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**Illegal Gun Markets in Trinidad and Tobago**  
**Report to the Minister of National Security**

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August 8, 2008

## Background

Any analysis of homicide trends in Trinidad and Tobago reveals the important role of gun use (Maguire, King, Johnson, & Katz, 2008). In 2001 approximately half of all homicides were the result of a gunshot; this percentage had risen to nearly 75 percent by 2007.<sup>1</sup> This close connection between gun use and the rise in homicides means that a disproportionate amount of resources should be devoted to disrupting illegal gun markets and taking guns off the streets. Disrupting gun markets and retrieving stocks of guns from the streets means fewer will be in circulation and available for use in crimes. Fewer guns on the streets can translate into rising costs for illegal guns. This means fewer people can afford to have guns and will, thus, have reduced access to guns. By increasing the costs of guns and by reducing their availability, gun violence can be reduced.

Despite strict regulations for civilian gun ownership, Trinidad and Tobago faces significant challenges to limiting the flow of illegal guns. With unguarded coastlines and nearby countries with available stocks of guns to be illegally exported, it is a challenge to detect and inhibit the flow of guns into the country. In addition, it can be difficult to find and retrieve guns that are already on the streets. In order to disrupt gun markets and make interdiction efforts successful it is crucial to have information about the nature of those markets. Some of the most significant questions that must be answered include the following (see Braga, 2004):

- Are guns used in crimes mostly imported illegally or do they originate as legal guns in Trinidad and Tobago?

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<sup>1</sup> By contrast, the percentage of suicides committed with a firearm remained stable at three percent or less annually between 2000 and 2005, the most recent year for which data are available from the Central Statistics Office. During this period an average of 2 suicides per year were committed with a gun whereas, for instance, 147 homicides were committed with a gun in 2003, 184 in 2004, and 277 in 2005.

- If guns used in crimes started out in the legal market, how did they migrate into the illegal market? Do legal guns enter the illegal market by thefts from legal gun dealers, straw purchasers, and thefts from legal gun owners including military, security, and police officers?
- Where do illegal guns come from when entering Trinidad and Tobago and how are they entering the country?
- What are the distribution methods in Trinidad and Tobago and who are the brokers?
- Are a few active, criminal groups responsible for a large portion of gun violence?
- Are street gangs playing an important role in controlling the distribution of guns?
- What are the motivations for acquiring illegal guns and for carrying them?
- How are illegal guns carried and stored by possessors?

The purpose of this report is to shed light on aspects of illegal gun markets in Trinidad and Tobago by examining multiple sources of data. While some of the information contained in these data sources might be limited, this analysis represents an important starting point that can guide police work to disrupt illegal gun markets as well as spawn new efforts to gather more detailed information about illegal gun markets. Due to their very nature illegal gun markets are difficult to study. In contrast to other illegal markets, including drug markets, Illegal gun transactions are likely to be less numerous, involve a smaller number of participants, and be more closed off to strangers (Koper & Reuter, 1996). These features make it difficult to gauge the size and nature of illegal gun markets. Nevertheless, we can obtain insights into illegal gun markets by tapping into indirect evidence.

## **Data Sources and Analysis**

This analysis utilizes data collected from a variety of sources, including a survey of school age youth, surveys of arrestees and detainees, forensic examinations of guns, information about guns retrieved by the TTPS, and interviews with TTPS personnel. This report explores aspects of each data source for the purposes of understanding the nature of illegal guns markets in Trinidad. This information can be used to develop strategic plans for disrupting illegal gun markets, retrieving greater numbers of illegal guns, and ultimately reduce gun-related violence.

One source of data is the 2006 Trinidad and Tobago Youth Survey (TTYYS), which contains useable information from 2,376 students in forms 3 and 5 (Katz & Fox, 2007), and was previously provided to the Ministry of National Security. The survey measured youths' gun-related behaviors and perceptions as well as risk and protective factors across four important domains: community, school, family, and peer-individual.

The next source of data comes from interviews with samples of arrestees and detainees. With respect to the arrestee survey, interviews were conducted with 397 recently booked arrestees in the Port of Spain District in 2006. These interviews focused on drug use, gun possession, gangs, and other criminological phenomenon. A similar survey was conducted in 2006 with all adults detained at the Youth Detention Center. Specifically, data were obtained from 61 detainees, of which 85 percent were age 20 or younger at the time of the interview and all were under the age of 25. Together these two data sources provide us with information about the prevalence of gun possession among high risk groups, as well as sources for illegal guns, reasons for possession, and storage practices.

Forensic examinations of guns used in crimes also provide insight into illegal gun markets. More specifically, examinations with the Forensic Science Centre's Integrated Ballistic

Identification System (IBIS) can determine whether one gun is linked to more than one violent crime. IBIS results can provide indirect evidence about gun availability on the streets. For this analysis we utilize a sample of forensic reports generated by IBIS in early 2007. Data on guns recovered from the streets by the TTPS and information obtained through interviews with TTPS personnel also shed light on the nature of illegal gun markets.

Gun tracing information was sought for the present report. Tracing guns that have been recovered from the streets and seized from offenders can provide information about whether a recovered a gun was legally sold by a firearm dealer in Trinidad and Tobago, the source country if the gun was imported illegally, and the time lapse between the original sale and recovery in crime. These pieces of information can provide insight into gun markets, including whether or not there are problematic firearms dealers in Trinidad and Tobago. Unfortunately, trace data on illegal guns retrieved by the TTPS were not useable (Wells, 2007) and guns seized in 2008 are being provided to SAUTT and are no longer being traced by the TTPS. The Crime and Problem Analysis Branch (CAPA) in the TTPS was collaborating with the United States Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (BATF) in early 2008 to establish e-Trace capabilities in Trinidad and Tobago. This gun tracing system would have facilitated gun tracing through the United States. These efforts were put on hold in March 2008 and are not proceeding. Thus, it is not yet possible to utilize this source of information to understand illegal gun markets.

## **Results**

### *Gun Possession and Ownership*

The TTPS Firearm Section estimates there are approximately 10,550 firearm license holders in Trinidad and Tobago and about 18 active legal firearm dealers. Obtaining valid and

useful estimates of the number of guns in Trinidad and Tobago is difficult because of a lack of quality data. Estimates are more easily derived in the United States for several reasons. First, because firearms are legal in the United States imports, exports, and manufacturing are monitored, and illegal imports are less prevalent. This means that estimates derived from imported and manufactured guns are relatively accurate. In addition, ongoing surveys of individuals in the United States can provide a sense of how many guns are in circulation.

