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## Violence Report Targets Proliferation of Guns

By Gary Fields

Thirty years after the most extensive study of violence in the USA concluded that the proliferation of firearms was one reason for the violence, a report out today reaches the same conclusion.

With about 220 million firearms in the USA, 120% more guns are in circulation now than in 1968, according to a report by the Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation, a private group created to follow the work of the original panel.

In addition to the increase in the number of guns, the study found:

- Fear of violence has increased. A 1967 survey found that 31% of the respondents were afraid to walk alone within a mile of their homes. A similar survey in 1998 found that 41% of those surveyed were afraid.
- Despite an eight-year drop in crime, the combined rate of murders, rapes, robberies and aggravated assaults in big cities increased from 860 per 100,000 residents in 1969 to 1,218 per 100,000 people in 1998.
- Prison construction has increased sevenfold during that same period, with 33% of African-American males in their teens and early 20's being under some form of supervision by the justice system. At least 29% of all African-American males born today can expect to go to jail at some point in their lives.

Without the booming economy, the situation would be even more critical, said foundation president Lynn Curtis, who also participated in the 1969 study.

Sociologist Jack Levin, director of the Brudnick Center on Violence and Conflict at Northeastern University in Boston, agrees. "Variations in the business cycle are inevitable," Levin said.

"I'm concerned we're being lulled into believing we've solved our social problems when we are only seeing a temporary reprieve because of a good economy."

The foundation suggests several solutions to the crime problem, including providing more funding for programs such as the Head Start program for early childhood education and after-school programs that create safe havens for students.

The report mirrors a study released in 1969 by the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence.

President Lyndon Johnson ordered the formation of that committee in the aftermath of the 1968 assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy.