1970, gang-related violence was responsible for 56 percent of murders in Jamaica,14 with a high of 78 percent in 2013.15 Jamaica is a violent country in other ways, with extraordinarily high rates of domestic violence,16 including intimate partner (IPV) and gender-based violence (GBV).17 Jamaica’s violence problem is so pernicious that the country has come to be described by academics and policy makers as having a “culture of violence.”18

Jamaica’s violence problem is not new:

8 Calculated average based on data from the Jamaica Constabulary Force.
10 Domestic violence as defined by the Jamaican police encompasses all acts of violence committed against or between people who are known to one another, that does not have a criminal motive. For example, people who live together in a tenement yard who injure or maim in the course of a violent dispute.
16 UNODC, 2019.

Despite the long-standing nature of the problem, it would appear that, given the growth and persistence of violence, effective solutions have either not been found, or those solutions that have garnered results have not been fully and properly implemented and/or sustained.

Given that improving citizen security, in particular reducing violence and murder, is the top priority for Jamaica, the obvious focus is on the gang problem. Jamaica’s gangs must be considered in the extant context of poverty, social exclusion, and weak rule of law. Gang violence further intersects with criminal activity and with organized crime, including transnational-organized crime, and is thought to be complicated by corruption in various forms. The social, political, and economic context, and the correlating factors of violence are constantly changing, as are the actors and motivations.

In an effort to bring focused attention to Jamaica’s gang problem, with the objective of advancing knowledge towards more effective policies and programmes for gang prevention and control, this report synthesizes what is known about:

1. The current scenario regarding gangs, violence, and organized crime in its various iterations, in Jamaica, with an emphasis on the post-2010 situation;
2. The difficulties Jamaica has had in resolving the gang problem;
3. The current strategies being employed to deal with the gang problem; and
4. The success or failure of these strategies.

This information will be used to make relevant policy recommendations, with an emphasis on providing a basis on which to mobilize civic support for and participation in good governance in the area of crime and violence reduction, particularly as it pertains to gangs.

Source: Jamaica Constabulary Force

Jamaica’s gangs must be considered in the extant context of poverty, social exclusion, and weak rule of law

Figure 1. Gangs and Murders, 2010 – 2018

Source: Jamaica Constabulary Force

2018, gang-related violence was responsible for 56 percent of murders in Jamaica,14 with a high of 78 percent in 2013.15 Jamaica is a violent country in other ways, with extraordinarily high rates of domestic violence,16 including intimate partner (IPV) and gender-based violence (GBV).17 Jamaica’s violence problem is so pernicious that the country has come to be described by academics and policy makers as having a “culture of violence.”18
n May 2010, the Kingston West Special Operation, a joint military-police operation in Tivoli Gardens, Kingston, dislodged the country’s most established organized crime entity, the Shower Posse, which was also a gang.18 This marked a critical juncture in Jamaica’s gang and organized crime scene. Following that operation there were sustained police operations targeting major players in other gangs across the island, which led to large-scale displacement.19 The number of murders in Jamaica correspondingly declined, from a high of 1,682 in 2009 to a low of 1,005 murders in 2014.20 This chapter sets out the current scenario regarding gangs, violence, organized crime, and crime in Jamaica, with an emphasis on the post-2010 situation.

Working Definitions, Operational Realities and Discursive Trends

Jamaican violent criminal gangs do not share many of the predominant characteristics of gangs in other parts of the world. They have a unique socio-political history, and display patterns of organization and behaviour that cannot be understood outside of the specific Jamaican context. For the most part, for example, they do not overtly demonstrate their gang status by the use of tattoos or specific colours, and many of the gangs are not the well-structured, hierarchical organizations as obtains in other areas with serious gang problems, such as Honduras or Chicago in the United States. Activities that are universal to gangs, such as crime and violence, also have to be considered in Jamaica’s very specific cultural, political, and social norms that do not obtain elsewhere. Further, in Jamaica, there are significant differences between gang-like groups which include street gangs, crews, and organized crime groups, though these may overlap, which require distinctive responses.21

The Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) works with a definition of gangs as developed by the Ministry of National Security (MNS) for the Suppression of Criminal Organizations Act (usually referred to as the Anti-Gang Act, or the anti-gang legislation): a criminal organization means any gang, group, alliance, network, combination or other arrangement among three or more persons, whether formally or informally organized, that has as one of its purposes to commit crime, violence, or any other unlawful activity.

Criminal organization means any gang, group, alliance, network that has as one of its purposes to commit crime, violence, or any other unlawful activity.

Jamaican violent criminal gangs do not share many of the predominant characteristics of gangs in other parts of the world.

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18 The distinction between gangs and organized criminal groups is delved into further along in the report.
19 JCF, “Gang Violence in Jamaica.”
20 JCF Statistics and Information Management Unit, correspondence with authors, October 2018.
syndicates, school gangs, and school children associated with established gangs.²³

The structure and organization of first and second generation gangs vary widely along these lines. In the 2019 trial of Tesha Miller, the prosecution alleged that there were three types of gang organizations.²⁴

Both second and third generation gangs are engaged in and derive their income from murder, shooting, extortion, weapon trade, robbery, lotto scamming, car theft, drug trafficking, drugs for guns, sexual offences, warehouse break-ins, hosting of entertainment events, praedial larceny, and the scrap metal trade. The more successful gangs are thought to use the proceeds from illicit business activities to engage in and transition into legitimate businesses,²⁵ though proof of this is scant. Some of these gangs have an association with law enforcement; that is, there are corrupt JCF personnel involved, directly and indirectly, in the gang’s activities.²⁶

Third generation gangs, under which transnational organized crime is included, tend to be more sophisticated transnational organizations with more focus on economic and political agendas, than on violence and localized territorial disputes.²⁷ With the 2010 demise of the Shower-Presidential Click, one of the most powerful, oldest, and most resilient criminal groups in Jamaica, with links in national power circuits and global criminal networks, and entrepreneurial in a wide range of illegal and legal activities,²⁸ the JCF considers that there are no third generation gangs in Jamaica.²⁹ JCF data did account for four third generation gangs in 2013, however.³⁰ (see table 1)
The JCF, in 2019, counted 381 gangs, all of which are first or second generation; of these 276 or 72 percent were deemed to be active, while the others were dormant.\(^3\) Because of ongoing fracturing and splintering within gangs, sudden and dramatic jumps in numbers of gangs can occur in a short space of time (see figure 2). Of the dormant and active gangs, about 90 percent are considered to be first generation.\(^4\)

Figure 2. Number of Gangs

![Number of Gangs graph]

Source: Jamaica Constabulary Force

Following the May 2010 Kingston West Special Operation, there was a significant displacement of gang members, and sustained state security operations targeting major players. This led to a significant reduction in the murder rate, but is thought to have also led to a splintering of existing gangs, and the formation of newer, mostly first generation gangs. Figure 2 above shows the annual growth of the number of gangs, while figure 3 below shows that the number of gangs increased dramatically from 191 in 2010 to 381 in 2018, (see table 3 for the breakdown by parish,) and the proportion of murders attributed to gangs also increased after 2010 (see figure 4).

Figure 3. Growth in numbers of gangs

![Growth in numbers of gangs graph]

Source: Jamaica Constabulary Force

Figure 4. Gang-related murders

![Gang-related murders graph]

Source: Jamaica Constabulary Force

33 Senior JCF personnel, 2019. The JCF deems a gang to be dormant when there has there is no evidence or intelligence regarding their involvement in criminal activities over a period of six (6) months.

34 Key stakeholder.

35 In mid-2011, JCF went through a reclassification exercise to recategorize homicides, as it become apparent that there was a disconnect between intelligence data and official JCF statistics. The data analysis by the intelligence division revealed that over 70% of murders were gang-related. This however was not reflected in the statistical data. The data analysis accounted for only 20% of homicides as gang-related. "Administration and Notifications: JCF violence attribution and assessment policy 2012," Jamaica Constabulary Force Orders, serial no.3377, February 23, 2012, http://library.joau.net/\text{mhl}/bismun/handle/1/1385/Force%20Orders%203377%20\text{file%202012-02-23.pdf?sequence=1.}
Organized Crime

There is a distinction to be made between third-generation type transnational organized crime groups, and the organized crime that second generation gangs in Jamaica engage in, such as extortion and scamming, and even drug trafficking. The link between transnational organized crime and crime carried out by violent gangs in Jamaica changed with the downfall of the Presidential Crack gang in 2010. While transnational organized crime still occurs in Jamaica, largely by way of the transshipment of large quantities of illegal drugs, and large amounts of cash, through Jamaica's ports and porous borders, most of the gang-related organized crime is local to the areas that the gang controls, and tends not to be linked to drug trafficking. Some gang-related organized crime is cross-border, for example with the aforementioned scamming.

Transnational organized crime groups are more often profit-driven, and eschew overt and obvious acts of violence, which attract the attention of law enforcement. Those that are operating in Jamaica presently are external groups, that is, they are not Jamaican-based or operated, and they are mainly engaged in trafficking. They operate at a high level of sophistication, and their main activities in Jamaica require intricate logistical infrastructure, and often the corruption of relevant officials. Drug trafficking does not necessarily generate violence, and the violence created by local gangs is thought to suit them by distracting law enforcement attention away from them. The transnational crimes that the violent gangs engage in tend to be more rudimentary, such as smuggling more portable amounts of drugs, cash, and weapons, especially between Costa Rica and Haiti, and they use violence as part of their standard operating procedure in their illicit criminal enterprise activity. Where the transnational trafficking entities and domestic gang crime intersect may be in the former contracting the latter to carry out killings on their behalf, or where changes in the system through which drugs flow upset the balance of power between territorial groups.

Another key difference between these two categories of cross-border crime is that transnational organized crime will more often be profit-driven, and eschew overt and obvious acts of violence, which attract the attention of law enforcement.

Gang Violence

With a key distinction between transnational organized crime and the more localized organized crime that Jamaican gangs currently engage in being the level of violence associated with the respective criminal activities, it is the first and second generation gangs that are the main threat to citizen security and public safety. They are the principal violence producers. The currency of a gang’s intergroup or intra-group enmity is violence, stemming from competition for power, domination, reputation, respect, and status, and which is a fundamental aspect of protecting territory and/or gang business.

Another distinction is reflected in the incident shift in the discourse in Jamaica that differentiates between crime and violence: "As some would put it, the Caribbean does not have a crime problem, it has a violence problem," given the prevalence of aggressive infractions like murder and assault on personal possession crimes, such as robbery. The discursive shift reflects the increasingly apparent fact that gang violence does not have an apparent criminal material motive—reprisal and informer killings as a prime example—thus a different policy response may be warranted: "the biggest predictor of violence is previous acts of violence. It doesn't operate like crime, and, therefore, the measures to deal with violence are different. Crime is largely done for economic gain, while violence is a cycle which thrives on previous acts of violence." In 2017, 40 percent of gang-related murders were attributed to acts of revenge or reprisal, and 13% to arguments or conflict (see table 2). This discursive trend has not yet manifested as official policy, but there is a growing acknowledgement that crime and violence should be treated as separate issues.