Figure 1 shows the percentage of survey respondents from each sample in Trinidad and Tobago who reported ever possessing or owning a gun. Gun possession is greatest among detainees, the group presumed to be most involved in crime. Somewhat surprising, the prevalence of gun possession among students and arrestees is very similar. We would expect to see greater levels of gun possession among arrestees than students because we would assume that arrestees are more likely to be involved in crime and to break laws, including those against gun possession. The extent of possession and ownership among Trinidadian students (19 %) is in the mid-point of results from studies of youths in the United States. For instance, a study of male students in inner city public schools across the United States found that 22 percent owned or possessed a firearm (Sheley & Wright, 1993a). On the other hand, only 6 percent of high school students in Seattle, Washington reported to own handguns (Callahan & Rivara, 1992) and 10 percent of 9th and 10th grade boys in a Rochester, New York sample reported owning a gun (Lizotte, Tesoriero, Thornberry, & Krohn, 1994). The close correspondence between findings of ownership and possession in Trinidad and the United States is cause for concern because civilian gun ownership is much less restricted in the United States and guns are presumably available at much greater rates.

The rate of ownership among the sample of detainees (75%) is similar to, and in some instances greater than the rates of gun ownership or possession samples of incarcerated youth in the United States. For example, 59.5 percent of adolescent males detained in King County, Washington reported owning a handgun (Callahan, Rivara, & Farrow, 1993), 83 percent of males in juvenile correctional facilities in California, New Jersey, Illinois, and Louisiana reported possessing a gun (Sheley & Wright, 1993b) and 47 percent of incarcerated youths in Indiana (May & Jarjoura, 2006) reported owning a gun. Interviews with 1,570 adult arrestees in England and Wales between 1999 and 2002 revealed that 20 percent of the sample had possessed an illegal gun (Bennett & Holloway, 2004).

Figure 1.      Reported Gun Possession and Ownership Among Students, Arrestees, and Detainees in Trinidad

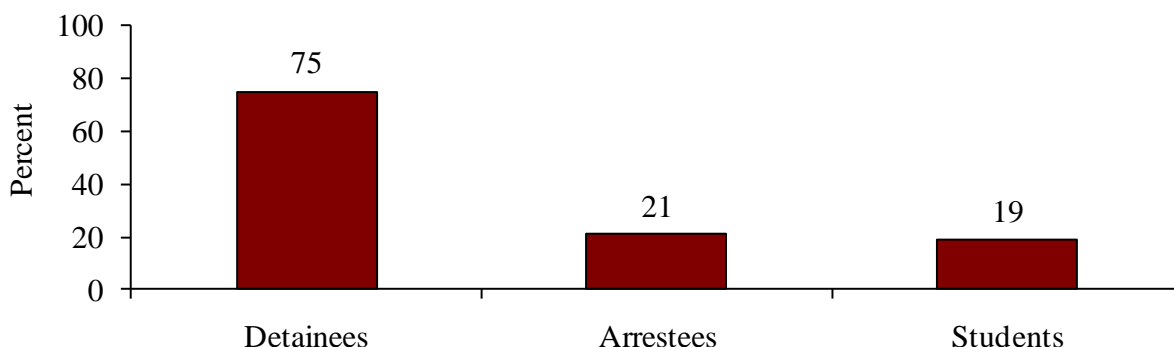


Figure 2 presents the reasons respondents reported for ever possessing or owning a gun. Examining this variable can provide evidence about the nature of demand for guns. Addressing factors linked to the reasons people possess guns can reduce demand, possession, and use.



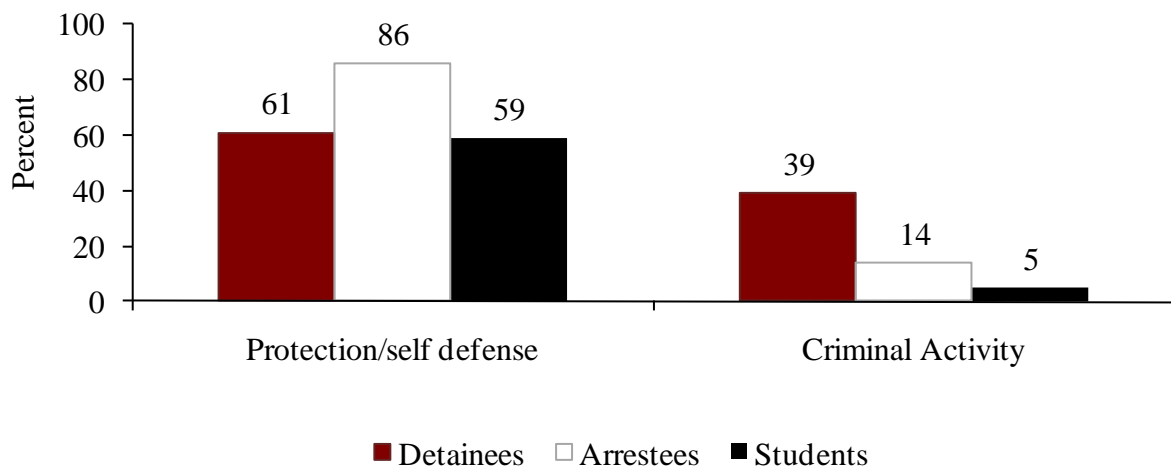
Protection and self-defense was clearly the most common reason.<sup>2</sup> This suggests a perceived need for protection is important for these groups. A challenge is to not only address the objective risk of victimization that youth face, but also perceptions of risk and fear.

Scholars have described the phenomenon of youths arming themselves in response to crime and perceived risk of victimization as an arms race (Blumstein, 1995). Others (Fagan and Davies, 2004; Kennedy, Braga, & Piehl, 2001) describe the arming of youths as being like a contagious disease whereby acts of violence in isolated and vulnerable communities begin to be seen as acceptable or normal. Such a process can begin when gang- and drug-related problems develop in neighborhoods. Initially the problems are confined to certain individuals and places that are closely aligned with gangs and/or the drug trade. Over time fear can spread like a disease in the neighborhood and affect individuals who are not directly involved in the problems. These individuals may begin to adopt protective attitudes and behaviors as a response to spreading fear. These attitudes might be favorable to the creation of a culture of aggression and violence, and behaviors reflective of this culture might include weapon carrying and use. Thus, finding that youth are reporting gun possession and ownership out of a perceived need for protection might signal that a contagious-like process might be developing or is underway. But it is important to understand the extent to which the specific problem of gun violence is connected to gangs and the drug trade. Interventions aimed generically at gangs, drugs, and guns might miss an important component of one problem if they are divorced from one another. This is discussed below.

