



# CITIZENS CRIME COMMISSION OF NEW YORK CITY

ASSESSING NEW YORK CITY'S YOUTH GUN VIOLENCE CRISIS: CREWS

VOLUME I

## DEFINING THE PROBLEM CREWS AND GUN VIOLENCE

BY STEPHANIE UEBERALL & ASHLEY CANNON

### 63 Gang Members Indicted in East Harlem Shootings

*The New York Times*



### Brooklyn Community Leaders Call For Programs To Curb Violence At Public Housing

DAILY NEWS

### Jitters But Few Answers Amid Wave Of Violence

*NEW YORK POST*



**ASSESSING NEW YORK CITY'S YOUTH GUN VIOLENCE CRISIS: CREWS**

VOLUME I

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# **DEFINING THE PROBLEM**

CREWS AND GUN VIOLENCE

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BY STEPHANIE UEGERALL & ASHLEY CANNON

CITIZENS CRIME COMMISSION OF NEW YORK CITY

MAY 2015

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The success or failure of community strategies to address the youth gun violence crisis is often attributed in part to how well the problem is understood and diagnosed.<sup>1</sup> With support from The New York Community Trust, the Crime Commission has undertaken an analysis of youth gun violence and crew activity – violent turf rivalries among less-organized, smaller and normally younger groups than traditional gangs – in select New York City communities. Our initial findings from available data, existing research, and interviews with stakeholders are presented in a series of papers titled, “Assessing New York City’s Youth Gun Violence Crisis: Crews”.

New York City has famously experienced unprecedented, sustained reductions in crime over the last 25 years.<sup>2</sup> Areas once so dangerous that they resembled foreign war zones now are home to some of the most desirable real estate in the country. We proudly and rightfully point to our success, calling ourselves the “safest big city in America”.<sup>3</sup> But there are places and people that have been left behind. There are areas which have not seen violent crime rates drop to nearly zero – as others have – or anywhere close. Certain races and age groups are also still far more likely to become victims and be responsible for violent crime than others.

The root causes of violent crime have not changed either—and the circumstances under which crime is committed sound eerily familiar to the high-crime New York of 25 years ago that we now refer to as the “bad old days”. Therefore, in order to make real strides in improving the quality of life amongst these persistently hardest-hit groups, we must address the root causes of why youth become involved in gun violence and crews.

The NYPD publically acknowledged that youth “gangs” are becoming more organized and more violent,<sup>4</sup> finding that more than a third of all shootings in New York City now involve what the NYPD calls “crews”.<sup>5</sup> In order to truly identify how youth are involved in organized activity (gangs, crews, etc.) and gun violence, the Crime Commission researched legal and intelligence definitions and conducted fieldwork with community residents, service providers, and policymakers which revealed three broad categories of organization:

### TRADITIONAL GANGS

Groups that have clear hierarchy, structure, organization, rules of conduct and are profit-motivated, usually affiliating with national gangs such as the Bloods.

### CREWS<sup>i</sup>

Fluid groups formed based on where members live, such as a building or block, creating violent turf rivalries. Crews generally do not have clear hierarchy, structure, or rules, and are usually not profit-motivated.

