A Holistic Approach to Reducing Organized Crime: Nine Preventive Mechanisms applied to 1% MC gangs

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Starting point: There are several competing models of crime prevention and counter-terrorism which (apparently) are incompatible, theoretically and practically.

- The criminal justice model of crime prevention (general and individual prevention)
- The social model of crime prevention (at societal, group and individual levels)
- The situational crime prevention model

Each of these models are too narrow and do not incorporate the other perspectives but tend to see them as competing strategies. Result: An ideological debate on which strategy is "better", "more effective" or "evidence-based".

An alternative approach: Develop a more holistic model based on the principle of preventive mechanisms.
Some basic concepts

- Preventive mechanism = how a measure is reducing terrorism / crime
- Some mechanisms are mental, others are physical
- Measures - the specific means or methods implemented to activate a mechanism in order to achieve a specific outcome
- A measure may activate several different mechanisms, including unintended side-effects
- Different measures may activate the same mechanism
A general model: Nine mechanisms for preventing crime

- Establishing and maintaining moral (normative) barriers against committing criminal acts
- Reducing recruitment to criminal social environments and activities by eliminating or reducing the social and individual causes and processes that lead to criminality
- Deterrence: Getting potential perpetrators to refrain from criminal acts through the threat of punishment or other negative consequences
- Disruption by stopping criminal acts before they are carried out
- Protecting vulnerable targets against criminal acts, reduce opportunities
- Reducing the harmful consequences of criminal acts
- Reducing the rewards from criminal acts
- Incapacitation (or neutralisation) by denying perpetrators the ability (capacity) to carry out new criminal acts
- Desistance and rehabilitation: Helping people who have been involved in or punished for crime to settle back into a normal life

This generic model needs to be specified for specific crime types to become a preventive strategy!
Analytical approach for specifying preventive strategies:

- Describing each of the preventive mechanisms: *how does it reduce this specific form of crime?*
- Measures used to activate these mechanisms
- Actors possessing the relevant measures
- Target group(s) to be influenced by the measures
- Strengths and benefits of the measures
- Limitations, costs and negative side-effects of the measures
Main strategies for preventing organised crime based on 1% MC gangs

- Reducing recruitment to 1% gangs and their support crews
- Moral barriers against acceptance of 1% gangs
- Deterrence by increasing the costs of participation in gangs and criminal activities
- Reducing rewards from criminal activities and participation in 1% gangs
- Disrupting planned violence and criminal activities
- Incapacitation by removing the gangs’ ability to carry out their (criminal) activities; neutralising leaders and core members
- Protecting persons vulnerable to threats and harassment
- Recusing harm from the activities of 1% gangs
- Exit: Facilitating disengagement by individual gang members, make entire clubs close down or distance themselves from Hells Angels / Bandidos.
Reducing recruitment to 1% gangs and support crews

**Background:** Several levels of involvement/membership in 1% clubs

**Mechanism:** Disrupting a recruitment process at an early stage; preventing individuals from rising in the hierarchy, or that they commit crimes which tie them more firmly to the group. Preventing MC clubs from becoming official supporters or members of HA.

**Measures:** Social prevention from young age: Gang members are often losers at school and socially. Preventive dialogues, warnings, negative social or judicial sanctions, appeals from family/girlfriends, undermining their "criminal standing" and usefulness.

**Actors:** Youth workers, school, police, politicians, media, civil society family/girlfriends, non-criminal MC clubs

**Target groups:** Children and adolescents; individuals and MC clubs at risk to be recruited as prospects or support groups

**Advantages:** Social integration has many positive side effects beyond preventing crime.

**Limitations and side effects:** Negative sanctions and stigmatisation may push individuals and groups further into the criminal scene; including non-criminals.
Moral barriers against criminal 1% gangs

- **Mechanism:** Building normative barriers against participation and involvement with the activities of 1% gangs

- **Measures:** Legislation, public statements, media coverage, debates, social media

- **Actors:** Legislators, local politicians, opinion makers, media, schools, local businesses, civil society, family/girlfriends

- **Target groups:** Local population, local businesses, potential participants in 1% gangs and supporter clubs, users of criminal services (money collecting, cannabis buyers, etc.)

- **Advantages:** Most measures are democratic and non-repressive. Low costs. Demonstrating that the law applies — even to ”outlaws”!

- **Limitations and side effects:** Difficult to impact the hard core, easier to reach their social environment. Campaigns to affect attitudes may easily appear as propaganda and moral panic. Can lead to stigmatisation, social exclusion and criminalisation of individuals who have not (yet) committed anything illegal.
Deterrence by increasing costs

**Mechanism:** Increasing the costs of participation in gangs and criminal activities by the threat of punishment and informal negative sanctions; ”make life difficult for them”, reducing motivation.

**Measures:** Criminal prosecution, constant controls, increasing social costs of participation in 1% clubs, bans on wearing ”colours” in public bars, night clubs etc, refusal/withdrawal of security clearances, gun permits, entry permits, liquor licence, building permits, etc.

**Actors:** Police, criminal justice system, local authorities, local businesses, civil society, news media.

**Target groups:** Active and potential participants in 1% clubs, and those making use of their criminal services.

**Advantages:** Demonstrating that outlaw clubs are subjected to the law and rules of society. May push some participants (or consumers) to withdraw because costs are too high.

