

and gang cultures. For example, international human trafficking is enabled by large criminal networks with operations in major cities throughout the world. These cities serve as major transit points or end destinations for the many thousands of women and children who are sold into the sex trade each year. It is also the case that American gang culture is being mimicked across the Americas, from music and fashion to a growing willingness to engage in drive-by shootings and armed urban combat with rival gangs and state security forces.<sup>148</sup> The widespread appeal of American gang culture, particularly its powerful bonding effect on

marginalized urban youth, may help to account for the proliferation of organized gangs as well as why it is so difficult to reduce incidents of armed violence in many cities.

In this sense, urban gangs can be seen as a local manifestation of transnational crime. In Latin America, youth gangs are frequently involved in drug trafficking, one of the most challenging international illegal enterprises. Not only are there important links between urban gangs and transnational crime, but evidence also suggests that these links are becoming more prominent. As one recent study found, "youth gangs no longer operate only within

the boundaries of a particular, relatively small neighbourhood, but increasingly extend their sphere of influence across cities, regions and countries."<sup>149</sup>

Transnational criminal activities, such as trafficking in drugs and weapons, are often closely intertwined and mutually reinforcing. Cocaine, opium, guns, and even people, are used as currency for illicit transactions between criminal groups.<sup>150</sup>

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**A member of the South African police unloads guns onto a pile of more than 1,000 illegal firearms destroyed in Cape Town. (September 2003)**



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