### GROUPS

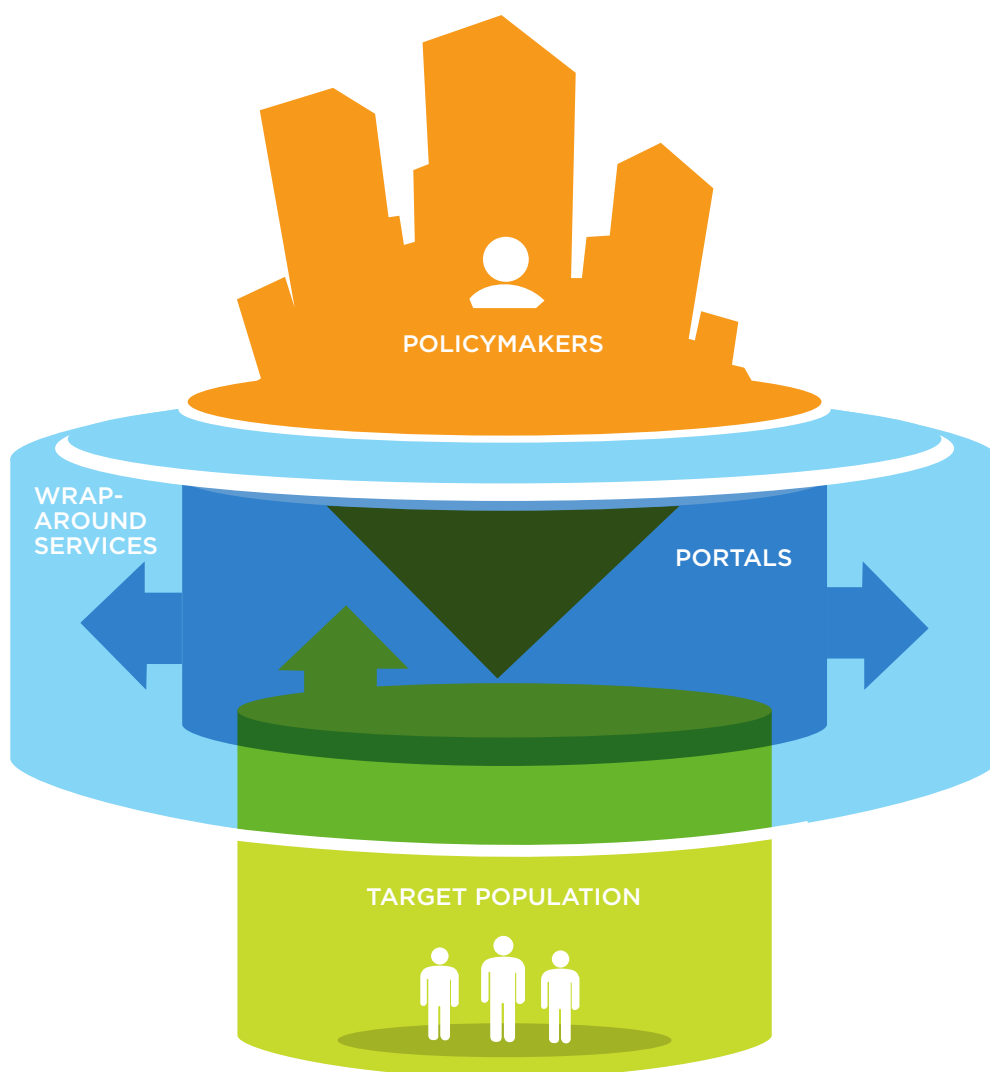
Unorganized groups, often temporal in nature, which form as a result of interpersonal conflicts.

This research and fieldwork demonstrated that crews – and not traditional, hierarchical gangs – are a major part of violent crime statistics and analysis. Crews actually account for a great deal of youth criminal activity, especially violent crime—and without proper interventions for this type of activity, we will not be able to adequately address what has been a persistent public safety and criminal justice issue for New York City.

**In order to develop more effective responses to crews it is essential for stakeholders to acknowledge the victimization of those involved, understand their underlying needs, and identify the neighborhood conditions that impact them.**

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i. Crews form working relationships with other crews, known as sets. Sometimes crew members also affiliate with a citywide set (Young Guns (YG) or Young Bosses (YB)) for recognition when traveling outside of their neighborhood.



### POLICYMAKERS

- Elected Officials
- Government Agencies
- Advocates
- Philanthropies

### WRAP-AROUND SERVICES

- Legal
- Education
- Job Readiness & Training
- Employment
- Mental Health
- Substance Use

### PORTALS

- Street Outreach
- Violence Interruption
- Conflict Mediation
- Hospital Responders
- Educational Workshops
- Community Mobilization
- Public Education
- Youth Development
- Peer Leadership

### TARGET POPULATION

- Youth Engaged in Crews and Violence
- Peers
- Family
- Community Members

**Although there have been significant recent investments by policymakers and funders – ranging from organizing task forces and work groups, to deploying new law enforcement strategies, to implementing programmatic interventions – New York City’s ability to fully understand and diagnose its crew problem is hindered by a lack of data and coordination.**

While the NYPD collects data on crew members and related criminal activity, law enforcement data are typically insufficient to inform comprehensive responses because it is collected for the purpose of informing suppression and investigation strategies.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, community-based organizations collect a range of data about the underlying needs of the individuals involved, but often lack the capacity to analyze and communicate these data to inform policy and programming decisions. Further, the City lacks a collaborative effort among stakeholders dedicated to addressing this problem.