**Limitations and side effects:** Criminal prosecution requires legal evidence and verdicts; witnesses against members of 1% groups are often frightened to silence. Informal sanctions may easily slide into unfair discrimination.
Reducing profits from criminal activities and participation in outlaw gangs

Mechanism: Make participation in criminal activities and 1% clubs less attractive by reducing criminal profit and the social status linked to membership in HA/Bandidos/Outlaws

Measures: Confiscating criminal profit, disturbing the scene to make participation a social liability, reduce the power, status and social benefits of membership in 1% clubs

Actors: Police, political authorities, control agencies, the local business community, news media, civil society

Target group: Participants in outlaw MC clubs, their support groups and those considering to join the 1% scene

Advantages: May reduce future acts of crime and recruitment to the scene

Limitations and side effects: Many measures require legal warrant which may be difficult to establish. Discrimination?
Disrupting acts of violence and other crimes

**Mechanism:** Detect and stop acts of crime before they are carried through

**Measures:**
- Surveillance, communication control, informants, infiltration and other concealed methods
- Arrests or other means to thwart criminal plots in advance
- Confiscation of weapons and drugs
- Early intervention with warnings
- Preventive dialogue with participants and their close ones (parents, girlfriends)
- Controls and ransacking of persons, vehicles and club houses
- Charing of information between agencies and information to the public

**Actors:** Police, criminal intelligence, news media, the public

**Target groups:** Active gang members and their supporters

**Advantages:**
- Targeted and concrete if crimes are disrupted, may save lives, reduce suffering
- Early disruption demands less police resources than a full investigation
- May break potential spirals of violence and escalation of conflicts
- Early disruption may reduce the economic and social costs of imprisonment

**Limitations and side effects:**
- Surveillance and arrests may harm innocent people
- Early disruption may make it difficult to prosecute the organisers of the plot
Inkapacitation

**Mechanism:** Reducing the capacity of criminal actor to carry out crimes

**Measures:** Imprisonment; confiscation of weapons, explosives, economic resources, vehicles. Neutralising leaders and the hard core, positive measures directed towards the others.

**Actors:** Police, prisons, control agencies

**Target groups:** Active criminals

**Advantages:** Criminals behind bars have less opportunity to engage in harmful activities than a criminal at large

**Limitations and side effects:**
- Keeping criminals in prison for a long time is expensive to society
- Prisons may be a convenient place to build criminal network, finding new partners and recruits
- 1% club members frequently enjoy a high status in prison
- New criminal plots can be planned and prepared from prison
- Individuals can easily be replaced in a criminal gang
- Removing one actor from a criminal market may open for another to move in, sometimes upsetting stability and causing violent conflicts
Reducing opportunities for crime and protecting vulnerable persons

Mechanisms: Making it more difficult to carry out specific crimes or establishing territorial dominance, increasing the risk for detection, identifying and remove opportunities for crime

Measures: Regulation, control, building permits, bans against wearing «colors» in pubs, witness protection, making it easier to ask the police for protection against illegal money collectors

Actors: Police, private security, bouncers, municipal authorities, regulatory agencies, place owners, businesses, the public, etc.

Target groups: Make active or potential criminals abstain from committing the crimes they consider. Protecting potential victims against threats and harm.

Advantages: May have considerable impact on specific crime problems, e.g. illegal money collecting.

Limitations and side effects: The victims of crimes committed by 1% gang members tend to be criminals as well. Some of the crimes are "victimless", e.g. drug distribution
Reducing harm

*The main question:* What are the concrete negative consequences of the presence and activities of 1% blubs in a local community?

*Mechanism:* Interventions aiming at reducing the negative consequences of the presence and activities of 1% clubs in the community, reducing harm to victims.

*Measures:* Conflict management, regulation, preventive dialogue, victim protection. Regulating rather than seeking to remove 1% clubs. Pragmatism.

*Actors:* Police, municipalities, regulatory agencies, emergency response services

*Target groups:* The 1% clubs, victims of crime and threats

*Advantages:* Reduces violent conflicts between 1% clubs and fear among victims and the public, restoring a sense of safety in the local community

*Limitations and side effects:* A dialogue strategy between the police and 1% groups may become too symmetrical, giving HA too much influence.
Exit: Disengagement and rehabilitation

- **Background:** HA/Bandidos/Outlaws have established procedures for quitting the club, "in good standing" or "in bad standing".

- **Mechanisms:** Make active gang members and supporters ending their involvement earlier rather than later, individually or collectively. Provide an exit, a realistic way out.

- **Measures:** Make use of established procedures for quitting in "good standing", witness protection or new identity for those quitting in "bad standing", practical assistance to those who exit. The Danish «Exit for rockers and gang members» is a promising model.

- **Actors:** Police, prisons, parole officers, ex-members, municipalities, NGOs, family, Exit programs.

- **Target group:** Those who have been actively involved in criminal gangs and activities and who are motivated to disengage.

- **Advantages:** May reduce the size of the group and new recruitment. May end criminal careers and reduce economic and human costs of crime.

- **Limitations and side effects:** Many gang members do not want to quit. Those quitting «in good standing» may still do favours to the club. Those quitting «in bad standing» are threatened by reprisals. Some may move on to other forms of crime. The Danish Exit program is ambitious and promising but the outcomes have not yet been evaluated.
The generic model can be applied to most forms of crime, such as terrorism...

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A new book, Preventing Crime, will be published in Norwegian (2014) and in English (2015), applying the model to burglary, youth gangs, drink driving, organised crime and more.