

Chicago police and Federal agents to team up on gun violence by Mitch Smith

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Mitch Smith's New York Times article, "Chicago Police and Federal Agents to Team Up on Gun Violence," reported in June 2017 on the creation of a Chicago Crime Gun Strike Force involving the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, the Chicago Police Department, and other law-enforcement partners. The article appeared after Chicago recorded 762 homicides in 2016, its highest annual total in roughly two decades, and after President Donald Trump repeatedly used the city's violence as a national political example. Smith's central question was not whether federal and local agencies should ever cooperate. It was whether the announced deployment represented a serious, adequately resourced strategy or a symbolic response amplified by presidential tweets. My original review supported practical action while criticizing public statements unsupported by implementation. That position remains reasonable, but the analysis should distinguish article reporting from personal opinion and should recognize that gun violence is not caused by one moral defect or solved by one enforcement unit. (Smith, 2017)

The Article's Main News Event

Smith reports that a strike force would bring federal agents and local officers together to investigate gun trafficking and shootings. ATF personnel could contribute firearms tracing, ballistics analysis, federal investigative authority, and coordination with prosecutors. Chicago police contributed local knowledge, case information, patrol contacts, and responsibility for most day-to-day public safety. Such collaboration was not entirely new; federal and local agencies had worked together through Project Safe Neighborhoods, task forces, and individual cases. The news value came from the administration's public presentation of additional federal involvement as a response to an intensely politicized crisis.

Trump's Tweet and the Difference Between Announcement and Policy

The article pays close attention to President Trump's statement that federal help had been sent to Chicago. A tweet can signal priority and attract attention, but it does not explain the strategy's scale, authority, duration, funding, or evaluation. Smith's skepticism arises partly from the contrast between a dramatic national statement and a force small relative to a city police department with thousands of officers. The article invites readers to ask whether the announcement changed operations materially or repackaged assistance already requested and planned. This is a legitimate accountability question,

not necessarily hostility toward law enforcement.

What Federal Agents Can Contribute

Federal involvement can be valuable when shootings involve interstate gun trafficking, repeat offenders, organized criminal networks, or evidence crossing jurisdictional lines. ATF's National Integrated Ballistic Information Network can connect cartridge cases from separate crime scenes, while firearm tracing can identify the first retail sale and patterns involving dealers or traffickers. Federal prosecutors may bring charges carrying different penalties or evidentiary tools. Joint intelligence can connect cases that individual districts see separately. These capabilities support local investigations, but they do not replace witness cooperation, community trust, timely evidence collection, victim services, or prevention.

The Limits of Personnel Numbers

The original review asks what difference a few additional agents could make when shootings were numerous. The question is valid but should not assume that impact depends only on head count. A small specialized team can affect a network or trafficking route if it has good intelligence and clear objectives. Conversely, a large deployment can produce little durable change if it conducts unfocused arrests or duplicates existing work. Evaluation should examine which cases were prioritized, whether clearance rates improved, whether illegal supply networks were disrupted, whether shootings declined in targeted networks, and whether activity displaced violence elsewhere. The proper comparison is not agents versus offenders in raw numbers but strategy, targeting, implementation, and results.

Mayor Rahm Emanuel's Position

The original essay misspells Mayor Rahm Emanuel's name and portrays his relationship with Trump mainly through electoral tension. Smith's report reflects a more complex dispute. Emanuel and other local officials welcomed resources while arguing that federal policy should support broader investments and sensible firearms regulation rather than rely on rhetoric. Political conflict mattered because Trump framed Chicago as evidence of Democratic failure, while city leaders resisted what they viewed as stigmatization. Readers should separate partisan exchange from the operational question: whether federal assistance was designed in consultation with local agencies and communities and whether it addressed verified drivers of violence.

Gun Violence Is Concentrated but Socially Produced

Serious violence is often concentrated among a relatively small number of people, groups, places, and conflicts. That concentration supports focused intervention rather than broad suspicion of entire neighborhoods. At the same time, the networks operate within social conditions shaped by segregation, poverty, school exclusion, housing instability, illegal gun access, trauma, underemployment, incarceration, and distrust of authorities. Describing violence only as a matter of individual morality ignores those conditions. Describing it only as a product of structure can understate agency and immediate risk. Effective policy must hold shooters accountable while reducing the situations in which retaliatory violence becomes likely.

Law Enforcement and Deterrence

Focused deterrence strategies identify individuals or groups at high risk of serious violence, communicate that shootings will receive concentrated enforcement, offer services and alternatives, and involve respected community voices. The evidence varies by design and location. Chicago's Project Safe Neighborhoods received a "Promising" rating from the National Institute of Justice's CrimeSolutions program, while an evaluation of a later Group Violence Reduction Strategy found little-to-no effect in the examined period. These mixed results show why the label of a strategy is less important than implementation, legitimacy, targeting accuracy, service capacity, and evaluation. Enforcement alone may incapacitate particular offenders, but arrests that are broad, inconsistent, or viewed as abusive can weaken cooperation needed to solve shootings. (Grunwald & Papachristos, 2017; National Institute of Justice, 2012; National Institute of Justice, 2018; Skogan et al., 2009)

Community Violence Intervention

The Democrats quoted or summarized in the original review emphasized social programs. That category should be made specific. Community violence intervention can include street outreach, hospital-based services, conflict mediation, intensive case management, cognitive-behavioral support, relocation assistance, employment connections, and help for people at highest risk of shooting or being shot. Chicago's CeaseFire model treated violence partly as a contagious process and used credible messengers to interrupt retaliation. Evaluations found reductions in some intervention areas but not every site. Programs need stable funding, skilled supervision, safety protocols, and coordination without turning community workers into intelligence sources against clients.