The blurred lines between violence, crime, and gangs also manifest in another growing trend, where generation one and two gangs deliberately desist from violence production in order to pursue their criminal activities, so as not to attract attention, and who might thus be considered by the ICF as dormant. Their inherently violent nature may be provoked by an inter-gang dispute that threatens their
commercial enterprise activity, or for any other reason.49 Jamaica’s extraordinary high impact violence situation is thought to be the result of a confluence of factors. Centuries of oppression under enslavement and colonialism, followed by decades of violent political tribalism,50 augmented by the violence associated with criminal enterprise, and fuelled by poverty, weak family structures, low quality government services, low trust in the state and its representatives, and weak social institutions. These have cemented a culture of violence that has persisted and worsened since Independence in 1962.

There are four categories of gang violence: inter-gang, intra-gang, criminal violence in direct or indirect pursuit of material gains, and violence against people who may be unrelated to the gang, but who are considered a threat, for example, witnesses or potential witnesses, and suspected informers.51 The two women mentioned at the outset of this report, it was reported, were thought to be informers; the killing of informers is a typical example of this type of gang violence.52 Witnesses and potential witnesses to gang crimes are also prime targets for murder. Witnesses may be gang members who have turned, or innocent people who have witnessed a crime, or have information pertaining to a crime, whether they have come forward with evidence or not. Inter and intra-gang violence comprise the majority of gang violence and murders. One basis for the state of emergency that was declared in the St. Andrew South police division in July, 2019, was not only that it had the largest number of gangs (of all police divisions,) but that the virulent violence there was in large part due to over 25 gangs engaged in deadly inter and intra-gang conflicts.53 Indeed the majority of gang-related murders are committed by proportionately fewer numbers of highly virulent violence producers than the number of gangs might suggest. One suggestion is that violence is concentrated in just 15 percent of gangs.54

Inter-gang violence, as the name suggests, is one gang versus another gang. These acts of violence or aggressions towards another group often stem from territorial disputes, or when one group perceives that they have been “disrespected” by another in some way. Intra-gang violence speaks to acts of aggression that occur within a gang, rather than with external groups. Intra-gang violence can occur for a wide variety of reasons, from interpersonal differences, to power struggles, to jealousy or disagreement over the sharing of ill-gotten gains. This distinction, however, itself gets easily blurred when intra-gang conflict leads to splintering and the formation of new gangs, which then is considered inter-gang conflict.

Gang violence in pursuit of criminal gain can include murder where the motive is robbery, enforcing an extortion demand, or pursuing a scamming lead list. The 2008 murder of the managing director of

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Table 2. Probable causes of murder (January – mid-June, 2017)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Probable Cause</th>
<th>Gang Related</th>
<th>Non-Gang Related</th>
<th>Unknown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argument/Conflict</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revenge/Reprisal</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Territory/ Turf Control</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contract</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robbery</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug Related</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lottery Scamming</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firearm</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political</td>
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<td>0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Specific</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not-Yet Established</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>27*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: JCF-JDF; * Includes one mob killing for which the motive has not yet been established.

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48 Key stakeholder interview, senior JCF official.
49 Political tribalism in the Jamaican context spoke to the willingness of party supporters to issue threats of violence or to commit acts of violence against rival party supporters and others, “to influence the outcome of an election, to increase or defend the support base of the party, to create exclusive electoral electorates, to protect political boundaries against violence or perceived threats of violence, and to limit the development of independent, contestable electoral zones.” Amanda Sims, Elections. Violence and the Democratic Process in Jamaica 1944-2007, Kingston, Ian Randle Publishers, 2010.
50 Innocent bystanders could be considered a fifth group that is subject to gang violence.
51 Even at the conclusion of the trial, where four men were convicted, it was not clear what was the motive for the women’s murder.
53 Gang expert and academic researcher, personal communication, December 4, 2019.
The Composition of Gangs

Criminal gang composition in Jamaica, as in most other parts of the world, is heavily gendered: most are young males from socio-economically challenged communities. These "at-risk" young men are generally unemployed (in the formal sector), undereducated, and below the age of 35. Males, in particular young, unattached males, not only make up the majority of the murder victims but are also the primary perpetrators. This gender dynamic is reflected in the statistics: between 2012 and 2018, of Jamaica’s 8,801 murder victims, 87 percent were adult male, 9 percent adult female, and 4 percent children.54

The role of women in criminal gang violence also bears scrutiny. Despite males being the majority of victims, women and children are victims of reprisal and retaliatory violence. A 2018 study on "Why Women Die in Jamaica" revealed that 62 percent of female victims’ deaths are gang related.55 Females are also involved in criminal gangs as influencers, (women "are the ones who call the shots - they do not fire the shots,"56) and movers of weapons, among other roles, though these are not well documented. There are all female gangs in high schools, which have engaged in violent altercations.57 In 2017 some nine girls, including a 14-year-old and two 15-year-olds, were arrested by the ICP for illegal possession of firearms.58

4 types of gang violence

- **Intra-gang**: primarily for ideological reasons and among other roles, though these are not well documented. There are all female gangs in high schools, which have engaged in violent altercations. In 2017 some nine girls, including a 14-year-old and two 15-year-olds, were arrested by the ICP for illegal possession of firearms.
- **Inter-gang**: for territorial control and personal vendettas. In 2017, 58 teenagers were arrested and charged with murder, including a 14-year-old boy.59 In that same year 78 teenagers were arrested for shooting, 148 for illegal possession of firearm, and 63 for robbery with aggravation by gang members.60
- **Intra-gang** and **Inter-gang**: territorial control and personal vendettas. In 2017, 58 teenagers were arrested and charged with murder, including a 14-year-old boy. In that same year 78 teenagers were arrested for shooting, 148 for illegal possession of firearm, and 63 for robbery with aggravation by gang members.
- **Crime Related Against witnesses and suspected informers**: Children in gangs is increasingly a problem. The main witness against Tesha Miller in the Douglas Chamber murder trial, a self-confessed murderer, told the court that he joined the Clansman gang when he was 13 years old.61 In 2017 also, 58 teenagers were arrested and charged with murder, including a 14-year-old boy. In that same year 78 teenagers were arrested for shooting, 148 for illegal possession of firearm, and 63 for robbery with aggravation by gang members.

Children in gangs is increasingly a problem. The main witness against Tesha Miller in the Douglas Chamber murder trial, a self-confessed murderer, told the court that he joined the Clansman gang when he was 13 years old. In 2017 also, 58 teenagers were arrested and charged with murder, including a 14-year-old boy. In that same year 78 teenagers were arrested for shooting, 148 for illegal possession of firearm, and 63 for robbery with aggravation by gang members.

There are two primary ways that children get involved in gangs. The first is by virtue of the fact that they come from communities with established criminal gangs. The second is that some of these gangs position themselves near high schools in order to actively recruit school children. In 2007, 70 percent of National School Gang Survey respondents indicated that gangs were present in their schools; 44 percent of participating principals indicated gang presence in their institutions.62 In a 2017 presentation to parliament, the ICF stated that there were approximately 50 ‘school gangs’ that have the attention of the police. Some of these school gangs are mimics of the more established criminal gangs.63

55 Harriot and Jones (2016).
56 CAPRI (2019a).
61 Nicky Wilson, “I killed on Tesha’s orders – witness – ex-member outlines structure of Clansman gang,”
62 Corey Robinson, “Young and Dangerous – Teenage Gangsters Driving up Crime.”
63 Corey Robinson, “Young and dangerous – Teenage Gangsters Driving up Crime.”
64 Senior Law Enforcement Official, October 24, 2019.
67 Michael Gordon, Criminologist and Lecturer at The University of the West Indies Mona, interview with authors October 15, 2019.
Politics and Gangs

In most, if not all, violent communities throughout Jamaica, what we today call “gang warfare”—specifically extreme violence, violent crime, and murder, carried out by a relatively small number of highly active offenders—is the direct descendant of organized partisan political violence that originated in the heated electoral disputes of the late 1940s. The division of neighbourhoods according to political allegiance resulted in party supporters agglomerating in geographically specific locales. Politicians depend on enforcers (or “dons”) in inner-city areas to ensure party loyalty and deliver votes; in return the politicians provided patronage in the form of jobs via public works programmes, overseas agricultural employment contracts, cash, food, and housing.56 To strengthen enforcement capabilities, guns were provided by politicians, and their use was either tacitly or overtly encouraged. This resulted in close ties between groups of high-impact violent offenders (what would come to be called gangs) and politicians in the 1970s and 80s, and gang warfare and murder were motivated by tribal politics.57

The nature of armed violence and the context of high murder rates in Jamaica has, however, changed. Political violence has diminished significantly since the mid-1990s, and while many gangs maintain political affiliations, the 2000s have seen few instances of violence and murder that can be or have been directly linked to partisan politics. New gangs have emerged that are not connected to politics or political patronage, though they may be identified with the dominant party in their community. They have their own sources of weapons, usually financed with the proceeds of their criminal activity. Older gangs still maintain their early political affiliations; for example, Clansman and One Order are openly aligned to the PNPP and JLP, respectively. The current scenario, however, is that many gangs have bridged political divides, reconciled their differences, and are promoting networking through relations of convenience.58

Nevertheless, there continue to be assertions that suggest that party-gang linkages do persist. In June 2019 a sitting member of parliament accused his fellow MPs of “using gangs as election tools,”59 and in October 2019, a bipartisan anti-crime summit was held, one outcome of which was a commitment from the prime minister and the leader of the opposition to “publicly repudiate links between politics and gangs.” These assertions suggest that the original politics-gang linkages do persist at least to some extent, though they may not be as ubiquitous as they once were. At the same time, there are strong suggestions that corrupt relationships endure. For example, a number of key stakeholders interviewed for this study stated their firm knowledge of politicians who provide protection to gangs. (We explore corruption and gangs further down.)