Preventing crew violence cannot be accomplished by a single agency or organization. Effective solutions require the combination of insight, hard work, and dedication from a wide variety of organizations and stakeholders. New York City should immediately mobilize stakeholders to take steps toward developing a comprehensive strategy to address the city’s crew violence problem.

## THE CRIME COMMISSION'S ASSESSMENT OFFERS THE FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATIONS:

### IMPLEMENT A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH:

- Deliver and sustain adequate services to prevent crew violence.
  - Develop funding strategies that promote stability and consistent service delivery, and thus situate providers in a position to succeed.
- Better track the risks, needs, victimizations, and activities of youth involved in crews, as well as the conditions impacting them by harnessing the wealth of knowledge possessed by stakeholders.
- Facilitate a collaborative effort among stakeholders to minimize the duplication of efforts and maximize the use of resources available to selected needs.

### BETTER COLLECT AND SHARE DATA:

- Share aggregated data on crews between government agencies and citizens.
  - Request the NYPD to report crew-related crimes as part the Mayor's Management Report and/or weekly CompStat reports.
  - Create information-sharing forums both within and across stakeholder groups (e.g., government, community-based organizations, youth) in order to share insights and identify effective prevention and intervention strategies.
- Build the capacity of community-based organizations.
  - Support must be provided to community-based organizations for internal capacity building by instituting a civilian CompStat-like data management system for violence prevention programs.
  - Strengthen inter-organization collaboration to facilitate the integration of resources and responses.

### COORDINATE A CONTINUUM OF INTERVENTIONS:

- Incorporate programs that have different points of contact with youth at each developmental milestone.
  - Government must invest in locally accessible interventions that focus on education and vocational skills, address victimization, trauma and grief, and emphasize the role of the family and community.

**As youth develop their identity, set goals, and plan for their future they stop committing crime.<sup>7</sup> By implementing these suggestions, the city can build comprehensive strategies that reduce crew violence and make our communities safer.<sup>8</sup>**



## VOLUME I

# DEFINING THE PROBLEM

## CREWS AND GUN VIOLENCE

BY STEPHANIE UEBERALL &amp; ASHLEY CANNON

New York City has experienced unprecedented, sustained reductions in crime over the last 25 years.<sup>1</sup> Yet some communities have not benefitted nearly as much from the improvement as others—and some neighborhoods are still suffering from persistently high crime (see *exhibit 1*). In fact, much of the city's crime – especially violent crime – is now largely concentrated to a few areas. For instance, nearly half of shooting incidents occur in just 11 police precincts<sup>2</sup>, and nearly 20% of citywide shooting incidents occur on New York City Housing Authority property.<sup>3</sup> Further, crews actually account for a growing amount of youth criminal activity, especially violent crime<sup>4</sup>—and without proper interventions for this type of activity, we will not be able to adequately address what has been a persistent public safety and criminal justice issue for New York City.

In order to truly identify how youth are involved in organized activity (gangs, crews, etc.) leading to gun violence and crime, the Crime Commission conducted research on legal and intelligence definitions and accompanying data, along with extensive fieldwork with community residents, service providers, and policymakers revealing three broad categories of organization for violence and crime: gangs, crews and groups.