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<sup>2</sup> Finding that protection is a frequent motive for gun ownership and possession is quite common across distinct samples in the United States (Block, 1997; Sheley & Wright, 1995; Smith 1996; Wright, & Rossi, 1986).

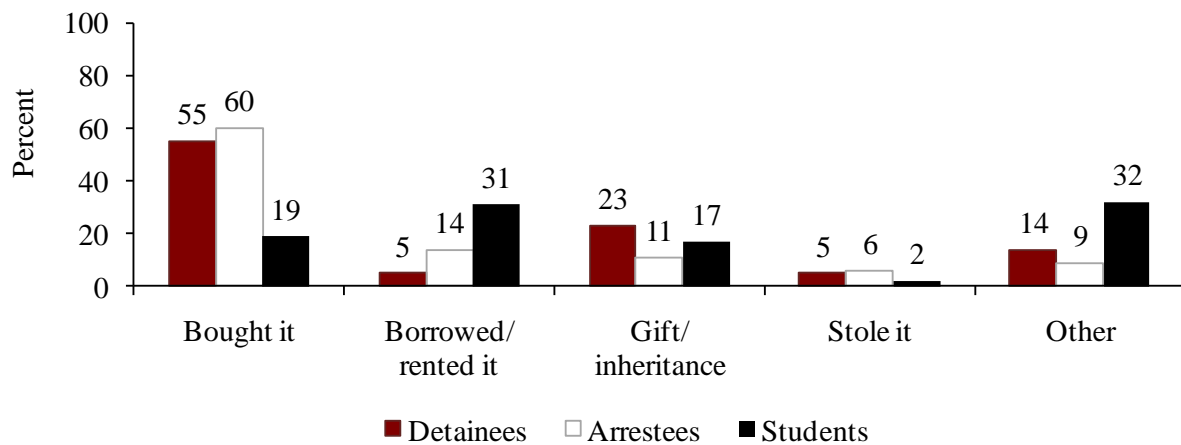
Figure 2. Reported Reasons for Gun Possession and Ownership



#### *Methods of Obtaining Guns and Sources*

The sources for illegal guns and the methods used to obtain them can reveal direct evidence about local markets. Figure 3 shows that firearm possessors and owners do not frequently resort to theft in order to obtain firearms. There is a market in which buyers and sellers trade firearms. More specifically, students frequently borrow and rent firearms rather than purchase them. The student group is most diverse in terms of the sources they use. Detainees and arrestees most frequently rely on illegal gun dealers for their firearms (43% and 48% respectively) while students most commonly rely on friends and family members (29% and 23%, respectively). Less than 10 percent of student gun possessors obtained their most recent handgun from an illegal gun dealer. Not surprising, the detainee and arrestee groups appear more closely linked to illegal markets for purchasing firearms than students. Students might have a more difficult time penetrating the illegal market (see also Cook, Ludwig, Vankatesh, & Braga, 2005).

Figure 3. Reported Methods of Obtaining the Most Recent Handgun

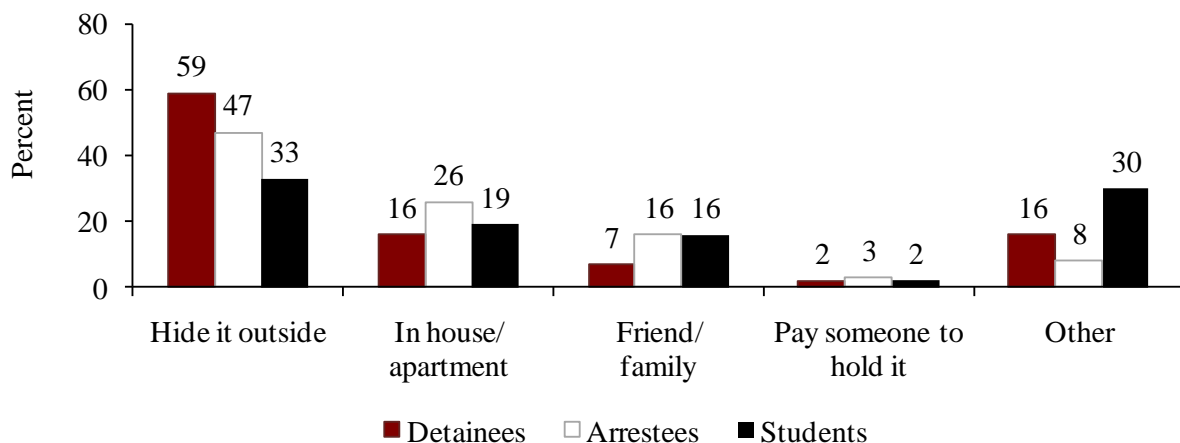


While the survey evidence does not suggest that a large portion of possessors and owners obtained their recent handguns *directly* from a legal dealer, it is worth considering the degree of oversight given to legal dealers. Legal firearms dealers in Trinidad and Tobago are audited once per year and no dealer license has been revoked in the previous two years. The survey of detainees and arrestees asked the respondents who never owned or possessed a gun where they would obtain a gun if they wanted one. Three quarters of detainees and over one third of arrestees indicated they would use a legal gun dealer. Current firearm registration systems in Trinidad and Tobago do not facilitate easy tracing of firearms recovered by the TTPS, and when tracing does occur records are not kept on the number of recovered firearms that are traced back to a legal firearm owner or dealer. Thus, it is not possible to know what proportion of crime guns originated from a legal gun dealer in Trinidad and Tobago and the extent of problems that may be associated with each legal dealer. This situation can be improved by tracing firearms that are recovered from the streets and by analyzing those tracing results.