Gangs in the Community

The state is, or ought to be, the primary actor in crime control and violence prevention, and its mandate is to control violent crime as a basic and primary function. The state’s monopoly on the legitimate use of force and the provision of security are seen as the most important features of a functioning state, and are normally carried out by the police, and in some places, the army.60 In reality, however, the state may be unwilling or unable to be the only provider for policing functions,61 and non-state actors fill the void; the result is a “hybrid” situation where state and non-state actors perform security and policing activities, and exert violence control.62

In the Jamaican context, violent criminal gangs commonly assume a policing role within their domains; the order they enforce is one that suits them rather than is aligned with national law. Powerful gangs that successfully enforce order within their domains may come to enjoy legitimacy among the members of that community due to their efficient provision of a certain security and stability, and the provision of needed material goods to those community members, particularly where the state has failed or is absent.63 The more established violent criminal gangs are also associated with “community justice” or “jungle justice,” terms for the punishment, usually swift, of community members deemed by the respective don to be guilty of offences such as rape or robbery. The culprits would then be subjected to being beaten (sometimes savagely, resulting in injuries such as broken bones), tortured (for example with electrical shocks), or killed.64

The social dynamic between violent gangs and the communities they are based in has evolved in tandem with the relationship between gangs and tribal politics. The gangs were often conduits for state resources into the communities, and as the politics-gang violence relation...
tionship shifted, the gangs often retained their positions of power in the communities, but now funneled resources obtained through crime. Weak social control and failure of the government to provide adequate social services for these marginalized communities further allowed for criminal actors to step into the vacuum. These criminal actors provide everything from “education, public health, and employment” to “traditional security,” all of which furthers the embeddedness, leverage, legitimacy, and power of criminal groups in communities, one effect of which is the reluctance of community members to provide the police with information on these groups. This has been seen clearly, and recently, in the support that communities provide for persons engaged in scamming because of the money they put back into the community. The criminal groups’ legitimacy also contributes to luring youths into their fold.

80 Leduc (2010).
81 Leduc (2010); Manwaring (2012), 25.
83 CAPRI (2018b).

Gang Linkages to Criminal Actors Outside of Jamaica

There are transnational networks between gangs located in Jamaica and criminal organizations of varying sorts and sizes in the United States U.S., Canada, and the United Kingdom. While there is not a great deal of recent research or evidence on these linkages, there is some knowledge about the nature of some of them. The older, more established gangs have established affiliates from the time when drug trafficking was the principal gang criminal activity.

Gangs today, even the less organized ones, might have an overseas base, and/or a contact through whom they procure weapons. Tesha Miller, leader of the Clansman gang, was arrested several times in the U.S. in the 2000s, and was known to be ordering murders in Jamaica from the U.S.; he is thought to have had some sort of base there, from which he operated.

The Canadian example demonstrates one type of linkage, where Jamaican gangs leverage diaspora connections to carry out criminal activities, particularly transnational drug trafficking networks, where they use brokers on the ground there to conduct business. These linkages also work in the other direction, where gangs are led and/or financed by gang members overseas, in the United States, Canada, and Great Britain. Instructions, money, and weapons are passed to someone on the ground in Jamaica, who carries out whatever directives are issued. For example, in mid-2018 the police attributed many murders in August Town, a volatile community with 11 gangs and corner crews, to the offer of cash payments from US-based allies of a slain Bedward Gardens gang member. They offered a reward (said to be US$10,000) to anyone, regardless of gang affiliation, for the killing of anyone from Jungle 12; a Jungle 12 gangster having committed the murder for which they were seeking reprisal. A somewhat similar relationship appears to

84 A report on Jamaican organized crime groups in Canada described linkages between the Shower Posse and two Canadian gangs that supplied drugs and weapons to, and exerted some measure of control over Canadian street gangs. The Shower Posse, the Canadian authorities came to conclude, had been operating in Canada for decades, and was responsible for a significant part of the city’s drug trade. Burt et al (2016), 14.
85 US Embassy officials’/Senior Law Enforcement Officials.
90 Black (2004), 125.
have existed between the UK and Jamaica, when two former leaders of the British Link-Up Crew, an English drug smuggling gang, were assassinated in Jamaica, in what appeared to have been a purge directed from the UK.92

What is perhaps a more significant—in terms of understanding and resolving virulent gang violence in Jamaica—set of cross border linkages is amongst Jamaican, Costa Rica and Haiti, whereby guns, cash, drugs, and people move back and forth.93 There is a nexus between Jamaican marijuana, Colombian cocaine, Haiti’s illegal gun supply, and the north coast of Costa Rica, facilitated by the ease of movement between Jamaica, Costa Rica, and Haiti, Haiti’s porous coastline. This nexus is a key element of understanding how Jamaican gangs supply themselves with the weaponry that underpins the prevalence of virulent violence in Jamaica.

Jamaica is the largest Caribbean source country of marijuana; gun production has increased since the decriminalization of marijuana in Jamaica in 2015, and the pausing of the eradication programme that had been in operation since 1974.94 Criminals (whether affiliated with established gangs or not) use Jamaican marijuana to buy weapons and cocaine.95

Costa Rica is a key transit point for Colombian cocaine.96 Jamaica is also a key transit point for cocaine trafficked from South America to North America and other international markets. Colombia’s cocaine production is at the highest level in history, due to socio-political factors within Colombia itself, as well as technological innovations that have improved yields, so the supply has increased and the price has fallen.97 The ICF, recorded, in 2019, the highest seizure of cocaine since 2004,98 (the year which coincides with the inception of Operation Kingfish).99

There are two categories of transshipped cocaine. The first is bulk amounts that are transshipped in highly sophisticated operations involving Colombian traffickers and their local counterparts, who are not members of gangs, though they may be associated with them as they may use their services for protection, or for contract killings. The Colombian eschews violence as it attracts attention that jeopardizes the enterprise. This enterprise often engages corrupt government personnel, for example customs and port officials.100 The other category is smaller amounts that are exported in small quantities using smuggling techniques such as concealing it in food packaging. This is an aspect of the cocaine trade that the violent Jamaican gangs tend to be involved in. (Very little from either category is consumed in Jamaica; it is estimated that 95 percent of the cocaine that enters the island leaves.)101

Haiti is “awash in illegal weapons,” with an estimated 500,000 illegal guns in circulation,102 and a principal seller of the arms that enter Jamaica, and that are used by Jamaican gangs.103 There are 145 uncontrolled ports of entry along Jamaica’s shoreline, through which, it has been reported, 2,400 guns enter the country illegally each year (annual gun seizures represent about a third of that number).104 Guns are a significant factor in the gang violence problem. Haiti is also a major transit point for marijuana originating out of Jamaica.105

There is a cocaine-for-marijuana trade directly between Jamaica and Costa Rica, where the Jamaican marijuana supplies the Costa Rican domestic market,106 and Colombian cocaine is transshipped out of Jamaica, or used to buy guns in Haiti. A February 2020 investigative news story reported that “deep-pocketed business men and gang members from Kingston, St Catherine, and St James sponsor expeditions from Jamaica to Haiti, where thousands of pounds of marijuana are traded for rifles and handguns: ‘50 pounds of weed usually swaps for one rifle, and 10 pounds for a handgun; a kilo of coke normally swaps for three rifles’.”107

Jamaican marijuana is thus, quite literally, used as currency. It is traded for cocaine that is on sale for cash, and it is traded for weapons. “The trade in guns in exchange for illicit drugs exacerbates the violence problem as large numbers of weapons, including expensive, high tech guns, flow freely into the country.”108


93 These three countries primarily, although other Central American countries and Caribbean islands do come into play.


95 US Embassy official, ‘Tauna Thomas,’ “Police make more than 500 arrests for drug trafficking this year.”


98 US Embassy official, “Tauna Thomas,” “Police make more than 500 arrests for drug trafficking this year.”

99 Seth Robbins, “Costa Rica’s Port of Limon Feeds European Cocaine Pipeline.”

100 Key stakeholder interviews, October 2019.

101 Tauna Thomas, “Police make more than 500 arrests for drug trafficking this year.”

102 “Operation Kingfish was a multi-lateral law enforcement joint task force that operated between 2004 and 2012, that sought to dismantle the illegal international drug trade that was a primary basis of violent gang activity in Jamaica.”

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107 “Fishing For Guns – Old Harbour Bay Boatsmen Rake In Profits With Drugs For Arres Trafficking To Haiti.”

108 “Fishing For Guns – Old Harbour Bay Boatsmen Rake In Profits With Drugs For Arres Trafficking To Haiti.”

109 Key stakeholder interviews, October 2019.

110 US Embassy officials.


113 “Fishing For Guns – Old Harbour Bay Boatsmen Rake In Profits With Drugs For Arres Trafficking To Haiti.”

114 “Fishing For Guns – Old Harbour Bay Boatsmen Rake In Profits With Drugs For Arres Trafficking To Haiti.”


116 US Embassy officials.

117 “Fishing For Guns – Old Harbour Bay Boatsmen Rake In Profits.”
Violence is also transmitted across these borders. In 2018, for example, a top-tier member of a St. James-based gang, who was on the radar of the police, died in Costa Rica, where he was fatally shot, in the midst of a feud which was initiated in Montego Bay.5 This scenario is not new; in 2009 the Immigration Administration in Costa Rica announced new entry restrictions as a direct result of major crimes allegedly committed by thugs from Jamaica.12

Guns are such a critical aspect of Jamaica’s gang problem because the vast majority of murders are committed with guns; between 2010 and 2018, 76 percent of murders by key domestic and international stakeholders.13 Corruption with regard to any type of crime in Jamaica is not well evidenced, and is difficult to document. In 2017 there were 1,844 cases of corruption brought before the parish courts, with 519 convictions. However, over a seven year period, there were only seven convictions for illicit enrichment, where someone has assets and a lifestyle that are inconsistent with the person’s known sources of income.14

Corruption in all aspects of government has always been alleged and assumed—the administration in office at the time of writing had two resignations of Cabinet ministers in the space of one year, due to allegations of corruption. In large part, however, there is seldom any substantiation of specific allegations and proven cases. Even after official investigations into specific cases, very little gets unsubstantiated allegations. What appears to be clear cut cases of public officials embezzling public resources, with an abundance of incriminating evidence, end without a conviction. That these crimes that seem to be so hidden in plain sight go unadressed, uninvestigated, and unprosecuted is a result of many variables. The difficulty of coming up with evidence is just one factor. In corruption scenarios where everyone is benefitting, it is rare that there will be a whistle blower. The rumours are, however, too persistent, and the statements made in private by reliable persons too frequent, to ignore the allegations.15

The dearth of evidence also pertains to gangs and corruption. Corruption is often cited as a barrier to solving aspects of the gang problem, and for some, the gang problem as a whole. The UNDP has stated that “the corrosive influence of gangs and organized crime also leads to decreased economic performance,”16 but evidence of that corruption is difficult to obtain, and so the problem largely remains conceptual, with little material basis to act on.