### GANGS AND GANG ACTIVITY

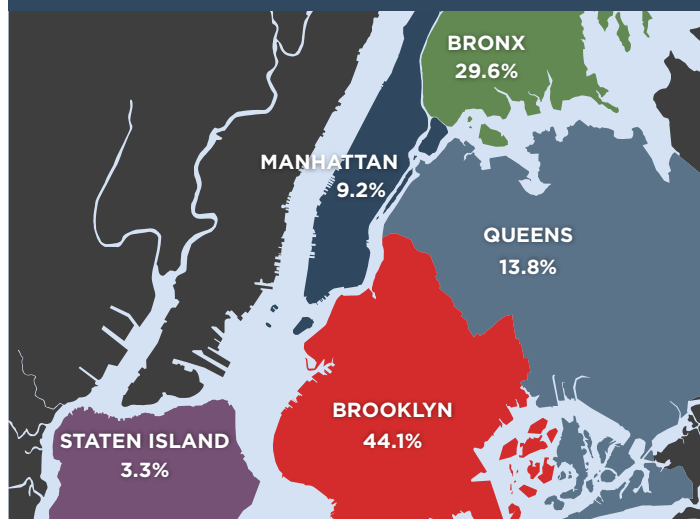
In New York, policymakers and law enforcement have developed several legal and intelligence definitions to describe gangs and gang activity. For example:

- The New York City Administrative Code defines a “criminal street gang” as “any ongoing organization, association, or group of three or more persons, whether formal or informal, that engages in criminal conduct<sup>i</sup> as one of its primary purposes or activities.”<sup>6</sup>
  - Further, gang initiation is termed “criminal street gang initiation activity” and is defined as “in the course of his or her own or another person's initiation or affiliation into a criminal street gang, he or she:
    1. Intentionally or recklessly engages in conduct that creates a substantial risk of physical injury to another person; or

i. “Criminal conduct” is defined as felony and misdemeanor crimes defined in the Penal Law relating to assault and related offenses (article 120), homicide (article 125), sex offenses (article 130), kidnapping, coercion and related offenses (article 135), burglary and related offenses (article 140), criminal mischief and related offenses (article 145), arson (article 150), larceny (article 155), robbery (article 160), theft (article 165), judicial proceedings (article 215), controlled substances (article 220), marijuana (article 221), gambling (article 225), prostitution (article 230), firearms and other dangerous weapons (article 265), or harassment in the first degree or aggravated harassment in the first or second degrees (article 240). (New York City Administrative Code § 10-170(b)(1))

### EXHIBIT 1: NYC SHOOTING INCIDENTS

There were over 1,100 shooting incidents during 2014 in New York City.<sup>5</sup>



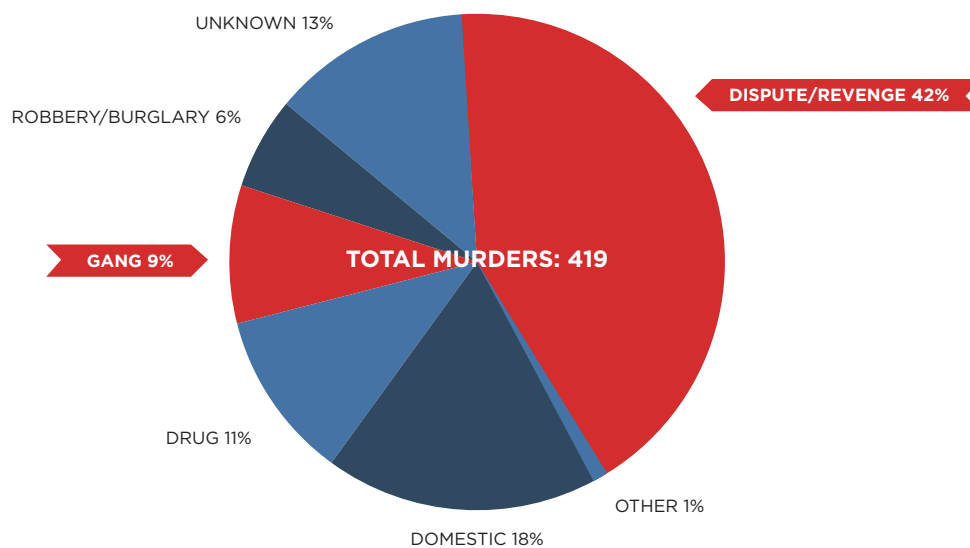
2. By physical menace, intentionally places or attempts to place another person in fear of death, imminent serious physical injury or physical injury.”<sup>7</sup>