Victims, Families, and Trauma

Smith includes the perspective of a man whose grandchild was killed, grounding the policy debate in human loss. Survivors and families need more than arrest announcements. They may require emergency financial support, counseling, funeral assistance, witness protection, legal navigation, and long-term trauma care. Children exposed to shootings can experience sleep disturbance, anxiety, grief, concentration problems, and changes in perceived safety. A public strategy should measure whether victims receive timely support and whether communities are repeatedly asked to provide information without receiving protection or services.

Police Legitimacy and Cooperation

Investigators depend on witnesses and residents, but cooperation is influenced by perceived fairness and safety. Chicago entered 2017 after the federal Department of Justice issued a report finding patterns of excessive force and inadequate accountability in the police department. Residents could simultaneously want protection from shootings and distrust police practices. Treating reluctance to cooperate as moral failure ignores fear of retaliation and prior experience. Procedural justice—respectful treatment, neutral decision-making, voice, and trustworthy motives—can improve legitimacy. Reform and violence reduction should not be presented as competing priorities because abusive policing can obstruct effective investigation. (U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, 2017)

Firearm Supply and Interstate Movement

Chicago's local regulations operate within a regional and national gun market. Firearms recovered in crimes may originate through lawful sales outside the city before diversion, theft, straw purchasing, or trafficking. Federal agents can investigate these pathways, but trace data must be interpreted carefully: the original purchaser is not automatically the person who committed a crime. Policy options include dealer inspections, prosecution of trafficking networks, reporting of lost or stolen firearms where authorized, secure storage, background-check enforcement, and improved data sharing. A strike force should articulate which supply problems it is designed to address.

The Article's Tone and Evidence

My original response suggests that Smith "offends" the president's statement, but the more accurate description is that the article subjects the announcement to scrutiny. Smith quotes or paraphrases federal officials, local leaders, political critics, and affected residents. The article's numerical comparisons establish the scale of violence and the limited size of the announced team. Its weakness is that a news article written at the program's launch cannot determine effectiveness. It can report

expectations and doubts, but outcomes require later evidence. Readers should not confuse skepticism about an announcement with proof that the strategy failed.

The Intended Audience

The article was relevant to Chicago residents, but its audience was national. Trump had made the city's violence part of a broader argument about policing, urban governance, and political leadership. Readers outside Chicago were being asked to evaluate federal authority and the meaning of a law-and-order response. The article also addressed policymakers, law-enforcement professionals, advocates, and communities facing similar violence. Framing Chicago only as an exceptional place of disorder risks reinforcing racialized stereotypes and ignoring the city's neighborhood variation, institutions, and local prevention work.

My Agreement with the Article

I agree with Smith's implicit argument that implementation matters more than a public declaration. Federal-local cooperation can help, but officials should state what resources are new, what objectives they serve, and how performance will be assessed. It is reasonable to question whether a small strike force can transform a citywide problem. It is also reasonable to support the team if it improves investigation and targets trafficking or highly active shooters. Skepticism and support are not mutually exclusive; public programs should earn confidence through transparent action and results.

Where I Would Extend the Article

The article could have provided more detail about the task force's theory of change. Were agents expected to increase federal gun prosecutions, improve ballistics matching, trace firearms, dismantle trafficking networks, or focus on particular groups? It could also have explained how the initiative related to existing Chicago programs and the police reform debate. Finally, it could have identified evaluation criteria and community safeguards. These additions would help readers move beyond the symbolic contest between Trump and Emanuel toward an assessment of public policy.

A Comprehensive Violence-Reduction Strategy

A stronger strategy combines precise investigation, fair enforcement, community intervention, victim support, youth opportunity, environmental improvements, and institutional accountability. Police and federal agencies should focus on the small number of shootings and networks creating the greatest harm, use lawful evidence rather than broad profiling, and coordinate with prosecutors. Community organizations should receive stable resources to mediate conflict and support high-risk people. Hospitals and schools should respond to trauma. City agencies can improve lighting, abandoned

properties, recreation, transit, and employment access. None of these interventions is sufficient alone, and each should be evaluated for outcomes and unintended harm.

Conclusion

Mitch Smith's 2017 article provides a useful account of the political and practical questions surrounding a federal-local gun-violence strike force in Chicago. Its central strength is the distinction between announcing help and demonstrating an effective strategy. Federal agents can contribute specialized firearms intelligence, interstate authority, and investigative resources, but personnel alone cannot resolve violence rooted in concentrated conflicts, firearm access, trauma, inequality, and distrust. My response remains cautiously supportive: practical assistance should be welcomed and evaluated, while presidential rhetoric should not substitute for implementation. The most credible policy combines targeted lawful enforcement with community-based prevention, victim services, social investment, and police legitimacy.

References

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