There are four main sites that corruption as it relates to criminal gangs is thought to occur: the police, the justice system, political representatives, and private businesses. Corruption is widely acknowledged as endemic to the ICF, with its history of criminal ties and extrajudicial killings;17,18 many, if not most, Jamaicans view the ICF as corrupt.19 In so far as it is associated with violent criminal gangs, it is thought that there are problems with collusion.20 This collusion can take various forms, such as being paid by the gang to give information regarding law enforcement activities related to them, or even carrying out gang-related killings. For example, the Uchence Wilson Gang, which went on trial in 2018, counted two policemen among those who went before the court.21 Corruption, especially in the police, is also blamed for the perceived failure to bring the guilty to justice.22

Apart from direct corrupt relationships between violent criminal gangs and police, there are fundamental deficiencies in the ICF that preclude the efficacy or success of any anti-crime initiative in general, and anti-gang effort in particular. One significant aspect of the police problem in Jamaica regards the trust deficit between the police and the citizenry, including the
Any significant lowering of the rates of homicide and other violent crimes, and any meaningful weakening of criminal networks, including gangs, requires a thorough transformation of the JCF to bring the force more in line with democratic policing principles and methods of work, and make it more effective as an instrument of crime prevention and control.

The Major Organized Crime and Anti-Corruption Agency (MOCA) was established as an elite and independent agency to focus on corruption which hinders good governance and transnational organized crime. MOCA focuses on what are considered to be the more organized gangs, which by 2019 numbered five to six. Their role is to gather intelligence and conduct investigations towards building a case. MOCA’s work involves extensive collaboration with other state agencies, in particular the ICF Counter-Terrorism and Organized Crime division, which contains the National Strategic Anti-Gang Unit, and the HID. MOCA’s approach is to separate gangs into two groups: violent criminal gangs, and transnational syndicates; their work is more focused on the latter. (Though the ICF considers transnational syndicates as third-generation gangs, and has considered there to be no third generation gangs in Jamaica for nearly a decade, MOCA nevertheless considers there are such groups.)

Though violent criminal gangs generally do not fall under MOCA’s purview, the high-level, or “white collar” criminal entrepreneurs that they do pursue often have corrupt connections to both law enforcement and violent inner city groups. In some instances these links are for their (the criminal mastermind’s) protection, in others that mastermind may have graduated out of a violent criminal gang. Even when investigators think they have cogent evidence of these connections, however, there is a very high threshold for commencing prosecution, and the prosecutors will advise that the available evidence does not meet that threshold. The evidence threshold challenge affects most entities whose work involves eradicating gangs and gang activity.

With regard to the judicial process, it has been averred that organized crime can have a substantial impact on the rule of law through the inefficiency and corruption of the judicial sector. A 2010 survey found that 36 percent of Jamaicans perceived that judges are corrupt, and 57 percent considered the justice system corrupt. The then-Minister of Justice admitted in 2011 that the justice system was plagued by corruption. One Jamaican newspaper columnist referred to corruption in the justice system as, “If you have enough funds and the right contact, your files can magically disappear.”

Corruption as it relates to the involvement, direct or indirect, of the political directorate with criminal elements is widely perceived. Fifty-eight percent of Jamaicans think that “politically connected criminals” go free. There are many allegations made off the record, by people with access to such information, or who claim direct knowledge of specific instances, of, say, a politician giving cover to a known criminal, to discard them for lack of concrete evidence.

More substantively, there is the well-documented historical relationship that was detailed earlier. That entailed significant corruption, as politicians used gang structures to control electoral violence and marshal votes, in return for which they delivered economic rents to gang leaders in the form of protection and access to government contracts, and allowed gangs to deliver public goods to the communities they control. These may have endured in some realms. GOJ’s own national security policy (written in 2013) states as an area of concern, “the placing of public works contracts with organizations that are fronts for organized crime.”

The evidence threshold challenge affects most entities whose work involves eradicating gangs and gang activity.

54% of Jamaicans think that “politically connected criminals” go free.

In 2017 there were 1,844 cases of corruption brought before the parish courts, with 519 convictions
The post-Dudus era features a proliferation of gangs that are much more loosely organized, are spread out throughout the island, and, for a variety of reasons, are considerably more violent.

Present Day Gangs in Present Day Jamaica

The stage for Jamaica’s present-day gang problem has thus been set. In the “post-Dudus” era, since 2010, contextual variables and drivers of gang crime and gang violence have changed. Where there was formerly more structure and control, and international organized crime linkages, the post-Dudus era features a proliferation of gangs that are much more loosely organized, are spread out throughout the island, and, for a variety of reasons, are considerably more violent.

At the same time the availability of guns has increased significantly with the ability to buy them with marijuana, which can be grown and harvested far more freely with decriminalization and the cessation of eradication efforts, and which has produced a situation where criminals are quite literally able to grow currency with which to purchase weapons.

What is further evident is that virulent gang violence has to be considered and treated apart from violent crime, so that it is the underpinning culture of violence, and the social norms that engender ruthlessness and brutality, that must be considered as problems separate and apart from gang crime, even violent gang crime. Along these lines, the social and cultural factors that engender a propensity for young boys to join gangs, must be addressed.

What follows is a review of what has been done about the gang problem, as it has been delineated here, and with what outcomes.
Jamaica’s attempts—successful and failed—to combat gang violence have been well-researched and analysed. Rather than reprise the events and outcomes of the transition from political to criminal gangs in the 1990s, or Operation Kingfish (2004-2012), here we focus on what appeared to have been a turning point, when Jamaica’s murder rate fell from 62 in 2009 to 36 per 100,000 in 2014. This was the post-Tivoli operation period, beginning in 2010, but gaining real momentum in 2011, when the Jamaican police stepped up their efforts to eradicate gangs and reduce gang violence.

Experts and stakeholders believe that the extremeness of the operation to apprehend Christopher “Dudus” Coke, and the visible multi-gang alliance that sought to repel the state forces, led to the broad realization that the gangs’ power had come to threaten the state itself. From then on, both the Jamaican government and, to an extent, the civilian population, began to distance themselves from the gangs, who thus became more vulnerable to the ensuing police crackdown.

The crackdown on gangs, in the then-commissioner’s words, involved “a proactive approach to policing in difficult circumstances with emphasis placed on a well-developed working plan and well-coordinated operational initiatives,” “focused attention on gangs, depriving criminals of the freedom to operate, and working steadfastly to a pre-determined policing plan,” and “cross-border initiatives that assisted the process of containment, a strategy that he recommended be used as a template for operations and disrupting the activities of mobile criminals.”

The failure of the kingpin strategy of going after criminal leaders, was not unique to Jamaica: similar strategies have precipitated chaos and record-setting murder rates in other countries that have tried it, such as Mexico.

- Former Police chief

The decline in murder was not sustained after 2014, and by 2017 Jamaica’s homicide rate had risen steeply, in what, according to one hypothesis, was the symptom of a splintering underworld, and the repercussions of the security force crackdowns on the gangs. One argument is that the gangs used the crackdown to redefine their operations and avoid detection, and so splintered, dispersed, and diversified (see figure 2, which shows a steady increase in the number of gangs in the island). This fragmentation also resulted in expansion outside of the traditional gang hotbeds into rural areas. Table 3 shows that the number of gangs recorded in some rural parishes did increase between 2010 and 2018.

Beyond only a couple of instances, the state did not take advantage of the unique opportunity to re-acquire social control, 139 Mimi Yagoub, “Why Jamaica’s homicide rate is up 20%,” Insight Crime, June 20, 2017, www.insightcrime.org/news/analysis/why-jamaica-homicide-rate-up-20-percent/.
140 Yagoub; senior JCF Official.
141 Mimi Yagoub, 2017a.
142 “Police chief praises cops for crime reduction.”

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The failure of this kingpin strategy of going after criminal leaders, was not unique to Jamaica: similar strategies have precipitated chaos and record-setting murder rates in other countries that have tried it, such as Mexico. The JCF’s view is that the gangs are able to quickly recruit and replace members who are killed or incarcerated.146

There are also two events that occurred in 2014 that may correlate with the end of the decline. The first was the initiation of the commission of enquiry into the
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Table 3. Number of gangs in Jamaica, by parish, between 2010 and 2018

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Source: Jamaica Constabulary Force. *missing figures were not available.

142 “Police chief praises cops for crime reduction.”
143 Harriss (2015a).
144 JCF collates the data based on police divisions. Kingston, St Andrew, and St. Catherine are broken down into multiple divisions, while all parishes are represented as a single division.
145 Requests were also made for breakdown of the number of gangs for the years 2008 and 2009. The research team was advised that these numbers were not available.
146 Mimi Yogaub, 2017a.
147 JCF; “Gang Violence in Jamaica.”
Tivoli operation, in February 2014. The Commission began sitting in December 2014 and completed its last session in February 2016. The Commission’s report was published in June 2016. One school of thought is that the political discourse around the commission of enquiry undermined the public support for the security forces and their work, which in turn led to a loss of confidence on the part of law enforcement officers to persist with the difficult tasks that the gang crackdown entailed. In this view the demise of the strategy was as much about politics, public perception, and police morale, as it was about policing tactics.

Second was the resignation of the Commissioner of Police in the middle of the year. He had come into the position in 2009, had been a leader of the 2010 Tivoli operation, and was a key architect and implementer of the post-Tivoli crackdown. It was during his tenure that volatile divisions such as St. Andrew South halved their number of murders in 2011, to the lowest number in 19 years. It later emerged that in one of the police divisions that had experienced a dramatic drop in murders—the Clarendon Division recorded 75 murders in 2011, a number that had not been seen since 1994—there was a “special” police death squad that was supplied by a senior JCF officer with resources to carry out extra-judicial killings, allegedly with the full backing of members of the Police High Command.

The blowback of the crackdown strategy—which was not sustained, and which was plagued with questions of its integrity—was that it further exacerbated the splintering of gangs, and concomitantly, the increase in violent crime.

The anti-gang strategy employed by the state in the immediate post-Dudus crackdown did yield significant results in so far as murders went down, and in a couple of instances the state re-entered communities and re-established itself as the governing authority. The blowback of that strategy—which was not sustained, and which was itself plagued with questions of its integrity—was that it further exacerbated the splintering of gangs, and concomitantly, the increase in the incidence of acts of violence, and violent crime. Which is the situation we now, in 2020, have at hand.
since 2016, the GOJ has increasingly prioritized national security, as indicated by the significant increase in the security budget in 2016 compared to the seven years prior, and the marked increases in the budgetary allocations to the sector in 2018 and 2019. The 2020/21 allocation for the Ministry of National Security was further increased by J$1.7 billion, from J$78 billion the previous year. That increase will cover spending to boost the military’s vehicle fleet, including to acquire armoured patrol carriers, to purchase and overhaul ships, as well as for cybersecurity initiatives, construction, and improvements.

The increase in resources is directly and indirectly meant to address the country’s violence problem, particularly as it is manifested by gangs. Containing criminal gangs requires a three pronged approach: prevention, intervention, and suppression, which includes legislation. The GOJ’s current approach to combating gang violence incorporates all of these. Prevention involves the provision of and access to services that should be provided by the state to ensure that persons develop into responsible contributing members of society. Key in this first prong is access to quality education, health services, and

There was a significant increase in the security budget in 2016 compared to the seven years prior, and marked increases in the allocations to the sector in 2018 and 2019. The 2020/21 allocation for the Ministry of National Security was further increased by J$1.7 billion, from J$78 billion the previous year.

