

Snitches Get Stitches: The (Under)Reporting of Crime, Gang Status, and Perceptions of Justice

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Objective

In the event of a crime, there is evidence to support that victims and bystanders will at times fail to report criminal incidents due to being intimidated or verbally threatened by a perpetrator. Research in this area requires further insight into the post-incident decision making process in the aggregate once situational characteristics are accounted for, such as perceptions of the perpetrator and neighborhood context. The author of this study examined the rate at which victims report crimes when they perceive the perpetrator to be a gang member.

Research Questions

1. Does a perpetrator's perceived gang status have any effect on reporting a crime?
2. Is intimidation a deterrent for reporting?
3. What other factors (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender, region) lead to differences in reporting?

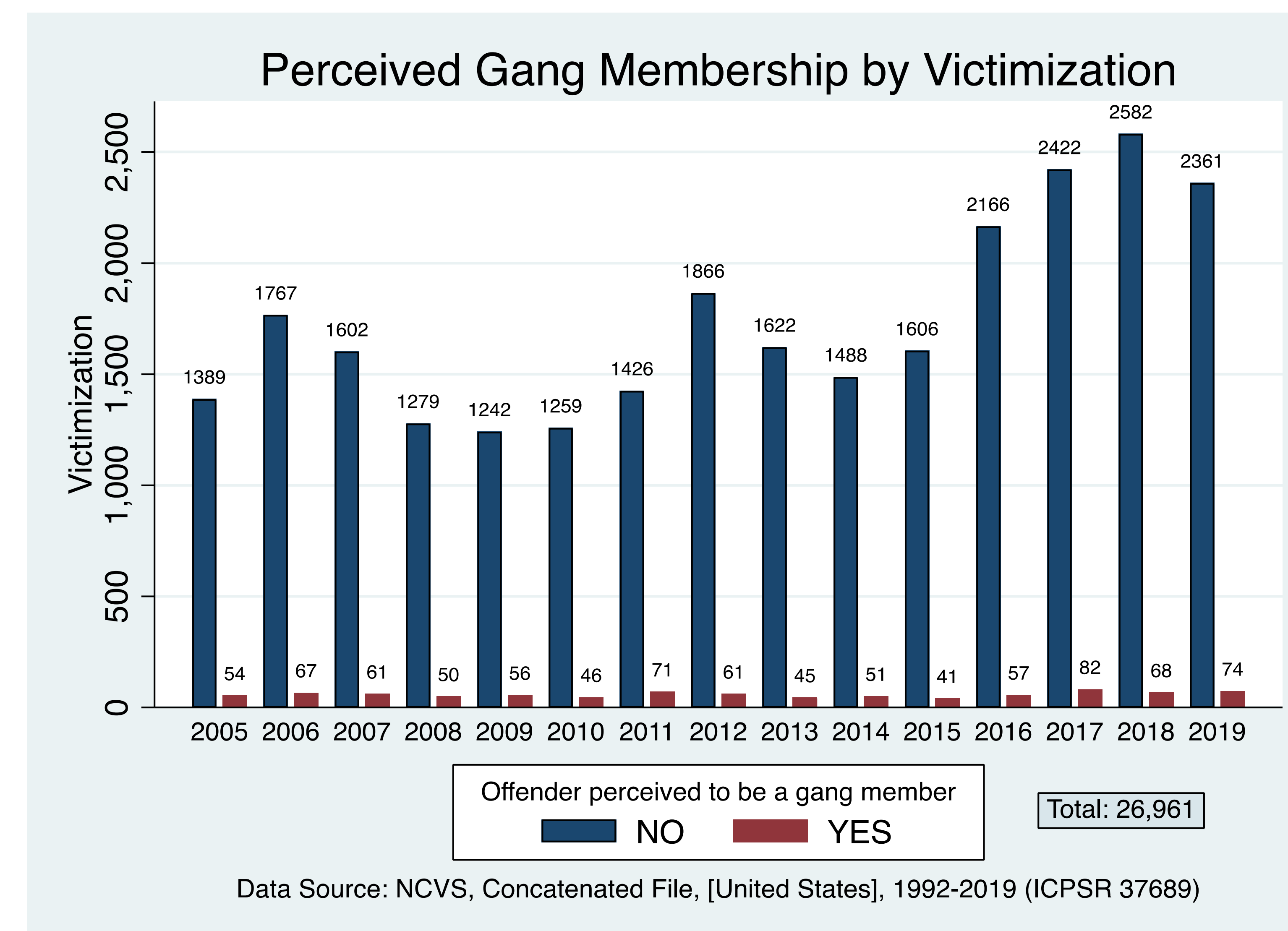
Data/Methods

Using the National Crime Victim Survey (NCVS), data were examined for a series of years (2005-2019) to analyze how intimidation functions in urban settings. Using firthlogit regression, survey results were regressed on a large sample ($n = 23,919$) of respondents to test the efficacy of gang victimization and intimidation on reporting outcomes.



Results

Annually, roughly 3 – 4% of NCVS respondents believe the perpetrator is affiliated with a gang.



Crime Reporting by Penalized Maximum Likelihood and Firthlogit Regression Methods

Variable	Firthlogit Regression					
	b	SE	z	P-value	OR	95% CI
Gang Membership	0.171	0.080	2.13	0.034~	1.186	[0.013, 0.328]
Intimidation	-8.329	1.415	-5.89	0.000*	0.000	[-11.102, -5.555]
Victim's Race (White)						
Black	0.132	0.044	3.02	0.003*	1.141	[0.046, 0.218]
Am. Indian/ Alaska Native	-0.021	0.127	-0.17	0.868	0.979	[-0.270, 0.228]
Asian	-0.001	0.967	-0.01	0.991	0.999	[-0.191, 0.189]
Hawaiian/ Pac. Islander	-0.131	0.259	-0.50	0.614	0.877	[-0.639, 0.377]