- Alternatively, the NYPD defines a “gang” as “a group of people with an informal or formal structure, with designated leaders, engaging in or supporting illegal activities.”<sup>8</sup>
  - The NYPD utilizes two categories to classify gang crimes:
    - “Gang-related incident” is defined as “any incident of unlawful conduct by a gang member or suspected gang member.”<sup>9</sup>
    - “Gang-motivated incident” is defined as “any incident that is done primarily to benefit or further the interest of a gang, as part of an initiation, membership rite or act of allegiance of support for a gang, or as a result of a conflict or fight between gang members of the same or different gangs.”<sup>10</sup>
- Finally, the New York State Penal Law describes “gang assault” as “when, with intent to cause physical injury<sup>ii</sup> [or serious physical injury<sup>iii</sup>] to another person and when aided by two or more other persons actually present, he causes physical injury [or serious physical injury] to such person or to a third person.”<sup>11</sup>
  - The two gang assault statutes do not require that those involved in the assault are actually gang members or affiliated in any way.

While these definitions describe organizing for criminal activity, whether for a one-time assault or an ongoing structure to support illegal activities, they do little to detail the types of crimes, behaviors, and individuals involved in gangs or what might be driving this activity. These vague descriptions of gangs make it difficult to develop effective interventions from government definitions alone.

An additional challenge to understanding the problem is the gaps in government data around gang violence. For example, in 2012, the NYPD reported that 9% of murders were gang-related and 42% were linked to disputes and revenge (see *chart 1*).<sup>12</sup> Gaining a deeper understanding of what drives dispute and revenge murders could provide more insight into violence in New York City, especially as gang violence is often fueled by retaliation.

**CHART 1: NYPD MURDER VICTIMS 2012 - WHY**<sup>13</sup>



ii. Gang Assault in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Degree  
 iii. Gang Assault in the 1<sup>st</sup> Degree

## A NEW CATEGORY: CREWS

To help provide a clearer picture of violence, the NYPD created a new category, labeled “crews,” which highlights more details about the individuals and behaviors involved in violence in New York City. Crews are described as “looser associations of younger men who identify themselves by the block they live on, or on which side of a housing development they reside. Their loyalty is to their friends living in a relatively small area and their rivalries are based not on narcotics trafficking or some other entrepreneurial interest, but simply on local turf.”<sup>14</sup> The NYPD has identified more than 300 crews in New York City<sup>15</sup> that they believe are responsible for approximately 40% of the more than 1,000 shootings incidents citywide.<sup>16</sup> This description and data provide more insight into the dispute and revenge murders described above, allowing us to gain a deeper understanding of violence occurring in New York City.

In addition to the definitions provided by the government, it is essential to understand how service providers and community members define gangs and their behavior. The Crime Commission’s fieldwork revealed three categories:

- **Traditional Hierarchical Gangs:** Groups that have clear hierarchy, structure, organization, rules for conduct, and are profit-motivated. These gangs usually claim affiliation with national gangs, such as the Bloods.
- **Crews:** Fluid groups formed based on where members live, such as a building or block, creating violent turf rivalries. Crews generally do not have clear hierarchy, structure, or rules, and are usually not profit-motivated.
  - **Sets:** Crew membership is typically limited to youth from a particular building or block. However, crews often form working relationships with other crews, known as sets, often uniting against a larger crew.
    - Further, some crews associate themselves with an umbrella group YG or YB – Young Guns or Young Bosses – as a means to create a citywide set. The YG/YB sets are primarily used for recognition when traveling outside of one’s neighborhood.
- **Groups:** Unorganized groups, often temporal in nature, which form as a result of interpersonal conflicts.

Comparing community and government definitions presents a common conclusion that crews are driving a large portion of gun violence in New York City. In order to effectively intervene in this violence, we must understand the underlying needs and conditions affecting those involved in crews.