3 main aspects of the GOJ’s current approach to combatting gang violence are:

- **suppression**
- **prevention/intervention**
- **legislation**
activities that engage young people positively.\textsuperscript{154} Interventions are efforts to successfully disengage and extricate active members from their gangs by providing them with social alternatives and rehabilitation. Suppression speaks to the formal and informal social controls operationalized by the state and its actors in the judiciary.\textsuperscript{155} Historically, suppressive and deterrent-heavy ideology and strategy has been the main approach by law enforcement all over the world,\textsuperscript{156} including by the ICF. Suppression as an anti-violence or anti-gang strategy is, however, now widely viewed in the literature and by stakeholders as retrograde and counterproductive. Purely suppressive tactics by law enforcement have been deemed as ineffective,\textsuperscript{157} and it is the emerging belief that “the repressive model of gang control” leads “to increased rates of violence.”\textsuperscript{158}

In the current Jamaican context, however, the consensus among the relevant decision-makers is that the severity of the gang violence problem warrants concern with short-term results, to bring the problem under control, provide relief from violence for the affected population, and to check the power and corrosive influence of gangs and their leaders—a suppressive strategy. In the absence of a well-articulated, coherent, and practical alternative, promoted by a group or entity that has integrity and public support, short-term measures that involve suppression enhance the policy influence of the experts on the use of force, and the institutions that administer suppression—the security forces and their intelligence organizations.\textsuperscript{159}

In the prime minister’s words: “What the SOE does is to provide a respite in the number of crimes, particularly murders. It helps to expand the number of law-enforcement personnel that we have on the ground, it helps to restrict the free movement of the criminal enterprise and then that gives [the security forces] an increased ability to do their work.”\textsuperscript{160}

In addition, as articulated by the Commissioner of Police: the respite from violence will augur well for citizens’ confidence in the security forces, and more people will come forward with evidence and information to capture criminals, recover guns, and build cases.

Thus the approach that the GOJ has taken towards gangs and gang violence since January 2018, with the States of Public Emergency (SOEs).\textsuperscript{161} Under a state of emergency the security forces have the power to search, curtail operating hours of business, restrict access to places, and detain persons without a warrant. It also gives them the power to stop and question persons, and to seize property. The other objectives of this strategy are redolent of the post-2010 crackdown: intensifying investigations, taking suspected gang members and leaders into custody, “strong security measures” to disrupt gangs’ operations, and “rooting out” the gangs.\textsuperscript{162}

Other aspects of the GOJ’s suppressive strategy include employing technology to enhance intelligence gathering and analysis, led by the National Intelligence Bureau. The ICF’s National Strategic Anti-Gang Unit, supported by Proactive Investigative Units,\textsuperscript{163} and guided by a National Strategic Anti-Gang Coordination Committee, are “aggressively” investigate top-tier gangs, in keeping with the provisions of the Anti-Gang Act.\textsuperscript{164} Another number of investigative innovations intended to weaken and bring down all gangs, regardless of their size and level of organization, are planned or underway.\textsuperscript{165}

In 2017 the government also announced “The Law Reform (Zones of Special Operations) (Special Security and Community Development Measures) Act 2017,” commonly known as the ZOSO Act.\textsuperscript{166} The ZOSO Act gives the prime minister the power to designate any community a “zone” that requires the focused attention of security personnel and social services because of high rates of violence within the community. In September 2017 the first ZOSO was established in the community of Mount Salem in St. James.

ZOSO is premised on a “clear, hold, build” long-term strategy,\textsuperscript{167} and is meant to provide intervention from a twofold perspective. Clear and hold means that there is a “focused deterrence” by the state’s security force, whereby they enter the community, “clear” out any criminal elements and “hold” the line against these criminal groups, by maintaining a presence. The presence by the security forces then allows for social services, whether by the state or NGOs, to be deployed to rebuild the communities,\textsuperscript{168} what one might consider “social interventions,” broadly speaking. If this—reconnecting and establishing trust between the state and the community, so that these communities are in a position to resist efforts by gangs, who may otherwise prey upon them—is successful, this would bridge the gap that wasn’t properly addressed in the 2011-4 crackdown.

Up to the end of 2019 there were nine SOEs across the island, in seven police divisions. There is not yet sufficient evidence available (beyond numbers of murders) on the effects of the SOEs to make definitive conclusions, though a long enough time to attempt a valid evaluation. There was a 22 percent fall in the number of murders in 2018 (compared to 2017) a decline which the GOJ has attributed to the SOEs.\textsuperscript{169} In St. James in 2018 there were 100 murders, down from 335 in 2017, and the lowest number since 2006.\textsuperscript{170} When the SOE was lifted in January 2019, St. James’ murder patterns returned to their pre-2018 situation. The state cites these changes in the murder rate as proof of success as the SOEs are working, but other preliminary data suggest that the SOEs rather than curtailing, may be causing a displacement of violence instead. For example, in the month after a SOE was declared in St. Andrew South (the police division that had the largest number of gangs of all police divisions in the island,) hotspot monitor showed that there was a significant decrease in violence in the division, but a corollary increase in the immediate surrounding areas. (see figure 7)

Figure 5. Differences in violent crime in St Andrew South pre and post SOE, 2019

Source: Mona Geo-Informatics, 2019


\textsuperscript{155} Lafontaine et al. \textsuperscript{156} Read and Decker (2002).

\textsuperscript{157} Read and Decker (2002).

\textsuperscript{158} Brubhenn and Gohe (2018).

\textsuperscript{159} Harriott (2015a).


\textsuperscript{161} Section 26 of the Jamaica Constitution states that a “period of public emergency” is any period during which a. Jamaica is engaged in a war. b. There is in force a proclamation by the governor general declaring that a state of public emergency exists, and c. There is in force a resolution of any House supported by the votes of a majority of all the members of that House declaring that democratic institutions in Jamaica are threatened by subversion.

\textsuperscript{162} Arthur Hall, Police Commissioner insist SOEs reaping success.

\textsuperscript{163} The unit within each police division that is responsible for intelligence gathering.

\textsuperscript{164} ICF (2017). (Gang Reduction Strategy).

\textsuperscript{165} Law Reform (“Zones of Special Operations) (Special Security and Community Development Measures) Act”, 2017.

\textsuperscript{166} ICF “Gang Violence in Jamaica.”

\textsuperscript{167} Government of Jamaica (2014).


\textsuperscript{170} When the SOE was lifted in January 2019, St. James’ murder patterns returned to their pre-2018 situation.
SOEs are not sustainable in the long term, because of the immense amount of resources they require and the curtailing of civil rights involved. There is also the danger that long term SOEs run the risk of the country becoming a police state. The GOJ has stated repeatedly that it does not intend to pursue SOEs as a long term strategy, and that the state is pursuing a number of other strategies at the same time. For example, the stated intention is that once the JCF removes gangsters from the communities, there will be a coordinated effort by the Community Safety and Security Branch to “develop, institutionalize, and maintain intervention and diversion projects to engage the youths in a positive way.”

A 2018-9 study on a violenceidden St. James community that was under the 2018 SOE, however, found that when the young men who were swept up by the police were released afterwards back into the community, there was no contact or follow up of these young men by social agencies, despite the fact that many of them were high school dropouts and looking for employment, common markers of potential gang members.

Legislation

Legislation is a key component of any approach to addressing Jamaica’s violent gang crime problem. Despite Jamaica’s longstanding challenges with gangs it has not had specific legislation to effectively combat these criminal organizations until recently. This delayed response of the state’s justice system to put forward effective legislation forestalls law enforcement’s effective response. For example, lottery scamming emerged as a problem in the early 2000s, with Jamaican law enforcement becoming aware of the prevalence of the crime in 2006. Yet the Law Reform (Fraudulent Transactions) (Special Provisions) Act, more popularly referred to as the “Lotto Scam Law,” was not enacted until almost seven years later, in 2013.174

The Criminal Justice (Suppression of Criminal Organizations) Act 2014, popularly referred to as the “Anti-Gang Act,” is the first of its kind in Jamaica that specifically targets criminal groups. Prior to its passage, law enforcement relied on existing legislation such as the Offences Against the Persons Act, 2011, and the Firearms Act, 1967. Up to November 2018, 448 persons were charged under the legislation with only two persons being successfully prosecuted.175

A study of the effects of the Anti-Gang Act on the rates of murder and organised crime in western Jamaica (a particularly violence-plagued area of the island), was commissioned by the Ministry of National Security in 2016.176 It found a number of weaknesses, loopholes, and operational challenges in the legislation. The inherent limitations to the legislation include: the Act does not allow for search and seizure, a critical omission, nor for the interception of communication. Further, courts/prosecutors and investigators/police diver in considerable in their interpretation of works as the legislation, including what constitutes a criminal organization.

There are also contingent limitations, contextual factors that impede the legislation’s efficacy. These include: the need for an easy and user-friendly framework for a plea bargaining arrangement; difficulty in securing interim protection/accommodation for witnesses before they are included in the witness protection programme; witnesses’ fear for their immediate and extended families, who can be targeted in retaliation (the witness protection program does not readily provide for extended families); the culture of silence, particularly in communities with high gang density; the pervasive gang culture in which gangs/doms are seen as doing positive things, which reduces the willingness of residents to support the investigative process; covert evidence gathering capability within the JCF is low; and inadequate funding and equipment for proactive investigators to engage in meaningful semi-covert and covert tasks, operations, from which evidence may be obtained.177

The study’s recommendations called for legislative revisions, clarification, wider and deeper training (for the JCF and the judiciary) the investment of substantial resources to improve the quality of policing and to build investigative capacities, and the need for dialogue and coherence across the judiciary and police. A parliamentary review of the legislation commenced in 2018, with the objective of addressing some of these, and other, issues. Since then, the Director of Public Prosecutions has established and equipped its own anti-gang unit, that has worked closely with the JCF to build cases that are better suited to be prosecuted under the Act. In late 2018 through to 2019 there were several high profile cases that were significant, in part, because entire gangs were being prosecuted, or groups from one gang, rather than individual gang members. Some of these cases were dismissed because of a lack of sufficient evidentiary support,178 primarily related to witnesses who are out of fear, or the disappearance or death of a key witness.179 The murder of witnesses is a serious, longstanding, and debilitating problem that plagues many court cases in Jamaica; the propensity of gangs to use violence to further their objectives exacerbates this risk.180

Two of the cases, Uchence Wilson Gang and Dexter Street Gang, concluded in late 2019 and early 2020, were considered to be “tests” of the new approach by the DPP and the JCF to building cases around the legislation.181 Given the precedent of witnesses disappearing/being murdered, the prosecution applied for and was granted permission for witnesses to testify via video link under the Evidence (Special Measures) Act, 2012,182 in an attempt to address that critical problem. If these cases are successful, the state will have a clear idea of what is needed to make prosecutable cases that are not bound to get convictions in the court.183 Some of the weaknesses identified by the review have since been addressed.184 The use of plea bargaining, while common in many jurisdictions, and done informally in Jamaica for some time, was formally done for the first time in Jamaica in 2019. The case against Deon Morgan was successfully prosecuted based on the evidence of one key witness, a former Clans- man gang member who flipped. Already incarcerated for another crime, the wit-

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175 Study’s findings were reported in “VPA calls for targeted violence intervention programmes for Cambridge,” Loop News, February 22, 2019, www.loopja-mica.com/content/vpa-calls-targeted-violence-intervention-programmes-cambridge.
177 Moncrieffe (2017). The study also reviewed the effectiveness of the Lotto Scam Law.
178 Moncrieffe, 8.
181 The increase in the 2020/21 budgetary allocation to the Ministry of National Security was, in part, earmarked for the Witness Protection Programme, probably as a response to the challenges presented by missing or fearful witnesses.
184 Wilson-Harris, “Uchence Wilson Gang Trial.”