## Storage Practices

Seizing more illegal guns from the streets can be improved by understanding storage practices. Police can tailor their tactics to increase their chances of locating illegal guns with a good understanding of where and how guns are frequently stored. Survey findings show that the most active criminal groups, detainees and arrestees, frequently hide their firearms outside. Illegal firearms belonging to these offenders are frequently hidden in public places rather than concealed inside their homes. This does not suggest that illegal guns are easily uncovered. Despite hearing anecdotes about women and children carrying guns for criminals, our data suggest that this is not a common method for concealing firearms for these groups.

Figure 4. Firearm Storage Practices in Trinidad



We have learned from TTPS officers that gangs store their guns at secure locations for quick access when needed. Active shooters in gangs can retrieve their guns when they are needed and then return those guns to storage places after use in crimes. The TTPS can make strides to prevent gun violence by identifying the locations where illegal guns are stored by the groups and individuals who frequently use them. This can be facilitated through a concerted effort to search

locations around shooting scenes and locations where known, active gang members congregate and by using informants to identify storage locations.

### *Youth Access to Handguns*

The TTYS data provide the opportunity to identify risk factors that are linked to illegal gun markets. The survey includes a question that asked students about how easy it would be for them to get a handgun. Figure 5 demonstrates that 65 percent of respondents thought it would be hard to get a handgun; about 10 percent reported that it would be easy to obtain a handgun and 20 percent reported that it would be very easy. The level of easy to access a handgun is comparable to findings from a study of urban high school students in Seattle, Washington in the early 1990's (Callahan & Rivara, 1992) but lower than that derived from a sample of students from 53 high schools in the United States (Sheley & Wright, 1998). This finding is somewhat surprising because gun availability is presumed to be greater in the United States. Viewed from this perspective, youths' access to handguns in Trinidad and Tobago seems problematic.

Figure 5. Difficulty Trinidadian Youth Would Have in Obtaining a Handgun

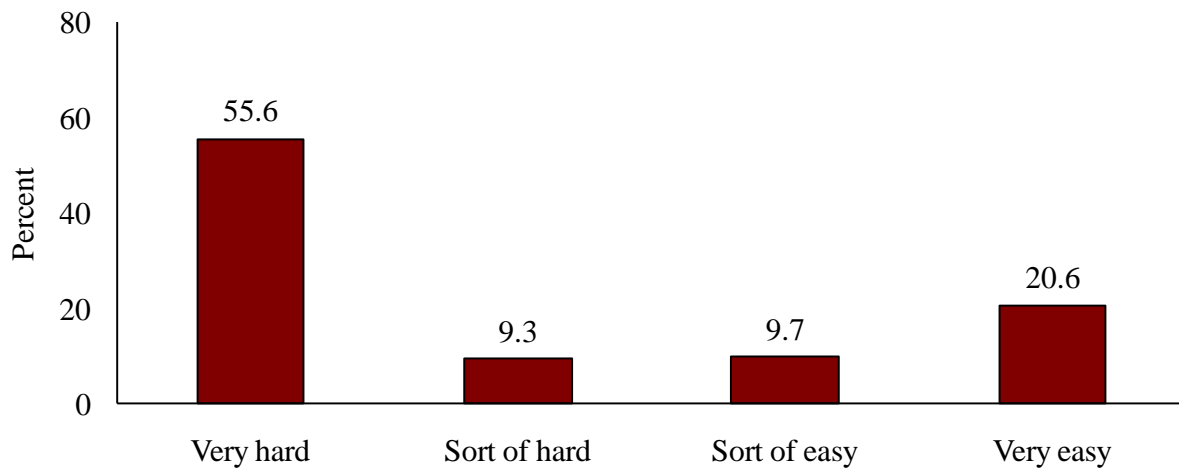


Figure 6 shows a close connection between gang membership and access to a handgun. Nearly half of gang members reported that it would be very easy to get a handgun compared to 18 percent of respondents who did not report belonging to a gang.

Figure 6. Access to a Handgun by Gang Affiliation

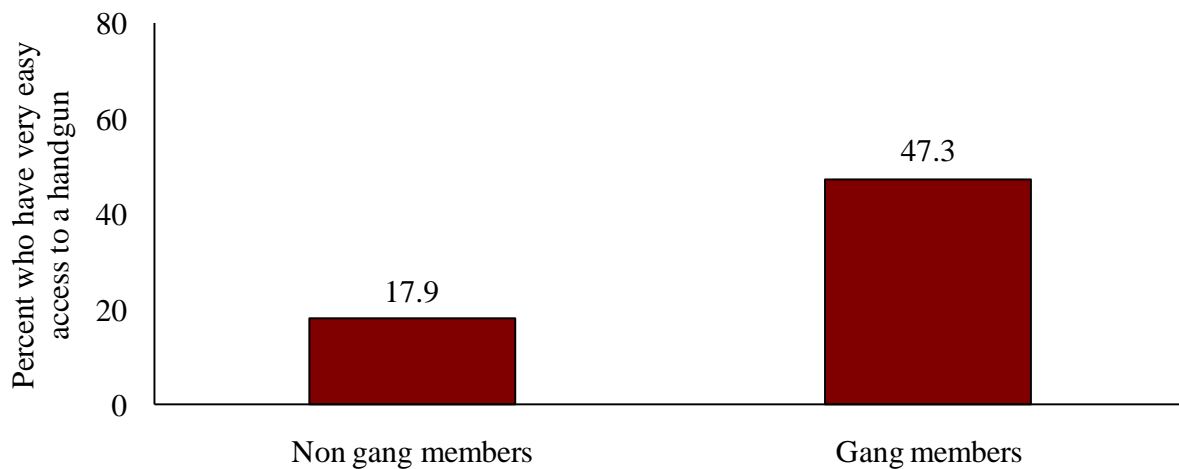


Figure 7 shows that there is a clear relationship between those who have easy access to a handgun and those who engage in a delinquency. Involvement in drug sales is most closely linked to having very easy access to handgun (70 %).