Other	-0.084	0.084	-1.00	0.317	0.919	[-0.249, 0.081]
Hispanic	0.088	0.045	1.97	0.049~	1.092	[-0.000, 0.176]
Gender (Male)						
Female	0.115	0.033	3.46	0.001*	1.122	[0.050, 0.181]
Land Type (Urban)						
Rural	0.133	0.039	3.44	0.001*	1.142	[0.057, 0.209]
Intercept	-0.527	0.047	-11.13	0.000*	0.590	[-0.619, -0.434]

(variable) denotes reference category within variable
 b = beta coefficient
 SE = Linearized Standard Error
 P>|t| = P-value for t-test (significance set at .05 level)
 OR = Odds Ratio has been converted by exponentiating the logit coefficient
 CI = 95% Confidence Intervals for logit coefficients
 ~ = meets traditional 0.05 alpha but not Bonferroni-corrected alpha

Findings

Table of Crime Reporting by Intimidation and Gang Membership ($n = 23,919$)

Variable	Intimidation and Gang Membership			Intimidation and Gang Membership		
	--- No ---			--- Yes ---		
	Non-GM	GM	Total	Non-GM	GM	Total
Crime Reporting						
No	11,965	356	12,321	2,805	96	2,901
Yes	8,403	294	8,697	0	0	0
Total	20,368	650	21,018	2,805	96	2,901

- Out of all victimization respondents (23,919), roughly 3.2% ($n = 746$) perceived the perpetrator to be a gang member.
- Although few were intimidated ($n = 2,901$; 12%), all respondents failed to report.
- Race, gender, and land type were statistically significant in producing differences in reporting.
- The (under)reporting crimes is consistent regardless of gang membership and intimidation

Discussion and Conclusion

The results highlight the need for caution when interpreting the level of influence gangs exert on communities as future measures are taken to enhance measures of justice. The (under)reporting of crimes is not so much a product of gangs or intimidation, but a fracture in the system which reporting is built upon. Urban residents, specifically those of lower classes, have different perceptions of justice than the broader society. More accountability towards systemic issues in reporting are required outside of individual behavior for a comprehensive understanding of crime severity.

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