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Most of these cases involve business persons who have engaged in some type of fraud. The legislation is not geared towards criminal prosecution; it is only used to sequester illicitly acquired wealth. However, the use of financial investigations techniques as provided for under POCA serve to uncover the movement of monies that are generated by crime, and that serve to finance criminal enterprises. Persons who deal with these funds knowing that they are proceeds of crime are guilty of money-laundering.

There is potential to conduct more financial investigations alongside criminal investigations of gangs, though pursuing financial crime investigations against violent criminal gangs is hampered by the fact that the vast majority of gang members are unbanked or not deeply embedded in financial institutions. As such they are not subject to suspicious transaction reports that banks and other financial institutions are obliged to file, and often do not own substantial assets available for forfeiture. However, as criminal enterprises become larger and their activities extend to corrupt payments, which then bring other players such as professional advisors (to legitimize these funds) into the scheme, these funds should naturally seek to enter the financial system. The records available through financial investigations then can create a strong evidential basis for prosecution, when considered together with evidence of the primary criminal activity. The constraint is that existing law enforcement players do not necessarily have the awareness to initiate financial investigations as a corollary to primary criminal investigations, nor does FID have the capacity to work alongside each and every investigation.

There are other tools available under the POCA legislation that are not as widely used as they could be, in going after criminal gangs. These include specialized investigatory tools, post-conviction pecuniary penalty orders, and civil recovery lawsuits. These could be used to attack criminal activity and discourage otherwise innocent parties (such as professional advisors) from participating in these criminal schemes, or providing services to criminals.

Around the world, particularly in the Commonwealth, governments and law enforcement agencies have turned to Unexplained Wealth Orders to part criminal funds from their illicitly acquired wealth.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Seized</th>
<th>Total Forfeited</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JA</td>
<td>US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>$26,657,394</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>$15,929,950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>$7,042,707</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Source: Moncrieffe, 2017
and, in some jurisdictions, prosecute them for the crimes they carried out to amass it. In Ireland, for example, the Proceedings of Crime Act (1996), with the support of a specialized unit, has been successfully used to pursue criminals who have accumulated large amounts of property with no apparent legitimate sources of income.185 A proposal to amend POCA in Jamaica to allow for a similar approach using Unexplained Wealth Orders was returned by the attorney general to further explore and resolve apparent constitutional infringements.

Yet another option is an asset recovery incentivisation scheme (ARIS), which would allow those agencies that work to combat money laundering and other financial crimes to be able to utilise a portion of the funds recovered in order to improve their capacity and operational effectiveness. Those proceeds of crime could even be ploughed back into vulnerable communities, which would be a powerful symbol and deterrent, as well as provide much needed material resources to those citizens. The Ministry of National Security announced in September 2019 that it intends to pursue this legislation.186

Prevention and Intervention

Suppressive strategies typically address problems that already exist; they do little to prevent new recruits from joining gangs or organized crime groups, and they do not address the social conditions that correlate with the propensity for youth to join gangs, and the expansion of these gangs.187 In a context such as Jamaica, where ARIS itself considers there to be an endless supply of violence producers ready to join gangs and do their bidding, social interventions are essential.188 The Ministry of National Security’s website lists 80 (formal) interventions in four of the island’s most crime-affected parishes so as to “to give a clear picture of the extent and placement, by community, of programme intervention.”189 These interventions are implemented by non-governmental, governmental, and foreign donor organizations. This is to say, there is no shortage of interventions that directly or indirectly aim to address the social, cultural, economic, and psycho-social factors that correlate with joining gangs, community’s vulnerability to gangs, and the violence associated with gangs. Of these, we highlight a few that the state is pursuing.

The largest social intervention programme in Jamaica is the Citizen Security and Justice Programme (CSJP), an initiative that began in 2002, and overseen by the Ministry of National Security, and funded by donor partners.190 The programme targets volatile communities with the stated aims to prevent and reduce crime and violence, strengthen crime management capabilities, and improve the delivery of judicial services.191 The programme works in many fields with other actors and stakeholders, such as community-based organizations, non-governmental organizations, and other state entities. Its work directly addresses some of the basic elements of preventing youth from joining gangs, which is to strengthen communities, families, and schools; improve community supervision; train teachers and parents to manage disruptive youth; and teach students interpersonal skills.192

The JCF has stated that prevention and diversion, by way of interventions, is a key aspect of their gang reduction strategy.193 Among the JCF’s intervention initiatives are school sensitizations “which seek to enhance prevention and diversion efforts, and inform the youths... of the signs and likely consequences of gang involvement”; the Proactive Violence Intervention Strategy (PVIS), the Safe Schools Programme through the School Resource Officers, and the greater use of Neighbourhood Watch, Farmers’ Watch, and Business Watch, which the JCF considers important vehicles through which gang violence can be disrupted, prevented, and diverted.194

There are other intervention and prevention-type initiatives carried out by the GOJ, whether through the Office of the Prime Minister, the Ministry of National Security, or other GOJ ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) that could be considered anti-gang interventions, in that they target unattached young people, mainly males, who are particularly vulnerable to joining gangs. Among these are the Housing, Opportunity, Production and Employment (HOPE) Programme, a training and apprenticeship programme, through the National Service Corps. An associated programme is Learning, Earning, Giving, Saving (LEGS), to provide these youth the opportunity to “work to learn, work to earn, work to give service to the nation and work to save for their future.”195 The development of uniformed groups in high schools is also a priority for the administration, mainly via the Jamaica Combined Cadet Corps; in 2019 it was announced that the GOJ plans to send a cadet corps in all high schools across the country by the end of FY2021.196

The development of uniformed groups in high schools is also a priority for the administration, mainly via the Jamaican Combined Cadet Corps; in 2019 it was announced that the GOJ plans to send a cadet corps in all high schools across the country by the end of FY 2021.196

189 UNDP (2012), 87.
190 “Social interventions,” in the broadest sense possible—any non-law enforcement attempt at changing the conditions which are thought to cause or correlate with the proliferation of gangs and violence.
192 The UK Department for International Development (DFID), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), and the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD) (Canada). The donor-funded iteration of CSJP is scheduled to end in December 2020, with the expectation that there will be a transition to GOJ-funded set of interventions, some of which will be carried over from the CSJP.
195 JCF “Gang Violence in Jamaica”
196 JCF (2017), 12
The question of “what works?” to remedy the social conditions that correlate with gangs is hotly debated, and rightly so. It has long been acknowledged that the evidence that any impact that the many social interventions have had over the years is mostly anecdotal and speculative. Many have not been sustained, and, as obtains in many countries throughout the world, evidence-based programming in areas such as violence interventions is not standard procedure.  

There are many NGOs in Jamaica that are capable of designing and implementing meaningful programmes, a large number of skilled and concerned citizens who can facilitate these programmes, and huge amounts of resources that have been invested. But these efforts have not translated into a national impact, and in the context of a suppresive mindset on the part of the leading policy makers, doubt has been very largely implicit cast on such interventions’ value and efficacy.

That skepticism is not unwarranted. The UNDP’s Caribbean Development Report 2012’s in-depth treatment of street gangs, organized crime, and violence, highlights the risks of uninformed responses to gangs. With regard to the impact of prevention and social intervention approaches to gang membership and crime they state: “while a few studies report some positive impacts, most of the research examining these strategies finds that they are ineffective in reducing gang membership or gang crime. Indeed some of the research indicates that these programmes lead to an increase in gang membership and gang delinquency.”

Jamaica is not unique in the lack of evidence from middle- and, in particular, low-income countries on preventing armed and other violence, despite the fact they suffer disproportionate levels of both. Many behavioural interventions are widely implemented without being adequately tested because it seems intuitive that they should work; unfortunately, often when these interventions are tested with randomized control trials, many have been found to be ineffective or even cause harm. Nevertheless, even with these justifiable concerns about social interventions as they are presently carried out, it is only through initiatives that are crafted for specific social problems and troubled places, to be implemented in specific contexts where there are known opportunities and constraints, that any feasible means of gang prevention and control can occur.

Even where “what works” is known, there are endemic capacity deficits that fetter the translation of robust evidence-based intervention approaches into scaled up, institutionalized programmes. For example, Reach Up is an early stimulation intervention that targets undernourished, poor children; integrating parenting skills and early psychosocial stimulation results in significantly improved developmental outcomes—including with regard to criminal activity and violent behaviour. The programme was designed and tested in Jamaica, the results were published by a Nobel Prize winning economist in the journal Nature, and other countries adopted the intervention on a large scale, but it took over 15 years for Jamaica’s own Ministry of Health to adopt and pilot the intervention across the island.

There is a need for evidence-informed, context-specific proposals that do not uncritically transfer anti-gang or anti-violence programmes from elsewhere, that can be applied to short-term approaches, and that are linked to long-term programming. The formulation and systematization of comprehensive and integrative approaches to the gang and organized crime problems require a deep understanding of the cultural, social, criminal processes that contextualize extreme violence production. It is apparent in this context that the announcement of a Violence Prevention Commission was made by the prime minister in 2018; in July 2019 it was announced that the Commission was to begin work. The objective of the commission is to examine all aspects of violence and ways to address it, by gathering all the research and studies already done on violence, and make recommendations. This most recent initiative deserves full support and adequate resources, to inform the necessary social interventions.

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The success of the 2011-4 policing strategy that brought down Jamai-
ca’s murder rate to a level it had not experienced in decades was underlined by evidence that the crack-
down may have had a significant dark side with regard to extrajudicial actions, and other abuses, and the failure of the state to maximize the opportunity presented by the vacuum. It also appears to have had the unintended consequence of splinter-
ing the gangs, causing them to increase in number, and given their loose structure, those new gangs were more unstable, and more virulent in their violence produc-
tion, leading to a rise in the murder rate after 2015.