Figure 7. Access to a Handgun by Involvement in Delinquent Behaviors

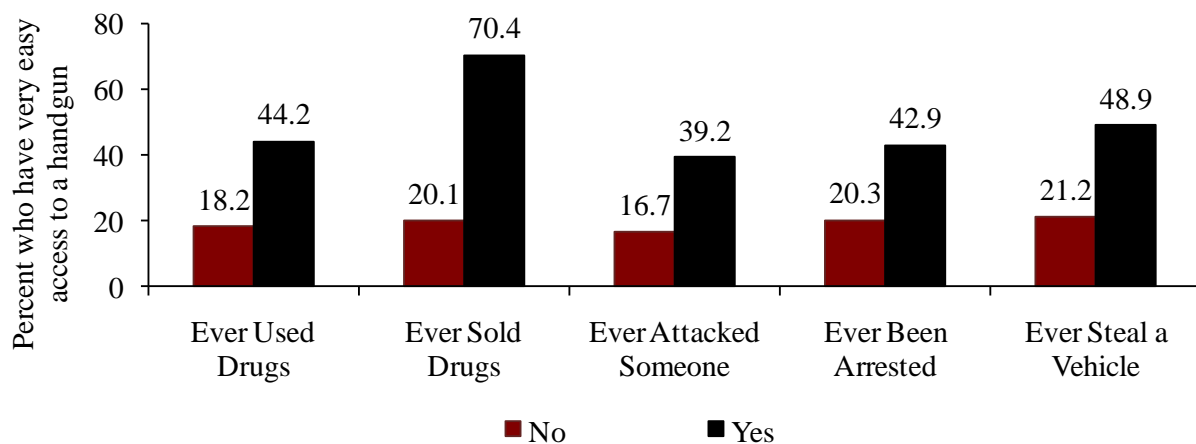
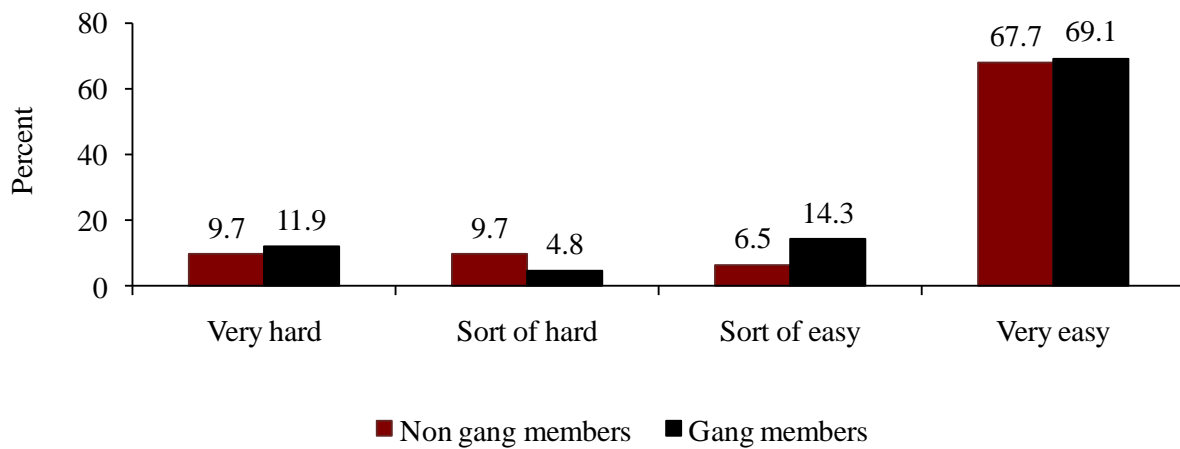


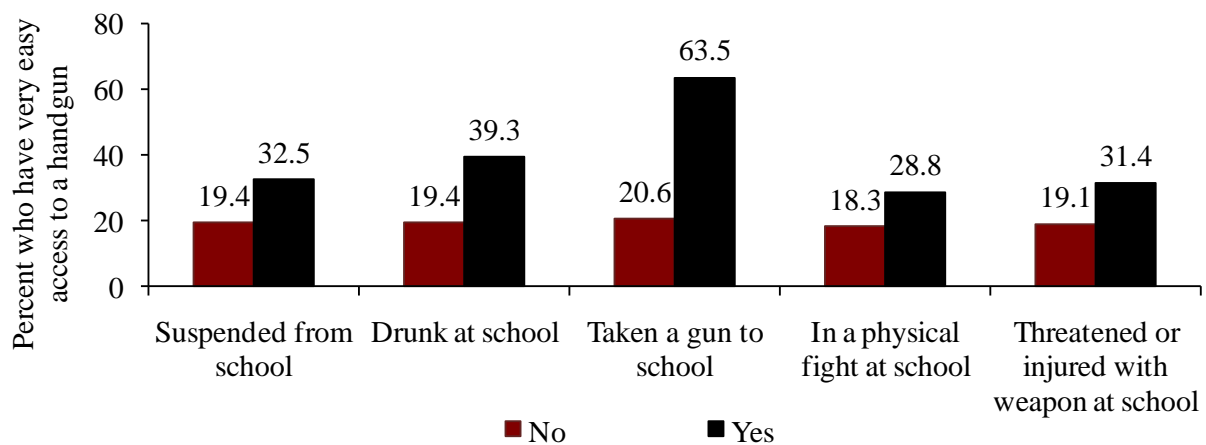
Figure 8 shows the relationship between drug selling, gang membership, and very easy access to a handgun. This figure shows the percent of drug sellers with handgun accessibility disaggregated by gang affiliation. Drug sellers, regardless of gang affiliation, demonstrate greater access to a handgun than non-drug sellers. Approximately 68 percent of drugs sellers who are not gang members and 69 percent of drug sellers who are gang members reported that it would be very easy to get a handgun. These patterns suggest that a large portion of drug sellers are aware of the routes to illegal firearms, regardless of gang affiliation.

Figure 8. Access to a Handgun Among Drug Sellers



We also found a relationship between school-based acts of delinquency and having very easy access to a handgun (Figure 9). These relationships, on the whole, do not appear as strong as the relationships between more generalized forms of delinquency presented in Figure 7. As expected, gun carrying to school is closely linked to very easy access to a handgun.

Figure 9. Access to a Handgun by Involvement in School-Based Delinquent Behaviors





Not surprising, students with siblings and friends who have carried firearms are more likely to report having very easy access to a handgun (Figure 10). Relationships between access to a handgun and peer and sibling experiences with guns appear stronger than the relationships between handgun access and most measures of school-based delinquency. For instance, approximately half of students with a sibling who has taken a gun to school reported having very easy access to a handgun. In combination with finding a relationship between handgun access and gang membership (Figure 6), this finding (Figure 10) implies that there is a strong peer influence on having access to a handgun.