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## A CLOSER LOOK AT CREWS

Recent indictments of crews reveal that young men (16-25 years old) are engaging in crime and violence, such as street fights, sharing guns, shootings, and robberies, and are often using social media to promote violence and coordinate activities.<sup>17</sup> Further, much of this violence is based on retaliation and creates cycles of violence.<sup>18</sup>

More importantly, these indictments demonstrate how youth involved in crews have often been victims of robbery, shootings, stabbings, and assaults.<sup>19</sup> In order to develop effective interventions for youth and young adults involved in gun violence, we must acknowledge their victimization and provide services to address this trauma in order to prevent feelings of needing to protect themselves by carrying a gun.<sup>20</sup>

Communities experiencing high rates of shooting incidents also endure high poverty rates, poor academic achievement, lack of economic opportunity, poor housing conditions, hunger, high crime rates, high rates of police activity, and homelessness, among other symptoms.<sup>21</sup> The combination of these factors results in a large concentration of people living under high-stress conditions, exacerbating risks for violence. Therefore, all of these factors must be taken into consideration when developing interventions for youth involved in gun violence. This is essential as these youth reflect the conditions of their neighborhoods, and, thus, present a wide range of risks and needs such as homelessness, not eating daily meals, trauma, unemployment, lack of education, needing positive social support, teen pregnancy, and lack of self-awareness, empathy, and self-control. Further compounding the problem is inadequate availability of locally



accessible services.<sup>22</sup> Given that turf wars make it difficult for youth to travel safely, it is critically important that services be accessible to youth in their communities.

Valuable insights were provided to the Crime Commission through countless meetings with community-based organizations who provide direct services to youth involved in gun violence. To highlight their intimate knowledge of this problem and how drastically victimization, trauma, and neighborhood conditions impact youth's mindsets, the organizations described how many youth involved in gun violence have seen their best friends murdered and believe they too will die soon. Their insights are essential to understanding violence and what conditions contribute to the problem.

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## SOLUTIONS

Combining the law enforcement intelligence and community-based knowledge detailed above allows us to more clearly see who is involved in violence in New York City, and why. In order to more effectively prevent gun violence and intervene in the lives of youth involved in violence – or those at risk of becoming involved – stakeholders must work together by sharing data and insights to identify effective policies and programs. This work would ideally lead to the creation of a comprehensive continuum of interventions.

**To facilitate this process, policymakers, law enforcement, service providers and community members must be mobilized to:**

### ASSESS ACTIVITIES, NEEDS & CONDITIONS

Stakeholders should conduct local assessments of the activities and needs of those involved in gun violence, as well as the neighborhood and online conditions in which they exist in order to develop effective strategies that address identified problems.

### SHARE DATA

To inform the local assessments and to develop effective strategies, whenever possible, aggregated data on crews should be shared between and among government agencies and the community:

- Request the NYPD to report crew-related crimes as part of the Mayor's Management Report and/or weekly CompStat reports. This information should be supplemented by the release of analysis of contextual data (e.g., location, time of day, motive) (similar to the NYPD's "Murder in New York City" reports).
- Create information-sharing forums both within and across stakeholder groups (e.g., government, community-based organizations, youth) to share insights and identify effective prevention and intervention strategies.

### CONTINUUM OF INTERVENTIONS

Government must invest in locally accessible services, including online interventions, to address the needs of youth and neighborhood conditions:

- Coordinate existing and new interventions into an effective continuum of services that incorporates programs that have different points of contact with youth at each developmental milestone.<sup>iv</sup>
- Prioritize interventions that seek to address the trauma of victimization and the grief that youth experience from losing loved ones to gun violence, in addition to addressing the risks associated with engaging in criminal behavior.

### BUILD CAPACITY

Support must be provided to community-based organizations for internal capacity-building focused on collecting, analyzing, and sharing data by adopting a civilian CompStat-like data management system for violence prevention programs.<sup>v</sup>

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iv. See volume III of series "Responding to the Problem: Coordinating a Continuum of Services"

v. See volume II of series "CompStat for Violence Prevention Programs"

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## ASSESSING NEW YORK CITY'S YOUTH GUN VIOLENCE CRISIS: CREWS

VOLUME I

# DEFINING THE PROBLEM

## CREWS AND GUN VIOLENCE

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For more information about the Crime Commission's Gang and Group Violence Prevention Initiative, contact Stephanie Ueberall at [ueberall@caasny.com](mailto:ueberall@caasny.com)

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