A similar crackdown approach has been taken since 2017-8, with suppressive strat-
egies that aim to eliminate the gangs, this time with the heaviest policing measure that exists, the state of emergency. At the same time, there are more resources for the security apparatus, and intensive ef-
forts to use the anti-gang legislation to investigate and prosecute criminal gang-
sters. There is a concerted effort to up-
grade the image of the JCF—a rebranding, as it were—with a view to building stron-
ger public support for the police and their work. A wide range of anti-violence inter-
ventions are implemented by the state and non-state actors.

The metric of the number of murders, however, is inadequate to gauge the suc-
cess or failure of the current suppressive approach. It is an important indicator, but when there is other preliminary data suggesting that violence and crime have simply been displaced and dispersed, not eradicated, it is unlikely that any initial declines in murder will be sustained. The most obvious indicator of the legislative approach would be number of convic-
tions; judgements in the two big cases are yet to be handed down. The outcomes of social interventions are difficult to ascer-
tain, in part because many of them take years to show results (if there are any re-
sults to be had,) and because many, if not most interventions, as they are currently designed and implemented in Jamaica, are not evidence-based and are not systemati-
cally monitored and evaluated.

Ultimately, a sustained decrease in vio-
ence in general, and murder in particular, without continued use of states of emer-
gency, would be considered a successful outcome of an anti-gang strategy. Thus gauging the success or lack thereof the current anti-gang strategy requires more time, and more evidence, than currently obtains.

Even as we await “results,” there are ar-
eas that can and should be given atten-
tion to strengthen the current approach. The JCF’s definition of gangs, does not, on the face of it, serve it well, because it does not appear to recognize the very disparate groupings that require very different responses whether in terms of prevention or suppression. For example, high school gangs may mimic established gangs, and are engaged in delinquency and school-level extortion, but any law enforcement response to those groups of (usually) boys, would necessarily differ from the response to the street-level gang or even corner crew. Furthermore, by put-
ting all these disparate groupings into one lump, “gang,” and putting that large num-
ber into the public domain, for example when the Minister says in parliament that there are 381 gangs in Jamaica, suggests a situation that exaggerates and misleads with regard to the scale and nature of the problem. Further work on definitions of gangs and criminal groups is needed not only to help develop a common under-
standing, but also to better comprehend the structural, functional, and behavioural characteristics that differentiate them. Differentiating between them is critical in order to accurately and effectively diag-
ose and respond to problems associated with each type.67

The potential for “following the money” could be exploited more than obtains at present. Financial investigations should be routinely conducted alongside criminal investigations of gangs. This requires pro-
actively increasing awareness among law enforcement and justice system players.

The role of civil society is essential. “Putting pressure” on the government is not enough. A coordinated effort that involves not only key civil society stakeholders, but the population at large, duly made aware of the issues, including the finer details, should hold the government accountable.

The outcomes of social interventions are difficult to ascertain, in part because many of them take years to show results (if there are any results to be had,) and because many, if not most interventions, as they are currently designed and implemented in Jamaica, are not evidence-based and are not systematically monitored and evaluated.
of the possibilities which exist under the POCA, and increasing the capacity of the relevant agencies such as the FID to conduct these investigations. Unexplained wealth orders and the financial investiga-
tion aspect of criminal investigations in general, and particularly against gangs, could be transformative. The discussion on Unexplained Wealth Orders should be reopened, with greater public awareness of the role such legislative change could play in the country’s crime and violence problem. Similarly, an asset recovery in-
centivisation scheme could have powerful deterrent and symbolic effects, as would modifying beneficial ownership laws so that they are more transparent.

Also with regard to legislation is the cur-
rent, some would say outdated, status of the Jamaican judiciary’s evidence thresh-
old. Modifying the threshold to make computer-generated evidence easier to be admitted is one simple fix. Making it a more standard procedure (rather than an exception) for witnesses to testify via video link, would go a far way in having the witnesses needed for stronger cases that can be prosecuted. While this is an area that requires a far more thorough and legally informed treatment than this report allows, to make very specific rec-
ommendations, it is an area that virtually every stakeholder who was interviewed for this report brought up as a barrier to more, and more effective, prosecutions and convictions of violent criminals. Social interventions should be evi-
dence-based, context-appropriate, and properly evaluated. Though this may ap-
pear straightforward, the problem of un-
informed interventions garnering huge amounts of resources when the results or unknown or might even do harm, is not fully appreciated to the extent that the requisite changes have not occurred.

In all of this, the role of civil society is essential. “Putting pressure” on the gov-
ernment is not enough. A coordinated effort that involves not only key civil society stakeholders, but the population at large, duly made aware of the issues, including the finer details, should hold the government accountable. For exam-
ple, civil society needs to demand more from the government with regard to so-
cial interventions. Stakeholders should be empowered with the knowledge to de-
mand that the state justify interventions, explain why the communities where they are being implemented have been cho-
sen, prove that they are evidence-based, and entail systematic, rigorous moni-
toring and evaluation. This information should be made public and easily acces-
sible. By making transparent the process by which a community is selected, for example, questions of partisan favourit-
ism are eliminated, which then makes it more likely to sustain the intervention across political administrations. As an-
other example, there should be greater scrutiny of the prioritization of a partic-
ular age group for targeted anti-violence interventions, bearing in mind that such scrutiny can only be meaningful if people understand the issues, and have the infor-
mation to properly question and evaluate.

While a few studies report some positive impacts, most of the research examining these strategies find that they are inef-
f ective in reducing gang membership or gang crime. Indeed some of the research indicates that these programmes lead to an increase in gang membership and gang delinquency.

- UNDP (2012)

Conclusion

Since 2011, Jamaica’s gang situation—
the context, structure, and dynamics—
has changed. Jamaican gangs have and are splintered: there are many more of them, and they are more loosely-orga-

ized. They are well-armed, and able to virtually grow currency to purchase new, high-powered weapons. They are extremely violent, often carrying out murders where there is no material mo-
tive. The historical relationship between partisan politics and gangs continues to transition from direct links between pa-
tronage, gang violence and the electoral cycle, to less distinctive relationships that are speculated about, and seldom sub-
stantiated. Police corruption is a problem, largely, it is thought, in the form of police taking payment for tipping off gangsters, or directly participating in gang criminal activity. This corruption also is not well evidenced. Many gangs do engage in or-
ganized crime as regards localized extor-
tion rackets, contract killings, robbery, and scamming. They are also engaged in cross border criminal activities, such as illegal drug trafficking where the drugs are primarily traded for arms. The links between transnational organized crime networks and Jamaican violent gangs, however, are far more fluid and transient than once obtained, and to the extent that high level transnational organized crime is happening in Jamaica, it suits those ac-
tors better to avoid association with the violent gangs than to be involved with them.

The state has invested significantly more money into the security apparatus, a large portion of which is directly or indirectly meant to address the gang problem, via a mostly suppressive strategy that is heavy on policing. Attempts to attack the gang problem via legislation have been am-
plified and the Anti-Gang Act is being tested. Social interventions, which are essential to change the drivers and cor-
relating factors that provide for the gangs’ ongoing existence and proliferation, are not producing significant, measurable results, in large part because they are not evidence based, sustained, or proper-
ly evaluated. That the interventions are not meeting expectations does not mean they should not be pursued; rather they should be approached with sufficient re-
sources and will so they can yield positive changes.

Existing research on state responsiveness to initiate and/or advance gang control programmes tells us that truly mean-
ingful efforts to combat gangs and gang violence depend on the power configu-
rations in the political administrations and states as well as within the political parties. For example, new and mean-
gful gang and organized crime control and prevention measures tend to be taken in the early stages of a new administra-
tion. Further, events that reveal the character of the problem and shock the political and social systems may mobi-
itize the populations for effective gang and crime control. This is what may have happened post-Tivoli, though it was not sustained. It should be sufficient for the existing high levels of violence and vio-

tence to shock the Jamaican people out of their complacency, and to mobilize support, whether for the security forces’
current efforts, or to rally around some other demand for action.

This points to the importance of civic pressures for good governance, and the power shifts and structural changes that they help to bring about that contribute to improved state responsiveness. The most obvious iteration of this in the Ja-
maican context is for civil society to exert pressure on the GOJ and the opposition to arrive at a non-partisan agreement on specific anti-gang and anti-gang violence actions. This is the basis for the Private Sector Organization of Jamaica’s (PSOJ) successful push for a bipartisan nation-
al stakeholder crime summit in October 2019, an initiative which has been fol-
lowed up with stakeholder consultations, the assignment of a committee of experts, and the drafting of a plan of action. But there is room for greater engagement and advocacy on specific issues, such as increasing law enforcement’s financial in-
vestigation capacity, and ongoing police reform.

The goal of this report was to synthesize the existing research and knowledge on gang violence in Jamaica, particularly as it currently exists, with a view to making policy recommendations that may bridge any identified gaps. However, this report is as much aimed at civil society and the general public as it is at policy and law makers, given the critical role that civil society can and should play in the effort to reduce gang violence in Jamaica, and thus the following recommendations are not only towards policy change, but to-
wards civil society to advocate for these.

207 Katz and Maguire (2013).
208 Harratt (2015), 342–543.
209 Harratt (2015), 343.
210 Harratt (2015), 345.
Recommendations

1. Social interventions, done properly, are essential. The government should provide more transparency around what social interventions are being invested in, how and why those interventions have been selected, and how they are to be measured. The state needs to be held more accountable as regards social interventions, particularly by civil society.

2. Increase the scope and depth of financial investigations into criminal activity at all levels, not only financial crimes. Pursue legislative change with regard to unexplained wealth orders to put the burden of proof on the owner of the suspected asset, and to asset recovery incentive schemes, having addressed any extant constitutional constraints. Empower, expand, and support the Financial Investigation Division (FID) to make it more effective and able to conduct investigations. Proactively engage the judiciary and the police to ensure they are aware of how and why financial investigations are critical, and how they can be used in the fight against gangs. Going after the proceeds of gang organized crime is a powerful disincentive and, symbol. (It doesn’t hurt that it raises revenue.)

3. Modernize the evidentiary threshold for criminal and other prosecution, in particular to modify the restrictions around using electronically-generated evidence (such as videos), and witnesses testifying via video link.

4. Make further and ongoing use of the plea bargain option with incarcerated or otherwise convicted potential witnesses.

5. Maintain and emphasize the distinction between crime and violence. The recently-established Violence Prevention Commission, given its mandate and membership, has the potential to put forward important evidence-based recommendations to deal specifically with the violence aspect of Jamaica’s gang problem. In doing its work the Commission should keep stakeholders and the public engaged in its findings, and proposals.