Figure 10. Access to a Handgun by Sibling and Peer Gun Behaviors

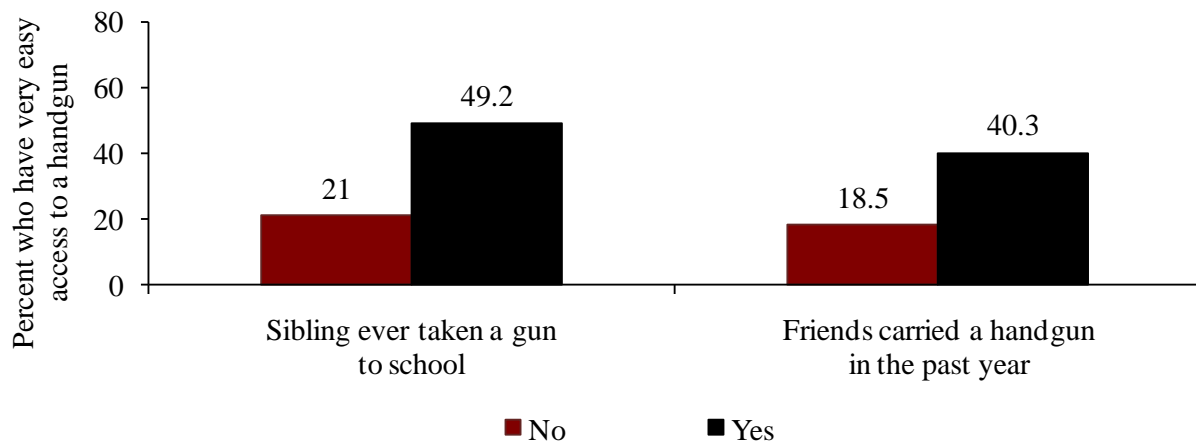
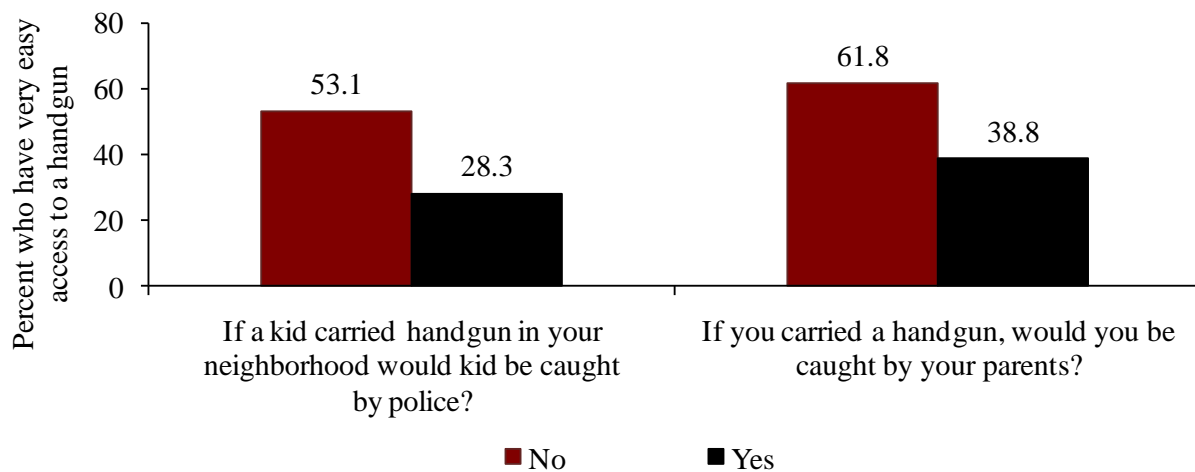


Figure 11 shows that the group of youths with very easy access to a handgun is the least likely to believe the police or parents would apprehend a gun carrier. Perhaps this is because they are most familiar with gun behaviors and understand that apprehension is infrequent. Those without easy access are perhaps less experienced with gun behaviors and are, thus, less familiar with the objective risks of apprehension.

Figure 11. Access to a Handgun by Perceived Risk of Apprehension for Handgun Carrying



### *Gun Recoveries*

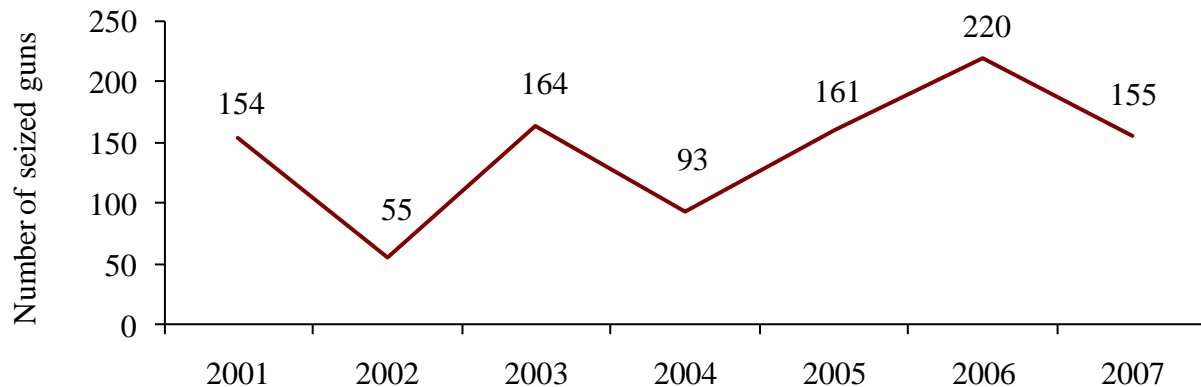
The TTPS maintains data on guns that officers have retrieved from the streets. In conjunction with results of forensic firearm examinations (discussed below) and information provided by TTPS personnel, gun retrieval data imply that there are not relatively large stock piles of firearms available for use in violence. For instance, the relatively large number of homemade guns recovered by the TTPS suggests that conventional firearms are not readily available to people who would use them for violence. On average, 27 homemade guns were retrieved each year between 2001 and 2007. This is greater than the average number of commercially manufactured shotguns and other long guns ( $n = 23$ ) retrieved by the TTPS each year during this period.

Even if there are not large numbers of illegal firearms available on the streets for use, the homicide trend data show that violent individuals are making use of the guns that are available. Figure 12 shows the trends in gun seizures from 2001 to 2007.<sup>3</sup> The most gun seizures occurred

<sup>3</sup> This trend counts handguns, rifles, shotguns, and homemade guns; air rifles, nail guns, toy guns, and gun parts are excluded from these statistics.

in 2006 (220), up from the low point in 2002 (55). Despite fluctuations, Figure 12 shows an overall trend of increasing gun seizures which reflects positively on TTPS productivity.

Figure 12. Trends in Firearm Seizures



It is difficult to put these retrieval statistics into a broader perspective because data on firearm retrievals from other nations in the region (and valid estimates of the number of firearms in Trinidad and Tobago) are not available. One baseline against which gun retrievals can be compared is the number of homicides committed with guns. A comparison shows that many more homicides are committed with firearms every year than the annual number of firearms retrieved by the TTPS. For instance, approximately twice as many homicides were committed with a gun in 2002 and in 2004 than the number of guns retrieved. The TTPS should view this as an indication that more precise focus should be placed on 1) targeting the specific individuals and groups responsible for using firearms in violence and 2) working diligently to retrieve more illegal firearms from the streets.

### *Forensic Firearm Examination Results*

Evidence from forensic examinations of guns retrieved from the streets also sheds light on the availability of guns. The Integrated Ballistics Identification System (IBIS) at the Forensic Science Centre (FSC) has expanded the ballistic analysis capabilities of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service (TTPS). IBIS is a computerized system that allows users to compare 1) firearm ammunition recovered from different crime scenes and 2) ammunition fired from retrieved firearms to ammunition recovered from other crime scenes. This is accomplished by entering pieces of evidence (i.e., cartridges, bullets, and ammunition fired from retrieved guns) into IBIS. When a recovered cartridge or bullet is entered into IBIS the computerized system identifies a list of pieces of evidence that are likely to match (i.e., to have been fired from the same gun). Firearm examiners then conduct manual comparisons of the most likely matches to confirm whether there is a match that links cases together. Making these types of comparisons without the use of IBIS can be extremely inefficient. IBIS makes it possible to efficiently connect crimes involving the same firearm to each other more efficiently.

Findings from an analysis of a sample of 33 IBIS results revealed that a small number of firearms were responsible for a seemingly large number of violent crimes (King & Wells, 2008). Specifically, these reports showed that 33 guns were linked to 83 distinct gun crimes, including 42 homicides. Nine uniquely “active” guns were linked to 28 homicides and 4 gunshot wounding incidents.

The assumption is that offenders desire access to “clean guns.” In other words, they seek those guns that have not previously been used in serious crimes. This is the case because if a gun possessor is apprehended with a gun that was used in a crime, then the possessor can be implicated in the crime. If the assumption is correct then finding that a single gun is used

repeatedly to commit serious violent crimes suggests guns are not widely available to offenders who will use them. The implication derived from results of the sample of 33 IBIS results is that illegal gun markets in Trinidad and Tobago are thin (King & Wells, 2008). Thin gun markets mean they consist of “small numbers of buyers, sellers, and total transactions” (Cook et al., 2005, p. 3).

A complementary explanation for the IBIS results is that offenders are not concerned about being apprehended with guns that have previously been used to commit violent crimes (see also Figure 11). This implies that police can improve their efforts to retrieve guns and levy charges against the individuals who illegally possess and use them.

Additional evidence suggests that illegal guns might not be widely available and that offenders have a somewhat difficult time gaining access to guns. First, police personnel report that street gangs have conflicts over their firearms. In other words, gangs are in conflict over access to firearms. In one instance a prominent street-gang leader was killed over guns. In this case a gang lent some guns to another street gang, and when the gang leader attempted to retrieve his gang’s guns he was killed. The fact that a street gang has to borrow guns from another gang suggests that active offenders do not have easy access to guns. The fact that a street gang killed a gang leader in order to retain firearms also suggests that guns are prized commodities. Why bring attention from law enforcement and draw the ire of another gang over a commodity unless the commodity was valuable? The values of commodities rise when they are scarce.

Second, police personnel who work as part of specialized units with access to intelligence and have frequent interactions with highly active offenders report that it is not easy to retrieve illegal guns. This can suggest that criminals are particularly good at concealing their guns and might also suggest that there simply are not that many guns to seize. Indeed, TTPS data show

that guns are typically retrieved one at a time rather than in groups of two or more. Police data also show that a relatively small number of guns, relative to those seized, have been reported stolen in recent years: 23 in 2001, 25 in 2002, 27 in 2003, 2 in 2004, 2 in 2005, 8 in 2006, and 15 in 2007. Thus, not many guns appear to be migrating from legal owners to the illegal market due to theft. Finally, the relatively large numbers of homemade guns seized by police suggest that commercially manufactured and presumably higher quality guns may not be widely available to the individuals who want to put them to criminal use.

The conclusion that guns might not be widely available to those who use them for criminal purposes does not necessarily match the findings from the TTYS that show nearly 30 percent of youths reported that it would easy or very easy to get a handgun. It may be the case that youth understand how and where to obtain a handgun through peer and social networks, but this does not necessarily mean that large numbers of firearms are available to them. It might be the case that active offenders, including gang members and those involved in the drug trade, have easy access to a relatively small volume of guns through pre-existing peer and social networks and that a small pool of guns is shared by a larger network of offenders.

## **Implications and Recommendations**

Recovering large numbers of illegal guns in Trinidad and Tobago will be challenging for the TTPS and law enforcement agencies like SAUTT. This is the case because there do not appear to be large stock piles of illegal firearms and the market may be “thin,” meaning the number of buyers, sellers, and transactions is small. A relatively small number of illegal guns means that their owners will take the steps necessary to protect their commodities and that illegal

gun possessors will attempt to conceal their firearms from the police in innovative ways. The TTPS must respond accordingly.