6. Proceed with and engage the public on a bipartisan anti-crime consensus. This will pave the way for bipartisan agreement on policies and programmes that will not be affected by changes in political administration, and will better ensure the continuity needed for policies to have an effect. The public’s engagement with the process and the resulting consensus is important for accountability and buy-in, and should be actively sought and supported.
References


Methodology

This study utilizes a mixed methods approach to understanding the gang situation in Jamaica, and the efforts being used to address them. The term “mixed methods” refers to the integration, or “mixing” of qualitative and quantitative data within a single investigation. The basic premise of this methodology is that such integration permits a more complete and synergistic utilization of data than do separate quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis.213

The research was mostly qualitative. A desk review was conducted to assess previous research on gangs, violence, and organized crime in Jamaica, including literature from official sources. Jamaica’s gang problem is (rightly) considered urgent, and a priority for the state, and receives a great deal of attention from the media, and from a wide variety of stakeholders whose mandate, in one way or another, is furthering Jamaica’s development. The prominence of the issue, and the urgency that surrounds it, means that news reports, policy decisions, and policy-related discussions and announcements about gangs and the country’s violence problem are produced daily, amounting to a dynamic and fast-moving policy environment. The in-depth expert and key stakeholder interviews that were conducted, therefore, were particularly valuable as much of the information gathered from those interviews was not readily available in the public sphere. Similarly, news articles on the topic were also heavily relied on for information that was not otherwise accessible. Statistics and documentation from the Jamaica Constabulary Force, and from Mona Geoinformatics Institute, were used in the analysis. The analytic strategy used for this study is a problem-driven content analysis of the interviews, the available data, and existing literature related to gangs, crime, and violence.214

Limitations and Challenges

Secondary data on crime in Jamaica is difficult to collect. The problem of unreliable or inaccessible data is an established weakness in Caribbean crime and security research especially as it relates to gangs and organised crime.215 The ICF primary data set, which while more available than other data sources, is limited, largely due to the shortcomings of the methodology used by the ICF to classify homicides,216 and the focus on numbers of murders, and not other variables that are related to gang activities and suppression interventions. The more granular data on some of these variables, some of which does exist, was not publicly accessible. Finally, local and international law enforcement stakeholders were, in many instances, unable to give specific information about gangs given the fact that there are ongoing related operations and investigation.

213 Content analysis is the analysis of the manifest and latent content of a body of communicated material through classification, tabulation, and evaluation of its key symbols and themes in order to ascertain its meaning and probable effect. Klaas Krippendorff, Content Analysis: An Introduction to its Methodology, Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 2004.
214 UNDP (2012).
215 Hartrott and Jones (2016).

Sample of social interventions targeting gangs, directly and/or indirectly

The largest social intervention programme in Jamaica is the Citizen Security and Justice Programme (CSJP), an initiative overseen by the Ministry of National Security, and funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), and the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD) (Canada). The programme targets volatile communities with the stated aims to prevent and reduce crime and violence, strengthen crime management capabilities, and improve the delivery of judicial services.217 The programme works in many fields with other actors and stakeholders, such as community-based organizations, non-governmental organizations, and other state entities. The programme has been renamed twice: CSJP I 2002-2008, CSJP II 2009-2013, and CSJP III 2014-2020.

One of the CSJP’s flagship anti-violence programmes is the Peace Management Initiative (PMI). The PMI was created in 2002 by the Ministry of National Security to employ “alternative ways to tackle violence that would avoid the bloodshed associated with harsh police repression.”218 It considers itself an independent entity, and is very much like an NGO in many respects.219 The organization works on its own, but more often its activities are carried out as one member of a large-scale collaborative agreement among multiple public and private institutions.220 The organisation collaborates with, among other entities, the Violence Prevention Alliance (VPA).221

The PMI’s main objective is to interrupt the cycle of revenge that tends to follow an act of violence between rival gangs using mediation, and working with groups of youths. The interventions seek not to end the violence per se, but rather to manage it, limiting its intensity and reducing harm, and so require working directly with perpetrators of violence, and responding immediately to crises, such as a gang killing.222 PMI engages in a range of interventions, projects, and activities, all aimed, whether directly or indirectly, at ending violence and promoting peace. The three main PMI interventions are: (1) violence intervention, (2) mediation, and (3) efforts to provide alternatives to gang life (indirect interventions).

For its founders, principals, and supporters, the PMI is an outstanding example of effective violence intervention, with an overall impact of an acceptance of the peace objective and the beginnings of a peace-building climate in a wide range of communities. PMI has been formally evaluated twice, in 2006 and in 2009; neither was an impact evaluation, though both were much attempted, in different ways, to estimate the project’s effects. The 2009 assessment found that “PMI is widely credited by interviewers with stopping the wars in August Town, Brown’s Town, and Moun-

218 Cara and Rojo, 114.
219 VPA is an umbrella organisation that was originally launched by the World Health Organization, and established in Jamaica in 2004. Its objective is to exchange violence prevention information between organisations, and to monitor programmes. Like many such organisations in Jamaica their work is forestalled by funding shortages.
pact, but that there are indications that “pont in the right direction.”

Another key CSJP-supported anti-vio-
lence intervention, which is directly related to gangs, is the Violence Inte-
rruption Programme (VIP). A qualitative
evaluation of the contribution of the VIP
to changes in trends and patterns of
violence in CSP and VIP communities
in St. James (in western Jamaica) found
that despite their limited reach, and the
view of target youth that they were not core
violence relief actors (the security forc-
es were), when the violence interrupters
and CSP community case management
officers are combined effectively, they
“guarantee youth the greatest ontological
security.” The Violence Interrupters (VIs),
according to the study, reached, gunned,
slowed those approaching the decision
to become killers, and kept violent youth
emotionally/behaviorally stable; they
reported instances where VIs brokered peace be-
tween warring gangs and brought an end
to violence in a community after horrific
gang murders.222

The donor-funded iteration of CSJP is
scheduled to end in December 2020,
with the expectation that there will be a transi-
tion to GOJ-funded set of interventions, some
which will be carried over from the
CSJP.

The third phase of the programme, which
began in December 2014, tabbed among
its achievements the training of 167 par-
time trainers and 189 providers; providing
counselling interventions for 2,900 bene-
ficiaries; conducting 612 outreach activi-
ties with 492 at-risk youth; implemen-
tation of a case management system and
social marketing campaigns; implementa-
tion of a national education campaign; train-
ing of guidance counsellors, deans of
discipline, and members of the student
council body to act as mentors, sports;
and a “safe schools tour” where music,
dub poetry, and performance, was used
to further engagement between students
and the police officers.223

There are other initiatives being carried
out by the GOJ, whether through the Of-
fice of the Prime Minister, the Ministry
of National Security, or other GOJ minis-
tries, departments and agencies (MDAs)
that could be considered anti-gang inter-
ventions, in that they target unattached
young people, mainly males, who are
particularly vulnerable to joining gangs.

The Housing, Opportunity, Production
and Employment (HOPE) Programme is,
in part, a training and apprenticeship
programme, through the National Ser-
vice Corps. The programme targets un-
attached youth 18 - 24 years old, who “are
not engaged in any meaningful way.” An
associated programme is Learning, Earn-
ing, Giving, Saving (LEGIS), to provide
these youth the opportunity to “work
to learn, work to earn, work to service
to the nation and work to save for their
future.”230 The extent to which either of
these programmes are modelled after ev-
education-informed protocols, or if they
are systematically evaluated, is not known.

The Holness administration has repeat-
edly stated its commitment to the de-
velopment of uniformed groups in high
schools. The Jamaica Combined Cadet
Corps is the main uniformed group that
is garnering public funding. The objec-
tives of this initiative are to “instil posi-
tive values and attitudes in the youth and
steer them away from negative influenc-
es,”231 “develop the character of young
Jamaicans,” give “more young men and
women the opportunity to actively par-
ticipate in nation-building,” and to pro-
vide a “counterweight to the ‘attractions
and distractions’ that are competing for
the attention of young people.” In 2019
it was announced that the GOJ plans to
cadet corps in all high schools
across the country by the end of F/Y
2021.232

The most recent announcement regard-
ing anti-violence interventions was from
the Ministry of National Security: a one-
year strategic social-intervention pilot
project in select communities, aimed at
reducing crime and violence, particularly
those perpetrated by youth. This project
will identify a cohort of students deemed
to be “at risk” from schools that are prone
to gang violence and recruitment, in
targeted communities. A key feature of
this approach is the focus on a younger
cohort than previous approaches which
targeted the 17 – 29 age group. This in-
tervention will target younger children,
which, the MNS said, research has shown
to be a better cohort for such efforts, and
so will focus on “primary students who are
from ‘feeder schools’, matriculating to
high schools in the targeted communities
where a large number of gangs operate,”
and “certain school settings that are
particular to GOJ plans to

unity-production-and-employment-hope-programme/

235 “More cadet units to be established in schools,” Jamaica Combined Cadet Force, http://cadetforceja.org/content/more-cadet-units-to-be-established-
schools

236 Okoye Henry, “Cadet Corps to be Established in All High School,” Jamaica Information Service, November 4, 2019, https://jis.gov/jm/cadet-corps-to-
be-established-in-all-high-schools

gov/jm/national-security-ministry-to-implement-social-intervention-pilot-project


To target children younger than the
cohort that are already labeled “unattached”
or “vulnerable,” is an idea supported by
evidence-informed research, and by Ja-
maican stakeholders and experts. Yet
there is a vulnerable population that ex-
is prior to eight and after 15 years, and
no age group should be excluded because
of the inclusion of another. For example,
it is recognized that gangs recruit from
among high school students. A 2018 JCF
report showed that there was a 65% in-
crease in the number of children arrested
for firearms between 2016 and 2017, the
majority of whom were 15-17 years old,
and were from the parishes where gangs
are prevalent (Kingston and St. Andrew).235

There is also a need for such interventions
to be gender-aware. Though most gang
members are male, interventions that
only target boys will miss the needs of
girls who are predominantly the victims
of sexual assault and intimate partner
violence, which are exacerbated in violent
situations where gangs are prevalent, and
who are likely to have unplanned preg-
nancies. The exclusion of persons from
prevention and intervention policies of
any age or gender, will undoubtedly ren-
der less effective any attempt to disrupt
the cycle of crime and violence, and mal-
adaptive development.

224 Cano and Bedolla, 121.


226 “Crime Prevention to Get Big Boost with $1 Allocation to the CSJP,” Loop, February 21, 2019, www.looop.com/content/crime-prevention-get-
big-boost-1b-allocation-csjp


228 JCF, "Gang Violence in Jamaica.”

/jm/safe-schools-programme-positive-impact-on-children

/jm/safe-schools-programme-positive-impact-on-children

231 JCF (2017), 12.

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