Finding that there may not be large caches of illegal guns available for criminal use implies that police efforts to remove guns from the streets can have dramatic effects. Increasing the number of guns retrieved annually may have positive impacts that grow exponentially (Cook et al., 2005). This possibility is supported by the fact that police personnel report that when guns enter the country illegally they do so in groups of approximately one to five. In other words, guns do not enter the country in large numbers at a single time. The small volume of guns being traded at one time is consistent with investigations of gun trafficking in the United States (Cook et al., 2005, p. 15). Thus, the stocks of illegal guns on the street might not be immediately replenished when police make significant seizures, thus preventing the opportunity for greater levels of gun violence to occur.<sup>4</sup>

### *Cultivation of Informants and Human Intelligence*

Interviews with TTPS officers who are successful at retrieving guns from the street report that working with informants and gathering human intelligence is the key to gun retrievals. This seemingly basic insight should not be overlooked. The TTPS should utilize its indigenous resources and learn from officers who have been particularly successful at retrieving guns from the streets. We have learned that making effective use of informants can lead to relatively large numbers of gun retrievals. Additionally, Cook et al. (2005) argue that using informants and buy-and-bust tactics can disrupt gun markets because those involved in the trade will be less trustworthy and more detailed information will be required for transactions. This kind of market

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<sup>4</sup> It must also be recognized that when guns are seized from gangs their members may become more vulnerable to victimization at the hands of rival gangs and thus, they may become desperate to obtain guns.

disruption will inhibit the flow of firearms. In spring and summer 2008 the GMU team supported this effort by sponsoring multiple training courses for TTPS officers on the use of informants and surveillance and undercover methods.

### *Targeted Shooter Initiative*

The findings reported here appear somewhat contradictory. Homicide trends show the growing importance of firearms in violence and a survey of Trinidad youth suggests that a seemingly large percentage of them have very easy access to a handgun. On the other hand, we have concluded that guns are not widely available. One way of making sense of these apparent contradictions is to conclude that illegal guns are not prevalent but those that are available are simply in the control of groups and individuals who are making frequent use of them through social networks (see Cook et al., 2005).

One response to this situation is to focus police resources on the high rate gun offenders, much like the mandate of the Repeat Offender Programme Task Force (TTPS ROP unit). Interviews with TTPS personnel suggest that gangs utilize specialized shooters to carry out acts of violence. Targeting these shooters for enhanced law enforcement would appear to be a viable solution that could have an immediate impact on gun-related violence. Discussions with TTPS executives and officers suggest that this approach could be successful. The blueprint for a plan to target active shooters was developed collaboratively between members of the GMU team, the Criminal Intelligence Unit, and Acting Commissioner of Police Philbert. This blueprint was provided to Acting Commission of Police James Philbert in early June 2008. Discussions between a member of the GMU Team and a small group of TTPS officers, including members of the Criminal Intelligence Unit, on June 12, 2008 suggested that a systematic program to bring the



full weight of law enforcement to bear on active shooters in the Western division would be viable. The Western Division was selected due to a spike in shootings during the second week of June 2008. Plans to launch this initiative were to begin June 13, 2008. Unfortunately, we learned in early July 2008 that this initiative was not launched as intended. If it is believed that the initiative is worthwhile then police leaders should carefully plan for implementation. This planning should begin with an assessment of which TTPS managers and officers should be tasked with leading and implementing the initiative.

### *Gun Tracing*

It is common knowledge among TTPS personnel that guns enter Trinidad and Tobago from Venezuela. Gun tracing becomes somewhat irrelevant if the vast majority of illegal guns originate in Venezuela. It is our belief, however, that domestic and international gun tracing by the TTPS can generate new sets of information about the sources of illegal guns in Trinidad and Tobago. Gun tracing may support the notion that most illegal guns originate in Venezuela. However, trace data might also reveal that an important percentage of guns used in crimes were once legally registered to an owner or dealer in Trinidad and Tobago. In this latter situation, gun tracing could advance criminal investigations.

A recommendation was offered in October 2007 to enhance gun tracing and hire two firearm intelligence officers who would be based in the CAPA Branch (Wells, 2007). Efforts to enhance gun tracing were launched in earnest by members of the CAPA Branch but this stalled in March 2008 and progress is not being made to enhance international tracing capabilities. The Minister of National Security and Commissioner of Police should work to overcome the barriers that are inhibiting a collaborative relationship between law enforcement and intelligence

agencies in Trinidad and Tobago and the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives.

The Firearm Section of the TTPS is currently working to create an up-to-date, computerized database of legal firearms. TTPS leadership should ensure this work is completed so guns retrieved from the street and guns used in crimes can be traced domestically. This will provide immediate information about the extent to which legal guns in Trinidad and Tobago are being diverted to the illegal market and can identify problematic gun dealers and owners.

### *Greater Use of Technology*

Acting Commissioner of Police Philbert and Deputy Commissioner of Police Gilbert Reyes are prioritizing the retrieval of guns. Both men view this as a critical component of work to reduce serious violence in Trinidad and Tobago. This work can be enhanced not only by greater use of human intelligence (see above) but also through improved use of technology. Interviews with TTPS personnel, including members of TTPS task forces and specialized units, reveals very little of use of technological advancements for the purposes of seizing guns. We have learned that illegal firearms are often stored in secure locations outside or in abandoned buildings where offenders can easily access them. Thus, it makes sense for TTPS officers to conduct thorough searches of locations where known offenders and shooters congregate and live. These searches can be aided with the frequent use of metal detectors and thermal imagers. It is our understanding from interviews with TTPS personnel that these pieces of equipment are rarely used to search for firearms. We recommend that the TTPS begin the process of learning more about how these and other technologies can be used to increase gun seizures.

### *Coastal Interdiction*

We are aware of TTPS work to identify groups and individuals who are illegally importing guns and other contraband into the country. At this point it is not easy to assess whether the greatest impact could be had by focusing on the above recommendations or by focusing on interdicting guns before they enter the country. Ideally, the TTPS approach would address the issue on both fronts: retrieving illegal guns that are being used in crime in Trinidad and interdicting guns before they enter the country. As suggested above, interdiction efforts will not likely lead to the seizure of large numbers of firearms. It seems reasonable to prioritize work that would increase gun retrievals from the streets and apply pressure on the individuals and groups known to make the most frequent use of guns. First, TTPS personnel and Coast Guard personnel report relatively small numbers of guns entering the country at any single time. Thus, the payoff from resource intensive work on the coast would likely be small. Second, homicide trends show the immediate problem is with the guns already in circulation among violent groups and individuals. To have a strong and immediate impact means this should be given priority. Finally, efforts to interdict firearms must be carefully planned with other agencies in Trinidad and Tobago, including the Coast Guard and SAUTT. This would be time consuming and entail a great deal of collaboration that does not currently exist. While interdiction efforts would be valuable, it would not be precisely focused on the current need to enhance safety in Trinidad and Tobago.

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